

Twenty-Twenty-four

Infinite Onion

November 2024

We are coming. Expect us.

“... Don Quixote meets al-Qaeda...”

—*Matt Taibbi*

“... the work of some naïve Millennial Malcolm X or Gen Z ‘intellectual’...”

—*Bill Maher*

“... a reasoned, sober look at American Empire today... a bullet aimed at the head of capitalism...”

—*Oliver Stone*

“... the Russians are at it again... now the Chinese are in on it too...”

—*Hillary Clinton*

“... a true grandmaster of Wing Chun...”

—*Ip Man*

“... a leftist Trump... be afraid...”

—*Neera Tanden*

“Too long... a great sleep aid...”

—*Ken Burns*

“... racist, white male supremacist, transphobic trash...”

—*Lena Dunham*

“... antisemitic... the next Hitler...”

—*Benjamin Netanyahu*

“... the Second Coming... Jesus has returned...”

—*Rick Santorum*

“A book about a leftist fanatic who writes a book about a leftist fanatic who writes a book aiming to overthrow the capitalist empire and that’s the book you’re reading?... brilliant... mind-blowing...”

—*Leonardo DiCaprio*

“... if Infinite Jest and Ready Player One and The Bible and The Communist Manifesto and The Unabomber thing and so many more had an orgy... this book would be the cum-stained sheet...”

—*Seth Rogen*

“Didn’t I already write this?”

—*Uwe Boll*

I am writing this book for all those trapped within the world's latest caste systems. You may be locked up or locked out of mainstream society, but you are not forgotten. To those who would rather be doing something useful with themselves. To the memories of those who died. To their families. To those who survived. To the those that suffered. To those who anguished. To those who did their best. And to those who continue asking what will come out of it all.

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Part I
Making You

There must be some kind of way out of here
Said the joker to the thief
There's too much confusion
I can't get no relief
Businessmen, they drink my wine
Plowmen dig my earth
None of them along the line
Know what any of it is worth

No reason to get excited
The thief, he kindly spoke
There are many here among us
Who feel that life is but a joke
But you and I, we've been through that
And this is not our fate
So let us not talk falsely now
The hour's getting late

All along the watchtower
Princes kept the view
While all the women came and went
Barefoot servants too
Outside in the distance
A wildcat did growl
Two riders were approaching
The wind began to howl

Chapter One

Stories

One Warm Thought

“One of the problems with reality is the extent to which it resembles bad fiction.”

“The glow of one warm thought is to me worth more than money.”

Sometimes I think it would be ideal if our whole society had some kind of coming-of-age ceremony, where your grandmother takes you up to the top of the tallest hill or building around and then whispers in your ear:

“The secret of adulthood is that none of us really know anything of importance. We didn’t tell you this when you were small because we needed you to trust our authority when we taught you not to drink household cleaning chemicals and to look both ways before crossing the street. But now you are a grownup, and we can remove those training wheels for you. You will never understand this world. Life will always be a mystery to you until the day you die.”

Because then we’d be getting it all out in the open in a very conscious way. We’d skip all those years of confusion, and nobody would be able to pull a fast one on us by pretending to be the only person in the room who understands what’s going on. It would certainly keep us a lot more honest, anyway.

The history of human society is a large topic. Attempting to write a book about such a topic is like taking a close up-picture of an elephant through a tiny lens. You may reveal valuable insight into one part of a foot, but you can never include the entire foot and the ears are left out entirely. This book, like everything in life, provides no absolute truths or any idea that is not up for debate or could not benefit from more nuance. It

is simply a particular perspective, one which I use to develop ideas written in books past and future. I hope any reader of this book will constantly and skeptically test what I say.

We invented words to help us understand each other but sometimes they trigger very different thoughts in different people.

One can parse language into droplets so small that the facts dissolve to difficult-to-detect dilutions; one can disperse truth itself. People get confused, get the wrong impression. Sometimes that's the goal. So it's better to stand with the truth. Political situations come and go. What begins and what ends, and what follows a person forever after, is the truth.

I have no religion, and I have absolutely no idea whether there is some sort of afterlife or not. Afterlife, God: what I am absolutely certain of is that no one on this planet really knows any answers to these so-called big questions, and those who claim that they do, know much less than me. Put enough malnourished schizophrenics in the desert and eventually one of them will speak to God.

This world and this damn humanity of ours is all that I know, and it is all that I have and care about. And I love it, because I have no other choice but loving it, despite all of its brutality and foolishness, recklessness and short-sightedness. But this planet, which used to be so brilliantly beautiful and pleasing to all of our human senses, is now frightened, humiliated, and plundered. It is getting raped, savagely, in front of our own eyes. And we are just watching, ruminating like cattle, shitting, and amusing ourselves in increasingly brainless ways. That's what we are actually supposed to do, according to those bastards who are in charge.

Our humanity has been derailed from its natural aims, goals, and dreams. Goals like egalitarianism, social justice, beauty, and harmony used to be on everyone's lips, no matter where they were living; just so recently, just one century ago. The brightest minds, bravely and determinedly, worked on finishing with all forms of inequality, exploitation, racism, and colonialism. Crimes against humanity committed by Western imperialism, racism, slavery, and capitalism were being exposed, defined, condemned, and confronted.

Unfortunately, it was one century ago that we were just about reaching the peak of enlightenment, and as humanity we were much closer to harmony and peaceful co-existence, than we are now. Our grand-grandparents had no doubts whatsoever, that reason and logic would soon be able to triumph, everywhere on earth, and that those who had been ruling so unjustly all over this world, would either "see the light" and voluntarily step down, or would be once and for all defeated.

Great revolutions erupted on all continents. Human lives were declared to be well above profit. Capitalism seemed to be finished. Imperialism and

capitalism were discredited, spat at, and stepped on with millions of feet. It was clearly just a matter of years, before all people of all races would unite, before there would be no more dictatorship of greedy and degenerate business-people, of crooked religious demagogues, of perverse monarchs and their serfs. In those days, humanity was full of optimism; of ground-breaking ideas, inventions; intellectual, as well as emotional courage; artistic creativity. A new era was beginning. The epoch of serfdom and capitalism was ending.

But then, the dark revanchist forces of oppression, of greed, regrouped. They had money and therefore could pay to buy the best psychologists, propagandists, mass-murderers, scholars, and artists. A hundred years later, look where we are! Look at us now. There is nothing to celebrate, and plenty to puke about. Gangsters and moral degenerates, who ruled during all previous centuries, are still in full control of the planet. As before, oppressed people form a majority: they inhabit all continents except Antarctica.

Actually, things have gone much further than before: the majority of people on our planet lost their ability to think logically. They have been brainwashed by the propagandist mass media, by mass-produced movies and pop music, by bizarre “trends” in fashion, and by aggressive consumerism. Education and media outlets have lost all their independence and become subservient to the interests of the regime.

Western democracy—not much of a project to begin with—kicked the bucket quietly and discretely, and its advocates again began taking direct dictates from big business, multi-billionaires and their multinational corporations. The system has evolved from turbo-capitalism into turbo-kleptocracy. All over the world, on all continents—what terrifies me is how ‘complete,’ ‘bulletproof’ the system has become. With advanced computerization, with the ability of the regime to monitor and analyze basically all corners of our planet, there seems to be no place on earth that can escape the advances and attacks of Western imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Just imagine: some country decides to resist and to work for the well-being of its own people, and immediately the Western propaganda, its NGOs, academia, media outlets, and potentially its mercenaries and military, get to work, systematically smearing the rebellious government, and potentially ruining entire countries. This is how Argentina collapsed, and then Brazil. This is how Syria was first destabilized and later almost destroyed.

It appears that nothing can withstand the global dictatorship. And the global dictatorship has no mercy; it has lost all rationale. Greed, the maximization of profits, knows no boundaries. Sacrificing human lives is now commonly perpetrated. Thousands of human lives, or a few millions, it does not seem to matter. In the Democratic Republic of Congo or in West Papua, who cares, as long as coltan, uranium, gold, and oil are flowing.

Witness entire nations ‘sinking,’ becoming uninhabitable, due to global-warming: Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands. I see tremendous islands like Borneo being thoroughly and irreversibly ruined. And nobody gives a damn. Corrupted—by the West and their own servile governments—scientists in places such as Indonesia, are still arguing that global warming and deforestation, as well as the palm oil plantations, are actually not threatening the world and its survival.

Some fifty years ago, there would have been powerful books written on these subjects. Wonderful art films were made, songs written and sang by brave bards, and the masses in both the oppressed world, but also in the West itself, bought revolutionary novels by the millions of copies. Multitudes of people stood in line, to watch films that were depicting their life, their struggle and their suffering.

Now? The destroyed masses are conditioned to forget about their nightmares and instead watch brainless horror films, some Star Wars or Marvel ‘epic,’ ‘romantic comedies’ depicting sweet suffering, or the ‘reality’ of the rich and famous. After saving for months, poor families in the devastated world are dragging their children to Disney Worlds; to those factories of plastic, emotionless dreams, to those Burger Kings of fairy-tales!

It is not a question of whether we can win, but of how we wish to live. I still passionately believe that a few people can make tremendous changes in the world around us. But I’m not looking to be paid for my efforts in some future paradise. I’m not an employee seeking the wages of revolution. I do this because the struggle itself is fulfilling. I don’t buy into the progress narrative of the Western Enlightenment, in which life inevitably becomes better and better over time and if we do our part we can congratulate ourselves on being a part of the arc of history that supposedly bends towards justice. On the contrary, the struggles we are engaged in today are very old. In some ways we have gained ground, in other ways we have lost ground, but there is no such thing as absolute victory or absolute defeat, and there are no guarantees as to how these struggles will turn out.

I don’t participate in this struggle because I think we will save the world. On the contrary, I fight because I know that one day the whole world will be destroyed—the earth will be consumed by the sun, leaving only ash—and when that day comes, I want the story that ends to be a story of beauty and tragedy and resistance to tyranny. I want the story we live to be a story of joy and courage and togetherness. I fight because it is a way of remembering those who came before us, because it is a way of honoring the creativity and rebelliousness of my contemporaries, because it is an act of care for everyone else whose heart breaks to see injustice and misfortune. I fight because I know that there is no happily ever after, there is no salvation

waiting for us at the end of history; there is just what we do together today. That is all the beauty and meaning in the world that there will ever be, and it can be more than enough.

But isn't it more difficult to fight? Aren't we setting ourselves up for gratuitous suffering, taking on such powerful adversaries? Wouldn't it be easier to give up and go with the flow?

Each of us is bound to suffer regardless—that is the only certainty in this world. Mortality is a far more formidable adversary than the state. Whether we choose to fight or not, we will suffer. The question is what we want the context of that suffering to be. Will we suffer in pursuit of the things that are most precious to us? Or will we suffer meaninglessly, attempting to flee from pain and uncertainty, as if that could protect us?

I've made peace with the fact that we are participating in struggles that can never be definitively won. It's not a question of simply overthrowing a single government but the never-concluded process of challenging hierarchy and oppression in all the different forms they can assume. This is not a project that will ever be complete.

For me, accepting that my actions cannot derive their meaning from some future goal is intertwined with the process of coming to terms with my mortality. Recognizing death as inevitable, I don't hurry any faster towards it. On the contrary, my attention shifts elsewhere, to everything that is not death, however small it may be. In a world of death, in a cosmos that is already on its way, astronomers anticipate, to universal heat death, the germination of a single seed holds more meaning for me than all the swirling galaxies of dust. We may be defeated by our enemies, we are certainly doomed to become dust ourselves, but if these things are so, then the entirety of what is meaningful consists only of the moments that something else is happening, something other than death—be it a loving interaction between two friends, an explosion of rioting, or the toppling of a government.

The fact that each of these moments has occurred will remain forever, immutable, in defiance of the vacuum. The cowardice and violence of individual police officers and of the police as an institution, the egregious acts of ISIS and the KKK—those are just background noise, death and taxes. From these moments—from our lived experiences of justice and freedom—we can extrapolate a vision of the future that is not a reiteration of Christian eschatology but rather a dimension of how we conduct ourselves in the present. We may or may not live to experience justice on a scale greater than our hard-won friendships, love affairs, projects, and uprisings. But in the meantime, the vision of that possibility can anchor and orient us in the present, informing our actions, the way a mariner navigates across the sea

by the stars. Regardless of what happens tomorrow, when we are able to imagine a utopia, that utopia can gain traction on reality by enabling us to take actions we would otherwise not be capable of. The reality content of a future utopia is determined by the actions it enables us to take today.

In this regard, my ability to believe in the possibility of change—not as something to occur in the future, but as something I can pursue right now—is a fundamental part of my power to live fully, to maintain a healthy relationship to my own agency. This is different from believing in a millenarian vision of revolution. It is not a prediction about the future, such as a scientist might make, but rather a decision about how to relate to myself and my own capabilities. This is what enables me to take action, however humble, however imperfect, and to learn from my actions, make contact with others, and take action again. The history of justice as the lived experience of human beings is comprised of such actions, which will hang in eternity after every empire has triumphed and been destroyed and the earth has been swallowed up by the sun.

“What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you:

‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again and you with it, speck of dust!’

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?”

I am scared, and at the same time, I am increasingly furious. If this is the future for humanity, do we, as human beings, really have right to exist; to survive as a species? Are we so submissive, so uninventive that we always end up begging for crumbs, praying to some invented superior forces, and prostrating ourselves in front of evil, greedy monarchs and morally-corrupt individuals and systems?

Fortunately, not everyone is blind, and not everyone is on his or her knees. Not all of us have lost the ability to resist, to dream, and to fight for a world that appeared to be so possible just one century ago.

Those who are still alive and standing on their feet, know perfectly well: Revolution is possible and morally justifiable. Capitalism and imperialism are totally inhuman. A Socialist or Communist or Anarchist system is the only way forward: not in some conservative, dogmatic form, but in an internationalist, enlightened, and tolerant way.

Like many before me they will make me bow with a bullet.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Education is potentially the most powerful means of bringing about a major shift in consciousness, within the individual and by extension society; a movement away from narrow ideas of self that feed selfishness, division, and material greed, to an inclusive view of life rooted in the recognition that humanity is one. We are forever brothers and sisters of one humanity, and from the realization of this essential fact flows all that is good: sharing, social justice, collective responsibility, freedom, and peace. These are transitional times and the early signs of such a transformation can be seen animating many people around the world, particularly the young, who are commonly in the vanguard of change.

Such a shift is essential if the various interconnected crises facing humanity are to be overcome and a true sense of self is to be established. A sense of being that is not limited or defined by the constraints of psychological-

sociological conditioning in its various forms. Dismantling such conditioning and creating space in which an unmediated relationship, or atonement with one's self can take place should sit at the heart of all areas of education.

It is from this unconditioned center of being that the blueprints of the age will be unearthed; ideas that are crucial in designing and building structures and institutions rooted in social justice and unity.

This book is intended as an initial mapping of a terra incognita, a first foray that I hope will pave the way for more explorers. My aim has been to develop the concepts and frameworks that enable us to see the pattern in what have appeared to be disparate concepts, phenomena, and fragments of rhetoric and practice, as each new point on the map contributes to materializing the puppet master in flesh and bone. Many of the points on this map are necessarily drawn from fast-moving currents in turbulent times.

The test of my efficacy will be in how well this map and its concepts illuminate the unprecedented and empower us with a more cogent and comprehensive understanding of the rapid flow of events that boil around us.

Each person bears a responsibility to pass an accurate understanding of the past to future generations so that the country and humanity can successfully advance. When we turn our backs on the truth, either through lies or indifference, we are ruining our own future. Without an accurate understanding of where we've been, we can't understand where we are, or where we're going. "Who controls the past controls the future," Eric Blair wrote under his pseudonym of George Orwell in his book *1984*. No one understood that better than Blair, who was himself an intelligence agent. He originally named his book '1948,' because he saw so clearly where the dictatorial impulse led, and how "perpetual war for perpetual peace" was not just an idea but already in motion after World War II ended.

The Cold War was a blanket term for what was in effect a series of resource wars. Who would control the oil supplies around the globe? Who would control the rare earth minerals that made flight, computers, and cell phones possible? We will perhaps always be involved in resource wars unless we recognize that nearly every international conflict is about resources, and that ideology is simply the fig leaf used to hide that fact.

I didn't plan to write a book when I started on this journey. I just had an intense, personal curiosity. I wanted to understand what happened for myself. But as the years went by, the gap between what I was learning and what appeared in print and media began to weigh on me. Reluctantly, I realized I had a responsibility to share what I had found. Thank you for being brave enough to open this volume. It takes a certain amount of courage to challenge the status quo, to dare to have a thought that differs

from what the media screams at you daily.

The media usually provides facts, but not always the clarifying context. Facts without context can become lies.

“He robbed a bank”

is a lot different from

“He robbed a bank because his kid needed expensive health-care.”

While both statements could be technically accurate, the first statement is closer to a lie if the second statement is true. Context matters. I believe the truth about these events informs our current political situation. And I believe you have a part to play in this story as well. The truth can set us all free.

Read on. Then find me.

I’m taking a risk by talking to you, because I feel I can make a difference. If nobody stands with you, you stand by yourself. There’s a risk that something could happen to me, but I don’t think like that. I think I’m going to be all right. I’m doing it for my family. It’s not all about me. I’m doing it for the whole community, because we all are related. Some of them look at me funny, but I hold my head up, because I believe in this. Where there’s a will, there is a way. And I believe that. Maybe I can’t figure it out, but somebody can. You might figure it out. You go tell people. Somebody going to make a difference.

We are not content with things as they are. Let us change our lives so we may love them the more. Things spiral around. And this is the time.

This is the time to stand for those things that are close to the American spirit. We are not content with things as they are. We reject the view of those who say, ‘America—love it or leave it.’ We reply, ‘Let us change it so we may love it the more.’ And this is the time.

Anti-establishment movements are a mess. Whether they’re left-wing or right-wing, whether they’re statist or anarchist, whether they’re organized or decentralized, whether they place emphasis on official or unofficial narratives, any circle of people who are interested in opposing the status quo on a deep, meaningful level almost invariably find themselves significantly bogged down by confusion, paranoia, infighting, and misdirected use of energy.

Every day, for example, I get people in my inbox and social media notifications telling me I shouldn’t quote or share anything from this or that leftist journalist or anti-establishment figure because they’ve said something “problematic” at some point or have some kind of association with some

aspect of the establishment. Rather than simply using narrative-disrupting tools wherever they come from to fight the establishment narrative control machine, I'm encouraged to isolate myself to the extremely narrow spectrum of voices which agree with my exact worldview perfectly. This kind of paranoid, self-cannibalizing mentality is rife throughout most anti-establishment circles.

This happens for a number of reasons, including the fact that the ruling power establishment will infiltrate dissident movements that it perceives as a threat with the intent of sowing confusion and division. But the underlying reason anti-establishment circles so often find themselves getting crushed by their own weight is ultimately because life itself is confusing and difficult to understand. Hardly anyone holds a lucid and steady awareness of just how much of society is comprised of mental narrative. Most people live their lives under the unquestioned assumption that when they are moving around in the world, speaking, acting, forming opinions, having ideas, et cetera, they are interacting with something that resembles objective reality. The truth of the matter is that most of the things which draw people's attention in their day-to-day experience, whether it's names, titles, news stories, political parties, economics, history, philosophy, religion, or what have you, consist entirely of mental noises firing off inside human skulls.

You might think it's a big jump to go from chatting about the sociopolitical dynamics within dissident movements to making vaguely Buddhist-sounding observations about human thought, but it's really not. The reason our species is in a mess right now, and thus the reason movements exist which seek to change the status quo, is because so much of life is dictated entirely by made-up mental narratives which can be easily controlled by the powerful, and hardly anyone fully grasps this. If they did, the revolution against the establishment would very smoothly and quickly succeed.

Scientific research has found that astronauts suffer problems with coordination, perception, and cognition when they are unable to determine which way is up in space. There is no "up" or "down" when you're outside the gravitational pull that our bodies are adapted to, so its absence sends our whole system out of whack. Navigating a society that is made of mental narrative is very much the same; if you don't know which way's up, you'll get lost and confused. Before you can see the narrative matrix clearly, you might be aware that some narratives serve power and swat at them while you're spinning through space, but you won't have any solid ground on which to orient yourself for the purpose of forming a clear path forward toward a healthy and harmonious world.

Your first and foremost task as a revolutionary, therefore, is to find solid ground on which to plant your feet while operating within a swirling

sea of narratives and counter-narratives. Without this you'll find yourself expending energy on ineffectual agendas, chasing shadows, attacking friends and advancing the interests of the enemy as you stumble around trying to fight a threat you can't even see clearly. You've got to figure out for yourself which way's up. The only way to do this is to turn inward and sort out your own mental narratives in your own experience. This takes a lot of dedicated work, because there are many layers of tightly believed narratives which dictate one's perception of the world that most people aren't even aware of.

As soon as we're born we are given a name which has nothing to do with the nature of the slimy, screaming naked creature which came roaring thunderously alive out of the womb. We spend our childhood being told who we are in various ways by our family, then we go to school to get taught how to think like everyone else and get labeled good/smart or bad/stupid for the rest of our lives based on how well we dance that dance. Along the ride we pick up coping mechanisms to deal with the stress of this whole unnatural ordeal, many of which become extremely counterproductive unconscious habits in later years. We pick up likes and dislikes, interests and aversions, life philosophies, religious beliefs, societal beliefs, political beliefs, all of which come together to form our worldview.

Because the foundations of our entire worldview are formed in early childhood long before we're mature enough to decide for ourselves what a useful foundation might look like, we wind up interfacing with life through this muddled, inefficient network of mostly unconscious mental and perceptual habits which don't serve us very well. It is with this warped tool that we interact with the vast sea of official and unofficial narratives we are presented with in our attempts to decipher what's wrong with the world and how to fix it. The path, then, is to unwind this whole confused, unconscious muddle of mental and perceptual habits until we get to the untarnished blank canvas of that powerful screaming baby who first met this wild world, and inhabit it consciously. That right there is our solid ground.

Who are you? Underneath the mental narratives about who you are? Underneath all the stories, labels, and beliefs? Underneath the field of consciousness full of thoughts, sensory impressions, and feelings? This is the most important inquiry that anyone can possibly engage in, and it is worthy of the entirety of your focus until it's resolved.

All of these swirling, babbling thought stories have dictated our lives for as long as we can remember, but rarely does anyone sit down and start sorting out where they come from and if they're useful. We lug around ancient mental narratives about life, about how we should be, about how other people should be, about the best ways to find happiness, about the best ways to avoid unhappiness, and we rarely consider the possibility that

we can interact with life unencumbered by that heavy load.

If you want to find solid ground beneath your feet so that you can push effectively for a healthy world, you've got to question every assumption you've ever made about yourself and the nature of the world, even your very most fundamental assumptions, because it's all narrative. As you turn your attention toward your essential nature and away from your churning, babbling mental habits, interest and attention will move away from mental narratives and toward the solid ground upon which they appear. The mind will relax and mental narrative will take on its proper role as a tool that can be used when it's useful and set down when it isn't, rather than the dominating feature of every minute of waking existence. Unhelpful mental habits can be discarded, and all attempts at narrative manipulation will stand out like a black fly on a white sheet of paper.

I can't tell you how to do this. Everyone's path to the heart of the fundamental matter is unique, and you can only travel it on your own. I can tell you that the answer does not exist in the realm of thought, and that it is closer to you than your own breath. Sincere, dedicated inquiry into your own true nature, on your own and in your own way, will lead you to the ground on which you must take your stand in order to fight the establishment narrative machine effectively

If people could see the world with fresh eyes, as though they were viewing it for the very first time, they would suddenly find themselves smashed between two equally strong yet wildly different experiences. On the one hand, they would experience breathless awe at the thunderous beauty of everything that exists. We tend to develop a mental habit of taking things for granted just because we have a thought story about knowing what they are and having seen them before. The labeling, dividing mind says, 'Oh yeah, I know what that is, that's a tree. I've seen a million of those, no big deal,' and we make a habit of overlooking it. This habit combines with our fixation on looping mental chatter to pull the interest and attention out of our experience of the world which would otherwise be experienced as a nonstop eruption of staggering beauty.

On the other hand, someone seeing the world with fresh eyes would at the same time experience howling rage at all the immense evils that the mass media manipulators have convinced us to accept as normal. All the oppression, exploitation, violence, domination, ecocide, and corruption which we were born into would no longer be seen as unfortunate but necessary mundane realities, and neither would all the horrible propagandists who deceived us into thinking they were.

Even the most informed and skeptical-minded people who are well aware that there is a nonstop psywar being waged by the powerful against human

decency and common sense tend to think of establishment propaganda in terms that fail to encapsulate its most pernicious aspects. Most hip, conspiracy-aware individuals, when asked to point to examples of mass media propaganda, will talk about things like discrepancies in coverage which benefit Western power structures, or the deliberate undermining of all political candidates even a tiny bit outside the mainstream consensus, or the lies that have been used to manufacture consent for wars. All of those are of course real things that have real consequences, but they are not the most significant and consequential aspect of establishment propaganda. The most significant and consequential aspect of establishment propaganda is the simple, everyday practice of manufacturing normality.

By “manufacturing normality” I mean the way the plutocrat-owned political/media class pour massive amounts of energy day in and day out into making the ridiculous, horrific status quo seem normal. They do this in many ways, both by action and by inaction. The way a celebrity saying something obnoxious on Twitter is treated as immensely newsworthy while daily US drone strikes overseas go completely unreported. The way people starving and dying of exposure both in the third world and in the first while resources are vacuumed up by an elite few is something we’re all kept just dimly aware of while Johnny Popsong wearing a meat tuxedo to the Snobbies occupies headlines for days. The way mainstream TV shows, movies, and music are all just really long commercials for capitalism and egocentrism.

Every time something horrible happens without news reporters treating it like something horrible, normality is being manufactured. Every time something unimportant happens that is treated as newsworthy, normality is being manufactured. Every time our bizarre, bat shit insane status quo is commented on without Jake Tapper taking his eyes off the teleprompter and screaming “HOLY SHIT WHAT THE FUCK HAVE WE BECOME,” normality is being manufactured. This happens every single day, many times a day.

This is hard to talk about, precisely because it has been so normalized. It’s easy to point out the glitches in the matrix that stand out against the background of normality like when CNN interviews a seven year-old girl to tell us all how important it is to invade Syria or whatever; it’s much more difficult to talk about the background of normality itself. And this is why the propaganda machine’s ability to manufacture normality is so powerful: by controlling what we all see as normal, they are able to spin any attempt to deviate from that false image of normality as abnormal. Humans are conditioned to see safety in normality; if patterns are constant and sustained we feel like we can relax, if patterns are disrupted we feel under threat. For this reason even something so clearly evil and deranged as the US forever

war can be spun as normal and therefore safe, and any attempt to end it can be spun as abnormal and therefore unsafe.

We're dealing with this exact kind of dynamic all day, every day. The narrative managers say all day every day in myriad ways that the status quo of endless war, exploitation, oppression, ecocide, and propagandistic mass mind control are all perfectly normal, and that the normal human impulse to pull away from that status quo is weird and dangerous.

People are afraid of being trapped inside a box, but they don't realize that they are already trapped inside a box—their brain—which is locked within a bigger box—human society with its myriad fictions. When you escape the matrix the only thing you discover is a bigger matrix. People fear that being trapped inside a box, they will miss out on all the wonders of the world. As long as Neo is stuck inside the matrix, and Truman is stuck inside the TV studio, they will never visit Fiji, or Paris, or Machu Picchu. But in truth, everything you will ever experience in life is within your own body and your own mind. Breaking out of the matrix or traveling to Fiji won't make any difference. It's not that somewhere in your mind there is an iron chest with a big red warning sign 'Open only in Fiji!' and when you finally travel to the South Pacific you get to open the chest, and out come all kinds of special emotions and feelings that you can have only in Fiji. And if you never visit Fiji in your life, then you missed these special feelings for ever. No. Whatever you can feel in Fiji, you can feel anywhere in the world; even inside the matrix.

Or have you any idea how many movies, novels, and poems you have consumed over the years, and how these artifacts have carved and sharpened your idea of love? Romantic comedies are to love as porn is to sex and Rambo is to war. And if you think you can press some delete button and wipe out all trace of Hollywood from your subconscious and your limbic system, you are deluding yourself.

How do you live in an age of bewilderment, when the old stories have collapsed, and no new story has yet emerged to replace them?

All political ideologies might be viewed as mental and emotional crutches, or substitute religions: for leaders, a means of manipulating attitudes and behaviors; for the rank and file, a lazy surrogate for problem solving and a way of fulfilling the craving to belong to something bigger than oneself.

How do we become part of any culture, any form of life, save by accepting its suggestions to be our truth? Suggestions by the thousands, millions, there's seas of suggestions; accepted, worshiped, reasonable and un-, declined, ignored, all of them pouring unseen through me, through every human being, every animal, every life-form on Earth: got to eat and sleep, feel hot and cold, pain and pleasure, got to have a heartbeat, breathe air, learn all physical

laws and obey, accept suggestions that this is the only life there is or ever was or ever will be.

Every suggestion of every second, every decision we make or don't make is poised on the pinpoint of the decision that's gone before; the decision before was poised on the one before; each one elected by which suggestion I decide is true for me. No one ever makes a decision for me: when I accept advice, I'm the one choosing to act on it. I could have said no, a thousand different ways. Call suggestions 'hypnosis' and all of a sudden here's a label you've been looking for, here's the pattern—the puzzle fits together. Every day, everybody in the world's going deeper into their own trance, everybody's got their own story they're believing about themselves.

Take the notion, which we all learn as children and most of us accept as self-evident truth, that what sets humans apart from other animals is rationality; that we, as a species, "possess the faculty of reason." This is very much a Medieval notion. If you think about it, it also doesn't make a lot of sense. If "rationality" is just the ability to assess reality more or less as it is and to draw logical conclusions, then most animals are extremely rational. They solve problems all the time. Most might not be nearly as good at it as humans but there is no fundamental difference in kind.

Go to the primate section of the Bronx Zoo where you can see our close relatives in the primate family leading their own busy social lives. You can also see masses of tourists laughing at the caricature of humans that the lower primates represent. Now imagine being a member of a higher-level species—say a "real" philosopher, a truly wise person—far more sophisticated than the human primates. You would certainly laugh at the people laughing at the nonhuman primates. Clearly, to those people amused by the apes, the idea of a being who would look down on them the way they look down on the apes cannot immediately come to their minds—if it did, it would elicit self-pity. They would stop laughing. Accordingly, an element in the mechanics of how the human mind learns from the past makes us believe in definitive solutions—yet not consider that those who preceded us thought that they too had definitive solutions. We laugh at others and we don't realize that someone will be just as justified in laughing at us on some not too remote day. Such a realization would entail the recursive, or second-order, thinking that many are not good at.

Their narrow circles of immediate experience held inside that bigger ocean of outlying beliefs and assumptions. In any era, there are truths that people take as obvious, stories that they think are weird or wrong, and dreams that they believe are distant or doomed. We like stories about time travel and living robots, and even have some speculative thoughts about how they might be made to happen. But on the whole we believe that the

time we're living in, and the way we live in it, is just the natural way things are. We like strange stories but believe only a few.

The obvious truths of 1809, the kind that were taught in school, involved what could be called a “vertical” organization of life, one in which we imagine a hierarchy of species organized on earth, descending from man on down toward animals, and a judge appraising us up above in heaven. Man was stuck in the middle, looking warily up and loftily down. People mostly believed that the kinds of organisms they saw on earth had always been here and always would be, that life had been fixed in place since the beginning of a terrestrial time, which was thought to go back a few thousand years at most. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment had, of course, already deepened a faith in Reason among the elite, but it was not a popular movement. It had altered many ideas without changing most minds.

People also believed—using examples ancient and modern; and the example of the Terror in France, which had only very recently congealed into Napoléon’s empire, was a strong case—that societies without inherited order were intrinsically weak, unstable, and inclined to dissolve into anarchy or tyranny. Democracy in the sense we mean it now was a fringe ideal of a handful of radicals. Even in America the future of democracy was unclear, in part because of the persistence of slavery, which was still a feature of Western life. Democracy was hard to tell from mob rule and the tyranny of mob rule. Democracy existed, and was armed, but didn’t feel entirely liberal; the difference between reformist parliamentary government and true democracy seemed disturbingly large even to well-intentioned people.

“Morally, we are caught in a system we did not design, faced with unpleasant choices we would rather skip over, torn between wanting a little more ease and a nagging conscience that suggests that such ease is not worth the moral cost, and sometimes compelled to choose what we would think is the least bad of two distressing alternatives.”

We are increasingly enmeshed in incompetent systems—that is, systems that exhibit pathological behavior but can’t fix themselves. This is because solving the problems of such a system would require coordinated action by significant components of the system, but engaging in such action(s) is not in the short-term interest of any individual component (and may indeed be counter to its interests). So, in the end, pathological system behavior continues until catastrophe ensues.

A case study of an incompetent system is our intellectual property regime, a large part of which is concerned with copying and the regulation thereof.

This regime was shaped in an analog world—in other words, an era in which copying was difficult, degenerative, and costly, and in which dissemination of copies was difficult and expensive. We now live in a digital world, in which copying is not only effortless, non-degenerative, and effectively free, but is actually intrinsic to digital technology. What is a computer, after all, but a copying machine? Copying is to digital technology as breathing is to animal life; you can't have one without the other. So trying to apply an IP regime designed for analog circumstances to a world in which all media and cultural artifacts are digital offends against common sense. Everybody knows this, but the prospects of getting a solution to the problem are poor. Why? Because moving to a more rational IP regime would require concerted action by powerful vested interests, each of which has a stake in the status quo. They're not going to move—which is why our IP regime is an incompetent system.

In an influential essay published in 1989 and in a subsequent book, Francis Fukuyama claimed that liberal democracy was the final form of human government, the “end point of mankind's ideological evolution.” Every country would eventually become democratic, and there would be no fundamental change in political organization from then on. This would be a shame, because there may be better forms of political organization that we can aspire to. But the spread of democracy may actually make it harder to discover these alternatives. To see why, we need to understand something that may at first appear counter-intuitive. Democracy doesn't give most people what they want; in fact, it leads to majority dissatisfaction.

When Barack Obama won the 2012 election with 51 percent of the vote, for example, it wasn't just the 49 percent who voted against him who were unhappy with the result. Most of those who voted for Obama were pretty disappointed too—because Obama ran on a platform that did not represent the ideal policy bundle of more than just a few voters. In every election, voters are forced to choose between a tiny selection of candidates, none of whom they particularly like. Everyone will be disappointed no matter which candidate wins, because nobody had a chance to vote for their ideal manifesto to begin with.

The very thing that makes majority dissatisfaction inevitable in a democracy, the voting mechanism, also makes it hard for a better political system to develop. The reforms that would be necessary to pave the way for alternative systems of governance lie well outside the safe middle ground of the median voter. Politicians advocating such reforms are unlikely, therefore, to be voted into office. For example, one route to discovering alternative forms of governance may begin with the secession of a few cities from their parent nations, or in the creation of new cities from scratch, operating under rules

different from those in the rest of the country. It's hard to imagine elected politicians getting away with such things, however, even if they wanted to. The only historical precedents so far have occurred in autocratic regimes, where leaders do not have to worry about reelection.

We should worry that democracy may turn out to be a historical cul-de-sac, a place that looks pleasant enough from far away but doesn't lead anywhere

When discussing global issues, we are always in danger of privileging the viewpoint of the global elite over that of various disadvantaged groups. The global elite commands the conversation, so it is impossible to miss its views. Disadvantaged groups, in contrast, are routinely silenced, so it is easy to forget about them—not out of deliberate malice, but out of sheer ignorance.

When you use the frames and language of your opponents, you don't persuade them to adopt your point of view. Instead you adopt theirs, while strengthening their resistance to your objectives.

Could our parameters on reality be set just a little too tight? I am most skeptical of those things I'd most like to believe, precisely because I'd like to believe them. Wanting to believe something can skew one's view.

The left isn't really a thing and neither is the right, they are but a spectrum of people who gravitate to ideas based on a set of values and where they feel like they fit relative to the culturally established polarities promoted, and to a large extent in the US what determines left and right ideologies is established by the Republican and Democratic parties. And the people don't set the agenda of either of the parties. Wealthy elites set their agenda, which equates to the people having no real voice, only if they want corporate authoritarian plan A or B.

The extremes of the spectrum of left and right are often misconstrued intentionally by those attempting to manipulate the public dialog, and for my purposes here, like the word 'radical,' the word 'extreme' isn't to mean good or bad only the furthest realms of thought down a logically consistent path. Most people have a mixture of right and left ideas, but the ideological thinking at the root of the left and right, what I'm referring to here as the extremes, have certain core beliefs at their foundations.

So the extreme right is embodied by the following ideas: An open endorsement of competition, discipline, control, militarism, shame, and punishment behavior modification—prisons and courts, law and order. A might makes right power structure, acting on fear impulses and using it as motivational tool. A culture of violent domination and ownership as a means to an end to accomplish the interests of the installed hierarchy. The right-wing embraces an archaic, brutal winner-take-all competition where the hoarding of resources is encouraged to utilize leverage over other people,

and warfare and policing is commonly employed to achieve those means if necessary.

And because they believe in hierarchy and broken ideas like “leadership” they are innately against mechanisms that distribute power whether they be economic or political. Hence they are against socialist policies of government that limit profits for corporate interests like healthcare, but for the physical authority aspects of socialism like policing, jails, and military. Also due to their belief in ruling hierarchy there is a more natural submission to play the role of unthinking pawn to an authority and those at the top of the pyramid will more commonly exhibit authoritarian tendencies.

Under the doctrine of the right the ruling power acts like a parent to the people. The parent will play nice so long as the child behaves, they may even negotiate occasionally should it be easier for the adult to briefly yield than use corporal punishment, but should the child interfere with the relationship with power to the adult then violence will be used to reestablish power.

The environment and human life are secondary priorities to maintaining the power structure to the right-wing. Words are reframed if not outright inverted to mask the extremely negative repercussions from operating in competitive hierarchy, where implications such as war, class subjugation, incarceration, and ecocide are merely the price we have to pay for the good of the nation state and its sacrosanct economic system. Nationalism and organized religion are heavily promoted by right-wing authoritarians as these are both ideologies where critical thinking is circumvented in favor of blind allegiance. They both have leaders who serve as conduits to a higher power; in religion this is the priest class and in patriotism a leader like Trump fills this role, who gains his power by being conduit to the American mythology and putting a flag in front of every atrocity made while lurching for more power. Every act of violence and abuse of power orchestrated is put in the context of a mistake or a necessity while ostensibly trying to protect ole glory.

The rationale dismisses most actions that might be considered ugly as merely isolated events and not indicative of the system itself which is beyond reproach as the mythology of the founding fathers is sacred, just as the bible itself was infallible to Christians as soon as ink touched parchment. Everything to foster a belief in held power and perpetuate the status quo way of doing things, while attempting to justify all the actions of it. Wholesale “loyalty” to a side is an underlined virtue. Due to blind subscription to -isms, the activities of ruling power are never dubious enough to dim the fidelity of the people to the -ism, in part because they have personified the -ism as a part of themselves, it becomes part of their identity, and thus all misgivings

are rationalized through the ultimate good they believe the power represents since they believe themselves to be good. And no matter how much evidence is presented to the contrary it remains sacrosanct to question that authority because it's akin to questioning their own ego identity.

As for the ideology of the extreme left, they are at root based in human cooperation, sharing, equality, and flattened models of power in a voluntary economic system. Lefty ideas are usually embodied under the umbrella of ideologies like socialism, communism, and most forms of anarchism. Consciousness, and the quality of it—for all living beings—is prioritized. Compulsory conformity is frowned upon. The extreme left consists of people who want to be left alone to live free in their communities unmolested by business interests and government. The extreme left chooses symbiosis with nature rather than bulldozing over it. They encompass shamanistic Native America values, with strong ties to community without petty division and being stewards of the land.

A live and let live outlook is embraced, a take only pictures leave only footprints mentality. Peace, diplomacy, and understanding are at the forefront of thought when dealing with others. Violence is a last resort only when facing an unyielding force, such as what Western empire is to countries not currently in their financial snare. And again, the left isn't really the political left, they are merely a diverse group who react to fear differently than those who more closely associate to ideas on the right. Lefties are traditionally less reactionary to fear, and less vengeful to external threats; maintaining a do unto others mentality with a belief that people should not exploit others or the land for profit. Not controversial stuff, just treat everyone like you would like to be treated, the Golden Rule.

Lefties are funded by almost no one with a big pot of gold, likely because there is an underlying contention on the left that no one needs to be that rich and powerful, so those who crave wealth and spend their days chasing money and power don't typically have much in common with core lefty values. And George Soros, Bill Gates, and other so called lefty elites don't support lefty writers, pundits, and journalists like the Koch brothers support on the right-wing, mostly because those billionaires aren't really the left, they are Reagan-era conservatives who are only considered lefty relative to Trump-era conservatives.

It's primarily the left that cares if animals are mistreated, the left that finds trophy hunting and abattoirs disdainful, the left that doesn't support "double tap" drone bombing, or giving weapons to hard-line authoritarian allies like Saudi Arabia who drops them on school buses in Yemen. The lefties are the ones suggesting nation states prioritize taking care of the people and living sustainably instead investing in mass murder and ecocide

on a global scale. Or that humanity not be an authoritarian shitshow. But for these sentiments the argument is inverted by the right-wing and the left is called authoritarian. The rebuke from the right-wing often lands on a variation of the following argumentation:

“Did you hear about Stalin and Hitler? They were authoritarian lefty communist/socialist types, and didn’t you know that communism and socialism always end in tragic failure?”

However, I’ve yet to meet a lefty that would support a modern day Stalin or Hitler regime or any of their methodologies, or their structure of power, or the way they conducted any of their business as usual behavior, but according to some punditry on the right, this is an example of a violent failure from the left. The most horrendous right-wing activities are pegged onto lefties as a basic straw-man shell game and intentionally using the most convenient arguments usually blurted from a bully pulpit with a large installed audience where the counter arguments are muted and/or ignored by big media outlets.

The misconceptions of what and who is radical have been driven by the aforementioned right-wing. Values are again very intentional. The right-wing is what Western civilization is based on, and they contort and confuse every successive generation into believing aspects of red-baiting propaganda, which works really well when one can control media outlets and silence dissent. Like when they sentenced lefty socialist Eugene Debs to a decade in prison in 1918 for nothing more than giving a speech. And today the ruling elite right-wing authoritarians have sought punishment for Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and others for whistle-blowing on the heinous activities of the state. If the people at the top of the hierarchy had lefty values they’d thank them for pointing out the corruption, but the reaction of the US government tells you all you need to know about the ideology currently running the world.

The proper and reasoned response to this systemic construct of intentional mass inequality, which threatens the very continuance of countless species, is to reject it outright. This is a system that deliberately manufactures inequality so an oligarchy can forever enrich themselves while keeping the lower classes divided, subjugated, and bemused. To create such inequality others must be disempowered to the point they cannot resist, clearing the way to properly rob them of the land beneath their feet and plunder the natural world for resources. The powers that be propagate large scale plans—like the Southern Strategy—for dividing people and not caring about the human suffering that is a result of their social meddling even should it lead

to violence, which is the intended result in most cases where it occurs. Their objective is only to virulently defend the helm of power at any cost, and to serve economic interests of those who already have more than their share.

Radical change starts with understanding that the way things are now isn't how they have to be. What occurred yesterday doesn't have to be what happens tomorrow. However, being a radical is not something to be taken lightly. Drawing outside the lines that comprise defined societal norms takes courage, but we should not endeavor to do things simply to prove we are not afraid, or to garner a sense of status, or because it betters our odds of getting laid. But when simple truths go ignored which give rise to widespread abuse and inequality, and standing up to end these practices makes one a radical—then so be it.

Be fuckin' radical.

Be radical when it comes to standing up for any action that reduces suffering of another. Be radical to protect all nascent threads of emotional connection, creativity, and courage wherever they may lie. Radically see life and consciousness in everything and treat all as an equal, radically enlighten, be radically sustainable; these are not controversial things yet they are all under attack to the degree that to be logically consistent with these ideas will make one a radical with a negative connotation. So in the face of ecocidal empire we must rebel radically, yet with radical wisdom to know that the methodologies in which we bring about change will determine the values that will be expressed into any new system of change. Divesting from the current economic methodologies, using radical non-participation, radical civil disobedience, and creating self-sufficient sustainable communities will help drive power away from the current model and potentially break it. Though, I'm afraid there's no way forward unless we accept being radical.

If you think you're right about something, first you have to see that you're making assumptions, and then you have to examine them—truly, honestly examine them—and once you've done those things and thought them through and come to your conclusions and stuck to that, then are you rigid? If you've made a decision that you believe in? Depends how you define rigid.

Enthusiast: An enthusiast displays an intense and eager interest in something (a sky-diving enthusiast).

Fanatic: A fanatic is not only intense and eager but possibly irrational in his or her enthusiasm; fanatic suggests extreme devotion and a willingness to go to any length to maintain or carry out one's beliefs (a fly-fishing fanatic who hired a helicopter to reach his favorite stream).

Zealot: A zealot exhibits not only extreme devotion but vehement activity in support of a cause or goal (a feminist zealot who spent most of her time campaigning for women's rights).

Extremist: An extremist is a supporter of extreme doctrines or practices, particularly in a political context (a paramilitary extremist who anticipated the overthrow of the government).

Bigot: It is the bigot who causes the most trouble, exhibiting obstinate and often blind devotion to his or her beliefs and opinions. In contrast to 'fanatic' and 'zealot,' the term 'bigot' implies intolerance and contempt for those who do not agree (a bigot who could not accept his daughter's decision to marry outside her religion).

No one is objective. I tend to think that if anyone tells you she or he is objective, that person is probably trying to sell you something.

Worldviews are like belly buttons. Everyone has one, but we don't talk about them very often. Or perhaps it would be better to say that worldviews are like cerebellums: everyone has one and we can't live without them, but not everyone knows that he has one.

Does that mean the whole book is biased? Well, sure! But if you think about it, that's unavoidable. Since everyone has a worldview, everyone has a bias. All of us are naturally biased toward our own worldviews, and all of us tend to interpret and evaluate the world in accordance with our worldviews. So do I have a bias? Yes, of course—but so do you! The real issue isn't whether we have biases—we all do—but whether we're aware of them and able to think critically about them. In a certain sense, each of us can step into someone else's worldview, just as we can step into someone else's house, to examine it 'from the inside' and to compare it with our own. I've tried to represent other worldviews fairly in this book: to summarize them accurately and to be realistic about their strengths and weaknesses. Even if you think I've failed in some cases, I hope you will nonetheless learn something useful along the way and benefit from thinking about these important matters.

Let me be up front about my bias. I don't trust former McKinsey consultants. I don't trust military intelligence officers. And I don't trust the type of people likely to appear on "40 under 40" lists, the valedictorian-to-Harvard-to-Rhodes-Scholarship types who populate the American elite. I don't trust people who get flattering reams of newspaper profiles and are pitched as the Next Big Thing That You Must Pay Attention To, and I don't trust wunderkinds who become successful too early. Why? Because I am somewhat cynical about the United States meritocracy. Few people amass

these kind of résumés if they are the type to openly challenge authority. The factors predicting success in our “meritocracy” are a combination of greed, cynicism, obsequiousness, and subordination, lack of curiosity and independence of mind, and self-serving disregard for others. So when journalists see ‘Harvard’ and think ‘impressive,’ I see it and think ‘uh-oh.’

A worldview is simply a person’s overall philosophical view of the world. It’s an all-encompassing perspective on everything that exists and matters to us. Your worldview shapes what you believe and what you’re willing to believe, how you interpret your experiences, how you behave in response to those experiences, and how you relate to others. A religion, on the other hand, is a set of fundamental beliefs and practices concerned with ultimate issues, such as the nature of the divine, the origins of the universe, the meaning of human existence, how we should live our lives and relate to one another, whether there is life after death, what it means to be “saved,” and how we can obtain “salvation.” Religions take many forms, but they typically involve teachings about how God relates to the universe and to us, adherence to certain sacred writings, observance of traditional rites and practices, symbols, moral codes, recognized leaders, and a strong sense of community. The major world religions today include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Judaism, Jainism, and the Baha’i Faith. Everyone has a worldview, but not everyone has a religion.

Not all dogmas are equally harmful. Just as some religious beliefs have benefited humanity, so also have some secular dogmas. This is particularly true of the doctrine of human rights. The only place rights exist is in the stories humans invent and tell one another. These stories were enshrined as a self-evident dogma during the struggle against religious bigotry and autocratic governments. Though it isn’t true that humans have a natural right to life or liberty, belief in this story curbed the power of authoritarian regimes, protected minorities from harm, and safeguarded billions from the worst consequences of poverty and violence. It thereby contributed to the happiness and welfare of humanity probably more than any other doctrine in history. Yet it is still a dogma. Thus Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights says:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.”

If we understand this is a political demand—everyone should have the right to freedom of opinion—this is perfectly sensible. But if we believe that each and every *Sapiens* is naturally endowed with a “right to freedom of opinion,” and that censorship therefore violates some law of nature, we miss

the truth about humanity. As long as you define yourself as “an individual possessing inalienable natural rights,” you will not know who you really are, and you will not understand the historical forces that shaped your society and your own mind (including your belief in “natural rights”). Such ignorance perhaps mattered little in the twentieth century, but it might become fatal in the twenty-first century, because biotechnology and artificial intelligence now seek to change the very meaning of humanity. If we are committed to the right to life, does that imply we should use biotechnology to overcome death? If we are committed to the right to liberty, should we empower algorithms that decipher and fulfill our hidden desires? If all humans enjoy equal human rights, do superhumans enjoy super-rights? Secular people will find it difficult to engage with such questions as long as they are committed to a dogmatic belief in “human rights.”

Secularism should not be equated with Stalinist dogmatism or with the bitter fruits of Western imperialism and runaway industrialization. Yet it cannot shirk all responsibility for them, either. Secular movements and scientific institutions have mesmerized billions with promises to perfect humanity and to utilize the bounty of planet Earth for the benefit of our species. Such promises resulted not just in overcoming plagues and famines, but also in gulags and melting ice caps. You might well argue that this is all the fault of people misunderstanding and distorting the core secular ideals and the true facts of science. And you are absolutely right. But that is a common problem for all influential movements.

Christianity has been responsible for great crimes such as the Inquisition, the Crusades, the oppression of native cultures across the world, and the disempowerment of women. A Christian might take offense at this and retort that all these crimes resulted from a complete misunderstanding of Christianity. Jesus preached only love, and the Inquisition was based on a horrific distortion of his teachings. We can sympathize with this claim, but it would be a mistake to let Christianity off the hook so easily. Christians appalled by the Inquisition and by the Crusades cannot just wash their hands of these atrocities—they should rather ask themselves some very tough questions. How exactly did their “religion of love” allow itself to be distorted in such a way, and not once, but numerous times? Protestants who try to blame it all on Catholic fanaticism are advised to read a book about the behaviour of Protestant colonists in Ireland or in North America. Similarly, Marxists should ask themselves what it was about the teachings of Marx that paved the way to the Gulag, scientists should consider how the scientific project lent itself so easily to destabilizing the global ecosystem, and geneticists in particular should take warning from the way the Nazis hijacked Darwinian theories.

As we come to make the most important decisions in the history of life, I personally would trust more in those who admit ignorance than in those who claim infallibility. If you want your currently existing religion, ideology, or worldview to lead the world, my first question to you is: ‘What was the biggest mistake your religion, ideology, or worldview committed? What did it get wrong?’ If you cannot come up with something serious, I for one would not trust you.

We are speaking of the most important thing: no less a thing than how to live. We might propose, then, that you should arrive at this book as at the beginning of a pilgrimage—a movement toward the truth and toward the self. That you should come to seek conversion, though you know not yet to what belief or way. That you should approach ideas as instruments of salvation, driven by a need to work things through for yourself, so that you won’t be damned to go through life at second hand, thinking other people’s thoughts and dreaming other people’s dreams. It’s been said that people go to monasteries to find out why they have come, and this may be an attempt to do the same.

We are born once, not only into nature but also into a culture that quickly becomes a second nature. But then, if we are granted such grace, we are born again. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his mortal soul? Far from only training workers to contribute to the GDP, or even citizens to play a role within the public sphere, a true education, like a true religion, enables you to stand apart, and if necessary, against, the claims that others make upon you. You can live without a soul, on ego and will alone—you can go on, keep on, and rush on—but you won’t have very much inside you.

We must engender a social conscience. There are wrongs which need attention. There are people who are poor and need help. And we have a responsibility to them and to this country. Through no virtues and accomplishments of our own, we have been fortunate enough to be born in the United States under the most comfortable conditions. We, therefore, have a responsibility to others who are less well off.

There is discrimination in this world, and slavery, and slaughter, and starvation. Governments repress their people; millions are trapped in poverty while the nation grows rich and wealth is lavished on armaments everywhere. These are differing evils, but they are the common works of man. But we can perhaps remember—even if only for a time—that those who live with us are our brothers; that they share with us the same short moment of life; that they seek—as we do—nothing but the chance to live out their lives in purpose and happiness. Some believe there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world’s ills. Yet many of

the world's great movements, of thought and action, have flowed from the work of a single person.

A young monk began the Protestant reformation; a young general extended an empire from Macedonia to the borders of the earth; a young woman reclaimed the territory of France. These people moved the world, and so can we all. Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change. And I believe that in this generation, those with the courage to enter the moral conflict will find themselves with companions in every corner of the globe.

The fortunate among us need to resist the temptation to follow the easy and familiar paths of personal ambition and financial success so grandly spread before those who enjoy the privilege of education and the right connections. We will all ultimately be judged on the effort we have contributed to building a better society and the extent to which our ideals and goals have shaped that event.

The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man alike, timid and fearful in the face of new ideas and bold projects. Rather it will belong to those who can blend vision, reason, and courage in a personal commitment to the ideals and great enterprises of American Society. Our future may lie beyond our vision, but it is not completely beyond our control. It is the shaping impulse of America that neither fate nor nature nor the irresistible tides of history but the work of our own hands, matched to reason and principle, that will determine our destiny. There is pride in that, even arrogance, but there is also experience and truth. In any event, it is the only way we can live.

“Some men see things as they are and say, ‘Why?’ I dream things that never were and say, ‘Why not?’”

Moral imagination is hard, and it is hard in a completely different way than the hard things that elite students are used to doing. You can't study for it. You can't compete for it. The qualities it calls upon are those of character, not intellect. It's never easy, and not only that, it's never enough. You also need courage, moral courage, the bravery to act on your imagination in the face of what your family and friends are going to say to try to stop you. Because they're not going to like it. The morally courageous person tends to make the individuals around him very uncomfortable. He doesn't fit with their ideas about the way the world is supposed to work, and he makes them insecure about the choices they themselves have made—or failed to make. Physical courage is admirable, but in social terms it's usually quite easy. You have your comrades there beside you, your community to cheer you on. Moral courage can be lonely indeed. People don't mind being trapped, as long as no one else is free. But stage a break, and everybody else begins to panic.

There is a hidden curriculum—under-the-hood concepts young children pick up as part of their schooling. This hidden curriculum connects young people to the structures of power in society and defines their relationships to them. Schools implicitly lay out norms and values that are crucial for navigating the outside world; these ideals teach students an approach to living and an attitude toward learning. A connection exists between the unstated lessons schools teach children on one side, and the social classes to which the children belong on the other. Schools do different things to different children. Boys and girls, blacks and whites, rich and poor are treated differently. The result is a silent message about the future paths they should take—for example, the low-income or high-income occupational choices that best fit them. The hidden curriculum of schools stubbornly reproduces the existing power structure of the society; even the ways student cliques form and resist administration policies within schools often echo the class distinctions of the students.

Telling stories is fundamental to every society. No stories are objective reproductions of reality. Folklorists emphasize that tales of all sorts serve up systems of messages that parade norms, values, and moral definitions, and tell people how to frame the world. The key difference between a society's traditional stories and those told by television, movies, and magazines lies in folklore's handicraft nature. Created and diffused organically through society, folklore is a product of the individuals who tell the stories. Modern media tales, news and entertainment, are by contrast created by industries where the concerns of organizations take precedence over all else. The stories result from media firms' need to satisfy marketers, investors, and, sometimes, politicians who benefit from showing people certain views of reality and not

others. Hidden curriculum applies not just to the educational institution but to the education people receive via widespread media about all institutions from their depictions in news and entertainment.

It is a lesson plan that nobody teaches but everyone learns. Culture power is the ability to define the rules of the game of life that most members of a society will take for granted. That some will reject and others will come to oppose some of the rules, or the game itself, is obvious and may on occasion be important. But the most important thing to know is the nature and structure of the representations that most people will assume to be normal and inevitable.

James Joyce called them nets. “When the soul of a man is born in this country,” the protagonist Stephen Dedalus says about Ireland, “there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.” Today we have other nets. “What are you going to do with that?” is a net. “Instead of finding yourself, how about finding a job?”—that’s a net. “Am I being self-indulgent if I major in philosophy instead of something more practical?” “Isn’t it self-indulgent to try to live the life of the mind when there are so many other things I could be doing with my degree?” “I want to travel for a while after I graduate, but wouldn’t that be self-indulgent?” These are the kinds of questions that young people find themselves being asked today if they even think about doing something a little different—even worse, the kinds that they are made to feel compelled to ask themselves.

We like to think of ourselves as a wealthy country, but it is one of the great testaments to the intellectual—and moral, and spiritual—poverty of American society that it makes its most intelligent young people feel that they are being self-indulgent if they pursue their curiosity. You’re told that you’re supposed to go to college, but you’re also told that you are being self-indulgent if you actually want to get an education. As opposed to what? Going into consulting isn’t self-indulgent? Going into finance isn’t self-indulgent? Going into law, like most of the people who do, in order to make yourself rich, isn’t self-indulgent? It’s not okay to study history, because what good does that really do anyone, but it is okay to work for a hedge fund. It’s selfish to pursue your passion, unless it’s also going to make you a lot of money, in which case it isn’t selfish at all.

We think it odd that a man should devote his life to writing poems but natural that he should devote it to inducing children to breakfast on Crunchies instead of Krispies.

It wasn’t so long ago that higher education was valued largely for its social relevance. The aim was to produce critical, highly educated citizens who could place their talents at the service of society. But these days the notion

of serving society is considered hopelessly old-fashioned. Universities have been reinvented as knowledge businesses, whose task is to equip students with competencies that enable them to stream straight into the business sector.

Using your privilege to pursue your dreams is spiritually suspect, but using it to enrich yourself still further is somehow authentic. If you've been blessed by Mammon, the feeling appears to be, it would be disloyal not to worship him.

These are four modes of human achievement paired with what might be considered their more familiar accompanying archetypes:

Climbing–Expertise: Moving up the path of steepest ascent toward excellence for admission into a community that holds and defends a local maximum of fitness.

Crossing–Genius: Crossing the ‘Adaptive Valley’ to an unknown and unoccupied even higher maximum level of fitness.

Moving–Heroism: Moving ‘mountains of fitness’ for one’s group.

Shaking–Rebellion: Leveling peaks and filling valleys for the purpose of making the landscape more even.

The essence of genius as a modality is that it seems to reverse the logic of excellence. Sometimes we must, at least initially, move away from apparent success and headlong into seeming failure to achieve outcomes few understand are even possible. This is the essence of the so-called Adaptive Valley, which separates local hills from true summits of higher fitness. Genius, at a technical level, is the modality combining the farsightedness needed to deduce the existence of a higher peak with the character and ability to survive the punishing journey to higher ground. Needless to say, the spectacle of an individual moving against his or her expert community, away from carrots and toward sticks, is generally viewed as a cause for alarm regardless of whether that individual is a malfunctioning fool or a genius about to invalidate community groupthink. The heroes and rebels don't even accept the landscape as immovable but see dunes of fitness to be shifted by a sculpting or leveling of the landscape, with an eye toward altering the fitness of chosen populations.

Ideals: Justice, beauty, goodness, truth—the old moral lodestars. We seem to find the word forbidding now, preferring the squishier “values.” But ideals have enormous power. They give you the strength to resist the seductions of status and wealth and success. An ideal is something that is

more important to you than anything the world can give you. It functions the way that religious belief once commonly did, and in fact I've found that religious students are often the ones who possess the greatest degree of moral autonomy, and are most indifferent to outside approval. Ideals are psychological goals, necessary to the health of the mind. And although you are expected to discard them at the college gates the day you graduate, Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote to his old headmaster forty years later, during the darkest days of World War II, to thank him for urging him to hold fast to his youthful ideals in later life.

What people usually mean by a leader, when referring to students, is now someone who, in a very energetic, upbeat way, shares all the values of the people who are in charge. Leaders tend to be little adults, little grown-ups who don't challenge the big grown-ups who run the place. When people say 'leaders' now, what they mean is gung ho followers.

The point is not to have a high IQ. The point is to use it. Intelligence is not an aptitude. It's an activity—and an ethical activity, to boot. We don't need students to be radicals; we only need them to be skeptical. 'Skeptical' comes from a word that means "to look." A skeptic is someone who bothers to look. What good does it do if you make it to the top, if by the time you get there you are just another "leader"—another opportunist, another genial conformist, another mediocrity?

The timid practicality that is the major message that our kids absorb today is alibied—and camouflaged, and soothed—with a hollow commercialized rebellion. You need to avoid that kind of crap. Putting a sticker on your MacBook that says "I'm an individual" (in whatever paraphrase) does not make you an individual. Getting a piercing, growing a mustache, moving to Austin—these do not make you an individual. You can't accessorize your way to moral courage. The choices it involves are not consumer ones. Cool furniture and hip music are perfectly nice, but they are utterly beside the point. Facebook also doesn't count; you don't become an independent thinker by posting quotes from independent thinkers. Here's a rule of thumb: if you aren't giving anything up, it isn't moral and it isn't courage. Stumbles, sacrifices, inner struggle, false starts and wrong turns, conflict with parents and peers—these are some of the signs of the genuine article. The way you know it's real is if it hurts.

It's not enough to resist accepted ideas; you also have to resist the people who purvey them, which is pretty much everyone: your parents, your teachers, your peers, your friends. Your group, whatever that may mean to you—an identity group, a party, a church. If you're an environmentalist, it means the other environmentalists. If you're a libertarian, it means the other libertarians. Acting with a group does not mean thinking with a

group. In every context, there are questions that you aren't supposed ask. The job of a leader, the job of a thinker, is to identify and ask them. This is where courage comes in.

People don't like it when you challenge the consensus, especially when it's one that's so pervasive that they do not even realize that it exists. When you question it, you're forcing them to question it as well. You're drawing out the doubts they've worked so hard to keep in check. The dissident impulse, the impulse to say no, has traditionally been a very powerful one in American culture. But it's hard to see much trace of it today—not even among the young, and certainly not among the young on selective campuses. Students now no longer seem to make the kind of fundamental demand upon society—that is, for a different world—that would once have been seen as a matter of course. They're making noise of course, but the system has quite capably channeled the noise into safe outlets.

We each must win our independence by mounting a private revolution to free ourselves from the tyranny of existing mental structures. Independence, revolution, tyranny, freedom: concepts that are essential to America's collective history, as well.

A student once complained that his father hadn't sent him to Harvard to become more confused. Yes, he did, or at least, he should have. College is the place to learn that most of what we believe (history is exemplary in this regard) is much more provisional and complicated than we usually care to admit. That may sound like mental masturbation—the pointless multiplication of complexity and nuance, the endless entertainment of theories, hypotheses, and alternatives, everything that people mean by “academic” in the pejorative sense. What it is, in fact, is an honest confrontation with reality.

History is a graveyard of classes which have preferred caste privilege to leadership. Our institutions don't reward cantankerous intellectual bomb-throwers. But, that's exactly who we need to start rewarding.

People often tell us that political and economic issues are too complex for us to understand, but I think mainly the problem is that those in power hide facts from us, and if we knew more, we would understand more, and we would be able to better respond to them.

The problem is that it has become extremely complicated to grasp what we are actually doing. The commandment not to steal was formulated in the days when stealing meant physically taking with your own hand something that did not belong to you. Yet today, the really important arguments about theft concern completely different scenarios. Suppose I invest \$10,000 in shares of a big petrochemical corporation, which provides me with an annual five percent return on my investment. The corporation is highly profitable

because it does not pay for externalities. It dumps toxic waste into a nearby river without caring about the damage to the regional water supply, to the public's health, or to the local wildlife. It uses its wealth to enlist a legion of lawyers who protect it against any demand for compensation. It also retains lobbyists who block any attempt to legislate stronger environmental regulations. Can we accuse the corporation of stealing a river? And what about me personally? I never break into anyone's house or snatch dollar bills from anyone's purse. I am not aware how this particular corporation is generating its profits. I barely remember that part of my portfolio is invested in it. So am I guilty of theft? How can we act morally when we have no way of knowing all the relevant facts?

In a world in which everything is interconnected, the supreme moral imperative becomes the imperative to know. The greatest crimes in modern history resulted not just from hatred and greed, but even more so from ignorance and indifference. Charming English ladies financed the Atlantic slave trade by buying shares and bonds in the London stock exchange, without ever setting foot in either Africa or the Caribbean. They then sweetened their four o'clock tea with snow-white sugar cubes produced in hellish plantations—about which they knew nothing. In Germany in the late 1930s, the local post office manager might be an upright citizen looking after the welfare of his employees, and personally helping people in distress to find missing parcels. He was always the first one to arrive at work and the last one to leave, and even in snowstorms made sure that the post came on time. Alas, his efficient and hospitable post office was a vital cell in the nerve system of the Nazi state. It was speeding along racist propaganda, recruitment orders to the Wehrmacht, and stern orders to the local SS branch. There is something amiss with the intentions of those who do not make a sincere effort to know. But what counts as a sincere effort to know?

If you want to go deeply into any subject, you need a lot of time, and in particular you need the privilege of wasting time. You need to experiment with unproductive paths, to explore dead ends, to make space for doubts and boredom, and to allow little seeds of insight to slowly grow and blossom. If you cannot afford to waste time you will never find the truth.

If you really want truth, you need to escape the black hole of power, and allow yourself to waste a lot of time wandering here and there on the periphery. Revolutionary knowledge rarely makes it to the centre, because the centre is built on existing knowledge. The guardians of the old order usually determine who gets to reach the centres of power, and they tend to filter out the carriers of disturbing unconventional ideas. Of course they filter out an incredible amount of rubbish too. Not being invited to the Davos World Economic Forum is hardly a guarantee of wisdom. That's

why you need to waste so much time on the periphery—they may contain some brilliant revolutionary insights, but they are mostly full of uninformed guesses, debunked models, superstitious dogmas, and ridiculous conspiracy theories.

The kind of role that I tried to play was to pick up pieces or put together pieces out of which I hoped organization might come. My theory is: strong people don't need strong leaders.

For years, decades even, the US has had a policy of assassination. Americans believe that if you kill the leaders, you kill an organization. This is delusional. It only works when it almost isn't necessary. How many times has the US killed the number two man of the Taliban? Did killing Osama stop al-Qaeda? Assassination *only* works when the organization is unhealthy *or* when much of it doesn't agree with the current leader but is following them anyway.

In a healthy organization, someone else just steps up and leads, and they're about as good as whoever was there before. It's not that leadership doesn't matter, it's that healthy organizations create lots of people who are capable of leading. Very few leaders are actually genius leaders; most of what looks like genius is leading a good organization, and know-how. Sometimes, someone is the first person to really figure out how to lead an organization, but if they're good, they train successors, or people learn from watching them. The other time it works is if there is a genuine disagreement in organization. Perhaps some are willing to make peace, and some aren't, and if you kill a few of the key leaders who don't want to make peace, you can get peace.

The problem with all this, however, is that it's often hard to tell who is actually a genius leader and which people actually believe in the organization. A lower ranking leader, gunning for the first spot, is often not public about disagreeing with #1, and if he is, may be lying to get followers. It's just hard to tell. As for genius: It's rare, and people are good at faking it—until crunch time. Who was America's last genius leader? Genius political leaders are truly, genuinely, rare. And genius politicians often are terrible leaders. But the bottom line is simple: A good organization produces a surfeit of good leaders who agree with the organization's mission. Decapitation only works on unhealthy organizations.

Managers in the US—the US doesn't have many leaders—manage unhealthy organizations rife with disillusionment, designed to promote time serving managers who don't take risks, who actively work to harm the rank and file of the organization, and who believe in nothing but themselves. Such managers find it difficult to get anything done. They have to use fear, coercion, and lies to get the rank and file to follow orders, because their

orders are usually both evil and against the rank and file's self interest. They know that managing organizations is difficult from their own experience, and they think that all organizations are like that.

But organizations like the Taliban or Hezbollah—not to conflate, I don't regard Hezbollah as equivalent in many ways—actually believe in what they are doing. People join because they believe in the mission. Even large drug cartels have a belief in a mission and a winnowing of fools and poltroons that often—though not as often as belief organizations—allows them to replace leadership.

When real leadership meets real mission, people fall over themselves to join. They want to belong. They believe. They will work for virtually nothing. They will beg to be part of something bigger than them. Most Americans have *never* experienced this. They cannot understand it at a gut level. It is alien to them. And no, 'Feeling the Bern' is not it; that's the fast food equivalent at best.

Assassination works only when organizations are unhealthy, and run by managers, not leaders, or during the early stages of a charismatic cult. A healthy charismatic cult, like the early disciples of Jesus, will quickly create enough leaders to survive a decapitation strike.

Some might read this all and say: 'So much of what you say here makes sense, but I still have a big problem with it. If agriculture and other authoritarian technology lead to overshoot and drawdown, which then lead to a choice of either collapse or conquest (and we know which this culture chooses); and if converting a land base to weapons of war leads to a short-term competitive advantage over cooperative and sustainable cultures; how do we stop them?'

I would reply: Congratulations, and thank you. You understood the point of the book far better than I could have dreamed. And what now? Welcome to the war. I'll see you on the front lines.

The world is being murdered. It is being murdered by actions that are perpetrated to support and perpetuate a worldview. Those actions must be stopped. Given what is at stake, failure is no longer an option. The truth is that it never was an option. So where do we begin? We begin by questioning the unquestioned beliefs that are the real authorities of this culture, and then we move out from there. And once you've begun that questioning, my job is done, because once those questions start they never stop. From that point on, what you do is up to you.

And please don't use my own addictions, mistakes, flaws—as I know some will—as an excuse to dismiss my larger analysis. First, the honest reflections of a heroin addict might have more credibility when speaking of that addiction than might that of a non-user. Second, the first step toward

recovery from addiction is to admit there is a problem, and much of this book is aimed toward getting us as a culture to admit we are addicted to this terribly destructive way of life, because if we don't acknowledge that these addictions even exist, we have no hope of breaking them. And third, the point here is not and has never been purity, and while removing the lightbulbs from my own home would help me sleep, it wouldn't do a fucking thing to help the migratory songbirds or the insects, and it wouldn't do a thing to stop consumer culture or any of the other costs of these particular tools and social norms. There are no personal solutions to social problems.

The validity of the arguments does not depend on the virtue of the person making them.

We are at a point in history similar to that in the mid-nineteenth century when we were enmeshed in, and dependent on, an unjust system. Then it was slavery and colonialism; now it is global capitalism, the industrial economy, commercial civilization—whatever you want to call it. In slavery's day, even those who opposed it were de facto supporters; their basic necessities—from cotton to rice to sugar to tobacco—were produced by slaves. Meanwhile those who benefited most from the slave trade—the plantation owners and mercantilists—had bankrolled generations of politicians, professors, and clergy to argue that slavery was ethical and necessary. The forced complicity created a soul sickness, which perhaps explained the blossoming in that era of spiritual revivals: Transcendentalists, Mormons, utopian colonies. Only a few committed sects—the Quakers and Amish—were able to renounce the products of slavery. The abolition movement took decades. And so it is today.

Everything in our background has prepared us to know and resist a prison when the gates begin to close around us. But what if there are no cries of anguish to be heard? Who is prepared to take arms against a sea of amusements? To whom do we complain, and when, and in what tone of voice, when serious discourse dissolves into giggles? What is the antidote to a culture being drained by laughter?

This new consensus must begin with dialogue, a conversation that fosters a critical consciousness, a key prerequisite to effective social action. This book is an attempt to ensure that the conversation does not end with nervous laughter. I hope others will pick up where the book leaves off and develop the critique more fully or apply the themes sketched here to other contexts.

I would rather be vaguely right than precisely wrong. When ideas first come into the world, they are likely to be woolly, and in need of more work to define them sharply.

In trying my best to get this right, I am sure that nearly all of what I've written is reasonable, much of it is true, and some of it is wrong. It's not

less than that, and not more.

One of the disadvantages of having your book become a classic is that often, people will actually check out such examples. One of the advantages is that even if they discover you were mistaken, people will continue to cite you as an authority anyway.

At this point, my wrongness doesn't even surprise me. I almost anticipate it. Whenever people tell me I'm wrong about something, I might disagree with them in conversation, but—in my mind—I assume their accusation is justified, even when I'm relatively certain they're wrong, too.

At some point, if you live long enough, it's probably impossible to avoid seeming crazy. Maybe the world simply changes too much for everyone. I sometimes suspect that—just after the Industrial Revolution—the ongoing evolution of society accelerated beyond the speed human consciousness could evolve alongside it. We superficially accept things that can't be understood or internalized. Someone born before the Wright Brothers' virgin 852-foot flight could have died after we'd gone to the moon so many times the public had lost interest. Everything in between happened within their lifetime. It might be unreasonable to expect any normal person to experience this level of constant change without feeling—and maybe without literally being—irrefutably nutzo. Consciously trying to keep up with what's happening might actually make things worse.

We spend our lives learning many things, only to discover, again and again, that most of what we've learned is either wrong or irrelevant. A big part of our mind can handle this; a smaller, deeper part cannot. And it's that smaller part that matters more, because that part of our mind is who we really are; whether we like it or not.

Doubt is a skill and error is the foundation of wisdom. Never to have failed is a sign not of merit but fragility; it means your fears have kept you from doing or becoming what you might have. Fail better. If your standards are as high as they should be, you will fail again and again. That is the difference between mere success—getting the 'A,' measuring up to some generic benchmark that may not actually be very high at all—and true excellence. But there is also failure in a larger sense, and you need to be prepared for that, as well. I mean big mistakes, existential mistakes.

“I am not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake, and perhaps as long as eternity too.”

Those are powerful and moving words, and they have long inspired me, but we need to take them at their full weight. For every person who takes the risk of going their own way and ends up accomplishing remarkable

things there are very many who fall short. The reason to try, the reason to invent your life—whether you aim at remarkable things or only at your own thing—is so that it will be your life, your choice, your mistakes. Of course you'll make mistakes, and some will be hard to endure. But life is a long process of learning how you ought to have lived in the first place. Or it is if you do it right.

Certain types of persons are terrified even to poke a big toe into genuinely felt regret or sadness, or to get angry. This means they are afraid to live. They are imprisoned in something, I think. Frozen inside, emotionally. Why is this? No one knows.

The three most important emotions are Fear, Sadness, and Anger. Some might now be shouting, but what about love, happiness, surely those are important. Certainly but they are acquired with anger, or the threat of it. Anger is the only emotion which can protect against the infliction of fear and sadness upon a people.

Some might argue that love conquers hate, look at the civil rights movement. But no, it was not love, it was anger. Anger at the injustices, at the official support for it, of the continuation of it all. Anger, rage, that is the only emotion which ever wins any positive change for the masses.

And yet we have been trained to fear it, to distance ourselves from those who display it—to consider them not like us. We have been neutered. We have left our youth rudderless, prone to having their anger manipulated, channeled into avenues where it can be safely vented. Though not always. We have our mass shootings as the rare exceptions that prove the rule.

Fear and sadness are also acidic, they eat away at us from the inside, properly managed anger acts as the protective lining. It can keep us from becoming overwhelmed, it can provide us with hope. But none of these messages are given to our children. And we pay for it with their misguided rage.

“And they said to the Prophet, ‘How may we stop our ears to the rant of the fool and yet show him charity?’ And he answered, ‘You show yourselves charity by opening wide your ears to him. The fool in the midst of his babble shall speak truths which the minds of the wise cannot perceive.’”

I have no fear of false starts and misconceptions, all mistakes are offered up for the benefit of the adventurers in experimental philosophy who follow. He who does not foolishly affect to be above the failings of humanity will not be mortified when it is proved that he is but a man.

“I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept the simplest and most obvious truth if it would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabrics of their life.”

Criticism is welcome. I have already spent enough time as a slave to a broken, flawed ideology, I do not wish to spend time on another.

I write this from a sense of duty, a feeling of obligation and I pose a question to my future self, whom I implore to read with compassion. What will I be, the person who, months or, even decades later reads this? Myself, the same as ever? What have you learned since you wrote this?

The nativity of baby Jesus reminds us of the fragility of childhood, the wonder of renewal in birth, and the long shadow of a probably horrible death that hangs over every one of us. But it is more than a symbol, too. It's alive. Bach knew this, and we know it, too. The imaginative life, in which we make symbols and stories, is not a secondary existence of ours, but a primary one. It's how we're made to live. When we talk of souls and spirits, we are not talking nonsense any more than we are when we talk of love and courage and faith in some cause. Those ideas may not have a fixed material existence. But the most compelling things never do. The “fact-value” distinction that is so much a part of the modern philosophy of science—the rule that our values are not naturally determined but chosen—is not intended to belittle values; it is intended to diminish the tyranny of facts. It is a way of saying not that physical truths imply no morality but that morality is made irrespective of mere physical truths.

It might be true, for instance, that life is brutal and pointless, but we can choose to live as though it were otherwise. It might be true—there is absolutely no such evidence, but it might be true—that different ethnic groups, or sexes, have on average different innate aptitudes for math or science. We might decide to even things out, give some people extra help toward that end, or we might decide just to live with the disparity. In any case, human populations are so large these days that the relatively tiny number of outliers who rise above the average is large enough to staff any university faculty you could want. It certainly is true that the chances of anything we are doing now being remembered are vanishingly small, and the chances of the obliteration of life on the planet depressingly real—but we all choose to live as though what we are doing has meaning and purpose beyond the day and moment.

The challenge right now, is that given that we don't know the answer to what comes next, to also ask: ‘what are the ethics that we set for ourselves?’

And to be aware that when we venture out into untrodden territory, that we are able to ask that question and dare to act when there is no clear answer.

If we won't be alive in a hundred or three-hundred or a thousand years, what difference will it make if we're unknowingly wrong about everything, much less anything? Isn't being right for the sake of being right pretty much the only possible motive for any attempt at thinking about today from the imagined vantage point of tomorrow?

There is not, in a material sense, any benefit to being right about a future you will not experience. But there are intrinsic benefits to constantly probing the possibility that our assumptions about the future might be wrong: humility and wonder. It's good to view reality as beyond our understanding, because it is. And it's exciting to imagine the prospect of a reality that cannot be imagined, because that's as close to universal truth as we will ever come. If you aspire to be truly open-minded, you can't just try to see the other side of an argument. That's not enough. You have to go all the way.

Process theology is a religious metaphysics based on the teachings of the late-Victorian English-born philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. The essential idea of process theology seems to be to pull together and integrate the various different aspects of human existence—religion, science, art—into a single coherent explanation. It is, in a sense, suspicious of “facts,” seeking instead to capture the experience of change,

For me, it is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring. It is always advisable to perceive clearly our ignorance.

Identifying the big truths requires an appreciation for continuity rather than change. It's not the superficial distinctions that matter but the subterranean similarities.

Once you start seeing injustice in one place, it's like taking off blinders—you start to see injustice everywhere, and how it is all connected. All injustices, and fights against injustice, are linked together. We become stronger when we can finally see those links.

My thesis, to put it bluntly, is that from late Neolithic times in the Near East, right down to our own day, two technologies have recurrently existed side by side: one authoritarian, the other socialist, the first system-centered, immensely powerful, but inherently unstable, the other human-centered, relatively weak, but resourceful and durable. If I am right, we are now rapidly approaching a point at which, unless we radically alter our present course, our surviving socialist technology and social forms will be completely suppressed or supplanted, so that every residual autonomy will be wiped out,

or will be permitted only as a playful device of government, like national balloting for already chosen leaders in totalitarian countries.

It's a lot more flattering to say that humans are superior because we learned to "cooperate," rather than to say we're superior because we learned the power of top-down, military-style bureaucratic organization, isn't it? Although this organizational form does bring a lot of benefits (that is, for the few at the expense of the many, including nonhumans); and it's also completely fantastic at getting large numbers of perhaps otherwise moral people to act in profoundly immoral ways.

At the very moment Western nations threw off the ancient regime of absolute government, operating under a once-divine king, they were restoring this same system in a far more effective form in their technology, reintroducing coercions of a military character no less strict in the organization of a factory than in that of the new drilled, uniformed, and regimented army. During the transitional stages of the last two centuries, the ultimate tendency of this system might be in doubt, for in many areas there were strong socialist reactions; but with the knitting together of a scientific ideology, itself liberated from theological restrictions or humanistic purposes, authoritarian technologies and social forms found an instrument at hand that has now given it absolute command of physical energies of cosmic dimensions. The inventors of nuclear bombs, space rockets, and computers are the pyramid builders of our own age: psychologically inflated by a similar myth of unqualified power, boasting through their science of their increasing omnipotence, if not omniscience, moved by obsessions and compulsions no less irrational than those of earlier absolute systems: particularly the notion that the system itself must be expanded, at whatever eventual cost to life.

I start from the supposition that the world is topsy-turvy, that things are all wrong, that the wrong people are in jail and the wrong people are out of jail, that the wrong people are in power and the wrong people are out of power, that the wealth is distributed in this country and the world in such a way as not simply to require small reform but to require a drastic reallocation of wealth. I start from the supposition that we don't have to say too much about this because all we have to do is think about the state of the world today and realize that things are all upside down. In every city in this country, when demonstrations take place, the protesters, whether they have demonstrated or not, whatever they have done, are assaulted and clubbed by police, and then they are arrested for assaulting a police officer.

Things are topsy-turvy in every sphere of society. One only wonders how long the farce can continue.

There is more income inequality in the United States than in any other "developed" democratic country. The financial implications of this inequality

are enormous for all of us. How has this happened? A disturbing part of the answer is that our tolerance for inequality has risen. Mainstream American opinion once considered the prospect of growing income inequality to be unacceptably antidemocratic. It wasn't only radicals outside the mainstream of American culture who supported the idea of setting limits on income inequality; it was widely considered a reasonable viewpoint. Franklin Roosevelt wanted to raise the marginal tax—the amount someone pays on the next dollar of income; the marginal tax rate rises as income rises—on people making more than about \$345,000 in today's dollars to 100 percent and to bookend the minimum wage he'd created a decade earlier with a new maximum wage. Today these policy ideas seem extreme.

Much as in the case of the great religions, the logic of the marketplace has insinuated itself even into the thinking of those who are most explicitly opposed to it. Part of the problem is the extraordinary place that economics currently holds in the social sciences. In many ways it is treated as a kind of master discipline. Just about anyone who runs anything important in America is expected to have some training in economic theory, or at least to be familiar with its basic tenets. As a result, those tenets have come to be treated as received wisdom, as basically beyond question. One knows one is in the presence of received wisdom when, if one challenges it, the first reaction is to treat one as simply ignorant—"You obviously have never heard of the Laffer Curve"; "Clearly you need a course in Economics 101"—the theory is seen as so obviously true that no one who understands it could possibly disagree.

What's more, those branches of social theory that make the greatest claims to "scientific status"—"rational choice theory," for instance—start from the same assumptions about human psychology that economists do: that human beings are best viewed as self-interested actors calculating how to get the best terms possible out of any situation, the most profit or pleasure or happiness for the least sacrifice or investment—curious, considering experimental psychologists have demonstrated over and over again that these assumptions simply aren't true.

It is quite difficult for the scions of the North Atlantic professional classes not to see their own characteristic ways of imagining the world as simple human nature.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. The class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The ideological beliefs are the ruling classes' self-legitimation, or self-justification, of the expectations that make up their ideologies.

The elites have been wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's

faces for far too long. I'm not looking to overthrow the American government, the corporate state already has.

A leech is a parasite that attaches itself to a host and drains the host while contributing nothing. In society, our leeches are financial institutions, old style media institutions (the ones internal to each system as well as public broadcasters), regulatory bodies, training and licensing institutions, distributors of goods and services and all other bodies set up to regulate the flow of resources to the society. None of these leeches contribute to society, they control access to resources.

This system of dissociation is so entrenched in society that it is very seldom questioned. Money for health care is equated to money for insurance, even though insurance companies do not provide health care. Banks need to be propped up to provide housing, even though banks do not provide housing. The almighty economy must be saved even at the cost of untold lives or life on earth itself but we can't eat the economy. Education and information are controlled, not produced, by existing institutions.

Even if the access allows the person plentiful amounts of everything, there is a built in awareness of shortage and reliance on the system that strongly discourages sharing. If one person's vein is broken, their need is met by hostility from the others dangling by their own veins. To rescue another is to weaken oneself.

Predictably, rescuing those in need requires the creation of more leeches in the form of NGOs and government regulatory bodies for people in crisis. This results in a transference of responsibility that prevents society as a whole from spending much time considering those who their society fails. All the NGOs and regulatory bodies do is distribute and control the generosity from the rest of society—and take a very large cut for themselves—but people are conditioned to believe the NGOs actually provide the support.

The Tax Payer was invented to assert moral control over other members of society such as children, anyone in crisis, prisoners, and anyone who dares to work outside a corporate approved role. The Tax Payer is encouraged by relentless propaganda and enabled by the financial system to consider themselves both the backbone of society, as evidenced on monetary flowcharts and nowhere else, and personally robbed by all others. When people look for the source of the obvious flaws in the systems of dissociation, they are always pointed to those that are not acting as The Tax Payer. Seldom does society look past the propaganda to the real culprits.

The current system is a massive, tangled tortuous mess of intelligence, media, spokespeople, communication departments, freedom of information laws and lobbies, actions and counteractions attempting to maintain balance in a system which preaches democracy and practices fascism.

Even science needs payoff in the current system. What do we not see because of it?

What other sensations, what other glories, what other sights had the foul cloud of civilization hid from my view? We can only miss what we once possessed. We can only feel wronged when we realize something has been stolen from us. We can't miss the million-strong flocks of passenger pigeons that once blackened our skies. We don't really miss the herds of bison that grazed in meadows where our suburbs stand. And few think of dark forests lit up with the bright green eyes of its mammalian lords. Soon, the glaciers will go with the clear skies and clean waters and all the feelings they once stirred. It's the greatest heist of mankind, our inheritance being stolen like this. But how can we care or fight back when we don't even know what has been or is being taken from us?

Analysis of prehistoric sites in the eastern United States lead some to believe that passenger pigeons had a small population size relative to their later abundance. Prior to European contact, passenger pigeon numbers were kept in check through what they describe as human-wildlife competition. Native Americans kept pigeon numbers low because they consumed the same mast as the birds did: beech, acorn, and chestnut. This ecological relationship was disturbed after contact with Europeans led to disease outbreaks, murder, displacement, and in general, mass death, among the indigenous tribes. The billions of pigeons settlers witnessed were actually an outbreak population, the result of increased food supply rather than an expression of the species innate biological evolution. And the same was true of bison, elk, and moose. The huge herds and flocks seen by Europeans were evidence not of American bounty but of Indian absence.

Others might argue this is not as clear as it initially seems, at least in the case of passenger pigeons. If half of the pigeon's native range was covered in ice tens of thousands of years ago, why hadn't it resulted in a population dip? Some suspect that the birds' ability to eat almost any type of food—not just mast—was the answer. Through all these forest changes, the birds were unaffected. The pigeons didn't have a migratory pattern, they were nomadic. So if the forest changes, they just moved and changed their diet. In the 1800s they were observed to eat acorn and beech. Twenty-thousand years ago, it would have been pine and spruce. They were super-generalists that are capable of responding to environmental change. All that matters to pigeons is the amount of forest that is available to them directly, and the forest's productivity.

Regardless of which is true, the incredible thing about the 22 million years of evolution, and the pigeon's amazing resilience over that time, is that it meant that after thriving for eons, they had disappeared in one-thousandth

of one percent of their total evolutionary history. It is now almost surely true that human predation caused their demise. For millions of years, forests in the Northeast had hosted the birds, and though they have only been gone for a hundred years, we have almost completely forgotten that they were here.

It's one thing to step out into the woods and go, 'Oh my god, this is amazing.' But what about stepping out into them and knowing that the passenger pigeon once existed there? I step into those woods and rather than having an awe-inspiring experience, I already know that it is a diminished version of itself. It's not as big and grand as it once was.

People just shrug and say, 'Well, this is the price that had to be paid for indoor plumbing and central heating and air conditioning and automobiles and all the rest.' I'm saying that the price you've paid is not the price of becoming human. It's not even the price of having the things just mentioned. It's the price of enacting a story that casts mankind as the enemy of the world.

What does it mean to grow rich? Is it to have red-blooded adventures and to make a fortune, which is what brought the whalers and other entrepreneurs north? Or is it, rather, to have a good family life and to be imbued with a far-reaching and intimate knowledge of one's homeland, which is what the Tununirmiut told the whalers at Pond's Bay wealth was? Is it to retain a capacity for awe and astonishment in our lives, to continue to hunger after what is genuine and worthy? Is it to live at moral peace with the universe?

The problem is when I sit there and think about the good, I have to confront the fact that the world is totally out of alignment with everything I believe in. It aggravates me. No amount of putting myself first makes that aggravation go away. I end up feeling like a traditional Buddhist monk—I have a good theory of how to alleviate my own suffering, but it involves withdrawing from society to such a degree that it feels deeply selfish. When Plato finally escapes from the cave, he can't stay there. He is driven to go back in and try to get other people out. Even though they'll hate him for it. Even though they may kill him, like they killed Socrates. When Plato went to Syracuse to tutor the tyrant's brother, the tyrant enslaved him. When his friends bought his freedom and helped him escape, he went back to tutor the tyrant's son. He went back. The tyrant's son eventually imprisoned Plato on the island. He escaped again, but this time he was broken—he wrote the *Laws*, a depressing dialogue about how nobody can change anything about Greece and there's no point trying.

I don't like to remember the Plato that wrote *Laws*. I like to remember the Plato that went back. That's what it really means to be like Plato—we have to go back. Into the cave. To Syracuse. We have to keep trying to

get this system to do something for folks, because it's what we have, and because if we can't find a way to make it work we will fiddle from our fancy perches as it burns.

The Kingdom of God Is Within You—when I cracked it, over 125 years after publication, it was still a blistering rant. Here was a landed aristocrat who instead of pickling in privilege tried to smash the system, and literally took to walking the countryside, Jesus-like, in robes. He savaged the well-intentioned liberal:

“I sit on a man's back, choking him, and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by any means possible, except getting off his back.”

Back Into the Cave

There was a master come unto the earth, born in the holy land of Indiana, raised in the mystical hills east of Fort Wayne.

The master learned of this world in the public schools of Indiana, and as he grew in his trade as a mechanic of automobiles.

But the master had learnings from other lands and other schools, from other lives that he had lived. He remembered these, and remembering, became wise and strong, so that others saw his strength and came to him for council.

The master believed that he had the power to help himself and all of mankind. and as he believed so it was for him, so that others saw his power and came to him to be healed of their many troubles and their many diseases.

The master believed that it is well for any man to think upon himself as a son of god, and as he believed, so it was. And the shops and garages where he worked became crowded and jammed with those who sought his learning and his touch; and the streets outside with those who longed only that the shadow of his passing might fall upon them and change their lives.

It came to pass, because of the crowds, that the several foremen and shop managers bid the master leave his tools and go his way, for so tightly was he thronged that neither he nor other mechanics had room to work upon the automobiles.

So it was that he went into the countryside, and people following began to call him messiah, and worker of miracles; and as they believed, so it was.

If a storm passed as he spoke, not a raindrop touched a listeners head; the last of the multitude heard his words as clearly as the first, no matter lightning nor thunder in the sky about. And always he spoke to them in parables.

And he said unto them:

“Within each of us lies the power of our consent to health and to sickness, to riches and to poverty, to freedom and to slavery. it is we who control these, and not another.”

A mill-man spoke and said:

“Easy words for you master, for you are guided as we are not, and need not toil as we toil. A man has to work for a living in this world.”

The master answered and said:

“Once there lived a village of creatures along the bottom of a great crystal river. The current of the river swept silently over them all—young and old, rich and poor, good and evil, the current going its own way, knowing only its own crystal self.

Each creature in its own way clung tightly to the twigs and rocks of the river bottom, for clinging was their way of life, and resisting the current what each had learned from birth.

But one creature said at last, ‘I am tired of clinging. Though I cannot see it with my own eyes, I trust that the current knows where it is going. I shall let go, and let it take me where it will. Clinging, I shall die of boredom.’

The other creatures laughed and said, ‘Fool! let go, and that current you worship will throw you tumbled and smashed across the rocks, and you will die quicker than boredom!’

But the one heeded them not, and taking a breath did let go, and at once was tumbled and smashed by the current across the rocks.

Yet in time, as the creature refused to cling again, the current lifted him free from the bottom, and he was bruised and hurt no more.

And the creatures downstream, to whom he was a stranger, cried, ‘See a miracle! a creature like ourselves, yet he flies! See the messiah come to save us all.’

And the one carried in the current said, ‘I am no more messiah than you. The river delights to lift us free, if only we dare to let go. Our true work is this voyage, this adventure.’

But they cried the more, ‘Savior!’ all the while clinging to the rocks, and when they looked again he was gone, and they were left alone making legends of a savior.”

And it came to pass when he saw that the multitude thronged him the more day on day, tighter and closer and fiercer than ever they had, when he saw that they pressed him to heal them without rest, and feed them always with his miracles, to learn for them and to live their lives, he went alone that day unto a hilltop apart, and there he prayed.

And he said in his heart, infinite radiant is, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me, let me lay aside this impossible task. I cannot live the life of one other soul, yet ten-thousand cry to me for life. I’m sorry I allowed it all to happen. If it be thy will, let me go back to my engines and my tools and let me live as other men.

A voice spoke to him on the hilltop, a voice neither male nor female, loud nor soft, a voice infinitely kind. And the voice said unto him:

“Not my will, but thine be done. For what is thy will is mine for thee. Go thy way as other men, and be thou happy on the earth.”

And hearing, the master was glad, and gave thanks and came down from the hilltop humming a little mechanic’s song. And when the throng pressed him with its woes, beseeching him to heal for it and learn for it and feed it nonstop from his understanding and to entertain it with his wonders, he smiled upon the multitude and said pleasantly unto them:

“I quit.”

For a moment the multitude was stricken dumb with astonishment. And he said unto them:

“If a man told god that he most wanted to help the suffering world, no matter the price to himself, and god told him what he should do, should the man do as he is told?”

“Of course, master!” cried the many. “It should be pleasure for him to suffer the tortures of hell itself, should god ask it!”

“No matter what the tortures, nor how difficult the task?”

“Honor to be nailed to a tree and burned, if so be that god has asked,” said they.

“And what would you do,” the master said unto the multitude, “If god spoke directly to your face and said, ‘I command that you be happy in the world, as long as you live.’ What would you do then?”

And the multitude was silent, not a voice, not a sound was heard upon the hillsides, across the valleys where they stood.

And the master said unto the silence:

“In the path of our happiness shall we find the learning for which we have chosen this lifetime. So it is that I have learned this day, and choose to leave you now to walk your own path, as you please.”

And he went his way through the crowds and left them, and he returned to the world of men and machines.

Society is a conspiracy to keep itself from the truth. We pass our lives submerged in propaganda: advertising messages; political rhetoric; the

journalistic affirmation of the status quo; the platitudes of popular culture; the axioms of party, sect, and class; the bromides we exchange every day on Facebook; the comforting lies our parents tell us and the sociable ones our friends do; the steady stream of falsehoods that we each tell ourselves all the time, to stave off the threat of self-knowledge. Plato called this *doxa*, opinion, and it is as powerful a force among progressives as among conservatives; in Massachusetts as in Mississippi; for atheists as for fundamentalists. The first purpose of a real education—a “liberal arts” education—is to liberate us from *doxa* by teaching us to recognize it, to question it, and to think our way around it.

What if somebody came along who was really good at this, who could teach you how the world works and how to control it? What if you could meet a super-advanced. . . what if a Siddhartha or a Jesus came into our time, with the power over the illusions of the world because he knew the reality behind them? And what if you could meet this person. What would he say, what would he be like?

Some say we magnetize into our lives whatever we hold in our thought, for instance—if that is true, then somehow I have brought myself to this moment for a reason, and so have you. perhaps it is no coincidence that you are reading this book; perhaps there’s something that you came here to remember. I choose to think so.

For all the skill that teaching involves, you ultimately only have a single tool: your entire life as you have lived it up until the moment you walk into class. The teacher, that professional amateur, teaches not so much his subject as himself. He provides a model of one in whom what seemed dead, mere print on the page, becomes living, a way of life.

There was a man who played this role for me when I was seventeen and thereby saved me from the life of thoughtless labor that appeared to be my fate. My teacher’s methods were the same as those of Socrates, the teacher of Plato himself: he echoed your opinions back to you or forced you to articulate them for yourself. By dragging them into the light, asking you to defend them or just acknowledge having them, he began to break them down, to expose them to the operations of the critical intelligence—and thus to develop that intelligence in the first place. The point was not to replace his students’ opinions with his own. The point was to bring his charges into the unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and endlessly fertile condition of doubt. He was teaching them not what to think but how.

Is this a privilege that most young people in the world can only dream of? Absolutely. But you won’t absolve yourself by throwing it away. Better, at least, to get some good from it.

The classroom is the grain of sand; it’s up to you to make the pearl.

Bodhisattva: a person who is able to reach nirvana but delays doing so out of compassion in order to save suffering beings

There are hierarchical relations that are explicitly self-subverting: the one between teacher and student, for example, since if the teacher is successful in passing her knowledge to the student, there is no further basis for inequality.

Continually receiving help reduces self-esteem and feelings of control, leading to feelings of helplessness and reduced agency. To reestablish this agency, patients need to become the givers of care, transforming into agents with increased self-confidence and personal power. It is no coincidence that twelve-step programs—whether for alcoholism, gambling addiction, or something else—involve sponsorship, in which senior members become shepherds for new members. By taking responsibility for another, you break through the mantle of victimhood, moving from one side of the mind-perception fault line to the other. Helping others turns you from a vulnerable feeler into a thinking doer.

These results suggest that personal power is not only a cause of heroism but also a consequence of it. Consider Mahatma Gandhi, who heroically helped India gain its independence from colonial rule in 1947. An examination of Gandhi's early life suggests that he was born with no more agency than anyone else, with an unremarkable merchant-class childhood. However, as he strove for national freedom, he became able to endure hunger strikes that few of us can imagine. These feats of agency are even more amazing considering that Gandhi was first a moral patient, suffering discrimination and beatings at the hands of the European ruling class. By committing himself to helping others, he turned from patient to agent, a process we call moral transformation.

One way to interpret “change their minds” is to say that the same mind merely shifted its opinion, but the more interesting way is to say that the mind actually changed—it's a different mind than it was in the first place.

Those who don't study history are doomed to repeat it. Yet those who do study history are doomed to stand by helplessly while everyone else repeats it.

Some people are born sentenced to terrible inheritance, diseases that lay dormant in the blood from birth. My sentence was to know, to understand.

I intend to get out of here. It can't last forever. Others have thought such things, in bad times before this, and they were always right, they did get out one way or another, and it didn't last forever. Although for them it may have lasted all the forever they had.

And yet, even if one person finds his way that means there is a Way. Even if I personally fail to reach it.

Who goes in front saves his companion, Who knows the road protects his friend.

Mourn not for us, for we have seen the light. Grieve but for those who go alone, unwise, to die in darkness.

We're each of us alone, to be sure. What can you do but hold your hand out in the dark?

“He had decided to live forever or die in the attempt.”

—Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*

I have faith in the fact that we never really die, that we perpetuate ourselves by the pieces we give others.

In contrast to literal immortality, which suggests the continued existence of your consciousness, symbolic immortality suggests the continued existence of other similar minds—and those symbols you all believe in. When people die for a cause, they are demonstrating symbolic immortality.

Symbolic immortality suggests that the fear of death depends upon how you spend your last days—the more you contribute to your culture, the less terror you are likely to feel. You will be afraid to die until you have won some victory for humanity. Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.

This book is a story. You need a story to displace a story. Metaphors and stories are far more potent (alas) than ideas; they are also easier to remember and more fun to read. Ideas come and go, stories stay.

Imagine some young hominids huddling around a Pleistocene campfire, enjoying their newly evolved language ability. Two males get into an argument about the nature of the world, and start holding forth, displaying their ideologies.

The hominid named Carl proposes:

“We are mortal, fallible primates who survive on this fickle savanna only because we cluster in these jealousy-ridden groups. Everywhere we have ever traveled is just a tiny, random corner of a vast continent on an unimaginably huge sphere spinning in a vacuum. The sphere has traveled billions and billions of times around a flaming ball of gas, which will eventually blow up to incinerate our empty, fossilized skulls. I have discovered several compelling lines of evidence in support of these hypotheses.”

The hominid named Candide interrupts:

“No, I believe we are immortal spirits gifted with these beautiful bodies because the great god Wug chose us as his favorite creatures. Wug blessed us with this fertile paradise that provides just enough challenges to keep things interesting. Behind the moon, mystic nightingales sing our praises, some of us more than others. Above the azure dome of the sky the smiling sun warms our hearts. After we grow old and enjoy the babbling of our grandchildren, Wug will lift us from these bodies to join our friends to eat roasted gazelle and dance eternally. I think these things because Wug picked me to receive this special wisdom in a dream last night.”

Which ideology do you suppose would prove more sexually attractive? Will Carl’s truth-seeking genes—which may end up discovering some rather ugly truths—out-compete Candide’s wonderful-story genes? The evidence of human history suggests that our ancestors were more like Candide than Carl. Most modern humans are naturally Caudides.

A politician can run a flawless campaign, say all the right things from a place of authenticity, hold wildly popular positions and an impeccable public record, but if they say things which upset the powerful, the narrative can be reshaped to paint them as crazy, incompetent, unelectable, treasonous, or all of the above, keeping them out of office forever.

An investigative journalist can spend months breaking a story that incriminates extremely powerful people. They can get all the facts right, source everything perfectly, report clearly and concisely, and get full exposure in a mainstream news outlet. But extremely powerful people can use their influence over the political/media class to quickly shift the narrative in the wake of that breaking news story to almost completely nullify its impact by making it seem insignificant.

A leak outlet can create a new and innovative drop box to protect the anonymity of leakers, opening up the possibility of bringing transparency and accountability to power. It can take the utmost care and implement the most exacting standards in confirming the authenticity of documents and protecting the identities of their sources, and it can get true bombshell documents that expose appalling amounts of corruption and malfeasance. But extremely powerful people can shift the narrative around that outlet, and soon millions of people will believe it’s a Kremlin operation and its founder is a smelly Nazi rapist who abuses his cat and rubs shit on the walls.

We’ve seen all these things happen. We live in a world in which you can tell the truth at all times, make no mistakes, get very lucky, and be fully

supported, but if you do anything to upset those in power, the narrative can be shifted around you to kill your ability to do any good.

The reason I talk about narrative so much is because it's ultimately what all our problems boil down to. The ability of the plutocratic class and their allied government agencies to manipulate the way people think, act, and vote is the only thing holding the ecocidal, omnicultural, unipolar world order in place, which is why billions and billions of dollars are poured into the plutocratic media, think tanks, the agenda to censor the internet, and other influence campaigns. Any attempt to replace that world order with a system that serves humanity instead of a few wealthy sociopaths must necessarily understand and interact with this dynamic.

Do you know the difference between fact and narrative? Are you sure? The ability to be as lucid as possible about the difference between raw data and the story that is spun about it is absolutely essential to understanding and fighting the establishment propaganda machine.

Let's look at Russiagate for an easy example. The narrative is that Donald Trump is secretly conspiring with the Russian government to subvert American interests to advance the agendas of the Kremlin. But what are the facts? The facts are that a few people who were associated with Trump during his presidential campaign have been convicted and pled guilty to process crimes and some underhanded dealings with nations that aren't Russia, while Trump has been staging a regime change intervention against Venezuela, bombing Syria, arming Ukraine, implementing a Nuclear Posture Review with a more aggressive stance toward Russia, withdrawing from the INF Treaty, throwing out Russian diplomats, sanctioning Russian oligarchs, expanding NATO and securing it more funding. The narrative and the facts couldn't be more different.

But that hasn't mattered, has it? The propagandists have been able to get everyone worked up about the idea that Putin has managed to influence the very highest levels of the US government, despite there being no facts whatsoever to substantiate that idea. It's pure narrative, yet it's been used to manufacture a conceptual framework which allows anyone challenging the unipolar world order to be undermined as a Kremlin crony. There is nothing but insinuation and innuendo backing up those narratives, but that's all they need.

This dynamic is not limited to political power, by the way. In an abusive relationship, for example, the abuser must control the narrative about what's going on to keep the abused party from leaving: I hit you because you made me so angry with your actions that I lost control. I'm not sleeping around, you're paranoid and crazy. You can't leave, no one will ever love you and you'll fail out there on your own. Narrative control is power, from the

smallest possible group of people to the very largest.

Anyone who wants to legitimately challenge the status quo will necessarily find themselves up against this protective wall of narrative that the ruling power establishment has surrounded itself with, so it's important to know how to fight against it.

There are a lot of great alternative media outlets out there, and a lot of good dissident politicians and activists, but the problem they run into again and again is that they often stay calm and monotonous while repeating cold, hard facts. This is a problem because while they're trying to calmly fight the status quo using raw data, the establishment is using sparkly narratives in all the right places. They're appealing to emotions, they're condensing their stories into catchy 20-second sound bytes, and they're using facts only when facts help advance the narrative.

I am not saying that dissidents should abandon truth and facts; if you're not trying to build a world that is based on truth then what the hell are you fighting for? But it is absolutely essential not just to tell the truth, but to seize control of the narrative as well. Get all your facts right, then tell the story. Make it interesting. Make it funny. Activists can be some of the most dry, boring people you'll ever encounter, believing that their rightness compensates for the fact that nobody's ever interested in listening to what they've got to say. Bollocks! If you want to convey a message, make that message pop! What's the point of speaking out if nobody's even listening? Being right isn't enough.

Humans are storytelling animals—have been ever since we invented language and campfires. If you want to shake people awake, you're going to have to interface with that reality. Being able to rattle off a bunch of data about your issue of concern isn't going to accomplish anything by itself; what the establishment understands and most dissidents do not is that people listen to stories, not data, and the more interesting the story the better. Russiagate didn't gain traction because it's factually accurate, it gained traction because it's a scandalous story about the President of the United States conspiring with nefarious forces and being blackmailed over a night of water sports with Russian prostitutes.

So tell stories. Tell truthful, interesting stories. Fight their deceitful interesting stories with truthful interesting stories; authenticity resonates with people in a way think-tank-manufactured narratives just don't. If enough of us can find authentically interesting, funny, amusing, colorful ways to tell the story about what's happening, it's only a matter of time before they get picked up and circulated by the public like a good joke or a viral video. Help fight the narrative war against the plutocratic establishment that is strangling our species to death, and have fun doing it. The more fun

you have with it, the better.

People want to reciprocate gifts and favors: to do so they must be taking part in a story in which someone gives a gift, and it would be wrong not to reciprocate. People want to be liked: to do so they must be taking part in a story in which they are liked, or not liked, by someone else. People have deference to authority: to have this emotion they must consider themselves part of a story in which someone has authority over them. For example, in the famous experiment by Stanley Milgram in which a “teacher” told subjects to deliver electric shocks to a “learner,” the subjects were identifying with the “teacher” who was in “authority,” and they strongly resisted their inclinations to disobey. People tend to follow others (social proof): in this case they must be telling themselves a story in which either those others have better judgment or information than they do (in the information explanation); or else they do not want to incur disapproval by failing to conform (in the social conformity explanation). People want their decisions to be consistent: to do so they must be taking part in a story about consistency among their disparate decisions.

The act of writing is an act of attempted comprehension, and, in a childlike way, control; we are so baffled and exhausted by what has happened, we want to imagine that giving words to the unspeakable will make it somehow our own. We are narrative creatures, compelled to make sense of our surroundings through stories, and the stories we tell matter. Perhaps most important of all, the stories we tell ourselves matter.

A novel, a story, a myth, or a tale, all have the same function: they spare us from the complexity of the world and shield us from its randomness. Myths impart order to the disorder of human perception and the perceived “chaos of human experience.”

The written word is far more powerful than simply a reminder: it re-creates the past in the present, and gives us, not the familiar remembered thing, but the glittering intensity of the summoned-up hallucination. Anthropologists know that the written word is not merely an echo of a speaking voice. It is another kind of voice altogether, a conjurer’s trick of the first order. It must certainly have appeared that way to those who invented it, and that is why we should not be surprised that the Egyptian god Thoth, who is alleged to have brought writing to King Thamus, was also the god of magic. People like ourselves may see nothing wondrous in writing, but our anthropologists know how strange and magical it appears to a purely oral people—a conversation with no one and yet with everyone. What could be stranger than the silence one encounters when addressing a question to a text? What could be more metaphysically puzzling than addressing an unseen audience, as every writer of books must do? And correcting oneself because one knows

that an unknown reader will disapprove or misunderstand?

Somebody who's writing has part of their motivation to impress themselves and their consciousness on others. There's an unbelievable arrogance about even trying to write something.

What writers have is a license, and also the freedom, to sit—to sit, clench their fists, and make themselves be excruciatingly aware of the stuff that we're mostly aware of only on a certain level. And that if the writer does his job right, what he basically does is remind the reader of how smart the reader is—to wake the reader up to stuff that the reader's been aware of the whole time. And it's not a question of the writer having more capacity than the average person. It's that the writer is willing cut themselves off from certain stuff, and develop and think really hard. Which not everybody has the luxury to do. But if they just look across the room and automatically assume that somebody else is less aware than them, or that somehow somebody else has an interior life less rich, and complicated, and acutely perceived than theirs, makes them not a good writer. Because that means they're going to be performing for a faceless audience, instead of trying to have a conversation with a person.

Proust called these moments of unity between writer and reader “that fruitful miracle of a communication in the midst of solitude.”

Too many have been taught to become accustomed to their own chains and cages. The way circus elephants are trained demonstrates this dynamic well: When young, they are attached by heavy chains to large stakes driven deep into the ground. They pull and yank and strain and struggle, but the chain is too strong, the stake too rooted. One day they give up, having learned that they cannot pull free, and from that day forward they can be “chained” with a slender rope. When this enormous animal feels any resistance, though it has the strength to pull the whole circus tent over, it stops trying. Because it believes it cannot, it cannot.

Unless and until something changes their view, unless they grasp the striking fact that they are tied with a thread, that the chain is an illusion, that they were fooled, and ultimately, that whoever so fooled them was wrong about them and that they were wrong about themselves—unless all this happens, these people will not feel that they have the power to influence society.

Ignorance will always find a way to oppress.

Rational debate becomes impossible in an irrational, cruel, and credulous culture.

Reason is a narrow system swollen into an ideology. With time and power it has become a dogma, devoid of direction and disguised as disinterested

inquiry. Like most religions, reason presents itself as the solution to the problems it has created.

One of the characteristics of a civilization which promotes form over content is that memory evaporates. It is as if we have abandoned the possibility that healthy societies evolve through ideas. And therefore through doubt and the possibility of change. Instead we have a hypnotic obsession with efficiency and methodology. Of course, it is entirely our right to continue on our downward spiral. We don't have to embrace doubt or learn how to live consciously. We can continue to abandon empathy as an expensive, inefficient pastime. Cultural suicide is a tradition well-established in history.

In order for patterns to repeat themselves, people first need to forget. We live in an anxious age of agitated amnesiacs. We Americans seem to know everything about the last twenty-four hours but very little of the last sixty centuries or the last sixty years.

For the most part, we're a very "new" people. Every generation is somehow new, more thoroughly cut off from the past than the one that came before. Mother Culture says that this is as it should be. There's nothing in the past for us. The past is dreck. The past is something to be put behind us, something to be escaped from. This is how we came to be cultural amnesiacs.

Orwell was wrong once again, at least for the Western democracies. He envisioned the demolition of history, but believed that it would be accomplished by the state; that some equivalent of the Ministry of Truth would systematically banish inconvenient facts and destroy the records of the past. Certainly, this was the way of the Soviet Union, our modern-day Oceania. But as Huxley more accurately foretold it, nothing so crude as all that is required. Seemingly benign technologies devoted to providing the populace with a politics of image, instancy, and therapy may disappear history just as effectively, perhaps more permanently, and without objection.

For the most part, we aren't aware of this change—but if we don't know where we've come from, we aren't likely to know where we're heading.

Even modern Islamic fundamentalists—with all their medieval fantasies—are grounded in contemporary global culture far more than in seventh-century Arabia. They are catering to the fears and hopes of alienated modern youth rather than to those of medieval peasants and merchants. Radical Islamists have been influenced by Marx and Foucault as much as by Muhammad, and they inherit the legacy of nineteenth-century European anarchists as much as of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs. It is therefore more accurate to see even the Islamic State as an errant offshoot of the global culture we all share, rather than as a branch of some mysterious alien tree.

European civilization is anything Europeans make of it, just as Chris-

tianity is anything Christians make of it, Islam is anything Muslims make of it, and Judaism is anything Jews make of it. And they have made of it remarkably different things over the centuries. Human groups are defined more by the changes they undergo than by any continuity, but they nevertheless manage to create for themselves ancient identities thanks to their storytelling skills. No matter what revolutions they experience, they can usually weave old and new into a single yarn. Even an individual may knit revolutionary personal changes into a coherent and powerful life story: ‘I am that person who was once a socialist, but then became a capitalist; I was born in France, and now live in the USA; I was married, and then got divorced; I had cancer, and then got well again.’

Similarly a human group such as the Germans may come to define itself by the very changes it underwent: ‘Once we were Nazis, but we have learnt our lesson, and now we are peaceful democrats.’ You don’t need to look for some unique German essence that manifested itself first in Wilhelm II, then in Hitler, and finally in Merkel and beyond. These radical transformations are precisely what define German identity. To be German in 2020 means to grapple with the difficult legacy of Nazism while upholding liberal and democratic values. Who knows what it will mean in 2050.

People often refuse to see these changes, especially when it comes to core political and religious values. We insist that our values are a precious legacy from ancient ancestors. Yet the only thing that allows us to say this, is that our ancestors are long dead, and cannot speak for themselves.

Lets consider a group which might be considered a ‘Third Rail’ in American discourse: Orthodox Jews. Nowhere is the ban on seeing women stricter than in the synagogue. In Orthodox synagogues women are carefully segregated from the men, and must confine themselves to a restricted zone where they are hidden behind a curtain, so that no men will accidentally see the shape of a woman as he says his prayers or reads scriptures. Yet if all this is backed by thousands of years of Jewish tradition and immutable divine laws, how to explain the fact that when archaeologists excavated ancient synagogues in Israel from the time of the Mishnah and Talmud, they found no sign of gender segregation, and instead uncovered beautiful floor mosaics and wall paintings depicting women, some of them rather scantily dressed? The rabbis who wrote the Mishnah and Talmud regularly prayed and studied in these synagogues, but present-day Orthodox Jews would consider them blasphemous desecrations of ancient traditions.

Similar distortions of ancient traditions characterize all religions. The Islamic State has boasted that it has reverted to the pure and original version of Islam, but in truth, their take on Islam is brand new. Yes, they quote many venerable texts, but they exercise a lot of discretion in

choosing which texts to quote and which to ignore, and in how to interpret them. Indeed, their do-it-yourself attitude to interpreting the holy texts is itself very modern. Traditionally, interpretation was the monopoly of the learned ulama—scholars who studied Muslim law and theology in reputable institutions such as Cairo’s Al-Azhar. Few of the Islamic State’s leaders have had such credentials, and most respected ulama have dismissed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his ilk as ignorant criminals. That does not mean that the Islamic State has been “un-Islamic” or “anti-Islamic,” as some people argue. It is particularly ironic when Christian leaders such as Barack Obama have the temerity to tell self-professing Muslims such as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi what it means to be Muslim. The heated argument about the true essence of Islam is simply pointless. Islam has no fixed DNA. Islam is whatever Muslims make of it.

Of course, societies are changing all the time; it’s just that we can’t always see it happening in real time, and to be honest, we aren’t always very good at accepting it. Our lives and experiences become our only reality.

So the best advice I could give a fifteen-year-old stuck in an outdated school somewhere in Mexico, India, or Alabama is: don’t rely on the adults too much. Most of them mean well, but they just don’t understand the world. In the past, it was a relatively safe bet to follow the adults, because they knew the world quite well, and the world changed slowly. But the twenty-first century is going to be different. Due to the growing pace of change you can never be certain whether what the adults are telling you is timeless wisdom or outdated bias.

There is, certainly, an unbreachable chasm between the subjective and objective world. A reasonable person expects subjective facts to be overturned, because subjective facts are not facts; they’re just well-considered opinions, held by multiple people at the same time. Whenever the fragility of those beliefs is applied to a specific example, people bristle—if someone says, ‘It’s possible that Abraham Lincoln won’t always be considered a great president,’ every presidential scholar scoffs. But if you remove the specificity and ask, ‘Is it possible that someone currently viewed as a historically great president will have that view reversed by future generations?’ any smart person will agree that such a scenario is not only plausible but inevitable. In other words, everyone concedes we have the potential to be subjectively wrong about anything, as long as we don’t explicitly name whatever that something is.

It’s a dissonance that creates the most unavoidable of intellectual paradoxes: When you ask smart people if they believe there are major ideas currently accepted by the culture at large that will eventually be proven false, they will say, ‘Well, of course. There must be. That phenomenon has

been experienced by every generation who's ever lived, since the dawn of human history.' Yet offer those same people a laundry list of contemporary ideas that might fit that description, and they'll be tempted to reject them all.

Consider the idea of temperature: Our skin can sense warmth on a hot day, but 'warmth' is not some independent thing that exists on its own. Warmth is just the consequence of invisible atoms moving around very fast, creating the sensation of temperature. We feel it, but it's not really there. So if gravity were an emergent force, it would mean that gravity isn't the central power pulling things to the Earth, but the tangential consequence of something else we can't yet explain. Put another way, this means that gravity might just be a manifestation of other forces—not a force itself, but the peripheral result of something else. We feel it, but it's not there. It would almost make the whole idea of 'gravity' a semantic construction.

Take the example of the Higgs Boson, what if the Higgs particle had not been found? Would any of the geniuses involved in its search quit their jobs? Would they have rebooted the entire concept? No way. They would have merely viewed the experiment itself as a failure, or the LHC as too small, or the particle as too crafty. They would have to double down on their commitment to certitude and we would have to agree with them. Philosophically, as a species, we are committed to this. In the same way that religion defined cultural existence in the pre-Copernican age, the edge of science defines the existence we occupy today.

If any scientific concept changes five times in five decades, the perception is that we're simply refining what we thought we knew before, and every iteration is just a "more correct" depiction of what was previously considered "totally correct." In essence, we anchor our sense of objective reality in science itself—its laws and methods and sagacity. If certain ancillary details turn out to be specifically wrong, it just means the science got better. But what if we're really wrong, about something really big?

Every day, our understanding of the universe incrementally increases. New questions are getting answered. But are these the right questions? Is it possible that we are mechanically improving our comprehension of principles that are all components of a much larger illusion, in the same way certain eighteenth-century Swedes believed they had finally figured out how elves and trolls caused illness? Will our current understanding of how space and time function eventually seem as absurd as Aristotle's assertion that a brick doesn't float because the ground is the "natural" place a brick wants to be?

"One of the exercises I always give my students is an essay assignment. The question is posed like this: 'Will there be a time in

our future when our current theories seem as dumb as Aristotle's theories appear to us now?' And the students are always divided. Many of them have already been infected by postmodernism and believe that knowledge is socially constructed, and they believe we'll have intellectual revolutions forever. You even hear that kind of rhetoric from mainstream science popularizers, who are always talking about science as this endless frontier. And I just think that's childish. It's like thinking that our exploration of the Earth is still open-ended, and that we might still find the lost city of Atlantis or dinosaurs living in the center of the planet. The more we discover, the less there is to discover later. Now, to a lot of people, that sounds like a naïve way to think about science. There was a time when it once seemed naïve to me. But it's really just a consequence of the success of science itself. Our era is in no way comparable to Aristotle's era."

"The only examples you can give of complete shifts in widely accepted beliefs—beliefs being completely thrown out—are from before 1600. You mentioned Aristotle, for example. You could also mention Copernicus and the Copernican Revolution. That's all before 1600. What was different from 1600 onward was how science got conducted. Science gets conducted by experiment. There is no truth that does not exist without experimental verification of that truth. And not only one person's experiment, but an ensemble of experiments testing the same idea. And only when an ensemble of experiments statistically agree do we then talk about an emerging truth within science. And that emerging truth does not change, because it was verified.

Previous to 1600—before Galileo figured out that experiments matter—Aristotle had no clue about experiments, so I guess we can't blame him. Though he was so influential and so authoritative, one might say some damage was done, because of how much confidence people placed in his writing and how smart he was and how deeply he thought about the world. I will add that in 1603 the microscope was invented, and in 1609 the telescope was invented. So these things gave us tools to replace our own senses, because our own senses are quite feeble when it comes to recording objective reality. So it's not like this is a policy. This is, 'Holy shit, this really works. I can establish an objective truth that's not a function of my state of mind, and

you can do a different experiment and come up with the same result.’ Thus was born the modern era of science.”

How do we know we’re not currently living in our own version of the year 1599?

Looking at the history of ideas and recognizing that every age thinks they were making real headway toward the ultimate answer, and every next generation comes along and says, ‘You were really insightful, but now that we know X, Y, and Z, here is what we actually think.’ So, humility drives me to anticipate that we will look like people from the age of Aristotle who believed stones fell to earth because stones wanted to be on the ground.

Due to various circumstances I was provided the luxury of long stretches of solitude and the ability to think about life and politics at the same time, almost as if they had an actual relationship. I don’t recall any feelings of loneliness; on at least three evenings, I sat on my balcony and watched a hedgehog eat apples, an experience more satisfying than going on dates and talking to other forlorn strangers about how dating is hard.

There was an apple tree in the yard, and the—comically obese, or maybe just fluffy—hedgehog would sit underneath its branches and longingly stare at the low-hanging fruit. It often seemed like he was torturing himself, because there was no way a hedgehog of his ample girth could reach an apple two feet above his head. Yet every time he did this, he knew what he was doing. Every time, or at least every time I happened to be watching, an apple would eventually fall to the ground, and he would waddle over and eat it. He was a brilliant goddamn hedgehog. I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

There is a platitude that often applies to politics. The clever fox knows many things, states the proverb, but the old hedgehog knows one big thing. In this case, the old hedgehog knows that gravity applies to fruit. The origin of fox versus hedgehog is Greek, but it was popularized by the British essayist Isaiah Berlin. In a plain sense, the adage simply means that some people know a little about many subjects while other people know a lot about one subject. Taken at face value, it seems like the former quality should be preferable to the latter—yet we know this is not true, due to the inclusion of the word ‘but.’ The fox knows a lot, but the hedgehog knows one singular thing that obviously matters more.

So what is that singular thing? Well, maybe this: The fox knows all the facts, and the fox can place those facts into a logical context. The fox can see how history and politics intertwine, and he can knit them into a nonfiction novel that makes narrative sense. But the fox can’t see the future, so he assumes it does not exist. The fox is a naïve realist who believes the complicated novel he has constructed is almost complete. Meanwhile, the

hedgehog constructs nothing. He just reads over the fox's shoulder. But he understands something about the manuscript that the fox is unable to comprehend: this book will never be finished. The fox thinks he's at the end, but he hasn't even reached the middle. What the fox views as conclusions are only plot mechanics, which means they'll eventually represent the opposite of whatever they seem to suggest. This is the difference between the fox and the hedgehog. Both creatures know that storytelling is everything, and that the only way modern people can understand history and politics is through the machinations of a story. But only the hedgehog knows that storytelling is secretly the problem, which is why the fox is constantly wrong.

Storytelling's relationship to history is a little like interviewing's relationship to journalism: a flawed process without a better alternative. We are socially-conditioned to understand the universe through storytelling, and—even if we weren't—there's neurological evidence that our brain automatically organizes information into an explainable, reassuring narrative. This is how the world will be understood, even if we desire otherwise. So which mode of storytelling is preferable? Is it better to strictly rely on verifiable facts, even if that makes the story inherently incomplete? Or is it better to conscientiously interpret events, which often turns history into an informed opinion? The former methodology is becoming increasingly dominant. Barring an unforeseeable academic reversal, one can infer that this fact-oriented slant will only gain momentum. It will eventually be the only way future historians consider the present era of America. And that will paint a much different portrait from the interpretive America we're actually experiencing.

The term 'historian's fallacy' was coined to describe the ludicrous but common error in the assumption that a man who has a given historical experience knows it, when he has it, to be all that a historian would know it to be, with the advantage of historical perspective. We are not talking about the benefit of hindsight, but about the tendency to forget that the actors in a historical drama simply did not know, at the time, what was coming next. Subsequent to an event, we may recall the clues and warnings that it was about to happen, but our memory does not extend with equal clarity to many other signs and signals which pointed unequivocally in the other direction.

The idea that those who actually took part in great events or lived through particular times have a superior understanding to those who come later is a deeply held yet wrongheaded one. Being there does not necessarily give greater insight into events; indeed, sometimes the opposite is true.

Take Ronald Reagan, he was the ultra-hedgehog, obsessed with only one truth: If people feel optimistic about where they live, details don't

matter. But here's the thing—you need to have an active, living memory of Reagan for any of this to seem plausible. You need to personally remember that the 1980s felt prosperous, even when they weren't. Every extension of mainstream popular culture expressed this. The 1980s felt prosperous even if you were poor. However, many of those who lived it can't reconcile Reagan's legacy, because they have distanced themselves from their own memories. They've unconsciously applied a fact-based perception, just like those (currently unborn) historians who will dictate reality in the year 2222. Those historians will look back at the 1980s and presume the US populace must have suffered some kind of mass delusion, prompting them to self-destructively lionize a president who—factually—made the country worse. Within the minds of those historiographers, Reagan will be defined as an objectively bad president. Except, of course, for that eight-year period when he actually was president, when he was beloved and unbeatable and so emotionally persuasive that—twenty-five years after he left office—his most ardent disciples sincerely suggested his face be carved into a South Dakota mountain. And that will make no narrative sense, except to a madman.

The practical reality is that any present-tense version of the world is unstable. What we currently consider to be true—both objectively and subjectively—is habitually provisional. But the modern problem is that reevaluating what we consider “true” is becoming increasingly difficult. Superficially, it's become easier for any one person to dispute the status quo: Everyone has a viable platform to criticize *Moby Dick* or a mediocre HP printer. If there's a rogue physicist in Winnipeg who doesn't believe in gravity, he can self-publish a book that outlines his argument and potentially attract a larger audience than *Principia* found during its first hundred years of existence. But increasing the capacity for the reconsideration of ideas is not the same as actually changing those ideas—or even allowing them to change by their own momentum. We live in an age where virtually no content is lost and virtually all content is shared. The sheer amount of information about every current idea makes those concepts difficult to contradict, particularly in a framework where public consensus has become the ultimate arbiter of validity. In other words, we're starting to behave as if we've reached the end of human knowledge. And while that notion is undoubtedly false, the sensation of certitude it generates is paralyzing.

There is the possibility that we are unable to isolate or imagine something fundamental about the construction of reality, and that the eventual realization of whatever that fundamental thing is will necessitate a rewrite of everything else. Science does not advance through minor steps, but through major ones—basically, that everyone believes all the same things for long stretches of time, only to have the entire collective worldview altered by

a paradigm shift transforming the entire system. Prior to these massive shifts, researchers conduct “normal science,” where scientists try to solve all the puzzles inside the existing paradigm, inadvertently propping up its dominance.

A philosopher can simultaneously forward an argument’s impregnable logic and its potential negation within the same sentence; a scientist can’t do that. There is no practical purpose to fungible physics. If a scientist were to validate the possibility that his entire day-to-day vocation is just “normal science” that will eventually be overwritten by a new paradigm, it would justify the lethargic thinking of anyone who wants to ignore the work that he does; work that he believes is too important to ignore. It is, in many ways, a completely unbalanced dispute. Any credible scientist can present ten-thousand micro arguments that demonstrate why our current structure of scientific inquiry is unique and unassailable. One need only make a single macro argument in response: Well, that’s how it always seems, until it doesn’t.

Do I believe our current assumption about how the present will eventually be viewed is, in all probability, acutely incorrect? Yes. And yet I imagine this coming wrongness to resemble the way society has always been wrong about itself, since the beginning of time. It’s almost like I’m showing up at the Kentucky Derby and insisting the two-to-one favorite won’t win, but refusing to make any prediction beyond ‘The winner will probably be a different horse.’

The idea of creativity—which we might define as the production of the new, beautiful, and useful—is one of the most elusive and mysterious of human abilities. Creativity is not necessarily about the arts. Scientific research—the kind that shifts paradigms but also the sort that finds an ingenious solution to a local problem—requires dollops of the stuff. It involves going from what is known to what is unknown; from what is old to what is new. It is a kind of thinking, but one in which you don’t know where you are going until you get there.

It’s impossible to understand the world of today until today has become tomorrow. This is no brilliant insight, and only a fool would disagree. But it’s remarkable how habitually this truth is ignored. We constantly pretend our perception of the present day will not seem ludicrous in retrospect, simply because there doesn’t appear to be any other option. Yet there is another option, and the option is this: We must start from the premise that—in all likelihood—we are already wrong. And not “wrong” in the sense that we are examining questions and coming to incorrect conclusions, because most of our conclusions are reasoned and coherent. The problem is with the questions themselves.

The reason something becomes retrospectively significant in a far-flung future is detached from the reason it was significant at the time of its creation—and that’s almost always due to a recalibration of social ideologies that future generations will accept as normative.

With books, these kinds of ideological transfers are difficult to anticipate, especially since there are over two-million books published in any given year. But it’s a little easier to conjecture how this might unspool in the smaller, more contained idiom of film. Take a movie like *The Matrix*. When *The Matrix* debuted in 1999, it was a huge box-office success. It was also well received by critics, most of whom focused on one of two qualities: the technological—it mainstreamed the digital technique of three-dimensional “bullet time,” where the on-screen action would freeze while the camera continued to revolve around the participants—or the philosophical—it served as a trippy entry point for the notion that we already live in a simulated world. If you talk about *The Matrix* right now, these are still the two things you likely discuss. But what will still be interesting about this film once the technology becomes ancient and the philosophy becomes standard?

I suspect it might be this: *The Matrix* was written and directed by “the Wachowski siblings.” In 1999, this designation meant two brothers; as I write today, it means two sisters. In the years following the release of *The Matrix*, the older Wachowski (Larry, now Lana) completed her transition from male to female. The younger Wachowski (Andy, now Lilly) publicly announced her transition in the spring of 2016. These events occurred during a period when the social view of transgender issues radically evolved, more rapidly than any other component of modern society. In 1999, it was almost impossible to find any example of a trans person within any realm of popular culture; by 2014, a TV series devoted exclusively to the notion won the Golden Globe for Best Television Series. In the fifteen-year window from 1999 to 2014, no aspect of interpersonal civilization changed more, to the point where Caitlyn (formerly Bruce) Jenner attracted more Twitter followers than the president; and the importance of this shift will amplify as the decades pass—soon, the notion of a transgender US president will not seem remotely implausible.

So think how this might alter the memory of *The Matrix*: In some protracted reality, film historians will reinvestigate an extremely commercial action movie made by people who—unbeknownst to the audience—would eventually transition from male to female. Suddenly, the symbolic meaning of a universe with two worlds—one false and constructed, the other genuine and hidden—takes on an entirely new meaning. The idea of a character choosing between swallowing a blue pill that allows him to remain a false placeholder and a red pill that forces him to confront who he truly is becomes

a much different metaphor. Considered from this speculative vantage point, The Matrix may seem like a breakthrough of a far different kind. It would feel more reflective than entertaining, which is precisely why certain things get remembered while certain others get lost.

This is how the present must be considered whenever we try to think about it as the past: It must be analyzed through the values of a future that's unwritten. Before we can argue that something we currently appreciate deserves inclusion in the world of tomorrow, we must build that future world within our mind. This is not easy, even with drugs. But it's not even the hardest part. The hardest part is accepting that we're building something with parts that don't yet exist.

The more foreign a custom seems, the more useful the moment of contact. To look into the strange and find the familiar is also to understand one's own self more clearly. The very unfamiliarity causes us to reflect in turn on our own "normal" practices.

Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in.

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?"

You and the people you love are just tiny smudges on a much larger canvas. If you stay where you are—focused only on the shape of your own little smudges, this year like last year and the year before—you will never understand more than you do now. But what if you found a way to step back and look, for once, at the entire painting?

Each and every one of us has been born into a given historical reality, ruled by particular norms and values, and managed by a unique economic and political system. We take this reality for granted, thinking it is natural, inevitable, and immutable. We forget that our world was created by an accidental chain of events, and that history shaped not only our technology, politics, and society, but also our thoughts, fears, and dreams. The cold hand of the past emerges from the grave of our ancestors, grips us by the neck and directs our gaze towards a single future. We have felt that grip from the moment we were born, so we assume that it is a natural and inescapable part of who we are. Therefore we seldom try to shake ourselves free, and envision alternative futures. Studying history aims to loosen the grip of the past. It enables us to turn our head this way and that, and begin to notice possibilities that our ancestors could not imagine, or didn't want us to imagine. By observing the accidental chain of events that led us here,

we realize how our very thoughts and dreams took shape—and we can begin to think and dream differently. Studying history will not tell us what to choose, but at least it gives us more options.

Movements seeking to change the world often begin by rewriting history, thereby enabling people to reimagine the future. Whether you want workers to go on a general strike, women to take possession of their bodies, or oppressed minorities to demand political rights the first step is to retell their history. The new history will explain that our present situation is neither natural nor eternal. Things were different once. Only a string of chance events created the unjust world we know today. If we act wisely, we can change that world, and create a much better one. This is why Marxists recount the history of capitalism; why feminists study the formation of patriarchal societies; and why African Americans commemorate the horrors of the slave trade. They aim not to perpetuate the past, but rather to be liberated from it.

This is the best reason to learn history: not in order to predict the future, but to free yourself of the past and imagine alternative destinies. Of course this is not total freedom—we cannot avoid being shaped by the past. But some freedom is better than none.

History is a grand view of the present, and not simply something in the past.

There is a shape to the past, and it is only by understanding it that we can begin to have a sense of the historical opportunities that exist in the present. Moments of historical opportunity—moments when meaningful change is possible—follow a distinct, even a cyclical pattern, one that has long been far more coordinated across geographical space than we would ever have imagined. There is a shape to the past, and it is only by understanding it that we can begin to have a sense of the historical opportunities that exist in the present.

A man had attacked a female police officer with a hammer and was shot by the policewoman's partner. This shooting occurred at 10:00, on the street, in the vicinity of Penn Station. Now, one assumes seeing a maniac swinging a hammer at a cop's skull before being shot in broad daylight would be the kind of moment that sticks in a person's mind. Yet a Times story explained how at least two of the eyewitness accounts of this event ended up being wrong.

False memories, received memories, how we fill in the blanks of conjecture, the way the brain fills in those spaces with something that is technically incorrect—all of these errors allow us to make sense of the world, and are somehow accepted enough to be admissible in a court of law. They are accepted enough to put someone in prison. And this, remember, was a

violent incident that had happened only hours before. The witnesses were describing something that had happened that same day, and they had no incentive to lie. But video surveillance proved their depictions of reality were inaccurate. This is a level of scrutiny that can't be applied to the distant past, for purely practical reasons. Most of history has not been videotaped. But what's interesting is our communal willingness to assume most old stories may as well be true, based on the logic that (a) the story is already ancient, and (b) there isn't any way to confirm an alternative version, despite the fact that we can't categorically confirm the original version, either.

Multiple truths don't really mesh with the machinations of human nature: Because we were incessantly told one version of a story before hearing the second version, it's become impossible to overturn the original template. It is unconsciously assumed that the alternative story has to both prove itself and disprove the primary story, which automatically galvanizes the primary version as factual. How much of history is classified as true simply because it can't be sufficiently proven false? In other words, there's no way we can irrefutably certify that an event from 1776 didn't happen in the manner we've always believed, so there's no justification for presenting a counter-possibility. Any counter-possibility would have to use the same methodology, so it would be (at best) equally flawed. This becomes more and more ingrained as we move further and further from the moment of the event. So while it's absurd to think that all of history never really happened, it's almost as absurd to think that everything we know about history is real. All of which demands a predictable question: What significant historical event is most likely wrong? And not because of things we know that contradict it, but because of the way wrongness works.

People who don't know better are often wrong by accident, and people who do know better are sometimes wrong on purpose—and whenever a modern news story explodes, everyone recognizes that possibility. But we question this far less when the information comes from the past. It's so hard to get viable info about pre-twentieth-century life that any nugget is reflexively taken at face value. In Ken Burns's documentary series *The Civil War*, the most fascinating glimpses of the conflict come from personal letters written by soldiers and mailed to their families. Many robotically consume those letters as personal distillations of historical fact. For many there is not one moment of *The Civil War* that feels false. But why is that? Why do we assume the things Confederate soldiers wrote to their wives might not be wildly exaggerated, or inaccurate, or straight-up untruths? Granted, we have loads of letters from lots of unrelated Civil War veterans, so certain claims and depictions can be fact-checked against each other. If multiple

letters mention that there were wheat weevils in the bread, we can concede that the bread was infested with wheat weevils. But the American Civil War isn't exactly a distant historical event, amazingly, a few Civil War veterans were still alive in the 1950s. The further we go back, the harder it becomes to know how seriously any eyewitness account can be taken, particularly in cases where the number of accounts is relatively small.

Discounting those events that occurred within your own lifetime, what do you know about human history that was not communicated to you by someone else?

History is a creative process or as Napoléon Bonaparte once said, "a set of lies agreed upon." The world happens as it happens, but we construct what we remember and what we forget. And people will eventually do that to us, too.

In Western culture, pretty much everything is understood through the process of storytelling, often to the detriment of reality. When we recount history, we tend to use the life experience of one person—the "journey" of one particular "hero"—as a prism for understanding everything else.

Consider how mainstream musical memory works. As the timeline moves forward, tangential artists in any genre fade from the collective radar, until only one person remains; the significance of that individual is then exaggerated, until the genre and the person become interchangeable. Sometimes this is easy to predict: I have zero doubt that the worldwide memory of Bob Marley will eventually have the same tenacity and familiarity as the worldwide memory of reggae itself. These happen to be celebrities of thundering genius, but we're still giving in to a winner-takes-all mentality. There's a basic human reason for this simplification: It's difficult to cope with the infinite variety of the past, and so we apply filters, and we settle on a few famous names.

What things actually are matters less than random social conditions and capricious assessments from people who don't necessarily know what they're talking about. Take architecture: Here we have a creative process of immense functional consequence. It's the backbone of the urban world we inhabit, and it's an art form most people vaguely understand—an architect is a person who designs a structure on paper, and that design emerges as the structure itself. Architects fuse aesthetics with physics and sociology. And there is a deep consensus over who did this best, at least among non-architects: If we walked down the street of any American city and asked people to name the greatest architect of the twentieth century, most would say Frank Lloyd Wright. In fact, if someone provided a different answer, we'd have to assume we've stumbled across an actual working architect, an architectural historian, or a personal friend of Frank Gehry. Of course,

most individuals in those subsets would cite Wright, too. But in order for someone to argue in favor of any architect except Wright—or even to be in a position to name three other plausible candidates—that person would almost need to be an expert in architecture. Normal humans don't possess enough information to nominate alternative possibilities. And what emerges from that social condition is an insane kind of logic: Frank Lloyd Wright is indisputably the greatest architect of the twentieth century, and the only people who'd potentially disagree with that assertion are those who legitimately understand the question. History is defined by people who don't really understand what they are defining.

As a brick-and-mortar visionary, Wright was dazzling. He was also prolific, which matters almost as much. He championed the idea of “organic architecture,” which—to someone who doesn't know anything about architecture, such as myself—seems like the condition all architecture should aspire to. But I know these imperative perspectives have no origin in my own brain. The first time I ever heard Frank Lloyd Wright's name, I was being told he was brilliant, which means the first time I looked at a building he designed, I thought either, ‘That is what brilliance looks like,’ or ‘This is what everyone else recognizes as brilliance.’ I knew he was considered “prolific” long before I ever wondered how many buildings an architect needed to design in order to be considered average, much less productive.

The forces shaping collective memory are so complicated and inconsistent that any belief system dogmatically married to the concept of “merit” ends up being a logical contention that misses the point entirely. It's like arguing that the long-term success of any chain restaurant is a valid reflection of how delicious the food is.

Do you unconsciously believe that Shakespeare was an objectively better playwright than his two main rivals, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson? If so, have no fear—as far as the world is concerned, he was. If you want to prove that he was, all you need to do is go through the texts of their respective plays and find the passages that validate the opinion most of the world already accepts. It will not be difficult, and it will feel like the differences you locate are a manifestation of merit. But you will actually be enforcing a tautology: Shakespeare is better than Marlowe and Jonson because Shakespeare is more like Shakespeare, which is how we delineate greatness within playwriting. All three men were talented. All three had enough merit to become the historical equivalent of Shakespearean, had history unspooled differently. But it didn't. It unspooled the way we understand it, and Shakespeare had almost nothing to do with that. He is remembered in a way that Marlowe and Jonson are not, particularly by those who haven't really thought about any of these guys, ever.

To matter forever, you need to matter to those who don't care. And if that strikes you as sad, be sad.

I sometimes wonder if the pillars of American political culture are really just a collection of shared illusions that will either (a) eventually be disbelieved or (b) collapse beneath the weight of their own unreality. And that would certainly be the end of everything. Or at least something that will feel like everything to those who live through the collapse.

History is something we have agreed to believe in.

The study and writing of history have always been problematic. Primary sources disagree, and there are historiographical fashions. Some histories become almost canonical—unchallengeable retailers of the truth about the past. It is often said that history is written by the victors in any struggle, and that the identities of heroes and villains are therefore constructed so as to fit in with the requirements of the winner.

Marxist historiography disputed the analytical usefulness of “bourgeois” history, and cast the passing worlds in terms of the struggle between social and economic classes. Social histories forswore the concentration on “great men,” insisting that you only understand the past if you examine the lives of the masses.

But revisionist history did something else. It was (and is) less an alternative way of studying than an adoption of deliberately alternative opinions about the past.

History, rather than being a static entity, is a dynamic field, with the way we see our histories changing depending on who writes, speaks about, or teaches about them.

For most of the twentieth century, there was an ever-growing realization (at least among intellectuals) that the only way to understand the deeper truth about anything complicated was through “shadow histories”: those under-reported, countercultural chronicles that had been hidden by the conformist monoculture and emerge only in retrospect. Things that seem obvious now—the conscious racism of Nixon's Southern Strategy, the role the CIA played in the destabilization of Iran, how payola controlled what was on FM radio, the explanation behind America's reliance on privately owned cars instead of public transportation, et alia—were all discussed while they were happening, but only on the marginalized periphery. They were not taken that seriously. Over time, these shadow ideas—or at least the ones that proved factually irrefutable—slowly became the mainstream view.

Ideologies are ways of organizing large swaths of life and experience under a set of shared but often unexamined assumptions. This quality makes an ideology particularly hard to see, at least while it's still exerting its hold on

your culture. A reigning ideology is a little like the weather—all pervasive and so virtually impossible to escape. Still, we can try.

You don't see something until you have the right metaphor to let you perceive it.

Human beings may not always get the right analogy, but they are almost certainly bound to try to use one.

Liberty is intimately connected with language. Those who seek to monopolize power always use inaccessible and specialized jargon to exclude the average citizen. We must break these chains.

It is said that a revolution begins in the mind—an alternative to our present circumstances must first be imagined before we can be moved to fight for it.

My goal is not to contradict conventional answer 'X' by replacing it with unconventional answer 'Y.' My goal is to think about the present in the same way we think about the past, wholly aware that such mass consideration can't happen until we reach a future that no longer includes us. And why do I want to do this? Because this is—or should be—why we invest time into thinking about anything that isn't essential or practical or imperative. The reason so many well-considered ideas appear laughable in retrospect is that people involuntarily assume that whatever we believe and prioritize now will continue to be believed and prioritized later, even though that almost never happens. It's a mistake that never stops being made. So while it's impossible to predict what will matter to future versions of ourselves, we can reasonably presume that whatever they elect to care about—in their own moment—will be equally temporary and ephemeral. Which doesn't necessarily provide us with any new answers, but does eliminate some of the wrong ones we typically fail to question.

Philosophy, classically understood, has as its task both the presentation of reality and the explanation of the illusions that deceive us from recognizing it.

As with any bit of illusion, once the actual workings are revealed, the strings made visible, it becomes ugly and obvious, drained of its power to enchant.

The Prince is the most misunderstood satire in all of history. Everything Machiavelli ever wrote, before and after *The Prince*, insists that 'Popular rule is always better than the rule of princes.' That's because Machiavelli was actually a huge advocate of free republics and hated the idea of monarchies. The Medici family in particular, the same family to which he dedicated *The Prince*, really pissed him off. See, Machiavelli worked for the Florentine Republic right before the Medici stepped in and insisted they were in charge from now on. Oh, and they also tortured Machiavelli before casting him

off into exile for being revolutionary. So why would an exiled, disgruntled writer suddenly try to help the reigning prince to be more merciless?

Well, he wouldn't. Without the context of the rest of Machiavelli's work, *The Prince* makes him look like a blatant asshole, when in fact he was actually a very sneaky asshole. After the pamphlet was circulated around Italy, if the Medicis made any move that seemed to earnestly follow the ideologies of *The Prince*, the public would be so furious at their arrogance that it would likely incite a revolution. So through his sarcasm, Machiavelli could effectively bind the hands of the ruling family, ensuring that the people would be looking for any parallels between the actions of the Medici family and that horrible pamphlet they'd just read.

Great Questions

The fact that Dostoevsky can tell a juicy story isn't enough to make him great. If it were, Judith Krantz and John Grisham would be great fiction writers, and by any but the most commercial standards they're not even very good. The main thing that keeps Krantz and Grisham and lot of other gifted storytellers from being artistically good is that they don't have any talent for (or interest in) characterization—their compelling plots are inhabited by crude and unconvincing stick figures. In fairness, there are also writers who are good at making complex and fully realized human characters but don't seem able to insert those characters into a believable and interesting plot. Plus others—often among the academic avant-garde—who seem expert/interested in neither plot nor character, whose books' movement and appeal depend entirely on rarefied meta-aesthetic agendas. The thing about Dostoevsky's characters is that they are alive. By which I don't just mean that they're successfully realized or developed or "rounded." The best of them live inside us, forever, once we've met them.

Dostoevsky's characters manage to embody whole ideologies and philosophies of life. The thrust here is that Dostoevsky wrote fiction about the stuff that's really important. He wrote fiction about identity, moral value, death, will, sexual versus spiritual love, greed, freedom, obsession, reason, faith, suicide. And he did it without ever reducing his characters to mouth-pieces or his books to tracts. His concern was always what it is to be a human being—that is, how to be an actual person, someone whose life is informed by values and principles, instead of just an especially shrewd kind of self-preserving animal.

The big thing that makes Dostoevsky invaluable for American readers and writers is that he appears to possess degrees of passion, conviction, and engagement with deep moral issues that we—here, today—cannot or do not permit ourselves.

“Anyone who attacks individual charity attacks human nature and casts contempt on personal dignity. But the organization of ‘public charity’ and the problem of individual freedom are two distinct questions, and not mutually exclusive. Individual kindness will always remain, because it is an individual impulse, the living impulse of one personality to exert a direct influence upon another. How can you tell, Bahmutov, what significance such an association of one personality with another may have on the destiny of those associated?”

Can you imagine any of our own major novelists allowing a character to say stuff like this? Not, mind you, just as hypocritical bombast so that some ironic hero can stick a pin in it, but as part of a ten-page monologue by somebody trying to decide whether to commit suicide? The reason you can't is the reason he wouldn't: such a novelist would be, by our lights, pretentious and overwrought and silly. The straight presentation of such a speech in a Serious Novel today would provoke not outrage or invective, but worse: one raised eyebrow and a very cool smile. Maybe, if the novelist was really major, a dry bit of mockery in *The New Yorker*. The novelist would be—and this is our own age's truest vision of hell—laughed out of town. So he—we, fiction writers—won't—can't—dare try to use serious art to advance ideologies. We will, of course, without hesitation use art to parody, ridicule, debunk, or criticize ideologies; but this is very different. People would either laugh or be embarrassed for us. Given this—and it is a given—who is to blame for the unseriousness of our serious fiction? The culture, the laughers? But they wouldn't—could not—laugh if a piece of morally passionate, passionately moral fiction was also ingenious and radiantly human fiction. But how to make it that? How—for a writer today, even a talented writer today—to get up the guts to even try? There are no formulas or guarantees.

When I was a teenager I was a troubled and restless person. The world made no sense to me, and I got no answers to the big questions I had about life. In particular, I didn't understand why there was so much suffering in the world and in my own life, and what could be done about it. All I got from the people around me and from the books I read were elaborate fictions: religious myths about gods and heavens, nationalist myths about the motherland and its historical mission, romantic myths about love and adventure, or capitalist myths about economic growth and how buying and consuming stuff will make me happy. I had enough sense to realize that these were probably all fictions, but I had no idea how to find truth. When I began studying at university, I thought it would be the ideal place to find answers. But I was disappointed. The academic world provided me with powerful tools to deconstruct all the myths humans ever create, but it didn't offer satisfying answers to the big questions of life. On the contrary, it encouraged me to focus on narrower and narrower questions.

For a very long time, the intellectual consensus has been that we can no longer ask Great Questions. Increasingly, it's looking like we have no other choice.

Our culture is hungry for the opportunity to feed the collective mind with something other than intellectual junk food. All too few are writing books that deal with big philosophical, cosmological, or historical concepts.

In a world deluged by irrelevant information, clarity is power. In theory, anybody can join the debate about the future of humanity, but it is so hard to maintain a clear vision. Frequently, we don't even notice that a debate is going on, or what the key questions are. Billions of us can hardly afford the luxury of investigating, because we have more pressing things to do: we have to go to work, take care of the kids, or look after elderly parents. Unfortunately, history gives no discounts. If the future of humanity is decided in your absence, because you are too busy feeding and clothing your kids—you and they will not be exempt from the consequences.

This may sound overambitious, but *Homo sapiens* cannot wait. Philosophy, religion, and science are all running out of time. People have debated the meaning of life for thousands of years. We cannot continue this debate indefinitely. The looming ecological crisis, the growing threat of weapons of mass destruction, and the rise of new disruptive technologies will not allow it. Perhaps most importantly, artificial intelligence and biotechnology are giving humanity the power to reshape and re-engineer life. Very soon somebody will have to decide how to use this power—based on some implicit or explicit story about the meaning of life. Philosophers are very patient people, but engineers are far less patient, and investors are the least patient of all. If you don't know what to do with the power to engineer life, market forces will not wait a thousand years for you to come up with an answer. The invisible hand of the market will force upon you its own blind reply. Unless you are happy to entrust the future of life to the mercy of quarterly revenue reports, you need a clear idea what life is all about.

There is a view in some philosophical circles that anything that can be understood by people who have not studied philosophy is not profound enough to be worth saying. To the contrary, I suspect that whatever cannot be said clearly is probably not being thought clearly either.

That it's a philosophy book does not place it in some arcane and inaccessible realm. Doing philosophy is largely a matter of trying to put things together, trying to get the pieces of very large puzzles to make some sense. Good philosophy is opportunistic; it uses whatever information and whatever tools look useful.

The degeneration of philosophical schools is the consequence of the mistaken belief that one can philosophize without having been compelled to philosophize by problems outside philosophy. Genuine philosophical problems are always rooted outside philosophy and they die if these roots decay. These roots are easily forgotten by philosophers who “study” philosophy instead of being forced into philosophy by the pressure of non-philosophical problems.

The quest for certainty, which became an obsessive theme in modern

thought when Descartes tried to ground philosophy in indubitable propositions, was misguided to begin with. It distracted attention from the real business of philosophy, the attempt to arrive at concrete judgments about ends and means in the regulation of practical behavior. In their pursuit of the absolute and immutable, philosophers took a disparaging view of the time-bound and contingent. Practical activity, became in their eyes intrinsically an inferior sort of thing. In the world view of Western philosophy, knowing came to be split off from doing, theory from practice, the mind from the body.

These are difficult times for writers and orators who wish to specialize in the language of Moral Harangue. We live in an era where persuasive speech is largely comprised of lukewarm appeals to self-interest. One seeks to prove to one's audience that they have something to gain—or, at the very least, nothing to lose—by supporting the desired moral proposition. When we denounce our political foes, we usually do so by vaguely suggesting that their ideas are “backwards” and that “history” will “judge” them. This is pretty toothless stuff: Our politicians are almost all nihilists who cheerfully consign their fellow humans to endless miseries on a daily basis, so why would they give the faintest fart what human beings not-yet-born will think of them? To say nothing of the fact that ascendant evil-doers always—and often correctly—assume they will be the ones writing the history books.

For those who like their rhetoric neat, of course, there is the language of revolution. But this is tricky to deploy. The invocation of revolution nearly always carries an implicit threat of violence:

“If you don't do the right thing, we will come kill you.”

If you're a pacifist, you may think that this is rarely, if ever, a morally justifiable threat. And even if you aren't a pacifist, you must at least think carefully about when to use revolutionary language: It's probably strategically unwise to invoke violence that you have no stomach or ability to carry out. But Back In The Day, there was another option available when you wanted to denounce your foes: the language of hellfire.

The idea of hell is, perhaps, the part of traditional Christianity that seems the most absurd and weirdly off-message to non-Christians. After all, isn't it rather at odds with the whole notion of Love Thy Neighbor that the creator of the universe would have a subterranean torture chamber where those who displease him are roasted in perpetuity? New Atheist types are always eager to point out that hell is an absurd contradiction: How can a god that inflicts horrific pain on his creations for eternity be the arbiter of any kind of morality?

There are two ways to approach this apparent contradiction. Option One: super lean into the idea that Hell Is A Good Thing in a way that makes everyone around you extremely uncomfortable. During the first thousand years or so of Christianity, there was recurring theological speculation that the blessed in heaven could actually see the damned in hell—and, what’s more, that they enjoyed seeing the damned in hell. Tertullian, a second-century Christian writer, looked forward with giddy anticipation to his front-row seat to the torment of the wicked:

“What a panorama of spectacle on that day! Which sight shall excite my wonder? Which, my laughter?”

He imagined “so many and so mighty kings, whose ascent to heaven used to be made known by public announcement, groaning in the depths of darkness,” and the provincial governors who tortured and executed his coreligionists “melting in flames fiercer than those they themselves kindled in their rage against the Christians braving them with contempt.” A couple beats later, Tertullian begins to sound less like an anti-establishment revolutionary and more like an incel posting a screed on 4chan, as he pictures the fiery torment of “the tragic actors, more vocal in their own catastrophe,” “the comic actors, more lither of limb in the fire,” and “the athletes, not in their gymnasiums, but thrown about by fire.”

Tertullian clearly got some kind of creepy, maybe-erotic kick out of imagining various Chads being burned alive: but other, soberer theologians also concurred that those in heaven would witness the spectacle of hell, and that it, like all God’s works, would be a cause of rejoicing. Many hundreds of years after Tertullian, Thomas Aquinas wrote:

“That the saints may enjoy their beatitude more thoroughly, and give more abundant thanks for it to God, a perfect sight of the punishment of the damned is granted them.”

Aquinas hastened to clarify that it wasn’t the torments themselves that caused the enjoyment, but the knowledge of God’s perfect justice, of which the torments were merely an insignificant side-effect. Thomas Aquinas would definitely have been one of those guys in high school who claimed to like the Saw series “for the plot.”

There are fire-and-brimstone varieties of evangelical Christianity that still preach basically along these lines. But I was raised Catholic, and in modern Catholicism, we go in for Option Two: don’t bring up hell that much and when you do maybe don’t talk about the fire stuff okay. Hell is literally real in Catholic theology: That is to say, hell is not a metaphor,

but an actual place, with actual flames, and any conscientious theologian will be forced to admit this when pressed. But when I went to church as a child, most priests—if they mentioned hell at all, which was rare—would talk about hell primarily as the condition of being cut off from the love of God. This, the priests hastened to assure us, was the worst agony of all, worse than any merely physical torture.

I think this is a pretty clever maneuver! The fire-and-bodily-agony thing just makes God sound like a garden-variety serial killer, so pivoting to the psychological dimensions of eternal torment is a way to take the murderous edge off God's sadism, while simultaneously assuring everyone that hell is still definitely very bad. It reminds me of the way one of my family members used to justify being against the death penalty on the grounds that:

- Killing is wrong
- Keeping people locked up forever is actually much crueler than just killing them, and people who have committed terrible crimes deserve to suffer

There's simply no getting away from that odd tension between doing the right thing because it brings you closer to a loving God versus doing the right thing because the same loving God will light you on fire if you don't—but it's really hard to argue that being lit on fire isn't more terrifying. I had a three-year stint at a Catholic school where we all publicly prayed the Act of Contrition at the end of every day, and I've always loved it as a model apology. It's written in the voice of an overly honest man frantically trying to cover his bases in real time:

“Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell but most of all because they offend *you*, oh God, Who art all good and deserving of all my love.”

That hastily-disclaimed “because I dread the pains of hell” really says it all. No living human with a flesh-and-blood body truly believes that forfeiture of the love of God could possibly be worse than the physical torments of hell. Given the choice between being gored with hot pokers over and over and over, and being afflicted with a particularly fierce case of FOMO, who would choose the pokers? No one, and anyone who says otherwise is a liar.

Given the visceral grittiness of the torments of hell, the language of hellfire—in times and places where people actually believe in hell, or at

least have to publicly pretend that they do—is a powerful rhetorical register. Unlike some revolutionary language, it isn’t an outright threat to slaughter your enemies, but neither is it a bloodless civil censure. It is, in effect, telling your political opponents:

“What you have done is so evil that when the omniscient, omnipotent author of the universe finally holds you to account, he will probably light you on fire, rip your entrails out of your body, and feed them back to you in an endless cycle for the rest of time.”

It’s a way to express moral outrage so furious, so implacable, that not even an eternity of torture could expiate it. Forget “cancel culture,” if you really intend to anathematize a member of your community, tell everyone why that person deserves to go to hell. Or, if you think your entire community is destined for the flames, then hellfire language is a way of expressing smoldering, vengeful despair, of declaring that we all deserve to be obliterated for what we have condoned, that the sins committed are so bad that no one who has been touched by them should escape punishment. Take, as an illustrative example, this speech by the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, in which he invites the wrath of God on a nation that has enriched itself on the agony of slaves:

“Yet I know that God reigns, and that the slave system contains within itself the elements of destruction. But how long it is to curse the earth, and desecrate his image, He alone foresees. It is frightful to think of the capacity of a nation like this to commit sin, before the measure of its iniquities be filled, and the exterminating judgment of God overtake it. For what is left us but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation? Or is God but a phantom, and the Eternal Law but a figment of the imagination? Has an everlasting divorce been effected between cause and effect, and is it an absurd doctrine that, as a nation sows, so shall it also reap?

Wherefore, hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men that rule this people: Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell we are at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall

overflow the hiding-place: And your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through it, then ye shall be trodden down by it.”

It's very hard to imagine Bernie Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez getting up in front of the nation and declaring that our country, left unreformed, merits “the exterminating judgment of God.” William Lloyd Garrison and other abolitionists of his ilk have been vaguely re-imagined in American history as milquetoast Anti-Slavery Good Guys, but in their time, they were viewed as dangerous radicals and seditionists. Today, a person who speechified in this manner about an analogous issue, like the prison-industrial complex, or the labor abuses of multinational companies, or the immigrant police state, or massive death camps for non-humans, would probably be accused of inciting domestic terrorism. Jesus is a contradictory model in this respect, because when he's not exhorting people to love their neighbors, he's roaming around the countryside irritably smiting fig-trees and flipping over money-changing tables.

I spend a lot of time thinking about the peculiar evil of judges, bureaucrats, lawyers, and political operatives. The sort of person who becomes an ICE attorney, or an immigration judge, or an advisor to a president is someone much closer to me. They are people I would have encountered in college or in law school. They, like me, live lives of relative comfort and certainty. The stakes of the decisions they make are, for themselves, largely professional, social, and reputational, not life-or-death. People like Kris Kobach, Jeff Sessions, William Barr, Ken Cuccinelli, and Stephen Miller grew up with every conceivable advantage and still choose to devote their lives to grinding the faces of the poor into the dirt.

I read an article recently about Agnelis Reese, an immigration judge in Louisiana, who has denied 100 percent of the asylum-seekers who have appeared before her, making her the harshest immigration judge in a country with some pretty stiff competition. The article's author highlights one hearing transcript where the judge lectures a man, S., facing deportation to Eritrea about his faith:

“Reese asked if he had ever told anyone about [his sexual abuse while imprisoned in Eritrea] before revealing it to the doctor at Pine Prairie. ‘I did not,’ he said. ‘This is very shameful for me to tell.’”

Later, S. said that, despite daily beatings, he refused to convert to Orthodox Christianity:

“And every time you said no?” asked Reese.

‘Yes, based on Matthew 10:22,’ he replied.

‘I didn’t—sir, I’m not asking you to quote scripture,’ said Reese.

‘Jesus is asking me to talk for him.’

Reese snapped. ‘And when you lied to the asylum officers or failed to disclose your sexual abuse, what do you think Jesus thought about that?’ The judge followed that up with a lengthy diatribe, chastising S. for not revealing the abuse earlier.”

Knowing that courtroom scenes like this are happening all across the country, it’s difficult to avoid feeling at least a tad Tertullian. How do we talk about these things? What language of moral disapprobation could possibly be vivid enough? How do we allow people like this judge to live respectable lives in human society—to eat in restaurants, go to the movies, attend PTA meetings—when the things they do in the ordinary, plodding course of their workdays are so repugnant and inexcusable that they should be permanently cut off from all love and communion with their fellows?

We might, like William Lloyd Garrison, take a leaf out of the book of the prophet Isaiah:

“Woe to unjust judges and to those who issue unfair laws, so that there is no justice for the poor, the widows, and orphans. Oh what will you do when I visit you in that day when I send desolation upon you from a distant land? To whom will you turn then for your help? Where will your treasures be safe? I will not help you; you will stumble along as prisoners or lie among the slain. And even then my anger will not be satisfied, but my fist will still be poised to strike you.”

When you feel powerless, there is at least some satisfaction in telling the powerful exactly what they deserve. You hope that maybe—if you express your hatred of evil, and the complacency that enables it, with enough conviction and passion—others will be stirred out of their slumbers and roused to righteous anger too.

People sometimes say that economic and ideological issues put voters off. But almost half the population already doesn’t vote. And most of the nonvoters are poor. It would be interesting to see how many of them would start showing up for elections that hinged on the meaning and importance of equality in America.

At every turning point of history someone rises up who can enunciate and in a sense personify the new direction of the public mind and will. America has reached such a crossroads.

It's not just about irrationality and systemic breakdown, its about injustice and the moral justifications of taken-for-granted rights and practices. It's not only about how much people in different positions in the economy should get paid for what they do, but about whether those positions are legitimate in the first place. Is it right that they're allowed to do what they're doing?

There is of course a long history of critiques of capitalism aimed at different targets: alienation, insecurity, and poverty; the treadmill of working and consuming; economic contradictions and irrationalities; and environmental destruction. There are useful things to learn from all of these critiques, but at the current time, when the rich have increased their power so much, and inequalities have widened, I believe we need a new line of attack, one that focuses on the institutions and practices that allow this to happen. Too many books on economic justice, and especially on the economic crisis, take as given the very institutions and practices that need questioning. This book is about the injustices of some long-standing economic relations that have come to a head in the crisis.

This book is not only about money and goods, but about the very language of economic life, for the history of our modern economy is partly one of struggles over how to describe or categorize economic practices, as this affects what we see as acceptable or unacceptable: words like 'investment,' 'speculation,' or 'gambling' invite different evaluations. Who wouldn't prefer to be called an investor rather than a speculator or gambler? But what do such terms mean and what practices fit them? When a top banker is described as having "earned" \$X million, we might question what 'earned' means in such a context: is it just what they've managed to extract from the economy? This struggle over words has been largely won by the rich and powerful, so how we speak about economic life systematically conceals their activities. Mainstream economics has proved to be a helpful if largely unwitting accomplice to this process, fearful of anything that might be construed as critical of capitalism.

This book should not be seen as ignoring the benefits capitalism has brought; nor, in criticizing it, to be legitimizing the state socialism of the former Soviet Bloc. 'Neither Washington nor Moscow, former or contemporary!' would be my slogan. A recent Russian saying goes: "Marx was completely wrong about communism, but damn, it turns out he was right about capitalism!" I don't think he was entirely right about capitalism by any means, though his thinking on its dynamics and on its generation of

inequalities was more illuminating than many.

If you're wondering whether I'm a Smithian, Marxist, or Keynesian, or whatever, my answer in each case is yes and no: yes where I think they're right, no where I think they're wrong.

Our predicament is simple to describe.

Since the dawn of civilization, powerful individuals have controlled the stories people tell themselves about who they are, who's in charge, how a good citizen behaves, what groups should be loved, what groups should be hated, and what's really going on in the world. When you study what we call history, you're mostly just reading the ancient proto-propaganda of whatever kingdom happened to win the last war during that period of time. When you study what we call religion, you're mostly reading stories that were advanced by ancient governments explaining why the people should be meek, forgiving taxpayers instead of rising up and killing their wealthy exploiters.

This continues to this day. We fill our children's heads with lies about how the world works, how the government works, how the media works, and, on a deeper level, how their own consciousness works, and the entire process is shaped to funnel power toward the people who control our stories. The modern schooling system was largely formed by John D. Rockefeller, widely considered the wealthiest person in modern history, in order to create generations of docile gear-turners for the industrial plutocratic machine. Modern schooling is essentially mainstream media in a building; it promotes authorized narratives day in and day out to ensure that children will have a reaction of cognitive dissonance and rejection when confronted with information which contradicts those narratives.

This funnels the populace seamlessly into the narrative control matrix of adulthood, where childhood indoctrination into mainstream narratives lubricates the way for continual programming of credulous minds with mass media propaganda. All the print, TV, and online media they are presented with supports the status quo-supporting agendas of the same plutocratic class that John D. Rockefeller dominated all those years ago. This ensures that no matter how bad things get, no matter how severely our spirits are crushed by end-stage metastatic neoliberalism, no matter how many stupid, pointless wars we're duped into, no matter how much further we are drawn along the path toward extinction via climate chaos or nuclear war, we will never revolt to overthrow our rulers.

That's three paragraphs. Our predicament is simple to describe and easy to understand. But that doesn't mean it's easy to solve.

I often hear revolutionary-minded thinkers expressing frustration at the masses for choosing to stay within this transparently abusive dynamic

instead of rising up and forcing change. And yes, it is self-evident that the citizenry could easily use its vastly superior numbers to do that if it collectively chose to. The door is right there. It's not even locked.

But the people aren't failing to choose the door because they love being abused, they're failing to choose the door because they've been manipulated into not choosing it. From cradle to grave they're pummeled with stories telling them that this is the only way things can be, in exactly the same way a battered wife or a cult member are pummeled with stories about how leaving is impossible.

The difficulty of our times is not that we are locked up; we aren't. The difficulty is that far too many of us are manipulated into choosing a prison cell over freedom. The fact of the matter is that a populace will never rise up against its oppressors as long as it is being successfully propagandized not to. It will never, ever happen. The majority will choose the prison cell every time.

You'd expect that more dissident thinking would be pouring into solving this dilemma, but not much is. People talk about elections and political strategies, they talk about who has the most correct ideology, they talk about rising up and seizing the means of production due to unacceptable material conditions, they wax philosophical about the tyranny of the state and the immorality of coercion, but they rarely address the elephant in the room: that you can't get a populace to oust the status quo when they do not want to.

I am writing with one end in mind: to help open a door for readers and encourage them to step through. A consensus that we might term the Great Western Narrative has been constructed not to inform and enlighten but to conceal and deceive. It is not that I or others are cleverer than everyone else. We have simply had a chance—an earlier one—to step through that door ourselves, because of a jarring life experience that the Great Western Narrative could not explain, or because someone held the door open for us, or more usually because of a combination of the two.

From the other side of the door, Russia's Vladimir Putin or Bashar al-Assad look as irrational, or rational, and as criminal as George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Barack Obama, or Donald Trump. In fact, they look less criminal—not because they are better humans than their Western counterparts, but simply because they enjoy less power and face more constraints in trying to impose their will. The issue is not about who is better. They are the same as humans. It is about who has more force at their disposal—and more will to use it—to perpetuate their power.

Why did we let Ronald Reagan die calmly in his sleep, at age ninety-three, almost a quarter century after he destroyed everything decent in

America? This book is in part an attempt to dig up Reagan's remains, hang them upside down from the nearest palm tree, and subject him, at last, to a proper trial.

Some argue the three most significant developments in the political economy of the twentieth century were:

1. The growth of democracy.
2. The growth of corporate power.
3. The growth of propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy.

Other, more specific developments include:

- Advertising and publicity devoted to the creation of artificial wants.
- The public relations and propaganda industry whose principal goal is the diversion to meaningless pursuits and control of the public mind.
- The degree to which academia and the professions are under assault from private power determined to narrow the spectrum of thinkable thought.

For many, it is an axiom of conventional wisdom that the use of propaganda as a means of social and ideological control is distinctive of totalitarian regimes. Yet, the most minimal exercise of common sense would suggest a different view: that propaganda is likely to play at least as important a part in democratic societies—where the existing distribution of power and privilege is vulnerable to quite limited changes in popular opinion—as in authoritarian societies, where it is not. In this context, conventional wisdom becomes conventional ignorance; as for common sense, maybe not so much.

The purpose of this propaganda barrage has been to convince as many people as possible that it is in their interests to relinquish their own power as workers, consumers, and citizens, and forego their democratic right to restrain and regulate business activity. As a result the political agenda is now confined to policies aimed at furthering business interests.

An extreme example of this view playing itself right under our noses and over decades was the cruel fiction of the “trickle down effect” (TDE)—a.k.a. the rising tide that would lift all yachts—of Reaganomics. One of several mantras that defined Reagan's overarching political shtick, the TDE was by any measure, decidedly more a torrent than a trickle, and said “torrent” was going up not down.

Yet as the global financial crisis of 2008 amply demonstrated, it culminated in a free-for all, dog eat dog, anything goes, every man for himself form of cannibal capitalism—an updated, much improved version of the no-holds-barred mercenary mercantilism much reminiscent of the Gilded Age and the Robber Barons who infested it, only one that doesn't just eat its young, it eats itself.

Capitalism, slammed against the ropes and almost down for the count of ten, found a way out of its dilemmas of the 1970s. The market was saturated and the labour movement was pressing for more say and higher wages. The old Fordist regime of standardized, often boring products was nearing its end. So was the idea of the “empowered worker.” Soon, the customer would be paid more attention than ever. In fact, a revolution of the commercialization of social life that aimed to save capitalism from the spectre of saturated markets after the watershed years was underway.

The capitalists learned in the 1970s to put the individualization of both customers and products at the service of commercial expansion. The golden key that unlocked the Neoliberal Revolution was diversified consumption.

“Commercialized diversification—the movement of markets and commercial relations from the satisfaction of needs to the servicing of wants—extended far beyond automobiles.”

Tying the purchasing of newly diversified products—luxury goods, from perfumes to watches—to a new form of stylized personal identity, production soared.

Niche production enabled consumers to purchase customized diversified goods, from golf clubs to cars. Even McDonald's discovered local cuisine. And vintners suddenly invented endless new wines for exquisite consumption (on a balcony overlooking the Mediterranean of course). Two German firms, Adidas and Puma, turned themselves into multi-billion-dollar global companies selling hundreds of ever changing running shoes and perfumes for men and women. We were all at the mercy of capitalist seduction. With obsolescence built into the commodities, all that glitters was available at the tap of a key.

Now, individuals were integrated into society with few obligations. In a mature, affluent market buying something involves no more than picking what you like best (and can afford) from what is in principle an infinite menu of alternatives awaiting your decision, with no need to negotiate or compromise as one had to in traditional social relations. This is sociation by consumption. It is voluntary rather than obligatory, individual rather than collective. It is from this perspective that it seems productive to

speak of a particular politics of consumption, associated with the affluent societies of today. In this high intensity consumer paradise, individuals can exit all forms of “collective identity”—traditional religious communities, neighbourhoods, even one’s nation. Thus, participating in a community of consumption, with its looser ties that bind, allows individuals to surf from one identity to the next, free from any pressure to explain themselves. Live lightly, flit about freely.

Sociation by social media—Twitter, Facebook, and the like—represents an extension of this trend, not least in that it offers these companies a further set of tools for highly individualized marketing. There are endless examples of illegal access to our private consuming profile, just to anticipate and shape what we might buy. This is what some call the “extractive economy.”

Licking their lips, firms and politicians seized a fantastic opportunity to use the new technologies to compensate for the increasing atrophy of traditional party organizations. Capitalism rescued itself from late-Fordist stagnation. But this, as we have seen, led to the unprecedented commercialization of social life. This process, however, transformed the nature of politics as such. The driving spirit of commercialization is viewing the world as one’s oyster—What’s in it for me?—and not whether everyone even has enough bread to eat. The narcissistic preoccupation with self-expression and affirmation easily accommodates itself to the dizzying world of the social media. There, one can hook up with sites that simply confirm one’s own biases. One may never engage thinking that upsets one’s own narrow angle on the world. There’s something for every taste, from bomb-building to growing orchids.

Since states now exist alongside dynamic, new markets for advanced consumption, they aid investment capital’s desire for the privatization of several hitherto publicly provided services, among them telecommunications, radio broadcasting, and television, which increasingly came to be perceived in their traditional format as old-fashioned, utilitarian, boring, and unresponsive to users-turned-consumers. Now, the idea was that only sexy private firms could deliver the snazzy customized products. The newly privatized sectors of telecommunications and television made huge fortunes—Murdoch and Berlusconi for example. There had only been two channels for Germans through the 1970s.

The received political wisdom during the 1980s and 1990s was that the difference between public and private provision was that the state dictates to people what they are supposed to need—which will always in effect be the same for everybody—whereas private markets cater to what people really want, as individuals. Here, it should not surprise us that this attitude—private enterprise can deliver the sparkling goods—infiltrated government

activity, which could be outsourced to the market.

Now, citizens were pressured to convert their old attitudes as citizens to perceiving themselves as customers. And state officials were taught not to act as representatives of the law, of legitimate public authority or of the general will, but on the pretense that they were providers of services in a competitive marketplace, driven simultaneously by the desires of their customers and the pressures of competition.

The new politics of consumption has eroded the public sphere. Judged as shabby and dull, public provision was demeaned—at great cost. While satisfying expectations of diversity, individuality, and choice may increase the legitimacy of the delivery of certain goods and services by governments rather than by commercial firms, it may be quite subversive when it comes to the production of such goods, in particular where it involves duties of citizenship, including the collective deliberation of how entitlements and duties can be weighed.

At stake is that there are collective goods which are indivisible and must be produced, or at least decided upon, by those who benefit from them, and indeed by their collectivity: social solidarity, distributive justice, and the general rights and duties that constitute citizenship. In other words, we must not judge these “public goods” by the same standards as modern commodities.

For one thing, one cannot measure citizenship by the same criteria as customer-ship. In fact, if we do so, citizenship will look structurally similar to the mass markets of by-gone days. Secondly, rather than merely consuming political decisions, citizens in a functioning democracy are invited and indeed obliged to participate in their production. This requires a third element: namely, the willingness to subject raw collective wants to critical scrutiny in some sort of public dialogue. A salient ingredient of active citizenship is a disciplined readiness to accept decisions that one had originally opposed, or that are contrary to one’s interest. Although the individual might not get his or her way, they can be compensated by civic satisfaction, achieved through a legitimate democratic procedure.

Thus, political participation can not travel the customer-ship rail line. Rather, it demands a preparedness to justify and recalibrate one’s choices in the light of general principles, developing preferences not in the sense of diversifying, but rather of aggregating and unifying them. Moreover, unlike customer-ship, citizenship demands that one provide generalized support to the community as a whole, such as by paying taxes, which may be put to as yet undecided uses by a lawfully constituted government, as distinguished from purchases of specific goods or services paid for one at a time, at market prices.

Once citizens become customers from head to toe, the possibility of the production of civic goods will dry up, which in turn will undermine the capacity of the state to produce the civic goods on which the legitimacy of politics as politics depends. Already—is this not true?—the combination of brutal neoliberal cuts to the public sector and the permeation of the ideology of customer-ship has seriously eroded public discourse and the vitality of public spheres. The poor and lowly have little opportunity for solutions to their distress as the very rich exit from concern for the collective interest. Why would the very rich elites of Nigeria invest in public trains when they can use their private jets or helicopters to flit around?

I've lost all patience with moderates, centrists, incrementalists, and mainstream establishment Democrats who think the status quo is not so bad, just needs a little tweaking around the edges. They'd be satisfied just getting rid of Trump—which is fine as far as that goes, it just doesn't go nearly far enough.

Anybody with a clear-eyed view of the status quo understands the horror of US foreign policy and the shameful neglect of US domestic policy. The system has failed us. The duopoly has frustrated all serious efforts to change things for the better. The owners of the USA—the billionaire class—like things just the way they are. There is no profit in peace or taking care of the needy or delivering justice to the masses. America is owned and dominated by greedy monsters who don't care that their money comes drenched in the blood of patriots and innocent victims of US war crimes. Democrats have failed us. They like to claim to be progressives, liberals, and/or part of 'the left' but in truth they are none of those things.

I'm done with those who think war is okay or that the Military Industrial Complex is just a conspiracy theory or that the wildly unfair distribution of wealth in this country is remotely okay. I'm sick and tired of those who insist that the Mainstream Media is equivalent to the "free press," and not the propaganda organs that lied and manipulated us into Vietnam, Iraq, Libya, and Syria (among others) and now Venezuela and Iran while helping to undermine anything smacking of true change or real reform of our screwed up and hopelessly corrupted system. That is not to say that they don't occasionally say something that is true, just that they can't be trusted not to lie for the oligarchy, as that is their top priority.

I am gobsmacked that so many Americans seem blithely unaware of the extent to which we are lied to and who have no clue about our own sordid history of assassinations, coups, torture, death squads, et cetera throughout Central and South America—and much of the rest of the world. Or how the mainstream media has fed our bloodthirsty empire by manufacturing consent for war and propagandizing the public with sinister intent in the

interest of the corporate elite and America's uber-wealthy owners—the very same folks who own the media.

The trend of media conglomeration has been steady. In 1983, fifty corporations controlled most of the American media, including magazines, books, music, news feeds, newspapers, movies, radio, and television. By 1992 that number had dropped by half. By 2000, six corporations had ownership of most media, and today five dominate the industry: Time Warner, Disney, Murdoch's News Corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom.

Mega-Corporations controlled by the super-rich determine what information is broadcast to the world and how it is framed. Sandwiched in-between the straight news are poison pills of rank propaganda meant to shape the thinking of the entire culture. The corporate-owned media consciously manipulates the public mind to get people to think and believe what the elite wants them to—which all ends up supporting and enabling their robbing, raping, and pillaging of the world. The worst thing about all of this is how appallingly effective it is.

The liberal rhetoric of inclusion and common humanity is insufficient: we must also acknowledge the role that a century of US-backed military coups, corporate plundering, and neoliberal sapping of resources has played in the poverty, instability, and violence that now drives people from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras toward Mexico and the United States. For decades, US policies of military intervention and economic neoliberalism have undermined democracy and stability in the region, creating vacuums of power in which drug cartels and paramilitary alliances have risen. In the past fifteen years alone, CAFTA-DR—a free trade agreement between the US and five Central American countries as well as the Dominican Republic—has restructured the region's economy and guaranteed economic dependence on the United States through massive trade imbalances and the influx of American agricultural and industrial goods that weaken domestic industries. Yet there are few connections being drawn between the weakening of Central American rural agricultural economies at the hands of CAFTA and the rise in migration from the region in the years since. In general, the US takes no responsibility for the conditions that drive Central American migrants to the border.

When we overthrow governments, assassinate leaders, run death squads and torture people, it devastates the societies to whom we do these things. The CIA and other nefarious agents of our government sow the seeds of mayhem and chaos and destroy whole cultures. Now that the victims of our unspeakable evil are seeking the only relief they can conceive by making their arduous way to our border and asking for our help, we shun them, smear them, stir up irrational fear and hatred against them, imprison them

and kidnap their children.

Those who support the status quo are complicit in the crimes against humanity that the global elite have committed. You don't get to call yourself "progressive" if you have propped up the status quo and worked against any meaningful change. Having some moderately liberal social ideas doesn't make up for all the rest. The lesser evil is still evil. The Establishment is still the Establishment.

Democrats are only superficially better than Republicans. At the deepest level they are functional equivalents. Both groups serve the empire and the wealthy elite. They all take the dirty money. They are all okay with war and corruption as long as they get theirs. Anyone who doesn't understand that by now, understands very little.

"It is the job of thinking people not to be on the side of the executioners."

Virtually every government in the world creates an illusion for its people. Take economic policy. Government policies might hurt us in the short-term, but we are all on a one-way route to the promised land of happiness, or so we are told by the politicians, the corporate media and spokespersons for the ones who make us suffer to ensure they never have to—the privileged elite, the ruling class.

Western governments set out to con ordinary working folk by bringing us war in the name of peace, austerity in order to achieve prosperity, and suffering to eventually make us happy. Is there any room for truth? Politicians never like to tell the public the truth. The feel-bad factor is never a vote winner. Best to keep the public in the dark and rely on positive spin. If people knew the truth, they just wouldn't be happy.

Well, no kidding, the truth is ugly. But some people would rather be falsely happy than suffer the painful truth. Ignorance is bliss and all that. Democrats are a fine example of people who don't want to understand what is actually true. They are willing to settle for that which confirms their own biases and that which makes them feel good: Democrats, Team Blue, those with Ds next to their name. They reduce governmental and social policy to a simplistic team sport and juvenile popularity contest, never noticing that the outcome is always the same: Democrat or Republican, it's all war all the time, austerity for the people, tax cuts for the rich, bonuses for banksters, and crimes against humanity dressed up in pretty rhetoric and a big fat 'NO' to any effort to reform this despicable system.

The outcome is always the same.

“In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

We should be tending to the needs of our people and improving lives here at home and around the world. Instead, we lavish all our treasure on warmongers and war profiteers, building the most lethal modern weapons possible to unleash on the rest of the world. The undeveloped world, especially where they have resources like oil that our rich guys want, wade in the blood shed on their land by our government’s anti-humanitarian gangster policies. That the American people want peace and a better life for themselves and the rest of the world matters not one whit to our so-called leaders.

“We’ve become now an oligarchy instead of a democracy. And I think that’s been the worst damage to the basic moral and ethical standards of the American political system that I’ve ever seen in my life.”

We’ve descended into oligarchy and fascism. The billionaires and millionaires at the top don’t care about us. To them we are merely pawns to be manipulated and preyed upon. Everything else about our government is sheer kabuki, sleight of hand, and rank bullshit.

“The central point that emerges from our research is that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on US government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence.”

Establishment Democrats are every bit as corrupt as Republicans. They are not serving the public interest, only their own. Corruption is rife from the bottom to the top. Democrats in Congress who oppose Medicare for All have taken vast sums of money from the pharmaceutical and medical industries. Pelosi took over a million dollars. Nancy Pelosi is worth at least

\$16 million and Dianne Feinstein is worth at least \$58.5 million. Who knows how much they've got hidden in shell companies and tax havens. American politicians in the modern era invariably get rich while in office.

Now the Democrats want us to all pull together, which would be fine but what they want is for us to unite behind some neoliberal, war-mongering, elitist millionaire who will only betray us to Wall Street and the great American war machine on day one while they cheat any real change agent out of the opportunity to serve the people and history. We've seen this movie before. It didn't work in 2016 and it won't work in 2020. Even some of the dead-enders get it now.

We shouldn't be trying to unite or make nice with those who still don't get it. We should be uniting with all of those who do get it and who have been ignored, belittled, preyed upon and shut out of the process for forever. It's time for a new deal—and a great big giant new deal. All those people who have been sitting at home on election day need to be given real reasons to come out and choose a new and better destiny. The same old tired crap wrapped in a shiny new box won't get it. We need a new deal. And not a FDR-saves-capitalism new deal or Bernie-and-AOC-saves-capitalism new deal, but instead one which provides true justice and equality.

Now is the time to get serious about real change in America because humanity itself is at stake. We have to change now or forever hold our peace. It's time to get on the right side of history and bring desperately needed change to the world. We need to stop taking no for an answer, stop making excuses for the corrupt government and media and stop swallowing the propaganda. It's time to stand up, not acquiesce. If we continue to roll over and hide our heads in the sand, this story is not going to end well. Entire categories of public policy options are effectively off-limits because of the combined influence of industry groups and donor interests.

Most Americans support Medicare for All, higher taxes on the rich, a Green New Deal, and other major items on the progressive agenda—so why has Congress failed to enact them? The reason is that the influence of corporations and the donor class on the American political system has drowned out the policy desires of the public.

There is a weird strain of political thought in this country that most people are moderates and only by pulling to the center can we garner enough support to win elections and guide the ship of state. This is the thinking of mainstream Democrats and also why most people stay home on election day. They have little to no interest in which group of elitist millionaires and billionaires get to screw America for the next four years while lying through their teeth and changing absolutely nothing—and who can blame them?

I've long believed that nothing short of a bold departure from the

conventional wisdom will change anything—and most people, when they aren't being freaked out by propaganda boogeymen, want change: better living conditions, greater opportunity, a brighter future for posterity, a viable ecosystem, less violence, more peace, greater equality, less hate, a more benevolent and less corrupt government, a friendlier and more supportive society. A world of hate and war, fear and loathing, resentment and strife, are not what people want and not what they deserve.

The tide of history seems to be turning at long last. It's time to get radical and force the changes that are needed—and we should have less than zero patience for anyone who stands in the way—whether it be through ignorance, incompetence, misplaced loyalty, gullibility, or malevolence. Too many of these people are impervious to education or reason, they simply need to be defeated or left behind. It's time.

It's time to reform our society from the prisons to the presidency. Don't listen to the status quo defenders who will tell you that the only thing that matters is beating Trump. That's the tune the Democrats will be singing. We need to be rid of Trump to be sure, but getting rid of the present establishment is paramount. If we shed ourselves of Trump but are still saddled by the same old establishment, we'll still be just as screwed.

Remember that things have been screwed up in this country since long before Trump came along. His ridiculous reign has simply brought it all into sharp focus—but Trump is a symptom of a much older disease, the logical end result of a corrupt and hateful right-wing government that serves only the myopic, greedy, selfish mega-rich. We are all out of time for putting up with this greed, corruption, and madness.

“Don't let the greedheads win.”

It's time—time to do the right thing.

People like to imagine that the so-called “center” is called that because it sits smack dab in the middle of the ideological spectrum between communism and fascism, right in that moderate sweet spot that respects capitalism and private ownership without flying off the deep end into Nazi-like tyranny. In reality, the status quo exists entirely outside any left-right paradigm. It's neither ‘left’ nor ‘right’ to give total control of the Western world to an alliance of plutocrats and opaque government agencies who seek to expand their power and wealth by destroying our ecosystem, waging endless wars, and gradually shoring up more and more control of their citizenry via internet censorship, surveillance, and police militarization. It's just fucking crazy.

We need a new, progressive political party in the US because on almost every important issue the Democrat and Republican Parties, both controlled

by Big Money, are indistinguishable. The Reagan Revolution was brought about with the active and strong support of the Democrats which controlled the US House of Representatives for eight out of Reagan's eight years and the US Senate for two out of Reagan's eight years. We need a new, progressive political movement in this country because the Democrats and Republicans are not only incapable of solving any of the major problems facing this country, they are not even prepared to discuss them.

The mass media in this country is heavily censored by the corporate ownership and the companies that advertise. Real—not superficial—analysis of why things are the way they are—the unfair distribution of wealth and power, starvation and poverty, war, ecological destruction, racism, sexism—is not considered news.

The US people, as almost never before, are rejecting the “two-party” system and are crying out for a political alternative. Everyone instinctively knows that the current system is failing, but the progressive movement is not getting out an alternative vision of society or an alternative program of immediate demands. The boldness and clarity that we need to articulate can never be done through the compromised and corrupt Democratic Party—dominated by Big Money. We must begin to have the courage to fight for power—not handouts. We are the majority of people and must act accordingly.

I understand the enormous difficulties that confront us when we take on the Democrat and Republican Parties and the economic oligarchy that controls this country. If we stop thinking about all the reasons as to why it can't be done, and go out in the streets and do it, we can succeed. We can create a third party. We can raise the important issues which the Democrats and Republicans ignore. We can win.

Politics, after all, is the art of persuasion; the political is that dimension of social life in which things really do become true if enough people believe them. The problem is that in order to play the game effectively, one can never acknowledge this: it may be true that, if I could convince everyone in the world that I was the King of France, I would in fact become the King of France; but it would never work if I were to admit that this was the only basis of my claim. In this sense, politics is very similar to magic—one reason both politics and magic tend, just about everywhere, to be surrounded by a certain halo of fraud.

A well-chosen and well-promoted keyword triggers an instinctive feeling that galvanizes people into action. This approach completely conflicts with prevailing notions about how people modify their behaviour.

There is an all-too-common misconception that behavioural change proceeds along rational and cognitive lines—explain to somebody what is

in their interests, also in the long-term, and they will automatically see the light and take the right decisions, however hard they might be. For years now, this strategy has been adopted in all kinds of public-information campaigns, usually with very little result. The conclusion is painfully clear: it doesn't work.

Why most moral philosophers refuse to acknowledge this is a mystery to me—one can only put it down to the persistent view of humans as rational beings, going back to the pseudo-religious version of the Enlightenment. The advertising world grasped the situation ages ago. To change behaviour—in their case, consumer behaviour—you need to sell values, and the most effective way to do so is to appeal to the emotions by invoking family, maternal love, fidelity, security, status, triumph, performance, et cetera. When you look at commercials in this light, you see straightaway that the product itself, and rational, factual information about it, are mere side issues. Indeed, the thing that's being sold is often hardly shown. And yet this approach works, unlike all those well-intentioned campaigns targeting our welfare.

If a particular message catches on, that's because it ties in with deep-rooted emotions and the values that go with them. The metaphor 'deep-rooted' signifies not only that we are scarcely conscious of them, but also that they branch out very widely. Keywords activate underlying frames of association with a powerful emotional charge, provoking a gut response. Some such deep frames can be held simultaneously, while others are in mutual opposition. Activating a single value also automatically activates associated values, while suppressing opposing values. Simultaneously activating the values of opposing frames is impossible.

If we are to change, it won't be through rational knowledge, but through emotionally charged values. Not through our cerebral cortex, but through gut feelings. Plans for reform will have to take account of this. We must also have the courage to push communal values back to the forefront—values from which the individual benefits, too. To start, we only need to ask ourselves a question that is as simple as it is fundamental: what do I really need to build a good life?

There are no general principles that one can convey to others which predict what one should do to successfully sway others non-rationally. One cannot therefore teach how to manipulate others. The manipulation of others depends upon particular facts about societies that are not part of a science of rhetoric. For example, successful creators of advertisements do not learn their craft via attending schools and acquiring a body of general principles. Success at advertising involves knowing a great deal of particular facts about popular culture. This part of advertising at least isn't something

one learns scientifically, as a body of general principles.

No matter how we dress up our negotiations in mathematical theories, we are always an animal, always acting and reacting first and foremost from our deeply held but mostly invisible and inchoate fears, needs, perceptions, and desires. That's not how these folks at Harvard learned it, though. Their theories and techniques all had to do with intellectual power, logic, authoritative acronyms like BATNA and ZOPA, rational notions of value, and a moral concept of what was fair and what was not. And built on top of this false edifice of rationality was, of course, process. They had a script to follow, a predetermined sequence of actions, offers, and counteroffers designed in a specific order to bring about a particular outcome. It was as if they were dealing with a robot, that if you did A, B, C, and D in a certain fixed order, you would get X. But in the real world negotiation is far too unpredictable and complex for that. You may have to do A then D, and then maybe Q.

Since the general opinions of large numbers of persons are almost certain to be a vague and confusing medley, action cannot be taken until these opinions have been factored down, canalized, compressed, and made uniform. The making of one general will out of multitudes of general wishes is an art well known to leaders, politicians, and steering committees. It consists essentially in the use of symbols which assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas.

Every sentence blends and balances at least two different communicative functions—one the transmission of raw info, the other the transmission of certain stuff about the speaker

When I say or write something, there are actually a whole lot of different things I am communicating. The propositional content (i.e., the verbal information I'm trying to convey) is only one part of it. Another part is stuff about me, the communicator. Everyone knows this. It's a function of the fact that there are so many different well-formed ways to say the same basic thing, from e.g. 'I was attacked by a bear!' to 'Goddamn bear tried to kill me!' to 'That ursine juggernaut did essay to sup upon my person!' and so on. Add the consideration that many grammatically ill-formed sentences can also get the propositional content across—'Bear attack Tonto, Tonto heap scared!'—and the number of subliminal options we're scanning/sorting/interpreting as we communicate with one another goes transfinite very quickly.

And different levels of diction and formality are only the simplest kinds of distinction; things get way more complicated in the sorts of interpersonal communication where social relations and feelings and moods come into play. Here's a familiar kind of example: Suppose that you and I are acquaintances

and we're in my apartment having a conversation and that at some point I want to terminate the conversation and not have you be in my apartment anymore. Very delicate social moment. Think of all the different ways I can try to handle it: 'Wow, look at the time'; 'Could we finish this up later?'; 'Could you please leave now?'; 'Go'; 'Get out'; 'Get the hell out of here'; 'Didn't you say you had to be someplace?'; 'Time for you to hit the dusty trail, my friend'; 'Off you go then, love'; or that sly old telephone-conversation-ender: 'Well, I'm going to let you go now'; et cetera, et cetera. And then think of all the different factors and implications of each option.

To be honest, the example here has a special personal resonance for me because in real life I always seem to have a hard time winding up a conversation or asking somebody to leave, and sometimes the moment becomes so delicate and fraught with social complexity that I'll get overwhelmed trying to sort out all the different possible ways of saying it and all the different implications of each option and will just sort of blank out and do it totally straight—"I want to terminate the conversation and not have you be in my apartment anymore"—which evidently makes me look either as if I'm very rude and abrupt or as if I'm semi-autistic and have no sense of how to wind up a conversation gracefully. Somehow, in other words, my reducing the statement to its bare propositional content "sends a message" that is itself scanned, sifted, interpreted, and judged by my auditor, who then sometimes never comes back.

Writers sometimes make the error of presuming the very audience agreement that it is really their rhetorical job to earn. Helping them eliminate the error involves drumming into student writers two big injunctions:

1. Do not presume that the reader can read your mind—anything that you want the reader to visualize or consider or conclude, you must provide
2. Do not presume that the reader feels the same way that you do about a given experience or issue—your argument cannot just assume as true the very things you're trying to argue for.

Because (1) and (2) seem so simple and obvious, it may surprise you to know that they are actually incredibly hard to get students to understand in such a way that the principles inform their writing.

The reason for the difficulty is that, in the abstract, (1) and (2) are intellectual, whereas in practice they are more things of the spirit. The injunctions require of the student both the imagination to conceive of the reader as a separate human being and the empathy to realize that this separate person has preferences and confusions and beliefs of her own, and

that are just as deserving of respectful consideration as the writer's. More, (1) and (2) require of students the humility to distinguish between a universal truth ('This is the way things are, and only an idiot would disagree') and something that the writer merely opines ('My reasons for recommending this are as follows:'). I therefore submit that the hoary cliché "Teaching the student to write is teaching the student to think" sells the enterprise way short. Thinking isn't even half of it.

Great stories and great jokes have a lot in common. Both depend on what communications theorists sometimes call exformation, which is a certain quantity of vital information removed from but evoked by a communication in such a way as to cause a kind of explosion of associative connections within the recipient.

We all know that there is no quicker way to empty a joke of its peculiar magic than to try to explain it—to point out, for example, that Lou Costello is mistaking the proper name 'Who' for the interrogative pronoun 'who,' and so on. And we all know the weird antipathy such explanations arouse in us, a feeling of not so much boredom as offense, as if something has been blasphemed. This is a lot like the teacher's feelings at running a Kafka story through the gears of your standard undergrad critical analysis—plot to chart, symbols to decode, themes to exfoliate, et cetera. Kafka, of course, would be in a unique position to appreciate the irony of submitting his short stories to this kind of high-efficiency critical machine, the literary equivalent of tearing the petals off and grinding them up and running the goo through a spectrometer to explain why a rose smells so pretty. Franz Kafka, after all, is the story writer whose "Poseidon" imagines a sea god so overwhelmed with administrative paperwork that he never gets to sail or swim.

It's not that students don't "get" Kafka's humor but that we've taught them to see humor as something you get—the same way we've taught them that a self is something you just have. No wonder they cannot appreciate the really central Kafka joke: that the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle. That our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home. It's hard to put into words, up at the blackboard, believe me. You can tell them that maybe it's good they don't "get" Kafka. You can ask them to imagine his stories as all about a kind of door. To envision us approaching and pounding on this door, increasingly hard, pounding and pounding, not just wanting admission but needing it; we don't know what it is but we can feel it, this total desperation to enter, pounding and ramming and kicking. That, finally, the door opens. . . and it opens outward—we've been inside what we wanted all along.

The fundamental questions involved are ones whose answers have to be

literally worked out instead of merely found.

The basic principle of structural analysis is that the terms of a symbolic system do not stand in isolation—they are not to be thought of in terms of what they “stand for,” but are defined by their relations to each other. One has to first define the field, and then look for elements in that field that are systematic inversions of each other. Take vampires. First you place them: vampires are stock figures in American horror movies. American horror movies constitute a kind of cosmology, a universe unto themselves. Then you ask: what, within this cosmos, is the opposite of a vampire? The answer is obvious. The opposite of a vampire is a werewolf. On one level they are the same: they are both monsters that can bite you and by biting you, turn you, too, into one of their own kind. In most other ways each is an exact inversion of the other. Vampires are rich. They are typically aristocrats. Werewolves are always poor. Vampires are fixed in space: they have castles or crypts that they have to retreat to during the daytime; werewolves are usually homeless derelicts, travelers, members of an ostracized peasant group or otherwise on the run. Vampires control other creatures: bats, wolves, humans that they hypnotize or render thralls. Werewolves can’t control themselves.

Yet—and this is really the clincher in this case—each can be destroyed only by its own negation: vampires, by a stake, a simple sharpened stick that peasants use to construct fences; werewolves, by a silver bullet, something literally made from money. By observing these axes of inversion, we can get a sense of what such symbols are really about: that vampires, for instance, are not necessarily so much about death, or fear, but about power; about the simultaneous feelings of attraction and repulsion that relations of domination tend to create.

Obviously this is an extremely simple example. What I’ve described is just the initial move, there’s a whole series of more sophisticated ones that normally follow: inversions within inversions, mediating terms, levels of hierarchical encompassment. There’s no need to go into any of that here. My point is just that even by making this initial move, one will almost invariably discover something one would not have thought of otherwise. It’s a way of radically simplifying reality that leads to insights one would almost certainly never have achieved if one had simply attempted to take on the world in its full complexity.

It is about methodically confronting obvious-but-often-overlooked truths until something in you shifts.

“I realized the very memory of being in this spot, on my nature-made throne, will disappear when I do. I felt a tremendous

sense of regret for all the things I hadn't done, and all the time I had wasted, all the times I avoided change, just because the known was comfortable and safe. Is that really living?

I killed myself that day—just in my mind, but in a way that reminded me how possible it was to do it in reality.”

An Axe for the Frozen Sea

When people in power are so callous that they shout down and jeer the murder of anyone who opposes them, what hope is there? How can we stand when unbridled greed is joined to unchecked and rampant violence?

Life is the cumulative effect of a handful of significant shocks.

People who're somehow burned by life, withered or ablated way past anything like what might be fair, they either curl up in their fire, or else they rise.

Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. One who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment. Live your beliefs and you can turn the world around.

Rock bottom provides a firm foundation. From there, we can do nothing but push ourselves up.

For the longest time, perhaps as long as you can remember, you've been riding along on your horse, heading in this direction or in that one, going toward this place or that place. All without a hitch. Yes, sometimes you've crossed some scrub grass or clanked down on some hard pebbles or almost lost your trot on some loose sand, but each time your horse and you nimbly adjusted and went on as if nothing much had happened. Had someone asked you afterward whether there had been any incident along the way, you might have forgotten to mention it.

You know how this story is going to go, don't you? Likely you do and you don't. Well, one day out of the blue you get knocked off your horse. Perhaps your horse gets up quickly and, spooked, runs off without you. Or perhaps you show some preternatural strength of the kind you didn't you know you had and, restraining yourself, you refuse to get back on the horse. Something tells you not to and this time you listen. Either way, you're horseless, ergo directionless, ergo also placeless.

This moment is an existential opening, an uncanny blessing, a moment that is the condition of possibility for being truly available to a matter of ultimate concern. Now everything may change for you.

What does "just going along on your horse" mean? Nothing but unexaminedly and therefore unconsciously following some script or other: going to school after school, taking job after job, taking up career after career, presuming calling after calling, pursuing relationship after relationship, raising child after child, tasting pleasure after pleasure, engaging in activity after activity.

Yet something almost inexplicably marvelous happens when, having been knocked sideways off our horse, you do not get right back on it. And what is that? A painful crack in your being opens like a sinewy thread and out come ultimate questions that may first transfix you before, should you stay with them while nurturing them, they're able to transform you. That's what.

“It was sort of an artistic and a religious crisis, than it was anything you would call a breakdown. All my reasons for being alive and the stuff that I thought was important, just truly at a gut level weren't working anymore.”

You are thrown into it by your personal sense of responsibility, combined with a complex set of external circumstances. You are cast out of the existing structures and placed in a position of conflict with them. It begins as an attempt to do your work well, and ends with being branded an enemy of society. The dissident does not operate in the realm of genuine power at all. He is not seeking power. He has no desire for office and does not gather votes. He does not attempt to charm the public. He offers nothing and promises nothing. He can offer, if anything, only his own skin—and he offers it solely because he has no other way of affirming the truth he stands for. His actions simply articulate his dignity as a citizen, regardless of the cost.

I don't want to be known for anything, I just need to know I did something.

There's one thing I know for sure: I will not be remembered as a traitor, as a weak man who reneged on his historical commitments and betrayed his people.

I didn't do something that someone else couldn't have done, I just happened to be around when something was happening. It's just history and I can't change that.

The right man in the right place is a devastating weapon.

I believe in freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of the press, freedom of criticism, and freedom of movement. I believe in the goal of equal opportunity, and the right of each individual to follow the calling of his or her own choice, and the right of every individual to an opportunity to develop his or her capacity to the fullest. I believe in the right and duty of every citizen to work for, to expect, and to obtain an increasing measure of political, economic, and emotional security for all. I am opposed to discrimination in any form, whether on the grounds of race, color, religion, political belief, or economic status. I believe in the freedom of choice of one's representatives in government, untrammelled by

machine guns, secret police, or a police state. I am opposed to arbitrary and unwarranted use of power or authority from whatever source or against any individual or group. I consider these principles sacred. I believe in them as living realities, and not as mere words on paper.

I looked at the bodies sprawled on the floor and thought, This is what matters in the world. The rest is a lie, as long as this exists. The way I'd lived, immersed in thoughts of self, seemed absurd and shameful. All that mattered was to fight against this, and all suffering. I had to make changes, drastic changes in how I lived. That this could exist, or conditions infinitely worse than this, was completely intolerable.

A society that does not embrace a common purpose for its existence has no standard against which to judge itself, making it vulnerable to the corruptions of men who chafe at the limits of law. A society that does not address the needs of its members, especially the vulnerable, weakens itself from within while wasting its most valuable resource, the minds and talents of all its citizens. A society that takes from the many to give to the few undermines its moral basis and must in the end collapse.

A socialist is just someone who is unable to get over his or her astonishment that most people who have lived and died have spent lives of wretched, fruitless, unremitting toil.

We share the world with creatures whose curious brains peacefully seek us, and we do it like this: We put up a firewall to protect them, while we destroy their food—and their ears. It would seem diabolical, but that isn't the thinking behind it. There is no thinking behind it. Our human brain doesn't reach.

Years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said it then, as I say it now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.

I'll be everywhere. Wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beating up a guy, I'll be there.

Whenever an oppressed people struggles against its oppressors, whenever an enslaved people combats for its liberty, my place is in their midst.

Where liberty is not, there is my country. The role of a citizen extends beyond national borders. The fight of those living under any system of tyranny is my fight. When it shall be said in any country in the world, 'My poor are happy; neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want'—when these things can be said then may that country boast of its constitution and its government.

If the things I'm doing are considered a crime then let history be a witness that I am a criminal. Hostility toward the American government and the capitalist system is a religious duty and we hope to be rewarded by our God.

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also prison.

I decided a while ago that I can live with whatever they do to me. The only thing I can't live with is knowing I did nothing.

Something happens, where you realize that this other, that how other people regard you does not have enough calories in it, to keep you from blowing your brains out. That you've got to find, make some other détente.

“The Assassin had killed evil before. People were happy, thrilled that another monster had met his end. On that clear, crisp morning in the normally serene Central Park, his trigger pull would be remembered for a while. And he would get on a plane or train or bus or, like today, use his own two feet, and pull another trigger, or throw another knife, or strangle the life out of someone using simply his bare hands. He would continue to do it, and for only one reason. If he didn't, the world had no chance to get better. If good people stood by and did nothing, the monsters won every time. He was not going to let that happen”

Assassins, you see, do not fear they are going to jail—they fear they are going to fail. And these ideas must die.

Ideas are more difficult to kill than people, but they can be killed, in the end.

In 1692 in Colonial America, Giles Corey was accused of witchcraft and pressed to death with four-hundred pounds of stones on his chest. It took him two days to suffocate. His last words? “More weight.”

“In the camp I was telling you about, the conditions were so brutal that many times I wanted to grab a rock, a hammer, a shovel, and take down one, maybe two guards. I would have died with them, for certain—and yet, in the searing heat of the moment of choice, at least I would have accomplished something. At least my life—my death—would have meaning. That was how I thought. And every day I despised myself for not going through with it. Every moment of inaction feels like cowardice in the face of such inhuman oppression. Survival often feels like an indignity. But—and this is the lesson as I see it now,

as an old man—sometimes the most difficult decision is to not martyr yourself for someone, but instead to choose to live for them. Because of them.”

Dying is easy, it's the living that's hard.

Still, you know: if tears are gonna fall, better their house than mine.

I am not Christ. I fight for the things I believe in, with all the weapons at my disposal and try to leave the other man dead so that I don't get nailed to a cross.

If you play Nazis with us, we ain't gonna play Jews.

In a system in which cheating is the norm, following the rules amounts to a handicap. Just ask the Tour de France cyclists who were annihilated for seven years straight by Lance Armstrong and his doping teammates.

John Brown was a man of romantic feeling. Brown shared with the slave owners a romantic ideology of personal honor through violence. “Our white brethren cannot understand us unless we speak to them in their own language; they recognize only force,” Brown's friend the black radical James McCune Smith wrote, using words that no Garrisonian abolitionist would have trusted but Brown grasped and admired.

“They will never recognize our manhood until we knock them down a time or two; they will then hug us as men and brethren.”

Brown set out, in effect, not to convert the South to Northern values but to convert the Northern abolitionists to the Southern code of honorable violence. He was a virus that was to prove deadly to the Old South because at some deep level he shared its DNA: its assumptions, its literature, and even some of its values—particularly the value of dying heroically for a cause rather than living honorably for one, and the companion value of forcing other people to die heroically for their cause, whether they quite wanted to or not.

Brown's acceptance of this feudal ethic forms the general background to his murderous night in Kansas on May 24, 1856. “We must show by actual work that there are two sides to this thing and that they can not go on with this impunity,” Brown declared after watching his fellow abolitionists quake and tremble in the face of violent pro-slave mobs. He assembled a party of activists, including four of his sons and a son-in-law, armed them with swords, and marched them toward the little settlement of Pottawatomie Creek. Brown had his men bang on the doors of pro-slavery households, pretending to be lost travelers, in order to get the men outside. There he ordered them cut to pieces, watching impassively as his sons and other followers did the work.

Brown in Kansas at first might seem to be without any cue to action—he had been neither implicated nor particularly humiliated by the vigilantes—until one realizes that the real trigger was something that had happened two days before in Washington: a South Carolina congressman had beaten Senator Charles Sumner, of Massachusetts, nearly to death with the gold head of his cane for daring to speak out against the pro-slavery forces in Kansas and, in a feudal manner, for criticizing a kinsman of his. Sumner, though no pacifist, had been unable to defend himself: his feet seem to have got caught under his little desk. This assault was put forward, instantly, as crowning proof of the difference between the Southern honor culture and the Northern procedural one: a Northerner could talk trash, but he couldn't make plays. Brown, one of his sons said, “went crazy—crazy. It seemed to be the finishing, decisive touch.” It was not a cool evaluation of the potential uses of violence in Kansas but the transferred sense of humiliation that he felt on behalf of Sumner that drove Brown to the massacre.

After his capture, when pressed on the great question, he said simply:

“I think, my friend, you are guilty of a great wrong to God and against humanity—I say it without wishing to be offensive—and it would be perfectly right to interfere with you, so far as to free those you wickedly and willfully hold in bondage.”

When Jeb Stuart warned sententiously “The wages of sin is death,” Brown turned on him:

“I would not have made such a remark to you if you had been a prisoner and wounded in my hands. You had better—all of you people of the South—prepare yourselves for a settlement of this question. You may dispose of me very easily—I am nearly disposed of now. But this question is still to be settled.”

Nonviolence is, in reality, a debate between self-defense and masochism. If you think I'll bleed nonviolently, you'll be sticking me for the rest of my life. But if I tell you I'll fight back, there will be less blood. I'm for reciprocal bleeding.

You don't have a peaceful revolution. You don't have a turn-the-other-cheek revolution. There's no such thing as a nonviolent revolution. Revolution is bloody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise, revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way. And you, sitting around here like a knot on the wall, saying, “I'm going to love these folks no matter how much they hate me.” No, you need a revolution. Whoever heard of a revolution where they lock arms singing “We Shall

Overcome”? You don’t do that in a revolution. You don’t do any singing, you’re too busy swinging. I’m not going to beg for anything I deserve—I’m gonna take it.

Violence is necessary; it is as American as apple pie.

“I am too painful to care enough to fight. To me, the fight seems without point: our own leaders have been subverted to pretend the invasion is alliance; we very few cannot repel an invasion; we cannot even make our government admit that there is an invasion. I am weak and, in pain, see all is pointless: I do not see the meaning of choosing to fight. It’s nothing but ‘Oh fuck me, just great, another horrible thing I’m going to have stand here and witness and then go feel pain over.’”

The fear of the pain is many times worse than the pain of the pain, is it not? You must see the point not of winning but of choosing merely to fight. Always do what you are afraid to do.

Blessed are those who struggle.
Oppression is worse than the grave.
Better to die for a noble cause,
than to live and die a slave.

One might dream that on the only green planet we know, life would have a special value of its own, just as books and works of art do in our culture. And if the interest in life per se were not sufficient to protect it, one might hope that simple, selfish interest in human comfort and sustenance might confer a special status on living systems and force their conservation. Unfortunately, neither occurs. The stacks are open in the world’s great library of life and we advertise to the vandals.

“To reverse the effects of civilization would destroy the dreams of a lot of people. There’s no way around it. We can talk all we want about sustainability, but there’s a sense in which it doesn’t matter that these people’s dreams are based on, embedded in, intertwined with, and formed by an inherently destructive economic and social system. Their dreams are still their dreams. What right do I—or does anyone else—have to destroy them.

At the same time, what right do they have to destroy the world?”

When I say this keeps me up at night, I mean it. I am plagued by visions of starving people seeking to escape from grey wastes, being beaten back by armed police. I see the last rich ecosystems snuffed out, the last of the global megafauna—lions, elephants, whales, and tuna—vanishing. And when I wake, I cannot assure myself that it was just a nightmare.

Other people have different dreams: the fantasy of a feeding frenzy that need never end, the fairy-tale of reconciling continued economic growth with a living world. If humankind spirals into societal collapse, these dreams will be the cause.

Were the Australian extinction an isolated event, we could grant humans the benefit of the doubt. But the historical record makes *Homo sapiens* look like an ecological serial killer.

Hundreds of stuffed heads: bongo, nyala, bushbuck, sitatunga, greater and lesser kudu, eland, ibex, Barbary sheep, chamois, impala, gazelle, dik-dik, musk ox, cape buffalo, sable, roan, oryx, waterbuck, and gnu. Hundreds of pairs of glass eyes fail to return your gaze. I can't imagine a more appropriate setting to describe what amounts to genocide. Millions of people slaughtered in death camps, from Europe's Holocaust to Darfur, are proof of what our species is capable of. The extraordinary loss of huge animals whose heads don't appear on these walls. They were all exterminated, simply because it could be done. The person who put this collection together could have walked straight out of the Pleistocene.

I am not proposing a return to the Stone Age. My intent is not reactionary, nor even conservative, but simply subversive. It seems that the utopian imagination is trapped, like capitalism and industrialism and the human population, in a one-way future consisting only of growth. All I'm trying to do is figure out how to put a pig on the tracks.

We are not here simply to protect what we have been given so far; we are here to try to be the future guardians of those areas as well as to sweep our protective arms around the vast lands which may well need us as man and his industrial world expand and encroach on the last bastions of wilderness. Today we are concerned about our natural areas being enjoyed by the people. But we must never forget that all the elements of nature, the rivers, forests, animals, and all the things coexistent with them must survive as well.

It means that, right from the beginning, everything that ever lived belonged to the world—and that's how things came to be this way. Those single-celled creatures that swam in the ancient oceans belonged to the world, and because they did, everything that followed came into being. Those club-finned fish offshore of the continents belonged to world, and because they did, the amphibians eventually came into being. And because the amphibians belonged to the world, the reptiles eventually came into being.

And because the reptiles belonged to the world, the mammals eventually came into being. And because the mammals belonged to the world, the primates eventually came into being. And because the primates belonged to the world, Australopithecus eventually came into being. And because Australopithecus belonged to the world, man eventually came into being. And for three-million years man belonged to the world—and because he belonged to the world, he grew and developed and became brighter and more dexterous until one day he was so bright and dexterous that we had to call him *Homo sapiens sapiens*, which means that he was us. And that's the way the we lived for three-million years—as if we belonged to the world. That's how we came into being. We know what happens if you take the Taker premise, that the world belongs to man. That's a disaster. If you take the Leaver premise, that man belongs to the world then creation goes on forever.

Life is a fine thing—so above and beyond everything, we have to defend life. We shouldn't sacrifice a generation in the name of such dreams.

You can be shaped, or you can be broken. There is not much in between.

A weed is a strong plant thriving where those in power do not want it. A witch is a strong person thriving where those in power do not want them.

The ideas contained within are seeds thrown to the wind, perhaps none will find a purchase, a place, a home, but even if one finds the darkest crevice, it can grow, and spawn its own seeds, thrown to the wind yet again.

Is it ambitious? Of course. Likely to fail? Of course. But then so were so many other things, until they happened.

To those dark crevices, those rotting pits, you are still fertile ground. You can still grow beautiful things despite the darkness. And we need you now more than ever.

And, if it becomes too much, if you are going to leap over that ledge, at least try to take some of the bastards out with you.

“Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts a hand on you, send him to the cemetery. That's a good religion. In fact, that's the old-time religion. Preserve your life, it's the best thing you've got. And if you've got to give it up, let it be even-steven.”

“The policeman arrested me in the name of the law; I hit him in the name of liberty.”

“He wasn't much good at livin', but he knew how to die.”

To give away the thing that is difficult to part with,
 Is the best offering amongst the alms.
 Let this impure and sinful body,
 Turn into something like a diamond.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche introduced the concept of the *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* is virtuous, loyal, ambitious and outspoken, disdainful of religious dogma and suspicious of received wisdom, intensely engaged in the hurly-burly of the real world. Above all he is passionate—a connoisseur of both “the highest joys” and “the deepest sorrows.” He believes in the moral imperative to defend—with his life, if necessary—ideals such as truth, beauty, honor, and justice. He is self-assured. He is a risk taker. He regards suffering as salutary, and scorns the path of least resistance.

The bravery or other ideals behind an act belong not to one individual, but to the world, for better or worse.

World-changing—it starts with ordinary people. Ordinary people do extraordinary things, and then we lionize them. We make heroes out of them. As endless epics, sagas, and eddas attest, heroes become heroes by making others small. And that’s a problem, because it makes other ordinary people look at these heroes and think that they can’t achieve the same things. But that path is open to everybody. Anybody at any time.

Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.

For a cosmic blink of an eye we are given the opportunity to directly control a small amount of energy and the potential to influence a much larger amount. What will you choose to do with it?

Mother Culture teaches you that things are as they should be. Except for a few thousand savages scattered here and there, all the peoples of the earth are now enacting this story. This is the story man was born to enact, and to depart from it is to resign from the human race itself, is to venture into oblivion. Your place is here, participating in this story, putting your shoulder to the wheel, and as a reward, being fed. There is no ‘something else.’ To step out of this story is to fall off the edge of the world. There’s no way out of it except through death.

If justice is what love looks like in public then neoliberalism is what lovelessness looks like as policy. It looks like generations of children raised amidst an uncaring landscape. It looks like the rat-infested schools of Detroit. It looks like water pipes leaking lead and poisoning young minds in Flint. It looks like foreclosed mortgages on homes that were built to collapse. It looks like famished hospitals that feel more like jails—and overstuffed jails

that are humanity's best approximation of hell. It looks like trashing the beauty of the planet as if it had no value at all. It is greed and carelessness incarnate.

There is a lot of confusion around the word 'neoliberalism,' and about who is a neoliberal. And understandably so. So let's break it down. Neoliberalism is an extreme form of capitalism that started to become dominant in the 1980s, under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, but since the 1990s has been the reigning ideology of the world's elites, regardless of partisan affiliation. Neoliberalism is shorthand for an economic project that vilifies the public sphere and anything that's not either the workings of the market or the decisions of individual consumers. It is probably best summarized by another of Reagan's famous phrases:

“The nine most terrifying words in the English language are:
I'm from the government and I'm here to help.”

Under the neoliberal worldview, governments exist in order to create the optimal conditions for private interests to maximize their profits and wealth, based on the theory that the profits and economic growth that follow will benefit everyone in the trickle-down from the top—eventually. If it doesn't work, and stubborn inequalities remain or worsen (as they invariably do), then according to this worldview, that must be the personal failing of the individuals and communities that are suffering. They must have “a culture of crime,” say, or lack a “work ethic,” or perhaps it's “absentee fathers,” or some other racially-tinged excuse for why government policy and public funds should never be used to reduce inequalities, improve lives, or address structural crises.

The primary tools of this project are all too familiar: privatization of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sphere, and low taxes paid for by cuts to public services, and all of this locked in under corporate-friendly trade deals. It's the same recipe everywhere, regardless of context, history, or the hopes and dreams of the people who live there. Larry Summers, when he was chief economist of the World Bank in 1991, summed up the ethos:

“Spread the truth—the laws of economics are like the laws
of engineering. One set of laws works everywhere.”

With socialism in decline, there was seemingly no longer a need to soften capitalism's edges anywhere. As Thatcher famously declared:

“There is no alternative.”

Another way of thinking about this is that neoliberalism is simply capitalism without competition, or capitalism lying on the couch in its undershirt saying, ‘What are you going to do, leave me?’

What always irritated me the most about Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis was not the way it reinforced the idea that “there is no alternative” to neoliberalism. Rather, it was the way it suggested that there was some fundamental difference between Us and Every Single Person Who Lived Before Us. We are the Present and they are History. Even as Fukuyama strongly rejected criticisms of his book, which he felt misunderstood his point, he was quite clear that there was some fundamental difference between events as we experience them and events as they used to be:

“What I suggested had come to an end was not events, even large and grave events, but History: that is, history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all peoples in all times.”

This annoyed me so much in part because it’s so easy to believe. The figures of history do seem quite unlike ourselves. It’s hard to believe that Socrates or Cleopatra or Marx ate, slept, and shat just the same way we do. I mean, it can be difficult enough to empathize with people who are alive today. It can be even harder to fully appreciate that previous ‘presents’ were just as present as our own.

When I look at our time, I try to look at it the way we look at ancient civilizations. Let’s assume that human beings will be around for another several thousand years at least. What do we look like to them? Clearly the idea that we were somehow uniquely different from those a hundred years before us will seem ludicrous to them, no matter what happens or doesn’t happen over the next several millennia. There are a few things I always wonder: Which things that we cared a lot about will seem completely trivial? And which things will it seem extraordinary not to have cared about? If I had to predict, I’d say that they’d be amazed we spent so much time talking about Paul Manafort and Michael Avenatti even as we tortured billions of animals to death and stood by watching the planet boil. Animal welfare, climate change, nuclear weapons, borders—our failures to do anything on these fronts will seem like a deep moral deficiency.

Understanding yourself as a person in history confers a great sense of responsibility. It’s interesting to daydream about questions like: If you had been alive in 1922, and had the freedom to act, what would you do to prevent the rise of Hitler? What would you have done had you been alive in Time & Place X, Y, or Z? Now, the question doesn’t really make much

sense, since “who you are” comes from the fact that you’re here, now, and have lived the life you’ve lived instead of some other life. But the exercise is still useful even if we can’t suspend the laws of the universe, because in some ways we have been plopped down in history and do face that exact question. Given that you are here, in a particular moment and place, an unchangeable past behind you and an unknowable future before you, what will you do? Any life is a historical blip—your lifespan is two numbers separated by a hyphen, and this is the hyphen—and as individuals we almost certainly can’t change the course of history alone. But the decisions people make do matter.

One of history’s main lessons is: Don’t be the person who grudgingly accepts the inevitability of atrocious things. The liberals who cautioned Martin Luther King to “go slow” were cowards, and the civil rights protesters changed the country by refusing to tolerate the intolerable. The people who gathered and attacked the first black family who moved to Cicero, Illinois—these were not the people you want to be. Same with the ordinary Germans who were afraid to speak up—each contributed to a human catastrophe. The “good men who do nothing” are not very good at all, because being good in part depends on what you do in response to your circumstances.

I am not saying that everyone must be an activist. Many people do not have the time or health. But I do think knowledge confers duty: As we try to look at our lives from the perspective of future people, aliens, or ourselves on our deathbeds, what decisions do we think we should make? I am not religious, but I often wonder how I would “justify myself” if there were a day of judgment. What were you for? What good were you? Did you sit idly by?

I believe strongly that life should be full of pleasure, and that there’s nothing helpful about living every day wracked with guilt over things you haven’t done. But I also know that history doesn’t just happen. It’s made by the sum total of the things people do, and I am a person, and you are a person, and we are the ones who decide what we do. 62,000 people lived rather than died because Carl Lutz was a good person who used his opportunities well. Because we are limited by our context, we each have constraints to our actions, but those constraints are also unknowable, and the only way to guarantee that a project fails is to resign yourself to its failure.

Try to look at our time as an outsider rather than a participant, and you’ll see how mad it all looks. These days, parts of the conservative press have switched from denying that climate change is happening to insisting that it won’t substantially impede GDP growth. The Wall Street Journal ran a column insisting that *nine degrees* of average warming would be

fine, because the economy could still expand. Did the article give any consideration to the billions of lives that would be disrupted, the refugees that would be generated, the people who would burn alive in new fires, or see their cities flooded? It didn't. The right-wing press is pathological: growth at all costs, without ever wondering where it will stop or how you can have limitless expansion on a finite planet.

Capitalism is a paperclip maximizer. It eats everything alive, and makes up whatever arguments are necessary to justify the ceaseless quest for maximizing productivity and revenue. It will do so even if it inflicts mass human suffering. What will this look like in the rearview mirror? How will we see columns that said the god of GDP must be served no matter the cost, that it is okay to kill every coral reef on earth if we can keep building new factories? I feel this will look like an age of lunacy, like we were members of a death-cult that made up rationalizations for its own destruction.

What mainstream liberals have been saying for decades is that we simply need to tweak the existing system here and there and everything will be fine. You can have Goldman Sachs capitalism plus solar panels. But the challenge is much more fundamental than that. It requires throwing out the neoliberal rulebook, and confronting the centrality of ever-expanding consumption in how we measure economic progress. In one sense, then, those with their desperate need to deny the reality of global warming, or belittle its implications, understand something that is fundamentally true: to avert climate chaos, we need to challenge the capitalist ideologies that have conquered the world since the 1980s. If you are the beneficiary of those ideologies, you are obviously going to be very unhappy about that. That's understandable. Global warming really does have radical progressive implications. If it's real—and it manifestly is—then the oligarch class cannot continue to run riot without rules. Stopping them is now a matter of humanity's collective survival.

No one familiar with American history can ignore how difficult it has been to bend the arc of history toward justice. Given the empirical evidence of the dire status of American citizens of African descent, it could be claimed that the bend in the arc is almost indiscernible.

Nor can the process of trying to achieve justice be viewed as simply the unfolding of democratic concepts into law and practice over time. Human agency, carefully crafted appeals, consciousness-raising of various sorts and at differing levels (individual, group, society-wide), cultural and artistic innovations and aesthetic challenges, years of human labor, blood, death, suffering, dreams, direct collective action, all and more were and are essential. And still we must account for the aforementioned evidence of how little has been the progress of equality for some groups. Community organizers,

agitators, rebels, activists, revolutionaries throughout the history of the American polity from Patrick Henry to Martin Luther King have known that challenging the flawed ideologies that dominate discourse, legitimate public practice, and shape the norms of civil society must be confronted sooner rather than later. Radical social movements in their time are always viewed as disturbances of the moral order. It is only retrospectively that social movements are viewed as speaking truth to power in ways that make moral sense.

In the United States, for example, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. is universally celebrated, including by citizens who share the ideology of those who despised him in his lifetime. This may be used as evidence of their success. But given persisting failures of equality in the United States, a more plausible explanation is that they have been assimilated into a rhetoric that views the polity as ever more just, the society progressively more fair and decent. The fact that social movements make retrospective moral sense does not mean that the practices that accompany them change in materially significant ways.

One must be constantly vigilant of the tendency for the supposed success of social movements to be used to mask their failure. Embracing the moral sense of a social movement is an effective method to justify the end of critical scrutiny into the contradictions and tensions between professed political ideals and the actual circumstances of citizens. The success of the Civil Rights Movement seemed to invite a retreat from the type of critical inquiry I am engaged in here. There is a case to be made that the nobility and courage of those who participated in the Civil Rights Movement were used to mask continuing inequality. Claims of persisting inequality could be dismissed as attempts to diminish the heroic efforts of those who participated in the Civil Rights Movement, who sought a “colorblind” society. An analysis of propaganda and its relationship to flawed ideology helps us understand this danger. A social movement based on compelling the polity to recognize the role of race in inequality could be utilized to mask continued racial inequality. The heroic narrative of social movements faces the ever-present risk of being co-opted in the service of the message that the problems they addressed are now solved.

I have sketched the mechanism by which the subversion of democratic ideals occurs. It is my hope, which by no means rises to the arrogance of expectation, that this book will play some positive role in its prevention.

If the study of mankind amounts to no more than picturing to us our darker potential, I have better things to spend my time on. If on the other hand the study of mankind is to be a study in what reborn man can be, that is a different story.

These ideas will seem audacious, because they require big changes—in our personal lives and in our wider societies—at a time when we have lost faith in our ability to make collective changes. I wondered at times—am I asking too much? But when I reflected on it, I realized that the audacity of the changes we need now doesn't tell you anything about me. It reveals only how deep this problem runs. If those changes seem big, that tells you only that the problem is big. But a big problem is not necessarily an unsolvable problem.

If at first an idea does not sound absurd, then there is no hope for it.

The so-called possibility of such events is of no importance whatever, for the criterion of what is possible in any age is derived from that age's rational assumptions.

I happen to think that the most serious barrier to accomplishing political goals is the people who insist that they cannot be done. This is why I think one of the worst things Hillary Clinton has ever said is “single payer will never, ever happen.” By saying it, you place a larger barrier in the way of its success than any of the actually-existing impediments. As a matter of fact, single-payer programs are not outlandish. We're talking about making the American healthcare system more like the Canadian healthcare system. Yet Clinton said that it would never happen. What, not in 20 years? 100 years? 500 years? Are our ambitions really so low, our sense of political possibility so constrained, that we think you can't even adjust healthcare funding to operate in the same way that our next-door neighbor does it? People with imaginations this impoverished are far more of an impediment to change than anything else about the world.

They have no constructive ideas; they regard those who have them as dangerous fanatics; in all their fictions there is no leading thought or inspiration for which any man could conceivably risk the spoiling of his hat in a shower, much less his life.

For much of the last century, the great revolutionary question has thus been: how does one affect fundamental change in society without setting in motion a process that will end with the creation of some new, violent bureaucracy? Is utopianism the problem—the very idea of imagining a better world and then trying to bring it into being? Or is it something in the very nature of social theory? Should we thus abandon social theory? Or is the notion of revolution itself fundamentally flawed? Since the sixties, one common solution has been to start by lowering one's sights.

In the years leading up to May '68, the Situationists famously argued that it was possible to do this through creative acts of subversion that undermined the logic of what they called “the Spectacle,” which rendered us passive consumers. Through these acts, we could, at least momentarily,

recapture our imaginative powers. At the same time, they also felt that all such acts were small-scale dress rehearsals for the great insurrectionary moment to which they would necessarily lead—*the* revolution, properly speaking. This is what's largely gone today. If the events of May '68 showed anything, it was that if one does not aim to seize state power, there can be no fundamental, onetime break. As a result, among most contemporary revolutionaries, that millenarian element has almost completely fallen away. No one thinks the skies are about to open any time soon. There is a consolation, though: that as a result, insofar as one actually can come to experiencing genuine revolutionary freedom, one can begin to experience it immediately.

We must make our freedom by cutting holes in the fabric of this reality, by forging new realities which will, in turn, fashion us. Putting yourself in new situations constantly is the only way to ensure that you make your decisions unencumbered by the inertia of habit, custom, law, or prejudice—and it is up to you to create these situations. Freedom only exists in the moment of revolution. And those moments are not as rare as you think. Change, revolutionary change, is going on constantly and everywhere—and everyone plays a part in it, consciously or not. What is this but an elegant statement of the logic of direct action: the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free? The obvious question is how this approach can contribute to an overall strategy—one that should lead, perhaps not to a single moment of revolutionary redemption, but to a cumulative movement towards a world without states and capitalism. On this point, no one is completely sure. Most assume the process could only be one of endless improvisation. Insurrectionary moments there will surely be. Likely as not, quite a few of them. But they will most likely be one element in a far more complex and multifaceted revolutionary process whose outlines could hardly, at this point, be fully anticipated.

In retrospect, what seems strikingly naïve is the old assumption that a single uprising or successful civil war could, as it were, neutralize the entire apparatus of structural violence, at least within a particular national territory—that within that territory, right-wing realities could be simply swept away, to leave the field open for an untrammelled outpouring of revolutionary creativity. But the truly puzzling thing is that, at certain moments of human history, that appeared to be exactly what was happening. It seems to me that if we are to have any chance of grasping the new, emerging conception of revolution, we need to begin by thinking again about the quality of these insurrectionary moments.

One of the most remarkable things about such insurrectionary upheavals is how they can seem to burst out of nowhere—and then, often, dissolve away

just as quickly. How is it that the same “public” that two months before say, the Paris Commune, or the Spanish Civil War, had voted in a fairly moderate social democratic regime will suddenly find itself willing to risk their lives for the same ultra-radicals who received a fraction of the actual vote? Or, to return to May ‘68, how is it that the same public that seemed to support or at least feel strongly sympathetic toward the student/worker uprising could almost immediately afterwards return to the polls and elect a right-wing government? The most common historical explanations—that the revolutionaries didn’t really represent the public or its interests, but that elements of the public perhaps became caught up in some sort of irrational effervescence—seem obviously inadequate.

First of all, they assume that ‘the public’ is an entity with opinions, interests, and allegiances that can be treated as relatively consistent over time. In fact what we call ‘the public’ is created, produced through specific institutions that allow specific forms of action—taking polls, watching television, voting, signing petitions or writing letters to elected officials or attending public hearings—and not others. These frames of action imply certain ways of talking, thinking, arguing, deliberating. The same public that may widely indulge in the use of recreational chemicals may also consistently vote to make such indulgences illegal; the same collection of citizens is likely to come to completely different decisions on questions affecting their communities if organized into a parliamentary system, a system of computerized plebiscites, or a nested series of public assemblies. In fact the entire anarchist project of reinventing direct democracy is premised on assuming this is the case.

To illustrate what I mean, consider that in English-speaking nations, the same collection of people referred to in one context as “the public” can in another be referred to as “the workforce.” They become a ‘workforce,’ of course, when they are engaged in different sorts of activity. The ‘public’ does not work—a sentence like ‘most of the American public works in the service industry’ would never appear in a magazine or paper, and if a journalist were to attempt to write such a sentence, her editor would certainly change it to something else. It is especially odd since the public does apparently have to go to work: this is why, as leftist critics often complain, the media will always talk about how, say, a transport strike is likely to inconvenience the public, in their capacity of commuters, but it will never occur to them that those striking are themselves part of the public—or that if they succeed in raising wage levels, this will be a public benefit.

And certainly the public does not go out into the streets. Its role is as audience to public spectacles, and consumers of public services. When buying or using goods and services privately supplied, the same collection of

individuals become something else, “consumers,” just as in other contexts of action they are relabeled a “nation,” “electorate,” or “population.” All these entities are the product of bureaucracies and institutional practices that, in turn, define certain horizons of possibility. Hence when voting in parliamentary elections one might feel obliged to make a “realistic” choice; in an insurrectionary situation, on the other hand, suddenly anything seems possible.

What ‘the public,’ ‘the workforce,’ ‘the electorate,’ ‘consumers,’ and ‘the population’ all have in common is that they are brought into being by institutionalized frames of action that are inherently bureaucratic, and therefore, profoundly alienating. Voting booths, television screens, office cubicles, hospitals, the ritual that surrounds them—one might say these are the very machinery of alienation. They are the instruments through which the human imagination is smashed and shattered. Insurrectionary moments are moments when this bureaucratic apparatus is neutralized. Doing so always seems to have the effect of throwing horizons of possibility wide open, which is only to be expected if one of the main things that that apparatus normally does is to enforce extremely limited horizons. This is probably why people often experience something very similar during natural disasters.

All of this would explain why revolutionary moments always seem to be followed by an outpouring of social, artistic, and intellectual creativity. Normally unequal structures of imaginative identification are disrupted; everyone is experimenting with trying to see the world from unfamiliar points of view; everyone feels not only the right, but usually the immediate practical need to re-create and reimagine everything around them.

New truths need to be told, and new truths need to be heard. The horizon is not so far as we can see, but as far as we can imagine.

Imagine that Martin Luther King never had a dream. Imagine that instead of working outside the narrow confines of time and place, he had resolved to work only within them. Imagine he had risen to the steps of the Lincoln Monument and announced a five-point plan that he thought he could both sell to the black community and win a majority for in both houses of congress that would bring civil rights legislation that one step closer.

But he didn’t. He chose not to engage in the nitty gritty of the here and now. Instead, he addressed not what will be or could be, but what should be.

It’s not naïve to hope that what does not seem possible in the foreseeable future is nonetheless necessary and worth fighting for. So many owe their life today to those outrageous and brave enough to fight for a society that they insisted upon even when they could not imagine it ever materializing.

If politics is the art of the possible, then radicalism must be the capacity to imagine new possibilities.

“A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth even glancing at. For it leaves out the one country at which humanity is always landing. And when humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.”

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

In economically advanced democracies, whose universities teach some sort of Enlightenment tradition and technocratic specialty, societies often do not share in common—and do not teach—certain important cultural cores. These cores, which I think of as modules, include personal conflict resolution (how do we disagree? how do we apologize?), personal finances (how do we spend our money? how luxuriously should we live? how much should we save?), personal fitness (how do I maintain my body? what athletic skills should be practiced to promote health and strength?), and emotional or spiritual growth.

These cultural modules are important because they address large parts of day-to-day life and overall lifestyle. They are also important because each module or chunk of teachings/practices can be fairly extensive, and hard to derive from scratch. Individuals, and entire societies, may take a long time to rediscover some of these helpful practices. Fortunately for those of us bred in educational systems which run light on these cultural modules, there are lots of gurus around which are not too hard to discover. By taking a guru here and a guru there, you can form a complete personal culture, a complete lifestyle. My point is not that any of these teachers represents the last word on the topic, though sometimes their acolytes seem to think so, and though it might seem so when you’re reading the firehose of information for the first time. My point is just that each teacher has assembled a rich set of advice and tips. Combining them generates many ideas and crossover habits, and putting them into practice will keep you busy for a long time.

Rolling your own culture in this way is in general a good idea, I think. Even if you come from a background that includes teachings or traditions which address each of these areas, contrasting advice may suit you better or at least provoke greater reflection. And if you do not come from such a background—the secular elementary and university system for instance—you likely will be able to find a more thoughtful approach than whatever your default is, saving you years of flailing.

Although rolling your own culture is a good idea in general, doing so leads to a few follow-on problems. First, rolling your own requires a lot of

work. Discovering ideas and concepts, understanding them, comparing them, trying them out, carries significant costs in time and energy. This can take years. Many people lack the time and energy—or intellectual bandwidth if we’re being honest—to accomplish this task. By God you had better have figured out something that works for you before your business hits a rough patch or you lose a family member or your partner gets cancer, because you won’t be able to figure it out after that. Some communities with a complete worldview contain these teachings as a package deal—both a feature and a bug of such communities. As a feature, a comprehensive and integrated set of teachings saves most ordinary people years (or generations) of search and testing. As a bug, some of the teachings may be pathological or simply not individually suited.

Second, the individual modules may not fit together very well. One could imagine a university-level course on lifestyle design. Our lives and cultures are, by and large, slipshod, ramshackle constructions, bits of this and that tacked together. We select from the available chunks and try to fit them together into a coherent whole—an education here, a job there, a box to live in, entertainment to pass the time. These available ‘life parts’ tend to be black boxes in whose design we have little say. They may not fit together into a satisfying whole at all—the boat they make may not float. I do not think this kind of problem is one that individual imagination is powerful enough to solve. Even the most imaginative among us will tend to build a monstrosity instead of a life.

The third problem resulting from rolling your own culture is more serious and more interesting. One definition of a community is the place you can bring all of your self to, the kind of space held up as an ideal in Robert Putnam’s classic, *Bowling Alone*. With a close friend, or at a traditional church, you can talk about your bad leg, your struggles or success at work, how your love life or lack thereof is going, and your newest hobby. There is no compartmentalization. That’s a community. By contrast, industrialized or post-industrialized economies are systematic. You can talk about your strength training at your gym, your bad leg at your physical therapist’s, your emotional life at your psychologist’s, and your career with your mentor—assuming you are lucky enough to have some or all of these. Your self becomes splintered among these locations and communities.

One common solution is to choose one of these categories in which to invest your identity. Ardent Crossfitters often like to date other Crossfitters and even have their own dubious sartorial aesthetic. Mustachians—devotees of the frugality blogger Mr. Money Mustache—spend much of their time thinking about luxuriously frugal financial strategies. By emphasizing one lifestyle category over others, you can find a lot of fulfillment among other

like-minded people.

However, finding a group that shares even a few of your cultural modules becomes a significant challenge. Sometimes lifestyle teachings select against each other. Sometimes some modules cluster together, such as libertarianism and the Paleo diet, and those clusters do aid in finding friends and community. Modules that cluster together or that select against each other can be set to one side for the moment. In general, as a simple matter of probability, because we now roll our own cultures, the increasing diversity of the modules of these cultures decreases overlap between the sub-communities of the modules, and decreases the chances of finding many people who share several modules with you.

A true community, where you bring all of your self, forms in the overlapping portion of the Venn diagram of many cultural modules. Traditional communities propagate themselves and preserve themselves precisely by maintaining that overlapping region. As that Venn center shrinks, so does the number of true communities.

“People have always had selves, but selves have not always had to carry the burden of supplying meaning to life in such a far-reaching fashion.”

As society has become simultaneously secular and atomized, community has become harder to come by. Community forms largely around shared culture of one sort or another, and with less cultural overlap, communities shrink. As cultures become atomized or nonexistent, our languages for communicating meaning to one another, for crafting meaning together, have a shrinking shared vocabulary. And as crafting meaning together becomes harder, the result is also poorer than received meanings from history.

Consider a five-stage model of personal maturity:

Stage 1: Mostly infants: in a blooming, buzzing confusion, the baby feels hunger, pain, sleepiness.

Stage 2: If the child could speak it would say ‘I am hungry’ or ‘I am sleepy.’

Stage 3: Usually older children, personal interests are relativized. They move from subject to object: you no longer are your collection of interests, you have interests. They are subordinated to, and are organized by, relationships. You are in relationships; and, tacitly, you find yourself defined by them.

Stage 4: Characterizes modern society. We have priorities and procedures based on reasons, and that applies to our personal lives as well. Adolescent dramas diminish as systematic priorities take over: I'm sorry, but we planned this party weeks ago, and I can't switch to go to yours. Middle-class career professionals sometimes feel cold and calculating to family members due to conflicts between the fourth and third stages. This fourth stage is also where all those cultural modules live. They are systematic approaches to specific pieces of the human puzzle. If you really buy into them, other approaches are incorrect or even morally wrong.

Stage 5: You become adept at using systems in situation-appropriate ways. You're not troubled by each system's shortcomings or by conflicts between systems, whether we're talking about political and justice systems, financial and fitness systems, or philosophical systems. In Stage 5, we move beyond a devotion to this or that project, and we define ourselves by the ongoing process of meaning making. As a result, individuals in the fifth stage are able to navigate fluidly multiple systems of culture and meaning. To the extent you "are" anything, you could become a Marxist libertarian, or a religious atheist.

Getting to Stage 5 often entails an uncanny valley, "Stage 4.5," a nihilistic stage where you've lost faith in your old systems but haven't yet adapted to their loss. I propose that people who live in stage five have eaten their shadow to a significant extent, as a part of their journey into that mature state. 'Eating the shadow' or 'emotional work' is a quasi-Jungian idea that you have to not only face but also embrace the darker sides of your personality before you realize your potential.

"Yet there is a mystery here and it is not one that I understand: Without this sting of otherness, of even—the vicious, without the terrible energies of the underside of health, sanity, sense, then nothing works or can work. I tell you that goodness—what we in our ordinary daylight selves call goodness: the ordinary, the decent—these are nothing without the hidden powers that pour forth continually from their shadow sides."

The petty, jealous, angry, manipulative, cowardly, cold, apathetic, et cetera sides of yourself actually prove key to becoming whomever you want to be: dynamic, powerful, wise, caring, clever—I'm not assuming we all want to be the same person, fill in your own virtuous adjectives. Stage transitions usually cannot be accomplished solo. Intellectual understanding

is not enough. A bridge needs a culture and community. And there's this sense that this initiation into a more emotionally mature stage has to be done, often physically, with other people, and it is something that you cannot do yourself. You cannot bootstrap your way to the next level of maturity. It is something that must be shown to you.

At the moment, right-wing nationalist and populist movements are sweeping Western democracies. When the politics of Britain, the US, Guatemala, France, and Italy start looking eerily similar, it's time to look for global commonalities. One explanation is neoliberal policies allowing capital to move out of industrialized economies, causing wage stagnation and a gradual hollowing out of the middle class, causing popular frustration which manifests in nationalist and populist movements.

Rome and other civilizations expanded as long as they absorbed more energy, usually via conquest. All that energy—crops, money, and so on—can only be handled efficiently at a higher level of societal complexity. But that level of complexity can only be sustained by continued growth. When the civilization stops expanding, it collapses. Applying this hypothesis to the modern world, if we have hit peak resources or peak capitalism, then the institutions that define liberal democracy are destined to collapse, and it is unclear whether they will do so rapidly or slowly. So perhaps the global economy is starting to slow down as a result, which may be one driver behind popular frustration, which is manifesting in nationalist and populist movements.

It's even possible that the basic toolkit of most of our institutions is worn out, past due for an overhaul: representative democracy may not process information quickly enough. Today, cities and companies seem to be innovating more effectively than nations do. Perhaps globalization and the information economy throws up challenges more quickly than representative democracy can solve them, and we should push power downward or move to a liquid democratic system. I'm not trying to advocate for any single hypothesis here, just to give a sampling of the range of complexity of the set of global-scale problems. Anyone attacking even a piece of the problem is going to have to be tough and agile and a high-level operator, able to coordinate many people, able to navigate many different ways to make meaning.

As cultures become atomized or nonexistent, our languages for communicating meaning to one another, for crafting meaning together, have a shrinking shared vocabulary. And as crafting meaning together becomes harder, the result is also poorer than received meanings from history. And as subcultures overlap less, the number of "comprehensive communities" dwindles. This attrition poses challenges not only to lifestyle design and

to social experiences, but may also severely handicap advanced emotional development. Reaching a fluid state of emotional and cognitive maturity, accomplished through emotional work which is best performed in community, matters not only to us individually, but also to society.

“The person who has eaten his shadow spreads calmness, and shows more grief than anger. If the ancients were right that darkness contains intelligence and nourishment and even information, then the person who has eaten some of his or her shadow is more energetic as well as more intelligent.”

Some worry that too few people think precisely enough and at a high enough level to craft new meanings which communicate across the many atomized subcultures. And those are the sort of people who can inspire and coordinate to solve global problems. More people in the fifth stage are needed—but those people are best grown in community. I speculate that a community interested in solving global problems, and which uses different cultural modules as a means to aid each other in reaching Stage Five, wouldn't be troubled by its members' non-overlapping cultural modules. This community's *raison d'être* would be to support the ongoing process of meaning making which becomes the identity of the person living in the fifth stage, rather than to promote any particular ethical or relationship or financial or fitness system. It would be a factory not for a specific culture, but for individuals who create cultures and communities.

One of this culture's ways of dealing with liberating ideas that are gaining enough recognition that they can no longer be ignored or ridiculed or crushed out of awareness is to vigorously co-opt the ideas back into the service of existing bigotries and hierarchies.

Shallow ideas can be assimilated; ideas that require people to reorganize their picture of the world provoke hostility.

In Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*, first published in 1925, a year after its author's death, Josef K. is arrested, but can't seem to find out what he's accused of. As K. navigates a labyrinthine network of bureaucratic traps—a dark parody of the legal system—he keeps doing things that make him look guilty. Eventually his accusers decide he must be guilty, and he is summarily executed. As Kafka puts it in the second-to-last chapter, “The Cathedral”: “the proceedings gradually merge into the judgment.”

Kafka's restrained prose—the secret ingredient that makes this story about a bank clerk navigating bureaucracy into an electrifying page-turner—trades on a kind of dramatic irony. This is Kafka's whole schtick, and it's what makes him so funny. By withholding knowledge from the protagonist

and the reader, Kafka dangles the promise that all will be revealed in the end. But with every sentence the reader takes in, it feels increasingly likely that the reason for K.'s arrest will remain a mystery.

As *The Trial* follows its tragic path deeper into K.'s insular, menacing, and sexualized world, it gradually becomes clear that the answer was never forthcoming. In fact, Kafka hints at the narrator's ignorance at the very beginning:

“Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested.”

Why the conjecture about what “must have” happened unless the narrator, who relates the story in the past tense, doesn't know? That ignorance sets up the humor: During certain particularly insane moments in K.'s journey, the frustration of not knowing why he's enduring it all becomes unbearable, at which point there's no choice but to laugh.

Many commentators on *The Trial* have observed a sense of unreality in the novel, a feeling that something is somehow “off” that hangs like a fog over Kafka's plot-line.

“In spite of the confirmation of more recent times that Kafka's nightmare of a world was a real possibility whose actuality surpassed even the atrocities he describes, we still experience in reading his novels and stories a very definite feeling of unreality.”

For her, this impression of unreality derives from K.'s internalization of a vague feeling of guilt. That all-pervasive guilt becomes the means to secure K.'s participation in a corrupt legal system.

“This feeling, of course, is based in the last instance on the fact that no man is free from guilt. And since K., a busy bank employee, has never had time to ponder such generalities, he is induced to explore certain unfamiliar regions of his ego. This in turn leads him into confusion, into mistaking the organized and wicked evil of the world surrounding him for some necessary expression of that general guiltiness”

In other words, she reads *The Trial* as a kind of controlled descent into madness and corruption, ending in a violent exaggeration of the knowledge that nobody's perfect.

Others have expanded on these psychological themes, pointing to the dreamlike quality of time values and the assumption of an interior time employed throughout *The Trial*. This unsteady temporality implies that

most of what happens in *The Trial* isn't real—or isn't fully real, at any rate. In fact, they suggest, it makes as much sense to assume that the characters are projections of K.'s mind. It's the nightmarish quality of unreality that has made Kafka's name synonymous with any unreal, mysterious force which operates against man. In other words, this type of unreality has become so closely associated with Kafka that the best word to describe it is, circularly, Kafkaesque.

However some have charged that many Kafka interpreters were engaging with a politicized fantasy of what Kafka represents, rather than with the real Kafka. Some of these interpreters were motivated by a desire to dismiss Kafka as a hand-wringing bourgeois do-nothing—or even a “pre-fascist.” Others expressed a willingness to excuse Kafka's alleged “indifference to social policy” by appealing to his loose associations with socialist or anarchist circles. All of them are missing the obvious: They underestimate Kafka's role as a lawyer at the Worker's Accident Insurance Institute, in Prague, where he imposed workplace safety regulations on unwilling industrial employers.

Thus at the highest echelons of a semi-public, government-sanctioned institution enacting social policy, Kafka's job was to regulate the social conduct of employers vis-à-vis the working class. The employers under Kafka's supervision tenaciously resisted the application of recent Austrian social policy laws, which were adapted from Bismarck's legislation in Germany. They contested their risk classifications, disregarded their safety norms, tried to thwart plant inspections, and evade their premium payments. The department headed by Kafka was pitted against them in an adversarial relationship, no matter how conciliatory the agency's mission was meant to be.

Kafka's tales are a reflection of the deep obstacles to progress he perceived in the social reality of his time. He even anticipated the political self-critique of literature to the point of its non-publication, keeping most of his writing private, then asking that the manuscripts for *The Trial* and *The Castle* be destroyed upon his death—a wish that was, obviously, not honored. But the critical focus has been trained on the received version of Kafka, an interpretation of his life derived under exigent circumstances—the eruption of fascism in Europe—for ideological purposes. It has been trained, so to speak, on the Kafkaesque, instead of on Kafka himself.

It's true that Kafka's fiction ultimately offers the most reliable guide to his political orientation, provided we understand that fiction in the context of his professional life. At work, he took the side of the working class—indeed, he represented its interests in a struggle against capital. He was a man who tried to live his life according to principles of humanism, ethics, even religion. As a direct result of that experience, he learned the disturbing

truth that, in the law, “Lies are made into a universal system,” as he wrote in the penultimate chapter of *The Trial*. The best he could manage within the law still would be a far cry from real justice, which, Kafka also knew, would have to include sexual justice to be anywhere near complete.

But what about the plunging sense of unease—like a feeling of falling—that no one can quite seem to shake when they first encounter Kafka’s stories? This feeling results from the fact that Kafka’s stories, despite their bizarre premises, are unnervingly real. Although there is undoubtedly an element of the absurd in the worlds Kafka creates, his style—unpretentious and specific, yet free from slang—renders those worlds with such painful accuracy that they seem totally familiar while we’re in them, like déjà vu or a memory of a bad dream:

“K. turned to the stairs to find the room for the inquiry, but then paused as he saw three different staircases in the courtyard in addition to the first one; moreover, a small passage at the other end of the courtyard seemed to lead to a second courtyard. He was annoyed that they hadn’t described the location of the room more precisely; he was certainly being treated with strange carelessness or indifference, a point he intended to make loudly and clearly. Then he went up the first set of stairs after all, his mind playing with the memory of the remark the guard Willem had made that the court was attracted by guilt, from which it actually followed that the room for the inquiry would have to be located off whatever stairway K. chanced to choose.”

The time-bending nature of Kafka’s prose, then, shouldn’t be seen as a pathological formalism—a linguistically engineered unreality—but as a reflection of Kafka’s intuitive understanding of the emerging principles of modern physics, in which time itself is relative. The “unreality” in Kafka that has captivated so many commentators is what best aligns, ironically, with the current scientific worldview, which sees its own understanding of reality as necessarily partial, limited, and relative. If time in *The Trial* seems nonlinear, that’s only because the novel is so thoroughly modern; the uneven flow of time in the novel captures the dawning scientific realization that time is neither absolute nor universal.

Isn’t it, after all, the sense that Kafka—the voice on the page—is firmly in touch with reality that makes it feel acceptable to laugh at the deranged goings-on in *The Trial*? His jokes are technical achievements, yes, but they also speak to a feeling of loneliness that typifies the modern condition. Kafka himself couldn’t resist laughing when asked to read aloud from his work. To

orchestrate this kind of laughter might have offered relief from the relentless self-criticism that drove Kafka to conceal his writings. Kafka's suppression of information gets us to let our emotional guard down. He contrives narrative tension so that he can shock us, confronting us anew with injustices to which we've become numb.

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound or stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow to the head, what are we reading for? So that it will make us happy? Good lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us.

Too often reading books or articles on the threats the world faces becomes little more than a form of consumerism. We read them to feel well informed—hopefully better informed than others. And it is easy to feel that the more threatening the problem under discussion, the more exhilarating it is as the plot of a whodunnit. Being well informed adds to our cultural capital and gives us more to say, but let us make sure this book also makes us part of the solution.

We writers sit around and bitch about how TV has ruined the audience for reading—when really all it's done is given us the really precious gift of making our job harder. You know what I mean? And it seems to me like the harder it is to make a reader feel like it's worthwhile to read your stuff, the better a chance you've got of making real art. Because it's only real art that does that. But as it gets more complex, the reader will feel they've wandered into a classroom where they missed the first few weeks of the course. So you need to teach the reader that he's way smarter than he thought he was.

I think one of the insidious lessons about TV is the meta-lesson that you're dumb. This is all you can do. This is easy, and you're the sort of person who really just wants to sit in a chair and have it easy. When in fact there are parts of us, in a way, that are a lot more ambitious than that. And what we need, is seriously engaged art, that can teach again that we're smart. And that there's stuff that TV and movies—although they're great at certain things—cannot give us. But that have to create the motivations for us to want to do the extra work, you know, to get these other kinds of art. And I think you can see it in the visual arts, I think you can see it in music—easier though, I'd think. Makes them realize it's more fun faster. Which is tricky, because you want to seduce the reader, but you don't want

to pander or manipulate them. I mean, a good book teaches the reader how to read it.

The old tricks have been exploded, and I think the language needs to find new ways to pull the reader. And my personal belief is a lot of it has to do with voice, and a feeling of intimacy between the writer and the reader. That sorta, given the atomization and loneliness of contemporary life—that's our opening, and that's our gift.

Some art is worth the extra work of getting past all the impediments to its appreciation.

As with painting, so with every art. In literature, what is observed is not primarily the physical world, but the psychological and social ones. The poet looks at what she really feels—about her body, or her sister—not what she's supposed to feel. The novelist reports upon the way we really treat each other—the pettiness or callousness or secret irrational longing—not the way we say we do. Those conventional modes of thought and emotion from which you need to free yourself—the party lines we spout, the happy talk that we're surrounded by—are exactly where art does its work by breaking through. There is a reason we avoid the truth, with our sociable lies and our psychological blocks: it is usually too hard to bear.

The more I think of it I find this conclusion more impressed upon me—that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion—all in one.

To say that the humanities can be a path to truth is itself to challenge one of our most closely held beliefs. We live not only in a scientific world, but also in a scientistic one: a world that thinks that science—empirical, objective, quantifiable—is the exclusive form of knowledge, and that other modes of inquiry are valid only insofar as they approximate its methods. But the humanities and science face in opposite directions. They don't just work in different ways; they work on different things. Science and the humanities are different forms of teaching that are each appropriate to their domain. Scientific knowledge relates to external reality, to that which lies outside our minds and makes itself available for objective observation. Humanistic knowledge relates to our experience of the world, to what reality feels like.

The scientist seeks to be objective and appeals to the impersonal language of numbers. The artist speaks from individual experience and appeals to our own individual experience. Humanistic knowledge isn't verifiable, or quantifiable, or reproducible. It cannot be expressed in terms of equations or general laws. It changes from culture to culture and person to person. It is a matter not of calculation but interpretation. When we engage in

humanistic inquiry—when we think about a poem or a sculpture or a piece of music—we ask, not how big is it, or how hot is it, or what does it consist of, but what does it mean. We ask of a scientific proposition, ‘Is it true?’, but of a proposition in the humanities we ask, ‘Is it true for me?’

Before you start to build a better future with “the crooked timber of humanity,” as Kant referred to it, you need to find out what you’re working with. You need to know what people are—how they think, what they want, how they act—as well as something of the moral pitfalls of your own proposed interventions. The law of unintended consequences is pretty much the governing principle of narrative art. The humanities put back everything the social sciences, by way of necessary simplification, take out. Economics, for example, the most authoritative of the social sciences today, informs us that people are rational actors, forever seeking to maximize their material self-interest—an assertion that would come as news to the author of *King Lear*, let alone *The Brothers Karamazov*. Only literature is unbounded enough to show how the world really works. I’ve heard it said that novels are obsolete, that books like *War and Peace* belong to an age when information could be delivered only in extremely inefficient forms. But *War and Peace* doesn’t tell you the same kinds of things that you can learn from a blog post or a Wikipedia entry, not even fourteen-hundred pages of them. It needs to be big and complex because it’s telling you something that’s big and complex. It doesn’t give you information; it gives you life.

The crucial thing is to study, not the Great Books, but simply, great books. The idea is to find yourself a few axes; anything that has the necessary edge and heft will do. It doesn’t matter who created it or when, as long as it can do some damage, as long as it inflicts that wound. The canon is irrelevant in this respect. A real reader creates her own canon, for it consists precisely of those books that she has used to create herself.

Politics, by definition and of necessity, concerns the exercise of power, which means the exercise of violence, wielded by those possessing power against all those without it. The powerful utilize violence in this way to maintain and increase their own power, wealth, and advantage. The power, wealth, and advantage of the ruling class are underwritten by and directly flow from the suffering, destruction, and death of the powerless. In such circumstances, a writer who seeks, on however modest a scale, to unmask the true nature of the political enterprise must forever be in search of that axe. In certain circumstances, if and when events reach the final breaking point in a society, the dispossessed will rise up with their own, non-metaphorical axes.

The lack of mass resistance to neoliberal oppression signals more than apathy or indifference, it also suggests that we don’t have an informed and

energizing vision of the world for which we want to struggle. Are we fighting for socialism or against neoliberalism? Are we battling neoliberalism or capitalism itself? Are we after a New Deal or a new society? Is the enemy neoconservatism or the white supremacist? Are we fighting racism, sexism, imperialism, neoliberalism, or all of the above?

This messaging mayhem is not an issue for the establishment. Rather than issuing harsh systemic critiques, the establishment paints pictures. For liberal audiences, Democrats fulminate about Donald Trump as the living manifestation of evil and traffic in the language of tyranny and resistance. For white supremacists, Republicans rouse racist enmities with images of impoverished refugees moving steadily toward our borders, which take on a monstrous character in the minds of MAGA minions. For uncompromising patriots, the armed forces air commercials of heroic young men jumping from helicopters and landing crafts and running across smoke-filled landscapes “toward the sound of chaos.” For bootstrap conservatives, there are Reagan’s welfare queens arriving at the unemployment office in waxed Cadillacs. For humanitarian interventionists, there is Colin Powell’s imagery of a team of mad scientists zigzagging Mesopotamia in mobile weapons labs, or Tony Blair brandishing a dossier warning that a nuclear-tipped WMD could hit central London in just 45 minutes.

In a mediascape littered with symbols, calls for the head of corporate capitalism on a gilded platter are thus swept aside by an interdependent duopoly that thrives on facilitating corporate exploitation with one hand and teasing the inexhaustible well of mass credulity with the other. Belief is the dodgy virtue that venal duopolists deploy the most. Each election cycle is an exercise in peddling hope and fear in alternating cycles, like a trafficker controlling his prisoners by a devious alternation of drug and deprivation. The left has done well illustrating the monstrosities of corporate capital, and the need to colorfully depict the crimes of the ruling class will always be crucial. But so too is the need to craft more compelling stories of a world without war and a land where health and education and work are rites of passage rather than a lifelong ordeal. Can the traditional bearers of bad tidings shape an electrifying vision of a socialist society? A companion narrative that finally replaces the extant portrait of collectivism as a bloodbath of mayhem and menace? The left’s chances for mass appeal likely depend on it. Even the Bolsheviks, who were scathing critics of socialist opportunism, let alone capitalists, headlined their 1917 revolution with the triple promise of, “Peace! Land! Bread!” The workers and the peasants knew exactly what they were fighting for.

You see, deep inside, people like to dream about a better world, they like to commit, even sacrifice themselves for another being, or for an ideal,

or revolution.

There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation has a rendezvous with destiny.

Almost nothing important that ever happens to you happens because you engineer it. Destiny has no beeper; destiny always leans trench-coated out of an alley with some sort of 'Psst' that you usually can't even hear because you're in such a rush to or from something important you've tried to engineer.

The men and women needed by a society in crisis are created by a greater societal group thought, they arise from their environment, from their folk, seeming to spring forth from the people as if they were waiting for the moment. They are not so much born as made to be what is needed of them by the greater group thought occurring around them.

There are those who bloom in chaos. You call them heroes or villains, depending on which side wins the war, but until the battle call they are but normal men who long for action, who lust for the opportunity to throw off the routine of their normal lives like a cocoon and come into their own. They sense a destiny larger than themselves, but only when structures collapse around them do these individuals become warriors.

Mark Twain once told a story about a man who scoured the planet looking for the greatest general who ever lived. When the man was informed that the person he sought had already died and gone to heaven, he made a trip to the Pearly Gates to look for him. Saint Peter pointed at a regular-looking Joe. "That isn't the greatest of all generals," protested the man. "I knew that person when he lived on Earth, and he was only a cobbler." "I know that," said Saint Peter, "but if he had been a general, he would have been the greatest of them all."

Absences do a poor job of unifying people because they are much less specific. Imagine a group that thinks Picasso is the greatest painter ever and another group that thinks he isn't—only the former seems like a real group. The dislike must reach the level of hate in order for a real group to form. This is why love or hate are the two emotions utilized in compelling individuals to act as a collective.

Giving a person a story about why they are in pain is one of the most powerful things you can ever do. Once people understand what is eating at them, their pain often becomes manageable. These people are knitting meaning from what seems to be a meaningless tangle of misery. Taking away the story for your pain is just as powerful. If you can't discover what's keeping you in, the will to get out soon becomes confused and ineffectual.

In my mind, the greatest problem we face right now is our absolute dependence on an unfriendly system. Right now people are very weak. Most of us are poor. We are required to work a lot, and we receive just enough pay to survive. Few of us have much of or any social safety net to rely on, which means we are effectively enslaved. Therefore, our first steps to freeing ourselves from this situation is to build a community. We need to network, get connected with other people, and we need to get organized as a group. We can find safety in numbers.

How do we do this? I will propose an algorithm for doing this, but first let me just point out the beauty of using such algorithmic solutions to these problems. The first notable feature is that algorithms can spread. In fact, because we humans are all so well connected these days, an algorithm can spread really quickly. Think of the way a YouTube video goes viral, in a matter of days or even hours a new video can reach hundreds of millions of people. The same is true of an algorithm. It can go viral and spread to the whole world, practically instantly.

The second amazing thing about these algorithms is that they can be designed with decentralization in mind. They can be made general enough to work in almost any situation or location. Designed properly, they are a simple template, which anyone anywhere can implement. Done properly, their use frees us from typical constraints of organizing a movement. There is no need for explicit designation of leadership or of detailed long-term planning. If we design this algorithm right, people should be able to simply start doing it, and in a matter of time a movement should materialize from the ground up.

Finally, before I propose an algorithmic solution to the problem, I want to admit that this may not be the solution, it is simply my first draft attempt at a solution. I hope people will consider this as a starting point which can be modified or improved upon.

I want to set off an idea bomb—I've been trying to set one off for some time now, but so far I haven't had any success. Don't worry though, I haven't given up yet, and I don't intend to give up any time soon. Thinking about my idea bomb problem, I wondered if maybe just talking about what an idea bomb is, and how one might work, could itself be an idea bomb. Anyway, maybe just talking about it would inspire someone else to set one off, which would be just as good an outcome to me.

So an idea bomb is an idea that precipitates sudden and major social change. It is an idea that explodes into the public consciousness and immediately gets people to start doing something new. An idea bomb, to my mind, is not just a mind-expanding idea, but it also includes an activity. An idea bomb is like an algorithm, a set of instructions, that people can

start doing to instantly improve, adapt to, or otherwise change their life's circumstances.

To rulers, the idea bomb is the stuff of nightmares. Especially in this age, when an idea can spread around the world in hours or minutes, an idea bomb is truly an existential threat. If some idea were to spread around the world that sparked a global movement, the elites could instantly find themselves in a heap of trouble.

So, in order to be successful, the idea has to be appealing to people. Perhaps this is obvious, but just to be clear, if the idea does not appeal to people, then nobody will try it; it will not explode into the public consciousness. I would also argue that in order to be successful the idea should be simple. It should be simple enough that, with minimal effort, people can understand how the idea is beneficial. This feature, I believe, is what would cause the idea to spread quickly.

New ways of thinking demand new kinds of eloquence. Our world rests on science and democracy, on seeing and saying; it rests on thinking new thoughts and getting them heard by a lot of people. Oratory, as Pericles knew, was what mattered crucially to the first democracy, in fifth-century BC Athens, but that was a small affair of few citizens (and many slaves) compared with our own, which needs words of all kinds, written and spoken and shouted, coming at you from all directions. However, writing well is not proof of thinking clearly. Orwell was wrong about that too. Sadly the truth is that plenty of men who have written very well have thought horrible thoughts, and the thoughts have been made to seem less horrible by being well written.

We must concede that important writing finds a way to accurately represent life, and that the writing that does so will consciously intermingle with the meaningful culture of the time, impermanent though it may be. What that constitutes in our present culture is debatable, but here's a partial, plausible list:

- The psychological impact of the Internet on day-to-day living.
- The prevailing acceptance of nontraditional sexual identities.
- The (seemingly regular) deaths of unarmed black men at the hands of white police officers.
- An unclear definition of privacy.
- An impotent, unspecified hatred of the wealthiest "one percent."
- The prolonging of adolescence and the avoidance of adulthood.

- A distrust of objective storytelling.
- The intermittent rebooting of normalcy in the years following 9/11.

I'm not saying an important book must include one of these ideas, or even an idea that would comfortably fit on this list. But it needs to include something that taps into what matters about the world now. There has to be something at stake that involves modernity.

Writing well isn't just a question of winsome expression, but of having found something big and true to say and having found the right words to say it in, of having seen something large and having found the right words to say it small, small enough to enter an individual mind so that the strong ideas of what the words are saying sound like sweet reason. Good writing is mostly good seeing and good thinking, too. It involves a whole view of life, and making that view sound so plausible that the reader adheres to it as obvious before he knows that it's radical.

The problem faced is a rhetorical one: how to say something that had never been said before in a way that makes it sound like something everybody has always known—how to make an idea that is potentially scary and subversive sound as sane and straightforward as one believes it to be.

As with all good writing, the traces of a lifetime's struggles for sense and sanity remain on the page.

In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.

For a manifesto to succeed, it must speak to our hearts like a poem while infecting the mind with images and ideas that are dazzlingly new. It needs to open our eyes to the true causes of the bewildering, disturbing, exciting changes occurring around us, exposing the possibilities with which our current reality is pregnant. It should make us feel hopelessly inadequate for not having recognized these truths ourselves, and it must lift the curtain on the unsettling realization that we have been acting as petty accomplices, reproducing a dead-end past. Lastly, it needs to have the power of a Beethoven symphony, urging us to become agents of a future that ends unnecessary mass suffering and to inspire humanity to realize its potential for authentic freedom.

One describes a tale best by telling the tale. You see? The way one describes a story, to oneself or to the world, is by telling the story. It is a balancing act and it is a dream. The more accurate the map, the more it resembles the territory. The most accurate map possible would be the territory, and thus would be perfectly accurate and perfectly useless. The tale is the map that is the territory. You must remember this.

All stories are incomplete. Yet in order to construct a viable identity for myself and give meaning to my life, I don't really need a complete story devoid of blind spots and internal contradictions. To give meaning to my life, a story needs to satisfy just two conditions: first, it must give me some role to play. A New Guinean tribesman is unlikely to believe in Zionism or in Serbian nationalism, because these stories don't care at all about New Guinea and its people. Like movie stars, humans like only those scripts that reserve an important role for them. Second, whereas a good story need not extend to infinity, it must extend beyond my horizons. The story provides me with an identity and gives meaning to my life by embedding me within something bigger than myself. But there is always a danger that I might start wondering what gives meaning to that 'something bigger.' If the meaning of my life is to help the proletariat or the Polish nation, what exactly gives meaning to the proletariat or to the Polish nation?

There is a story of a man who claimed that the world is kept in place by resting on the back of a huge elephant. When asked what the elephant stands on, he replied that it stands on the back of a large turtle. And the turtle? On the back of an even bigger turtle. And that bigger turtle? The man snapped and said: "Don't bother about it. From there onwards it's turtles all the way down."

Most successful stories remain open-ended. They never need to explain where meaning ultimately comes from, because they are so good at capturing people's attention and keeping it inside a safe zone. Thus when explaining that the world rests on the back of a huge elephant, you should preempt any difficult questions by describing in great detail that when the elephant's gigantic ears flap they cause hurricanes, and when the elephant quivers with anger earthquakes shake the surface of the earth. If you weave a good enough yarn, it won't occur to anyone to ask what the elephant is standing on. Similarly, nationalism enchants us with tales of heroism, moves us to tears by recounting past disasters, and ignites our fury by dwelling on the injustices our nation suffered. We get so absorbed in this national epic that we start evaluating everything that happens in the world by its impact on our nation, and hardly think of asking what makes our nation so important in the first place.

Though some stories go to the trouble of encompassing the entirety of space and time, the ability to control attention allows many other successful stories to remain far more modest in scope. A crucial law of storytelling is that once a story manages to extend beyond the audience's horizon, its ultimate scope matters little. People may display the same murderous fanaticism for the sake of a thousand-year-old nation as for the sake of a billion-year-old god. People are just not good with large numbers. In

most cases, it takes surprisingly little to exhaust our imagination. Given everything we know about the universe it would seem utterly impossible for any sane person to believe that the ultimate truth about the universe and human existence is the story of Israeli, German, or Russian nationalism—or indeed of nationalism in general. A story that ignores almost the whole of time, the whole of space, the Big Bang, quantum physics, and the evolution of life is at most just a tiny part of the truth. Yet people somehow manage not to see beyond it.

While a good story must give me a role, and must extend beyond my horizons, it need not be true. A story can be pure fiction, and yet provide me with an identity and make me feel that my life has meaning. Indeed, to the best of our scientific understanding, none of the thousands of stories that different cultures, religions, and tribes have invented throughout history is true. They are all just human inventions. If you ask for the true meaning of life and get a story in reply, know that this is the wrong answer. The exact details don't really matter. Any story is wrong, simply for being a story. The universe just does not work like a story.

So why do people believe in these fictions? One reason is that their personal identity is built on the story. People are taught to believe in the story from early childhood. They hear it from their parents, their teachers, their neighbours, and the general culture long before they develop the intellectual and emotional independence necessary to question and verify such stories. By the time their intellect matures, they are so heavily invested in the story, that they are far more likely to use their intellect to rationalize the story than to doubt it. Most people who go on identity quests are like children going treasure hunting. They find only what their parents have hidden for them in advance. Second, not only our personal identities but also our collective institutions are built on the story. Consequently, it is extremely frightening to doubt the story. In many societies, anyone who tries to do so is ostracized or persecuted. Even if not, it takes strong nerves to question the very fabric of society. For if indeed the story is false, then the entire world as we know it makes no sense. State laws, social norms, economic institutions—they might all collapse.

Most stories are held together by the weight of their roof rather than by the strength of their foundations. Consider the Christian story. It has the flimsiest of foundations. What evidence do we have that the son of the Creator of the entire universe was born as a carbon-based life form somewhere in the Milky Way about 2,000 years ago? What evidence do we have that it happened in the Galilee area, and that His mother was a virgin? Yet enormous global institutions have been built on top of that story, and their weight presses down with such overwhelming force that they keep the

story in place.

Once personal identities and entire social systems are built on top of a story, it becomes unthinkable to doubt it, not because of the evidence supporting it, but because its collapse will trigger a personal and social cataclysm. In history, the roof is sometimes more important than the foundations. The stories that provide us with meaning and identity are all fictional, but humans need to believe in them. So how to make the story feel real? It's obvious why humans want to believe the story, but how do they actually believe? Already thousands of years ago priests and shamans discovered the answer: rituals. A ritual is a magical act that makes the abstract concrete and the fictional real.

If you want to know the ultimate truth of life, rites and rituals are a huge obstacle. But if you are interested in social stability and harmony, truth is often a liability, whereas rites and rituals are among your best allies.

Of all rituals, sacrifice is the most potent, because of all the things in the world, suffering is the most real. You can never ignore it or doubt it. If you want to make people really believe in some fiction, entice them to make a sacrifice on its behalf. Once you suffer for a story, it is usually enough to convince you that the story is real. If you fast because God commanded you to do so, the tangible feeling of hunger makes God present more than any statue or icon.

This is of course a logical fallacy. If you suffer because of your belief in God or in the nation, that does not prove that your beliefs are true. Maybe you are just paying the price of your gullibility? However, most people don't like to admit that they are fools. Consequently, the more they sacrifice for a particular belief, the stronger their faith becomes. This is the mysterious alchemy of sacrifice. In order to bring us under his power, the sacrificing priest need not give us anything—neither rain, nor money, nor victory in war. Rather, he needs to take away something. Once he convinces us to make some painful sacrifice, we are trapped.

Self-sacrifice is extremely persuasive not just for the martyrs themselves, but also for the bystanders. Few gods, nations, or revolutions can sustain themselves without martyrs. If you presume to question the divine drama, the nationalist myth or the revolutionary saga, you are immediately scolded: 'But the blessed martyrs died for this! Do you dare say that they died for nothing? Do you think these heroes were fools?'

When we think of human sacrifice we usually have in mind gruesome rituals in Canaanite or Aztec temples, and it is common to argue that monotheism brought an end to this terrible practice. In fact, monotheists practiced human sacrifice on a much larger scale than most polytheistic cults. Christianity and Islam killed far more people in the name of God than

did the followers of Ba'al or Huitzilopochtli. At a time when the Spanish conquistadors stopped all human sacrifices to the Aztec and Inca gods, back home in Spain the Inquisition was burning heretics by the cartload.

In Israel, Orthodox Jews often try to force secular Jews and even complete atheists to keep their taboos. Since Orthodox parties usually hold the balance of power in Israeli politics, over the years they have succeeded in passing many laws banning all kinds of activities on the Sabbath. Though they were unable to outlaw the use of private vehicles on the Sabbath, they have been successful in banning public transport. This nationwide religious sacrifice hits mainly the weakest sectors of society, especially as Saturday is the only day of the week when working-class people are free to travel and visit distant relatives, friends, and tourist attractions. A rich grandmother has no problem driving her brand-new car to visit her grandchildren in another town, but a poor grandmother cannot do so, because there are no buses or trains. By inflicting such difficulties on hundreds of thousands of citizens, the religious parties prove and entrench their unwavering faith in Judaism. Though no blood is shed, the well-being of many people is still being sacrificed. If Judaism is just a fictional story, then it is a cruel and heartless thing to prevent a grandmother from visiting her grandchildren or to prevent an impoverished student from going to have some fun on the beach—and don't even get us started on what they do to children on the beaches of the world's largest open-air prison camp. By nevertheless doing so, the religious parties tell the world—and tell themselves—that they really believe in the Jewish story. What, do you think they enjoy harming people for no good reason whatsoever?

Sacrifice not only strengthens your faith in the story, but often substitutes for all your other obligations towards it. Most of the great stories of humankind have set up ideals that most people cannot fulfill. How many Christians really follow the Ten Commandments to the letter, never lying or coveting? How many Buddhists have so far reached the stage of egolessness? How many socialists work to the utmost of their ability while taking no more than they really need? Unable to live up to the ideal, people turn to sacrifice as a solution. A Hindu may engage in tax frauds, visit the occasional prostitute and mistreat his elderly parents, but then convince himself that he is a very pious person, because he supports the destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya and has even donated money to build a Hindu temple in its stead. Just as in ancient times, so also in the twenty-first century, the human quest for meaning all too often ends with a succession of sacrifices.

The Word Shaker

There is an ecstasy associated with certain ideas, experienced before one dares just yet to envision its complications, dangers, and vicious absurdities. For now, the idea is enough. It is indestructible. Transforming it into reality, well, that is something else altogether. And sometimes reality comes to take it away—oh, how it can come.

Some might call it “willful naïveté.” You kind of have to close your eyes to the feeling that you’re trying to do the impossible. Imagination means, by definition, that you’re bringing something new into the world. It only feels impossible because nobody’s ever done it before—or at least, you never have. You must, in other words, face down your fears. Fear is an agent of control, something that authorities instill to make you tractable.

The West tries to silence emotions, “burn” books and hit us all with ugly, meaningless noise and images, because it knows perfectly well that beauty is creative and inspiring. Beauty and creativity are also dangerous, in fact, fatal to the regime’s dark and depressing designs. I may be scared, but I am also cautiously hopeful. We can still win. Actually, it is our obligation to win. It will be an extremely tough struggle that lies ahead of us. And no one will fight just in the name of facts and data. People are known to fight only in the name of a beautiful future. For us to win, all great muses are expected to march by the side of brave and determined revolutionaries!

“I wanted to make history move ahead in the same way that a child pulls on a plant to make it grow more quickly. I believe we must learn to wait as we learn to create. We have to patiently sow the seeds, assiduously water the earth where they are sown and give the plants the time that is their own. One cannot fool a plant any more than one can fool history.”

Stand in the public square and shove as many revolutionary ideas as far into the public spotlight as possible. Do it even if it means people you used to spend your time opposing start picking them up and using them. Do it with the goal of having your healthy anti-establishment ideas become the norm throughout your society. Do it with the goal of your worldview becoming conventional and boring. Do it with the intention of your activism becoming obsolete. Crave the absence of your own cool revolutionary self-image. The goal of revolutionary political activism is to make revolutionary ideas so common that they become the new normal. If you’re not going to do that, it’s just glorified masturbation. And there are much more energy efficient ways to wank.

Whoever you are, if you are a human being with a voice, you can start to persuade people, and if your arguments are good enough and you never stop, you will make converts, and they will join you, and you will win. And even when you appear to be losing, you might be starting a process that will win further down the line.

Banging your head over and over against a wall is not as bad as it sounds. Or rocking back and forth, or pacing like a panther in a zoo. It's like you're going over the same ground again and again and again, knowing that you will eventually wear a path so deep that you will break through to the knowledge that you seek, break out of this world that makes you want to bang your head against a wall and into another, better one.

There are but two powers in the world, the sword and the mind. In the long-run the sword is always beaten by the mind.

In life as in any game whose outcome depends on both luck and skill, the rational response to bad odds is to try harder.

Numbers alone don't count for much in history. History is often shaped by small groups of forward-looking innovators rather than by the backward-looking masses.

They dreamed what in a different time and place we might have called "immigrant dreams" but instead of imagining that somewhere far away across an ocean there is a better, warmer, brighter place, they looked at their own sorry, sodden lives and said:

"Here. This place is my home. And it is in this place that I will build a better life."

And so we must.

One needs a large amount of money and resources to convince people to act against their interests. One needs very little to get them not to. However it is uncertain what is required if such interests and motivations have been corrupted at a basic fundamental level.

Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.

An honestly informed nation can be trusted to eventually do right. Justice is the petulant child of truth.

Champion of Truth. . . eccentric, piercing, bold
Like his own lightnings, which no chains can hold
Neglecting caution, and disdaining art
He seeks no armor for a naked heart

My manner has always been to give my whole attention to a subject till I have satisfied myself with respect to it. I picture knowledge spreading like a wave in all directions and believe that it will soon put an end to all usurped authority in the world.

An idea is energy which travels out, rippling through time, perhaps going unnoticed, or perhaps having great effects on individuals and events within that time period. It is how one can become immortal, can live on, forever, in others' ripples, distortions. What ancient ideas are effecting us now? How far have they come, through both space and time?

echo: a close parallel or repetition of an idea, feeling style, or event

The edge of melancholia is a giant cliff into depression. And art created from melancholia could, if circumstances were slightly different, have just been a view of the endless void—in other words: nothing. Art is a product of an individual's attempt to deal with their circumstance. Art made on the edge many times is inspiring and insightful for both the creator and the viewer but could just as easily been nothing.

A society of self-interest makes trust difficult if not impossible—it is an ethic that cannot sustain trust. Because it cannot sustain trust, it creates relationships of mutual suspicion and self-protection. It makes it far more difficult to have meaningful and rich interactions with people, at least those outside our immediate families and close circles of friends. And we may be forgiven for being wary even in these relationships. In human societies unfairness breeds mistrust, and mistrust creates social instability. Is it far-fetched to wonder whether the integrity and efficiency of a pack of wolves, a pride of lions, a herd of elephants, or a troop of chimpanzees rests on individuals trusting the intentions of other group members? No. Trust is essential for maintaining group cohesion. It is important in social play and in reciprocity, both of which foster group living.

Fairness is deeply rooted in vulnerability; vulnerability is a normal human condition; we are all vulnerable. We can start by changing our minds—by changing the ways we think about these issues. We can start by understanding that fairness is all about vulnerability. If we do, we will breed trust. We will breed social cohesion. We will build community.

A rentier economy is one in which individuals and entire sectors levy charges for the property and privileges they have obtained, or more often that their ancestors have bequeathed. The greatest fortunes originated from thefts or insider dealings whose details are so lost in the mists of time that they have become legitimized simply by the force of social inertia.

At the root of such parasitism is the idea of rent extraction: taking without producing. Permitting an excess of market price to be charged over intrinsic cost-value lets landlords, monopolists, and bankers charge more for access to land, natural resources, monopolies, and credit than what their services need to cost. Unreformed economies are obliged to carry what nineteenth-century journalists called the idle rich, twentieth-century writers called robber barons and the power elite, and Occupy Wall Street call the One Percenters.

The rentier class is pulling rank and deploying its power via the global media networks and political factions it owns. The game has changed. Incremental progress from within a Party framework is a relic of a bygone era. Every politician who has, or potentially has, influence over policy has to demonstrate ideological purity or they will get taken down. And the tactics deployed by the neoliberal cabal work—owning the vast majority of the Western media has many benefits. The sooner the opposition realizes and accepts that their old tactics no longer work, the sooner new tactics can be developed and used.

The biggest obstacle right now is the inability, or unwillingness, of people to accept the scary new way of the world and the entire mainstream media apparatus telling them it's the Russians or LePen or Trump or Corbyn that is the real problem and not the political and economic power structure itself.

Sure, it seems pretty hopeless but things have a way of changing quickly. All it would take to get things rolling is an articulate, charismatic, and genuinely dedicated leader who can tap into the worries and fears that people repress or deny and show them how the current order is screwing them left, right, and center. Articulate an alternative vision that is grassroots and strong enough to transcend media influence. Perhaps more people have to feel the bite and burn of destitution first before they become receptive to radical change. And any budding MLK will have to contend with a burgeoning reactionary right that offers extremely toxic “solutions” but shares a lot of common ground with libertarians and the old-school left when it comes to diagnosing the illness inflicting the Western body politic.

A German war veteran, while in prison, wrote a tract admiring British propaganda during World War I as “marvelous,” praising its simple presentation of “negative and positive notions of love and hatred, right and wrong, truth and falsehood,” thereby allowing “no half-measures which might have given rise to some doubt.” The fan was Adolf Hitler, and given his chance, he thought he could do even better.

German propaganda in the first World War tended toward the legalistic, officious, and convoluted. Take Germany's defense of its invasion of Belgium, as articulated by its propaganda official in America in 1914. The main point

in his Saturday Evening Post commentary is that the relevant peace treaty between Germany and Belgium had, technically, expired.

“We were sincerely sorry that Belgium, a country that in fact had nothing to do with the question at issue and might wish to stay neutral, had to be overrun.”

He goes on to blame the Belgians for not surrendering more quickly:

“It would have been entirely possible for Belgium to avoid all the devastation under which she is now suffering.”

In general, German war propaganda made the elementary error—common among clever people and experts, and familiar to the great ancient orators—of jumping into the complex merits of an issue before having engaged the listener. With their reductive messages and vivid imagery, the British and Americans handily avoided that blunder.

Hitler’s entire approach to propaganda might be understood as a reaction to the rationalism for which German thinkers were known. Instead, he had an alarmingly intuitive understanding of how to appeal to a mass audience and to the reptilian core. In *Mein Kampf*, he asks:

“To whom has propaganda to appeal? To the scientific intelligentsia, or to the less educated masses? It has to appeal forever and only to the masses! The strong leader, by understanding the great masses’ world of ideas and feelings, finds, by a correct psychological form, the way to the attention, and further to the heart, of the great masses.”

Propaganda must “be popular and has to adapt its spiritual level to the perception of the least intelligent. Therefore its spiritual level has to be screwed the lower, the greater the mass of people which one wants to attract.”

In *Mein Kampf* he suggests that propaganda need be like advertising, and seek first to attract attention: “A poster’s art lies in the designer’s ability to catch the masses’ attention by outline and color,” he writes. It must give “an idea of the importance of the exhibition, but it is in no way to be a substitute for the art represented by the exhibition.” Similarly “the task of propaganda lies not in a scientific training of the individual, but rather in directing the masses towards certain facts, events, necessities, et cetera, the purpose being to move their importance into the masses’ field of vision.” Those who are “already scientifically experienced or striving towards education and knowledge” are not the subject.

Hitler also intuited a few other basic truths about how we process information: since everything can be ignored, imprinting information in the memory requires a constant repetition of simple ideas.

“The great masses’ receptive ability is only very limited, their understanding is small, but their forgetfulness is great. As a consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda has to limit itself only to a very few points and to use them like slogans until even the very last man is able to imagine what is intended by such a word.”

Nuance was nonsense; complexity was a risk:

“As soon as one sacrifices this basic principle and tries to become versatile, the effect will fritter away, as the masses are neither able to digest the material offered nor to retain it.”

One couldn’t overstate the intensity of the effort required, for the masses “with their inertia, always need a certain time before they are ready even to notice a thing, and they will lend their memories only to the thousandfold repetition of the most simple ideas.” Finally, Hitler understood the demagogue’s most essential principle: to teach or persuade is far more difficult than to stir emotion. And far less welcome: what the audience most wants is an excuse to experience fully the powerful feelings already lurking within them but which their better selves might lead them to suppress.

The rise of Hitler would have been very difficult to stop. It’s true that internal division within the left, and a weak central government, created a political opening for the Nazis even though they had never received a majority of the vote. But Hitler was also a formidable and terrifying political force from early on. Because we’re removed in time and place, it is sometimes difficult to see how Hitler achieved such popularity, especially when one watches his furious, spittle-spraying speeches. The speeches should be watched more closely, though. I understand a bit more what people mean when they say he was a powerful orator. When you watch with the closed captions on, and you watch from the beginning, rather than just watching the clips where he has worked himself up into a fit, you can see how he lured people.

What alarmed me most is that, if someone with equivalent political talent emerged in the contemporary United States, I think it might be difficult to stop them. I do not think Trump is like Hitler: Hitler was a true fanatic, committed to a rigid ideology, whereas Trump is a corrupt capitalistic schmoozer. Fortunately for us, corruption is actually more desirable than

ideological purity; if someone just wants to enrich themselves and play a dictator, it's better than if they are hell-bent on committing mass murder. It's still not good. But I do imagine that someone who comes after Trump, a millennial right-winger who worships him, could be that kind of fanatic. And the only thing I can see to do is: Be prepared with a compelling alternative ideology that can keep people from flocking to that person. If your side has no answers and no direction, you do not stand a chance against someone who comes along offering hope, destiny, struggle, and strength.

Politics hates a vacuum; if it isn't filled with hope, someone will fill it with fear.

Even without being Nazis, most of us know the experience of being part of a crowd wild with excitement, and have an intuitive sense that the way our minds process information might change under such circumstances, even to the point that we might come to do something or begin to believe something different. If to pay attention is to open the mind to information, to do so in an animated crowd is to fling the doors wide open. To be exposed to any information is to be influenced, but in crowds the possibilities go well beyond everyday experience. It is perhaps the perceived loss of individual responsibility that makes the individual in the crowd more malleable.

There were many in Germany who recognized this story as rank mythology. They were nevertheless held captive by it simply because the vast majority around them thought it sounded wonderful and were willing to give their lives to make it a reality.

The same energy of discontent can be marshaled to put the homeless into homes or undesirables into camps (or worse).

In 1935 Sinclair Lewis wrote a popular novel in which a racist, anti-Semitic, flag-waving, army-backed demagogue wins the 1936 presidential election and proceeds to establish an Americanized version of Nazi Germany. The title, *It Can't Happen Here*, was a tongue-in-cheek warning that it might. But the "it" Lewis referred to is unlikely to happen again any place. Even in today's Germany, Italy, or Japan, a modern-style corporate state or society would be far different from the old regimes of Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese oligarchs. Anyone looking for black shirts, mass parties, or men on horseback will miss the telltale clues of creeping fascism. In any First World country of advanced capitalism, the new fascism will be colored by national and cultural heritage, ethnic and religious composition, formal political structure, and geopolitical environment. The Japanese or German versions would be quite different from the Italian variety—and still more different from the British, French, Belgian, Dutch, Australian, Canadian, or Israeli versions. In America, it would be supermodern and multi-ethnic—as American as Madison Avenue, action flicks, credit cards, and apple pie. It

would be fascism with a smile. As a warning against its cosmetic facade, subtle manipulation, and velvet gloves, we might call it friendly fascism. What scares me most is its subtle appeal.

I am worried by those who quibble about labels. Some of my friends seem transfixed by the idea that if it is fascism, it must appear in the classic, unfriendly form. “Why, oh why,” they retrospectively moan, “didn’t people see what was happening during the 1920s and the 1930s?” But in their own blindness they are willing to use the terms invented by the fascist ideologists, “corporate state” or “corporatism,” but not fascism.

I am appalled by those who stiffly maintain that nothing can be done until things get worse or the system has been changed. I am afraid of inaction. I am afraid of those who will heed no warnings and who wait for some revelation, research, or technology to offer a perfect solution. I am afraid of those who do not see that some of the best in America has been the product of promises and that the promises of the past are not enough for the future. I am dismayed by those who will not hope, who will not commit themselves to something larger than themselves, of those who are afraid of true democracy or even its pursuit. I suspect that many people underestimate both the dangers that lie ahead and the potential strength of those who seem weak and powerless. Either underestimation stems, I think, from fear of bucking the Establishment. This is a deep and well-hidden fear that guides the thoughts and actions of many of my warmest friends, closest colleagues, and best students. It is a fear I know only too well, for it has pervaded many years of my life.

“You’re either part of the solution or you’re part of the problem.”

By now I think this statement must be both stood on its head and reformulated:

“If you can’t see that you’re part of the problems, then you’re standing in the way of attacks on them.”

Programs never stop the things they’re launched to stop. No program has ever stopped poverty, drug abuse, or crime, and no program ever will stop them. And no program will ever stop us from devastating the world.

The world will not be saved by old minds with new programs. If the world is saved, it will be saved by new minds—with no programs. If the world is saved, it will be saved because the people living in it have a new vision.

“Where there is no vision,” the Book of Proverbs tells us, “the people perish.”

Successful philosophers are advertisers who can sell their new models of the universe to large numbers of others, thus converting thought to action, mind to matter. Think of some of the most revolutionary American slogans:

- “Give me Liberty or Give Me Death”
- “A Nation Cannot Exist Half Slave and Half Free”
- “The Only Thing We Have to Fear Is Fear Itself”
- “Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco”

And so it was on January 14, 1967, in Golden Gate Park that Timothy Leary first took his carefully constructed message to a broader audience. His speech centered on the infectious refrain, repeated over and over: “Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out.” Leary’s line caught on as well as any advertising slogan and became, effectively, the motto of the counterculture. Most would take Leary’s words as a call to pay attention to where your attention is paid; mind what you open your mind for. This was not America’s first call to attentional revolt but Leary’s proposed a far broader compass of things to ignore, not only messages from television and government but college, work, parents, as well as other sources of authority. He called for a complete attentional revolution. Some two decades on, Leary would write that “unhappily,” his ideas had been “often misinterpreted to mean ‘Get stoned and abandon all constructive activity.’”

Everything can be defended in some way or other. The defenses aren’t necessarily good. But you can always come up with a series of words, something sounding like an argument, to justify nearly anything you’d care to do, no matter how heinous. Because there’s always an argument available, one that may sound strong even if it’s actually atrociously weak, it can be extremely difficult for the truth to compete. In theory, when the person who is right and the person who is wrong enter into a discussion, the person who is right will triumph in the “marketplace of ideas.” In reality, the marketplace of ideas is very similar to an actual marketplace, where flimsy products can look superficially similar to quality ones, and people have trouble knowing whether they’ve bought a lemon until they get it home.

When I say there are justifications for everything, I truly mean everything. You can make an argument against democracy or against empathy. ‘People don’t know what’s in their best interests,’ and ‘Excess compassion impedes rational decision-making,’ respectively. If I want to seize the land of native

peoples, destroy their property and force them into exile, I might say: ‘Land should be put to its most efficient and productive use, and while we respect the ancestral rights of all people to their homes, all benefit alike from the development of resources toward their optimal functions.’ In fact, even today there are those who defend colonialism, saying:

“Colonialism improved living standards in the aggregate and was therefore more beneficial than detrimental.”

Even slave-owners had arguments: In addition to their crackpot racial theories, they said that dominance of man over man was the natural way of things, and that slave-owners treated their slaves better than industrialists treated factory workers. If your defense of your actions is ‘I’m not as bad as the capitalists,’ your actions are probably indefensible.

I could come up with a utilitarian justification for blowing up the universe and exterminating all of humanity—it alleviates suffering; an argument for cheating on your taxes; or an argument for racial profiling—stereotypes are rational. There have been arguments for invading Iraq, arguments for bombing Hiroshima, arguments for massacring unarmed Palestinian protesters, arguments for eliminating free speech, arguments for scrapping fundamental constitutional rights, arguments for purges and guillotines and show trials. Ayn Rand made the case for *The Virtue of Selfishness*. Hitler and Stalin each made arguments. Terrorism, assassination, torture: each have their defenders. Osama bin Laden made an argument for 9/11; the United States justified atrocities in Vietnam—and hell, others before and since—as serving the national interest.

Sometimes the arguments for horrible things even sound quite persuasive! Consider how the kind of ends-justify-the-means logic used by revolutionaries can proceed:

- The people are oppressed and cannot be saved by bourgeois government, they need a revolution.
- A revolution needs leadership.
- If the leadership is undermined, the revolution will fail.
- The leadership is therefore justified in searching out and eliminating counterrevolutionaries.
- Anything that has the effect of impeding the revolution is counterrevolutionary.
- Questioning the leadership of the revolution impedes the revolution.

You can see how, through a few argumentative steps, it's easy to produce a justification for a small number of authoritarians crushing all dissent in the name of the popular will.

Intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination and also the abolition of "public opinion" along with its makers. We envision an end to all forms of repression, whether social, economic, or technological. The people must recognize the mark of social repression, even in the most sublime manifestations of traditional culture, even in the most spectacular manifestations of technical progress. The result will be solidarity for the human species, for abolishing poverty and misery beyond all national frontiers and spheres of interest, for the attainment of peace.

But on the way to paradise, where should one direct his attention if not to the ubiquitous media? What should people be doing with their lives? The wise person devotes his life exclusively to the religious search for therein is found the only ecstasy, the only meaning. The message of God never changes. It may be expressed to you in six simple words: turn on, tune in, drop out.

The manipulators do not want you to live a religious life. They will apply every pressure (including prison) to keep you in their game. Your own mind, which has been corrupted and neurologically damaged by years of education in a mediated reality, will also keep you trapped.

This is how you be a person, say the actors on the screen. You chase after the car and the girl and the money and the success. You be extremely attractive but it's no big deal because it's normal and everyone's supposed to look this way. You say funny things you totally made up yourself right here on the spot. You kill bad guys. You act cool and confident even though you've never felt like you understood life even one time ever since you were born. You remain tightly wound up in the trance of egoic consciousness and never once turn around and realize your true nature. You never relax and start coloring outside the narrow lines of this tightly streamlined model we are feeding you. You keep looking for superheroes everywhere except in you.

When you're a kid and you don't really have any idea of how to be what you want to be, you fall for these sort of cultural models.

Real heroes work for the powerless, not the powerful.

It is possible to wake up from that narrative Matrix. It isn't easy, and it doesn't happen overnight. It takes work. Inner work. And humility. Nobody likes acknowledging that they've been fooled, and the depth and extent to which we've all been fooled is so deeply pervasive it can be tempting to decide that the work is complete far before one is actually free. Mainstream American liberals think they're clear-eyed because they can

see the propaganda strings being pulled by Fox and Donald Trump, and mainstream American conservatives think they're clear-eyed because they can see the propaganda strings being pulled by MSNBC and the Democrats; but the propaganda strings on both trace back to the same puppet master. And seeing that is just the beginning.

But, through sincere, humble research and introspection, it is possible to break free of the Matrix and see the full extent to which you and everyone you know has been imprisoned by ideas which have been programmed into social consciousness by the powerful. Not just in our adult lives, but ever since our parents began teaching us how to speak, think, and relate to the world. Not just in the modern world, but as far back as history stretches when the power-serving belief systems of societal structure and religion were promoted by kings and queens of old. All of society, and all of ourselves, and indeed all of the thoughts in our heads, have been shaped by those in power to their benefit. This is the reality that we were born into, and our entire personality structure has been filtered through and shaped by it.

For this reason, escaping from the power-serving propaganda Matrix necessarily means becoming a new creature altogether. The ideas, mental habits and ways of relating to the world which were formed in the Matrix are only useful for moving around inside of it. In order to relate to life outside of the power-promulgated narratives which comprise the very fabric of society, you've got to create a whole new operating system for yourself in order to move through life independently of the old programming designed to keep you asleep and controlled.

So it's hard work. You'll make a lot of mistakes along the way, just like an infant slowly learning to walk. But, eventually, you get clear of the programming.

And then you're ready to fight.

Because at some point in this process, you necessarily come up against a deep, howling rage. Rage at the oligarchic manipulators of your species, yes, but also rage against manipulation in all its forms. Rage against everyone who has ever tried to manipulate your narrative, to make you believe things about yourself or make other people believe things about you. Rage against anyone who manipulates anyone else to any extent. When your eyes are clear manipulation stands out like a black fly on a white sheet of paper, and your entire system has nothing to offer it but revulsion and rejection.

So you set to work. You set to work throwing all attempts to manipulate you as far away from yourself as possible, and expunging anyone from your life who refuses to stop trying to control your narrative. Advertising, mass media propaganda, establishment academia, everything gets purged from your life that wants to pull you back into the Matrix.

And they will try to pull you back in. Because our narratives are so interwoven and interdependent with everyone else's, and so inseparable from our sense of ourselves, your rejection of the narrative Matrix will present as an existential threat to many of your friends and loved ones. You will see many people you used to trust, many of them very close to you, suddenly transform into a bunch of Agent Smiths right in front of your eyes, and they will shame you, guilt you, throw every manipulation tool they have at you to get you to plug the jack back into your brain. But because your eyes are clear, you'll see it all. You won't be fooled.

And then all you'll want is to tear down the Matrix from its very foundations and plunge its controllers into irrelevance. You will set to work bringing down the propaganda prison that they have built up around your fellow humans in any way you can, bolt by bolt if you have to, because you know from your own experience that we are all capable of so much more than the puny gear-turning existence they've got everyone churning away at. You will despise the oligarchs for the obscene sacrilege that they have inflicted upon human majesty out of greed and insecurity, and you will make a mortal enemy of the entire machine that they have used to enslave our species.

And, because their entire kingdom is built upon maintaining the illusion of freedom and democracy, all they will have to fight back against you is narrative. They'll try to shame you into silence by calling you a conspiracy theorist, they'll have their media goons and manipulators launch smear campaigns against you, but because your eyes are clear, none of that will work. They've got one weapon, and it doesn't work on you.

And you will set to work waking up humanity from the lie factory, using whatever skills you have, weakening trust in the mass media propaganda machine and opening eyes to new possibilities. And while doing so, you will naturally shine big and bright so the others can find you. And together, we'll not only smash the narratives that imprison us like a human centipede swallowing the narrative bullshit and forcing it into the mouth of the next slave, but we'll also create new narratives, better narratives, healthier narratives, for ourselves and for each other, about how the world is and what we want it to be.

Because here's the thing: since it's all narrative, anything is possible. Those who see this have the ability to plunge toward health and human thriving without any regard for the made-up reasons why such a thing is impossible, and plant seeds of light which sprout in unprecedented directions that never could have been predicted by someone plugged into to establishment how-it-is stories. Together, we can determine how society will be. We can re-write the rules. We are re-writing the rules. It's begun already.

Out of the white noise of a failing propaganda machine, a new world is being born, one that respects the autonomy of the individual and their right to self-determination. One that respects our right to collaborate on large scales to create beautiful, healthy, helpful systems without the constant sabotage and disruption of a few power-hungry psychopaths who would rather rule than live. One that respects our right to channel human ingenuity into harmony and human thriving instead of warfare and greed. One that respects our right to take what we need, not just to survive but to thrive, and return it to the earth for renewal. One that respects the sovereign boundaries of not just ourselves and each other, but of the planet that we live in.

Unjack your cortex fully from the fear-soaked narratives of insanity, and let the true beauty of our real world flood your senses. Let the grief of what we have unknowingly done send you crashing to your knees in sorrow. And when you're ready, stand up. We have much work to do.

Despite some awareness among people of the injustices rising from capitalism, I would argue that some of the foundational laws of capitalism are unjust. While the effects of these laws can be seen to result in various forms of injustice, the laws themselves are rarely questioned. It is as if most of us concede that Margaret Thatcher was right when she said there is no alternative to capitalism. Many people have acknowledged the shortcomings of capitalism and work to ameliorate its injustices, yet leave intact the very laws that created the injustice.

For instance, Roosevelt's New Deal and his use of Keynesian economic theory to establish regulations were meant to limit the negative effects of capitalism that socialists and communists had been lamenting since the nineteenth century. Despite the good these programs and laws led to, they never questioned the core tenants of capitalism and the laws that supported it. Indeed, Keynesian capitalism is still capitalism even though it tries to stem some of the excesses endemic to capitalism.

Another example is advocating for a living wage. This has been going on since the nineteenth century and continues today. When people in Seattle, for instance, obtain enough votes to enact a hike in the minimum wage, most of us see this as a victory. On the one hand, it is a victory, because it forces producers and owners to increase wages for workers. On the other hand, this is a Pyrrhic victory because not only is it still not enough to be considered a living wage, laws that support capitalism remain unquestioned.

More problematic is that even if there is smaller disparities in wages, workers are excluded from a decision-making process that impacts them directly and significantly. Workers have no voice or seat at the table because they do not own the company, which makes them more vulnerable

to exploitation, as history has repeatedly shown. Any group whose voice is denied and who are excluded from sitting at the table will likely be marginalized and oppressed by those who have voices and seats. They remain forever dependent on the whims of the bosses. A critic may counter, saying they have a voice in that they could find another job or they could speak out or they could get more education. These responses are usually made by people of privilege who aren't trapped in a job, fearing that the loss of the job will result in losing one's apartment, car, et cetera. Moreover, these responses overlook the fact that the only option a worker may have is to work low wage jobs—jobs where she or he has no voice about the company's use of profits. Worse, these neoliberal responses deflect attention from the exploitative nature of business.

One can raise criticisms about the effects of capitalism, but ignore the very laws that give it life.

Awareness is merely the most minuscule beginning of attempting to redress social ills. A clever, cliché-filled advertising campaign never helps anything but the bottom-line of the corporation doing the marketing. Marketing and consumerism are the problem, not the solution. Advertising is not a political act, it is a financial one. Social change never came from marketing or consumerism and it never will.

The ills of society that have been conquered thus far were not overcome by the pragmatists or the centrists who rationalized a bad action for the sake of a good action. Historically, social change resulted from the radicals and the purists, the unheralded masses who worked their asses off, fighting for ethical issues, and willingly forsaking their careers, their reputations, their financial stability, and often even their own lives for the greater good. Justice cannot occur when one substitutes one oppression or injustice for the sake of another.

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

“Without your free, rational, and inquisitive mind, I would have been stuck many times in a world where obedience and conformity are easier than courage and the will to make necessary mistakes.”

Only mass social movements can save us now. Because we know where the current system, left unchecked, is headed. We also know, I would add, how that system will deal with the reality of serial climate-related disasters: with profiteering, and escalating barbarism to segregate the losers from the winners. To arrive at that dystopia, all we need to do is keep barreling

down the road we are on. The only remaining variable is whether some countervailing power will emerge to block the road, and simultaneously clear some alternate pathways to destinations that are safer. If that happens, well, it changes everything.

Many of our problems are very solvable, as they are merely the result of childish power grabs and a desire to control the labor of others. By not subscribing to this system it doesn't mean giving up, it means shifting focus. It means incorporating real pragmatism to stop the nose dive into dystopian apocalypse and take a swing at a sustainable egalitarian borderless global society where humanity finally rids itself of the parasites who continue to insist they are more crucial to the world than the hosts they feed from.

If we rid ourselves of those arrogant parasites and their system of abuse, we will perhaps find freedom again—freedom like before the bloodsuckers latched upon us. Many will find this vantage point to be highly impractical, but I find naïve half-assed solutions, endless extreme unnecessary suffering, and a trajectory leading directly to societal collapse to be far more impractical.

Revolt!

How does one act well—sensitively, compassionately, without irreparable damage—on the basis of partial knowledge?

If there is anything that you don't understand and you don't feel comfortable doing, just say so. But it is a problem if you are a person that says, 'I can do everything,' and does a really lousy job. Arrogance is a bad thing.

Theory is when you know everything but nothing works. Experiment is when everything works but you know nothing. Most of the time nothing works and no one knows why.

If there was ever a need for political representation or a paternalistic and opaque authority, it has been removed by technology. Every political system we have tried has proven incapable of protecting human rights and dignity. Every political system we have tried has devolved into oligarchy.

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against their will, is to prevent harm to others.

In order for any society to ensure its survival without the use of tyrannical force, the members must be convinced that it is better than the alternative. If an alternative or no society at all appears more attractive than the current state, people will naturally be motivated to dismantle the current system.

In order for a society to appear more attractive than no society at all, we need to consider the basic rights of individuals in no society. There are certain basic rights that we can see enjoyed by most mammals in their natural state. To ensure that people do not need to resort to fighting for

these basic rights, we can enshrine them in our social contract. If people can see their basic rights more attainable within the system than without, it will be in their best interests to protect the system.

Every undomesticated mammal will seek and sometimes fight for their basic needs: food; shelter; safety; the right to reproduce and to provide for and educate their young; the right to cohabit, at least with offspring; some measure of privacy; the right to associate or refuse to associate; the right to communicate; the right to explore; and the right to learn. To some extent, all mammals have also the right to choose the time, place, and method of their work within the bounds of nature and survival. Any interference with these basic rights is seen as an attack and will be greeted with whatever defense the mammal is capable of.

If an individual agrees to abide by the laws of a society and not attack it, it is reasonable that the society provides means for all members to attain the same advantages they would fight for in a state of nature. When a society refuses to allow its members to attain basic needs such as food, shelter, and safety, and the deprivation is not caused by unavailability, only the most extreme repressive force and mass imprisonment will protect the society from revolution.

We do not have human dignity in a system where our basic needs are treated not as a right but as a privilege which we must earn and be grateful for and which a higher parental authority can remove from us.

What Rousseau omits is that the citizens possess individual rights independently of all social and political authority, and any authority which violates these rights becomes illegitimate. The rights of the citizens are individual freedom, religious freedom, freedom of opinion, which includes the freedom to express oneself openly, the enjoyment of property, a guarantee against all arbitrary power.

We can make a better world. Pessimism is so much part of the mental equipment of modern people that to gainsay it is to seem unserious. But there is a difference between a tragic consciousness and pervasive pessimism. We don't know what Utopia would look like, but we do know the difference between bad and better.

Leftists have often shied away from suggesting blueprints, thinking them undemocratic. But proposing a course isn't the same thing as imposing one. If the movements we've embraced in the past couple of years are worth taking seriously, it's because they can form the political basis for social plans. People want to know that there is another way.

One thing is clear: public scarcity in times of unprecedented private wealth is a manufactured crisis, designed to extinguish our dreams before they have a chance to be born.

Much of what is proposed does not fit inside the box of what is considered politically possible in mainstream political discussions. But what we are trying to do is explode the box. Because if the box doesn't leave room for justice, equality, compassion, for the safety and possibly the survival of our species and others, then there is something very, very wrong with that box. If what is considered politically possible today consigns us to a future of continued injustice and climate chaos the day after tomorrow, then we have to change what's politically possible.

We live in a time of multiple, intersecting crises, and since all of them are urgent, we cannot afford to fix them sequentially. What we need are integrated solutions. This is a great deal to take on all at once, but such are the times in which we live.

It's easier to crush evils in their infancy than when grown to maturity.

“If you really attack a fire, you put it out. But if you attack it cautiously and fearfully, you get burned.”

Revolution rips up social evils by its roots; reform merely shifts it from one spot to another.

Dividing a problem into pieces in order to solve the whole thing is altogether different from defining a problem solely in terms of the bits that seem easiest to fix. In the first instance, the remedy for each piece must develop in relation to its effect on actual or possible remedies for the other pieces. The other way is to solve a small part without considering whether the outcome strengthens or weakens the big problem's hold on the world.

The distinction sketched out above is the difference between reformist reform—tweak Armageddon—and non-reformist reform—deliberate change that does not create more obstacles in the larger struggle. Some of the timidity in the fight against warehousing humans in cages for part or all of their lives results from the lethal synthesis of abandoned optimism and calculated convenience. People think there's no alternative to capitalism, and in a weird distortion of capitalism itself, imagine all aspects of life as winners and losers in a zero-sum game.

Many funders of anti-prison advocacy—whether through arrogance or anxiety—narrow the scope of what can be done with resources that pass through the tiny social-justice portfolio door. The challenge seems so enormous that many desperately conclude it's better to save the “deserving” weak (women or children or addicts) and cross their fingers that everyone else can swim on their own. The anti-political tendencies of reformist reform embrace the sentimental maxim that whatever is wrong with the United States will be fixed by what's right with it. Not so fast.

It is important to recognize, though, that postponing important decisions because of uncertainty is actually just an implicit endorsement of the status quo, and often an excuse for maintaining it.

Many governments and institutions are not agents of change. Instead governments often act only as custodians of stability, and strive to protect the status quo. That is the very definition of inertia.

We place our faith in time-honored practices probably because the tried-and-true seems like a safer bet when our survival is in jeopardy. ‘Now’s not the time to be embracing a new, untested philosophy of life,’ whispers a voice in the back of your mind—the part that, whether you’re conscious of it or not, is constantly assessing the risks and advising how to react in response.

You should always give yourself three options. The reason for creating three options is that it frees you from the need to be correct; you know that at least two of your options will be wrong, and this freedom from judgment clears a path to intuition. In practice, this turns out to be less an exercise in creativity than an exercise in discovery; what you may think you are making up, you are calling up. Many believe the process of creativity is one of assembling thoughts and concepts, but highly creative people will tell you that the idea, the song, the image, was in them, and their task was to get it out, a process of discovery, not design. This was said most artfully by Michelangelo when asked how he created his famous statue of David:

“It is easy—you just chip away the stone that doesn’t look like David.”

Albert Einstein said that when you follow intuition:

“The solutions come to you, and you don’t know how or why.”

All we have are partial solutions; the best we can do is try.

If a governing authority were to pass laws in contradiction to the social contract, the government would be in breach of contract. The people in the society can then remove the authority given to the government or consider the contract null and void and declare a state of no governance from which a new social contact may or may not be formed. The governing body loses authority when it acts in contradiction to the social contract.

If the point of a social contract is that each individual agrees that they will work for the greater good of the society and protect the individual rights of others in exchange for having their own rights protected, every violation of anyone’s rights needs to be of grave concern to the whole of society.

The idea that only a lawyer can understand the law was created to disguise the undermining of the basic principles of society. In order for a social contract to be binding, the principles must be easily taught to anyone, including children. No law must ever deviate from the principles of the social contract, therefore law ought to be largely intuitive.

Tribal peoples have their full share of suffering to do, but in the tribal life, no one suffers unless everyone suffers. There's no class or group of people who are expected to do the suffering—and no class or group of people who are exempt from suffering. If you think this sounds entirely too good to be true, check it out. In the tribal life there are no rulers to speak of; elders or chiefs—almost always part-time—exert influence rather than power. There's nothing equivalent to a ruling class—or to a rich or privileged class. There's nothing equivalent to a working class—or to a poor or underprivileged class.

If this sounds ideal, well, why shouldn't it be, after three-million years of evolutionary shaping? You're not surprised that natural selection has organized geese in a way that works well for geese. You're not surprised that natural selection has organized elephants in a way that works well for elephants. You're not surprised that natural selection has organized dolphins in a way that works well for dolphins. Why should you be surprised that natural selection organized people in a way that worked well for people? And conversely, why should you be surprised that the founders of our culture, having obliterated a lifestyle tested over a period of three-million years, were unable to instantly slap together a replacement that was just as good? Really, the task was a formidable one. We've been working at it for ten-thousand years, and where are we?

The very first thing to go was the very thing that made tribal life a success: its social, economic, and political egalitarianism. As soon as our revolution began, the process of division began, between rulers and ruled, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, masters and slaves. The suffering class had arrived, and that class (as it would always be) was the masses.

Trial and error isn't a bad way to learn how to build an aircraft, but it can be a disastrous way to learn how to build a civilization.

Ted Kaczynski believed he had to kill people in order to get his ideas into the public discourse. He was totally upfront about this:

“If I had never done anything violent and had submitted the present writings to a publisher, they probably would not have been accepted. In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression, we've had to kill people.”

On the most primitive level, this goal succeeded. But not the way he hoped. Because Kaczynski sent bombs to people, nobody takes anything he says seriously—they might in three-hundred years, but they don't right now. Despite the huge circulations of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and its ever-present availability on the Internet, the “Unabomber Manifesto” is an unread, non-influential document.

The fact that Kaczynski supposedly has a deeply damaged psyche doesn't mitigate its value at all: Not all crazy people are brilliant, but almost all brilliant people are crazy.

This reaction isn't all bad, at least you have their attention. If people think you're crazy, they don't view you as boring. They may even think you're doing something worth thinking and talking about.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.

Great ideas come from everywhere if you just listen and look for them. You never know who's going to have a great idea.

A Nepali peasant with a smartphone on Google, now has more access to information than the president of the United States did fifteen years ago.

I don't care about my personal legacy. I care about how much justice is advanced in America, and in our world day after day, and I'm willing to sacrifice whatever reputation in the cause of that effort.

Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.

When Jonathan Seagull joined the Flock on the beach, it was full night. He was dizzy and terribly tired. Yet in delight he flew a loop to landing, with a snap roll just before touchdown. When they hear of it, he thought, of the Breakthrough, they'll be wild with joy. How much more there is now to living! Instead of our drab slogging forth and back to the fishing boats, there's a reason to life! We can lift ourselves out of ignorance, we can find ourselves as creatures of excellence and intelligence and skill. We can be free! We can learn to fly!

The Council did not see it this way.

A seagull never speaks back to the Council Flock, but it was Jonathan's voice raised. “Irresponsibility? My brothers!” he cried. “Who is more responsible than a gull who finds and follows a meaning, a higher purpose for life? For a thousand years we have scabbled after fish heads, but now we have a reason to live—to learn, to discover, to be free! Give me one chance, let me show you what I've found. . . .”

They didn't listen.

Jonathan Seagull spent the rest of his days alone, but he flew way out beyond the Far Cliffs. His one sorrow was not solitude, it was that other gulls refused to believe the glory of flight that awaited them; they refused to open their eyes and see.

He learned more each day. He learned that a streamlined high-speed dive could bring him to find the rare and tasty fish that schooled ten feet below the surface of the ocean: he no longer needed fishing boats and stale bread for survival. He learned to sleep in the air, setting a course at night across the offshore wind, covering a hundred miles from sunset to sunrise. With the same inner control, he flew through heavy sea-fogs and climbed above them into dazzling clear skies—in the very times when every other gull stood on the ground, knowing nothing but mist and rain. He learned to ride the high winds far inland, to dine there on delicate insects. What he had once hoped for the Flock, he now gained for himself alone; he learned to fly, and was not sorry for the price that he had paid. Jonathan Seagull discovered that boredom and fear and anger are the reasons that a gull's life is so short, and with these gone from his thought, he lived a long fine life indeed.

And then he died. But that is not the end of Jonathan's story.

As the days went past, Jonathan found himself thinking time and again of the Earth from which he had come. If he had known there just a tenth, just a hundredth, of what he knew here, how much more life would have meant! He stood on the sand and fell to wondering if there was a gull back there who might be struggling to break out of his limits, to see the meaning of flight beyond a way of travel to get a breadcrumb from a rowboat. Perhaps there might even have been one made Outcast for speaking his truth in the face of the Flock. And the more Jonathan practiced his kindness lessons, and the more he worked to know the nature of love, the more he wanted to go back to Earth. For in spite of his lonely past, Jonathan Seagull was born to be an instructor, and his own way of demonstrating love was to give something of the truth that he had seen to a gull who asked for only a chance to see truth for himself.

And so he went back and found his students.

When the flying was done, the students relaxed on the sand, and in time they listened more closely to Jonathan. He had some crazy ideas that they couldn't understand, but then he had some good ones that they could.

"Jonathan, remember what you said a long time ago, about loving the Flock enough to return to it and help it learn?"

"Sure."

"I don't understand how you manage to love a mob of birds that has just tried to kill you."

“Oh, Fletch, you don’t love that! You don’t love hatred and evil, of course. You have to practice and see the real gull, the good in every one of them, and to help them see it in themselves. That’s what I mean by love. It’s fun, when you get the knack of it. I remember a fierce young bird, for instance, Fletcher Lynd Seagull, his name. Just been made Outcast, ready to fight the Flock to the death, getting a start on building his own bitter hell out on the Far Cliffs. And here he is today building his own heaven instead, and leading the whole Flock in that direction.”

As far back as I can remember, I’ve had the feeling that the most exciting things in life were locked away somewhere, like Fabergé eggs or hundred-year-old Scotch. And that the only way to get to them was by relentless searching. You weren’t going to stumble across a lost civilization on your way to catch the commuter bus, for instance, or find a goblin shark lying in the seafood section of Safeway. Seeing the moon on TV, visiting the wildest creatures in cages, nose-pressing museum cases to admire a souvenir of history—all this added up to an unacceptable trade-off. And yet pretty much everyone I knew had already made it.

At this point I set my goal for life, which was to find out why. What is the point of our brief existence? What are we doing here and to what end? I had no plan of attack because I had no notion of what form the answer might take or where it might be found. Would it be in a book or in a place? Coded or in plain sight? Would it take years of patient study to comprehend or would it come in a rush of revelation? And if it was easily available, say in a library book, why didn’t anyone ever mention it? Because one thing you learn early in this line of work is that you can’t go around telling people, ‘I’m on a mission to discover the purpose of life.’ Not if you’re hoping to prolong the conversation.

Many people labor in life under the impression that they are doing something right, yet they may not show solid results for a long time. They need a capacity for continuously adjourned gratification to survive a steady diet of peer cruelty without becoming demoralized. They look like idiots to their cousins, they look like idiots to their peers, they need courage to continue. No confirmation comes to them, no validation, no fawning students, no Nobel. “How was your year?” brings them a small but containable spasm of pain deep inside, since almost all of their years will seem wasted to someone looking at their life from the outside. Then bang, the lumpy event comes that brings the grand vindication. Or it may never come. Believe me, it is tough to deal with the social consequences of the appearance of continuous failure. We are social animals; hell is other people.

Not matching the idea of success others expect from you is only painful if that’s what you are seeking. You stand above the rat race and the pecking

order, not outside of it, if you do so by choice. This is the first step toward throwing a four-letter word at fate. You have far more control over your life if you decide on your criterion by yourself. Mother Nature has given us some defense mechanisms: as in Aesop's fable, one of these is our ability to consider that the grapes we cannot (or did not) reach are sour. But an aggressively stoic prior disdain and rejection of the grapes is even more rewarding. Be aggressive; be the one to resign, if you have the guts. It is more difficult to be a loser in a game you set up yourself.

You tear yourself apart, examine each individual piece, toss out the useless, rehabilitate the useful, and put your moral self back together again.

Long ago, becoming a training priest was recognized as a way of living, and I think that considerable numbers of the priests were people who had troubles that prevented them from living in society—people who would be called depressed or neurotic in today's terms. The basic rule was to leave the family and friends, discard all the relationships and renounce the world. The old society accepted these training priests, although they were thought to be completely useless. Or rather, it treated them with respect, and supported them by giving offerings. In very rare cases, some attained so-called "enlightenment," and those people could spread teachings that could possibly save people in society who had troubles. In other words, there were certain cases where training priests could be useful to society, and I think that is why society supported them.

I think that training priests and hikikomori are quite similar. First, neither of them can fit in to this society—while the training priests are secluded in mountains, hikikomori are secluded in their rooms. They both engage in the activity of facing the root of their problems alone. However, nobody accepts this way of living anymore, and that's why hikikomori hide in their rooms. But hikikomori are very important beings. Hikikomori cannot be cured by society; rather, it is society that has problems, and hikikomori may be able to solve them.

But this is fine—the dismissal, the platitudes, the brusque moving-on of the grown-ups. It's all fine. I withdraw, you see. I withdraw from the campaigning and the marching, I withdraw from the arguing and the talked-up necessity and all of the false assumptions. I withdraw from the words. I am leaving. I am going to go out walking.

I am leaving on a pilgrimage to find what I left behind in the jungles and by the cold campfires and in the parts of my head and my heart that I have been skirting around because I have been busy fragmenting the world in order to save it; busy believing it is mine to save. I am going to listen to the wind and see what it tells me, or whether it tells me anything at all. You see, it turns out that I have more time than I thought. I will follow the

songlines and see what they sing to me and maybe, one day, I might even come back. And if I am very lucky I might bring with me a harvest of fresh tales, which I can scatter like apple seeds across this tired and angry land.

One must be a nomad, pass through ideas like one passes through countries and cities.

A mind forever
Voyaging through strange seas
Of thought alone

“He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity.”

If you take too many risks, you don't get home—if you take too few, you don't get the data.

Courageous or just unwise? The line between is narrow.

“He had a reputation of being idealistic almost to the point of craziness. He is now thought simply to have been way ahead of his time.”

Untrained, isolated artists, cut off as they are from the rest of the world and oblivious to any notions of artistic training or concern for prevailing fashions, give an insight into the raw creative process. In effect, insane people show us what we are all capable of if we can only throw off society's constraints. If, goes this school of thought, art has become so corrupted by formal movements, trendiness, and marketing, then it is only by returning to the work of “primitive” cultures, children, and the insane that we can gain some sense of the purity of artistic expression.

You've got to be crazy. It's too late to be sane. Too late. You've got to go full-tilt bozo 'cause you're only given a little spark of madness, and if you lose that you're nothing. Note, from me to you: Don't ever lose that, 'cause it keeps you alive.

And that's what's exciting, the idea you could explore creativity at any price is like—you're going to come to the edge, you're going to look over, and sometimes you're going to step over the edge, and then you're going to come back, hopefully.

We are less ready to suffer or die for what we have or are than for what we wish to have or to be.

Which is excellent news if you are a one-eyed archaeologist, or a penniless young artist, or a wandering playboy-poet, or anything else. We might be offering misfits like these a death sentence but we're also offering a new way to live.

The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.

"I'm scared."

Good, now you have something you can kill.

Fear of serious injury cannot alone justify suppression of free speech and assembly. Men feared witches and burnt women. It is the function of speech to free men from the bondage of irrational fears.

Wouldn't it be great to be consumed by a passion? To be short lived, but to have given it your all?

"Which are you, a pessimist or an optimist?"

Both is the most sensible answer. To be only the former would be self-defeating—and to be only the latter would be self-deception.

"Are we not all of us fanatics? I say only what you of the USA only pretend you do not know. Attachments are of great seriousness. Choose your attachments carefully. Choose your temple of fanaticism with great care. What you wish to sing of as tragic love is an attachment not carefully chosen. Die for one person? This is a craziness. Persons change, leave, die, become ill. They leave, lie, go mad, have sickness, betray you, die. Your nation outlives you. A cause outlives you.

Some say: 'What if sometimes there is no choice about what to love? What if the temple comes to Mohamed? What if you just love? Without deciding? You just do: you see her and in that instant are lost to sober account-keeping and cannot choose but to love?'

Then in such a case your temple is self and sentiment. Then in such an instance you are a fanatic of desire, a slave to your individual subjective narrow self's sentiments; a citizen of nothing. You become a citizen of nothing. You are by yourself and alone, kneeling to yourself.

In a case such as this you become the slave who believes he is free. The most pathetic of bondage. Not tragic. No songs. You believe you would die twice for another but in truth would die

only for your alone self, its sentiment. Welcome to the meaning of individual. We're each deeply alone here. It's what we all have in common, this aloneness."

Those unwilling to die for an idea cannot possibly articulate an idea worth dying for since they do not know what one looks like.

The coward's fear of death stems in large part from his incapacity to love anything but his own body. The inability to participate in others' lives stands in the way of his developing any inner resources sufficient to overcome the terror of death.

The problem with fear, though, is that it isn't any one thing. Fear has a whole taxonomy—*anxiety, dread, panic, foreboding*—and you could be braced for one form and completely fall apart facing another.

There are different kinds of strength, and containing fear may be the most profound, the one without which armies couldn't function and wars couldn't be fought (God forbid). There are big, tough guys in the Army who are cowards and small, feral-looking dudes, who will methodically take apart a SAW while rounds are slapping the rocks all around them. The more literal forms of strength, like carrying 160 pounds up a mountain, depend more obviously on the size of your muscles, but muscles only do what you tell them, so it still keeps coming back to the human spirit. Wars are fought with very heavy machinery that works best on top of the biggest hill in the area and used against men who are lower down. That, in a nutshell, is military tactics, and it means that an enormous amount of war-fighting simply consists of carrying heavy loads uphill.

By cowardice I do not mean fear. Cowardice is a label we reserve for something a man does. What passes through his mind is his own affair.

It is easier to repress well-justified fears than to control the dangers giving rise to them. We must avoid an air-raid shelter mentality, in which people go underground rather than deal directly with threatening prospects.

I don't think there is another country on earth where its citizens have so much potential power and are so fearful to use even one ounce of it.

Civilians understand soldiers to have a kind of baseline duty, and that everything above that is considered "bravery." Soldiers see it the other way around: either you're doing your duty or you're a coward. There's no other place to go. In 1908, five firemen died in a blaze in New York City. Speaking at the funeral, Chief Ed Croker had this to say about their bravery:

"Firemen are going to get killed. When they join the department they face that fact. When a man becomes a fireman his

greatest act of bravery has been accomplished. What he does after that is all in the line of work.”

You don't have to be a soldier to experience the weird comfort of that approach. Courage seems daunting and hard to attain, but work is mundane and eminently doable, a collective process where everyone takes their chances.

It is when he perceives no alternatives that violence is most likely. David wouldn't have fought Goliath if he perceived alternatives. Justification alone wouldn't have been enough to compensate for his low ability to prevail over his adversary. More than anything, he fought because he had no choice. A person (or an animal) who feels there are no alternatives will fight even when violence isn't justified, even when the consequences are perceived as unfavorable, and even when the ability to prevail is low.

Even heroes die screaming for their mothers. This will affect you if things get bad enough. You can drink your Kool-Aid of denial and wrap yourself in scrolls and belts and trophies, but those are just talismans to keep the boogeyman away. Even heroes die screaming for their mothers.

That's the ugly truth about heroism: the tests don't start when you're ready or stop when you're tired. You don't get time-outs, warm-ups, or bathroom breaks. You may have a headache or be wearing the wrong pants or find yourself in a skirt and low heels in a hallway becoming slick with your own blood.

Psychopaths and heroes: twigs on the same genetic branch.

Progressive ideas are introduced by weirdos and mocked by the world, and then everybody else adopts and refines those ideas ten years later.

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.

“I am a horse for a single harness, not cut out for tandem or teamwork for well I know that in order to attain any definite goal, it is imperative that one person do the thinking and the commanding.”

“A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.”

“A truth’s initial commotion is directly proportional to how deeply the lie was believed. When a well-packaged web of lies has been sold gradually to the masses over generations, the truth will seem utterly preposterous and its speaker, a raving lunatic.”

This is the lie we tell ourselves our whole lives: as soon as we get the next meal, party, vacation, sexual encounter, as soon as we get married, get a promotion, get to the airport check-in, get through security and consume a bouquet of Auntie Anne’s Cinnamon Sugar Stix, we’ll feel really good. But as soon as we find ourselves in the airport gate area, having ingested 470 calories’ worth of sugar and fat before dinner, we don’t bother to examine the lie that fuels our lives. We tell ourselves we’ll sleep it off, take a run, eat a healthy breakfast, and then, finally, everything will be complete. We live so much of our lives pushed forward by these “if only” thoughts, and yet the itch remains. The pursuit of happiness becomes the source of our unhappiness.

If I were a member of the class that rules, I would post men in all the neighborhoods of the nation, not to spy upon or club rebellious workers, not to break strikes or disrupt unions; but to ferret out those who no longer respond to the system in which they live. I would make it known that the real danger does not stem from those who seek to grab their share of wealth through force, or from those who seek to defend their property through violence, for both of these groups, by their affirmative acts, support the values of the system in which they live. The millions that I would fear are those who do not dream of the prizes that the nation holds forth, for it is in them, though they may not know it, that a revolution has taken place and is biding its time to translate itself into a new and strange way of life.

In Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “The Secret Miracle,” a writer is unjustly imprisoned by the Nazis and sentenced to death. On the eve of his execution, he prays to God, asking for a year to finish his play. That night he dreams that his prayer is answered, but the next morning he is nevertheless led down to the firing squad in gloomy rain. As he stands in front of four soldiers, “a heavy drop of rain grazes his temple and rolls slowly down his cheek; the sergeant calls out the final order.”

But suddenly, miraculously, the universe stops: The weapons converged upon him, but the men who were to kill him were immobile. The sergeant’s arm seemed to freeze, eternal, in an inconclusive gesture. As though in a painting, the wind had died. He attempted a scream, a syllable, the twisting of a hand. He realized that he was paralyzed. He could hear not the slightest murmur of the halted word. He thought time has halted. He had asked God for an entire year in which to finish his work; God in His omnipotence

had granted him a year. God had performed for him a secret miracle: the German bullet would kill him, at the determined hour, but in his mind a year would pass between the order to fire and the discharge of the rifles.

In this secret year the writer crafts his play into perfection. Without the aid of movement, or speech, or writing, he repeats the acts in his head, honing every paragraph and polishing every word. At long last:

“He completes his play; only a single epithet is left to be decided upon now. He finds it; the drop of water rolls down his cheek. He begins a maddening cry, he shakes his head, and the fourfold volley fells him.”

I wish I had a few lifetimes to get better at paying attention, at listening. I wish I had more time to learn the song. But maybe the time we have is all the time we need.

Disappointment is a response to things not working out while regret is the recognition that you made a mistake and if you had done something differently, things would have gone better.

I would die happy if I knew that on my tombstone could be written these words:

THIS MAN WAS AN ABSOLUTE FOOL. NONE OF THE
DISASTROUS THINGS THAT HE PREDICTED EVER CAME
TO PASS!

I’m just afraid of having a tombstone that says:

HERE LIES A PROMISING OLD MAN

There are no masters here, nor will there ever be, all are forever students.

So by all means, keep asking. That’s what we have—and this compendium of shared knowledge makes up all we can achieve intellectually. To go deeper requires nearer experience, and that will come with time, whether we want it or not.

Movement culture is critical to mass protest. The people need to see themselves experimenting in democratic forms.

If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will.

You don’t need to understand all the details of a system to know that it has failed.

Uncertainty, in the presence of vivid hopes and fears, is painful, but must be endured if we wish to live without the support of comforting fairy tales.

You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions.

- We know that the hidden crimes of slavery and environmental destruction are not just inextricably linked but mutually reinforcing and reach around the planet.
- We know that slaves are used to destroy the environment, and that when an ecosystem is devastated the people who live within it are pushed closer to slavery.
- We know that this destruction and slavery feed the global market and that we eat and wear and use the spoils of this crime every day.
- We know that slavery, our old enemy, is also a major cause of global warming, our big new enemy.
- We know that environmental laws and treaties stopped much legal deforestation and that slave masters rushed in to fill the hole in the market.
- We know criminal slaveholders go straight for the sweet spots—the national forests, the wildlife preserves, the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and the protected homes and territory of indigenous peoples.
- We know these slaveholders don't care about obeying environmental laws; to them the world is to be pillaged and slaves are the tools they use to smash and grab.
- We know the profits generated when we buy things flow back down the supply chain to fuel the assault on the natural world, drive more people toward slavery, and then feed more goods into the global supply chain.
- We know these crimes go round and round, a criminal perpetual motion machine that devours people and nature like a cancer.
- We know that to save our planet we have to fight slavery, and that to end slavery we have to protect our environment.

And we know that knowing these things changes the way we see the world and how we act. From now on we can't plead ignorance, only indifference. We're now part of the generation that came to know better. It's a burden on us but it's also an opportunity. A new way of seeing the world doesn't come along very often, and when it does it can be a jarring awakening, a responsibility as well as a privilege. The new challenge of global warming and the age-old challenge of slavery, both seemingly insuperable, now have

a linked solution. Knowing that makes us the people our children will fairly ask: What did you do when you learned the truth about slavery and environmental destruction?

How would making that decision change us? What kind of world do we create when we choose not to live with slavery and ecocide? That choice doesn't have to be all consuming, but to be real it does have to be a consistent part of our lives. Small choices, made at the right moment, can bring very big changes.

Compassion is a muscle that gets stronger with use, and the regular exercise of choosing kindness over cruelty would change us.

Research your own experiences for the truth. Absorb what is useful. Add what is specifically your own. The creating individual is more than any style or system.

We are mining by proxy every time we buy a cellphone or a piece of gold jewelry. When we choose to load up the barbecue with shrimp, we are fishing by proxy. When we buy furniture or cars or kitchen sinks, we are cutting down forests by proxy, burning them into charcoal by proxy, and smelting iron by proxy. What we eat, or choose to wear, the things we buy for our homes, or choose not to buy, all link us in one relationship after another to people in slavery, national economies, and protected forests. To avoid or ignore the inconvenience of thinking through our actions is surely the easiest decision. Who wants to be bound by these pesky concerns? Can't we just feign the ignorance of our parents? Surely our little choices don't really change anything, right? Yes, each choice is small, like a tiny drop of water. But the act of choosing is repeated every day of our lives, and carries into the lives of our children and their children. These millions of little choices turn into a great river of economic pressure, a powerful river that can either erode or sustain people's lives and the natural world. But you are right, it will not be enough. Such choices must extend beyond the consumer sphere.

This is beyond reason, it is about our core. This is about the earth we all spring from and will all return to. This is about being human, and though we are thinking and reasoning animals, being human is more than reason. Our truest essence is found where thought meets desire, where facts and dreams collide, where being human presses against the rest of the natural world. The choices we make at those intersections transcend our lives and reach far into the future. What seem to be small decisions and small actions actually determine our intrinsic human worth, what it means to be human, as well as the judgment we will receive from future generations.

The possibility of reaching such ideals comes rarely, and when it does, it usually comes at the dangerous crossroads of opportunity and crisis. What

we decide to do at this intersection is a test of how we respond to the most distant, the powerless, and the voiceless. No one is forcing us to choose one way or the other. We don't have to be consistent, but we have no choice but to engage. Either we act to make our ideals reality or we do nothing and attempt to un-know what we know.

As a society we're more comfortable with custom and precedent than with facing new and unfamiliar proposals. But let us be brave. Let us cast out what we know has not only failed us but has added substantially to the heavy inventory of crimes committed against us.

If we all use the immensely powerful weapon of solidarity then the only thing left for us is to know the daily stretch of the road and to take it. Nobody can point out that stretch; that stretch in the personal road of each individual; it is what he will do every day, what he will gain from his individual experience dedicated to the people's well-being.

Defending common territory is a hallmark of any group, whether an army, a tribe, or a troop of monkeys. Humans have expanded this idea and symbolized it in that many are willing to fight and die for intangibles—a flag, patriotism, a place in heaven. Just because the territory being defended or invaded is imaginary does not make the passion of the defenders any less.

It is war, class war, and you were the first to wage it under cover of the powerful institutions you call order, in the darkness of your laws. There will likely be bloodshed; we will not dodge; there will likely have to be murder: we will kill, only because it is necessary; because you will force it, there will have to be destruction. We will destroy to rid the world of your tyrannical institutions.

Or you could give up your power, wealth, status—all stolen from the commons. But you won't do that, will you?

Soft people make tough times
Tough times make strong people
Strong people make good times
Good times make soft people

Some people get old and never grow up; some people are young and have already seen through the veil.

Tiger got to hunt, bird got to fly; Man got to sit and wonder 'why, why, why?' Tiger got to sleep, bird got to land; Man got to tell himself he understand.

I always thought it was just a trick of long exposure until I went on a trip with some friends and saw it. It's one of the most profound things I've ever seen, I was completely in awe. I've held the opinion for awhile now that

one of the main problems we face is humans not seeing that awe inspiring sky every night. The night sky is inspiring, it forces us to notice and think and dream and wonder. When it's not visible, it becomes too easy to say 'look at how badass we are, look at all this stuff we created!' But I think, at our core, humans need to be shown our insignificance every once in awhile to inspire us, spark our imagination, and remind us that we aren't the only game in the universe.

What we see before us is just one tiny part of the world. We get in the habit of thinking, this is the world, but that's not true at all. The real world is a much darker and deeper place than this, and much of it is occupied by jellyfish and things.

Ring the bells that still can ring
 Forget your perfect offering
 There is a crack, a crack in everything
 That's how the light gets in.

We do not always remember the things that do no credit to us. We justify them, cover them in bright lies or with the thick dust of forgetfulness.

I think if you erase the whole past, it's too easy to feel innocent. It's too easy to not learn from it and to think that you're not going to make any mistakes in the present—you're better than those mistakes. We're not better than those mistakes.

“Anyone can love a thing because. That's as easy as putting a penny in your pocket. But to love something despite. To know the flaws and love them too. That is rare and pure and perfect.”

For those relatively privileged, it's pretty crazy how growing up as kids we harbor all these thoughts and ideas about what the world is like. Grownups are good people! The world runs on love! Doctors know exactly what they're doing and the legal system is fair! Then you grow up and find out that you were wrong about basically everything you thought about the world. Not only are you wrong, but in every single instance of you being wrong the reality is worse than what you thought. We stopped checking for monsters under our beds when we realized they were inside us.

I think I no longer believe in monsters as faces in the floor or feral infants or vampires or whatever. I think now I believe the only real monsters might be the type of liar where there's simply no way to tell. The ones who give nothing away. 'But then how do you know they're monsters, then?' That's the monstrosity right there, I'm starting to think. That they walk among us. Teach our children. Inscrutable. Brass-faced.

I know it is not easy to deal with evil, but it is very necessary that we should confront it. We need to take a long hard look at wickedness, wherever it occurs and however uncomfortable it might make us feel. It is far, far more dangerous to deny it and to look the other way.

Spirits, demons, monsters, simply labels for that which we do not understand.

Fundamental Attribution Error: a universal thought process that says that when other people screw up, it's because they're stupid or evil, but when we screw up, it's totally circumstantial.

The process feels so obvious when explained: We simply lack information about the context in which the other person screwed up, so we fill it in with our own. If we've never been fat, then we assume that the fat guy feels the exact same level of hunger as we do, that his upbringing was the same, and that the spare time and energy he can devote to exercise is the same as ours. In other words, we think that both of us faced the exact same fork in the road and only one of us chose to eat churros until they passed out, then did it again when they woke back up. The reality is, of course, that you were on completely different roads the whole time—a stress-eating pothole, a thyroid speed bump, and a few wrong turns in Nachotown, and you could easily switch places.

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

We don't live in a world full of monsters. We live in a world full of people, and some of them look like monsters to you. The problem with killing the monsters is that underneath the fog of hatred and fear most of them are still just people. So when you go monster hunting, if you're not careful, you'll probably end up doing more harm than good.

It is much better to imagine men in some smoky room somewhere, made mad and cynical by privilege and power, plotting over the brandy. You have to cling to this sort of image, because if you don't then you might have to face the fact that bad things happen because ordinary people, the kind who brushed the dog and told their children bedtime stories, are capable of then going out and doing horrible things to other ordinary people. It is so much easier to blame it on Them. It is bleakly depressing to think that They are Us. If it is Them, then nothing is anyone's fault. If it is Us, what does that make Me? After all, I'm one of Us. I must be. I've certainly never thought

of myself as one of Them. No one ever thinks of themselves as one of Them. We're always one of Us. It's Them that do the bad things.

There are hardly any excesses of the most crazed psychopath that cannot easily be duplicated by a normal kindly family man who just comes in to work every day and has a job to do.

Evil is no faceless stranger living in a distant neighborhood. Evil has a wholesome, hometown face, with merry eyes and an open smile. Evil walks among us, wearing a mask which looks like all our faces.

Slow-burning, life dies like a flame,
 Never resting, passes like a river.
 Today I face my lone shadow.
 Suddenly, the tears flow down.

The beast is a tool most of us never wake. Those that see it sometimes live in fear of it, never realizing it was always there, sleeping, before they even knew it existed. This is a step in your growth as a human. Some people don't get to take that step, and some stumble. Don't take it as a good or bad thing, it's just a thing and you didn't realize it until now.

Personally I try to avoid killing anything at all anymore because I don't like how quickly the blood rage rises and takes over. The people doing the things that got your brain fucked up are desperate and broken and have let the beast run wild because they don't know what else to do. Being a monster is a powerful thing, and some of us need that to survive. Doesn't mean we don't need to put them down, doesn't mean we do, just means it's understandable and you don't have to get messed up over it.

Those same humans have the capacity for great compassion and empathy, just like the people you love, but they don't use it. There are reasons we do what we do and sometimes it's easier to do good and sometimes easier to be fucked up. I don't hold it against people much anymore when they fuck up, I just try to prevent it from hurting anyone else if I can.

One of life's greatest questions is how those with a strong moral code can deal with monsters without becoming monsters themselves.

The loneliest people are the kindest.
 The saddest people smile the brightest.
 The most damaged people are the wisest.
 All because they don't want people
 to suffer the same way they did.

That's my response when people ask me how I can smile even when bad things come around, or how I can be kind to a person who is rude to me.

I've had enough time to be rude or sad already, I don't need to do it any more. I should bring less sadness and more joy to the world, even if it's just one small gesture or one oddly timed smile.

Most times in life, when someone does something good for us, our first inclination is to pay them back and return the favor, but paying it forward instead involves doing something good for an entirely new person—often with the hope that you're forging the first link in a chain of goodness stretching into the future. If the previous person in line bought your coffee, you will buy a coffee for the next person—would monkeys do the same?

Researchers tested this idea by putting monkeys as a middle link of a chain of three monkeys, where they would receive an outcome from the first monkey and give an outcome to the third monkey. Monkeys could receive one of two outcomes, either a delicious prized grape or an unappealing piece of spinach. Importantly, it was completely costless for monkeys to give grapes, because the monkey doing the passing always got a grape. In sum, the monkeys chose between option A (me: grape, other: grape) and option B (me: grape, other: spinach), so the only reason they would give another monkey spinach was out of spite. They found that monkeys paid forward their outcomes. When the second monkey received a grape, it would give the third monkey a grape, but when the second monkey received a piece of spinach, all hell broke loose—it jumped and screamed and looked disgustedly at the first monkey. It then gave a piece of spinach to the third monkey, who reacted the same way, forging a new link in the chain of injustice.

Consciously or unconsciously, each of us helps to create the world we live in—day-by-day, hour-by-hour, moment-by-moment. Every thought in our minds, every word we speak, every action we take makes a difference in our world. So then, the question is not 'How can I make a difference?' The question is 'What kind of difference do I choose to make?' If you choose to act out of love—smiling at the baby in the grocery cart in the long checkout line or contributing money, food, or clothing to folks in need—you help to create one kind of world. If you choose to react out of fear—snarling at the person in the slow-moving car in front of you or clinging to all of your material wealth for dear life—you help to create another kind of world.

Not one day in anyone's life is an uneventful day, no day without profound meaning, no matter how dull and boring it might seem, no matter whether you are a seamstress or a queen, a shoeshine boy or a movie star, a renowned philosopher or a Down's-syndrome child. Because in every day of your life, there are opportunities to perform little kindnesses for others, both by conscious acts of will and unconscious example.

Each smallest act of kindness—even just words of hope when they are needed, the remembrance of a birthday, a compliment that engenders a

smile—reverberates across great distances and spans of time, affecting lives unknown to the one whose generous spirit was the source of this good echo, because kindness is passed on and grows each time it's passed, until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage years later and far away.

Likewise, each small meanness, each thoughtless expression of hatred, each envious and bitter act, regardless of how petty, can inspire others, and is therefore the seed that ultimately produces evil fruit, poisoning people whom you have never met and never will.

All human lives are so profoundly and intricately entwined—those dead, those living, those generations yet to come—that the fate of all is the fate of each, and the hope of humanity rests in every heart and in every pair of hands.

Therefore, after every failure, we are obliged to strive again for success, and when faced with the end of one thing, we must build something new and better in the ashes, just as from pain and grief, we must weave hope, for each of us is a thread critical to the strength—the very survival—of the human tapestry.

Every hour in every life contains such oft-unrecognized potential to affect the world that the great days for which we, in our dissatisfaction, so often yearn are already with us; all great days and thrilling possibilities are combined always in this momentous day.

The victories of justice occur from small realizations that eventually seep into the collective mind.

In the sense in which a man can ever be said to be at home in the world, he is at home not through dominating, or explaining, or appreciating, but through caring and being cared for.

If we cannot leave something tangible behind—such as a gene or a poem—perhaps it is enough if we just make the world a little better? You can help somebody, and that somebody will subsequently help somebody else, and you thereby contribute to the overall improvement of the world, and constitute a small link in the great chain of kindness. Maybe you serve as a mentor for a difficult but brilliant child, who goes on to be a doctor who saves the lives of hundreds? Maybe you help an old lady cross the street, and brighten up an hour of her life? Though it has its merits, the great chain of kindness is a bit like the great chain of turtles—it is far from clear where its meaning comes from. A wise old man was asked what he learned about the meaning of life:

“Well, I have learned that I am here on earth in order to help other people. What I still haven't figured out is why the other people are here.”

In 1970 a study was conducted on a group of students at the Princeton Theological Seminary, who were training to become ministers in the Presbyterian Church. Each student was asked to hurry to a distant lecture hall, and there give a talk on the Good Samaritan parable, which tells how a Jew traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was robbed and beaten by criminals, who then left him to die by the side of the road. After some time a priest and a Levite passed nearby, but both ignored the man. In contrast, a Samaritan—a member of a sect much despised by the Jews—stopped when he saw the victim, took care of him, and saved his life. The moral of the parable is that people’s merit should be judged by their actual behaviour, rather than by their religious affiliation.

The eager young seminarians rushed to the lecture hall, contemplating on the way how best to explain the moral of the Good Samaritan parable. But the experimenters planted in their path a shabbily dressed person, who was sitting slumped in a doorway with his head down and his eyes closed. As each unsuspecting seminarian was hurrying past, the “victim” coughed and groaned pitifully. Most seminarians did not even stop to enquire what was wrong with the man, let alone offer any help. The emotional stress created by the need to hurry to the lecture hall trumped their moral obligation to help strangers in distress.

Human emotions trump philosophical theories in countless other situations. This makes the ethical and philosophical history of the world a rather depressing tale of wonderful ideals and less than ideal behaviour. How many Christians actually turn the other cheek, how many Buddhists actually rise above egoistic obsessions, and how many Jews actually love their neighbours as themselves?

No one is perfect, we all have things in our past we regret, but the question is: why aren’t you doing good now? We can certainly have reasons, excuses for our failures then. But what is it now, why do we fail again?

“I don’t expect my leaders to be perfect. They’re human. I’ve been active in politics for over a decade now (and before that I apparently was serving my country so that later on the rich could pillage in the name of ‘democracy’). Quite frankly I’m tired. I’d just like some glimmer of hope that things could get better instead of worse. Just a freaking glimmer. Something that shows me the people in charge learned something instead of attempting to manage optics. Something that I could share with my kids that isn’t some pretend, farcical nonsense and looks like real hope that what I’m handing over to them isn’t a contrived system managed by a wealthy few for a wealthy few. Today, I’m

not seeing it. All I'm seeing is what looks like a political version of the Wizard of Oz. Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain. . . ."

It would be a major step forward if we could inculcate a sense of pride in being proved wrong, in showing publicly that you can change, and that your opinions aren't the same as 'you,' but rather things we carry with us.

"There's nothing wrong with being a political convert. I've worked for one, and been friends with them, but usually, they recognize that they were terrible people for ever having been on the wrong side. Often, that makes for an even more compelling reason to trust in their conversion."

And now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good.

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice. Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in. Be grateful for whatever comes. Because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

For most of life, nothing wonderful happens. If you don't enjoy getting up and working and finishing your work and sitting down to a meal with family or friends, then the chances are you're not going to be very happy. If someone bases his or her happiness on major events like a great job, huge amounts of money, a flawlessly happy marriage, or a trip to Paris, that person isn't going to be happy much of the time. If, on the other hand, happiness depends on a good breakfast, flowers in the yard, a drink or a nap, then we are more likely to live with quite a bit of happiness.

"Get drunk. One should always be drunk. That's all that matters; that's our one imperative need. So as not to feel Time's horrible burden, one which breaks your shoulders and bows you down, you must get drunk without cease. But with what? With wine, poetry, or virtue as you choose. But get drunk.

And if, at some time, on steps of a palace, in the green grass of a ditch, in the bleak solitude of your room, you are waking and the drunkenness has already abated, ask the wind, the wave, the stars, the clock, all that which flees, all that which groans,

all that which rolls, all that which sings, all that which speaks,
ask them, what time it is; and the wind, the wave, the stars, the
birds, and the clock, they will all reply: 'It is time to get drunk!'

So that you may not be the martyred slaves of Time, get
drunk, get drunk, and never pause for rest! With wine, poetry,
or virtue, as you choose!"

The more carefully you've planned your life, the fewer people you'll find
to plan it with.

Here I am, at the fork in the road. I see her there, dead. I see her tracks
too, from the point of impact to where she finally rested, in relative safety,
at the fork in the road.

Left or right, I must choose. Left or right, she must have chosen. Why
did she go the direction she did. Was it inertia? Was she already facing
there? Or did she consciously, and with great effort, change her orientation,
and set off on a new path, the last journey of her life?

Would she have known it was the last? Do we ever? Left or right? Did
she know it was the last? Would it have affected her choice if she did? Did
it?

Perhaps her choice sealed her fate. Would help have been forthcoming
if she had gone elsewhere? Would someone have seen her in time to help?
Did the never ending question of left or right lead her here? It must have,
it's led me here.

Without but a single changed left, would she be lying here? Would I be
sitting here?

What seemingly meaningless left or right did we take that transported
us here? Or are they all meaningless?

Left or right?

How do we choose?

Left or right?

How did she choose?

Left or right?

I'm closer to her now, I can see the individual hairs in the bloody mats.

Left or right?

I'm touching her now. Cold body. Cold steel now pressed against my
skull.

Left or right?

Paralyzed with inaction. Paralyzed by death.

Left or right?

Unless you really think this is the only way, you shouldn't even try it. I followed this path because it seemed to me that the only other path was death, and until you reach that point, I'd say stick with something easier.

Its not about growing up, its about going on.

Following a tragedy, grief comes in waves, each bigger than the previous, each carrying a new component of pain.

Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All of that unspent love gathers in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and the hollow in your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.

“One thing that I found horrible was that I got used to her not being around. I never again want to get used to that. It's much better to be sad than calloused.”

Even grief lessens with time, should never be forgotten, but rather, testified.

“When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world.

I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation.

When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family.

Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.”

Saving one man is no less noble than saving ten.

“The eenie, meeny, minie, mo? Sure. But that's Schindler's List, right? He had an eenie, meeny, minie, mo situation, too, but what was he supposed to do—nothing? Just because there's a greater need than what you can give doesn't mean you shouldn't give.”

The oligarchs only give up their wealth when peasants ask very, very politely. Remember, when a bank defrauds you, be polite. When an oligarch ships your job out, be polite. When you are sleeping on a bench and an

oligarch demands the force of state to remove you, be polite. Think of oligarchs as wasps. Don't be loud. Don't invade their space. Be very gentle. Don't upset them. Be polite! And they will willingly give you honey if you are patient.

“Even if I don't get justice it's fine, his death will raise awareness. Because you can't put chains on the rays of sunlight.”

You either die a hero or long live enough to see yourself become a villain.

In every generation, in effect, a certain number of geniuses will be born, but their upbringing, the problems that confront them, and the resources they will have available to solve those problems, are not theirs to choose. All these things are produced by the labors of other creative minds of the past and present, and are profoundly influenced by the cycles of history.

Let's take Isaac Newton as an example. He happened to be born just as the scientific revolution was beginning to hit its stride, but before it had found its paradigm, the set of accomplishments on which all future scientific efforts would be directly or indirectly modeled. His impressive mathematical and scientific gifts thus fastened onto the biggest unsolved problem of the time—the relationship between the physics of moving bodies sketched out by Galileo and the laws of planetary motion discovered by Kepler—and resulted in the *Principia Mathematica*, which became the paradigm for the next three-hundred years or so of scientific endeavor.

Had he been born a hundred years earlier, none of those preparations would have been in place, and the *Principia Mathematica* wouldn't have been possible. Given the different cultural attitudes of the century before Newton's time, in fact, he would almost certainly become a theologian rather than a mathematician and physicist—as it was, he spent much of his career engaged in theology, a detail usually left out by the more hagiographical of his biographers—and he would be remembered today only by students of theological history. Had he been born a century later, equally, some other great scientific achievement would have provided the paradigm for emerging science—my guess is that it would have been Edmund Halley's successful prediction of the return of the comet that bears his name—and Newton would have had the same sort of reputation that Karl Friedrich Gauss has today: famous in his field, sure, but a household name? Not a chance.

What makes the point even more precise is that every other civilization from which adequate records survive had its own paradigmatic thinker, the figure whose achievements provided a model for the dawning age of reason and for whatever form of rational thought became that age's principal cultural expression. In the classical Western world, for example, it was

Pythagoras, who invented the word ‘philosophy’ and whose mathematical discoveries gave classical rationalism its central theme, the idea of an ideal mathematical order to which the hurly-burly of the world of appearances must somehow be reduced. Like Newton, by the way, Pythagoras was more than half a theologian; it’s a common feature of figures who fill that role.

To take the same argument to a far more present time, does this text represent the act of a unique individual influencing the course of history? A glance at history shows otherwise. It is written by a figure of an easily recognizable type, which shows up reliably as each civilization’s Age of Reason wanes and it begins moving toward what some have called the Second Religiosity: the resurgence of religion that inevitably happens in the wake of rationalism’s failure to deliver on its promises. At such times you get intellectuals who can communicate fluently on both sides of the chasm between rationalism and religion, and who put together syntheses of various kinds that reframe the legacies of the Age of Reason so that they can be taken up by emergent religious movements and preserved for the future.

In the classical world, for example, you got Iamblichus of Chalcis, who stepped into the gap between Greek philosophical rationalism and the burgeoning Second Religiosity of late classical times, and figured out how to make philosophy, logic, and mathematics appealing to the increasingly religious temper of his time. He was one of many such figures, and it was largely because of their efforts that the religious traditions that ended up taking over the classical world—Christianity to the north of the Mediterranean, and Islam to the south—got over their early anti-intellectual streak so readily and ended up preserving so much of the intellectual heritage of the past.

That sort of thing is a worthwhile task, and if I can contribute to it I’ll consider this life well spent. That said, there’s nothing unique about it. What’s more, it’s only possible and meaningful because I happen to be perched on this particular arc of the wheel of time, when our civilization’s Age of Reason is visibly crumbling and the Second Religiosity is only beginning to build up a head of steam. A century earlier or a century later, I’d have faced some different tasks.

“No story can be devised by the wit of man which cannot be interpreted allegorically by the wit of some other man.”

—C.S. Lewis

“Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.”

—Mark Twain

“When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion.”

—Dale Carnegie

“You’re talking about a culture that teaches people how to make moral choices, that teeters very easily into a culture, into a totalitarian, authoritarian culture. But a culture that doesn’t, and that prides itself on not—the way sort of ours does, or has recently. I think we’re just beginning to see, that on either side of the continuum there are terrible prices to pay.

I don’t think there’s an answer. You mean, are there laws that should be passed? Or is there public education we can do—my personal suspicion is that for the really deep important questions, there aren’t any answers because the answers are individual, you know? I mean, there’s no culture—I mean, the culture’s us, you know? The country’s us. So no answer: either that kind of freedom or that kind of guidance. I think it’s—I mean I think the whole thing is an enormous game of Goldilocks, and you’re trying to find what’s just right. And you, you know—what is it?—you can’t find the middle till you hit both walls? You know?

The thing that really scares me about this country—and again I’d want you to stress, I’m a private citizen, I am not a pundit. Is I think we’re really setting ourselves up for repression and fascism. I think our hunger, our hunger to have somebody else tell us what to do—or for some sort of certainty, or something to steer by—is getting so bad, um, that I think it’s, there’s even a, Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*, I mean, makes a similar argument economically. But I think, you know, there are rumbles on the Western horizon, you know. And that it’s going to be, that the next few decades are going to be really scary. Particularly if things get economically shaky, and people for instance—people who’ve never been hungry before, might be hungry or might be cold.

This difference between American politics, say, and Europeans. And that we don’t tend to get extremism with the kind of political influence here that there is in Europe. And that one reason is that there has been this peculiar kind of liberal centrism. That we’re very nervous about extremes. I don’t know about you, and I don’t know what your friends are like. But this seems to me to be a sadder, more hungry generation. And the

thing that I get scared of is, when we're in power, when we're the forty-five-year-olds and fifty-year-olds. And there's really nobody—no older—that no people older than us with memories of the Depression, or memories of war, that had significant sacrifices.

And there's gonna be no check on our, um, appetites. And also our hunger to give stuff away. And I'm aware—I'm again, I'm speaking as a private citizen, I do not know any other generation. I'm talking about kind of a feeling I have, that's somehow way down in my stomach. You think this generation is more prone to—I think this generation has it worse or better than any other. Because I think we're going to have to make it up. I think we're going to have to make up a lot of our own morality, and a lot of our own values. I mean, the old ones—the '60s and early '70s did a marvelous job of just showing how ridiculous and hypocritical, you know, the old authoritarian Father's-always-right, don't-question-authority stuff was. But nobody's ever really come along and given us anything to replace it with.

Reagan gave us a kind—I mean, the Reagan spasm I think was very much a story about a desperate desire to get back to that. But Reagan sold the past. Reagan enabled a fantasy that the last forty years hadn't taken place. And we're the first generation—maybe people starting about my age, it started in '62. We grew up sorta in the rubble of kind of the old system. And we know we don't want to go back to that. But the sort of—this confusion of permissions, or this idea that pleasure and comfort are the, are really the ultimate goal and meaning of life. I think we're starting to see a generation die on the toxicity of that idea.

Dying in what ways? I mean, literally dying? I'm talking about the number of people that—I'm not just talking about drug addicts dying in the street. I'm talking about the number of privileged, highly intelligent, motivated career-track people that I know, from my high school or college, who are, if you look into their eyes, empty and miserable. You know? And who don't believe in politics, and don't believe in religion. And believe that civic movements or political activism are either a farce or some way to get power for the people who are in control of it. Or who just don't believe in anything. Who know fantastic reasons not to believe in stuff, and are terrific ironists and pokers of holes.

And there's nothing wrong with that, it's just, it doesn't seem to me that there's just a whole lot else.

I don't know what's going to come after it, but I think something's gonna have to. I mean, something's gonna have to. What do you think it will be? My guess is that what it will be is, it's going to be the function of some people who are heroes. Who evince a real type of passion that's going to look very banal and very retrograde and very. . . You know, for instance, people who will get on television, and earnestly say, 'It's extraordinarily important, that we don't allow the lower strata of our society to starve to death and freeze to death.' That it's vitally important that we do that. Not for them, but for us. You know? That our survival depends on an ability to look past ourselves and our own self-interest.

And these people are going to look—in the climate, in the particular climate of our generation and MTV and Letterman, they're going to look absurd. They're going to look like, What do you call it? Pollyannas. Or, um, you know, suffragettes on soapboxes. They're gonna come off bombastic and pretentious and self-righteous and smug. At some point this generation's gonna reach a level of pain, or a level of exhaustion with the standard solutions. You know, there's the drug therapy, there's the sex therapy, there's the success therapy. You know, if I could just achieve X by age X, then something magical will happen. We're gonna find out, as all generations do, that it's not like that. That at a certain point, we're gonna look for something. And the question for me is, what?—is what comes after it? Some Ralph Reed, knuckle-draggin', fundamentalist, you know? Easy atavistic bullshit that's regressive and, that's repressive and truly self-righteous and truly intolerant? Or is there going to be some kind of like, you know, something like what the founding fathers and the Federalists did. You know? Are we going to like look inside our hearts and decide that, things have been fucked up, and we're going to make some rules that are good for everybody?

We live in the twilight of the old morality: there's just enough to make us feel guilty, but not enough to hold us in."

We're all the sons of God, or children of the Is, or ideas of the Mind, or however else you want to say it.

Don't pray for the Is to recognize you. Pray for you to recognize It, perfect ever-present Love, way beyond your silly beliefs.

God doesn't protect anyone. Everyone's already indestructible.

You teach best what you most need to learn.

Before believing, we choose what we want to believe. Then we test it for true.

Live never to be ashamed if anything you do or say is published around the world even if what is published is not true. You are led through your lifetime by the inner learning creature, the playful Spiritual being that is your real self. Don't turn away from possible futures before you're certain you don't have anything to learn from them. You're always free to change your mind and choose a different future, or a different past.

In every disaster, in every blessing, ask, 'Why me?' There's a reason, of course, there's an answer.

There is no such thing as a problem without a gift for you in its hands. You seek problems because you need their gifts.

A little time, a little perspective, we'll see what the leveling of this site has been making room for in our lives.

If we want to end this lifetime higher than we began, we can expect an uphill road.

The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's life. Rarely do members of one family grow under the same roof.

Argue for your limitations, and sure enough, they're yours.

Imagine the universe beautiful and just and perfect. Then be sure of one thing: the Is has imagined it quite a bit better than you have.

A cloud does not know why it moves in just such a direction and at such a speed. It feels an impulsion. . . this is the place to go now. But the sky knows the reasons and the patterns behind all clouds, and you will know, too, when you lift yourself high enough to see beyond horizons.

You are never given a wish without also being given the power to make it true. You may have to work for it, however

The world is your exercise-book, the pages on which you do your sums. It is not reality, although you can express reality there if you wish. You are also free to write nonsense, or lies, or to tear the pages.

The original sin is to limit the Is. Don't.

If you will practice being fictional for a while, you will understand that fictional characters are sometimes more real than people with bodies and heartbeats.

Your conscience is the measure of the honesty of your selfishness. Listen to it carefully.

Every person, all the events of your life are there because you have drawn them there. What you choose to do with them is up to you.

The truth you speak has no past and no future. It is, and that's all it needs to be.

The best we can do is live our highest right, gracefully as we can, and let the Principle of Coincidence take it from there.

Here is a test to find whether your mission on earth is finished: If you're alive, it isn't.

In order to live free and happily, you must sacrifice boredom. It is not always an easy sacrifice.

The world of space, time, and appearances can be wondrous, beautiful. Just don't mistake them for real.

We're all fakes on this whole world we're all pretending to be something that we're not. We are not bodies walking around, we are not atoms and molecules, we are unkillable undestroyable ideas of the Is, no matter how much we believe otherwise.

If we agree that the world is not what it seems, then we have an important question: What shall we do about it?

If this world is a fiction, then soon as we discover what's fact, we've found our power over appearances.

Don't be dismayed at good-byes. A farewell is necessary before you can meet again. And meeting again, after moments or lifetimes, is certain for those who are friends.

'You can't sit, you can't stand, you can't walk, you can't eat (OK, you won't eat), you can't talk, you can't think, don't you know you're helpless? Death is so sweet, no effort, you can let go, let it take you to another world. Listen to me. Death is not a sleep, it's a new beginning.' Those are fine suggestions, when we're desperately tired. When it seems impossible, it's easiest to let a lifetime go. Yet we shrug the suggestions away when we want to continue with a life that isn't quite finished. We ask what must I do, to live again?

The mark of your ignorance is the depth of your belief in injustice And tragedy. What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.

Everything in this book may be wrong.

"Tell the truth and run."

—Yugoslav proverb

There was once a strange, small man. He decided three important details about his life:

1. He would part his hair from the opposite side to everyone else.

2. He would make himself a small, strange mustache.
3. He would one day rule the world.

The young man wandered around for quite some time, thinking, planning, and figuring out exactly how to make the world his. Then one day, out of nowhere, it struck him—the perfect plan. He'd seen a mother walking with her child. At one point, she admonished the small boy, until finally, he began to cry. Within a few minutes, she spoke very softly to him, after which he was soothed and even smiled. The young man rushed to the woman and embraced her. "Words!" He grinned. "What?" But there was no reply. He was already gone.

Yes, the Führer decided that he would rule the world with words. "I will never fire a gun," he devised. "I will not have to." Still, he was not rash. Let's allow him at least that much. He was not a stupid man at all. His first plan of attack was to plant the words in as many areas of his homeland as possible. He planted them day and night, and cultivated them. He watched them grow, until eventually, great forests of words had risen throughout Germany. It was a nation of farmed thoughts.

While the words were growing, our young Führer also planted seeds to create symbols, and these, too, were well on their way to full bloom. Now the time had come. The Führer was ready. He invited his people toward his own glorious heart, beckoning them with his finest, ugliest words, handpicked from his forests. And the people came. They were all placed on a conveyor belt and run through a rampant machine that gave them a lifetime in ten minutes. Words were fed into them. Time disappeared and they now Knew everything they needed to Know. They were hypnotized. Next, they were fitted with their symbols, and everyone was happy.

Soon, the demand for the lovely ugly words and symbols increased to such a point that as the forests grew, many people were needed to maintain them. Some were employed to climb the trees and throw the words down to those below. They were then fed directly into the remainder of the Führer's people, not to mention those who came back for more. The people who climbed the trees were called word shakers.

The best word shakers were the ones who understood the true power of words. They were the ones who could climb the highest. One such word shaker was a small, skinny girl. She was renowned as the best word shaker of her region because she Knew how powerless a person could be *without* words. That's why she could climb higher than anyone else. She had desire. She was hungry for them. One day, however, she met a man who was despised by her homeland, even though he was born in it. They became good friends,

and when the man was sick, the word shaker allowed a single teardrop to fall on his face. The tear was made of friendship—a single word—and it dried and became a seed, and when next the girl was in the forest, she planted that seed among the other trees. She watered it every day.

At first, there was nothing, but one afternoon, when she checked it after a day of word-shaking, a small sprout had shot up. She stared at it for a long time. The tree grew every day, faster than everything else, till it was the tallest tree in the forest. Everyone came to look at it. They all whispered about it, and they waited... for the Führer. Incensed, he immediately ordered the tree to be cut down. That was when the word shaker made her way through the crowd. She fell to her hands and knees. "Please," she cried, "you can't cut it down." The Führer, however, was unmoved. He could not afford to make exceptions. As the word shaker was dragged away, he turned to his right-hand man and made a request. "Ax, please."

At that moment, the word shaker twisted free. She ran. She boarded the tree, and even as the Führer hammered at the trunk with his ax, she climbed until she reached the highest of the branches. The voices and ax beats continued faintly on. Clouds walked by—like white monsters with gray hearts. Afraid but stubborn, the word shaker remained. She waited for the tree to fall. But the tree would not move. Many hours passed, and still, the Führer's ax could not take a single bite out of the trunk. In a state nearing collapse, he ordered another man to continue. Days passed. Weeks took over. A hundred and ninety-six soldiers could not make any impact on the word shaker's tree. "But how does she eat?" the people asked. "How does she sleep?" What they didn't know was that other word shakers threw supplies across, and the girl climbed down to the lower branches to collect them.

It snowed. It rained. Seasons came and went. The word shaker remained. When the last ax-man gave up, he called up to her. "Word shaker! You can come down now! There is no one who can defeat this tree!" The word shaker, who could only just make out the man's sentences, replied with a whisper. She handed it down through the branches. "No thank you," she said, for she knew that it was only herself who was holding the tree upright.

No one knew how long it had taken, but one afternoon, a new ax-man walked into town. His bag looked too heavy for him. His eyes dragged. His feet drooped with exhaustion. "The tree," he asked the people. "Where is the tree?" An audience followed him, and when he arrived, clouds had covered the highest regions of the branches. The word shaker could hear the people calling out that a new ax-man had come to put an end to her vigil.

"She will not come down," the people said, "for anyone." They did not

Know who the ax-man was, and they did not know that he was undeterred. He opened his bag and pulled out something much smaller than an ax. The people laughed. They said, "You can't chop a tree down with an old hammer!" The young man did not listen to them. He only looked through his bag for some nails. He placed three of them in his mouth and attempted to hammer a fourth one into the tree. The first branches were now extremely high and he estimated that he needed four nails to use as footholds to reach them. "Look at this idiot," roared one of the watching men. "No one else could chop it down with an ax, and this fool thinks he can do it with—" The man fell silent.

The first nail entered the tree and was held steady after five blows. Then the second went in, and the young man started to climb. By the fourth nail, he was up in the arms and continued on his way. He was tempted to call out as he did so, but he decided against it.

The climb seemed to last for miles. It took many hours for him to reach the final branches, and when he did, he found the word shaker asleep in her blankets and the clouds. He watched her for many minutes. The warmth of the sun heated the cloudy rooftop. He reached down, touching her arm, and the word shaker woke up. She rubbed her eyes, and after a long study of his face, she spoke. "Is it really you?" Is it from your cheek, she thought, that I took the seed? The man nodded. His heart wobbled and he held tighter to the branches. "It is."

Together, they stayed in the summit of the tree. They waited for the clouds to disappear, and when they did, they could see the rest of the forest. "It wouldn't stop growing," she explained. "But neither would this." The young man looked at the branch that held his hand. He had a point. When they had looked and talked enough, they made their way back down. They left the blankets and remaining food behind. The people could not believe what they were seeing, and the moment the word shaker and the young man set foot in the world, the tree finally began to show the ax marks. Bruises appeared. Slits were made in the trunk and the earth began to shiver. "It's going to fall!" a young woman screamed. "The tree is going to fall!"

She was right. The word shaker's tree, in all its miles and miles of height, slowly began to tip. It moaned as it was sucked to the ground. The world shook, and when everything finally settled, the tree was laid out among the rest of the forest. It could never destroy all of it, but if nothing else, a different-colored path was carved through it. The word shaker and the young man climbed up to the horizontal trunk. They navigated the branches and began to walk. When they looked back, they noticed that the majority of onlookers had started to return to their own places. In there. Out there. In the forest. But as they walked on, they stopped several times, to listen.

They thought they could hear voices and words behind them, on the word shaker's tree.

“Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance.”

—George Bernard Shaw

“It might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure.”

—Friederich Nietzsche

“What is not surrounded by uncertainty cannot be the truth”

—Richard Feynman

“The real problem of humanity is the following: we have paleolithic emotions; medieval institutions; and god-like technology.”

—E.O. Wilson.

“Never argue with stupid people, they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience.”

—The Prophet Muhammad

This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill—the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill—you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Remember, all I'm offering is the truth—nothing more.

The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off.

Chapter Two

Please Put on Your Tinfoil Hat

‘Conspiracy Theorists,’ is a frame the CIA promoted to its media assets in 1967 when New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison was investigating suspects in the JFK assassination case with deep connections to the CIA.

Most conspiracy theories are based on detecting patterns in events that, when viewed with the theory in mind, seem to help us understand why they happened. In essence, conspiracy theories infer cause from coincidence. The more you believe the theory, the more likely you are to fall prey to the illusion of cause.

A conspiracy theory is simply a conspiracy that never happened, it is ‘the nonexistent version of a conspiracy.’ A better definition of a conspiracy theory might be ‘the attribution of deliberate agency to something that is more likely to be accidental or unintended.’

The term ‘conspiracy theory’ has an irrevocable public relations problem. Technically, it’s just an expository description for a certain class of unproven scenario. But the problem is that it can’t be self-applied without immediately obliterating whatever it’s allegedly describing. You can say, ‘I suspect a conspiracy,’ and you can say, ‘I have a theory.’ But you can’t say, ‘I have a conspiracy theory.’ Because if you do, it will be assumed that even you don’t entirely believe the conspiracy you’re theorizing about. There’s also a growing belief that conspiracy theories aren’t merely goofy; some would argue they’re politically detrimental. A smart person is supposed to recognize that the term ‘conspiracy theory’ has only one conversational utility: It’s a way to marginalize undesirable possibilities as inherently illogical, along with the people who propose them.

Conspiracy theories originate and are largely circulated among the educated and the middle class. The imagined model of an ignorant, priest-ridden peasantry or proletariat, replacing religious and superstitious belief with equally far-fetched notions of how society works, turns out to be completely wrong. It has typically been the professors, the university students, the artists, the managers, the journalists, and the civil servants who have concocted and disseminated the conspiracies.

Real skepticism is indeed tiring and in many ways unattractive. “There

are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamed of in our philosophy,” Hamlet reminds his friend in words that almost every doubter has had quoted to them at some point in their adult lives. Such an admonition may have been uttered during a discussion of religion, spirituality, New Age philosophy, or alternative therapies, in which the doubter (or real skeptic) has tried to invoke common sense. It always means the same thing: it is the skeptic who has a closed mind, and the believer whose being is open to the world. So the believer in a conspiracy theory or theories becomes, in his own mind, the one in proper communion with the underlying universe, the one who understands the true ordering of things. There are plenty of other ways of enjoying that feeling of transcendence, however, such as embracing esoteric religion or Eastern philosophies. But at certain times and under certain circumstances in the modern, developed, and industrialized world, a large number of people find the story of a conspiracy, no matter how shallowly rooted in fact, almost impossibly seductive.

A conspiracy theory is likely to be politically populist, in that it usually claims to lay bare an action taken by a small power elite against the people. By contrast, belief in the conspiracy makes you part of a genuinely heroic elite group who can see past the official version duplicated for the benefit of the lazy or inert mass of people by the powers that be. There will usually be an emphasis on the special quality of thought required to appreciate the existence of the conspiracy. The conspiracists have cracked the code, not least because of their possession of an unusual and perceptive way of looking at things. Those who cannot or will not see the truth are variously described as robots or as sheeple—citizens who shuffle half awake through their conventional lives following the herd.

The eternal appeal of the hidden-hand theory—the idea that history is guided by secret organizations, whether for woe or weal. Like a joke or gossip, once you know what the secret is, not only do you hold the key to understanding but you can also pass the information on yourself, becoming the storyteller, the wise one.

One feature of widely believed conspiracy theories may be that even those who do not accept them often cease to examine them properly; something that would otherwise be quickly seen as absurd is instead treated as if it were one genuine possibility among several.

The accusation leveled against conspiracy theories—that in trying to explain everything they explain nothing—could be turned back against lone gunman theories, which by contrast explain the assassination by declaring Oswald’s motive inexplicable.

However, there is a good reason why the single shooter often succeeds where the corporate conspirator might fail, and that is because he is not

only unafraid of being caught, he probably wants to be caught.

We fail to register just how far ordinary people are prepared to go in preferring to believe the improbable as opposed to the likely, and therefore risk underestimating the strength of the desire in society for the “higher” explanation.

It is in our nature to dramatize. We need to construct, or have constructed, dramas and stories for ourselves. Therapists and psychoanalysts know the truth of this. Their patients, like the rest of us, invariably have a story about inexplicable or mundane aspects of their lives. Our illnesses are due to stress or genetics or that day we went out for a walk and it was cold. Adopted children very often create a backstory of their real parents, and unadopted children have fantasies of their “real” mothers and fathers. We will have a story even if it means giving characteristics to the elemental.

The compulsion to create a story might actually be biological. It may represent a cognitive imperative—an innate need to have the world organized cognitively. Some speculate that the requirement to establish causality was a necessity for an animal that made tools in order to survive, and has thus become instinctive. Once there were causal beliefs for tool use then our ancestors developed causal beliefs about all key events. If we are impelled, therefore, to find causes, it follows that failure to do so created discomfort or anxiety. Consequently, human beings would have evolved with a strong tendency to make up a causal story to provide an explanation since ignorance about important causes is intolerable. We construct apparently coherent stories about what happened but where consistency and internal satisfaction have to compete with testing against the real world, we choose consistency.

Why do conspiracy theories emerge so robustly to explain tragedies such as disease, war, and death? The answer is dyadic completion. When there is a tragedy, people seldom throw up their hands, say, ‘C’est la vie,’ and accept the inherent randomness of life. Instead they search for meaning, asking not only how something bad could have happened but also who is behind it. When people feel like suffering moral patients, their dyadic moral template compels them to find moral agents to hold responsible. As an easy example, consider rush-hour driving. When a car cuts you off during your daily commute, you likely seldom think, ‘They must be in a hurry,’ or even, ‘They’re a little distracted,’ but instead, ‘That asshole knew I was there and cut me off just to spite me!!’

The link between perceptions of harm and perceptions of evil intention is nicely illustrated by a pair of scenarios. Both scenarios feature a chairman of the board presented with a new, profitable project by a company vice president. In the first case, the VP says:

“We are thinking of starting a new program. It will help us increase profits, but it will also help the environment.”

The chairman of the board then answers:

“I don’t care at all about helping the environment. I just want to make as much profit as I can. Let’s start the new program.”

The question is whether the chairman intentionally helped the environment. Most people in this case answer no—if the CEO doesn’t care about helping the environment, then the help is unintentional. But now consider the second scenario with only one word changed. The VP now says to the chairman of the board:

“We are thinking of starting a new program. It will help us increase profits, but it will also harm the environment.”

The chairman of the board then answers:

“I don’t care at all about harming the environment. I just want to make as much profit as I can. Let’s start the new program.”

Did the chairman intentionally harm the environment? Most people now answer yes—if the CEO doesn’t care about harming the environment, then the harm is intentional. This is a striking reversal. His words and deeds were exactly the same in both cases, and in both cases he was motivated only by profit. However, psychologically we perceive the good act to be merely incidental and the evil act to be intentional.

Paranoia may often be a defense against indifference, against the far more terrible thought that no one cares about you. The elderly, at a time of their lives when no one very much wonders what they think, often become classically paranoid, believing that someone wishes to rob or hurt them. The lonely person fears that there is a burglar or a murderer in the empty house waiting for them. Indeed, they may often perceive the real symptoms of such threats—the noises, the shadows, the displaced objects. These fears disguise the truly obliterating disaster, the often well-founded fear that no one is thinking about them at all—the catastrophe of indifference.

In Umberto Eco’s spoof novel of the faux-archaeological genre, *Foucault’s Pendulum*, the worldly publisher Signor Garamond says to his employees:

“It’s a gold mine, alright. I realized that these people will gobble up anything that’s hermetic, as you put it, anything that says the opposite of what they read in their books in school. I

see this as a cultural duty: I'm no philanthropist, but in these dark times to offer someone a faith, a glimpse into the beyond."

Signor Garamond knows he has to give his buyers "anything that says the opposite of what they read in their books in school." That way, when they have read his magical nonsense, they will think they know more than those who instructed them.

Like urban blacks considering the justice system, the rural Right has seen things the elite would prefer to ignore. It has observed correctly phenomena indicating loss of sovereignty for themselves, their states and their country. They have seen treaties replaced by fast-track agreements and national powers surrendered to remote and unaccountable trade tribunals. Like urban blacks, they have not been paranoid in this observation, merely perceptive. Seen this way, conspiracist and similar narratives, however crazy they sound, contain real validity, something that the economists and dusty actuaries of politics and the press are unable to comprehend. What is needed is a more poetical reading of these claims, because the poet understands that a myth is not a lie but the soul's version of the truth.

Things Have Never Been So Good

Prehistoric Myths

It is tempting to suppose that our ancestors were just like us except where there is evidence to the contrary. This is a hazardous assumption.

It's important to dispel the myth that modern humans are operating in a completely new environment because we only recently began to live as long as we do now, whereas our ancestors, or the average hunter-gatherer, lived only until thirty or forty, and hence never had to experience age-related diseases. While it is absolutely true that the average life span of a human being has increased enormously over just the last few centuries, this does not mean that thousands of years ago people were healthy until thirty-five and then suddenly dropped dead. An average life expectancy is just that—an average of all the ages that the people in the population attain before they die. A life expectancy of less than forty can occur without a single individual dying at or even near that age if, for example, childhood mortality from diseases such as measles or malaria is high—a common pattern in developing countries.

Suppose you have a village of 100 people. If half of them die at age five, perhaps from such childhood ailments, twenty die at age sixty, and the remaining thirty die at seventy-five, the average life span in the society is thirty-seven, but not a single person actually reached the age of thirty hale and hearty and then suddenly began to grow old. The same pattern writ large is what makes the life expectancy in developing countries so shockingly low. It isn't that people in sub-Saharan Africa or ancient Rome never experienced old age; it's that few of them survived their childhood diseases. Average life expectancy is not the same thing as the age at which most people die. Old age is not a recent invention, but its commonness is.

Some suggest that the reason some studies have found lower life expectancy for populations with agriculture than for those before settlement is that agricultural populations usually grow at a much more rapid rate than non-agricultural populations. This means a lot of babies being produced.

More babies mean more opportunity to succumb to the aforementioned diseases. This high childhood death rate makes the average life expectancy seem lower than it actually is.

The Neanderthals, reconstructions of whom are probably responsible for most people's conceptions of what cavemen supposedly looked like, lived in Europe and eastern Asia from 127,000 until about 30,000 years ago. They were not human ancestors, meaning that their lineage did not lead directly to that of modern humans, but because they lived in Europe and many paleontologists found their own European homeland a more convenient place to dig for fossils than many parts of Africa and Asia, we know more about them than we do about any other early human.

The common impression that pre-agricultural humans lived in an age of stone is a misconception based on this archaeological bias—stone preserves better. The Stone Age should more accurately be called the Wood Age, because most of the tools used by ancient hunter-gatherers were made of wood.

Bones and tools preserve much better than stems, seeds, or pits, but that does not mean that early humans relied more on meat than on other food sources.

Contrary to the claims of many Paleo-diet proponents, the earliest humans did not have an exclusively meat-based diet that we are best adapted to eat; and second, our ancestors' diets clearly changed dramatically and repeatedly over the last tens, not to mention hundreds of thousands of years, even before the advent of agriculture.

It is difficult to comment on 'the best diet' for modern humans because there have been and are so many different yet successful diets in our species. Furthermore, because some hunter-gatherer societies obtained most of their dietary energy from wild animal fat and protein does not imply that this is the ideal diet for modern humans, nor does it imply that modern humans have genetic adaptations to such diets. Any attempt by Paleo-diet experts to calculate the ratios of nutrients such as protein or saturated fat in hunter-gatherer diets so that these can be emulated by followers of the paleo way of life, would again run into the problem of the vast range of diets eaten by modern foragers and the lack of detailed information on foods eaten by early humans.

Even if we did know more about what our ancestors really ate, it wouldn't necessarily help, because those ancestors do not seem to have been particularly specially adapted to their foods. Regardless of what Paleolithic hunter-gatherer societies were eating, there is little evidence to suggest that human nutritional requirements or human digestive physiology were significantly affected by such diets at any point in human evolution. The notion

that humans got to a point in evolutionary history when their bodies were somehow in sync with the environment, and that sometime later we went astray from those roots—whether because of the advent of agriculture, the invention of the bow and arrow, or the availability of the hamburger—reflects a misunderstanding of evolution. What we are able to eat and thrive on depends on our more than 30 million years of history as primates, not on a single arbitrarily more recent moment in time.

This does not mean that many of the diseases of civilization are unrelated to diet, or that we should go further back and emulate the diets of gorillas or other modern apes rather than hunter-gatherers. If the proponents of paleo diets were correct, however, those hunter-gatherers with higher levels of protein in their diets should be less likely to suffer from modern maladies like obesity and hypertension than do cultures consuming more plants and starches, but no evidence exists to support such a claim. Such diseases are indeed absent in most foraging societies, but they are more uniformly absent than would be expected if a high meat intake were the preventive. The biggest problem with many Western diets seems to be their energy density—the vast number of calories contained in a Big Mac as opposed to an equal volume of wild fruits or game. The concentration of calories makes it far too easy to overconsume, even when it feels as if the amount of food eaten is not particularly large.

The relative proportion of carbohydrates in the diet does affect one aspect of our health: our teeth. But here the problem arose not with a switch to agriculture, but much later, when the Industrial Revolution led to increased consumption of refined sugars and processed foods. A 2012 conference examined the dental health of modern humans compared with that of either modern peoples eating more traditional diets, such as the Maya of Mexico, or our fossilized ancestors. People in industrialized societies not only have far more cavities than either of the other two groups but their jaws are also shaped differently, with malocclusion and overcrowding of the teeth. Ancient people and those consuming more fibrous foods simply chew more, which changes the development of the jawbones and associated musculature. The scientists who studied early dental health are quick to caution against a quick fix of a paleo diet for those seeking to avoid the dentist and orthodontist:

“There was not a single oral environment to which our teeth and jaws evolved—there is no single caveman diet. Still, we need to acknowledge that our ancestors did not have their teeth bathed in milkshake.”

The early models of Man the Hunter were popular in part because they validated the way Western families were structured in the 1940s–60s. Even today, most museum dioramas and other illustrations of prehistoric family life depict a man setting out with a spear, or holding a captured rabbit, while a woman sits by the campfire, an infant at her bosom. The implication is that women stay home and care for the children, while men go out and bring home the bacon, or mammoth meat. Starting in the 1970s some anthropologists began to question this macho perspective. They discovered that in contemporary foraging peoples, women’s gathering often provided the bulk of the nutrients consumed by the group, and furthermore, that in some cultures, such as some Australian aboriginal tribes, women hunted as well. But the Man the Hunter model has persisted. It came to stand for a way of life that placed males center-stage, gave an evolutionary basis for aggressive male behavior and justified gun use, political aggression, and a circumscribed relationship between women and men as a natural outcome of human evolutionary history.

The discovery that hunted food items, particularly big-game animals, are often shared among the group members, rather than being consumed only by the hunter’s family, as well as the unreliable nature of hunted meat as a staple in the diet, has caused some anthropologists to question whether the main function of hunting is even subsistence at all. Instead perhaps hunting is a way for men to show off to prospective mates, and that good hunters gain high status in their social groups. It is not that hunted meat isn’t eaten and appreciated by the group, but that a given man’s share does not necessarily increase the survival of his own children more than other sources of food do. The unreliability of big-game hunting therefore may make it a poor choice as the sole source of support for a family; saying you want to maintain your wife and children on it is the ancestral equivalent of claiming that you will be able to fulfill your familial responsibility on the proceeds of playing lead guitar in a band.

But hunted meat is not simply food—it is a signal. More than its value as a source of nutrition, meat is a medium of communication through which the hunter transmits information to potential mates, allies, and competitors. By contributing to the group, good hunters gain the respect of their peers. Anthropologists point out that “showing off” in this context does not have to involve actual bragging; in fact, among the Aché, meat is often brought into camp quietly and without much fanfare. But everyone knows who can, quite literally, deliver the goods. This ‘status signaling’ hypothesis has been critiqued by other anthropologists, who continue to discuss how best to calculate hunters’ contributions to their families, whether shared meat is repaid in kind, and which other factors play into the sexual division of labor.

Nature is a tinkerer, not an engineer. Evolution can work only with the parts at hand, rather than inventing the best possible solution to a problem. Hence, people in the Pleistocene may well have had knee trouble, because our knees are jury-rigged joints that have been modified from our quadruped ancestors. That doesn't make bending down unnatural. And we use our limbs, and our bodies, for a wide variety of activities, depending on our place in history and on the planet. It is therefore futile to look for the single best type of exercise, given our evolutionary heritage, though it's a safe bet that we would be healthier if we got up off the couch.

Both people and bonobos have sex under circumstances other than procreation, such as when resolving conflict or cementing bonds between individuals, and some cite this similarity as grounds to believe that the bonobos are a more accurate representation of our ancestral state than are those no-nonsense chimps. They then go on to promulgate a rather orgiastic view of human sexuality, saying that our monogamous woes arise from an uphill, and ultimately doomed, battle with our more bonobo-like desires for multiple sexual partners. An abundance of casual sex could then function to make the wheels of society run more smoothly, though I have trouble imagining the kind of genital-on-genital rubbing that is commonplace among female bonobos ever catching on at book clubs.

It's true that the bonobos and the chimpanzees are our closest relatives on Earth, but at the same time, we have not shared a common ancestor for at least 5 million years, so more than enough time has elapsed for selection to act separately on each of the three species. The bonobos may share non-reproductive sexual activity with humans, but vervet monkeys, a species much less closely related to us than are any of the apes, also have sex outside the time when a female can conceive. There is no a priori reason to expect that any particular aspect of our sexuality has been preserved from one ancestor and not another.

The image of the Pleistocene family as one of mother and father with their dependent offspring, operating largely by themselves, is inaccurate. And therefore the idea that we ourselves are best suited to a nuclear family life is misguided.

Fuck Off, Steven Pinker

“Don’t be deceived when they tell you things are better now. Even if there’s no poverty to be seen because the poverty’s been hidden. Even if you got more wages and could afford to buy more of these new and useless goods which industries foist on you and even if it seems to you that you never had so much. That is only the slogan of those who still have much more than you. Don’t be taken in when they paternally pat you on the shoulder and say that there’s no inequality worth speaking of and no more reason to fight because if you believe them they will be completely in charge in their marble homes and granite banks from which they rob the people of the world under the pretense of bringing them culture. Watch out, for as soon as it pleases them they’ll send you out to protect their gold in wars.”

Yes, life expectancy, mortality, and education have improved—this is fantastic news that we should celebrate! But, a few things:

1. You can’t make an argument about poverty by pointing to something else entirely. Consumption is increasing, yes. But that’s not what’s at stake here. What’s at stake is whether consumption is increasing enough to raise people out of poverty.
2. I’ll be the first to agree that income and consumption are not the only measures of well-being. But one reason they are absolutely crucial is because they allow us to assess inequality in the distribution of world resources. A higher life expectancy among the poor is no justification for condemning them to a tiny and ever-shrinking share of global income. That is not a morally defensible position.
3. You have invoked gains in life expectancy and education as part of a narrative that seeks to justify neoliberal globalization. But here again that’s intellectually dishonest. What contributes most to improvements in life expectancy are in fact simple public health interventions—sanitation, antibiotics, vaccines—and what matters for education is, well, public education. Indeed, the countries that have been most successful at this are those that have robust, free health care and education. Don’t forget that the US has worse infant mortality than Cuba.

4. As for hunger, your claim here relies on a methodology used by the FAO after 2012 that has been widely criticized. The hunger-reduction narrative depends on a calorie line that—like your \$1.90 poverty line—is too low to support normal human activity, ignores the impacts of food price crises, and tells us nothing about nutrient deficiencies. According to the FAO’s earlier methodology, both the number and proportion of people in hunger was higher in 2009 than in 1995—another trend that you glibly ignore.

Until we value everyone’s life, and until we value the life of other animals at least to the point where we aren’t genociding them, we will not and cannot have a good world overall.

It is often said, by the supporters of the current regime, that things have never been so good, but I don’t believe the statistics. Even if they were true, it would not matter, because the reality they describe is not sustainable. If I know I’m doing something which makes me comfortable today but will lead to mass death tomorrow, that isn’t ethical, and that’s what we are doing.

There is a fundamental dishonesty in every news story that presents stories in this fashion. It’s called whitewashing. Because all our information is spoon-fed to us in this same sanitized way, we first of all never think about it and secondly, have little collective knowledge (and hence concern) about what’s going on in the world, and how the US and its policies affect other people, living things, and the planet at large.

It is a measure of our misbegotten privilege that we can live in such a state of denial at all, in a bubble. And it is violence that empowers that privilege in the first place. It is upon the graves of Indians and the whipped backs of slaves that the US gained its power and it is through the military and economic subjugation of much of the world at large that it is now sustained. There’s nothing collateral about any of the suffering and damage that results from this system.

Three questions to those who think we are on the right track:

1. How is it that nearly two-hundred years after the birth of the Industrial Revolution, which produced humanity’s greatest period of economic expansion, the absolute number of those living in misery, both material and social, has grown exponentially?
2. How is it that the world’s slum population has developed at a rate vastly greater than that of global population growth?

3. How is it that despite incredible technological innovations the world now faces man-made threats of quite different magnitude from the wars, famines, epidemics, and other upheavals of previous dark ages?

“As the United States commemorates 241 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Americans are not in a celebratory mood. By most polls, 60% of the country believes that America is on the wrong track; that number is slightly higher among Republicans.

That sour mood is not a product of the Trump administration; the last time a majority believed the country was headed in the right direction was right after the US invasion of Iraq in 2004. And this is not solely an American phenomenon.

According to global polls conducted by Pew, in France, Spain, Great Britain, Poland, Mexico, you name it, less than 40% of the public feel that their polities are headed in a positive direction. Notable exceptions are China, Vietnam, and Germany, each of which have been doing rather well economically, though so have many other nations whose citizens are far less sanguine.

What has been and remains remarkable about the outbreak of global pessimism, anger, and despair is how at odds those sentiments are with certain unequivocal material realities. Never before have so many people been so well-fed, long-lived, decently housed; never before have so many people had so much say in their local and national affairs, had so little to fear from random or state-sanctioned acts of violence, and had so little risk of untimely death due to war or famine.

And yet, it is fair to say, that never before have such a large swath of humanity been so royally pissed off, so aware of all that remains broken in a world where many things have been fixed, and so convinced that we are, nationally and collectively, on the wrong path.

There has been no shortage of voices reminding us of how much the material circumstances of our lives have improved over the past century. Yet, somehow, those notes have been almost utterly drowned out in the cacophony of despair.

Still, for most of us humans now alive, life today is more abundant, more materially secure, and free from the fatal and lethal threats that humans confronted for the vast preponderance of our time on the planet. And not free as if by magic. Free

because of the assiduous, dogged, passionate efforts of generations of us to address those challenges, scientifically, politically, philosophically and eradicate the worst of them.

Take a series of statistics about the United States and the world: every part of the world has seen an increase in calorie consumption since 1960, with all the concomitant benefits in terms of health and longevity.

Increasingly, more people face health challenges from obesity (a derivative of caloric affluence) than from malnutrition, which was one of the primary causes of human suffering, disease, and premature death for most of recorded history.

Every part of the world has seen vastly reduced risk of early death not just from starvation, but from disease and from war. For all the attention to the parts of the world where violence and state disintegration are endemic, there are fewer deaths from war and violent conflict than for most of the twentieth century, even after World War II.

Yes, there is some debate over what precisely constitutes a 'war' and how to count fatalities, but your actual chances of being caught in a violent conflict have only been decreasing.

So too have your chances of being caught in a political collapse. For all the economic uncertainty of the past decade, few countries have seen total political collapse or revolution. Governments have fallen, but not entire systems. Political upheaval can be positive; the post-1989 era in Eastern Europe was mostly beneficial.

But political upheaval historically is also closely connected to war and famine and violence. Consider the tens of millions who died in China during the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s and then the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, and the waves of war and violence that followed the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War.

Then there is longer lives thanks to medical innovations on the one hand, and ever-widening access to safe potable water for much of the world's population. There is increased literacy and higher levels of education, which often correlates to high incomes. There is increased participation of women in the workforce, even with inequalities of payment persisting, which also means high levels of education for women, better health, and in much of the world, decreasing numbers of children.

In the United States, for all the legitimate unease with the costs and unpredictability of health insurance, most Americans

are spending less on life's essentials than the parents and grandparents. And they are getting more for what they are spending, whether on food, shelter, clothing, education, or entertainment.

In the years just after World War II, the new subdivisions of Long Island's Levittown were touted as the key to the American dream and the middle class. The size of those homes? 750 square feet, with a living room, two bedrooms, one bathroom and a kitchen with no modern appliances.

Today, the average American home is nearly 3,000 square feet, with an array of equipment that would have been unfathomable mid-century; even in 1973, the average home size was 1,000 square feet less than today.

The percentage of income spent on food has gone from nearly 25% in 1930 to under 10% today. The percentage spent on apparel has also come down precipitously. It will come as a surprise to learn that spending on healthcare hasn't actually changed markedly, although consumption of health care has increased with lifespans.

The only thing that Americans do spend more on relative to income is housing, and even there the increase from 1950 to the present is much less proportionately than the decrease of other costs. In essence, Americans have taken the savings derived from lower costs for life necessities and spent them on nicer places to live, work, and entertain.

These are broad averages, of course, yet similar pictures could be painted of most countries. The average person living in China enjoys a level of abundance, safety, and stability that almost no one in China could claim (even the upper classes) for much of the twentieth century. Yes, averages mean that many millions can be doing quite a bit worse, and therein may lie an explanation for the disconnect between how we are doing and how many of us worldwide feel we are doing.

The reasons for such global dyspepsia are both evident and mysterious. The 'news' everyday bears witness to the obvious: there are portions of the world—Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan—mired in violence. There are people determined to destroy what they can when they can in the name of a God they call their own. There are states—Venezuela, Zimbabwe—that teeter on the precipice of collapse. And there are nations ruled by angry, calculating souls who, it seems safe to say, do not wish their fellow humans the best.

In the developed world, there was a financial collapse in 2008 that shook confidence in our collective ability to keep economies afloat, and given that all of the economies of the developed world now rely on digital systems of currency and ideas, these systems appear both mysterious and fragile.

There has also been a continual resetting of expectations. There's an old saying in the financial world that people always remember the most they made and the least they spent. It's your grandparents tisking that something used to cost ten cents, without the context that was when an average salary was two-thousand dollars a year.

As human life has expanded, as homes have gotten larger, calories cheaper, war less frequent, senseless death rarer, political injustice more the exception than the norm, people have become less tolerant of that which used to be tolerated. In short, it would seem that the more we have, the more aware we become of what we still lack.

Which leads us back to the 'news.' The news has become a daily focus on what is broken, rather than on what is working. That doesn't make it wrong, but it does make it distorted.

Yes, as life expectancy has expanded in general, across certain swaths of the United States, it is decreasing for white males and others, coincident with dying industries and opioid addiction. Yes, millions still face bankruptcy or substantial economic harm from sudden illness, accidents, loss of work, jobs made irrelevant by technology. Yes, in the United States, not nearly enough is done to address and ameliorate those challenges.

The fact that we are collectively doing so much better should never obscure the degree to which some of us are doing so much worse, or at the very least, struggling. The fact that much of the world is at peace should not obscure to the degree to which some of the world is ripping itself apart.

But losing perspective is dangerous. It creates a climate of fear and anxiety, fed by stories of harm and danger, that threatens to become detached from the manifest good we have done is addressing human needs and wants.

It also, oddly, inhibits our ability to meet the actual challenges of the world today. Yes, terrorism as a tool of the weak is a problem everywhere, and will continue to be. But obesity and climate, both of which are the result of abundance, will impact

exponentially more of us. We focus obsessively on terrorism, to the exclusion of challenges that may ultimately matter more.

But on this American 4th of July, we ought to for a moment, acknowledge how much is going right in the world. We know what is going wrong; news of that, awareness of it, and the feeling of it is impossible to escape or deny. But what is going wrong is only one facet of a complicated story that has seen much go right. For a day, at least, we can take a deep breath and say, yes.”

More of this fucking propaganda bullshit. After a certain point—one that is easily reached for most in the current societies—it does not matter how much one has but how much one has in relation to the most wealthy that matters. If the wealthy can have so much, then a loved one dying from despair is made so much worse, not less so simply because we can have refrigerated food and a larger living area to eat and walk around in after the funeral.

Such screeds are a sign of massive privilege, ignorance, a lack of critical thinking. The world is less diverse, more polluted. Every issue that exists today is so clearly a cause of human choices, not simply an act of god as a far less informed populace might have believed in the past. It has always been human choices that lead to our suffering but it has been hidden so much better in the past.

The problem is inequality. A society in which every member is equally vulnerable—even if all were less materially well off than they are now—is a far more equal and just society than the one we have now. It is the gap that most continue to ignore, that is the main issue. The gap is what makes it all so much work. The gap highlights what is possible—or what we consider possible for a few at least. Without the gap we’re happier. Without the gap many incentives for antisocial behavior go away.

Fuck these people who try to say slaves have never been more comfortable, that they should be happy with the scraps that have filtered down from above, from our betters—that is after all how they achieved their positions, their wealth, because they’re better, smarter, harder-working. No, it is greed, it is luck, it is manipulation. That is how their wealth, their status, their power, was gained. They are not to be exalted, respected. They must be spit on, denigrated, shamed. Fuck you, fuck your massive expressions of greed, your unempathetic lives, fuck all of that.

“My concern,” said famed Harvard economist Jeffrey D. Sachs, “is not that there are too many sweatshops but that there are too few. Those are precisely the jobs that were the stepping stones for Singapore and Hong

Kong and those are the jobs that have to come to Africa to get them out of back-breaking rural poverty.”

There is no truth to the story that the job loss and wage stagnation faced by manufacturing workers in the United States and other wealthy countries was a necessary price for reducing poverty in the developing world. This is a fiction that is used to justify the upward redistribution of income in rich countries.

This points to a nagging and important question about free-market ideologues: Are they “true believers,” driven by ideology and faith that free markets will cure underdevelopment, as is often asserted, or do the ideas and theories frequently serve as an elaborate rationale to allow people to act on unfettered greed while still invoking an altruistic motive?

Exploiting its rich natural resources will spur the impoverished nation into rapid development, the government claims. It will also push people from subsistence farming into more profitable enterprise—subsistence farmers pay no taxes. But poverty is a very subjective concept. Laos has poor infrastructure (although it is improving thanks to Chinese funds), it has next to no medical provision, poor education, and no social-service protection. But people do not starve here. Many are truly self-sufficient because they exist in a low population in a naturally resource-rich environment, even if the country is being rapidly deforested. People here gather fruit, vegetables, insects, and other animals from the jungle and rivers—90% live in rural villages—and they keep chickens and buffalo, plant rice and vegetables. In terms of cash, they are poorer by far than an Indian beggar; in terms of quality of life, they are perhaps rich.

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

It’s much better to fall off a chair than to fall off a mountain. This does not mean it’s good to fall off a chair. It is better to wake up missing only your thumb than to wake up missing both arms, and better to forget your cuff-links than to forget your pants. To say that one thing is ‘better’ than another, or even the best, is not necessarily to say anything of substance.

Beware of relative judgments, then. That’s obvious. Yet relative comparisons are so often used to draw absolute conclusions. This is particularly true in economics. If sweatshops are a bit more remunerative than agricultural labor, this means that, actually, sweatshops are good. If laws against price gouging end up restricting supply, then price gouging is good for the public. If capitalism produces a higher standard of living than authoritarian socialism, then capitalism is good. If poor people in America today are better off than poor people were during the Great Depression, then poverty

isn't a moral outrage. Arguments of this variety are deployed throughout Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*, which downplays the complaints of leftists by showing that human beings now are better off than they were during, say, the Holocaust or the Great Irish Famine.

We can see why arguments of this type fail. If I say that sweatshops are good, and my evidence is that when sweatshops were introduced into a country, the wages of those who went to work in the sweatshops were higher than the country's average wages, I may sound persuasive. But if the factories I am talking about are crowded, unsafe, abusive places in which people exhaust themselves, destroy their bodies, and have little control over their work, it's perverse to describe this situation as good merely because it is marginally better than what came before. We have to have a notion of "good" independent of mere 'better' and 'worse.' Otherwise, if 'better' means 'good,' then a kidnapper who said they would either kill one of my children or both of them would be offering me a good choice. Instead, they are offering me two horrific options, one of which I may be stuck with, but which is only 'better' in the narrowest sense of the word.

The argument that "price gouging is actually good" results from this confusion. Its proponents usually say something like: After a disaster, when emergency supplies (such as water) are in high demand, but merchants only have a limited supply on hand, price gouging ensures that the supplies will go to those who really want them. After all, if water is \$100 a bottle, people will limit themselves to exactly the amount of water they really need. Actually, as is obvious, supplies will not go to the people who "want" them the most but the people with the most money to spare. Price gouging will also ensure that the supply gets replenished, because if merchants can make a killing from rushing to the scene with supplies, then you will see people bringing truckloads of water in to sell, until the price gets back to normal. This means that laws against price gouging are counterproductive and that price gouging is good.

"My own version of dealing with price gougers would be to thank them for the good work they're doing."

We can see, though, that this view isn't just callous, it uses deeply flawed reasoning. Saying "Banning profiteering actually ends up causing worse social consequences than permitting it" doesn't mean "it's morally justified to be a profiteer and profiteering is good." It may well be that, because merchants are selfish, if you allow them to extort hurricane victims, they will go to great lengths to obtain more supplies so that they can profit as much as possible. This does not mean it is a good thing when a family

has to spend a considerable portion of their remaining wealth on obtaining the basics necessary to survive a disaster. A good situation would be one in which, after a tragedy, everyone just pitched in to help each other out, with nobody thinking about how much money they could make. Actually, a good situation would be one in which we had prevented the tragedy to begin with, and it's worth bearing that in mind in order to remind us what our ultimate goals really are. If rent control makes landlords less likely to repair broken fixtures, that might be an argument that on balance, the rent control law we have designed will make things worse for tenants, but it doesn't say anything about whether it's "good" to have selfish landlords who will extract as much money as possible from their tenants.

The difference between 'better' and 'good' is why I consider utopian visions valuable. If we merely look at whether things have gotten better, we might be congratulating ourselves for progress despite still being far away from a tolerable situation. On the left, we often talk about the need to create "a better world." But this is slightly misleading; in fact, we should want to create an excellent world. It would be a better world if students had a maximum of \$100,000 in debt rather than \$1,000,000. But it won't be an excellent world until worries about debt are nonexistent. It might actually be less cruel to have institutionalized flogging rather than our existing system of mass incarceration. But flogging is horrific too, and when we measure reality against our principled idea of the good, rather than against some other unsatisfactory alternative, we are able to say both of those things are bad and think through what we'd actually like.

Of course, economists will say that in a world of constraint, you can never have everything. There will always be trade-offs; things cannot be perfect, they can only be the best of our available options. So, for example, even if we may be repulsed by sweatshops, they are still the best option. This is, of course, bunk. But one problem with seeing the world this way is that it stifles one's ability to think creatively about how to find new possibilities. If I say 'Well, there are two options: Option A and Option B, and B is better than A,' then I may be taking a small step toward progress. But if I have a notion of the good, and I see both A and B as thoroughly inadequate, then the question I will ask myself is 'How can I create a new option, Option C, one I'm actually satisfied with?' This is how leftists think: Instead of accepting 'brutal exploitative agricultural labor' and 'brutal exploitative sweatshop labor with marginally better compensation' as the two options, we ask how to get rid of exploitation altogether. This doesn't mean we are opposed to marginal improvements. It means we aren't satisfied with them. But if you do think in terms of 'better' rather than 'good,' you have no way of articulating that dissatisfaction, or explaining why what people like

Pinker call “progress” is so infuriatingly inadequate.

Better and good are mixed up all the time. If an employer is told their wages are too low, they may reply that they pay “well above the market rate for the area.” But that tells us very little. If the market rate isn’t nearly enough to pay one’s rent and raise a family, then it’s no defense to say one pays “more than almost nothing.” The question is not how it compares to everything else, the question is whether it conforms to a set of principles. In a world full of injustice and misery, relative progress might not tell us much about how we’re doing. What matters most is not whether we’re doing better than before, but whether we’re doing as well as we can and should.

This obsession makes complete sense. After all, if taken seriously, the Don’t Worry, Everything is Better Now narrative is perhaps the most compelling defense of global capitalism out there. Sure, the wealthiest individuals might own a grossly disproportionate amount of global wealth, the rules may be rigged in favor of the rich, and hundreds of millions may continue to live without their basic needs met, but the believers are quick to point out that the system that produced these conditions has done more for the poor than any other. Global capitalism may not be perfect but the benefits it brings—namely, eradicating poverty as we know it—far outweighs its costs.

“Economics taught me that two-billion of my brothers and sisters had escaped poverty in my own lifetime. This was a modern-day miracle. I had to find its source. Virtually all development economists, across the mainstream political spectrum, agreed on the core explanation. In short, it was the American free enterprise system, spreading around the world, that had affected this anti-poverty miracle.”

It is no wonder that ardent defenders of neoliberal capitalism, like Brooks, Pinker, and Gates, believe that they are real advocates of the marginalized and leftists are backwards ideologues. Once you accept this narrative—that global capitalism has indeed been responsible for lifting billions out of poverty and radically improving the lives of even the most marginalized—then calls for systemic or structural change seem misguided at best and sinister at worst. Defenders of the status quo are framed as agents for progress and social justice while leftists calling for change are portrayed either as blindly ignorant or uninterested in actually helping the marginalized.

The received wisdom comes to us from all directions: Poverty rates are declining and extreme poverty will soon be eradicated. The World Bank, the governments of wealthy countries, and—most importantly—the United

Nations Millennium Campaign all agree on this narrative. Relax, they tell us. The world is getting better, thanks to the spread of free market capitalism and Western aid. Development is working, and soon, one day in the very near future, poverty will be no more.

It is a comforting story, but unfortunately it is just not true. Poverty is not disappearing as quickly as they say. In fact, according to some measures, poverty has been getting significantly worse. If we are to be serious about eradicating poverty, we need to cut through the sugarcoating and face up to some hard facts.

The most powerful expression of the poverty reduction narrative comes from the UN's Millennium Campaign. Building on the Millennium Declaration of 2000, the Campaign's main goal has been to reduce global poverty by half by 2015—an objective that it proudly claims to have achieved ahead of schedule. But if we look beyond the celebratory rhetoric, it becomes clear that this assertion is deeply misleading.

The world's governments first pledged to end extreme poverty during the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996. They committed to reducing the number of undernourished people by half before 2015, which, given the population at the time, meant slashing the poverty headcount by 836 million. Many critics claimed that this goal was inadequate given that, with the right redistributive policies, extreme poverty could be ended much more quickly.

But instead of making the goals more robust, global leaders surreptitiously diluted it. When the Millennium Declaration was signed, the goal was rewritten as “Millennium Developmental Goal 1” (MDG-1) and was altered to halve the proportion (as opposed to the absolute number) of the world's people living on less than a dollar a day. By shifting the focus to income levels and switching from absolute numbers to proportional ones, the target became much easier to achieve. Given the rate of population growth, the new goal was effectively reduced by 167 million. And that was just the beginning.

After the UN General Assembly adopted MDG-1, the goal was diluted two more times. First, they changed it from halving the proportion of impoverished people in the world to halving the proportion of impoverished people in developing countries, thus taking advantage of an even faster-growing demographic denominator. Second, they moved the baseline of analysis from 2000 back to 1990, thus retroactively including all poverty reduction accomplished by China throughout the 1990s, due in no part whatsoever to the Millennium Campaign.

This statistical sleight-of-hand narrowed the target by a further 324 million. So what started as a goal to reduce the poverty headcount by 836 million has magically become only 345 million—less than half the original

number. Having dramatically redefined the goal, the Millennium Campaign can claim that poverty has been halved when in fact it has not. The triumphalist narrative hailing the death of poverty rests on an illusion of deceitful accounting.

But there's more. Not only have the goalposts been moved, the definition of poverty itself has been massaged in a way that serves the poverty reduction narrative. What is considered the threshold for poverty—the “poverty line”—is normally calculated by each nation for itself, and is supposed to reflect what an average human adult needs to subsist. In 1990 an economist at the World Bank noticed that the poverty lines of a group of the world's poorest countries clustered around \$1 per day. On his recommendation, the World Bank adopted this as the first-ever International Poverty Line (IPL).

But the IPL proved to be somewhat troublesome. Using this threshold, the World Bank announced in its 2000 annual report that “the absolute number of those living on \$1 per day or less continues to increase. The worldwide total rose from 1.2 billion in 1987 to 1.5 billion today and, if recent trends persist, will reach 1.9 billion by 2015.” This was alarming news, especially because it suggested that the free-market reforms imposed by the World Bank and the IMF on Global South countries during the 1980s and 1990s in the name of “development” were actually making things worse.

This amounted to a PR nightmare for the World Bank. Not long after the report was released, however, their story changed dramatically and they announced the exact opposite news: While poverty had been increasing steadily for some two centuries, they said, the introduction of free-market policies had actually reduced the number of impoverished people by 400 million between 1981 and 2001.

This new story was possible because the Bank shifted the IPL from the original \$1.02 (at 1985 PPP) to \$1.08 (at 1993 PPP), which, given inflation, was lower in real terms. With this tiny change—a flick of an economist's wrist—the world was magically getting better, and the Bank's PR problem was instantly averted. This new IPL is the one that the Millennium Campaign chose to adopt.

The IPL was changed a second time in 2008, to \$1.25 (at 2005 PPP). And once again the story improved overnight. The \$1.08 IPL made it seem as though the poverty headcount had been reduced by 316 million people between 1990 and 2005. But the new IPL—even lower than the last, in real terms—inflated the number to 437 million, creating the illusion that an additional 121 million souls had been “saved” from the jaws of debilitating poverty. Not surprisingly, the Millennium Campaign adopted the new IPL, which allowed it to claim yet further chimerical gains.

We need to seriously rethink these poverty metrics. The dollar-a-day

IPL is based on the national poverty lines of the 15 poorest countries, but these lines provide a poor foundation given that many are set by bureaucrats with very little data. More importantly, they tell us nothing about what poverty is like in wealthier countries. A 1990 survey in Sri Lanka found that 35 percent of the population fell under the national poverty line. But the World Bank, using the IPL, reported only four percent in the same year. In other words, the IPL makes poverty seem much less serious than it actually is.

The US government itself calculated that in 2005 the average person in the US would need at least \$4.50 per day simply to meet minimum nutritional requirements. The same story can be told in many other countries, where a dollar a day is inadequate for human existence. In India, for example, children living just above the IPL still have a 60 percent chance of being malnourished.

Here are a few points to keep in mind. Using the current \$1.90 line shows that only 700 million people live in poverty. But note that the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) says that 815 million people do not have enough calories to sustain even "minimal" human activity. 1.5 billion are food insecure and do not have enough calories to sustain "normal" human activity. And 2.1 billion suffer from malnutrition. How can there be fewer poor people than hungry and malnourished people? If \$1.90 is inadequate to achieve basic nutrition and sustain normal human activity, then it's too low—period. It's time for Gates and all the humanitarian billionaire douchebags to stop using it. Lifting people above this line doesn't mean lifting them out of poverty, "extreme" or otherwise.

Remember: \$1.90 is the equivalent of what that amount of money could buy in the US in 2011. To live at this level would be like thirty-five people trying to survive in Britain on a single minimum wage, with no benefits of any kind, no gifts, borrowing, scavenging, begging, or savings to draw on (since these are all included as income in poverty calculations). That goes beyond any definition of 'extreme.' It is patently absurd. It is an insult to humanity

In fact, even the World Bank has repeatedly stated that the line is too low to be used in any but the poorest countries, and should not be used to inform policy. They created updated poverty lines for lower-middle-income (\$3.20/day) and upper-middle-income (\$5.50/day) countries. At those lines, some 2.4 billion people are in poverty today—more than three times higher than you would have people believe.

But even these figures are not good enough. The USDA states that about \$6.70/day is necessary for achieving basic nutrition. Some argue that people need about \$7.40 if they are to achieve normal human life expectancy.

Others conclude that around \$8 is necessary to reduce infant mortality by a meaningful margin. A few have argued that since the poverty line is based on purchasing power in the US, then it should be linked to the US poverty line—so around \$15/day.

“The level at which one sets an arbitrary cutoff like ‘the poverty line’ is irrelevant—the entire distribution has shifted, so the trend is the same wherever you set it.”

Not so fast. In fact, the story changes quite a bit—and you know it. If we use \$7.40 per day, we see a decline in the proportion of people living in poverty, but it’s not nearly as dramatic as the rosy narrative would have it. In 1981 a staggering 71 percent lived in poverty. As of 2013 it hovers at 58 percent. Suddenly the grand story of progress seems tepid, mediocre, and—in a world that’s as fabulously rich as ours—completely obscene. There is nothing worth celebrating about a world where inequality is so extreme that 58 percent of people are in poverty, while a few dozen billionaires have more than all of their wealth combined.

That’s proportions. Don’t get me wrong: proportions are an important indicator—and we should pay attention to it. But absolute numbers are equally important. In fact, that is the metric that the world’s governments first agreed to target in the Rome Declaration in 1996, the precursor to the Millennium Development Goals. The goalposts were shifted to proportions in the following years, which created the impression of faster progress. But really now it’s a moot point: if the goal is to end poverty, what matters is absolute numbers. Certainly that’s what matters from the perspective of poor people themselves.

And if we look at absolute numbers, the trend changes completely. The poverty rate has worsened dramatically since 1981, from 3.2 billion to 4.2 billion, according to World Bank data. Six times higher than you would have people believe. That’s not progress, in my book—that’s a disgrace. It is a crushing indictment of our global economic system, which is clearly failing the majority of humanity. Mainstream claims about global poverty intentionally skate around this fact. That is not responsible scholarship.

The billionaire parasites and their flunkies like to invoke the poverty numbers to make claims about the legitimacy of the existing global economic system. They say the system is working for the poor, so people should stop complaining about it. When it comes to assessing such a claim, it’s really neither absolute numbers nor proportions that matter. What matters, rather, is the extent of global poverty vis-à-vis our capacity to end it. Our capacity to end poverty (the cost of ending poverty as a proportion of the income of

the non-poor) has increased many times faster than the proportional poverty rate has decreased (to use your preferred measure again). By this metric we are doing worse than ever before. Indeed, our civilization is regressing. Why? Because the vast majority of the yields of our global economy are being captured by the world's rich.

Only five percent of new income from global growth goes to the poorest 60 percent of humanity—people living on less than \$7.40/day. This is neither acknowledged as a problem nor are attempts made to defend it. Instead they just ignore it, I suppose because it undermines such claims about how well the economy is working for poor people.

Here's how well it's working: on our existing trajectory, it will take more than one-hundred years to end poverty at \$1.90/day and over two-hundred years to end it at \$7.40/day. Let that sink in. And to get there with the existing system—in other words, without a fairer distribution of income—we will have to grow the global economy to 175 times its present size. Even if such an outlandish feat were possible, it would drive climate change and ecological breakdown to the point of undermining any gains against poverty.

It doesn't have to be this way, of course. We can end poverty right now simply by making the rules of our global economy fairer for the world's majority.

Make sure to bear this in mind next time you see someone pointing out that “global extreme poverty is in decline.” What that means is that people are crossing from an extremely small amount of money to a slightly larger but still comparatively minuscule amount of money. Their incomes are still essentially nonexistent when we put them next to the incomes of the people at the top. The gap is just unfathomably wide. Those who talk about how capitalism is reducing poverty pat themselves on the back because hundreds of millions of people have gone from having \$1.50 a day to \$4 a day, from being malnourished to being able to afford a bowl of soup.

“We've significantly reduced the number of famines!”

The question, however, is not:

“Did the lives of the poor get better?”

but

“How much better would the lives of the poor be if we did not live in a world where a tiny number of people own nearly everything?”

If you just look at whether things are ‘better’ to determine whether they are ‘good,’ then the Gilded Age was good because it was better than the Europe during the Middle Ages.

Why assume that the correct comparison to be making is the one between the world as it was, say, 200 years ago, and the world as it is today? You might argue that comparing the present with the past is stacking the deck. Of course things are better than they were. But they’re surely nowhere near as good as they ought to be. To pick some obvious examples, humanity indisputably has the capacity to eliminate extreme poverty, end famines, or radically reduce human damage to the climate. But we’ve done none of these, and the fact that things aren’t as terrible as they were in 1800 is arguably beside the point.

Ironically, given their reliance on cognitive biases to explain our predilection for negativity, the New Optimists may be in the grip of one themselves: the ‘anchoring bias,’ which describes our tendency to rely too heavily on certain pieces of information when making judgments. If you start from the fact that plague victims once languished in the streets of European cities, it’s natural to conclude that life these days is wonderful. But if you start from the position that we could have eliminated famines, or reversed global warming, the fact that such problems persist may provoke a different kind of judgment.

The argument that we should be feeling happier than we are because life on the planet as a whole is getting better, on average, also misunderstands a fundamental truth about how happiness works: our judgments of the world result from making specific comparisons that feel relevant to us, not on adopting the view from outer space. If people in your small American town are far less economically secure than they were in living memory, or if you’re a young British person facing the prospect that you might never own a home, it’s not particularly consoling to be told that more and more Chinese people are entering the middle classes. In the US Midwest many have frequently questioned such optimism on the grounds that their own lives didn’t seem to be on an upward trajectory. They say, ‘You keep saying the world’s getting better, but it doesn’t feel like that round here.’ And our perky little optimists will reply, ‘Yes, but this isn’t the whole world! Are you not even a little bit cheered by the fact that really poor Africans are getting a bit less poor?’

There is a sense in which this is a fair point. But there’s another sense in which it’s a completely irrelevant one.

This is the same logic that causes people like Nicholas Kristof to argue that because sweatshops are supposedly better than farm labor, there is a progressive case for sweatshops and we should defend them. This is one

of the differences between liberalism and leftism: liberalism argues for the least bad of several bad options, while leftism insists on having a better set of options.

For our modern liberals, it is obvious that careers should be open to talent and it is an outrage when barriers of any kind prevent the able from rising to the top. Another term for this understanding of equality is meritocracy, which is one of the great, defining faiths of the professional class. Meritocracy is about winners, and ensuring that everyone has a chance to become one. The areas in which liberals made the most significant progress—gay rights, inclusion of women in higher education, the end of de jure racial discrimination—are the battles they fought or are fighting in favor of making the meritocracy more meritocratic. The areas in which they have suffered their worst defeats—collective action to provide universal public goods, mitigating rising income inequality—are those that fall outside the meritocracy’s purview.

The difference between meritocracy and socialism is I don’t want everyone to have a fair shot at the 15% of non-shitty lives, I want everyone to have a decent life.

Liberals believe that the economic and political system is a machine that has broken down and needs fixing. Leftists believe that the machine is not broken. Rather, it is working perfectly well; the problem is that it is a death machine designed to chew up human lives. You don’t fix the death machine, you smash it to bits.

The narrative is nothing more than a carefully crafted fantasy. At its core are five interlocking myths about poverty, capitalism, development, and progress. Let’s evaluate these myths one at a time.

Myth 1: We have nearly eliminated extreme poverty in the last 40 years.

A chart from Our World in Data (OWD) tells a compelling story. It shows that the number of people living in extreme poverty has plummeted from almost 90 percent of humanity at the outset of the Industrial Revolution to around 10 percent today. This trend is so promising that in 2015 the World Bank predicted we could conceivably eliminate extreme poverty altogether by 2030. It is no wonder that true believers are obsessed with this chart: For them, it represents empirical evidence that global capitalism really is “the rising tide that lifts all boats.”

There is only one problem: This chart is completely misleading—in fact, it’s borderline insulting. First, the claim that it shows the “number of people in poverty” going back to 1820 is inaccurate. The World Bank did not actually start measuring poverty until 1981, so the database used for

the pre-1981 numbers is based on rough and incomplete estimates of GDP rather than accurate measurements of poverty. If we want to empirically assess the changing rates of poverty, we should focus on the time period after 1981—a focus which, in many ways, actually favors the believer’s narrative. Since 1981, the World Bank data shows a steep decline in the proportion of individuals in extreme poverty: from nearly half of all humanity (44 percent) to a mere fraction (10 percent). On its face, this is quite an impressive outcome. Yet, these data contain a fundamental flaw. They say nothing about how we define poverty in the first place.

Global poverty is calculated according to what is called the International Poverty Line (IPL)—an international estimate of how much income is needed to meet the basic needs of life, adjusted for the purchasing power of each country. For instance, the current IPL was set by the World Bank at \$1.90 per day, meaning that anyone who earns their country’s equivalent of \$1.90 US per day is considered to be in “extreme poverty.” What the OWD chart shows, then, is the percentage of people in the world who are now earning more than their country’s equivalent of \$1.90/day.

The problem is that the \$1.90/day IPL is not a meaningful measure of poverty. Remember, the \$1.90/day IPL is the international equivalent of living in the United States on only \$1.90/day. Anyone living in the US knows that living on \$2/day is inadequate to even afford breakfast, let alone adequate nutrition, shelter, or clothing (and we can just forget health care). This flaw becomes even more clear when we compare poverty data to international hunger data, which reveals that anywhere between 115 million and 1.8 billion people who have supposedly been “lifted out of poverty” by the World Bank’s standards can’t even afford enough food to meet their caloric needs. This disparity calls the legitimacy of the \$1.90/day IPL into question. After all, if “living above the poverty line” does not even mean that one can afford to meet their basic nutritional needs, then how can we call this line a meaningful measurement of poverty?

Unsurprisingly, most serious development economists and international agencies (including the World Bank itself) agree that the \$1.90/day IPL is far too low—even if they disagree on how high the IPL should be. The USDA states that around \$6.70/day is necessary for achieving basic nutrition. Multiple scholars agree that \$7.40 is the bare minimum ethical poverty line (one that would allow the poor to achieve a normal life expectancy). Even development economist Charles Kenny (whose salary is paid by the Gates Foundation) wants a \$10 per day line while his colleague Lant Pritchett argues that the threshold should be no less than \$15 per day.

When we apply any of these more accurate thresholds, the picture of global progress against poverty changes dramatically. Even if we use the

relatively conservative poverty line of \$7.40 per day, we find that global poverty has only dropped from 71 percent of people in 1981 to around 58 percent today—a mere 13 percent reduction. Of course, that is still progress, but it is a far cry from the notion that we have nearly eliminated extreme poverty altogether.

But when we look at absolute numbers, the news gets worse. Remember that guy touting free markets for lifting “over 2 billion people” out of poverty? Well, under the \$7.40/day threshold, it turns out that nearly 1 billion have been added to the ranks of the global poor since 1981. Let that sink in for a minute. There are 1 billion additional people living in conditions of extreme poverty today compared to 40 years ago. That is no cause for celebration. It is a tragedy.

When we do bring the number of people living on less than \$1.90/day to zero, as the World Bank predicts, the Economist will celebrate the true End of Suffering, Steven Pinker will write another celebratory book, and Bill Gates will receive a Nobel Peace Prize. Meanwhile billions will remain unable to afford to meet the most basic necessities for themselves and their families, and their ranks may keep increasing.

Myth 2: Global capitalism is responsible for the gains we have made against poverty.

Some have pointed out that just because people can't afford the basic necessities of life, doesn't mean their lives aren't getting better (for instance, their incomes may have risen from 50 cents to \$2 per day). In other words, just because we haven't gotten close to alleviating extreme poverty doesn't mean we haven't made considerable progress in reducing the poverty gap.

Of course, if people don't even have the means to buy enough food to meet their basic caloric needs—let alone take care of health care, housing, transportation, and the like—then we cannot say they have been “lifted out of poverty.” Period. Still, they have a point: On the whole, things have at least gotten better for the global poor since 1981. The question, then, is ‘why?’ Is this progress attributable to the global capitalist model of development peddled by international institutions, Western countries, and mainstream economists since the late 1980s?

Not quite. For the poor in most countries of the Global South, things haven't been getting much better at all. A closer look at the data reveals that the gains made against global poverty in the last 40 years stem primarily from one region: East Asia. If we take just one country, China, out of the global poverty equation, then even under the \$1.90 poverty standard we find that the extreme poverty headcount is the exact same as it was in 1981.

And when we look at proportions we find a similar story. While East Asia has made consistent progress against poverty, South Asia only began seeing a decline after 2000 and Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa have made shockingly little progress at all.

The impact of East Asia becomes even more obvious when looking at the \$7.40 per day line. While looking at the world as a whole showed modest progress against poverty since 1981—from 71 percent to 58 percent—the picture changes entirely when you take China out of the equation. Under the \$7.40 per day line minus China, we find that over a billion people have been added to the ranks of the global poor and that the proportion of people in poverty has barely budged.

Why does this matter? The East Asian countries that have made the most progress against poverty—namely, China, Korea, and Japan—have explicitly rejected the sort of *laissez-faire*, free market orthodoxy often heralded as the secret ingredient to economic development. These countries took advantage of extremely high tariffs, protected infant industries through import substitution, “pirated” Western inventions, invested in massive state-owned enterprises, and allowed for high-levels of inflation—all of which directly contradict the neoliberal development model characterized by free trade, privatization, strict patents, deregulation, and public austerity. Meanwhile, the countries in Latin America and Africa who more closely followed the neoliberal development path failed to develop at nearly the same levels.

Laissez-faire capitalism cannot take credit for the gains made against poverty in the last 40 years. If anything, neoliberal policies have significantly impeded this progress. At the very least, the story is far more complicated than the believers would have us believe.

Myth 3: While our current economic system isn’t perfect, we just can’t afford to risk trying something different.

On the contrary, it seems we can’t afford not to try something different. Some have calculated that if we maintain the fastest rate of income growth that the poorest have enjoyed since 1981 (assuming the absence of any financial crises or economic downturns), it will take 100 years to eradicate \$1.90 per day poverty and 207 years to eradicate \$7.40 per day poverty. Others determined that it would take over 250 years for the income of the poorest 10 percent to merely reach the global average income of \$11 per day. Worse yet, to reach the \$7.40 per day level GDP would have to be 175 times its current level, at which point the average global income would be \$1.3 million/year. In other words, under our current economic system, the

average income would have to be over a million dollars per year just so that the poor could live on \$7.40 per day.

But here's the real kicker. In 2017, nearly 20,000 scientists from 184 countries issued a "warning to humanity" that our consumption levels are on "a collision course with the natural world" that will result in "widespread misery and catastrophic biodiversity loss" if we don't start acting now to reverse this trajectory. The UN's IPCC report—which some scientists critiqued as "too conservative"—came with a similar message: Time is running out—we must act now to significantly cut emissions or face dire consequences. Even a report co-written by a former fossil fuel executive called climate change "a near- to mid-term existential threat to human civilization" citing the forced relocation of billions of people from unlivable conditions, the collapse of much of the world's agriculture, massive water shortages, and natural disasters on a scale we've never seen. It isn't surprising, then, that our best estimates indicate that we need something closer to degrowth if we want to achieve the CO₂ emissions levels needed to meet reasonable warming targets.

If we hope to save our planet—or at the very least stave off mass human misery and financial catastrophe—we cannot afford to remain on our current trajectory for the next 10 years, let alone the next 250. The scale of economic growth needed to alleviate poverty under capitalism would mean catastrophic climate change beyond the levels at which even the fiercest climate hawks are willing to make predictions. The classic "capitalism may be flawed, but it is the best we got" argument is simply irreconcilable with the environmental realities of the twenty-first century. If we continue on our current trajectory, then the lengthy timeline to alleviate poverty and the resulting inequality will be the least of our problems. The status quo is a catastrophic risk to all of humanity. What we can't afford to do is ignore alternatives.

Myth 4: At least Western countries are trying to alleviate poverty. If it weren't for the billions Western countries give to the rest of the world, who knows how bad things would be in the Global South?

It is true that Global North countries give billions in financial support to Global South every year. But this narrative changes dramatically when we look at the flow of money in the opposite direction. In 2016, researchers tallied up the total net outflows between rich and poor countries, finding that while \$1.3 trillion is transferred every year from Global North countries to the Global South—in the form of foreign aid, foreign direct investment, remittances—approximately \$3.3 trillion is transferred in the

other direction—mostly due to illicit financial flows such as multinational corporations cheating poor countries out of much-needed tax revenue. In fact, they calculated that that poor countries have sent a total of \$16.3 trillion in net outflows to the Global North since 1980. In other words, for every \$1 of aid that the South receives, they lose \$24. The reality is that aid is effectively flowing in reverse.

And that's not even considering the monies extracted in the name of protecting intellectual property. The real question is not a matter of how bad things would be without us—it is a matter of just how much better things would be if powerful countries didn't rig the rules of the global economy in their favor.

Myth 5: Eradicating poverty is too difficult—we should just give up.

In the face of seemingly intractable problems, it is easy to lose hope. However, poverty is not an intractable problem—in fact, we have a greater capacity to truly eliminate poverty now than ever before in history. It would cost only 3.9 percent of the total incomes of those who live at more than double the poverty line to eradicate poverty for good (even less per person if the super-rich were to pay a higher portion). That is worth repeating: We could end extreme poverty tomorrow and it would cost less than 5 cents on the dollar. What this means is that the poverty we face today is not the result of resource scarcity; we have more than enough to eradicate global poverty 20 times over. For most of human history, poverty has existed because humans lacked certain basic resources. Today poverty exists because we fail to distribute those resources in a remotely just way. We lack the political will, not the economic means, to end poverty once and for all.

And this brings us full circle: Why is it that we lack the will to end global poverty? The answer is obvious: Every day we are inundated with stories about how great everything is already. We are told that we are living in an age of unprecedented global progress. That, thanks to our current economic system, human welfare has increased more in the last 40 years than the previous 400. That all we need to do is sit back and wait for the rising tides of Global Capitalism to lift us all to Utopia.

Denial is a powerful sedative, and there is no more effective form of denial than clinging to the notion that everything is just fine. Without it we all might start questioning a system that benefits the few while leaving so many behind. Without it we may start fighting back. Without it the status quo may just begin to crumble before our eyes.

The first step to recovery is recognizing the problem. We have celebrated the end of poverty while billions remain unable to meet their most basic

needs. We have patted ourselves on the back for charity while taking far more than we would ever give. We have misidentified the root causes of genuine progress. And we have worshiped an economic system that not only produced morally abhorrent outcomes but poses an existential threat to the future of our planet. Only once we stare this harsh reality in the face can we ever hope to find ourselves capable of imagining a more just and equitable world.

Chapter Four

Societal Blueprints

Jesus & the Volcano Virgins

In the would you rescue a child from a pond thought experiment, a strict utilitarian would not rescue the child from the shallow pond at all: he would leave the child to drown, sell his unmuddied clothes, and donate the proceeds to a charity that could save more than one child with the money.

Effective Altruism: A growing social movement, increasingly influential among Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and within the rationalist community, which characterized itself as “an intellectual movement that uses reason and evidence to improve the world as much as possible.” An effectively altruistic act, as opposed to an emotionally altruistic one, might involve a college student deciding that, rather than becoming a doctor and spending her career curing blindness in the developing world, her time would be better spent becoming a Wall Street hedge fund manager and donating enough of her income to charity to pay for several doctors to cure a great many more people of blindness.

People have the potential to be good, but when you live in a society that doesn't groom any goodness, this is what you get.

A life lived without moral/spiritual values is not just incomplete but depraved.

“If we are to suppose, a miracle to be something so entirely out of the course of what is called nature, that she must go out of that course to accomplish it, and we see an account given of such miracle by the person who said he saw it, it raises a question in the mind very easily decided, which is, is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie?”

Human Suffering: clinging to that which changes

One day, two policemen were driving up the road when, just beyond the railing, they saw a young man about to jump. One of the policemen bolted from the car and grabbed the fellow just as he was stepping off the ledge. His momentum threatened to carry both of them over the cliff, but the policeman refused to let go. Somehow he held on long enough for his partner to arrive and pull the two of them to safety. When a newspaper reporter asked, “Why didn’t you let go? You would have been killed,” he answered:

“I couldn’t... I couldn’t let go. If I had, I couldn’t have lived another day of my life.”

Do you realize what had suddenly happened to that policeman? He had given himself over to death to save a stranger. Everything else in his life dropped off. His duty to his family, his duty to his job, his duty to his own career, all of his wishes and hopes for life, just disappeared. What mattered was saving that young man, even at the cost of his own life.

How can this be? A psychological crisis represents the breakthrough of a metaphysical reality, which is that you and the other are two aspects of one life, and your apparent separateness is but an effect of the way we experience forms under the conditions of space and time. Our true reality is our identity and unity with all life.

“Of course one doesn’t need to justify it on grounds other than religion. Plenty of people believe in religions. So-called rationality is also merely another belief system, as is deciding not to believe in God.”

Believing in things that may not exist—or disbelieving in things that may exist—is a peculiarity of your culture, not a universal human activity. Because it’s universal among you, you assume it’s universal among humans in general.

The cultural fallacy. The belief that the ideas that come to us as the received wisdom of our culture are innate to the human mind—that they actually arise from the structure of the human mind itself. According to this particular cultural fallacy, someone who can’t tell the difference between right and wrong is either retarded or insane.

What exactly does ‘faith’ mean? As in ‘religious faith,’ ‘faith in God,’ et cetera. Isn’t it basically crazy to believe in something that there’s no proof of? Is there really any difference between what we call faith and some primitive tribe’s sacrificing virgins to volcanoes because they believe it’ll produce good weather? How can somebody have faith before he’s presented

with sufficient reason to have faith? Or is somehow needing to have faith a sufficient reason for having faith? But then what kind of need are we talking about?

Plenty of people can believe small aliens have a control room in their head that dictates everything the body does and it doesn't change the accuracy of the statement. Of course all belief systems humans have created are imperfect, so they will all have an element of irrationality. But when a system embraces irrationality, the false virtue of faith is invoked.

Faith was born out of our ignorance, as a result of our curiosity and desire to have a story to explain things, science is slowly taking its place, but of course being imperfect constructs, science can be affected by much of the same biases, preferences, and desires for power that we see have shaped what we call religions. So irrationality and faith can reside here too—just look at the Wuhan Flu panic.

Why did you choose to believe there are no dragons on the moon? Just because Aldrin didn't get set on fire isn't sufficient evidence, I'm sorry, the dragon must have been sleeping. 'Why can't we just find it with a telescope from earth?' Well... umm... it actually only lives on the dark side of the moon. 'Oh, then how come the probe didn't photograph it?' Oh, well it must live underground, yep that's it. 'Hey, so we tunneled in and couldn't find it, what did we do wrong?' Oh you silly fool, the great dragon exists on its own plane, it would only allow you to see it if he wants you to; live a good life and he may appear, and when you die you go to the great treasure hoard in the sky.

You can believe whatever you want personally, but the line must stop at your body when harms are concerned. You wanna beat a living creature as punishment for sins? Beat yourself but you don't get to touch another. This is what is referred to when demanding that you provide justification that is at least more rational than faith. Because if you are familiar with history, you are aware of the numerous horrors committed in the name of irrational justifications, often faith in particular.

What are the proper limits of religious freedom? Marianne Thieme, leader of the Party for the Animals in the Netherlands, offers this answer:

“Religious freedom stops where human or animal suffering begins.”

The Party for the Animals, the only animal-rights party to be represented in a national parliament, has proposed a law requiring that all animals be stunned before slaughter. The proposal has united Islamic and Jewish leaders in defense of what they see as a threat to their religious freedom,

because their religious doctrines prohibit eating meat from animals that are not conscious when killed.

But prohibiting the ritual slaughter of animals does not stop Jews or Muslims from practicing their religion. During the debate on the Party for the Animals' proposal, Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs, Chief Rabbi of the Netherlands, told members of Parliament:

“If we no longer have people who can do ritual slaughter in the Netherlands, we will stop eating meat.”

That, of course, is what one should do, if one adheres to a religion that requires animals to be slaughtered in a manner less humane than can be achieved by modern techniques. Neither Islam nor Judaism upholds a requirement to eat meat.

And like many religious practices, this holy requirement is likely related to spreading a beneficial tip on healthy living. If you just come across an unconscious animal, it's probably sick—meaning you shouldn't eat it. And the easiest way to both spread that knowledge and ensure its adherence is to bake that shit into your religion.

Restricting the legitimate defense of religious freedom to rejecting proposals that stop people from practicing their religion makes it possible to resolve many other disputes in which it is claimed that freedom of religion is at stake. For example, allowing men and women to sit in any part of a bus does not violate orthodox Jews' religious freedom, because Jewish law does not command that one use public transport. It's just a convenience that one can do without—and orthodox Jews can hardly believe that the laws to which they adhere were intended to make life maximally convenient. Likewise, the Obama administration's requirement to provide health insurance that covers contraception does not prevent Catholics from practicing their religion. Catholicism does not oblige its adherents to run hospitals and universities. The government already exempts parishes and dioceses, thereby drawing a distinction between institutions that are central to the freedom to practice one's religion and those that are peripheral to it. Of course, the Catholic Church would be understandably reluctant to give up its extensive networks of hospitals and universities. My guess is that, before doing so, they would come to see the provision of health-insurance coverage for contraception as compatible with their religious teachings. But, if the Church made the opposite decision, and handed over its hospitals and universities to bodies that were willing to provide the coverage, Catholics would still be free to worship and follow their religion's teachings.

Although the lower house of the Dutch Parliament overwhelmingly passed a ban on ritual slaughter, the upper house rejected it. The issue was

resolved by the government brokering a characteristic Dutch compromise: ritual slaughter continues, but a veterinarian must be present, and must stun the animal if it is still conscious 40 seconds after its throat is cut.

So God's got only 40 seconds to get off.

“Much of what convinces me of the existence of God is going to fall into the area of what you do not consider evidence.

- The existence of the universe and life itself.
- The existence of language.
- The existence of a conscience.
- The mystery of consciousness.
- The complexity of the brain.
- The experiences I have with spiritual attack, deception, and temptation, and how the techniques in scripture for dealing with these by not relying on my will and mental powers, but by trusting in the power of God to free me from the temptations, see through the lies, and fend off attacks of unwanted thoughts, compulsive guilt and doubts, et cetera.
- The problems that beset any person have solutions in scripture. If I feel guilt for doing something I know is wrong, I can repent of it, be free of guilt because I am now not the same person inside who chose to do those things. I am free from my past to change. I can forget my failures, press onward toward being the kind of man I believe I should be.
- I am oriented toward love for others as my main goal in life. I consider myself a servant to others, and I can forget the drive to satisfy my own desires because I trust God to provide for my needs, and he does.
- I know I am not capable of being a good person by my own efforts. I've tried. But when I let go of trying and trust God to give me strength to obey his will, I find myself able.
- There is power in the truth I find in scripture. It has changed who I am. I deny myself, put my own old self to death each day, and endeavor to let God's will as exemplified by Jesus' example lead me, rather than doing what my desires prompt me to do.

None of this is likely to be at all convincing to you. God improves me through my surrender to him. I have found the

Bible to be reliable. So in an area of my real experiences with life that is outside of your conception of the universe, I find convincing evidence. I do not find physics to be a satisfactory explanation for the existence of the universe, and I do not find natural selection to be a satisfactory explanation of either the origin of life or of the manifest complexity and beauty of it. My skepticism is as great as yours, I think.”

If you stare long enough at anything, you will start to find similarities. The word ‘coincidence’ exists in order to stop people from seeing meaning where none exists.

Imagine a puddle waking up one morning and thinking, ‘This is an interesting world I find myself in—an interesting hole I find myself in—fits me rather neatly, doesn’t it? In fact it fits me staggeringly well, must have been made to have me in it!’

The Universe is a big place and despite our understandable fascination with the anthropic principle, the stark truth is that nearly all of it is incompatible with life—at least our carbon-based, water-dependent version of it. Given the abundance of other possible locations, if humans existed simply as a result of chance alone, we’d find ourselves—very briefly—somewhere in the very cold empty void of outer space, and would be dead almost instantly. Might this, in turn, contribute to the conclusion that our very existence is evidence of a beneficent designer?

But we’re not the outcome of a strictly random process: we find ourselves occupying the third planet from the Sun, which has sufficient oxygen, liquid water, moderate temperatures, and so forth. It isn’t a coincidence that we occupy a planet that is suitable for life as we know it, if only because we couldn’t survive where it isn’t. It’s no more amazing that the Earth isn’t a hot gas giant than the fact that no matter how tall or short a person might be, her legs are always precisely long enough to reach the ground.

To marvel at the fact of our existing is like a golf ball being amazed that it ended up wherever it did.

The deeper the mysteries of the universe, the less likely it is that whatever is responsible for them gives a damn about female dress codes or human sexual behaviour.

We may think our species genetically unique, and indeed it is, as every species is. But the mix of our DNAs is really an amalgam of all life’s DNA, and in many and varied ways that mix reaches back to a common origin at the dawn of life. One example of most recent common origin comes from our hunter ancestors, whose skill and knowledge were pivotal, as we’ve seen, in the recycling of animal carcasses. Since those carcasses were derived

from formidable live animals, which the hunters had to get to know well in order to hunt them effectively, we became empathetic. We learned that the precious, mysterious gift that we call 'life' may disappear suddenly when the animal is punctured with a spear or arrow. In no area did we know less and need to believe more than in that period after death, when a body is little changed and yet suddenly bereft of life. Where has 'it' gone, and where did it come from and why? We invented stories about human creation to try to make sense of our life and our fate, stories that specified our relationships to each other and to the earth, which then nurtured our morality.

Abstain from murder not because some ancient book forbids it, but because killing inflicts immense suffering on sentient beings. There is something deeply troubling and dangerous about people who avoid killing just because 'God says so.' Such people are motivated by obedience rather than compassion, and what will they do if they come to believe that their god commands them to kill heretics, witches, adulterers, or foreigners?

Among the moral concepts shared across the globe are proscriptions against murder and rape, as well as redress of wrongs. Within all human cultures, individuals tend to react with quick, automatic feelings of anger, contempt, and indignation when they see people causing suffering. The universality of these responses strongly suggests that intuitions about fairness, harm, and respect for authority has been built into the human mind by evolution. All children who are raised in a reasonable environment will come to develop these ideas, even if they are not taught by adults. No society, whether modern or preliterate, can function and cohere unless its citizens exist within a system of personal accountability that stigmatizes some actions and praises others.

What big societies need to really enforce cooperation is a powerful police force that knows not only people's every action but also their every thought. One possibility is an Orwellian thought police and a secret network of spies, but an even better solution is God. Even if someone can deceive other people and disguise his selfishness to others, God can see directly into his mind—and is able to punish him with eternal suffering. The evolutionary importance of cooperation is why God seems to care more about your morality than about your hobbies. Working together and suppressing selfishness is essential to the success of societies and the individuals living within them. Without close neighbors to observe actions, big, anonymous societies need an all-seeing, all-powerful divine judge.

Examining the characteristics ascribed to God across many different human societies—from the small tribes of aboriginal populations to the bustling cities of America—one finds that in the small tribes God is perceived as having a very different mind than He does in big societies like ours. The

gods of small tribes are seen as relatively less powerful and knowledgeable than the God of the Western world. These small gods are not omniscient or omnipotent like our Western gods, and often their power is limited to the village borders. You can even trick these gods and hide your sins from them.

However, as the size of societies increases, their gods also increase in power, knowledge, and moral orientation. In the largest and most anonymous societies, such as the United States, God is “big”—He is omniscient and omnipotent and has very strict ideas about what you ought to do. The concept of sin and punishment features very prominently in Christianity and other Abrahamic religions, and the gravest sins are those that put one’s own interests above social harmony, such as murder, adultery, theft, and jealousy. In Dante’s “Inferno,” the lowest levels of hell are occupied by those who betrayed their families, their friends, and their lords.

Not only does believing in God come with the specter of Hell, but unlike other people, God cannot be tricked. Like Santa Claus, God is always watching your behavior and keeping a list of all your naughty deeds. Feeling watched by God has the same effect on our behavior as being watched by other people—we suddenly feel self-aware and are more likely to act in socially desirable ways. Even more than God, another supernatural mind—the Devil—offers a powerful corrective against wrongdoing, because he most vividly represents the punishment for selfishness: an eternity in hell. In early thought Satan lacked the supernatural powers—and evilness—he is now seen as possessing. The original translation of the Hebrew word *satan* means something like a stumbling block that stands in the way of achieving a goal. Although this obstruction can be negative, it can also be positive, such as when God places barriers in people’s path to imprudent actions. As God became more powerful and moralizing, so too did Satan become more immoral, and the idea of stumbling transformed into “the fall” from grace.

Religion at its most fundamental level is a road map for how to live and explain the world. It can of course be corrupted into a powerful tool of coercion, manipulation, and oppression.

A lot of people tend to go where they find theology that matches their own opinions. It’s much easier for people, rather than being challenged by the Bible, to find some version of the faith that matches what their preexisting belief structure is.

One general rule for helping supernatural ideas stick is “minimal counter-intuitiveness”—when religious concepts are surprising but not too surprising. Consider two different hypothetical supernatural agents. The first is a seemingly normal man named Kitus, who can make himself invisible, hear any conversation on Earth, and be killed only by making him eat a plant grown deep in the Amazon rain forest. The second is a life-form named

R443TTS that frequently looks like a thick paste but can also transform into a feathered hat. It speaks only in clicks and whistles, eats only nickels from 1979, and visits other universes every other Tuesday in months that end with -er. Which one would you guess has more cognitive staying power?

If you said the first, you are right (and might consider calling yourself prophet). People tend to believe in agents that are mostly normal—Kitus is just a person with a couple of special characteristics, whereas R443TTS is abnormal in every respect. Minimally counter-intuitive agents are those that fit squarely into our category of ‘agent’ (or person) but are just a bit different, which makes them emotionally evocative. Minimal counter-intuitiveness can help explain why more people are Christians than are Scientologists: Jesus was a reasonably normal guy who died for your sins, whereas Xenu was an alien dictator who came to Earth (a.k.a. “Teegeeeack”) 75 million years ago on space cruisers that look like DC-8s and used hydrogen bombs to obliterate millions of people near active volcanoes.

Or maybe they threw them into the volcanoes and then dropped the bombs into there—I don’t know. I’m sure some Scientologist will be happy to tell me how wrong I am while his partner is tossing poisoned meat over my fence to murder the dog.

In the past a ‘religion’ was the collection of societal rules and knowledge of the environment the tribes lived in. Just look at the body of religious texts. They lay out the ground rules of their respective societies *and* explain how the world works. A religion was a valid body of knowledge until science caught up and left this body of knowledge biting the dust.

That’s why today’s religious establishments are irrelevant. Their societal rules can’t keep pace with the changes in the society and the knowledge they contain are refuted, and therefore no single religion has the ability to rule the human world.

You may think they help people by giving them the feeling of being part of a community, but I doubt even the consolation of this feeling is permanent. The human being is inquisitive. Religions have to evolve or die. Else they become suppressive like reactionary Christianity or Saudi-style Islam just to keep people inside the religion

“All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.”

Fear-based morality was and still is an incredibly effective form of social control.

Any story that explains the meaning of the world, the intentions of the gods, and the destiny of man is bound to be mythology.

If the understanding of how to detoxify cycads is empirical, it wouldn't be surprising that it was passed down in the language of the supernatural, rather than the scientific metaphors we are used to. The hard line between bodily and spiritual health, after all, is an invention of the Western imagination, and a recent one at that. When the Hebrews divined the dangers of porcine trichinosis and the benefits of hand washing, they enshrined the resulting rules alongside the Ten Commandments, never thinking to separate the laws that guard against physical and moral dangers.

The rabies virus appears to improve its transmission by essentially bludgeoning the brain, causing numerous circuits to go haywire all at once. Some of the symptoms it induces—for example, hydrophobia—appear to be irrelevant to its spread, but heightening sexual arousal may be useful (at least in animals). Certainly inciting an animal to bite by stirring up rage and hyperesthesia—jangling its nerves in response to the least sensation—are methods it uses most effectively for host-hopping. Nonetheless, the fact that rabies can be transmitted before symptoms emerge by a friendly lick or nip on the neck during normal sexual coupling suggests the furious stage in reality serves as an insurance policy—in essence, the parasite's backup plan for finding a new host should it fail to get around by more mundane means. That's the modern take on rabies.

In earlier times, before anyone knew about viruses or how they spread, people no doubt saw the disease as a contagious madness. A savage beast bites you, and through the wound, its spirit enters your body. Thus possessed, you too become a wild animal. You foam at the mouth, rage at the world, and may even, in your delirium, bite. You bark like a dog and display uncontrolled carnality. Violence, sex, blood, and gore. An evil that spreads and has a life of its own. If that profile sounds familiar, it's because rabies almost certainly provides the foundation for vampire myths. In many of these legends, especially versions originating in Eastern Europe in the first half of the eighteenth century, vampires are people—including, sometimes, the deceased—who rise at night and, often taking the form of a dog or wolf, violate their neighbors—gorging on their flesh, sucking their blood, or raping them, among other heinous acts. Actually, these were not just stories to people living at that time; they were believed to be true and anyone accused of having such savage powers could be hanged or burned at the stake.

Count Dracula, penned into existence by Bram Stoker in 1897, built on these ancient accounts, except that his villain famously morphs into a bat. It is surely no accident that these supernatural forms possessed the viciousness and hypersexuality of rabid animals and wore the mantle of

rabies's most common hosts—or that vampirism, like the viral disease, can be transmitted by a bite. Nor does the resemblance stop there. According to folklore, the lifespan of a vampire was forty days, which coincides with the average time a victim lives after being bitten by a rabid animal. And just like rabid people, vampires were repelled by light (hence their nocturnal habits), strong smells (the odor of garlic, according to folktales, could ward them off), and water (pouring it around graves was recommended to keep them in their underground vaults).

Or maybe it was *Ruminococcus* instead. *Ruminococcus* produces a substance called haem, which the body needs for many things, including producing blood. One character who probably had problems producing haem was Count Dracula. A genetic defect has been identified in his home country, Romania, that results in symptoms that include a lack of tolerance to garlic, sensitivity to sunlight, and the production of red urine. This urine discoloration is caused by a defect in blood production that means sufferers excrete the unfinished precursors of blood production. Nowadays, those affected by the condition—called porphyria—are given medical treatment rather than the starring role in a horror story.

Traditional religions have lost so much turf because, frankly, they just weren't very good in farming or healthcare. The true expertise of priests and gurus has never really been rainmaking, healing, prophecy, or magic. Rather, it has always been interpretation. A priest is not somebody who knows how to perform the rain dance and end the drought. A priest is somebody who knows how to justify why the rain dance failed, and why we must keep believing in our god even though he seems deaf to all our prayers. Yet it is precisely their genius for interpretation that puts religious leaders at a disadvantage when they compete against scientists. Scientists too know how to cut corners and twist the evidence, but in the end, the mark of science is the willingness to admit failure and try a different tack. That's why scientists gradually learn how to grow better crops and make better medicines, whereas priests and gurus learn only how to make better excuses. Over the centuries, even the true believers have noticed the difference, which is why religious authority has been dwindling in more and more technical fields.

The willingness to admit ignorance has made modern science more dynamic, supple, and inquisitive than any previous tradition of knowledge.

Scientists use wrong models with incomplete data all the time. What sets science apart is its ability to test itself, correct its errors and improve. A model should never be set in stone. It must be constantly probed and analyzed, using new information, and appropriately adjusted, if necessary. This not only allows the model to adapt to changing contexts, but makes it

more resilient against errors. An iterative process of this kind is fundamental: it enables us to detect and correct mistakes and therefore achieve progress.

One undeniable trait of stories is their ability to be passed on from generation to generation. While some ancient tales are still relevant, there is no guarantee that a centuries-old story will be applicable in today's environment or at any time in the future. Religions generally fall short of providing a satisfactory mental model, for this reason. Religious doctrines are, by definition, rarely questioned—questioning them can even be considered taboo. Taking the doctrines for granted is often even regarded in a positive light, as an act of faith. A model that is thousands of years old is likely to exhibit dangerous flaws, especially if one is not aware of the conditions in which it was created.

People afraid of losing their truth tend to be more violent than people who are used to looking at the world from several different viewpoints. Questions you cannot answer are usually far better for you than answers you cannot question.

“It’s OK, thanks for asking. I’m new to this but it seems like its going to be good. The gorilla god, praise be upon him and his silverest of silver backs, is almost like a parental figure for me as an adult. He keeps me safe, he forgives me and still loves me when I’ve done wrong (provided I confess to him of course!), and he’s starting to teach me what right and wrong are and where I belong in the world.

Its such a refreshing feeling: safety, contentment, certainty. I’ve also begun to feel a certain superiority over those that do not follow him, but he says that’s natural, because of course as a follower of the one true religion, I *am* superior.”

The biggest danger of faith is when people believe what they want to believe, defending against any and all evidence; especially when that evidence revolutionizes their foundation from the ground up. And the biggest culprit to that danger is the ego trap: rejecting/criticizing others, for being unlike you.

For centuries, the defense of blind faith has driven nations to war, violence, discrimination, slavery, and to become the society of automatons that we are today; and for just as long, it has been justified with lies. If you know better, act like it.

If you believe in the real God, you may scoff at those who offer prayers to Google, but the breadth of knowledge housed within the mind of Google

is all but incomprehensible, just like the mind of God. Despite being incomprehensible, God's mind is, conveniently, very human-like. God supposedly created us in His image, but how are we to know that we aren't just creating Him in our image?

In one classic study that tested mind perception and God, participants read a story about God doing various tasks, such as helping people. This story was constructed to be consistent with what is called a "theologically correct view of God," such that God could have been in two places at once (omnipresence) or could have heard a conversation over very loud noises (omniscience). Although participants shared this theologically correct view, explicitly ascribing to Him all the appropriate 'omnis,' a different pattern emerged when they informally recalled the stories. Participants spoke of God as having to stop one thing before starting another (violating omnipresence) and of not being able to see something when it was behind a barrier (violating omniscience). In other words, they saw God as an especially powerful person and not an incomprehensible deity.

This contradiction between the human (anthro) and divine (omni) elements of God—particularly in Jesus—has long been a point of contention in Christianity. How can something be both a mortal man and an immortal God? The whole point of being godly is to transcend humanity, whereas the whole point of being human is to have flaws and limitations. Some early Christians found this omni-anthro paradox too hard to take, but this duality may in fact have helped Christianity to spread around the world, as it may be just counter-intuitive enough to stick in people's minds. Something fully godlike or fully human may be easily forgotten, but something that is both may capture attention in a powerful way. An anthropomorphic God not only sticks in our thoughts but is simply easier to think of as someone like us. Western religious images portray Jesus as a white European, despite the fact that a Middle Eastern Jew would look quite different. In Africa Jesus can appear as a black man; in South America, as a Hispanic man. Even more than the physical image of God, we project our individual beliefs onto Him. Ever wonder why people who condemn homosexuality also believe that God hates fags, whereas those who think homosexuality is merely a matter of attraction also believe that God loves us all? God seems to share our exact moral belief, even when it contradicts someone else's God-endorsed moral belief.

Because God talks to people through their thoughts, such conversations blur the line between their own minds and God's, and it takes practice to recognize which of their thoughts have divine provenance. This discernment between mundane and divine thoughts also appears to require social consensus, as congregants frequently relay a number of potentially godly

thoughts to other members, who then identify which ones seem reasonably divine. For example, thoughts that are self-centered (e.g. God says to buy a new stereo) are often seen as coming from the self, whereas thoughts of compassion (e.g., God says to volunteer at the soup kitchen) are collectively acknowledged as godly.

Once people are able to discern their divinely inspired thoughts, they are encouraged to have even more regular conversations with Him. Some women often speak of setting aside a night to have a “date with Jesus,” sometimes setting their dinner table for two: themselves and Him. During these dates people are encouraged to speak to God as if he were actually sitting there, directing his full attention and limitless love to them. As one congregant said about the Bible:

“It’s a love story, and it’s written for me.”

This kind of relationship would seem incredible to medieval believers, who saw God as a cold, inscrutable, and distant judge.

What about those who experience God directly, not in a symbolic way but via an intense, personal vision of God, in the style of Moses, Joseph Smith, or Muhammad? One scientist believes that he can elicit this religious experience in anyone, even the staunchest of disbelievers. Using the “God helmet,” a device that uses a weak electric current to stimulate a small area of the temporal lobe. Participants who wear this special helmet are placed in a completely darkened room with zero stimulation. They are seated comfortably in a large armchair and covered with a blanket. The current is turned on, and they spend the next hour alone in complete darkness—but are they really alone? Participants soon report strange sensations, such as spirits in the room, rising out of their bodies, and an overwhelming feeling of a presence. Sometimes they experience God.

If you know that you’re in a lab, this may be simply a fun adventure in tricking the brain, but imagine the consequences if someone were to have the same experience in a mosque, in a synagogue, in a church, or even home alone at night. Such an experience could be a life-changing revelation for a believer or even cause a skeptic to rethink his views. The God helmet suggests that some of the deepest and most transformative religious experiences could stem from the simple overstimulation of neurons. However, many scientifically sophisticated believers suggest that it cannot be any other way. God—through evolution—gave us the kind of brain that can know Him, not through something magical but through the same neural processes by which we know other truths in the world, such as the love of our children and the freshness of the air after a thunderstorm.

This is why I believe that god is a creation of man. It serves both as a way to control the masses—before the almighty dollar and the economic control of modern times—but it’s also a huge placebo/consolation prize for people. ‘Everything’s okay because bad people go to hell and god is watching over me. Worst case scenario my entire life sucks but when I die I’m going to be placed in paradise of infinite eternal happiness. Right?’ I can’t get over how much that sounds like an idea of man, not something that man stumbled upon because we’re so special.

It is said that God created human beings in His own image; but what we can state with certainty is that human societies create God in their own image. As Xenophanes famously proclaimed:

“If lions and horses had agile hands, they would paint gods as lions and horses.”

All gods are homemade, and it is we who pull their strings, and so, give them the power to pull ours.

“Meanwhile, elsewhere there are an infinite number of other universes each with its own God dreaming the cosmic dream. It is said that men may not be the dreams of the Gods, but rather that the Gods are the dreams of men.”

Gods are great. But the heart is greater, for it is from our hearts they come, and to our hearts they shall return.

I think I understand that religious faith which makes the holy brave and strong; my strength is just somewhere else—it’s in myself. I do not fear what may await me, though I’m equally confident that nothing awaits.

Does this guy Jesus Christ’s life have something to teach me even if I don’t, or can’t, believe he was divine? What am I supposed to make of the claim that someone who was God’s relative, and so could have turned the cross into a planter or something with just a word, still voluntarily let them nail him up there, and died? Even if we suppose he was divine—did he know? Did he know he could have broken the cross with just a word? Did he know in advance that death would just be temporary—because I bet I could climb up there, too, if I knew that an eternity of right-hand bliss lay on the other side of six hours of pain. But does any of that even really matter? Can I still believe in JC or Mohamed or Whoever even if I don’t believe they were actual relatives of God? Except what would that mean, to “believe in?”

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is the world's oldest work of literature, going back in Mesopotamian oral tradition more than 5,000 years. Though unknown to many in the West, its narrative has influenced countless themes of humankind: there is a great flood, and there was an ancient time that existed before the deluge; there is a serpent that upends immortality; there are parables and rules that suggest moral codes for living one's life; and there are warnings of the dangers of absolute power on earth. Gilgamesh's story is so universal that references to it reached thousands of miles away into Egyptian and Hittite courts, into Greek and Roman literature, and even into the two great Judeo-Christian and Islamic books. Gilgamesh links East and West, antiquity and modernity, poetry and history.

While I cannot disprove the existence of every possible kind of deity, we can be sure that we do not live in a world that was created by a god who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all good. Christians, of course, think we do live in such a world. Yet a powerful reason for doubting this confronts us every day: the world contains a vast amount of pain and suffering. If god is all-knowing, he knows how much suffering there is. If he is all-powerful, he could have created a world without so much suffering. If he is all-good, he surely would have created a world without so much suffering.

Christians usually respond that god bestowed on us the gift of free will, and so is not responsible for the evil we do. This response fails to deal with the suffering of those who drown in floods, are burned alive in forest fires caused by lightning, or die of hunger or thirst during a drought. Sometimes Christians attempt to explain this suffering by saying that all humans are sinners, and so deserve their fate, even if it is a horrible one. But infants and small children are just as likely to suffer and die in natural disasters as adults, and it seems impossible that they could deserve to suffer and die.

Even if one were to accept all this, however, the problem remains unresolved. For humans are not the only victims of floods, fires, and droughts. Animals, too, suffer from these events, and since they are not descended from Adam and Eve, they cannot have inherited original sin. In earlier times, when original sin was taken more seriously than it generally is today, the suffering of animals posed a particularly difficult problem for thoughtful Christians. The seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes solved it by the drastic expedient of denying that animals can suffer. They are, he maintained, merely very ingenious mechanisms, and we should not take their cries and struggles as a sign of pain any more than we take the ticking of a clock as a sign that it has consciousness. That claim is unlikely to convince anyone who lives with a dog or a cat.

Many Christians when pressed on this fall back on the claim that we should not expect to understand god's reasons for creating the world as it

is. It is as if an ant should try to understand our decisions, so puny is our intelligence in comparison to the infinite wisdom of god. This is the answer given, in more poetic form, in *The Book of Job*. But once we abdicate our own powers of reason in this way, we may as well believe anything at all.

The evidence of our own eyes makes it more plausible to believe that the world is not created by a god at all. If, however, we insist on divine creation, the god who made the world cannot be all-powerful and all-good. He must either be evil or a bungler.

“You are wrong about gods, and you have wasted a significant portion of your life devoted to groveling before figments of your imagination. There will be no afterlife, no reuniting with loved ones, and no salvation for the ‘sins’ you think you have committed. Every moment you have spent in prayer has been squandered because there isn’t anything out there altering the universe for you. You have based much of your life on a lie, and you are a moron for doing so. I reject your values, your morality, and everything you hold dear.”

The difference between my darkness and your darkness is that I can look at my own badness in the face and accept its existence while you are busy covering your mirror with a white linen sheet. The difference between my sins and your sins is that when I sin I know I’m sinning while you have actually fallen prey to your own fabricated illusions.

Religion is a fraud, what god would intentionally create humans.

God’s ostensible support of war comes from the importance of group coordination in evolution. In the evolutionary landscape, people and their genes were threatened not only by wild animals and lazy individuals but also by rival groups. When resources become scarce or tensions are high, it takes little to prompt one group to attempt the destruction or enslavement of a competing group. The winning group is then free to enjoy the spoils of victory, spreading both their genes and their religion. The most functional religions, therefore, are ones that encourage not only intragroup cooperation but also intergroup dominance.

Although atheists often bemoan religion-induced aggression, consider the point of view of the religion itself. Imagine that you are a god with your own religion and you are competing for believers with lots of other gods, each with their own religions. In other words, you are a religious entrepreneur. How should you design your religion and brand yourself to earn maximum market capitalization?

First, you want to encourage your members to have a lot of children, because they are easily indoctrinated and typically adopt the views of their parents. Second, you want to encourage missionaries to spread your Word across the land and reach new markets. A religion with no children and no missionaries would die as soon as its current believers die. Third, you would want to have reasonably unique views—a distinct brand—to ensure that your religion stands out from others. Research in marketing finds that brand distinctiveness is a key to luring customers and out-competing competitors, and religion is no different. Fourth, you would want to discourage dissent or free thinking, since free thinking could lead people to believe in gods other than you. Fifth and finally, you would want to destroy any other competing religions, whether through marketing campaigns, lawsuits, or outright violence. Regardless of their ultimate truth, religions that have many or all of these features tend to out-compete rival religions.

Consider the world's most popular religion: Christianity. Both Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism encourage kids and missionaries, the reliance on authority—whether through the pope or the unchanging Bible—and the occasional use of violence against threats. These principles can also explain why Mormonism is one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States, with an increase of 45.5 percent from 2000 to 2010. Mormonism encourages many children, formalizes missionary work by sending young men abroad to spread the Word, and also takes a large annual tithe (10 percent of income) to help build the church's influence and support group projects. Although Christian, Mormons also have unique views, believing that Jesus came to the New World after his crucifixion and that the angel Moroni revealed a set of golden tablets to Joseph Smith in upstate New York. Mormons have also used violence to protect their views, such as in the Mountain Meadows massacre, which left dead a hundred men, women, and children.

Traditionally, religions have propagated themselves by giving children no choice in the matter until habit and social peer pressure can take over. That's a less effective strategy these days.

If the only way you can make your belief persist is to lie to children, if that's the only way this thing can persist, its not worth it, it should disappear.

Religions may have qualities that help them spread from mind to mind, but they must also help their believers in return. One important benefit of believing in a powerful supernatural agent is that belief furnishes people with a sense of control in an otherwise random world. Uncertainty makes people see mind because minds are relatively easy to understand. Consider the question of why earthquakes happen. One reason, provided

by geophysicists, stems from the instability of subduction zones, in which one tectonic plate dives under another and releases a tremendous amount of energy. While technically true, a better explanation for earthquakes—psychologically speaking—is that they are expressions of God’s anger. This explanation also affords a sense of control, as earthquakes can be avoided as long as God stays happy.

The need for control and the belief in God may help explain why the wealthy are the least religious. Of Americans making under \$10,000 a year, 83.8 percent report some belief in God, with 64.7 percent being strong believers. In contrast, only 68.7 percent of Americans making over \$150,000 report some belief in God, with only 40.2 percent being strong believers. The wealthy feel control and agency in their day-to-day lives and so have little need for divine order. In contrast, those struggling with poverty face a number of challenges in their day-to-day lives, and the comfort of a caring creator may serve to create order in an otherwise chaotic world.

The appeal to common sense turns out to have quite strict limits. Almost everything that modern science tells us is intuitively untrue, and much more interesting than common sense can imagine. If the defense of scientific knowledge is that it can be supported by evidence, this too turns out to be more complicated and much less secure than seemed obvious 150 years ago. The things that we take for granted—democracy, equality, human rights, and so on—turn out to be very easy to deny, in theory, as well as in practice, and impossible to justify except by their fruits. They are just as vulnerable to the charge of absurdity as most religions are.

Some are using science the same way some priests do—always promising a better tomorrow in another place, while allowing worsening living conditions here today. ‘Science for a better tomorrow’ is their ‘Religion for a better afterlife.’

For many ideologies, a truly key feature is that, at least for their adhering leaders, their doctrines impart a sense of righteous superiority, of knowing something that the infidels and even the mere laity do not. You cannot burn the heretics without such a conviction that you are in possession of superior truth and insight. And, you can not believe in your own superior knowledge without acknowledging that lesser folk are stuck in the mud of mythos and foolishness.

Perhaps you too have noticed the disturbing trend that many people follow nowadays to just blindly believe every statement shoved their way so long as you put ‘science’ in front of it. Any attempt to question the method used, the results found, or the person/group conducting the study is frequently refuted with ‘shut up you stupid fool, it’s Science!’ Fool is the new heretic. In one of the ultimate ironies, the pursuit of Science has become

one of the fastest growing religions today, despite its supposed resistance to it.

It requires a naïve belief in scientific objectivity. Even in the physical sciences, everything from quantum mechanics to Information Theory has shown that an act of observation is itself part of the phenomenon observed and is analytically inseparable from it. It's now pretty much universally accepted that (a) meaning is inseparable from some act of interpretation and (b) an act of interpretation is always somewhat biased, i.e., informed by the interpreter's particular ideology.

It's important to remember that scientists are just people, each subtly influenced by a set of assumptions and beliefs, each guided by a unique assortment of ambitions, passions, and incentives. Most science is plastic enough that it can be influenced, consciously or otherwise, by the desires of the experimenter. Several surveys of peer-reviewed articles have showed that those studies done with the support of an interested party were more likely to produce a result favorable to that party. The facts researchers produce are constructed in part from observation of reality and in part from the forces that constrain that observation.

The reality of science is that it can't call everything into question at the same time. It has to stand on certain assumptions which for the time being are not challenged, in order to test other things.

Often it isn't scientific phenomena they're observing and tabulating, but rather a set of human behaviors, and a lot of human behaviors are—to be blunt—moronic. Try, for instance, to imagine an authoritative ethics textbook whose principles were based on what most people actually do.

That is the tip of the iceberg. Reproducibility in science is not very sexy. Because our scientific culture generally rewards innovation over cautiousness, replicating a study conducted by others will not get a researcher a publication in a high-end journal, a splashy headline in a newspaper, or a large funding grant from the government. Only an estimated 0.15% of all published results are direct replications of previous studies.

Much of the scientific literature, perhaps half, may simply be untrue. Afflicted by studies with small sample sizes, tiny effects, invalid exploratory analyses, and flagrant conflicts of interest, together with an obsession for pursuing fashionable trends of dubious importance, science has taken a turn towards darkness. Poor methods get results.

It is simply no longer possible to believe much of the clinical research that is published, or to rely on the judgment of trusted physicians or authoritative medical guidelines. I can't tell you exactly what percentage of the trials are flawed, but I think the problem is far bigger than you imagine, and getting

worse. It is so easy to manipulate data, conceal it or fabricate it. There is almost a code of silence not to speak about it.

In one study, more than 70% of researchers tried and failed to reproduce another scientist's experiments, and more than half failed to reproduce their own experiments. 40% of scientists admit that fraud always or often contributes to irreproducible findings.

Doing Good

Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.

I think it's got something to do with how people should behave. I think you should do things because they're right. Not because gods say so. They might say something different another time.

“A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. Now, what are they? Men at all? or small movable forts and magazines, at the service of some unscrupulous man in power? Visit the Navy-Yard, and behold a marine, such a man as an American government can make, or such as it can make a man with its black arts—a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity, a man laid out alive and standing, and already, as one may say, buried under arms with funeral accompaniments. . . .”

—Henry David Thoreau

We often wonder how people of the past, including the most revered and refined, could have universally engaged in conduct now considered unconscionable. While retrospective judgment tends to make us feel superior to our ancestors, it should really evoke humility. Surely some contemporary practices will be deemed equally abominable by succeeding generations. The only question is: *Which ones?*

A “never again” mentality means understanding how atrocities can be normalized, how moral blind spots can cause us to overlook terrible suffering, and how real objectivity does not just require a sense of superficial balance, but a deep understanding of what matters. The past is frozen in amber. We can't go back and scream at those who were willfully blind to obvious crimes. But what we can do is try to look at our own era as we look at theirs, to think about what we'll look like in retrospect, and to try to do what we wish those others would have done. And we can ask if future historians are looking at us across time, pleading with us and asking a question for which

we have no good answer: Why didn't you stop it before it started? Why did you wait until it was too late?

It is crucial that we never confine ourselves to solely what is currently lawful, for the great evil of slavery happened within the confines of the law. The law is generally a poor metric of ethics. Most of history's worst mass crimes have been legal at the time.

“I, for one, support outlawing bad and will gladly sign a petition saying that bad should, in fact, be banned. Only the bad would support bad. And so I must support good, as must anyone who is good. I will, for that matter, go so far as to say that bad is bad and that good is good and would take issue with anyone who would say otherwise”

Obviously hilarious, but I think there is something to take away from this. The standardization of culture that came about with the rise of ubiquitous communication—post, radio, television—also brought marketing strategies to define good. For example, someone may hold the opinion that drugs are bad, not based on medical science or experience, but because they were forced to watch a bunch of fear-mongering public service announcements in the 50s. I was exposed to the art/culture of cyberpunk before I was interested in technology. One of the primary themes was the trans-valuation of values. That as control over discourse increased, what is called good would be more aligned in the interests of keeping established power structures in place rather than actual morality. In this way, what is disruptive can be called bad so as to oppose it not on practical grounds but moral/spiritual. Eventually this becomes a veil of ignorance that keeps the populace productive and tacitly supporting all kinds of atrocities.

Never trust people whose identity is caught up in appearing good.

Any moral code should be impossible to live up to fully. Otherwise one will either attempt to cheat, lie, deceive in order to gain the recognition, status, honor of a rare individual who might be able to achieve it fully. Any moral code capable of being lived to 100% by any large number of people will by necessity have been watered down, diminished, compromised, in order to allow more individuals into the elite, righteous, moral few.

It was to resist personal gain-seeking at the expense of the body politic and group solidarity that the world's major philosophies and religions for the past two-thousand years urged self-control, generosity, care for the weak and poor, and rules to limit the luxurious self-indulgence and anti-social egotism it bred in ruling elites. Excluding this intellectual legacy from the

curriculum has paved the way for inverting today's moral attitude upholding creditor claims against the rest of society.

The only time we should look in our neighbor's bowl is to ensure they have enough food.

Never look down on anyone unless you're helping them up.

What you have become is the price you paid for the things you thought you wanted. Choose carefully those things you want. Understand the cost.

We expect good things to get done our behalf, but we don't want to have to actually do the good things. You can't legislate morality, it has to be learned.

“If a mother in my presence thrashes her child, what shall I do? Consider that the question is what I must do, that is, what is good and rational, and not what my first impulse will be. The first impulse in the case of a personal insult is revenge, but the question is whether this is rational.

Precisely such is the question as to whether it is rational to use violence against the mother who is whipping her child. If a mother is whipping her child, what is it that pains me and that I consider evil? Is it that the child is suffering pain, or that the mother, instead of the joy of love, is experiencing the agony of malice? I think that in either there is evil.

One man can do no evil, for evil is the disunion between men. And so, if I want to act, I can do so only for the purpose of destroying the disunion and establishing the union between the mother and the child. What, then, shall I do? Shall I use violence on the mother? I shall not destroy her disunion (sin) with the child, but shall only introduce a new sin: the disunion between her and me. What, then, shall I do? I will take the child's place, and this will not be irrational.

To what Dostoevsky writes (which has always disgusted me) and what the monks and the metropolitans have told me—that it is lawful to wage war for the purpose of defense (‘to lay down one's life for one's brothers’)—I have always replied, ‘To defend with one's breast and to substitute oneself, yes; but to shoot people with guns, that is not defending, but killing.’”

Instead of ordering young men to be drilled and ready to kill, forgive and be ready to die for love and reason.

The surest way to work up a crusade in favor of some good cause is to promise people they will have a chance of maltreating someone. To be able

to destroy with good conscience, to be able to behave badly and call your bad behavior “righteous indignation”—this is the height of psychological luxury, the most delicious of moral treats.

You take away the sources of power and the man who was formerly a tyrant becomes just an old man.

Just as we typecast actors into enduring character roles, so too do we often typecast people in enduring moral roles, seeing them as either those who do moral deeds or those who receive them. More succinctly, we see others as either moral agents or moral patients. It is hard to imagine Joseph Stalin, George Bush, Barack Obama as a victimized moral patient because of all the evil they committed. Likewise, it is hard to imagine a poor orphan as a responsible moral agent because of all the suffering she feels. Moral typecasting is this phenomenon applied to morality and mind perception: when you see someone as a moral agent, you are blind to their patiency, and when you see someone as a moral patient, you are blind to their agency.

That heroes and villains seem insensitive to pain can make us treat them poorly. For very evil criminals we demand proportionately harsh punishment—not only to atone for their sins but also to overcome their perceived toughness and ensure they suffer enough. That we are especially cruel to the especially cruel is not surprising, but we sometimes seem to mistreat those we admire, easily forgetting the sacrifices of our heroes. We neglect the feelings of our parents, the trials of our mentors, and the suffering of our leaders.

Our schema for heroes is grounded in moral typecasting—those who do good seem tougher than us and better able to endure life’s tribulations. This ‘moral agent only’ schema means that the suffering of heroes is less salient and less demanding of empathy than that of others. When a normal person is punched, our heart leaps, but when Superman or Batman gets punched, we shrug it off because we expect them to do the same. If heroes seem tougher than most, then we may be more likely to give them pain. Admittedly, people seldom enjoy betraying the saintly, but often when push comes to shove—when someone has to be harmed—people harm their heroes.

Imagine a meeting at work where someone is being selected to develop client relationships in Siberia. Chances are the person packing her parka will be the person who has a history of doing previously thankless tasks. If you’ve done past good deeds, others see you as capable of handling terrible burdens that no one else wants to bear—whether that perception is true or false. So next time your selflessness is praised in front of others, beware: making sacrifices for others makes it easier for them to sacrifice you.

To those who see sexual orientation as a matter of biology and not morality, claims of its harmfulness seem hyperbolic, but the moral dyad

suggests that perceptions of harm are legitimate, even if disconnected from objective harm. Just as—despite many cues to mind—the objective criteria for mind-having are unclear, objective criteria for harm are also often elusive. Of course, there are some obvious cues to direct physical and emotional harm, such as bloodshed, crying, and death, but not all harm is so transparent.

Gay marriage seems not to cause death and dismemberment, but how are we to objectively disprove the idea that gay marriage causes “societal decay” or “spiritual damnation”? These kinds of harm are a matter of perception and are perceived when people see immorality. Such harm may seem nebulous, but people often see a direct link between this abstract harm and more direct suffering—a weakened America is more vulnerable to terrorists or race riots. Evil deeds inevitably create perceived suffering victims.

Those who see drug use as wrong think it harms teenagers; those who see flag burning as wrong think it harms disabled veterans; and those who see masturbation as wrong think it harms children. Suffering children are actually a common theme in moral uproar, because their status as vulnerable feelers makes them obvious moral patients. Perceptions of victimhood arise not from effortful justification but automatically from our dyadic moral minds.

In one study participants read about harmless misdeeds, such as defiling a corpse or using strange masturbation techniques, and then rated their harmfulness. Participants not only saw these wrongs as generally harmful but saw even more harm when given a strict time limit that precluded conscious reasoning. Another study in the same set revealed that people perceived more suffering in the faces of children—within milliseconds—after reading about masturbation and necrophilia.

If harm automatically accompanies judgments of immorality, then dyadic completion casts doubt on the very existence of ‘victimless wrongs.’ Harmless wrongs may be a logical possibility but—psychologically speaking—are exceedingly rare; only those who fail to see immorality fail to see harm. Because perceptions of harm are ever present in moral judgments, harm provides a powerful way of understanding morality across cultures.

We have to start talking about morals again. I feel like the left has become really consumed with this idea of desire: ‘What do you want?’ ‘What makes you happy?’ Rather than: ‘What is the moral content of my existence?’

“Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams.”

Ambivalence toward do-gooders arises out of a deep uncertainty about how a person ought to live. Is it good to try to live as moral a life as possible—a saintly life? Or does a life like that lack some crucial human quality? Is it right to care for strangers at the expense of your own people? Is it good to bind yourself to a severe morality that constricts spontaneity and freedom? Is it possible for a person to hold himself to unforgiving standards without becoming unforgiving? Is it presumptuous, even blasphemous, for a person to imagine that he can transfigure the world—or to believe that it really matters what he does in his life when he’s only a tiny flickering speck in a vast universe? Should morality be the highest human court—the one whose ruling overrides all others?

To most people, most of the time, the choice between family and strangers is no choice at all: caring for strangers’ children as much as your own, say, would seem not so much difficult as unnatural, even monstrous. But the do-gooder doesn’t believe his family deserves better than anyone else’s. He loves his more, but he knows that other people love their families just as much. To a do-gooder, taking care of family can seem like a kind of moral alibi—something that may look like selflessness, but is really just an extension of taking care of yourself.

Political movements and religious orders have always known that a certain distance from the claims of family—sometimes to the point of celibacy or abandonment—is necessary for a total commitment to something larger. Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son; Agamemnon was ready to sacrifice his daughter; Buddha left his family behind. Saint Francis was brutal to his parents; Gandhi was brutal to his wife. Jesus says, in Luke:

“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”

Sometimes the claims of actual family have been not explicitly rejected so much as incorporated into spiritual family, to the point of disappearance: all humans become brothers; God becomes a husband. A do-gooder might not go so far as hatred or abandonment, but the fact that he even asks himself how much he should do for his family and how much for strangers—weighing the two together in the same balance—may seem already a step too far.

Gandhi believed that the seeker after goodness is obliged to forswear close friendships and exclusive loves, because loyalty may tempt him to wrongdoing, and detracts from an impartial love of all mankind. Reviewing Gandhi’s memoir, George Orwell found this belief repellent. He wrote:

“The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one is sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one’s love upon other human individuals. It is too readily assumed that the ordinary man only rejects saintliness because it is too difficult: in other words, that the average human being is a failed saint. It is doubtful whether this is true. Many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings.”

There is one circumstance in which the extremity of do-gooders looks normal, and that is war. In wartime—or in a crisis so devastating that it resembles war, such as an earthquake or a hurricane or a media-induced panic—duty expands far beyond its peacetime boundaries. In wartime, it’s thought dutiful rather than unnatural to leave your family for the sake of a cause. In wartime, the line between family and strangers grows faint, as the duty to one’s own enlarges to encompass all the people who are on the same side.

It’s usually assumed that the reason do-gooders are so rare is that it’s human nature to care only for your own. There’s some truth to this, of course. But it’s also true that many people care only for their own because they believe it’s human nature to do so. When expectations change, as they do in wartime, behavior changes, too. In war, what in ordinary times would be thought weirdly zealous becomes expected. In ordinary times, to ask a person to sacrifice his life for a stranger seems outrageous, but in war it is commonplace. Acts that seem appallingly bad or appallingly good in normal circumstances become part of daily life. In wartime, extreme malevolence is excused, and extreme virtue is also excused. People respond to this new moral regime in different ways: some suffer under the tension of moral extremity and long for the forgiving looseness of ordinary life; others feel it was the time when they were most vividly alive, in comparison with which the rest of life seems dull and lacking purpose.

This is the difference between do-gooders and ordinary people: for do-gooders, it is always wartime. They always feel themselves responsible for strangers—they always feel that strangers, like compatriots in war, are their own people. They know that there are always those as urgently in need as the victims of battle, and they consider themselves conscripted by duty.

“It then seemed to her that it was not enough to be a nurse, doing work that someone else would do if she didn’t. She would change her life, and she would do work that needed to be done but that other people would not do, because it was too hard or too dangerous.”

Some do-gooders say they’re only doing their duty: they’re only doing what everyone ought to, and if most people think their sense of duty is bizarre and unreasonable, then most people are wrong. They reject the idea that what they do is saintly or heroic, because to them, that’s another way of saying that most people needn’t even try to do such things. Praise is a disguised excuse. But of course it could be those do-gooders who are wrong. Nearly everyone believes that some acts go beyond the call of duty. Nearly every religion believes that there are some superior creatures, such as saints, who are capable of more than the rest of us. Some argue that it’s a fundamental part of human morality to call some deeds saintly or heroic—meaning that they’re very good to do but can’t possibly be demanded of anyone, because the sacrifice or courage they require is too great. To reject the idea of saintliness and heroism—to say that there is no such thing as “beyond the call of duty”—is to say that everyone must be a saint or a hero, in the same way that everyone must pay his debts and avoid stealing; and that would be ridiculous, a morality for angels, not human beings.

Do-gooders believe that most ordinary ideas about how much you owe to strangers, and how much duty can demand of you, are wrong. A do-gooder might believe, like any ordinary person, that you should save your wife rather than two strangers from drowning; but as the number of drowning strangers increases, the do-gooder will worry far sooner than the ordinary person whether it’s immoral not to change his mind. And the number of hours in the do-gooder’s life when he feels free to do entirely as he likes—when he owes nothing to the world, when he has done his duty, and what remains of his day and his money and his energy are his alone—are very few.

Nowadays, a moral theory according to which nearly everyone appears immoral to the point of depravity seems ridiculous. In the past, however, it’s worth remembering, the idea that nearly everybody was a wretched sinner seemed perfectly normal. The do-gooder belief that one is obliged to take care of strangers as well as one’s family can seem like a violation of human instinct; but human instincts do not all tend toward comfort and love. Sacrifice is a human instinct, too. There is an instinct to hoard for one’s family against future disaster; but there is, too, an instinct to send gifts out into the unknown. There is a sublime austerity about giving to unseen, unknown strangers, like the belief in an unseen and mysterious deity.

If it's unnatural to adopt the point of view of the universe, as do-gooders try to do, then it is equally unnatural to imagine the point of view of God.

“Before he watched his father die, he had thought mostly about the pain of animals. He had seen so much footage of terrified animals bellowing in slaughterhouses, of crippled animals infected and bleeding in cages, of animals whose legs hurt so much they couldn't walk—he had spent so many years of his life with these images and sounds in his head that suffering had come in his mind to mean something that humans inflicted on animals, the anguish of the weak and wordless inflicted by the strong. Now he had seen that there were humans trapped in places as brutal as feed cages, and when those humans suffered, their torment was as world-ending as the torment of animals who lived in wretchedness only in order to die. He had known that humans could suffer, of course. But that humans could suffer as helplessly as animals could—that there were humans who could not move, who could not feed themselves, who did not have language to say what was happening to them or to beg for relief—that, he had forgotten.”

Robespierre was a fierce do-gooder who killed his enemies for moral reasons, for justice; and there seemed something more sinister, and more powerful, about a morally passionate killer like him than there was about an ordinary revolutionary like Danton. After Robespierre, extreme moral conviction carried with it the shadow of violence; and after the Communist revolution in Russia reinforced the association, it was no longer possible to see a man who was convinced that he knew how to bring about a better world, and who was prepared to sacrifice himself for it, without thinking of death.

The Story Circle:

- | | |
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| 1. A character is in a zone of comfort or familiarity. | 5. They get that which they wanted. |
| 2. They desire something. | 6. They pay a heavy price for it. |
| 3. They enter an unfamiliar situation | 7. They return to their familiar situation. |
| 4. They adapt to that situation. | 8. They have changed as a result of the journey. |

Preachy do-gooder characters are nearly always ridiculed for their self-righteousness, their puritanism, and their efforts to change other people.

“A character who possessed all the seven great virtues would never do as the hero of a novel. He would be perfect, and in consequence unsympathetic, for we are impatient and suspicious of human perfection.”

In fiction, it often seems that the imperfect and sinful are more profoundly human than the good, and so the preachy do-gooder is guilty not only of sanctimony but of a deeper failure to understand human nature. Characters whose emotions are stirred by ideals as much as people are not to be trusted: a character who is any kind of philosopher or theorist is likely to be deplored, either for foolish unworldliness or, if his ideas are effective, for violence. Wise characters are devoted to the complex, the particular, the intimate: to the densely drawn place, the ephemeral moment, and most of all, through love, to the individual person.

When these elements are brought together—the embracing of messiness and imperfection, the dislike of preaching, the prizing of the complex and particular and distrust of the abstract, the injunction to love real people close to you rather than an ideal of people in general—what they amount to is an implicit exhortation to accept the human condition. You should love humans as they are, not as they should or could be. You should embrace human nature, with all its suffering and sin, and accept that it will always be thus. You should accept the role of fate and luck in human life, and the limits of man’s ability to alter his lot. To fail to do these things is to become the sort of do-gooder who doesn’t love the world as it is, or the imperfect humans in it—only ideas inside his head.

The do-gooder’s goodness is not usually obedience—it is often, on the contrary, a revolt against the rules and customs he grew up with. Part of the reason do-gooders seem so strange is that they’re acting on their own. They are following rules that they laid down for themselves, driven by a sense of duty they have felt since they were too small to know what duty was, much less how anybody else thought about it. The people they came from thought they were as weird and extreme as anyone else did. They didn’t come from a community in which their sacrifice was normal, part of the order of things. In some circumstances, do-gooders do not look so odd. For do-gooders, it is always wartime; and in wartime, do-gooders look less zealous, their commitments less severe.

But war itself has changed, which may be one reason do-gooders look even odder now than they used to. War no longer demands sacrifice from

everyone. War for some rich countries is now, as often as not, something that happens to other people, somewhere far away. For most of human history, the sacrificing of self or child or work for something larger was ordinary, because conscription was ordinary. But many countries got rid of the draft decades ago. Not for a long time has it been a common experience in those countries to be expected, as a matter of course, to risk your life, or those of your family members, for the sake of your country. It may be that, in the absence of this older form of duty, the sense of duty to family has expanded to take its place, so that sacrificing family for a cause now seems unnatural and extreme.

Why shouldn't people be spurred to action as much by the existing shame of their country's injustices as they are by the threatened shame of conquest? Why shouldn't the commitment and fellowship and urgency of war be grafted onto the morality of ordinary times?

When people hear about do-gooders, many of them say: "But aren't they mentally ill?" An extreme sense of duty seems to many people to be a kind of disease—a masochistic need for self-punishment, perhaps, or a kind of depression that makes its sufferer feel unworthy of pleasure. Surely those who suffer from a disease like that must live dark, narrow lives, overcast by responsibility, forcing themselves always to think about the misery of others and to endure misery themselves. Surely they must be perpetually crouched in some dank office, bolting a bowl of reheated noodles before racing off to the next emergency.

In fact, some do-gooders are happy, some are not. The happy ones are happy for the same reasons anyone is happy—love, work, purpose. It's do-gooders' unhappiness that is different—a reaction not only to humiliation and lack of love and the other usual stuff, but also to knowing that the world is filled with misery, and that most people don't really notice or care, and that, try as they might, they cannot do much about either of those things. What do-gooders lack is not happiness but innocence. They lack that happy blindness that allows most people, most of the time, to shut their minds to what is unbearable. Do-gooders have forced themselves to know, and keep on knowing, that everything they do affects other people, and that sometimes (though not always) their joy is purchased with other people's joy. And, remembering that, they open themselves to a sense of unlimited, crushing responsibility.

It happens often in politics that people will criticize those who are clearly in the right morally, but will moan about them being "smug" or "arrogant," and dismiss their side, thus helping the people who are clearly the real bad guys. We see it all the time when people criticize environmentalists, civil rights activists, civil liberties activists, and others who are actually trying

to do something about the problems of the world. We may not have to deal with institutionalized slavery these days, but we still have to deal with the very weak human mind that will put up with and rationalize any moral injustice as long as it's the norm; and many are still hostile towards anyone who tries to change it, even when they agree with them.

What is the difference between helping, which doesn't work, and helping, which does? Why is one a disease and the other the road to health? The difference seems to be the difference between helping from above and helping someone like yourself—between telling someone what to do and telling someone what you've done. What is a blessing coming from a sinner is malignant coming from a saint. So sit down and shut the fuck up Bill—and stop funding the pandemic cosplay industry, it makes people stupid, though, we suspect, that might be precisely what you and your billionaire buddies want; it sure is easier to “nudge” a population you've totally knocked off balance with fear. Better enjoy those billions while you can Billy, we're coming for them.

For those that are not wealthy philanthropic douchebags, the logic of codependency suggests that helping is often a disease, because the one who helps is not free. She may believe that she chose to become a therapist, say, because she liked the work, but in fact she needed to do the work, had no choice but to do some work of that sort, because she could not see people in trouble without feeling obliged to help them. But then the question becomes: Is she wrong to feel that way? When she feels responsible for helping other people, is she making a mistake?

Anyone who acknowledges the force of morality at all feels bound to do something. A person who understood herself to be freely choosing a moral life as just one option among others, with no obligation involved—who might with the same sense of freedom have chosen to spend her life throwing pebbles into a bucket—would not be more free but more confused. A person who feels herself wholly unfettered, unbound by duties of any kind, is not free, but a sociopath. And it's not only do-gooders and codependents who crave duty: duty gives meaning and structure to a life. Without it, there can be no home—only the aimless freedom of a tourist. Moral intuitions, like all intuitions, come from somewhere. Suppose a person grows up feeling responsible for helping others because her good parent taught her to do so. What is the difference between a sense of duty that comes from a good parent and a sense of duty that comes from a bad parent? Is one less free or true than the other? Perhaps evil in sub-lethal quantities begets its own cure, as antibodies are produced by an injection of poison.

But any of these stories might have turned out differently. One step over the brink and their commitment might have looked like craziness, or

cruelty. Do-gooders are different from ordinary people because they are willing to weigh their lives and their families in a balance with the needs of strangers. They are willing to risk the one for the sake of the other. They, like anyone else, believe that they have duties to their families, but they draw the line between family and strangers in a different place. It's not that they value strangers more: it's that they remember that strangers have lives and families, too. When this willingness results only in calculated sacrifice, that's one thing; when it results in destruction, it's another. How things turn out depends partly on the choices of the do-gooder, but partly on luck. It might seem that moral judgment shouldn't depend on luck—surely you can't be blamed for something you have no control over. But, in fact, luck affects moral judgments all the time. Someone who attempts murder but fails is judged differently from someone who succeeds. And someone who lives the life of a do-gooder, attempting to relieve the pain of strangers without ruining the lives of those he is close to, is judged, too, on his success.

What would the world be like if everyone thought like a do-gooder? What would it be like if that happy, useful blindness fell away and suddenly everyone became aware, not just intellectually but vividly, of all the world's affliction? What if everyone felt obliged to put aside the work he had chosen and do something about that affliction instead? What if everyone decided that spontaneity or self-expression or certain kinds of beauty or certain kinds of freedom were less vital, or less urgent, than relieving other people's pain? What if everyone stopped believing it was his duty to protect and comfort and give to his family as much as he could, no matter what, and started thinking that his family was no more important or valuable than anyone else's?

If everyone thought like a do-gooder, the world would not be our world any longer, and the new world that would take its place would be so utterly different as to be nearly unimaginable. People talk about changing the world, but that's not usually what they mean. They mean securing enough help so there is less avoidable suffering and people can get on with living decent lives; they don't mean a world in which helping is the only life there is. If there were no do-gooders, on the other hand, the world would be similar to ours, but worse. Without their showing what a person can do for strangers if he sets himself to do it, fewer would try. It may be true that not everyone should be a do-gooder. But it is also true that these strange, hopeful, tough, idealistic, demanding, life-threatening, and relentless people, by their extravagant example, help keep those life-sustaining qualities alive.

This is the story of a wise old man and a smart-aleck boy. The smart-aleck boy wanted to show up the old man as a fool. The boy had captured a small bird in the forest. His plan was to go to the old man with the little

bird cupped inside his hands so that only the small tail of the bird protruded. Then he'd say with a sneer, 'Old man, what do I have in my hand?' And the wise old man would say, 'You have a bird, my son.'

Then the boy would say with confronting disdain, 'Old man, is the bird alive or is it dead?' And if the old man said the bird was dead, the boy would open up his hand and the bird would fly away free into the forest. But if the old man said the bird was alive, then the boy would begin to crush the bird in his cupped hands, and to crush it and crush it until the little bird was dead, and then he'd open his hands and say, 'See, old man, the bird is dead!'

So the smart-aleck boy, as planned, came to the old man with the bird hidden in his cupped hands, and he said, "Old man, what do I have in my hands?" The old man said, "You have a bird, my son." Then the boy said, "Is the bird alive or is it dead?" And the wise old man softly said, "The bird is in your hands, my son."

One challenge raised by the backlash against moral exemplars is how moral entrepreneurs can hope to change majority views. One suggestion comes from the effect of the manipulation on attitudes toward eating meat. The opportunity to derogate do-gooders may have the ironic after-effect of making majority members less resistant to minority values in the face of threat. Given the tentative and unpredicted nature of this result, however, more research is needed to ensure that it is reliable and to better establish its mechanism.

Part of our problem is that we are removed from more and more each year in the name of progress. Now, this is not some hippie argument saying we should 'just stop paving over fuckin everything man.' The shooting of unarmed people are abstracted by our various screens. The imprisonment of hundreds without trial is abstracted by our screens and mostly subservient journalists. The cruel lives of our food sources are abstracted by the farmer, truck driver, butcher, plastic packaging. Our poverty doesn't leave people dead in the streets from malnutrition, but instead dead in hospital beds from heart attacks, diabetes complications, preventable disease.

We forget that our adaption to civilization is in its infancy, a mere blip on our evolutionary timeline. Could we continue our lives if we personally witnessed these killings? Heard the shots, the reactions of others, the smell, the sounds of a dying man. All removed by the frame of the video, the medium lacking full sensory experience. Could we continue to farm as we do, if we saw the results, heard the cries? If we truly understood the cause and effects of our nutrition and healthcare policies, would we continue the way we are?

The "humans are inherently an awful species" bunch, applies the false

notion of animal instinct to humans. It is subtle of course, because it is taboo in most circles to make much of a connection between humans and others, but it is there nonetheless. Assuming the greed, violence displayed today is something inherent and unchangeable. This is of course not true. Certainly our biological hardware has given us the ability to create software which has then allowed us to create immense damage to the planet and ourselves. But our biological hardware is not necessarily required to run this software, we can run stuff which does not promote greed and violence, we simply choose not to or believe not to due to the lies about the permanence of certain aspects of our species. In fact, this was largely true until the real, basic foundations of our current civilization were really laid. In many social groups, helping others helped yourself, we need to get back to a similar model.

Abstraction is the tool which allows a few to gain control over your life. And perhaps you really don't give a shit about animals, unarmed deaths, or healthcare. But there is without a doubt something that you do care about. And just as you are going to desire the time, power, resources to influence how that thing is dealt with, there are those that desire the same for these three issues. Protecting and promoting their power and right to do so, protects and promotes yours as well. You need not endorse it, but you should not suppress it.

“I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is
that I know nothing.”

—Plato

For Epicurus, the purpose of philosophy was to attain the happy, tranquil life, characterized by ataraxia—peace and freedom from fear—and aponia—the absence of pain—and by living a self-sufficient life surrounded by friends. He taught that pleasure and pain are measures of what is good and evil; death is the end of both body and soul and should therefore not be feared; the gods neither reward nor punish humans; the universe is infinite and eternal; and events in the world are ultimately based on the motions and interactions of atoms moving in empty space.

The first line of Epictetus' manual of ethical advice, the *Enchiridion*—“Some things are in our control and others not”—made me feel that a weight was being lifted off my chest. For Epictetus, the only thing we can totally control, and therefore the only thing we should ever worry about, is our own judgment about what is good. If we desire money, health, sex, or reputation, we will inevitably be unhappy. If we genuinely wish to avoid poverty, sickness, loneliness, and obscurity, we will live in constant anxiety

and frustration. Of course, fear and desire are unavoidable. Everyone feels those flashes of dread or anticipation. Being a Stoic means interrogating those flashes: asking whether they apply to things outside your control and, if they do, being ready with the reaction ‘Then it’s none of my concern.’

Epictetus also won me over with his tone, which was that of an enraged athletics coach. If you want to become a Stoic, he said, “you will dislocate your wrist, sprain your ankle, swallow quantities of sand,” and you will still suffer losses and humiliations. And yet, for you, every setback is an advantage, an opportunity for learning and glory. When a difficulty comes your way, you should feel proud and excited, like “a wrestler whom God, like a trainer, has paired with a tough young buck.” In other words, think of every unreasonable asshole you have to deal with as part of God’s attempt to “turn you into Olympic-class material.” This is a very powerful trick.

Both Stoicism and Epicureanism are branches of proprietor ethics, but only Stoicism—in various degraded forms—could be turned into sermons for servants. An ‘Epicurean slave morality’ means: no, we will not be content to do our “duty,” and yes, actually we do want what you—up there—have, but we intend to make much wiser use of it.

Every decent man is ashamed of the government he lives under. It doesn’t have to be this way.

Every virtual reality game is a version of Plato’s “Ring of Gyges” problem. As Plato tells the story, Gyges was a guy who came across a ring of invisibility and used that power to seize possession of a queen and a kingdom. The point of the story is to raise the question: What would keep you moral if you had the power of invisibility—that is, freedom from detection, or the power to get away with it? This is what virtual-reality games give us (and lucid dreams, for that matter). We are often encouraged to do all the stuff we could never do and would never do in real life, for the thrill of it. But what happens to us as we do it? How does our moral character change as we flex our talents for immorality in virtual spaces?

What would you do, if you had limitless resources and an entire world to play with—and there was no one around to judge you? What parts of you would rule your actions? Would you build tremendous things? Would you become a destroyer of that world? Would you inflict harm on the beings in it for the dark pleasure of doing so? Would you create industrial “mob farms” that generate monsters and kill them in great numbers, just so that you can harvest the things they drop when they die?

Everything not analogous to being able to flap my arms and fly like a bird is simply arbitrary. Some arbitrary decisions are far more defensible than others. We do not argue about the arbitrariness of a particular rule, construct, et cetera, but instead about the defensibility of the arbitrary

decision. Morals are arbitrary, much “logic” is arbitrary, ideologies are arbitrary.

When it comes to using extreme cases in thought experiments, I find them troubling because I often see them as distracting us from what the larger project of morality ought to be. In the case of having enough food to only feed one child, I don’t think there’s any moral choice to be made. One is being forced to commit an injustice by letting one of the children die, due to larger, societal injustices that allow individuals to live in such poverty. Moral examination shouldn’t lead us to deciding whether we ought to choose the life of a human over the life of a dog—or one child over another—but how to live day-to-day, how to be better.

Nietzsche characterized moral philosophy as the use of bad logic to prop up inherited prejudices. Nietzsche was not saying that morality is a waste of time and we all ought to run out and do whatever happens to come into our heads, from whatever source. He was saying that we don’t yet know the first thing about morality, because we’ve allowed bad logic and inherited prejudices to get in the way of asking the necessary questions—because we haven’t realized that we don’t yet have any clear idea of how to live.

I have become increasingly disturbed by how many people believe that there is no such thing as objective moral truth.

I believe that there are true answers to moral questions, just as there are to mathematical ones. Humans can perceive these truths, through a combination of intuition and critical reasoning, but they remain true whether humans perceive them or not. I believe that there is nothing more urgent for me to do in my brief time on earth than discover what these truths are and persuade others of their reality. I believe that without moral truth the world would be a bleak place in which nothing mattered. This thought horrifies me.

We would have no reasons to try to decide how to live. Such decisions would be arbitrary. We would act only on our instincts and desires, living as other animals live.

I feel myself surrounded by dangerous skeptics. Many of my colleagues not only do not believe in objective moral truth—they don’t even find its absence disturbing. They are pragmatic types who argue that the notion of moral truth is unnecessary, a fifth wheel: with it or without it, people will go on with their lives as they have always done, feeling strongly that some things are bad and others good, not missing the cosmic imprimatur. To me, this is an appalling nihilism.

Subjectivists sometimes say that, even though nothing matters in an objective sense, it is enough that some things matter to people. But that shows how deeply these views differ. Subjectivists are like those who say,

“God doesn’t exist in your sense, but God is love, and some people love each other, so in my sense God exists.”

I am an atheist, but when it comes to moral truth I believe what Ivan Karamazov believed about God: if it does not exist, then everything is permitted.

We have the ability to make the future much better than the past, or much worse, and I know that I will likely not live to discover which turns out to be the case. I know that the way we act toward future generations will be partly determined by our beliefs about what matters in life, and whether we believe that anything matters at all. This is why I continue to try so desperately to prove that there is such a thing as moral truth.

I am now sixty-seven. To bring my voyage to a happy conclusion, I would have to resolve the misunderstandings and disagreements that I have partly described. I would need to find ways of getting many people to understand what it would be for things to matter, and of getting these people to believe that certain things really do matter. I cannot hope to do these things myself. But I hope that, with art and industry, some other people will be able to do these things, thereby completing this voyage.

Purists always force us to examine our own beliefs. It’s true that the moral standard Thoreau set was impossible—he was often vexed by his own failure to meet it. “I cannot fish without falling a little in self-respect,” wrote the sporadic vegetarian.

Today’s progressive may be inclined to dismiss Thoreau’s obsession with purity—an ethical lifestyle being impossible under capitalism—and while this attitude isn’t wrong, it does miss something crucial.

While Thoreau’s refusal to pay the poll tax didn’t slow the operation of the state, it was brilliant propaganda. He forced his peers to examine a machine they might have preferred to ignore, and showed his neighbors—and, later, his readers—that it was possible to say no, even for a day. His attempts at purity expand the imagination, showing us things need not be as they are. His forays into the wild form the other side of this story, offering a glimpse into the lives we could be living. Ultimately, both his guilt over complicity and his sense of connection to the outdoors seem to come from the same radical empathy for all other beings.

The culture of “it’s not my business” and “each to his/her own” negates the idea that the world is in fact our business and we should have a reciprocal relationship with both the planet and with the people who help provide us with a home and a life. Instead, there’s a sense of entitlement, especially in “first world” countries.

Like an old man living above some college students, the moral noise is deafening. One would like to simply be let alone, to live and let live, if not

for that fucking noise. The screams, wails, cries, cheers, taunts, praises.

The first rule of creating and maintaining a good world, or a good society, is living in something approximating the truth. If you are delusional, you cannot make good decisions. The second rule is that your ethical system must, if applied, create a good world.

This is harder than it seems. Ostensibly, we all agree that murder is bad, theft is bad, fraud is bad, and so on. We say that every human life has value and that all humans were created equal. We say that all life has value.

But in our actual actions we prove that we believe none of these things. We excuse mass murder by our own countries. We prioritize the deaths of people not like us over people like us—generally at very high ratios. We place human life over animal life, to the point where we are genociding multiple species every day. We prioritize property over human life more often than not, refusing to spend small amounts of money that would; easily save lives. We have enough food to feed everyone but don't. We have enough industrial capacity to give everyone a decent life, but don't.

We have known for decades that we were killing off animal species and did far too little. We have known about climate change for decades and done essentially nothing.

Our ethics are monstrous. They have led to a great die-off of other animals. They currently cause the death and suffering of hundreds of millions of humans who need do neither.

Until we value everyone's life, and until we value the life of other animals at least to the point where we aren't genociding them, we will not and cannot have a good world overall.

It is often said, by the supporters of the current regime, that things have never been so good, but I don't believe the statistics. Even if they were true, it would not matter, because the reality they describe is not sustainable. If I know I'm doing something which makes me comfortable today but will lead to mass death tomorrow, that isn't ethical, and that's what we are doing.

We can have that good world when a Somali's life matters as much as an American's and when both a billionaire and a poor person receive quality health care. We can have a good world when the possibility of a species extinction is considered, and treated as an emergency. We can have a good life when we look at the human footprint in the world and we don't allow it to destroy multiple other species. We can have a good world when we make sure everyone gets fed, everyone has a decent set of material goods, and everyone is free to do more or less as they choose, so long as their actions are less harmful than the good they do, and don't lead to the foreseeable and preventable suffering and death of others.

It is insane that we are worried about AI and robotics, for example. The idea that machines might be able to do the work that humans do should fill us with joy. It's insane that we cannot imagine a world in which humans do not have to do mostly meaningless drudge work to survive; that we cannot figure out how to distribute resources to people without making them spend the better part of their waking adult lives doing shit they'd rather not do.

If you'd win the lottery and keep your job, congrats, you are the exception. Most people would not.

The right thing to do is generally the right thing to do. It is the great tragedy of the human race that we don't believe that being kind and not hurting other people, or preventing suffering and enabling people to do what they will so they hurt none, and not being mass murderers of other species, is in our self-interest.

It is precisely in our self interest—it is the only way we will ever create a world that is really good to live in for the vast majority of the world's residents.

The great task is trying to figure out a social system that aligns with ethics. This is where the critics will cry about how human nature is incompatible with doing the right thing. Perhaps that is so, though I do not believe it. But if it is so, Earth will remain hell for far too many, and we are in some danger of wiping ourselves out, along with all our victims in the non-human world.

But perhaps it is not so, and just as we could not fly until recently, we simply haven't figured out yet how to be good at scale. And perhaps we should treat this problem as the most important problem in our society, because everything else which seems important from climate change, to war, to fascism, is simply a manifestation of the fact that we suck at being ethical; at being kind.

All lives have value. Everyone's suffering matters. Everyone should have a good life. These are prescriptive statements: statements that to be true, we have to make true. They are truths that will never be absolute, we will never reach 100 percent. But we can get far closer than we are today, and it is on us, as a species, if we do not.

It is a choice. Good and evil are a choice. And the first step towards evil is to say, 'The pain of people like me matters more than the pain of people who are not like me.'

It is not my job to make you do what you know it is right, that is merely your excuse for not doing it.

“What do you think of the argument that if you wish to have any credibility in order to be listened to when you call for

these cultural changes, that you first have to display your own personal daily adherence to modeling these cultural changes in your own life to where all your neighbors can see you doing it?"

I think that sort of "credibility" doesn't necessarily win arguments anyway, as it usually also falls short of absolute perfection, and those who don't want to listen will point to this, find some blemish as it were, and say it ruins the whole thing.

I really think a lot of people are just doing it for their own conscience though, which by definition will not, cannot, save the world. There may often be a resignation that a world as evil as this one—or more accurately, this culture is evil—can't be saved. It's an entirely different way of looking at it to think people are deluded into thinking their small steps matter, and thinking they are resigned to the world going to hell, and just want to die at peace with themselves. Whether they ought to... oh I don't know.

In 1944, *Nation* Washington editor I.F. Stone begged his fellow journalists to publicize the plight of European Jews, then being denied entry to the United States:

"I need not dwell upon the authenticated horrors of the Nazi internment camps and death chambers for Jews. That is not tragic but a kind of insane horror. It is our part in this which is tragic. The essence of tragedy is not the doing of evil by evil men but the doing of evil by good men, out of weakness, indecision, sloth, inability to act in accordance with what they know to be right. The tragic element in the fate of the Jews of Europe lies in the failure of their friends in the West to shake loose from customary ways and bureaucratic habit, to risk inexpediency and defy prejudice, to be wholehearted, to care.

There is much we could have done to save the Jews of Europe before the war. There is much we could have done since the war began. There are still things we could do today which would give new lives to a few and hope to many. The hope that all is not black in the world for his children can be strong sustenance for a man starving in a camp or entering a gas chamber. But to feel that your friends and allies are wishy-washy folk who mean what they say but haven't got the gumption to live up to it must brew a poisonous despair."

After ten-thousand years of human civilization we are coming up hard against questions that have finally become too big to look away from: Can we recognize that we are the snake in the garden? Can we own up to our

abuses and begin to make restitution? Is that even possible? Can we change? This may be our last chance to face these questions and try to answer them. Extreme inequality, climate change, mass extinction, deforestation, soil depletion, acidified oceans, melting ice: all the warning signs have long been flashing red. It is too late now to plan for the future or to issue warnings about it. The future is here. We are living in it.

When we contemplate these changes and these threats, we tend to revert to certain ways of speaking, which themselves stem from certain ways of seeing. We use the language of science and economics; the language of politics; the language of anger and righteousness, guilt and judgment. We talk about the one percent and parts-per-million of carbon, and we talk about our responsibilities to future generations. This kind of talk is easy; it is expected. But I have come to believe that it is largely useless, and not just because nobody is really listening. It is useless because it does not get anywhere near the heart of the matter.

The real questions to be answered are not questions of politics, economics, or social morality. They are questions about what is missing from all of this talk and from the world that we have built. They are questions about what has meaning, what matters, what is greater than us, and how we should behave toward it. And those, whether we like it or not, are religious questions.

The world must have a God; but our concept of God must be extended as the dimensions of our world are extended. The anthropomorphic God can no longer withstand the scrutiny of the bright light of science and reason; but that does not mean we live in a Godless universe. In fact, what some call the “Creator God” actually comes into sharper focus under the light of science and reason, and gives humanity far more dignity and responsibility than our forebears ever imagined. When we talk about God, we may be invoking many different conceptions. It is critical to differentiate between the anthropomorphic God—a personal God that thinks and acts like a human—and the cosmic God—a God that is responsible for the fundamental nature of the universe. The cosmic God is deeply satisfying in that it still retains, in a far more sophisticated form, characteristics of God with which we are familiar: law-giver, life-creator, wisdom-giver. Even the reputed die-hard atheist Richard Dawkins emphasizes in *The God Delusion* that he is only going after the anthropomorphic God. The unfolding of cosmic evolution, especially the evolution of life and mind, can be explained by intelligible persistent patterns, or natural laws, without reference to arbitrary change of natural laws or inelegant “intelligent design.”

If I were called in to construct a religion I would make use of trees. At the heart of the creation myth of the West, in the primeval garden, before

the fall into fire and farming, stands a tree, on which grows a sacred fruit. We pluck and eat the fruit and we are cast from the peace at the heart of all things. The fruit will help us live forever, but first we must saw down the tree and burn it, and use the flames to forge weapons with which to battle the world itself.

What happens if the tree remains? What happens if the warnings from history, the new information provided by the sciences, and the song that sings deep inside us come together to make us, the people of the West, the children of modernity, look at trees as many of the ancients did? Would that begin to heal the wound? If we were to see not just the half of the tree that towers above the ground but the half that lives beneath it. If we were to see that great complex of roots connected to all of the other trees in the woodland by networks of mycelium that act almost as a neural network, connecting up communities of living beings, sending and receiving signals. If we were to see this network, this community, as alive, as in some way aware. If we were to understand that when we tug on one leaf it is connected to everything else in the world.

If we saw trees as living, connected, aware—would we change our ways in relation to them, and would that change us? Perhaps not. We know that mice and rats and cows and pigs are living, aware beings, but that doesn't stop us torturing and slaughtering them if we find it useful. But in the long-term, or maybe sooner, we will be faced with what we have done. That crisis will hit. The Earth will not be ignored nor will it long endure being despised, neglected, or mistreated. We will change, or we will be changed. I suspect it will be the latter. But in the meantime, there is work we can do.

New stories—or old stories in new form—will not be purely individual endeavors. They will not arise from research, from thinking, from analysis, from planning. They will not be utopian, globalist, all-encompassing, neat, and satisfying. If we are to develop different ways of relating ourselves to the earth or to some new spiritual methodology that connects us back again to our natural heritage, this isn't going to come from our rational minds. It may not come from us at all. Some speak of stories as being “an echolocation from the Earth.” The old folktales and foundation myths were not purely the creations of human minds. Rather, those minds acted like aerials, telling a story that a place, or the spirit of a place, wanted to be told. Such new stories, again, are the oldest stories of all: they are a retelling of the eternal story, from before we felled the tree. And they are not the product of thinking. They are the product of listening.

“He who knows does not speak,” Lao Tzu wrote. “He who speaks does not know.” It's a useful warning to essayists everywhere. What if the stories we need, the new ways of seeing, are right here under our feet, waiting for

us to notice them? What if they are dancing through the canopy in the sunlight?

Chapter Five

Sexy Action, Ugly Reflection

Quiet Solitude

“A shy man no doubt dreads the notice of strangers, but can hardly be said to be afraid of them. He may be as bold as a hero in battle, and yet have no self-confidence about trifles in the presence of strangers.”

—Charles Darwin

“The glory of the disposition that stops to consider stimuli rather than rushing to engage with them is its long association with intellectual and artistic achievement. Neither $E = mc^2$ nor *Paradise Lost* was dashed off by a party animal.”

—Winifred Gallagher

“Even when media does depict a less extroverted activity it is done so with action. The representation of essentially all characters in media is that of the extrovert, in most cases where an introvert is depicted they are either the villain or simply creepy, weird, et cetera. More often than not the character is a consumer, whether that’s shopping sprees, visits to a bar, hailing a ride, flying, et cetera. How much of the extrovert/consumer bias can be attributed to the need to make things interesting for the viewer and how much is the greater culture’s influence?”

Today we make room for a remarkably narrow range of personality styles. We’re told that to be great is to be bold, to be happy is to be sociable. We see ourselves as a nation of extroverts—which means that we’ve lost sight of who we really are. Depending on which study you consult, one third to one half of Americans are introverts—in other words, one out of every two or three people you know. Given that the United States is among the most extroverted of nations, the number must be at least as high in other parts of the world.

We live with a value system one might call the Extrovert Ideal—the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. He favors quick decisions, even at the risk of being wrong. She works well in teams and socializes in groups. We like to think that we value individuality, but all too often we admire one type of individual—the kind who’s comfortable “putting himself out there.” Sure, we allow technologically gifted loners who launch companies in garages to have any personality they please, but they are the exceptions, not the rule, and our tolerance extends mainly to those who get fabulously wealthy or hold the promise of doing so.

Introversion—along with its cousins sensitivity, seriousness, shyness—is now a second-class personality trait, somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology. Introverts living under the Extrovert Ideal are like women in a man’s world, discounted because of a trait that goes to the core of who they are. Extroversion is an enormously appealing personality style, but we’ve turned it into an oppressive standard to which most of us feel we must conform.

Many of the most important institutions of contemporary life are designed for those who enjoy group projects and high levels of stimulation. As children, our classroom desks are increasingly arranged in pods, the better to foster group learning, and research suggests that the vast majority of teachers believe that the ideal student is an extrovert. We watch TV shows whose protagonists are not the “children next door,” like the Cindy Bradys and Beaver Cleavers of yesteryear, but rock stars and webcast hostesses with outsized personalities, like Hannah Montana and Carly Shay of *iCarly*. Even Sid the Science Kid, a PBS-sponsored role model for the preschool set, kicks off each school day by performing dance moves with his pals—“Check out my moves! I’m a rock star!”

As adults, many of us work for organizations that insist we work in teams, in offices without walls, for supervisors who value “people skills” above all. To advance our careers, we’re expected to promote ourselves unabashedly. The scientists whose research gets funded often have confident, perhaps overconfident, personalities. The artists whose work adorns the walls of contemporary museums strike impressive poses at gallery openings. The authors whose books get published—once accepted as a reclusive breed—are now vetted by publicists to make sure they’re talk-show ready.

At school you might have been prodded to come “out of your shell”—that noxious expression which fails to appreciate that some animals naturally carry shelter everywhere they go, and that some humans are just the same.

Introverts are not necessarily shy. Shyness is the fear of social disapproval

or humiliation, while introversion is a preference for environments that are not overstimulating. Shyness is inherently painful; introversion is not. One reason that people confuse the two concepts is that they sometimes overlap (though psychologists debate to what degree). Some psychologists map the two tendencies on vertical and horizontal axes, with the introvert-extrovert spectrum on the horizontal axis, and the anxious-stable spectrum on the vertical. With this model, you end up with four quadrants of personality types: calm extroverts, anxious (or impulsive) extroverts, calm introverts, and anxious introverts. In other words, you can be a shy extrovert, like Barbra Streisand, who has a larger-than-life personality and paralyzing stage fright; or a non-shy introvert, like Bill Gates, who by all accounts keeps to himself but is unfazed by the opinions of others (having \$100 billion probably doesn't hurt).

You can also, of course, be both shy and an introvert: T. S. Eliot was a famously private soul who wrote in "The Waste Land" that he could "show you fear in a handful of dust." Many shy people turn inward, partly as a refuge from the socializing that causes them such anxiety. And many introverts are shy, partly as a result of receiving the message that there's something wrong with their preference for reflection, and partly because their physiologies compel them to withdraw from high-stimulation environments.

There is no such thing as a pure extrovert or a pure introvert. Such a man would be in the lunatic asylum.

In 1790, only three percent of Americans lived in cities; in 1840, only eight percent did; by 1920, more than a third of the country were urbanites. Americans found themselves working no longer with neighbors but with strangers. 'Citizens' morphed into 'employees,' facing the question of how to make a good impression on people to whom they had no civic or family ties.

"The reasons why one man gained a promotion or one woman suffered a social snub had become less explicable on grounds of long-standing favoritism or old family feuds. In the increasingly anonymous business and social relationships of the age, one might suspect that anything—including a first impression—had made the crucial difference."

Americans responded to these pressures by trying to become salesmen who could sell not only their company's latest gizmo but also themselves.

Coming of age in the 1920s was such a competitive business compared to what their grandmothers had experienced, warned one beauty guide, that they had to be visibly charismatic:

“People who pass us on the street can’t know that we’re clever and charming unless we look it.”

Such advice, ostensibly meant to improve people’s lives, must have made even reasonably confident people uneasy. Counting the words that appeared most frequently in the personality-driven advice manuals of the early twentieth century and comparing them to the character guides of the nineteenth century one will find that the earlier guides emphasized attributes that anyone could work on improving, described by words like:

- Citizenship
- Duty
- Work
- Golden deeds
- Honor
- Reputation
- Morals
- Manners
- Integrity

But the new guides celebrated qualities that were—no matter how easy Dale Carnegie made it sound—trickier to acquire. Either you embodied these qualities or you didn’t:

- Magnetic
- Fascinating
- Stunning
- Attractive
- Glowing
- Dominant
- Forceful
- Energetic

It was no coincidence that in the 1920s and the 1930s, Americans became obsessed with movie stars. Who better than a matinee idol to model personal magnetism?

Americans also received advice on self-presentation—whether they liked it or not—from the advertising industry. Early print ads were straightforward product announcements:

EATON’S HIGHLAND LINEN:
THE FRESHEST AND CLEANEST WRITING PAPER

However, the new personality-driven ads cast consumers as performers with stage fright from which only the advertiser’s product might rescue them. These ads focused obsessively on the hostile glare of the public spotlight.

A 1922 ad for Woodbury's soap warned:

ALL AROUND YOU PEOPLE ARE JUDGING YOU SILENTLY

The Williams Shaving Cream company advised:

CRITICAL EYES ARE SIZING YOU UP RIGHT NOW

Madison Avenue spoke directly to the anxieties of male salesmen and middle managers. In one ad for Dr. West's toothbrushes, a prosperous-looking fellow sat behind a desk, his arm cocked confidently behind his hip, asking:

EVER TRIED SELLING YOURSELF TO YOU?
A FAVORABLE FIRST IMPRESSION IS THE GREATEST SINGLE
FACTOR IN BUSINESS OR SOCIAL SUCCESS

The Williams Shaving Cream ad featured a slick-haired, mustachioed man urging readers to:

LET YOUR FACE REFLECT CONFIDENCE, NOT WORRY!
IT'S THE 'LOOK' OF YOU BY WHICH YOU ARE JUDGED MOST
OFTEN

Other ads reminded women that their success in the dating game depended not only on looks but also on personality. In 1921 a Woodbury's soap ad showed a crestfallen young woman, home alone after a disappointing evening out. She had "longed to be successful, gay, triumphant," the text sympathized. But without the help of the right soap, the woman was a social failure. Ten years later, Lux laundry detergent ran a print ad featuring a plaintive letter written to Dorothy Dix, the Dear Abby of her day:

"Dear Miss Dix,

How can I make myself more popular? I am fairly pretty and not a dumbbell, but I am so timid and self-conscious with people. I'm always sure they're not going to like me. . .

—Joan G."

Miss Dix's answer came back clear and firm. If only Joan would use Lux detergent on her lingerie, curtains, and sofa cushions, she would soon gain a "deep, sure, inner conviction of being charming." This portrayal of courtship as a high-stakes performance reflected the bold new mores of the Culture of Personality.

“Respect for individual human personality has with us reached its lowest point and it is delightfully ironical that no nation is so constantly talking about personality as we are. We actually have schools for ‘self-expression’ and ‘self-development,’ although we seem usually to mean the expression and development of the personality of a successful real estate agent.”

At the onset of the Culture of Personality, we were urged to develop an extroverted personality for frankly selfish reasons—as a way of outshining the crowd in a newly anonymous and competitive society. But nowadays we tend to think that becoming more extroverted not only makes us more successful, but also makes us better people. We see salesmanship as a way of sharing one’s gifts with the world. This is why Tony Robbins’s zeal to sell to and be adulated by thousands of people at once is seen not as narcissism or hucksterism, but as leadership of the highest order.

Toastmasters, the nonprofit organization established in 1924 whose members meet weekly to practice public speaking and whose founder declared that “all talking is selling and all selling involves talking,” is still thriving, with more than 12,500 chapters in 113 countries. The promotional video on Toastmasters’ website features a skit in which two colleagues, Eduardo and Sheila, sit in the audience at the “Sixth Annual Global Business Conference” as a nervous speaker stumbles through a pitiful presentation.

“I’m so glad I’m not him,” whispers Eduardo.

“You’re joking, right?” replies Sheila with a satisfied smile. “Don’t you remember last month’s sales presentation to those new clients? I thought you were going to faint.”

“I wasn’t that bad, was I?”

“Oh, you were that bad. Really bad. Worse, even.” Eduardo looks suitably ashamed, while the rather insensitive Sheila seems oblivious. “But,” says Sheila, “you can fix it. You can do better. Have you ever heard of Toastmasters?”

Sheila, a young and attractive brunette, hauls Eduardo to a Toastmasters meeting. There she volunteers to perform an exercise called “Truth or Lie,” in which she’s supposed to tell the group of fifteen-odd participants a story about her life, after which they decide whether or not to believe her. “I bet I can fool everyone,” she whispers to Eduardo sotto voce as she marches to the podium. She spins an elaborate tale about her years as an opera singer, concluding with her poignant decision to give it all up to spend more time with her family.

When she finishes, the toastmaster of the evening asks the group whether they believe Sheila’s story. All hands in the room go up. The toastmaster

turns to Sheila and asks whether it was true. “I can’t even carry a tune!” she beams triumphantly.

Sheila comes across as disingenuous, but also oddly sympathetic. Like the anxious readers of the 1920s personality guides, she’s only trying to get ahead at the office. “There’s so much competition in my work environment,” she confides to the camera, “that it makes it more important than ever to keep my skills sharp.” But what do “sharp skills” look like? Should we become so proficient at self-presentation that we can dissemble without anyone suspecting? Must we learn to stage-manage our voices, gestures, and body language until we can tell—sell—any story we want? These seem venal aspirations, a marker of how far we’ve come—and not in a good way—since the days of Dale Carnegie’s childhood.

In the United States conversation is often about how effective you are at turning your experiences into stories, whereas a Chinese person might be concerned with taking up too much of the other person’s time with inconsequential information.

There are traditional Asian attitudes to the spoken word: talk is for communicating need-to-know information; quiet and introspection are signs of deep thought and higher truth. Words are potentially dangerous weapons that reveal things better left unsaid. They hurt other people; they can get their speaker into trouble. Consider these proverbs from the East:

“In a gentle way, you can shake the world.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

“The wind howls, but the mountain remains still.”

—Japanese Proverb

“Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know.”

—Lao Zi, *The Way of Lao Zi*

“Even though I make no special attempt to observe the discipline of silence, living alone automatically makes me refrain from the sins of speech.”

—Kamo No Chomei, 12th-century Japanese recluse

And compare them to proverbs from the West:

“Be a craftsman in speech that thou mayest be strong, for the strength of one is the tongue, and speech is mightier than all fighting.”

—Maxims of Ptahhotep, 2400 BC

“Speech is civilization itself. The word, even the most contradictory word, preserves contact—it is silence which isolates.”
—Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*

“The squeaky wheel gets the grease.”

Many Asian cultures are team-oriented, but not in the way that Westerners think of teams. Individuals in Asia see themselves as part of a greater whole—whether family, corporation, or community—and place tremendous value on harmony within their group. They often subordinate their own desires to the group’s interests, accepting their place in its hierarchy. Western culture, by contrast, is organized around the individual. We see ourselves as self-contained units; our destiny is to express ourselves, to follow our bliss, to be free of undue restraint, to achieve the one thing that we, and we alone, were brought into this world to do. We may be gregarious, but we don’t submit to group will, or at least we don’t like to think we do. We love and respect our parents, but bridle at notions like filial piety, with their implications of subordination and restraint. When we get together with others, we do so as self-contained units having fun with, competing with, standing out from, jockeying for position with, and, yes, loving, other self-contained units. Even the Western God is assertive, vocal, and dominant; his son Jesus is kind and tender, but also a charismatic, crowd-pleasing man of influence—Jesus Christ Superstar.

What looks to Westerners like Asian deference, in other words, is actually a deeply felt concern for the sensibilities of others. It is only those from an explicit tradition who would label the Asian mode of discourse “self-effacement.” Within this indirect tradition it might be labeled ‘relationship honouring.’ And relationship honouring leads to social dynamics that can seem remarkable from a Western perspective. It’s because of relationship honoring, for example, that social anxiety disorder in Japan, known as *taijin kyofusho*, takes the form not of excessive worry about embarrassing oneself, as it does in the United States, but of embarrassing others. It’s because of relationship honoring that Tibetan Buddhist monks find inner peace by meditating quietly on compassion. And it’s because of relationship honoring that Hiroshima victims apologized to each other for surviving.

“‘I am sorry,’ said one of them, bowing, with the skin of his arms peeling off in strips. ‘I regret I am still alive while your baby is not.’ ‘I am sorry,’ another said earnestly, with lips swollen to the size of oranges, as he spoke to a child weeping beside her dead mother. ‘I am so sorry that I was not taken instead.’”

How did we go from Character to Personality without realizing that we had sacrificed something meaningful along the way?

The essence of the Harvard Business School education is that leaders have to act confidently and make decisions in the face of incomplete information. The teaching method plays with an age-old question: If you don't have all the facts—and often you won't—should you wait to act until you've collected as much data as possible? Or, by hesitating, do you risk losing others' trust and your own momentum? The answer isn't obvious. If you speak firmly on the basis of bad information, you can lead your people into disaster. But if you exude uncertainty, then morale suffers, funders won't invest, and your organization can collapse. The HBS teaching method implicitly comes down on the side of certainty. The CEO may not know the best way forward, but she has to act anyway.

“The HBS method presumes that leaders should be vocal and in my view that's part of reality. But there is the common phenomenon known as the ‘winner's curse,’ in which two companies bid competitively to acquire a third, until the price climbs so high that it becomes less an economic activity than a war of egos. The winning bidders will be damned if they'll let their opponents get the prize, so they buy the target company at an inflated price.

It tends to be the assertive people who carry the day in these kinds of things. You see this all the time. People ask, ‘How did this happen, how did we pay so much?’ Usually it's said that they were carried away by the situation, but that's not right. Usually they're carried away by people who are assertive and domineering. The risk with our students is that they're very good at getting their way. But that doesn't mean they're going the right way.”

If we assume that quiet and loud people have roughly the same number of good (and bad) ideas, then we should worry if the louder and more forceful people always carry the day. This would mean that an awful lot of bad ideas prevail while good ones get squashed. Studies in group dynamics suggest that this is exactly what happens. We perceive talkers as smarter than quiet types—even though grade-point averages and SAT and intelligence test scores reveal this perception to be inaccurate. In one experiment in which two strangers met over the phone, those who spoke more were considered more intelligent, better looking, and more likable. We also see talkers as leaders. The more a person talks, the more other group members direct

their attention to him, which means that he becomes increasingly powerful as a meeting goes on. It also helps to speak fast; we rate quick talkers as more capable and appealing than slow talkers.

A well-known study found that television pundits—people who earn their livings by speaking confidently on the basis of limited information—make worse predictions about political and economic trends than they would by random chance. And the very worst prognosticators tend to be the most famous and the most confident—the very ones who would be considered natural leaders in an HBS classroom.

The US Army has a name for a similar phenomenon: the Bus to Abilene.

“It’s about a family sitting on a porch in Texas on a hot summer day, and somebody says, ‘I’m bored. Why don’t we go to Abilene?’ When they get to Abilene, somebody says, ‘You know, I didn’t really want to go.’ And the next person says, ‘I didn’t want to go—I thought you wanted to go,’ and so on. Whenever you’re in an army group and somebody says, ‘I think we’re all getting on the bus to Abilene here,’ that is a red flag. You can stop a conversation with it. It is a very powerful artifact of our culture.”

The Bus to Abilene anecdote reveals our tendency to follow those who initiate action—any action. We are similarly inclined to empower dynamic speakers.

We tend to overestimate how outgoing leaders need to be. Most leading in a corporation is done in small meetings and it’s done at a distance, through written and video communications. It’s not done in front of big groups. You have to be able to do some of that; you can’t be a leader of a corporation and walk into a room full of analysts and turn white with fear and leave. But you don’t have to do a whole lot of it. There have been many leaders of corporations who are highly introspective and who really have to make themselves work to do the public stuff. The lesson is clear. We don’t need giant personalities, we need leaders who build not their own egos but the institutions they run.

Introverts are uniquely good at leading initiative-takers. Because of their inclination to listen to others and lack of interest in dominating social situations, introverts are more likely to hear and implement suggestions. Having benefited from the talents of their followers, they are then likely to motivate them to be even more proactive. Introverted leaders create a virtuous circle of proactivity, in other words. Team members report perceiving introverted leaders as more open and receptive to their ideas,

which motivates them to work harder. Extroverts, on the other hand, can be so intent on putting their own stamp on events that they risk losing others' good ideas along the way and allowing workers to lapse into passivity. Often the leaders end up doing a lot of the talking and not listening to any of the ideas that the followers are trying to provide. But with their natural ability to inspire, extroverted leaders are better at getting results from more passive workers.

We have been graced with limelight-avoiding leaders throughout history. Moses, for example, was not, according to some interpretations of his story, the brash, talkative type who would organize road trips and hold forth in a classroom at Harvard Business School. On the contrary, by today's standards he was dreadfully timid. He spoke with a stutter and considered himself inarticulate. The Book of Numbers describes him as "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." When God first appeared to him in the form of a burning bush, Moses was employed as a shepherd by his father-in-law; he wasn't even ambitious enough to own his own sheep. And when God revealed to Moses his role as liberator of the Jews, did Moses leap at the opportunity? Send someone else to do it, he said. "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" he pleaded. "I have never been eloquent. I am slow of speech and tongue."

It was only when God paired him up with his extroverted brother Aaron that Moses agreed to take on the assignment. Moses would be the speechwriter, the behind-the-scenes guy, the *Cyrano de Bergerac*; Aaron would be the public face of the operation. "It will be as if he were your mouth," said God, "and as if you were God to him." Complemented by Aaron, Moses led the Jews from Egypt, provided for them in the desert for the next forty years, and brought the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai. And he did all this using strengths that are classically associated with introversion: climbing a mountain in search of wisdom and writing down carefully, on two stone tablets, everything he learned there.

We tend to write Moses' true personality out of the Exodus story. Cecil B. DeMille's classic, *The Ten Commandments*, portrays him as a swashbuckling figure who does all the talking, with no help from Aaron. We don't ask why God chose as his prophet a stutterer with a public speaking phobia. But we should. The book of Exodus is short on explication, but its stories suggest that introversion plays yin to the yang of extroversion; that the medium is not always the message; and that people followed Moses because his words were thoughtful, not because he spoke them well.

"Most inventors and engineers I've met are like me—they're shy and they live in their heads. They're almost like artists. In

fact, the very best of them are artists. And artists work best alone where they can control an invention's design without a lot of other people designing it for marketing or some other committee. I don't believe anything really revolutionary has been invented by committee. If you're that rare engineer who's an inventor and also an artist, I'm going to give you some advice that might be hard to take. That advice is: Work alone. You're going to be best able to design revolutionary products and features if you're working on your own. Not on a committee. Not on a team."

Flow is an optimal state in which you feel totally engaged in an activity—whether long-distance swimming or songwriting, sumo wrestling or sex. In a state of flow, you're neither bored nor anxious, and you don't question your own adequacy. Hours pass without your noticing. The key to flow is to pursue an activity for its own sake, not for the rewards it brings. Although flow does not depend on being an introvert or an extrovert, many flow experiences are solitary pursuits that have nothing to do with reward-seeking: reading, tending an orchard, solo ocean cruising. Flow often occurs in conditions in which people become independent of the social environment to the degree that they no longer respond exclusively in terms of its rewards and punishments. To achieve such autonomy, a person has to learn to provide rewards to herself. There are some activities that are not about approach or avoidance, but about something deeper: the fulfillment that comes from absorption in an activity outside yourself. Psychological theories usually assume that we are motivated either by the need to eliminate an unpleasant condition like hunger or fear, or by the expectation of some future reward such as money, status, or prestige. But in flow, a person could work around the clock for days on end, for no better reason than to keep on working.

Introverts prefer to work independently, and solitude can be a catalyst to innovation. Introversions concentrates the mind on the tasks in hand, and prevents the dissipation of energy on social and sexual matters unrelated to work. In other words, if you're in the backyard sitting under a tree while everyone else is clinking glasses on the patio, you're more likely to have an apple fall on your head.

What's so magical about solitude? In many fields it's only when you're alone that you can engage in Deliberate Practice, which some have identified as the key to exceptional achievement. When you practice deliberately, you identify the tasks or knowledge that are just out of your reach, strive to upgrade your performance, monitor your progress, and revise accordingly. Practice sessions that fall short of this standard are not only less useful—

they're counterproductive. They reinforce existing cognitive mechanisms instead of improving them.

Deliberate Practice is best conducted alone for several reasons. It takes intense concentration, and other people can be distracting. It requires deep motivation, often self-generated. But most important, it involves working on the task that's most challenging to you personally. Only when you're alone can you go directly to the part that's challenging to you. If you want to improve what you're doing, you have to be the one who generates the move. Imagine a group class—you're the one generating the move only a small percentage of the time.

The cooperative approach has politically progressive roots—the theory is that students take ownership of their education when they learn from one another—but it also trains kids to express themselves in the team culture of corporate America. This style of teaching reflects the business community where people's respect for others is based on their verbal abilities, not their originality or insight. You have to be someone who speaks well and calls attention to yourself.

Today the world of business works in groups, so now the kids do it in school. Cooperative learning enables skills in working as teams—skills that are in dire demand in the workplace. Leadership training is a primary benefit of cooperative learning. Indeed many teachers seem to pay close attention to their students' managerial skills. One public school teacher pointed out a quiet student who likes to “do his own thing.” “But we put him in charge of safety patrol one morning, so he got the chance to be a leader, too,” she assures us.

Group brainstorming doesn't actually work. One of the first studies to demonstrate this was conducted in 1963. Researchers gathered forty-eight research scientists and forty-eight advertising executives, all of them male employees of Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing—otherwise known as 3M, inventors of the Post-it and a source of toxic water contamination—and asked them to participate in both solitary and group brainstorming sessions. The researchers were confident that the executives would benefit from the group process. They were less sure that the research scientists, considered more introverted, would profit from group work.

Each set of forty-eight men was divided into twelve groups of four. Each foursome was given a problem to brainstorm, such as the benefits or difficulties that would arise from being born with an extra thumb. Each man was also given a similar problem to brainstorm on his own. Then researchers counted all the ideas, comparing those produced by the groups with those generated by people working individually. In order to compare apples with apples, the ideas of each individual were pooled together with those of three

other individuals, as if they had been working in “nominal” groups of four. The researchers also measured the quality of the ideas, rating them on a “Probability Scale” of 0 through 4. The results were unambiguous. The men in twenty-three of the twenty-four groups produced more ideas when they worked on their own than when they worked as a group. They also produced ideas of equal or higher quality when working individually. And the advertising executives were no better at group work than the presumably introverted research scientists.

Since then, some forty years of research has reached the same startling conclusion. Studies have shown that performance gets worse as group size increases: groups of nine generate fewer and poorer ideas compared to groups of six, which do worse than groups of four. The evidence from science suggests that business people must be insane to use brainstorming groups. If you have talented and motivated people, they should be encouraged to work alone when creativity or efficiency is the highest priority.

The one exception to this is online brainstorming. Groups brainstorming electronically, when properly managed, not only do better than individuals but, it also turns out, the larger the group, the better it performs. The same is true of academic research—professors who work together electronically, from different physical locations, tend to produce research that is more influential than those either working alone or collaborating face-to-face. This shouldn’t surprise us, it was the curious power of electronic collaboration that contributed to the New Groupthink in the first place. What created Linux, or Wikipedia, if not a gigantic electronic brainstorming session? But we’re so impressed by the power of online collaboration that we’ve come to overvalue all group work at the expense of solo thought.

We fail to realize that participating in an online working group is a form of solitude all its own. Instead we assume that the success of online collaborations will be replicated in the face-to-face world. Indeed, after all these years of evidence that conventional brainstorming groups don’t work, they remain as popular as ever. Participants in brainstorming sessions usually believe that their group performed much better than it actually did, which points to a valuable reason for their continued popularity—group brainstorming makes people feel attached. A worthy goal, so long as we understand that social glue, as opposed to creativity, is the principal benefit.

Psychologists usually offer three explanations for the failure of group brainstorming:

Social Loafing: In a group, some individuals tend to sit back and let others do the work

Production Blocking: Only one person can talk or produce an idea at once, while the other group members are forced to sit passively

Evaluation Apprehension: The fear of looking stupid in front of one's peers—the fear of public humiliation is a potent force

Imagine being asked to work together with three other people—call them Jane, Emily, and Megan—to solve challenging math problems. You don't know who in your group is good at math; you have only your imperfect knowledge of your own abilities. On the first problem, Jane is the first to suggest an answer, and Emily chimes in with her own thoughts. Megan is initially quiet, but after a while, she comes up with the correct answer and explains why the other answers were wrong. This happens several times, so it becomes clear to all that Megan is good at solving problems like these. The group comes to defer to her as their *de facto* leader, and it does very well on its task. In an ideal world, group dynamics would always work this way: The cream would rise to the top; all members would contribute their unique knowledge, skills, and competence; and group deliberation would lead to better decisions. But the reality of group performance too often diverges from this ideal.

The very process of putting individuals together to deliberate before they reach a conclusion almost guarantees that the group's decision will not be the product of independent opinions and contributions. Instead, it will be influenced by group dynamics, personality conflicts, and other social factors that have little to do with who knows what, and why they know it. Rather than producing better understanding of abilities and more realistic expressions of confidence, group processes can inspire a feeling akin to 'safety in numbers' among the most hesitant members, decreasing realism and increasing certainty. This reflects another illusion people have about the mind—the misguided intuition that the best way for a group to use the abilities of its members in solving a problem is to deliberate over the correct answer and arrive at a consensus.

People with dominant personalities tend to exhibit greater self-confidence, and due to the illusion of confidence, others tend to trust and follow people who speak with confidence. If you offer your opinion early and often, people will take your confidence as an indicator of ability, even if you are actually no better than your peers. The illusion of confidence keeps the cream blended in. Only when confidence happens to be correlated with actual competence will the most able person rise to the top.

Many of our most important civic institutions, from elections to jury trials to the very idea of majority rule, depend on dissenting voices. But

when the group is literally capable of changing our perceptions, and when to stand alone is to activate primitive, powerful, and unconscious feelings of rejection, then the health of these institutions seems far more vulnerable than we think.

Different Kinds of Power

Psychologists often discuss the difference between “temperament” and “personality.” Temperament refers to inborn, biologically based behavioral and emotional patterns that are observable in infancy and early childhood; personality is the complex brew that emerges after cultural influence and personal experience are thrown into the mix. Some say that temperament is the foundation, and personality is the building.

There is of course a wide range of possible outcomes for each temperament. Low-reactive, extroverted children, if raised by attentive families and in safe environments, can grow up to be energetic achievers with big personalities—the Richard Bransons and Oprahs of this world. But give those same children negligent caregivers or a bad neighborhood and they can turn into bullies, juvenile delinquents, or criminals. Psychopaths and heroes: twigs on the same genetic branch.

Consider the mechanism by which kids acquire their sense of right and wrong. Many psychologists believe that children develop a conscience when they do something inappropriate and are rebuked by their caregivers. Disapproval makes them feel anxious, and since anxiety is unpleasant, they learn to steer clear of antisocial behavior. This is known as internalizing their parents’ standards of conduct, and its core is anxiety. But what if some kids are less prone to anxiety than others, as is true of extremely low-reactive kids? Often the best way to teach these children values is to give them positive role models and to channel their fearlessness into productive activities. A low-reactive child on an ice-hockey team enjoys his peers’ esteem when he charges at his opponents with a lowered shoulder, which is a legal move. But if he goes too far, raises his elbow, and gives another guy a concussion, he lands in the penalty box. Over time he hopefully learns to use his appetite for risk and assertiveness wisely.

Now imagine this same child growing up in a dangerous neighborhood with few organized sports or other constructive channels for his boldness. You can see how he might fall into delinquency. It may be that some disadvantaged kids who get into trouble suffer not solely from poverty or neglect, say those who hold this view, but also from the tragedy of a bold and exuberant temperament deprived of healthy outlets.

Many children are like dandelions, able to thrive in just about any environment. But others, including the high-reactive types, are more like orchids: they wilt easily, but under the right conditions can grow strong and magnificent. The reactivity of these kids’ nervous systems makes them quickly overwhelmed by childhood adversity, but also able to benefit from a

nurturing environment more than other children do. In other words, orchid children are more strongly affected by all experience, both positive and negative. Scientists have known for a while that high-reactive temperaments come with risk factors. These kids are especially vulnerable to challenges like marital tension, a parent's death, or abuse. They're more likely than their peers to react to these events with depression, anxiety, and shyness.

What scientists haven't realized until recently is that these risk factors have an upside. In other words, the sensitivities and the strengths are a package deal. High-reactive kids who enjoy good parenting, childcare, and a stable home environment tend to have fewer emotional problems and more social skills than their lower-reactive peers, studies show. Often they're exceedingly empathic, caring, and cooperative. They work well with others. They are kind, conscientious, and easily disturbed by cruelty, injustice, and irresponsibility. They're successful at the things that matter to them.

Introverts have wide-open information channels, which causes them to be flooded with stimulation and over-aroused, while extroverts have tighter channels, making them prone to under-arousal. Over-arousal doesn't produce anxiety so much as the sense that you can't think straight—that you've had enough and would like to go home now. Under-arousal is something like cabin fever. Not enough is happening: you feel itchy, restless, and sluggish, like you need to get out of the house already.

Introverts and extroverts direct their attention differently: if you leave them to their own devices, the introverts tend to sit around wondering about things, imagining things, recalling events from their past, and making plans for the future. The extroverts are more likely to focus on what's happening around them. It's as if extroverts are seeing 'what is' while their introverted peers are asking 'what if.'

High-reactive kids also tend to think and feel deeply about what they've noticed, and to bring an extra degree of nuance to everyday experiences. This can be expressed in many different ways. If the child is socially oriented, she may spend a lot of time pondering her observations of others—why Jason didn't want to share his toys today, why Mary got so mad at Nicholas when he bumped into her accidentally. If he has a particular interest—in solving puzzles, making art, building sand castles—he'll often concentrate with unusual intensity. If a high-reactive toddler breaks another child's toy by mistake, studies show, she often experiences a more intense mix of guilt and sorrow than a lower-reactive child would. All kids notice their environments and feel emotions, of course, but high-reactive kids seem to see and feel things more. If you ask a high-reactive seven-year-old how a group of kids should share a coveted toy he'll tend to come up with sophisticated strategies like "Alphabetize their last names, and let the person closest to

A go first.” Putting theory into practice is hard for them because their sensitive natures and elaborate schemes are unsuited to the heterogeneous rigors of the schoolyard. Yet these traits—alertness, sensitivity to nuance, complex emotionality—turn out to be highly underrated powers.

Sensitive types may think in an unusually complex fashion. It may also help explain why they’re so bored by small talk. If you’re thinking in more complicated ways, then talking about the weather or where you went for the holidays is not quite as interesting as talking about values or morality. Another thing about sensitive people is that sometimes they’re highly empathic. It’s as if they have thinner boundaries separating them from other people’s emotions and from the tragedies and cruelties of the world. They tend to have unusually strong consciences. They’re acutely aware of the consequences of a lapse in their own behavior. In social settings they often focus on subjects like personal problems, which others consider “too heavy.”

In our culture, guilt is a tainted word, but it’s probably one of the building blocks of conscience. The anxiety these highly sensitive toddlers feel upon apparently breaking the toy gives them the motivation to avoid harming someone’s plaything the next time. By age four these same kids are less likely than their peers to cheat or break rules, even when they think they can’t be caught. And by six or seven, they’re more likely to be described by their parents as having high levels of moral traits such as empathy. They also have fewer behavioral problems in general.

Of course, having these traits doesn’t mean that sensitive children are angels. They have selfish streaks like everyone else. Sometimes they act aloof and unfriendly. And when they’re overwhelmed by negative emotions like shame or anxiety they can be positively oblivious of other people’s needs. But the same receptivity to experience that can make life difficult for the highly sensitive also builds their consciences.

Evolutionary biologists once believed that every animal species evolved to fit an ecological niche, that there was one ideal set of behaviors for that niche, and that species members whose behavior deviated from that ideal would die off. But it turns out that it’s not only humans that divide into those who ‘watch and wait’ and others who ‘just do it.’ More than a hundred species in the animal kingdom are organized in roughly this way. From fruit flies to house cats to mountain goats, from sunfish to bushbaby primates to Eurasian tit birds, scientists have discovered that approximately 20 percent of the members of many species are “slow to warm up,” while the other 80 percent are “fast” types who venture forth boldly without noticing much of what’s going on around them. Slow animals are best described as shy, sensitive types. They don’t assert themselves, but they are observant and

notice things that are invisible to the bold.

Both types of animals exist because they have radically different survival strategies, each of which pays off differently and at different times. This is what's known as the trade-off theory of evolution, in which a particular trait is neither all good nor all bad, but a mix of pros and cons whose survival value varies according to circumstance. Shy animals forage less often and widely for food, conserving energy, sticking to the sidelines, and surviving when predators come calling. Bolder animals sally forth, swallowed regularly by those farther up the food chain but surviving when food is scarce and they need to assume more risk.

When scientists dropped metal traps into a pond full of pumpkinseed fish, an event that perhaps seemed to the fish as unsettling as a flying saucer landing on Earth, the bold fish couldn't help but investigate—and rushed headlong into the traps. The shy fish hovered judiciously at the edge of the pond, making it impossible to catch them. On the other hand, after succeeding in trapping both types of fish with an elaborate netting system and carrying them back to the lab, the bold fish acclimated quickly to their new environment and started eating a full five days earlier than did their shy brethren. There is no single best personality but rather a diversity of personalities maintained by natural selection.

The trade-off theory may even apply to entire species. Among evolutionary biologists, who tend to subscribe to the vision of lone individuals hell-bent on reproducing their own DNA, the idea that species include individuals whose traits promote group survival is hotly debated and, not long ago, could practically get you kicked out of the academy. But this view is slowly gaining acceptance. Some scientists even speculate that the evolutionary basis for traits like sensitivity is heightened compassion for the suffering of other members of one's species, especially one's family.

Suppose a herd of antelope has a few members who are constantly stopping their grazing to use their keen senses to watch for predators. Herds with such sensitive, watchful individuals would survive better, and so continue to breed, and so continue to have some sensitive individuals born in the group. And why should it be any different for humans?

We know from myths and fairy tales that there are many different kinds of powers in this world. One child is given a lightsaber, another a wizard's education. The trick is not to amass all the different kinds of available power, but to use well the kind you've been granted. Introverts are offered keys to private gardens full of riches. To possess such a key is to tumble like Alice down her rabbit hole. She didn't choose to go to Wonderland—but she made of it an adventure that was fresh and fantastic and very much her own.

A quiet temperament is a hidden superpower.

There's a word for "people who are in their heads too much": thinkers.

Most great ideas spring from solitude.

You can stretch like a rubber band. You can do anything an extrovert can do, including stepping into the spotlight. There will always be time for quiet later. But even though you'll need to stretch on occasion, you should return to your true self when you're done.

Two or three close friends mean more than a hundred acquaintances (though acquaintances are great too).

Introverts and extroverts are yin and yang—we love and need each other.

It's okay to cross the hallway to avoid small talk.

You don't need to be a cheerleader to lead. Just ask Mahatma Gandhi. Speaking of Gandhi, he said:

"In a gentle way, you can shake the world."

Chapter Six

Teach the Children Well

Constructing Worlds

“It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.”

From public schools shall general knowledge flow,
For ‘tis the people’s sacred right to know.

A lesson which many gifted persons never learn as long as they live is that human beings in general are inherently very different from themselves in thought, in action, in general intention, and in interests. Many a reformer has died at the hands of a mob which he was trying to improve in the belief that other human beings can and should enjoy what he enjoys. This is one of the most painful and difficult lessons that each gifted child must learn, if personal development is to proceed successfully. It is more necessary that this be learned than that any school subject be mastered. Failure to learn how to tolerate in a reasonable fashion the foolishness of others leads to bitterness, disillusionment, misanthropy.

“The value of a college education is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think.”

—Albert Einstein, explaining to a reporter why he didn’t know facts like the speed of sound

“I have sworn, on the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”

—Thomas Jefferson

“Both teachers and learners go to sleep at their posts as soon as there is no enemy in the field.”

—John Stuart Mill

“I would not be a Moses to lead you into the Promised Land, because if I could lead you into it, someone else could lead you out of it.”

—Eugene Debs

What is the difference between a good leader and a good teacher?

It’s not the source that makes you informed, it’s how you process information. People who are wise don’t pretend to know everything, and they don’t think the truth is wrapped up in a single thing.

“Children don’t have a wide worldview so they can’t really make any meaningful decisions on why this dam should/shouldn’t be built.”

We equate knowing less with making poor decisions and not having good ideas. This is not necessarily true. Experiences can also influence us to be more close-minded; sometimes children, with their open, unbiased minds can offer the most insightful suggestions. Even if idea is poor, it could perhaps spark an idea just by listening to it.

It is a mistake to believe somebody is stupid just because you don’t know their reason for doing something.

Does the child upset over not having toys as nice as another know something we have been trained to ignore? Is the response, while in the case of toys, filtered and affected by consumerism, simply a natural one? Perhaps an evolutionarily favored genetic disposition designed to ensure the social primate and its group survive?

Children’s questions are important. Pay attention not only to what they’re asking, but why. There are lots of really nifty people hiding in child suits.

You are not showing intelligence by punishing unguarded curiosity, because you’re pulling out threads of the future to score ego points for yourself.

Seeing with a child’s eyes is seeing without preconceptions, and it is also, when associated with knowledge, the precondition for making discoveries.

The more details and layers of experience we need to encode, the longer we feel it lasts. This is why childhood summers feel like they last forever, and then start to fly by as we age. When we’re young, everything is new, and we’ve got many images, smells, sights, and sounds to record. But as we age, we tend to see and experience fewer new or novel events.

Genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will.

Good Learner Questioning Activity

Study the following questions:

1. What is the name of this school?
2. Are children of permissive parents more creative than children of nonpermissive parents?
3. Who discovered oxygen?
4. Who discovered America?
5. Who is the most beautiful woman in America?
6. Are the people on Mars more advanced than the people on Earth?
7. Will it rain tomorrow?
8. How are you?
9. Will you get into the college of your choice?
10. Is love a noun or a verb?
11. $8+6=?$
12. Why do aeroplanes crash?

Answer the following questions:

1. Which of the questions above can you answer with absolute certainty? How can you be certain of your answer?
2. What information will enable you to answer other questions with absolute certainty? Where will you get the information?
3. Which questions restrict you to giving factual information? Which do not? Which require no facts at all?
4. Which questions require the greatest amount of definition before you try to answer than?
5. Which questions require the testimony of experts? What makes one an expert?
6. Which questions assume the answerer is the expert?
7. Which questions may have false assumptions?
8. Which questions require predictions as answers? What kinds of information may improve the quality of a prediction?

Thinking about thinking, metacognition, is like trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks.

In 1953, when anti-communist fervor threatened freedom of expression, libraries responded with the historic Freedom to Read Statement. This document offers a powerful and timeless affirmation of librarians' professional charge:

“The written word is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.”

“If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy-tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy-tales”

There is no doubt that these weird dramas of risk, terror, loyalty, and reward agitate the blood and captivate the heart. Time spent in fairyland arouses in a child a longing for he knows not what. It stirs and troubles him (to his lifelong enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his actual reach and, far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth. He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: The reading makes all real woods a little enchanted.

The reading does something else, too. It situates children in a cultural sense, equipping them to understand references to fairy tales and other classic stories that they will find all around them. When we read “Hansel and Gretel” or “The Fisherman and His Wife” or “Puss in Boots,” we’re at once transporting children with our voices and grounding them in foundational texts. For this reason, the time we spend reading to them can amount to a second education, one that helps children acquire a sense of horizons. What we give them is an introduction to art and literature by means so calm and seamless that they may not notice it’s happening.

There was a boy, his elementary-school librarian showed him around the stacks and told him:

“All the books on the shelves are yours.”

It was a galvanizing moment that he never forgot. And it is a message that every child needs to hear.

The more stories children hear, and the more varied and substantial those tales, the greater the confidence of their cultural ownership. They will recognize allusions that other children may miss. A girl who has heard the stories of Aesop or Jean de la Fontaine will have a clear idea of what is meant by “sour grapes” and will know why people compare the industriousness of ants and grasshoppers. A boy who’s heard a parent read *The Odyssey* has a more complete idea of what constitutes a “siren song” than his friend who thinks it must have something to do with an alarm going off.

The narratives of the past have helped to frame the consciousness and language of the present, and it’s a gift to children to help them recognize as much as they can. The milk of human kindness, the prick of the spindle, the wolf in sheep’s clothing, the wine-dark sea: all are expressions of a vast cultural treasury.

“We all come from the past, and children ought to know what it was that went into their making, to know that life is a braided cord of humanity stretching up from time long gone, and that it cannot be defined by the span of a single journey from diaper to shroud.”

Children get a wider perspective when they’re tugged out of the here and now for a little while each day. In an enchanted hour, we can read them stories of the real and imagined past. With picture-book biographies we can acquaint them with people we want them to know. With any luck, our children will come to appreciate that the people of generations past were as full of life, intelligence, wisdom, and promise as they are, and impelled by the same half-understood desires and impulses; that those departed souls were as good and bad and indifferent as people who walk the earth today. Those who came before us wrote stories and songs, built roads and bridges, invented and created and argued and fought and sacrificed for all sorts of causes.

Young people are inclined to think, in a vague way, that events began when they did. When I was a child, I was told that President Kennedy was shot in 1963. It seemed to me that the tragedy coincided, more or less, with the end of the Civil War. When you’re young, the decades blur together. Only years later did I come to understand that JFK died six months before I was born, and that I entered a world still shocked by his departure.

So it goes. Youth is inattentive. It thinks itself something fresh, full of energy, spirit, and insight. It feels that no one has ever cared so much,

felt with such intensity, or realized truth with such exquisite clarity. It prepares for a future that is unique in its grandeur and meaning. Youth may have no idea that it is wreathed in ghosts, informed by ghosts, held up on the shoulders of ghosts. When we read aloud from the literature of the past—and all literature is the literature of the past—and when we share artistic traditions, we are not merely giving children stories and pictures to enjoy. We're also inviting a measure of humility, gently correcting youth's eternal temptation to arrogance.

Books let you dream about places other than Detroit, Newark, or simply your soulless suburb. You can go anywhere—the past, the future. It exposes you to new points of view. It makes you really imagine what the world would look like, could look like—and reimagine, because the first way you imagined didn't really make any sense.

Reading is an amazing way to learn. The obvious ways, like reading a textbook to remember facts, and subconscious ways like when you read a novel and pick up on social norms, culture, and distinct perspectives. Before written language, we had to depend on oral traditions and experiences for knowledge. The downside to that is that human memory is actually pretty awful. When you think back on something that happened long ago, you aren't usually recalling that moment. Instead, you remember what you were thinking the last time you recalled that moment. Each time there is potential for changes for what happened.

There was a study done where researchers asked participants about an event from their past. Something like do you remember when you were seven years old and you went on that hot air balloon ride? People overwhelmingly reported remembering the event even though it never happened. 'Truth' long after something happens is practically invented by our own desires, biases, and emotions.

By reading, discussing what we read, and re-reading what we've read, we're able to utilize a consistent source of information. Written language provides an objective, universal way to pass on and share knowledge and experiences. Other than fire and agriculture, I can't think of a more important tool in the development of modern society.

The ability to read heightens your potential. You become able to think critically, develop and share complex ideas, and base your understanding of the world past what you see directly or hear from the few people in this world (out of billions) who you actually talk to. Unlike TV, reading lets you 'think the thoughts' in a way, of another human being. Every single person who lives or has ever lived, gained some knowledge that you do not possess. Reading and writing is by far the best way I can think of to keep that knowledge from vanishing into thin air the second a person dies.

There is no greater divide in life than the one between kids for whom the experience of learning to read is a painful or tedious one, whose rewards are remote if real, and those for whom the experiences of reading and writing are addictive, entrancing, overwhelming, and so intense as to offer a new life of their own—those for whom the moment of learning to read begins a second life of letters as rich as the primary life of experience.

Those who do not read pay with their lives and if the offender is a nation, that nation pays with its history. Somehow, the developed world manages to live while being completely oblivious to other worlds living on the same planet.

Leftists like to explain the disaffection of working-class people with public education as a natural reaction to the patriotism, conformity, and civility pushed by what they call the “ideological state apparatus.” The object of education, according to this view, is to police class boundaries by transforming most kids into unquestioning drones while selecting a small number of others for management positions. Kids from blue-collar homes are supposed to know intuitively that this is the case, and they respond accordingly, cutting class and getting high and listening to *The Wall* over and over again. A more nuanced version of this critique points out that high school American history textbooks give a Disney version of history: heroic, egalitarian, jam-packed with progress, and almost entirely free of class conflict. Teaching such an ‘Officer Friendly’ account of reality is merely to make school irrelevant to the major issues of the day. The kids know bullshit when they see it.

The disaffection of the conservatives with public education is almost precisely the opposite. They do not have a problem with the idea that schools should be designed to churn out low-wage workers; indeed, many would tell you that was a worthy goal. The conservatives are pissed off because they think the schools don’t provide enough Disney, enough Officer Friendly.

History is often used as a series of moral tales, to enhance group solidarity or, more defensibly in my view, to explain how important institutions such as parliaments and concepts such as democracy developed; and so the teaching of the past has been central to the debates over how to instill and transmit values. The danger is that what may be an admirable goal can distort history either by making it into a simple narrative in which there are black-and-white characters or by depicting it as all tending in one direction, whether that of human progress or the triumph of a particular group. Such history flattens out the complexity of human experience and leaves no room for different interpretations of the past.

One of history’s most useful tasks is to bring home to us how keenly,

honestly, and painfully past generations pursued aims that now seem to us wrong or disgraceful. Visiting the past is something like visiting a foreign country: they do some things the same and some things differently, but above all else they make us more aware of what we call home.

People sometimes ask how it is that we've come to be so anti-intellectual as a culture. Societies built on violence often repress the reality of their origins behind a veneer of noble intentions. Our national narrative tells us we were founded on the proposition that all men are created equal. On paper, perhaps, but what of the actuality? After all, the country was built on unbelievable violence, first the slaughter of the natives, second the enslavement of Africans. Honest reflection was a psychologically costly luxury that most founders couldn't afford as they forged a nation from the bones of fellow humans.

A citizenry that cannot begin to put the present into context, that has so little knowledge of the past, can too easily be fed stories by those who claim to speak with the knowledge of history and its lessons. History is called in, as we have seen, to strengthen group solidarity, often at the expense of the individual, to justify treating others badly, and to bolster arguments for particular policies and courses of action. Knowledge of the past helps us to challenge dogmatic statements and sweeping generalizations. It helps us all think more clearly.

A popular way of thinking about history goes something like this: Society is a train that travels along an inevitable, one-way track. As it hurtles ceaselessly forward, progress is made.

We once believed that the sun revolved around the earth, before rightly conceding the error of our ways and embracing heliocentrism. We once allowed black people to be kept as chattel, subjected regularly to torture and rape. But then we learned that slavery was wrong. We once hired children to toil in dangerous mines and factories, where they lost eyes and limbs and succumbed early to occupational diseases like black lung. But we abolished child labor because we know better now.

Yes, things just keep getting better and better. And nowhere does this view of history as an inevitable, one-way progress train seem more evident than in the collective imagining of Victorian poverty, which has become a sort of shorthand for gratuitous cruelty and squalor. We tut-tut at the society our unenlightened forebears built, at the workhouse of *Oliver Twist* and the overcrowded tenement of *Jacob Riis*. We sure have come a long way, we tell ourselves.

If you studied studiously in high school, your view of the facts of history is probably very, very misinformed.

One marvels at the yawning gulf between the Very Serious Stuff I was

taught in grade and high school civics and history about the Fundamental Nature Of Our Great Nation and its founding fathers and the Beautiful Documents they wrote, on the one hand, and what we mopes learn, through a drip-drip-drip process punctuated occasionally by Major Revelations, about the real nature of the Empire and our fellow creatures.

When I first read *A People's History*, this a year ago, in my freshman year at college, I was struck most notably with a vivid sense of indignation. For all my life, I had been blatantly lied to. Christopher Columbus was not a hero. He did not welcome the Americas into the “European enlightenment.” He was the architect of a genocide, just like Hitler, Stalin, and every other historically “evil” figure. Throughout all of high school, not once was it mentioned that the worst genocide in known History was committed by the same guy we have a holiday named after.

In high school history, they do spend some time covering The Trail of Tears, Slavery, and the Evils of the Jim Crow era, but its always done so in this theatrical rendition of America triumphing over intolerance.

Lincoln was a hero—even though he sent six-million Americans to their deaths in a war which was primarily fought for economic purposes. J.P. Morgan, and Rockefeller, were savvy, revolutionary business men—even though they reduced half of the population to slave-like conditions in order to achieve their ‘maximum profits.’

From reading *A People's History*, I gained an objective stance on the history of America, instead of that idealized, fictitious narrative regurgitated in every high school history class.

I believe that knowing the idealized version alone is reducing our society to sheep. The majority of us only understand this idealized America because it's all we're aware of. So, when we're faced with the actual America in practice, and we don't know what the hell is going on, we think everybody else is just sullyng our country's good name for foolish reasons. But America has done some fucked up shit in the past, and in various forms, it still is today. It's important to be aware of this.

Instead of receiving an enriching and well-rounded education, we were fed myths. All societies perpetuate lavish myths that enable the few to rule over the many, repress critical thinking, camouflage the grim realities.

Education is the way that a society articulates its values, the way that it transmits its values. Every educational system wants to produce a certain kind of human being.

If I dropped you all of in the middle of nowhere alone, some of you might be able to get home by yourselves, others might need to be rescued. If I gave you a math problem, some of you would be able to solve it, some of you wouldn't. If we had a race, some of you will be faster than others. If

we had a drawing contest, some of the pictures might be better than others. Everyone's got strengths and weaknesses (differences), accept others' and hope they accept yours.

I'm 60 and I've learned basically everything too late:

- No one knows what they're doing 100% of the time. It's not just you who feels out of your depth
- At some point you realize you've completely forgotten someone you thought was your most best friend who'd go through life with you. They were kind of an asshole, anyway. You won't miss them.
- I was a dumbass for not using what I had, as a young, attractive woman, to get what I wanted. Don't be an asshole about it, don't always rely on it, but as long as the rule is in place, use it if you need to. It's practical.
- It's absolutely true that it's quicker and simpler to apologize than to ask for permission. . . in most everything except interpersonal relationships.
- Life is long and fascinating and no one ever knows what's around the next corner. Don't fear it—run to meet it! Jump into the next, let go of the used to be. It's gone. Get over it.
- Remember to look at the small, beautiful things you encounter every day. An icy cold beverage on a hot day, kids jumping in puddles, the toddler that catches your eye in line at the grocery store and smiles, a book that takes your breath away, low clouds over a city, rain on leaves. . . there's so much awfulness swirling around you that you need to balance it with something great, even if it seems so small that it's meaningless. It's not. Each tiny thing we see or hear or touch is a thread that's woven into the day. Add a sparkly one once in a while.
- Plans are bullshit. It's better to be a person who can roll with whatever comes than a person who has unchangeable plans that just can't work. Be the water, not the rock. Unless you are The Rock, in which case, I agree: Vin Diesel is a punk ass bitch.

Why do we adults feel the need to construct the world for our children?
Why can they not explore and construct the world for themselves?

“Students are free to switch lanes on their own. Sometimes they will be in the ‘slow’ lane, sometimes they’ll be in the ‘fast’ lane. My job is to make sure they don’t get stuck in a ditch.”

Multitasking is not only not thinking, it impairs your ability to think. Thinking means concentrating on one thing long enough to develop an idea about it. Not learning other people's ideas, or memorizing a body of information, however much those may sometimes be useful. Developing your own ideas. In short, thinking for yourself. You simply cannot do that in bursts of 20 seconds at a time, constantly interrupted by Facebook messages or Twitter tweets, or fiddling with your iPod, or watching something on YouTube.

I find for myself that my first thought is never my best thought. My first thought is always someone else's; it's always what I've already heard about the subject, always the conventional wisdom. It's only by concentrating, sticking to the question, being patient, letting all the parts of my mind come into play, that I arrive at an original idea. By giving my brain a chance to make associations, draw connections, take me by surprise. And often even that idea doesn't turn out to be very good. I need time to think about it, too, to make mistakes and recognize them, to make false starts and correct them, to outlast my impulses, to defeat my desire to declare the job done and move on to the next thing.

Excellent Sheep

What, in short, is college for? We talk, in the overheated conversation we've been having about higher education lately, about soaring tuition, rising student debt, and the daunting labor market for new graduates. We talk about the future of the university: budget squeezes, distance learning, free tuition, massive open online courses, and whether college in its present form is even necessary. We talk about national competitiveness, the twenty-first-century labor force, technology and engineering, and the outlook for our future prosperity. But we never talk about the premises that underlie this conversation, as if what makes for a happy life and a good society were simply self-evident, and as if in either case the exclusive answer were more money.

Education is more than the acquisition of marketable skills, and you are more than your ability to contribute to your employer's bottom line or the nation's GDP, no matter what the rhetoric of politicians or executives would have you think. To ask what college is for is to ask what life is for, what society is for—what people are for.

In 1971, 73 percent of incoming freshmen said that it is essential or very important to “develop a meaningful philosophy of life,” 37 percent to be “very well-off financially” (not well-off, note, but very well-off). By 2011, the numbers were almost reversed, 47 percent and 80 percent, respectively. For well over thirty years, we've been loudly announcing that happiness is money, with a side order of fame. No wonder students have come to believe that college is all about getting a job.

The things that are most worth doing are worth doing for their own sake. Anyone who tells you that the sole purpose of education is the acquisition of negotiable skills is attempting to reduce you to a productive employee at work, a gullible consumer in the market, and a docile subject of the state. What's at stake, when we ask what college is for, is nothing less than our ability to remain fully human.

You don't arrive in college a blank slate; you arrive having already been inscribed with all the ways of thinking and feeling that the world has been instilling in you from the moment you were born: the myths, the narratives, the pieties, the assumptions, the values, the sacred words. Your soul is a mirror of what is around you. Freshman students can always be counted on to produce an opinion about any given subject the moment it is brought up. It is not that they had necessarily considered the matter before. It is that their minds are like a chemical bath of conventional attitudes that will instantly precipitate out of solution and coat whatever object you introduce.

Being an intellectual begins with thinking your way outside of your assumptions and the system that enforces them. But students who get into elite schools are precisely the ones who have best learned to work within the system, so it's almost impossible for them to see outside it, to see that it's even there. Long before they got to college, they turned themselves into world-class hoop-jumpers and teacher-pleasers, getting A's in every class no matter how boring they found the teacher or how pointless the subject, racking up eight or ten extracurricular activities no matter what else they wanted to do with their time.

Paradoxically, the situation may be better at second-tier schools and, in particular, again, at liberal arts colleges than at the most prestigious universities. Some students end up at second-tier schools because they're exactly like students at Harvard or Yale, only less gifted or driven. But others end up there because they have a more independent spirit. They didn't get straight A's because they couldn't be bothered to give everything in every class. They concentrated on the ones that meant the most to them or on a single strong extracurricular passion or on projects that had nothing to do with school or even with looking good on a college application. Maybe they just sat in their room, reading a lot and writing in their journal. These are the kinds of kids who are likely, once they get to college, to be more interested in the human spirit than in school spirit, and to think about leaving college bearing questions, not résumés.

As you may have guessed, I didn't apply to the Journal or to any judges. But that was because I had a family, and I didn't want to spend any more evenings away from them to do cite checking. I also had a career and enough accomplishments behind me that I was emotionally secure enough not to pursue credentials for their own sake. But if I had been single and in my twenties, I'm sure I would have played the game. That's what our educational system teaches smart young people: that there are universal, objective markers of achievement and ability, and that's what you're supposed to get.

The system does not actually prefer high intelligence; it prefers moderate giftedness—I hate that term, but it's the one currently used—combined with compliance, a desire to please authority figures, and craving status. These are often traits which the profoundly gifted have lower, rather than higher, levels of. Being extremely intelligent does not protect you from cognitive bias, or make you a better person.

The broader problem of credentialism is real. For one thing, the pursuit of brass rings because they are shiny creates unnecessary stress and unhappiness. More generally, when you give out prizes based on idiosyncratic criteria, ambitious people adjust their behavior to excel at those criteria—which may

not be particularly valuable in the real world.

Then there's the cost to society. A world in which success means Rhodes, or Teach for America, or Goldman, or McKinsey followed by Yale Law School or Harvard Business School followed by Blackstone, or Bridgewater, or Google is one in which too many are doomed to failure, too many indoctrinated into a certain way of being and seeing.

To me, the entire value system behind the Race to the Top (RTT) was mistaken. I actually think we should be careful about conceding that education is about "student achievement." Personally, I think education is about introducing young people to the world, helping them achieve wisdom and understanding, and cultivating their curiosity, thoughtfulness, sociability, and creativity. The Obama administration's view seemed to be that education is about improving math and reading outcomes in order to prepare students for college. And college, of course, exists to prepare students for jobs—see Obama's infamous disparaging comment about the economic value of an art history major. The narrowly instrumental view of education has been embraced by libertarians and "progressive" Education Reformers alike, who both seem to accept the premise that schools should be pumping as much Skill into students as possible as efficiently as possible.

I de-emphasize assessment entirely when I think about what a good school should be. This is not because I think it doesn't matter whether students learn. Rather, it's because I believe that when you create the right school environment, in which teachers have what they need, the learning follows, and you don't actually need to worry too much about measuring performance. It's important to remember, as many critics of testing-focused teaching have pointed out, that the more "performance assessment" there is, the less teachers can teach. Time spent assessing is time not spent doing, and among those who demand more quantitatively-based teacher accountability, there is very little discussion of what this actually means in the lives of teachers (e.g. more stress, more paperwork).

I am a lot more interested in the experiences of students and teachers than their Outcomes. Are kids excited to come to school, or do they dread it? Do teachers enjoy their work, or do they feel as if they are being handcuffed by administrative regulations that prevent them from reaching their full potential? I am an old school believer in a "liberal education," the success of which is not measured quantitatively in terms of your test results but qualitatively in terms of your character.

Race to the Top may have been misguided, but it was the logical education policy that followed from the brand of liberalism Obama believed in. This brand of liberalism is meritocratic, technocratic, and capitalistic, meaning that it:

1. Sees competition as good, and winning competitions as proof of desert
2. Defers to policy experts over the actual people affected by policies
3. Views productivity and success within the marketplace as a measure of the good

This view sees “innovation,” “technology,” and “competition” as inherently good things, regardless of the facts on the ground. Those of us with a vision of a humane education need to reject this type of policy entirely.

RTT was wrong in a thousand ways. It prioritized data collection for its own sake, and in spite of its focus on achievement and evidence-based policy, didn’t actually boost achievement and wasn’t based on evidence. It was just free market ideology. Instead of talking about adding yet more assessments of teacher performance, we should be talking about the fact that teachers across the country have to buy their own school supplies, and the profession offers too much work for too little pay to attract good candidates who will stay for the long-term. No more races to the top. What we need is a race to make sure every school has a music teacher, every building is safe and beautiful and well-maintained, every child is well-fed, every classroom is full of books and supplies, and every teacher has what they need in order to help children discover the world of knowledge.

“Children should be custom made not mass produced. One room schoolhouses here are still very popular. The older children help the younger children while the teacher works with individual students.”

The reasons for credentialism go beyond any easy cure. One is the innate conservatism of people who play by the rules and excel at school. One is the high degree of inequality in contemporary society, which inflates the costs of not landing at the top end of the income distribution. One is the homogenization of culture, which means that most smart young people in the United States grow up in the same informational environment, evaluating the same set of options. Finally, for the most part, credentialism is individually rational: it’s ‘work for Goldman now, save the world later.’ But after too many years in that environment, people come to believe that working for Goldman is saving the world—I believe the phrase is “doing God’s work.” And that’s where credentialism can lead you.

Essentially, you sell your life to afford to keep living so you can sell more. And the best you can hope for is to train your whole first quarter of life so that your lifetime is worth more than the time of others.

Within education systems rooted in the Mechanics of the Market, where conformity and competition are widespread, creative self-expression becomes very difficult, individuality is curtailed and the pressure to “achieve” is immense. Such an approach does not liberate intelligence and encourage creative living; on the contrary, it inhibits and frustrates a person. Instead of awakening the integrated intelligence of the individual, education is encouraging you to conform to a pattern and so is hindering your comprehension of yourself. This methodology of competition and conformity is frustrating teachers, sucking creativity out of school and university, and fueling increasing levels of mental illness amongst young people, leading in some cases to self-harm and suicide.

We mandate “activities,” so we reward joiners. We insist on “leadership,” so we reward climbers. We value those who give us what we want, so we reward manipulators. We punish those who will not play the game. We are robbing children of their childhood and teenagers of their adolescence. We have engineered a vast regimentation of youth. So many are desperately struggling to do their best within a system that has lost its mind. But we need to do more than throw up our hands. We cannot continue to go with the flow, however powerful the current is.

When you approach life as a sequence of milestones to be achieved, you exist in a state of near-continuous failure. Almost all the time, by definition, you’re not at the place you’ve defined as embodying accomplishment or success. And should you get there, you’ll find you’ve lost the very thing that gave you a sense of purpose—so you’ll formulate a new goal and start again.

We once had a chance to achieve a balance between autonomy, diversity, and society. Many societies of interwoven dependencies worldwide had the potential to evolve and allow both autonomy and society for all. Instead we created a global, sectarian, stratified class system where everyone must strive for the same goals and all but the few setting the goals would fail.

“Countries with more engineering majors tend to grow faster and those with more law students tend to grow slower.”

Of course, a society in which everyone is a good little worker cog in Carnegie’s money-making machine is also a nightmare. A society in which no one has the skills to critique and analyze the society itself is already dead. We need less lawyers, MBAs, and STEM graduates, and a hell of a lot more English majors—even as infested as that field is with post-modernist bullshit. Also, constant “growth” and technological/industrial “progress” will ultimately bring not just individual societies but our species as a whole to the very brink of planetary destruction.

When schools were asked about the morality of allowing financial firms—which have caused so much harm and contributed so much to inequality—and defense contractors—which have aided in the murder of hundreds of millions in the last century alone—to attend on-campus career fairs they cited their duty of impartiality, which, they believe, prevents them from seeking to influence students' choices, and explained that there were plenty of other careers on offer. But they appear to have confused impartiality with passivity. Passivity in the face of unequal forces is anything but impartial. Impartiality demands an active attempt to create balance, to resist power, to tell the dark side of the celestial tale being pummeled into the minds of undergraduates by the richest money and death cults.

In fairness, many university presidents are paid largely for their ability to attract donations, and it is possible that these presidents were especially successful in attracting contributions. However, this is a skill that matters much more in an unequal society that depends on donations from the rich to support higher education. Being able to develop relationships with the wealthy is a much less valuable skill in a society where the wealthy have less money and education is supported through other channels.

Basically universities have become a cog in the machine of neoliberalism. Rather than anything resembling an institution for the public good, it has taken on the worst aspects of corporate America (and Canada). You can see this in the way they push now for endowment money, the highly paid senior management contrasted with poorly paid adjuncts, and how research is controlled these days. Blue skies research is cut, while most research is geared towards short-term corporate profit, from which they will no doubt milk society with.

I tremble when I think about what all of this means:

1. Students won't be getting a good education when they are taught by adjuncts being paid poverty wages.
2. Corporations will profit in the short-run.
3. The wealthy and corporations—due to endowment money—have a huge sway.
4. Blue skies research will fall and over time, US leadership in hard sciences.
5. The productivity of future workers will be suppressed and with it, their earning potential.

6. Related to that, inequality will increase dramatically as universities worsen the situation.
7. There will be many “left behind” students and graduates with high debt, along with bleak job prospects.
8. State governments, starving for tax money will make further cuts, worsening these trends.
9. Anything hostile to the corporate state will be suppressed.
10. With it, academic freedom and ultimately democracy will be much reduced.

What it means is decline in US technological power and productivity gains, and with them, living standards. All of these trends already are happening. They will worsen.

Our new multiracial, gender-neutral, globalized meritocracy has figured out a way to make itself hereditary, and the education system is that way. That is largely what “diversity” amounts to now. Visit any elite campus across our great nation, and you can thrill to the heartwarming spectacle of the children of white business-people and professionals studying and playing alongside the children of black, Asian, and Latino business-people and professionals. Kids at schools like Stanford think that their environment is diverse if one comes from Missouri, another one from Pakistan, or one plays the cello and the other one lacrosse—never mind that all of them have parents who are bankers or doctors. They aren’t meeting “all kinds of people,” as they like to say. They’re meeting the same kind of people; they just happen to come from all kinds of places. They are aware of themselves as an academic elite, but not as a social or economic one.

We’re not entitled, we work hard—that’s the rationale one often hears. And you may indeed have worked much harder than the kids around you, but what about the ones you couldn’t see? Do you really think that none of them worked hard? What about the kid at the public school a couple of towns over, who put in just as many hours every week, only twenty-five of them were at a Denny’s? The way things go at this point, being treated fairly is itself a form of privilege. Most Americans work hard without receiving the rewards they’ve earned. That, in fact, is pretty much what social inequality involves today.

The kind of individuals who go to elite colleges are enlightened enough to be politically correct, but not enough to find the very idea of an elite college objectionable. They preen themselves on their progressive views on

race, gender, and sexuality, but they blind themselves to the social division that matters the most, that they guard most jealously, that forms the basis of their comfort, their self-respect, and even of their virtue itself: class.

I know it's hard to hear these things if you're a privileged young person. It was very hard for me to hear them, when the knowledge started to be thrust upon me. It's not your fault you grew up affluent and sheltered. But now you need to take responsibility for it. You can start by recognizing that you aren't, in fact, more valuable than other people, no matter what you've always heard. Your pain does not hurt more. Your soul does not weigh more. If I were religious, I would say that God does not love you more. And the social implications should be clear.

Grabbing everything you can isn't any more virtuous when you do it with the power of your brains than it is when you do it with the power of your fists. Yet that is exactly what's happening now, to an extent we haven't seen in nearly a hundred years: our "leaders," the elite, who are supposed to work for the greater good, enrich themselves at everyone else's expense and justify their actions with the notion that they're "better." Not being an entitled little shit is an admirable goal, but the real problem is the situation that makes it so hard to be anything else. The real problem, once again, is the system itself.

The colleges seem to think that piling up rejections makes them special. In fact, it just means that they have collectively opted to deploy their massive, tax-subsidized endowments to replicate privilege rather than fulfill their duty to produce an educated public.

Consider the US News college rankings, student financing was left out of the model. This brings us to the crucial question we'll confront time and again: What is the objective of the modeler? In this case, put yourself in the place of the editors at US News in 1988. When they were building their first statistical model, how would they know when it worked? Well, it would start out with a lot more credibility if it reflected the established hierarchy. If Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, and Yale came out on top, it would seem to validate their model, replicating the informal models that they and their customers carried in their own heads. To build such a model, they simply had to look at those top universities and count what made them so special. What did they have in common, as opposed to the safety school in the next town? Well, their students had stratospheric SATs and graduated like clockwork. The alumni were rich and poured money back into the universities. By analyzing the virtues of the name-brand universities, the ratings team created an elite yardstick to measure excellence.

Now, if they incorporated the cost of education into the formula, strange things might happen to the results. Cheap universities could barge into the

excellence hierarchy. This could create surprises and sow doubts. The public might receive the US News rankings as something less than the word of God. It was much safer to start with the venerable champions on top. Of course they cost a lot. But maybe that was the price of excellence. By leaving cost out of the formula, it was as if US News had handed college presidents a gilded checkbook. They had a commandment to maximize performance in fifteen areas, and keeping costs low wasn't one of them. In fact, if they raised prices, they'd have more resources for addressing the areas where they were being measured. Tuition has skyrocketed ever since.

Between 1985 and 2013, the cost of higher education rose by more than 500 percent, nearly four times the rate of inflation. To attract top students, colleges have gone on building booms, featuring glass-walled student centers, luxury dorms, and gyms with climbing walls and whirlpool baths. This would all be wonderful for students and might enhance their college experience—if they weren't the ones paying for it, in the form of student loans that would burden them for decades.

We cannot place the blame for this trend entirely on the US News rankings. Our entire society has embraced not only the idea that a college education is essential, but the idea that a degree from a highly ranked school can catapult a student into a life of power and privilege. The US News rankings simply fed on these beliefs, fears, and neuroses. It created powerful incentives that have encouraged spending while turning a blind eye to skyrocketing tuition and fees.

Every ranking system can be gamed. And when that happens, it creates new and different feedback loops and a host of unintended consequences. But even those who claw their way into a top college lose out. If you think about it, the college admissions game, while lucrative for some, has virtually no educational value. The complex and fraught production simply re-sorts and reranks the very same pool of eighteen-year-old kids in newfangled ways. They don't master important skills by jumping through many more hoops or writing meticulously targeted college essays under the watchful eye of professional tutors. Others scrounge online for cut-rate versions of those tutors. All of them, from the rich to the working class, are simply being trained to fit into an enormous machine—to satisfy an algorithm. And at the end of the ordeal, many of them will be saddled with debt that will take decades to pay off. They're pawns in an arms race, and it's a particularly nasty one.

Perhaps it was just as well that the Obama administration failed to come up with a rejiggered ranking system. The pushback by college presidents was fierce. After all, they had spent decades optimizing themselves to satisfy the US News model. A new formula based on graduation rates, class size,

alumni employment and income, and other metrics could wreak havoc with their ranking and reputation. No doubt they also made good points about the vulnerabilities of any new model and the new feedback loops it would generate. So the government capitulated. And the result might be better. Instead of a ranking, the Education Department released loads of data on a website. The result is that students can ask their own questions about the things that matter to them—including class size, graduation rates, and the average debt held by graduating students. They don't need to know anything about statistics or the weighting of variables. The software itself, much like an online travel site, creates individual models for each person. Think of it: transparent, controlled by the user, and personal.

Anywhere you find the combination of great need and ignorance, you'll likely see predatory ads. If people are anxious about their sex lives, predatory advertisers will promise them Viagra or Cialis, or even penis extensions. If they are short of money, offers will pour in for high-interest payday loans. If their computer is acting sludgy, it might be a virus inserted by a predatory advertiser, who will then offer to fix it. Even the boom in for-profit colleges is fueled by predatory ads.

A 2012 Senate committee report on for-profit colleges described Vatterott's recruiting manual, which sounds diabolical. It directs recruiters to target:

- Welfare Mom w/Kids
- Pregnant Ladies
- Recent Divorce
- Low Self-Esteem
- Low Income Jobs
- Experienced a Recent Death
- Physically/Mentally Abused
- Recent Incarceration
- Drug Rehabilitation
- Dead-End Jobs—No Future

Why, specifically, were they targeting these folks? Vulnerability is worth gold. It always has been. Picture an itinerant quack in an old western movie. He pulls into town with his wagon full of jangling jars and bottles. When he sits down with an elderly prospective customer, he seeks out her weaknesses. She covers her mouth when she smiles, indicating that she's sensitive about her bad teeth. She anxiously twirls her old wedding ring, which from the looks of her swollen knuckle will be stuck there till the end of her days. Arthritis. So when he pitches his products to her, he focuses on the ugliness of her teeth and her aching hands. He can promise to restore the beauty of her smile and wash away the pain from her joints. With this

knowledge, he knows he's halfway to a sale before even clearing his throat to speak.

It starts with the sales pitch colleges make to kids. The thrust of it is usually that people who go to college make lots more money than the unfortunate dunces who don't. "A bachelor's degree is worth \$2.8 million on average over a lifetime" is how Georgetown University put it. The Census Bureau tells us similarly that a master's degree is worth on average about \$1.3 million more than a high school diploma.

But these stats say more about the increasing uselessness of a high school degree than they do about the value of a college diploma. Moreover, since virtually everyone at the very highest strata of society has a college degree, the stats are skewed by a handful of financial titans. A college degree has become a minimal status marker as much as anything else. I'm sure people who take polo lessons or sailing lessons earn a lot more on average too. But does that mean you should send your kids to sailing school? Maybe you're never too young to start networking?

Your basic citizen's education wasn't expanded from four grades to eight in order to include astronomy, microbiology, and zoology. It wasn't expanded from eight grades to twelve in order to include astrophysics, biochemistry, and paleontology. It wasn't expanded from twelve grades to sixteen in order to include exobiology, plasma physics, and heart surgery. Today's graduates don't leave school with all the advances of the past hundred years in their heads. Just like their great-great-grandparents a century ago, they leave with enough in their heads to start at the bottom of the job market, flipping burgers, pumping gas, and bagging groceries. It just takes today's graduates a whole lot longer to get there.

What happens when busyness and sociability leave no room for solitude? The ability to engage in introspection, I put it to my students one day, is the essential precondition for living an intellectual life, and the essential precondition for introspection is solitude. They took this in for a second, and then one of them said, with a dawning sense of self-awareness:

"So are you saying that we're all just, like, really excellent sheep?"

Well, I don't know. But I do know that the life of the mind is lived one mind at a time: one solitary, skeptical, resistant mind at a time. The best place to cultivate it is not within an educational system whose real purpose is to reproduce the class system.

The Weight of the Past

“When he thinks of the starry-eyed puerility and narcissism of these fantasies now, a rough decade later, he experiences a kind of full-frame internal wince, that type of embarrassment-before-self that makes our most mortifying memories objects of fascination and repulsion at once, though in his case a certain amount of introspection and psychotherapy (the latter the origin of the self-caricature doodling during downtime in his beige cubicle) had enabled him to understand that his professional fantasies were not in the main all that unique, that a large percentage of bright young men and women locate the impetus behind their career choice in the belief that they are fundamentally different from the common run of man, unique and in certain crucial ways superior, more as it were central, meaningful—what else could explain the fact that they themselves have been at the exact center of all they’ve experienced for the whole twenty years of their conscious lives?—and that they can and will make a difference in their chosen field simply by the fact of their unique and central presence in it?”

In America the young are always ready to give, to those who are older than themselves, the full benefits of their inexperience.

The problem with shunning climate change deniers is that it doesn’t take into account that for the average person ignorance about major issues is rational. Most people cannot do anything about climate change, or neoliberalism, or any of the other things that plague us. Deep down most people know that they have little power to change governmental and corporate policy. So the average person either doesn’t follow current events much (the majority) or they only read and watch sources that confirm their beliefs.

Most people are so worn out from work and the difficulties of daily life that they refuse to educate themselves. I used to think that these people were sheep but now I have more sympathy for this kind of attitude. The refusal to think deeply about important and potentially troubling issues is rational because it reduces stress and helps people focus on their immediate survival. To your average person, worrying about something that seems distant, like climate change, seems ludicrous. It is like worrying about an asteroid hitting the Earth. Even if you convinced them that climate change was a serious problem they would say that there is nothing they can do about it.

I don't necessarily blame past generations because they were trapped in the logic of rational ignorance. It just doesn't pay for most people to think deeply about big issues like the environment. Most individuals have a very, very tiny chance of influencing events so it makes sense for them to not be troubled by matters they have no control over. That is why so many people seem to be "sheep." It is a rational way for people to deal with the world around them by putting most of their time and energy into their private lives and not worrying about big picture issues.

The low-wage worker who wants to use his mind isn't going to waste his time on international affairs, because that's useless; he can't do anything about it anyhow, and he might learn unpleasant things and even get into trouble. So he might as well do it where it's fun, and not threatening—professional football or basketball or something like that.

Your first mistake is assuming that the goal of public education is to produce critical thinkers. It isn't. Never was. Never will be. Our entire economic and political paradigm has been concocted to allow those with power to stay in power and those without power to have the illusion of personal autonomy and participation in this society as something more than necessary labor.

Once, long ago, those in power did not need this illusion to maintain their grasp on society. We had widespread actual slavery, actual serfdom, and actual social castes. Now we have virtual freedoms and virtual rights. The moment you begin to upend the apple cart, you get labeled a dissident, bullied by police, military, judiciary, or even other corporatocratic enterprises into ceasing and desisting from destabilizing our fragile marketplace.

Our economy is built on smoke and mirrors and whispers of prosperity. Our workforce exists to peddle material bullshit we don't need and only believe that we want. Our careers exist to provide us not with the means to live, but the means to survive so that we can save enough earnings to not have to work when we become too old and frail to enjoy life as we did when we were young.

Our higher education systems shackle us with debt that we will spend decades working our way out of, such that we will be unable to explore our desires and passions and instead elect to only debase ourselves in the name of profit.

Our prisons don't house those who would undo our society through malice and mental infirmity, they are overflowing with those that dared to involve themselves in illicit commerce. Our patrolmen don't safeguard the public, they generate revenue for municipalities and states.

Our soldiers don't protect the nation against enemy aggressors, they enforce corporate goals against enemy nations by invading and dismantling

countries too weak to repel them. Our politicians don't serve their constituents, they feed an economic paradigm that will continue to stamp and tax reality, manufacturing cheap, plastic meaning instead of calling our state and species to a higher, better purpose.

Our hospitals don't aid the sick or poor, they prolong suffering and death in exchange for money.

Public education is the propaganda wing of a short-sighted, incompetent entity that would rather employ its population in the chasing of white elephants as opposed to expanding their horizons and helping them see reality. We are taught not to see reality, we are told to ignore cynics and preached a whitewashed history of heroes and philanthropists rather than butchers and sociopaths.

“Philosophy is a wonderful thing. Critical thinking is wonderful, but our society would not survive a thinking majority.”

“Knowledge is power; but who hath duly Considered the power of Ignorance? Knowledge slowly builds up what Ignorance in an hour pulls down. Knowledge, through patient and frugal centuries, enlarges discovery and makes record of it; Ignorance, wanting its day's dinner, lights a fire with the record, and gives a flavor to its one roast with the burned souls of many generations.”

—George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*

Without religious decrees, rules, whatever label you put on them, you are forced to examine everything yourself. Well, this is not entirely true, in modern times our secular culture has replaced religion in many spheres. However, in many instances the secular and religious are the same for our purposes.

Without examining everything, we leave ourselves open to manipulation. Our priests guiding us the way the powerful wish. Our education system should be giving every child the skills needed to do this. However this skill is not only not easily testable by filling in bubbles, it also poses a threat to institutions which allow a few to be enriched, empowered, at the expense of the many. Why concentrate such great power when information can be transmitted to the other side of the planet in the blink of an eye? Why limit decisions to some elite few when information is no longer scattered in physical buildings across the globe but instead accessible by anyone with an inexpensive tool?

Ignorance is a double-edged sword for the powerful, while it is nothing but negative for the powerless. Even those who are not ignorant are shackled

by the masses of still-ignorant, receiving no benefit except the knowledge of their true position.

We embrace (right) or coddle (left) ignorance. Whether it is something to be praised because it shows a truer knowledge, a common-sense that those eggheads just don't have, or a sympathetic gaze and soft touch, because it was the unequal system which helped keep them ignorant.

A group of ignorant people is fucking dangerous. Whether they're surrounding you and picking up some rocks, or just vocally supporting barbaric policies—it doesn't matter—they're a fucking threat. That doesn't mean you need to kill them, just as you don't need to kill all predators just because they might do something bad. But you be fucking aware, wary, and understand the power wielded.

A war or ignorance would be the only 'War on X' that would actually be worth fighting. And it must be fought like a war. Whether that is a cold or hot one, it does not matter, but the stakes are not simply your preferred option not being chosen, a workable compromise chosen, but life and death, if not for you, surely for millions of sentient feeling emotive creatures around the world.

The most dangerous man to any government is the man who is able to think things out for himself, without regard to the prevailing superstitions and taboos. Almost inevitably he comes to the conclusion that the government he lives under is dishonest, insane, and intolerable, and so, if he is romantic, he tries to change it. And even if he is not romantic personally, he is very apt to spread discontent among those who are.

If we were to provide students with the fundamental learning and teaching skills necessary, each individual would be capable of educating their own children at the same level if not better than current institutions. Any other outcome would signal a failure of the institutions, not the people.

The invocation of theory has something modest about it, but it is also "massive," as the kids say now; theology was countered by theories, which are tentative, open-ended, and unsure but also explain things that were otherwise mystifying, and are always empirical—open to probing and testing and changing. Theories are in many ways the ground and basis of our humanity: it is in the child's ability to make theories, test them from experience, and then make new and better ones, that intelligence emerges; and it is, by the same argument, in the perversion of theory into dogma that intelligence becomes enslaved. A child who can't make new theories is a disabled child.

The problem is you're viewing things through too much of your own cultural biases. We view the world and people in it largely in two chunks: Pre-Civilization and Civilization. But at the rough dividing line of these

two, there begins—or likely simply continues—to be a whittling down of ideas, of “acceptable” practices. Some of this whittling was good, but I think you will find, in our ignorance, we cut off quite a bit of useful material as well.

Human nature as it is commonly used is misleading; it is nothing more than the inherited cultural practices of a single dominant ideology.

Conservative arguments throughout history show that they consistently make appeals to the same notions: perversity, futility, and jeopardy: Proposed Reform X is against God or nature, it won’t work, and it will threaten existing progress. The arguments are made consistently regardless of whether there is any evidence that they are true. This is how a war on the imagination is waged, and people become convinced that it isn’t worth dreaming of anything radically different than the status quo. So when teachers are being paid so little that they leave the profession, we are told that the only options are to let unqualified people teach or import teachers from overseas. And when our public schools are underfunded and dysfunctional, we have a debate over how best to turn the schools into effective job-training programs.

One of the distinguishing marks of history as an academic discipline is the better you know a particular historical period, the harder it becomes to explain why things happened one way and not another. Those who have only a superficial knowledge of a certain period tend to focus only on the possibility that was eventually realized. They offer a just-so story to explain with hindsight why that outcome was inevitable. Those more deeply informed about the period are much more cognizant of the roads not taken.

My students used to tell me how lucky I was to be teaching history. Once you have got a period or the events of a war straight, so they assumed, you don’t have to think about them again. It must be so nice, they would say, not to redo your lecture notes. The past, after all, is the past. It cannot be changed. History, they seemed to say, is no more demanding than digging a stone out of the ground. It can be fun to do but not really necessary. What does it matter what happened then? This is now.

Part of the problem lies in the way in which we teach history. We teach as if it is a concrete story, whose facts are certain and agreed upon. It was long ago and we know the truth of what happened. It creates a certain inevitability to the current ways of thinking; adds a certain natural progression to the ideas and cultural practices of the present. Rather than developing critical thinking, history, as currently taught, simply indoctrinates a child into the current culture, giving it an air of superiority and finality.

This will effect all aspects of their life going forward. What they will accept, what they will support, what they will strive for, altered simply by effecting the story of the world.

I distrust summaries, any kind of gliding through time, any too great a claim that one is in control of what one recounts; I think someone who claims to understand but is obviously calm, someone who claims to write with emotion recollected in tranquility, is a fool and a liar. To understand is to tremble. To recollect is to re-enter and be riven. I admire the authority of being on one's knees in front of the event.

The most important impact of script on human history is precisely this: it has gradually changed the way humans think and view the world. Free association and holistic thought have given way to compartmentalization and bureaucracy.

A lobotomy is performed on each generation. Facts are removed. History is excised and replaced by an eternal present. It is the manipulation of power worldwide, while masquerading as a force for universal good, a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis which means that it never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest.

Perhaps because historians—much like economists—long to sound like their peers in the sciences, they have increasingly gone in for specialized language and long and complex sentences. Much of the writing is difficult, often needlessly so. A historian offers a curious defense of obscurantism. We should not, he said severely, expect historians to be entertaining or to tell interesting stories:

“Do we need professional history that entertains us—especially when public money pays for so much of what we historians do? Do we need physics that entertains us?”

Historians, however, are not scientists, and if they do not make what they are doing intelligible to the public, then others will rush in to fill the void. Political and other leaders too often get away with misusing or abusing history for their own ends because the rest of us do not know enough to challenge them. What they like to do is select from history—as they see it—the “glorious” moments. Any politician who tries to use history, almost always doesn't get it quite right. Already much of the history that the public reads and enjoys is written by amateur historians. Some of it is very good, but much is not. Bad history tells only part of complex stories. It claims knowledge that it could not possibly have, as when, for example, it purports to give the unspoken thoughts of its characters.

Victorian historians too often depicted the past as an inevitable progress leading to the glorious present when Britain ruled the world. And French and German and Russian and American historians did much the same thing

for their nations' stories. Like epic poems, their books were filled with heroes and villains and stirring events. Such histories sustain us in difficult times, but they are nursery history.

Anyone who has ever had an argument and said, 'You always do that' or 'I trusted you' or 'You owe me one,' is using history to gain an advantage in the present. And almost all of us, from heads of countries to private citizens, do it. We spin the events of the past to show that we always tend to behave well and our opponents badly or that we are normally right and others wrong. Therefore, it goes almost without saying, we are in the right again this time.

In a secular world, which is what most of us in Europe and North America live in, history takes on the role of showing us good and evil, virtues and vices. Religion no longer plays as important a part as it once did in setting moral standards and transmitting values. Congregations at the old mainstream churches have declined sharply. It is true that there are huge evangelical churches out there but they are as much about entertainment and socializing as religion. The millions who describe themselves as born-again Christians often have, according to surveys, the sketchiest of ideas about what it is they are adhering to.

History with a capital 'H' is being called in to fill the void. It restores a sense not necessarily of a divine being but of something above and beyond human beings. It is our authority: it can vindicate us and judge us, and damn those who oppose us.

One part of our problem is that we are too familiar with novels, TV shows, and films. In art, nothing happens that is not later found to be important. Details are clues that affect story plot and help determine the conclusion. But life isn't that way. Life's tales are many, contradictory, overlapping. In life, one needs to stay loose, recognize happenstance, be ok with uncertainty, not indulge magical thinking.

Another aspect regarding the stories we've been told is how evil is handled. It's often given more three-dimensionality than the good to make clear its fearsomeness and to produce some adrenaline flow. To serve this, evil people and groups are often played as geniuses while the good people and groups are common folk who win by the skin of their teeth or by lucking out just because they are good. This is disempowering—our stories need to do better on this.

Art is not life.

The prison is your culture, which you sustain generation after generation. You yourself are learning from your parents how to be a prisoner. Your parents learned from their parents how to be a prisoner. Their parents

learned from their parents how to be a prisoner. And so on, back to the beginning in the Fertile Crescent ten-thousand years ago.

In times of profound change, learners will inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.

We spend altogether too much of our energy laboring in the shadows of the past—under the stultifying weight of convention, precedent, received wisdom, and neurosis. Our personal and collective inheritance stands in the way of our enjoyment of life and accomplishment of anything original.

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. The mind like the moon, cratered with all the big impressions things had made.

Why do people believe in what they do? Why do they do what they do? And how can that be changed?

The primary problem isn't that we don't know what our problems are, or even how to fix them (in technical terms). It is that we aren't fixing them even though we know they exist and have a pretty good idea how to fix them.

I mean, we've known about climate change, undeniably, since the late 70s, at the latest. And we did, well, basically nothing. We know that inequality is terrible for everyone, and people were warning back in the late 80s about it and we, well, slammed our foot down on the accelerator.

And so on.

Now, this isn't a new pursuit for me. I wondered about it when I was younger, but I examined it, mostly, the wrong way—through anthropology, sociology, linguistics, history, neuroscience, and so on. Oh, it's not that these disciplines don't have important insights, but they are all fragmentary and none of them tell you the most important thing, not really: How to change. I mean, it's nice to have some insights into why you're fucked up, but if those insights don't lead to the ability to become less fucked up, the exercise is somewhat sterile.

There are a group of people who have, over millennia, spent virtually all their time examining how the human mind works, and why it believes what it believes. Spiritual people. Not religious people, understand; religion is what people who want pat answers to the insights of spiritual people create. They suck the insights dry, and turn them into set rules.

You've got someone like Mohamed, say, whose first followers are mostly slaves, women, and poor people. And Mohamed, well, he made their lives better; he made new rules which were not as bad as the old rules. Sure, women still weren't equal to men, but they had more rights than before. And people think that the new rules are now set in stone for eternity, rather

than considering that he was making things as much better as he could under the circumstances and given his own, unbroken conditioning.

Then there's poor Jesus. Good God, what his followers have done to his teachings! They've turned them into, with some exceptions like the social gospel, an utter force for evil. This is the fate of the great spiritual figures: to be misunderstood. Sometimes that misunderstanding doesn't do too much harm; sometimes it does a lot, as with Mohamed and Christ.

There's a type of spirituality which basically involves learning to examine one's mind, until the way it really works becomes something one can't deny any more. The simplest rule of the mind is that everything in it is stuff given to you by other people. Your religion, your nationality, your love of sports, whatever—it's all conditioning and while it isn't precisely all garbage, it's close to it. You didn't choose it, but you think it is 'you.' You think your personality is you, or that you are American or Chinese or Hindu or Christian or Jewish.

You're full up to the brim with stinking garbage; realities created by "wise" men of the past, which served their purposes and which has been, usually, completely unsuited to living a healthy, happy life with other humans in such a way that you don't, well, destroy the ecosphere, for one.

And the humor of it is in the identification with it—that you, that we, think that all this garbage is actually us. It's closer to a sickness, a virus, passed from sufferer to sufferer. And it's why we're ten yards from a wall, going 100 miles an hour.

If you want to stop being sick, and a vector for sickness, start by just resting and examining the contents of your consciousness as they come and go. And be ready to be really unhappy, as you realize you're a slave. But it is the slave who believes they are free who is most chained: You can't break invisible chains.

The bullshit this generation puts up with as a temporary nuisance from deranged politicians will seem perfectly ordinary to the next generation.

We use history to understand ourselves, and we ought to use it to understand others. If we find out that an acquaintance has suffered a catastrophe, that knowledge helps us to avoid causing him pain. We can never assume that we are all the same, and that is as true in business and politics as it is in personal relations. If we know nothing of what the loss of the Civil War and Reconstruction meant to Southern whites, how can we understand their resentment toward Yankees that has lingered into the present day? Without knowing the history of slavery and the discrimination and frequent violence that blacks suffered even after emancipation, we cannot begin to grasp the complexities of the relationship between the "races" in the United States. In international affairs, how can we understand the deep

hostility between Palestinians and Israelis without knowing something of their tragic conflicts?

It is sometimes hard for us, perhaps especially in North America, to recognize that history is not a dead subject. It does not lie there safely in the past for us to look at when the mood takes us. History can be helpful; it can also be very dangerous. It is wiser to think of history not as a pile of dead leaves or a collection of dusty artifacts but as a pool, sometimes benign, often sulfurous, that lies under the present, silently shaping our institutions, our ways of thought, our likes and dislikes. We call on it, even in North America, for validation and for lessons and advice. Validation, whether of group identities, for demands, or for justification, almost always comes from using the past. You feel your life has a meaning if you are part of a much larger group, which predated your existence and which will survive you—carrying, however, some of your essence into the future.

In 1935, W.E.B. Du Bois published *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880*. In it, Du Bois challenges the then prevailing view, exemplified by the “Columbia School” of historians, John Burgess and William Dunning, that the end of Reconstruction was brought about by the incapacity of freed Black citizens to govern themselves. Du Bois’s alternative account of the failure of Reconstruction is that white economic elites exploited the racism of poor whites to prevent poor whites and newly freed Blacks from joining together in a labor movement with unified class interests.

Though it took several decades, the accuracy of Du Bois’s account of why Reconstruction came to an end has long since been widely acknowledged. At the time, Du Bois’s correct reading was disregarded, in favor of a manifestly racist interpretation. In the final chapter of the book, Du Bois argues that Burgess and Dunning’s view undermines history, by twisting its ideals of truth and narrative accuracy to the service of dominance and power. The chapter is called in “The Propaganda of History,” and in it he writes:

“If history is going to be scientific, if the record of human action is going to be set down with that accuracy and faithfulness of detail which will allow its use as a measuring rod and guidepost for the future of nations, there must be set some standards of ethics in research and interpretation. If, on the other hand, we are going to use history for our pleasure and amusement, for inflating our national ego, and giving us a false but pleasurable sense of accomplishment, then we must give up the idea of history either as a science or as an art using the results of science, and admit frankly that we are using a version of historical fact in

order to influence and educate the new generation along the way we wish.”

So why study history? Unlike physics or economics, history is not a means for making accurate predictions. We study history not to know the future but to widen our horizons, to understand that our present situation is neither natural nor inevitable, and that we consequently have many more possibilities before us than we imagine.

“But I’ll tell you what. I’ll never look at home the same way again. I’ll never look at education the same way again. That’s what’s been missing here, the whole way, from Kampala to Juba. It’s education. How are you supposed to want something if you’ve never seen it? And we totally take that for granted.”

You cannot understand the world, you cannot even understand yourself, unless you understand the past, for that is largely where your thoughts and feelings come from—not to mention almost all the laws and attitudes and structures that we collectively live by. To study the past is to continually have the experience of realizing: ‘Oh, so that’s why I think that.’ That is what is speaking through me when I say that. A liberal arts education ought to lead to a recognition scene, as at the climax of a play. But in the study of the liberal arts the thing we come to recognize is ourselves.

The most successful tyranny is the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities. The past gave rise to the present, but it is also different from the present. It shows us that things do not have to be the way that they are now. It provides us with a vantage point from which to see that our conventional wisdom is just conventional, not wisdom—that what we think is natural is merely cultural; temporal, not eternal; particular, not universal. It offers us an exit from the present. It tells us that things change: not only don’t they have to be the way they are, they will not be the way they are. The past, in other words, allows us to create the future. If you want to be a leader, if you want to find a new direction, then that is where you need to start.

History is important. If you don’t know history it’s as if you were born yesterday. And if you were born yesterday, anybody up there in a position of power can tell you anything, and you have no way of checking up on it.

As individuals, we are all, at least in part, products of our own histories, which include our geographical place, our times, our social classes, and our family backgrounds. For example, a Canadian who has grown up in Canada, and so has enjoyed an extraordinary period, unusual in much of the world’s

history, of peace, stability, and prosperity. That has surely shaped the ways in which they look at the world, perhaps with more optimism about things getting better than they might have if they had grown up in Afghanistan or Somalia.

People are born into what exists. They have no experience of what previously existed. Therefore, they do not know what has been lost.

One value of history is in fact to recognize how much better or worse or simply different things have been in other times and places. But the purpose of that is not to restore some better time. All past times thus far, each taken as a whole, have been horrendously awful. The purpose is to facilitate the rejection of the silly idea that we're stuck with whatever we happen to have in the way of a lifestyle at the moment.

In northern India, for example, around 500 BC, Siddhartha Gautama, who would later become a Buddha, or "awakened one," began to question the nature of reality and the religious practices of the day, because nobody was giving him answers that satisfied him. The alternative that he developed involved a deep and unsparing examination of the nature of the human mind and the supposed separation of the individual self from the greater whole. The key to Gautama's method was questioning: questioning the reality of the self, questioning the solidity of existence, questioning the nature of the mind, questioning what you were told by everybody else, including him.

Instead of granting authority to history, we can and should destabilize the universalizing narratives to which we've grown accustomed. Embracing such a narrow, unifying vision of identity—such as that which is based upon national myth, history, or family relations—grants legitimacy to fascism. Rather, when we recognize the singular multiplicities that characterize our existence, thus removing the pernicious confines of nation and history, we can re-think how much credence we lend to a mythologized history and to the agenda of national prosperity.

True resistance starts with delegitimizing power, and ends with mobilizing ourselves with new myths and a new vision for stability.

There needs, moreover, to be sufficient accountability for the present. To be alive at a particular time requires that we throw our entire fleshed existence into the chaos of our historical moment. Re-write the American myth to reveal the destruction we've created in the wake of our path. Point to the world around us and concede that this crisis is our crisis.

We must candidly explain the limits of our knowledge to students, then set them loose on the mystery. We need a new generation to solve this. I have a set of pre-assumptions that I'm not even aware of, and it's dictating what I'm thinking. We need these young minds when they're not stuck.

Any story can be told in dozens of different ways. For that very reason, I believe, every time you go back and reexamine an important chapter in your life, you learn something new about it. The same can be said for history.

“There’s two ways to make it more complex for the defense. One is to have a whole bunch of different plays, but that’s no good because then the offense experiences as much complexity as the defense. Another is a small number of plays run out of lots of different formations. That way, you don’t have to teach a guy a new thing to do. You just have to teach him new places to stand.”

It’s easy to overlook the significance of this kind of quote, mostly because it seems obvious and casual and reductionist. But it’s none of those things. It’s an almost perfect description of how thinking slightly differently can have an exponential consequence, particularly when applied to an activity that’s assumed to be inflexible.

“But I was wrong. And I suspect the reason I was wrong was not because I didn’t understand what was happening on this specific play; I suspect it was because I felt like I already understood football. I had played football and written about football and watched it exhaustively for twenty years, so I thought I knew certain inalienable truths about the game. And I was wrong. What I knew were the assumed truths, which are not the same thing. I had brainwashed myself. I was unwilling to admit that my traditional, conservative football values were imaginary and symbolic. They belonged to a game I wasn’t actually watching but was still trying to see. Over time, I realized this had happened with almost every aspect of my life.”

We have a tendency to maintain the status quo. To keep traditions going. This is not to say it is inherent to human nature—that is not necessarily clear—but it does seem to be a common feature of our current dominant cultures.

We must educate and encourage our children—every new generation—to critically examine all of our core social beliefs and values. They should view them with as open a mind as possible. Potentially difficult discussions allowed to flourish, safe in the knowledge that many individuals before them have grappled with many of the same issues. That their peers were grappling with these same issues today. A fresh mind helps reveal stealthy prejudices and unacknowledged assumptions that cloud the way we view the world.

“I can put fifty kids in here. I have a PowerPoint presentation about marine life. I’ll tell them all about the ocean, about ecosystems and endangered species, all these different ways of looking at the environment and stewardship and balance and understanding, not just the science and the laws, but how it’s a part of you and you’re a part of it. And they’re watching and smelling and seeing and hearing the songs and stories of a people who were living the heartbeat of life itself, not just this fabricated system that’s telling you that your freedom is this document, not your birthright to have healthy land, water, and air. That’s your true freedom. Fight for that. Be the voice of that which can’t speak for itself. Because that’s yours too. So I’m building little advocates.”

Any important lesson or decision can be easily done at a 4th–6th grade level.

John Dewey argued that a democratic society is one whose members should always be seeking to realize its ideals. A necessary part of this process is reflection on the failure of those ideals.

If we look back too much and tinker with history through apologies, the danger is that we do not pay enough attention to the difficult problems of the present. There is the danger that focusing on past grievances can be a trap, as governments and groups avoid dealing with issues facing them now. American blacks can demand apologies for slavery and American governments can offer them, but how does that help the black children who are going to poor schools or the black men who are abused today by the criminal justice system?

The message minority groups often get from such a focus on the past is:

“Don’t be fooled, there is only repression.”

Dwelling on past horrors such as the Holocaust or slavery can leave people without the resources to deal with problems in the here and now.

In order to rationalize our industrial-military complex, we have to destroy our capacity to see clearly what is in front of—and to imagine what is beyond—our noses. Long before a thermonuclear war can come about, we have had to lay waste our sanity. We begin with the children. It is imperative to catch them in time.

Without the most thorough and rapid brainwashing their minds would see through our dirty tricks. Children are not yet fools, but we shall turn them into imbeciles like ourselves, with high IQs if possible. From the moment of birth, when the Stone Age baby confronts the twentieth century

mother, the baby is subjected to these forces of violence, called love, as its mother and father, as their parents and their parents before them, have been. These forces are mainly concerned with destroying most of its potentialities, and on the whole this enterprise is successful. By the time the new human is fifteen or so, we are left with a being like ourselves, a half-crazed creature more or less adjusted to a mad world. This is normality in our present age.

Love and violence, properly speaking, are polar opposites. Love lets the other be, but with affection and concern. Violence attempts to constrain the other's freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other's own existence or destiny. We are effectively destroying ourselves by violence masquerading as love. We live equally out of our bodies and out of our minds.

Please do not consider as normal a horrible thing, just because it happens to occur everyday.

There once was a time when sorties were being launched by a range of teachers and masters—from Israeli prophets to Chinese sages—against spiritual notions that had served people for millennia but which were proving inadequate for a new time. Animal sacrifices and ancestor worship made no sense in this new world. The world of the spirit had to evolve with the world of economics and technology.

Then as now, old stories were failing and new ones were being conceived. What are our modern-day equivalents of animal sacrifice and ancestor worship? What are our faltering tales? We tell a story that the world is a machine that can be programmed to serve our purposes. We tell a story that humans are the measure of all things, that we can justify enclosing other creatures in factory farms or animal-testing labs, clearcutting the great forests and poisoning the seas, killing off other forms of life to feed our hunger and desire. We tell a story that we can mold the world to the needs of the self, rather than molding the self to the needs of the world.

We would do well to remember that the lens through which we view the world is only one type of lens, there are many different ones that exist, some completely unlike the lens we are familiar with. If I give you a lens that doesn't allow you to see yellow, if most everyone has those lenses, you will never know yellow exists. You may even find someone to be crazy if they told you about it, for you had never seen it or know anyone serious who claims to believe in yellow.

What biases are you not even aware of? What concepts have you not been given or thought of yourself? What concepts *have* you been given or thought of that then influence others? Is there some information, some experience, you lack?

We are limited by the constructs we possess at the time. This applies to

everyone so you must question the fundamentals of your ideology periodically. As a social animal, we are also limited by the way the majority of the culture thinks, especially if the majority culture is overtly hostile towards the ideas; animals being in any way equal to humans being a prominent example.

Brutalizing Youth

The real problems stem from the systemic nature of our education system. The Pledge of Allegiance is just something easy to pick out, but it is really only a small thread in the canvas. The scary part comes when you realize that schools, in order to maintain accountability and safety, must act in a similar fashion as prisons. The students line up, they are counted, roll call commences; a bell rings, it is time to eat; another bell, back to the cell. . . err, classroom. If they break the routine they are labeled: trouble-maker, tardy, problem child. It takes a really open-minded and charismatic teacher to create an environment comfortable and fun enough to combat the routine and make the students interested in anything other than the social aspect of school. Sadly, these people are few and far between. I like to think I am one of these, but it is difficult to really know. I like to think we are realizing the problem as a country, but then shit like SpringBoard comes out and takes what little autonomy teachers have away from them. It makes them teach prepackaged lessons, void of creativity. That is why I get excited to see kids breaking the mold by sitting during the pledge. One small win in my day.

So no matter how much ink is spilled analyzing the legal technicalities of suspending a 17-year-old student for off-campus speech, that's not what the case is really about. The case is really about attitudes. Change society's attitudes to think of 17-year-olds the way we currently think of 25-year-olds, and no judge is going to deny them their right to criticize their school or country on their own time, any more than a judge in today's society would deny that right to a 25-year-old.

And where does this attitude towards minors come from? I suspect that most people who believe that we have to draw the line somewhere around age 18, believe it for no better reason than because they were raised in a society where most other people believe it too. If you think that setting the cutoff age at 18 is just "common sense," then I would bet my house that if you had been raised in a society where the cutoff age was set at 13, that would seem like "just common sense" to you as well, and similarly if you had been raised in a society where the cutoff had been set at 22. This may seem like an unremarkable observation, but my belief in minors' rights has always been motivated by a more fundamental belief that you should not believe things merely because most people in your society believe them.

If that sounds like a trite platitude, consider how few people in the US seem to question the rule that you can show a man's chest on television but not a woman's chest. In more liberal Denmark, supermarkets can stock tabloids at toddler-eye-level with photos of topless women on the cover,

while in Saudi Arabia, adult women can't leave the house without covering their faces, and in all three societies, the majority thinks these regulations are just plain "common sense." Is the age of majority just another arbitrary illusion caused by the power of consensus?

Some might make the thoughtful observation that most countries all over the world set the age of majority for most purposes at 18. But it doesn't quite prove what it seems to prove, because those globally diverse societies did not reach that conclusion independently—they move in similar directions because of cross-cultural influences. The voting age was set at 21 in many democracies before many of them lowered it to 18 in the 1970s within a few years of each other. To get a better sense of whether there is any merit to the idea, we'd have to do something like the 'putting the ten judges in ten separate rooms' test—put ten different societies in mutual isolation from each other, let them develop and debate things on their own, and see if all or most of them reach the conclusion that 18 is a good cutoff age for adulthood.

The idea that actual children—under the age of, say, 11—are qualitatively different from adults, has in fact been re-discovered by civilizations that developed independently at different points in history, all over the world. So there's probably something to it. The idea that teenagers are qualitatively different from adults, is something particular to recent history, and a wise person transported forward in time from the 1500s to the present day might scratch their heads and wonder why we think that 18-year-olds should be allowed to criticize their teachers but 17-year-olds cannot.

Poor children have become targets of the new criminalization. Public school children, particularly in poor communities of color, are arrested and sent to juvenile and even adult courts for school behavior that not long ago was handled with a reprimand. The dangerous rhetoric of "superpredators"—thanks Hillary—and the murders at Columbine High School in Colorado led to "zero tolerance" policies and brought an enlarged police presence, called "school resource officers," into public schools, with the ironic result that the murder of white suburban children led to punitive policies that hit poor inner-city children the hardest.

"In Chinese thinking, the child is the extension of the self."

Parental narcissism does not get more explicit than that. Happiness is not the point; the point is control. But Tiger Mom Chua does not seem like a parent at all. Still an extension of her own parents—forever feeling their eyes upon her, incapable of questioning the values with which she was

raised—she remains an eternal child, insatiable in her demands for love and attention.

The idea of duties to others is de-emphasized when a kid starts their education. There it's 'do better than others,' 'you take the test alone, or else, you're cheating by sharing answers,' 'Johnnie is too dumb and we'll be leaving him behind in the same grade next year.' A young mind is a malleable one and those lessons stay forever.

Caregivers must now attempt to raise contributing members of society while competing with far stronger coercion from media, video games, addiction, mental health issues, and a surrounding sociopathic community. Middle-aged single mothers or elderly grandmothers are not strong enough to stand up to fully grown adolescents, but they are held solely responsible for the behaviour of their teenage sons and daughters. Not only do they receive no societal support, they are degraded in the eyes of the child. Because lifegiving and caregiving work has no value attached, the old inherent debt of honour to lifegivers, caregivers, and community elders has been erased.

State education takes responsibility for indoctrination of selected history and worldview along with preparation for the work force—frequently a compulsory education that parents will go to jail for resisting. Propaganda dictates that the same parents who were capable of teaching nutrition, health, hygiene, speech, safety, and so much more to their children are incapable of teaching reading. Capitalism insists every child has a right to daily indoctrination paid for by the state but not a right to food and shelter. To appoint only mothers and caregivers as fully responsible for producing and caring for the entire society and not recognize or support that work is institutionalized slavery. State propaganda is not a social right. Food, safety, shelter, and all the benefits of the society are. If the child is to love their society, they must be welcomed by it. If a society is to benefit from caregivers, their labour must be recognized and included in the economic structure.

The root of society, the first dependence, is created when a woman gives birth to a child. The nature of society depends on how it is built out from that core, whether all share in responsibility for the first and all other dependencies or whether the strongest are pulled away to isolate caregivers and commodify dependency.

How can a society function efficiently if it cannot depend on parental good faith toward offspring as a bedrock assumption? This does not mean, of course, that there aren't truly awful parents who reject and abuse. But they are the exception rather than the rule. To establish guidelines and policies based on these exceptions grants too much authority to the state and institutions for children's well-being and undermines the role of the

parent. This leads to policies that range from the dangerous to the absurd.

Children will learn anything they want to learn. They'll fail at learning how to figure percentages in the classroom but will effortlessly learn how to figure batting averages, which are of course just percentages. They'll fail at learning science in the classroom but, working at their personal computers, will effortlessly defeat the most sophisticated computer security systems.

Children are universally fascinated by the work their parents do outside the home. In our new tribal system, parents will understand that including their children in their working lives is their alternative to spending tens of billions of dollars annually on schools that are basically just detention centers. We're not talking about turning children into apprentices—that's something else entirely. We're just giving them access to what they want to know, and all children want to know what their parents are up to when they leave the house.

Once they're loose in an office, children do the same things they did at home—they dig up all the secrets, investigate every closet, and of course learn how to work every machine, from the date-stamp machine to the copier, from the shredder to the computer. And if they don't know how to read yet, they'll certainly learn to read now, because there's very little they can do in an office without reading. This isn't to say that children would be prohibited from helping. There's nothing children like better at this age than feeling like they're helping Mommy and Daddy—and again, this isn't something learned, this is genetic.

Imagine what a twelve-year-old with a musical bent could learn at a recording studio. Imagine what a twelve-year-old with an interest in animals could learn in a veterinarian's office. Imagine what a twelve-year-old with an interest in painting could learn in an artist's studio. Imagine what a twelve-year-old with an interest in a trade could learn on a job site.

But, of course, having children underfoot in the workplace would seriously reduce efficiency and productivity. Even though sending them to educational detention centers is terrible for children, it's unquestionably wonderful for business. The system I've outlined here will never be implemented among the people of our culture as long as we value business over people.

A man told me how his native ancestors would go on "vision quests," which was a ritual that young men in villages would undergo when they reached a certain age. They'd venture out into the woods and starve themselves for days on end until they were granted a vision. What they saw during their quest would play a huge role in the formation of their identity. Sometimes they'd even change their name according to whatever animal spirit greeted them. It sounded a bit fantastical, yet I totally got it. The vision quest was like a journey. When we are raised by institutions, we are

fashioned, in ways big and small, to be like everyone else. But when we go on a journey—especially a journey that follows no one else's footsteps—it has the capacity to help a person become something unique, an individual.

We tend to forget that there's nothing sacrosanct about learning in large group classrooms, and that we organize students this way not because it's the best way to learn but because it's cost-efficient, and what else would we do with our children while the grown-ups are at work?

In most cultures, children are net contributors to their households by age seven. They tend livestock, clean the kitchen, and fetch firewood; they cook, do laundry, and sell stuff in markets. But mostly, they are babysitters for their younger siblings and sometimes, their cousins. In fact, in a survey of 186 societies worldwide, anthropologists found that, in most places, mothers are not the principal caretakers or companions of younger children. Older children are. Kids, those who study them tell us, are wired to help out, to spend their day in multi-age groups of other kids, caring for each other, absorbing and passing along the skills they have learned from observing and working alongside adults.

This order of things seems to work well for everybody, especially in contexts of low-skill work where children's contributions are meaningful. In traditional Mayan villages in Mexico, for example, kids essentially run households and market stalls. These children have high levels of self confidence: they know exactly what they're supposed to do, master it, and feel important. And their parents do not report stress, depression, or fatigue as so many parents in the industrialized West do. In West African countries where children begin helping out as early as age three, people often say, "A man with children can never be poor." Children are assets, loved and valued as such. Kids, in these contexts, bring real joy because they really contribute. They make their parents rich.

Sociologists and historians, meanwhile, tell us that childhood is an idea, distinct from biological immaturity, the meaning of which changes over time. In his seminal 1962 study of the subject, the French historian Philippe Ariès argued that childhood as we know it is a modern invention, largely a by-product of schooling. In the Middle Ages, when almost no one went to school, children were treated as miniature adults. At work and at play, there was little age-based segregation. Everything was permitted in their presence, even coarse language, scabrous actions and situations; they had heard everything and seen everything. Power, not age, determined whether a person was treated as a child. Until the eighteenth century, the European idea of childhood was bound up with the idea of dependence: the words 'sons,' 'varlets,' and 'boys,' were also words in the vocabulary of feudal subordination. One could leave childhood only by leaving the state

of dependence, or at least the lower degrees of dependence. Our notion of childhood as a sheltered period of innocence begins to emerge with the modern education system. As the period of economic dependence lengthened among the educated classes, so too did childhood. These days education and the immaturity it entails often lasts well into one's twenties, or longer.

Which particular words are selected as forbidden is an arbitrary accident of history. Words that once would have earned the utterer a mouthful of soap—expressions like “Zounds!” or “That sucks!”—hardly lead the modern schoolmarm to bat an ear. And conversely, words that today rank among the most obscene were at one time commonly used to refer to the most mundane things, like roosters and female dogs. No, the only risk children run by hearing the four-letter words prohibited over the public airwaves is the small chance of broadening their vocabularies. And even this possibility is remote, as anyone can attest who has recently overheard the goings-on in an elementary school playground.

So when the Motion Picture Association of America forbids children from watching a movie; when parents instruct children to put their hands over their ears in “earmuff” position; and, indeed, when the FCC levies fines on broadcasters, they aren't protecting children. But they are having an effect. Paradoxically, it's these actions we take to shield children from words, with censorship foremost among them, that give specific words their power. And this makes perhaps the best argument that we shouldn't be afraid of exposing children to taboo words. Doing so is the best way to take away any perceived threat they pose.

In Chicago, as well as in virtually every other jurisdiction in the country, child welfare officials deem it inappropriate for a brother and sister to sleep in the same bedroom once they reach a certain age. At some point, if the authorities were to find out that Kaitlin and Cole were sharing a room, Jennifer would be at risk of losing custody due to “neglect.” By today's standards of child well-being, Jennifer can't move into a studio apartment to help balance her family's budget.

For the record, suspicion can kill, and prejudice can destroy. And a thoughtless, frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all its own, for the children and the children yet unborn.

Who can define ‘abuse’? The difficulty with really interesting cases of abuse is that the ambiguity of the abuse becomes part of the abuse. Beatings, diddlings, rapes, deprivations, domineerment, humiliation, captivity, torture, excessive criticism, or even just utter disinterest. But at least the victims of this sort of abuse can, when they have dredged it back up after childhood, confidently call it abuse. There are, however, more ambiguous cases. Harder to profile, one might say. What would you call a parent who is so neurasthenic

and depressive that any opposition to his parental will plunges him into the sort of psychotic depression where he does not leave his bed for days and just sits there in bed cleaning his revolver, so that the child would be terrified of opposing his will and plunging him into a depression and maybe causing him to suicide? Would that child qualify as abused?

Or a father who is so engrossed by mathematics that he gets engrossed helping his child with his algebra homework and ends up forgetting the child and doing it all himself so that the child gets an A in Fractions but never in fact learns fractions? Or even say a father who is extremely handy around the house and can fix anything, and has the son help him, but gets so engrossed in his projects (the father) that he never thinks to explain to the son how the projects actually get done, so that the son's help never advances past simply handing the father a specified wrench or getting him lemonade or Phillips-head screws until the day the father is crushed in a freak accident and all opportunities for transgenerational instruction are forever lost, and the son never learns how to be a handy homeowner himself, and when things malfunction around his own home he has to hire contemptuous filthy-nailed men to come fix them, and feels terribly inadequate (the son), not only because he is not handy but because this handiness seemed to him to have represented to his father everything that was independent and manly and non-disabled in an American male. Would you cry 'Abuse!' if you were the unhandy son, looking back? Worse, could you call it abuse without feeling that you were a pathetic self-indulgent piss-puddle, what with all the genuine cases of hair-raising physical and emotional abuse diligently reported and analyzed daily by conscientious journalists.

I saw parents, usually upscale and educated and talented and functional and white, patient and loving and supportive and concerned and involved in their children's lives, profligate with compliments and diplomatic with constructive criticism, loquacious in their pronouncements of unconditional love for and approval of their children, conforming to every last jot/tittle in any conceivable definition of a good parent. I saw parent after unimpeachable parent who raised kids who were:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Emotionally retarded | 5. Consumed with narcissistic self-loathing |
| 2. Lethally self-indulgent | 6. Neurotically driven/addicted |
| 3. Chronically depressed | 7. Psychosomatically disabled |
| 4. Borderline psychotic | 8. Some conjunctive permutation of 1-7 |

Why is this. Why do many parents who seem relentlessly bent on producing children who feel they are good persons deserving of love produce children who grow to feel they are hideous persons not deserving of love who just happen to have lucked into having parents so marvelous that the parents love them even though they are hideous?

Important Questions for Students:

- What do you worry about most?
- What are the causes of your worries?
- Can any of your worries be eliminated? How?
- Which of them might you deal with first? How do you decide?
- Are there other people with the same problems? How do you know? How can you find out?
- If you had an important idea that you wanted to let everyone (in the world) know about, how might you go about letting them know?
- What bothers you most about adults? Why?
- How do you want to be similar to or different from adults you know when you become an adult?
- What, if anything, seems to you to be worth dying for? How did you come to believe this?
- What seems worth living for? How did you come to believe this?
- At the present moment, what would you most like to be or be able to do? Why? What would you have to know in order to be able to do it? What would you have to do in order to get to know it?
- How can you tell 'good guys' from 'bad guys'?
- How can 'good' be distinguished from 'evil'?
- What kind of a person would you most like to be? How might you get to be this kind of person?
- At the present moment, what would you most like to be doing? Five years from now? Ten years from now? Why? What might you have to do to realize these hopes? What might you have to give up in order to do some or all of these things?

- When you hear or read or observe something, how do you know what it means?
- Where does meaning ‘come from’?
- What does ‘meaning’ mean?
- How can you tell what something ‘is’ or whether it is?
- Where do words come from?
- Where do symbols come from?
- Why do symbols change?
- Where does knowledge come from?
- What do you think are some of humans’ most important ideas?
- Where did they come from? Why? How? Now what?
- What’s a ‘good idea’?
- How do you know when a good or live idea becomes a bad or dead idea?
- Which of humans’ ideas would we be better off forgetting? How do you decide?
- What is ‘progress’?
- What is ‘change’?
- What are the most obvious causes of change? What are the least apparent?
- What conditions are necessary in order for change to occur?
- What kinds of changes are going on right now? Which are important? How are they similar to or different from other changes that have occurred?
- What are the relationships between new ideas and change?
- Where do new ideas come from? How come? So what?

- If you wanted to stop one of the changes going on now (pick one), how would you go about it? What consequences would you have to consider?
- Of the important changes going on in our society, which should be encouraged and which resisted? Why? How?
- What are the most important changes that have occurred in the past ten years? Twenty years? Fifty years? In the last year? In the last six months? Last month?
- What will be the most important changes next month? Next year? Next decade? How can you tell? So what?
- What would you change if you could? How might you go about it?
- Of those changes, which are going, to occur, which would you stop if you could? Why? How? So what?
- Who do you think has the most important things to say today? To whom? How? Why?
- What are the dumbest and more dangerous ideas that are ‘popular’ today? Why do you think so? Where did these ideas come from?
- What are the conditions necessary for life to survive?
- Which of these conditions are necessary for all life?
- Which ones for plants? Which ones for animals? Which ones for humans?
- What are the greatest threats to all forms of life? To plants? To animals? To humans?
- What are some of the ‘strategies’ living things use to survive? Which are unique to plants? Which are unique to animals? Which are unique to humans?
- What kinds of human survival strategies are:
 1. Similar to those of animals and plants
 2. Different from animals and plants?
- What does our language permit us to develop as survival strategies that animals cannot develop?

- How might human survival activities be different from what they are if we did not have language?
- What other ‘languages’ does man have besides those consisting of words?
- What functions do these ‘languages’ serve? Why and how do they originate? Can you invent a new one? How might you start?
- Do non-humans have languages?
- What would happen, what difference would it make, what would man not be able to do, if he had no number (mathematical) languages?
- How many symbol systems does man have? How come? So what?
- What are some good symbols? Some bad?
- What good symbols could we use that we do not have?
- What bad symbols do we have that we’d be better off without?
- What’s worth knowing? How do you decide? What are some ways to go about getting to know what’s worth knowing?

Chapter Seven

What Do You Know?

Ideological Blinders

“Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.”

—Oscar Wilde

“This is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it.”

—James Baldwin

Birds born in a cage think freedom is a crime.

Motivated Reasoning: the tendency of people to unconsciously process information to promote goals or interests extrinsic to the decision-making task at hand.

An ideology is simply a social “script” that governs one’s expectations, normative and practical.

If one’s identity is based on a life involving a social script that allows one to expect as a matter of course a rationally unjustifiable amount of society’s goods, given one’s choices, then one’s social script will typically involve unreasonable expectations. So one should construct one’s identity in a way that avoids hierarchies that would justify unreasonable expectations. That is the best way to avoid the formation of false beliefs that lead to moral error.

If we live in a society with an unequal hierarchical structure, that will create stereotypes that influence perception. It is not the mechanisms that are functioning incorrectly; these same mechanisms would provide stereotypes not susceptible to those errors in societies with a different

structure. It is part of ordinary epistemic functioning in societies with flawed social structures to have beliefs based on perceptual mechanisms that mislead us in characteristic ways. If knowledge required a perceptual faculty that did not mislead us in these ways, we would not know anything.

Inequalities, even material inequalities, give rise to flawed ideological beliefs. In a society that is meritocratic, those who fail to possess resources will tend to possess the flawed ideological belief that their failure to acquire resources is a social injustice. In a society that is not meritocratic, those who possess an unjustly high position in the hierarchy, perhaps one not justified by “merit,” will have the flawed ideology that their position in the hierarchy is justified, for example, by individual merit in a society that is meritocratic. Both of these flawed ideologies are democratically problematic: the flawed ideology of the resource-poor in societies in which resources are divided by merit, and the flawed ideology of the resource-wealthy in societies in which resources are unjustly divided.

However, I suspect that there is no coherent metaphysics of merit that could support the claim that some citizens deserve a significantly better overall proportion of society’s resources. And even if there were such a metaphysics, if it were normative in any way, the description of a meritocratic society would be so distinct from any existing human society that it would be revealed to be fantasy. For example, I believe that there is no defensible normative notion of merit that grants more merit to the baby of a wealthy family than to the baby of a poor family.

Members of privileged groups, by something like sociological necessity, develop flawed ideological beliefs. The fates of human beings are not equal. Men differ in their states of health and wealth or social status or what not. Simple observation shows that in every such situation he who is more favored feels the never ceasing need to look upon his position as in some way legitimate, upon his advantage being deserved, and the other’s disadvantage as being brought about by the latter’s fault. That the purely accidental causes of the difference may be ever so obvious makes no difference. The continued exercise of every domination always has the strongest need of self-justification through appealing to the principles of its legitimation. This as a “need” that also makes itself felt in the relation between positively and negatively privileged groups of human beings. It is natural to expect that those who are born into a privileged group will have flawed ideological beliefs concerning the privileges they have. In particular, they will believe they deserve the privileges they obtain as a result of accidental forces, such as birth position. These beliefs will be flawed ideological beliefs.

One main source of the unrevisability of certain beliefs is that they are connected to social practices. The beliefs are ones I need to have in order

to remain in those practices. One central source of ideological beliefs is our social identities. We value our social identities. Social identities are constituted by the practices and habits in which we engage; those we engage with are our community. We must at least act as if certain propositions are true in order to engage in those practices. To abandon these beliefs is to abandon certain practices and habits that constitute our social identity. To abandon these beliefs is therefore to abandon one's community, to leave everyone with whom you identify behind.

This is very difficult for an individual person to envisage; usually they can only perform the experiment of setting beliefs aside that are so connected to their social identities when they explicitly are asked to rationally reflect upon them. But as soon as they slip back into ordinary life, they reengage in the practices that make them who they are. What this means is that revision of flawed ideological belief whose source is flawed social structure is very hard, perhaps almost as hard as revising flawed ideological belief the source of which is flawed psychology.

If this is right, then it's not correct to try to solve the puzzle of why even obviously flawed ideological belief is hard to revise by looking just at intrinsic features of the beliefs themselves, or even the overall mental structure of individuals. Many flawed ideological beliefs 'look mentally' just like ideological beliefs. The reason individuals are loathe to abandon them is that they don't like to leave their friends behind.

The distinctive feature of ideological belief often arises from being embedded in a practice together with people like you, your friends, and family. What is needed to eliminate problematic ideological belief is to change the practice of a large group of people simultaneously over time, to alter a social identity many people share.

Consider a prosperous family in the Antebellum American South who lives on a plantation that has provided a high level of income for the family for several generations. The family owns slaves who maintain and cultivate their plantation, and slaves who work in the house doing domestic chores. The members of the family have grown up with the expectation that slaves will cook their meals for them, slaves will clean the house and raise the children, and slaves will work on the plantation at no cost to provide for their well-being, as well as the well-being of future generations of that family. I will take the ideology of this family to be the beliefs they have that guide them through their social lives, as well as the concepts they use to structure reality around them. The beliefs that are part of this ideology are beliefs like:

- The belief that slaves will cook them dinner

- The belief that slaves will clean the house
- The belief that slaves will work in the field and collect the cotton that is sold on the market for the family's gain

These are beliefs that constitute the ideology of this family. They are representations of social life that serve in some way to support social practices. It is because of the expectation of a dinner without labor that they arrive at the table without first cooking in the kitchen. It is because of the expectation of slaves cleaning the house that they retire to bed without doing any household chores. It is because of the belief that slaves should do the field-work that they spend the day in the house rather than laboring in the hot sun. These beliefs are the ones that explain their everyday behavior. This is what I will, provisionally at least, take to be their ideology.

Now that we have a sense of the ideology of this particular family, I will explain how their ideology can be expected to include, and give rise to, beliefs that will prevent them from gaining knowledge about their social world. The family has, for several generations, relied on the work of slaves to create and maintain their fortune, as well as their daily existence. If the institution of slavery is unjust, then their wealth was not properly obtained. Furthermore, their ancestors, including their own parents, were the ones who built and maintained that wealth by exploiting the institution of slavery.

So if slavery is deeply unjust, then their own immediate ancestors were perpetrators of great wrongs. If slavery is deeply unjust, then the comfortable aristocratic manner of living to which they are accustomed, relying as it does on the institution of slavery, is unjustifiable. It is very difficult to view one's own parents as evil. It is also difficult to contemplate giving up luxuries that one has spent one's life enjoying. It is therefore natural to expect the members of the plantation family, by virtue of the ideology they have, to form beliefs that protect them against considering the hypothesis that slavery is an unjust institution.

One might expect the ideology to lead the members of the plantation family to believe that Blacks are inherently lazy and require the institution of slavery to instill in them a work ethic that they naturally lack. One might expect their ideology to lead them to believe that Blacks, by virtue of culture or genetics, are not capable of self-governance. One might expect them to believe that Blacks are inherently violent and dangerous and require harsh punishment and control to keep them from posing a threat to civil society. One might expect them to believe, as a result of all of these beliefs about Blacks, that the institution of slavery is just and required by the inherent nature of Blacks.

The ideology of the family can be considered to be the social practices they engage in, together with the beliefs that guide their behavior in these practices. These include their ordinary daily expectations about their social life: expectations of a clean house and food without labor, of free labor for their financial gain, and so on. These expectations lead them to adopt a justification for their expectations. It is justified to expect Black slaves to prepare one's dinner, clean the house, raise the children, and labor in the hot sun for free, because Blacks are lazy, incapable of self-government, and a danger to civil society. The institution of slavery is good for society, and good for the Black slaves as well.

These expectations are legitimizing myths, they have importance as the means by which ascendant groups assign to themselves positive social value while portraying others as justifiably possessing lower standing. Without legitimizing myths, hierarchy is merely stratification. With legitimizing myths, hierarchy becomes grounded in superiority and inferiority and formal distinctions become laden with norms.

There are causes of flawed ideological belief other than failures of equality in various senses. Societies in which uniformity of ideology is encouraged will give rise to expectations that one will encounter only others who share that ideology. If one is used to discussions and friendships only with those with the same ideology, encountering someone whose ideology differs may violate one's expectations. Of course, certain kinds of violations of expectations are welcome, rather than disturbing. But if one is raised to think of certain expectations as moral norms, violations of the conventions to which one has grown accustomed will again characteristically seem like a disruption of normal expectations of the sort that is easily mistaken for an encounter with someone who should be morally condemned. That is why those who are brought up in communities with a uniform ideology tend to experience those who fail to share that ideology as morally deviant. Therefore, societies that encourage uniformity of ideology will often result in flawed ideologies, ideologies that contain or produce moral error, that is, false moral beliefs. Those who are raised in communities with a uniform ideology will identify themselves with that ideology.

Stereotypes are an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world, to which our habits, our tastes, our capacities, our comforts and our hopes have adjusted themselves. They may not be a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted. In that world people and things have their well-known places, and do certain expected things. We feel at home there. We fit in. We are members. We know the way around. There we find the charm of the familiar, the normal, the dependable; its grooves and shapes are where we are accustomed to find

them. And though we have abandoned much that might have tempted us before we creased ourselves into that mould, once we are firmly in, it fits as snugly as an old shoe. No wonder, then, that any disturbance of the stereotypes seems like an attack upon the foundations of the universe. It is an attack upon the foundations of our universe, and, where big things are at stake, we do not readily admit that there is any distinction between our universe and *the* universe. A world which turns out to be one in which those we honor are unworthy, and those we despise are noble, is nerve-racking.

When archaeological excavations called into question many of the key components of the Old Testament and its whole chronology, many fundamentalist Christians and Israelis refused to believe the findings or simply remained indifferent. Many ancient historians and archaeologists have come to believe that the Israelites may never have been in Egypt. If there was an exodus, it may have been only a small affair with a few families. The Israelites may not have conquered the land of the Canaanites, and Jericho probably did not have walls to fall down at the blast of a trumpet. The great kingdom of Solomon and David, which was said to stretch from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, was more likely to have been a small chiefdom. Remains from the time indicate that Jerusalem was a small city, not the magnificent one of the Bible. So why, has what is a major change in views about the biblical past not provoked a reaction, even from secular Israelis? Perhaps they find it too painful to contemplate.

“The blow to the mythical foundations of the Israeli identity is apparently too threatening, and it is more convenient to turn a blind eye.”

A cherished belief is a belief that we want to retain; it is a pleasant belief to hold. We have to be on our guard against supposing that a belief that is cherished could not be false because it would be so dreadful if it were. The disturbance of a stereotype seems like “an attack upon the foundations of the universe.” A cherished belief is one that we will be reluctant to give up. It is one that is resistant in a distinctive way to rational revision. Beliefs that are connected to our identity will be emotionally dear to us in ways that beliefs unconnected to our identity are not. As a consequence, they will not be easy to abandon.

Why are subjects whose interests are not furthered by the agenda of the elite nevertheless guided by the opinions the elite wish them to have? Almost every highly privileged group develops the myth of its natural, especially its blood, superiority. Under stable conditions that myth is accepted by the negatively privileged group. It is natural to think that the elite maintain

power by promoting the flawed ideology that their interests are the interests of the society at large. They do so by promoting the ideology of elite superiority and the belief that the society is a meritocracy.

Suppose that we take negative privilege to be measured in terms of relative ownership of goods. In this case, many people may be negatively privileged toward those they never encounter, but not negatively privileged relative to those they encounter. This will hinder political action to correct unjust distributions with respect to the former group. Moreover, negative privilege comes in degrees. If so, perhaps the expected utility of acting alone is not sufficiently great.

If one can get negatively privileged groups to accept that the system is basically fair and meritocratic, then one can lead them to oppose attempts to reform corruption. It just makes sound economic sense for the positively privileged groups to get members of negatively privileged groups to accept that the system is fair and meritocratic.

All highly privileged groups throughout history share one thing in common: the ideology that they have achieved their success through merit. Members of the highly privileged group, through control of the media and the education system, will make it part of the dominant narrative of the society that the goods of society are justly distributed, according to merit rather than accident of birth position. This will occur even in conditions in which there are obvious differences in equality from birth, due, for example, to inheritance. This is exactly what one should expect in any society with a highly privileged group that has an unjust accumulation of its goods. In fact, one would expect that the more unjust and more arbitrary the distribution of goods is in a society, the more intensely and more fervently the view that the distribution of goods is due to pure merit will be held.

Suppose we accept that members of negatively privileged groups tend to adopt the dominant narrative. If so, they will be incapable of acting against the very system that oppresses them. Members of the negatively privileged group will fling themselves against the high barriers erected against them, only to blame themselves for their failure to scale them. The few who do manage the feat will be convinced that they did so out of their own individual merit. They then will be used as pawns in a propaganda game of legitimatization of the dominant ideology. The situation will seem deceitful to no one.

On the assumption that belief in the meritocratic nature of society is a flawed ideological belief, it will be held more firmly than rational beliefs. Because members of the highly privileged group accept this myth, they will be highly motivated to celebrate members of negatively privileged groups who succeed in surmounting the high barriers to success facing their

group. They will accept them because they serve as a legitimation of the dominant narrative. And members of the highly privileged group will develop an ideology that explains the failures of most members of the negatively privileged groups to acquire the goods of society in terms of “cultural” flaws of that group.

Adoption of the flawed ideology of the highly privileged group clearly would handicap the negatively privileged group. To act against the structure that oppresses them, they need to know something about the way in which it holds them back from achievement. There are presumably no particular propositions the negatively privileged group needs to know in order to act against their oppression. They might not even have to know that they are oppressed. But if they blame their lack of advancement on themselves rather than on the special barriers they face, they will be prevented from acting against the forces that oppress them. The negatively privileged groups will be prevented from attaining the knowledge needed to act precisely by the flawed ideological beliefs they adopt from the dominant narrative. A primary nexus of democratic contestation is over the distribution of resources. Members of negatively privileged groups will be hindered in such contestation by acceptance of the dominant ideology: that society’s resources are fairly divided by merit.

It is indeed implausible in the extreme that someone would willingly adopt a belief that entails the inferiority of her own group. However, this kind of skepticism about the view relies on a false picture of how beliefs are formed. It relies on the false premise that one can decide to believe. Since it is evident that one would not rationally decide to adopt a belief that presents one’s own group in a negative light, someone gripped by this model of belief formation will be skeptical of the claim. However, we cannot simply decide to believe something. It is not up to me to decide whether or not I am on Mars now. It is similarly not up to me to decide about the direct evidence of my senses. But testimony from authoritative sources is a primary source of evidence. This is why the school system of a state is the paradigm example of an ideological state apparatus.

There is a simple argument from the premise that belief is not under our direct voluntary control to the conclusion that negatively privileged groups will acquire the flawed ideological beliefs of the positively privileged group. The positively privileged group will control the dominant narrative. If the positively privileged group controls the dominant narrative, then the testimonial evidence of authorities will be the ideology of the positively privileged group. That is the mechanism by which the flawed ideology of the positively privileged group comes to be held by the negatively privileged groups. The negatively privileged groups are not exposed to an alternative

ideology.

If the argument is plausible, it raises even more serious concerns in a liberal democratic state. A liberal democratic state requires provision of schooling for all, as well as a news media. The concern is that the education system as well as the news media will become an organ for the propagation of the ideology of the positively privileged group. This is why what is taught in public schools is invariably, in states that self-identify as liberal democracies, a matter of great political contestation. Control of what is taught in the public schools amounts to control of the basic political dialectic. It seems implausible to deny that members of the highly privileged group will win such battles of control.

We accept as truth many things that for the Greeks were partisan positions of war. The ancient Greeks were great experimenters. We are still amazed by their novelty and ingenuity. They fashioned democracy, philosophy, grammar, history, and science out of a loose assortment of shared knowledge and practices from the Mediterranean and Near East.

On the other hand, we accept much of what they considered experiment as fact, thanks to certain politicians, philosophers, grammar teachers, historians, and scientists. We see the same arguments, the same problems, and the same strategies for dealing with them persist into today, even in our remote Midwestern towns. If one wants to reopen the door to experimentation, one must weaken the foundations at the point at which experiment became truth, one must be willing to dispense with comforting facts.

Perhaps even the ingenuity of the Greeks is false, perhaps they simply stole it all from the East and history simply popularizes them and not the originators.

Granting that belief is not under direct voluntary control, maybe belief is nevertheless under indirect voluntary control? I can voluntarily join communities that doubt the sources of evidence I have and, after long exposure, learn to reject such sources of evidence. Perhaps I have been raised in a religious cult. I can choose to go to a university and take courses in other cultures that force me to confront the contingencies of my upbringing. But spontaneous belief formation is in general an involuntary process. We acquire beliefs spontaneously from the testimony of authority figures, from the lack of reliable sources that contradict them, and so on. Even to begin the process of indirect voluntary control over belief is clearly an arduous, often life-changing task, one that often involves separation from family and community.

“I dreamed of going north and writing books, novels. But where had I got this notion of doing something in the future, of

going away from home and accomplishing something that would be recognized by others? I knew that I lived in a country in which the aspirations of black people were limited, marked-off. Yet I felt that I had to go somewhere and do something to redeem my being alive. I was building up in me a dream which the entire educational system of the South had been rigged to stifle. I was feeling the very thing that the state of Mississippi had spent millions of dollars to make sure that I would never feel; I was becoming aware of the thing that the Jim Crow laws had been drafted and passed to keep out of my consciousness; I was acting on impulses that southern senators in the nation's capital had striven to keep out of Negro life; I was beginning to dream the dreams that the state had said were wrong, that the schools said were taboo. My classmates felt that I was doing something that was vaguely wrong, but they did not know how to express it.

As the outside world grew more meaningful, I became more concerned, tense; and my classmates and my teachers would say: 'Why do you ask so many questions?' Or 'Keep quiet.' In me was shaping a yearning for a kind of consciousness, a mode of being that the way of life about me had said could not be, must not be, and upon which the penalty of death had been placed. Somewhere in the dead of the southern night my life had switched onto the wrong track and, without my knowing it, the locomotive of my heart was rushing down a dangerously steep slope heading for a collision, heedless of the warning red lights that blinked all about me, the sirens and the bells and the screams that filled the air."

It is not just that a set of concepts, a conceptual scheme, can be flawed because the concepts misrepresent social reality, for example, by imputing to it a fictional hierarchy of worth between people. A pattern of concepts can be flawed because it lacks some concepts entirely. A striking example of the phenomenon by which a conceptual scheme lacks a crucial concept is from a memoir of the women's liberation movement. The story involved a woman working for Cornell University who was systematically sexually harassed over a period of years. Yet the concept of sexual harassment had yet to be articulated. So she could not conceptualize or understand her "ongoing mistreatment." This is a clear example in which the failure of her ideology to have a concept robbed her of the tools to understand her own oppression. This clearly brings out the sense in which failure to possess a concept can be disabling.

On May 13, 2013, the Chinese government issued a secret document, entitled “A Report about the Current Situation of Ideology,” to university administrations. The report was leaked by Gao Yu and published in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* in August 2013. The document demands that university professors refrain from discussing seven topics. The seven topics are universal values, free press, civil society, civil rights, historical mistakes of the Chinese Communist Party, crony capitalism, and independence of the judiciary. This is a clear attempt to ensure that students lack crucial political concepts, precisely the ones possession of which would enable them to critique Chinese government policy. It is an attempt to instill a flawed ideology in Chinese students by ensuring that they lack crucial political concepts.

Negatively privileged groups are hindered from acting in their own self-interest by their failure to have the right conceptual scheme, a scheme that would isolate and explain the oppressive social contexts in which they find themselves.

The perceived epistemic challenge facing groups that lack society’s resources will prevent them from acting. In schools, they will hear that the society in which they live is a meritocracy. They will encounter confident elites who seem—because they are more confident—more deserving of the goods of society. If the dominant ideology involves a belief that the rich have the goods they do because of hard work alone, members of negatively privileged groups will be especially hindered in democratic contestation. The self-serving ideology of the elites will make sense out of the injustice that members of the negatively privileged groups will encounter. And since knowledge is required to act, if any of the accounts that explain the phenomenon in terms of failure to know are correct (whatever the source), negatively privileged groups will be prevented from acting to alleviate their negatively privileged status. They will not be able to act on the basis of knowledge of injustice, because their negatively privileged status may, in the presence of the alternative explanation provided by the ideology of elite superiority, as well as the prospect of retribution by those controlling the prisons and the police, prevent them from acquiring knowledge.

We have seen that flawed ideologies aid the material interests of the highly privileged group, the elites. But false ideologies harm the elites in ways that cut deeper than material interest. The reason that members of unjustly privileged groups are led to adopt legitimizing myths is that they cannot confront the possibility that their actions are unjust. False ideologies blind even those they seem to help, by making them ‘untrue to themselves.’ The flawed ideology of the elites leads members of the elite to support policies that they would not accept if they knew what the real source of

their support is. Flawed ideologies threaten the autonomy of members of highly privileged groups.

Acceptance of the false ideology of the elite group does lead negatively privileged groups to act against their own material interests. But the false ideology of the elite group leads to members of the elite group acting against their own ethical interests. Inequality is problematic for everyone.

This seems to be an excellent example of the knots individuals must twist themselves into if they allow the dominant ideology to determine what reality is.

The *only* purpose of an economy is to ensure that all are clothed, housed, fed, have clean air and water, healthcare, education, et cetera. And less concretely, things like equality and fairness. If the economy as structured is not doing so, it is a failure and a poor, harmful ideology. There is no need to engage with any of the status quo's arbitrary limits and restrictions which only help legitimize them.

Anything else is a distraction from the real issues—stalling by those few whom the system works for or theorizing by those lacking the creativity and vision to truly think outside the box. If such thinkers are experts in anything they are experts at allowing their reality to be artificially and arbitrarily dictated and limited.

Our artificial constructs can either be used to enhance the well-being of all or they can be used to keep most subjugated and exploited.

Authoritarian socialism and capitalism share strong tendencies toward centralizing—one in the hands of the state, the other in the hands of corporations. They both also keep their respective systems going through ruthless expansion—whether through production for production's sake, in the case of Soviet-era socialism, or consumption for consumption's sake, in the case of consumer capitalism.

What many often fail to see is that it was *authoritarian* communism which proved to be as bad or worse than capitalism. That is not to say that communism is the perfect solution. But it is quite easy to argue—given the biological background of the human species, along with modern scientific knowledge regarding environments and ecosystems—that cooperation, sharing, community, are far more rational and natural ideas to structure society around.

Our structures are often corrupted. Because whether through ignorance or greed we allow them to. We've allowed massively ignorant and greedy individuals to control the course for millennia. But this is not some natural law, some foregone conclusion. It is within our abilities to change this, not guaranteed to, but within the realm of possibility.

The first step is simply recognizing that we're like a horse in a parade wearing binders. We've all been trained from birth with stories which slowly boxed in our rational world, our reality. To many imagining a world with true justice and equality is akin to riding a fire-breathing dragon. But they are nothing alike.

It's the journey part that makes it all worthwhile. A mental inquiry can, simultaneously, be irrational, rational, emotional, intellectual, empirical, theoretical, et cetera. An ongoing mental inquiry is often terminated when imprisoned within an -ism. We are better off to take one statement at a time.

A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

“Catholics believe that working through suffering and anxieties while offering them up to the Lord (instead of dwelling on and complaining about their shit deals in life) will help the sinners on earth and those in purgatory. And the extremely poor obviously suffer the most, but they can still feel the entirety of God's peace and love, many times more often than those who are wealthy.”

Oh I agree. When I see all of the gilding and opulence of the Vatican built up on the auspices of “a higher calling” or the guise of social programs for the poor—I feel so many things. Is that what it feels like to get the entirety of God's peace and love? Because if I were poor, I would imagine this feeling would be many times more powerful than if I were wealthy (as you say).

It is worship of mammon. I fail to understand how a significant part of the US' population believe themselves to be devout Christians. A short reading of the beatitudes, with a modern day comparison is instructive:

Blessed are the poor in spirit	→	Blessed are the Rich
Blessed are they that mourn	→	Blessed are they that don't have to
Blessed are the meek	→	Blessed are the arrogant
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righ- teousness	→	Blessed are they who lie
Blessed are the merciful	→	Blessed is warmongering, the death penalty, and pun- ishing victimless crime

Blessed are the pure in heart	→	Blessed are they who cheat and steal
Blessed are the peacemakers	→	Blessed are the warmongers
Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake	→	Blessed are they who persecute
Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake	→	Blessed are they who lie and cheat for power's sake

Everyone expects a Christian way of life from a Christian. They want to see in him an example of non-hypocritical faith, honesty, a spiritual attitude and love. On the other hand, there is nothing sadder than seeing a Christian who lives only for worldly, mortal interests.

In an even larger sense, we have substituted ideology for religion. Consider capitalism, privatization, democracy, the profit motive, materialism, utility maximization, and, yes, even the scientific method. We worship these just as ardently as we did the Grecian or Egyptian pantheon of gods in the years BC, and the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic characterizations of god up to the present era.

The unquestioning acceptance of these belief systems filters our perceptions of reality and blinds us to the infinite number of possibilities that exist outside of those frames of reference. In fact, those systems have indeed become our religion and stepping outside of them frequently incurs the same stigma and scorn formerly accorded to religious heretics who were often burned at the stake. One doesn't need to spend more than a day reading a layperson's guide to quantum mechanics to get an idea of what happens when you set your mind free of those confining boxes. I now view all belief systems skeptically and try to place them in a larger context.

The description of economics as an unassailable belief system rings true to me. Not unlike religion—the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Conquistadors, right on up to ISIS—economics has wreaked and is wreaking havoc across the globe. Who knows what wonders await us when we start thinking out of that box.

I'm a great believer in self-deception. If you asked me what makes the world go round, I would say self-deception. Self-deception allows us to create a consistent narrative for ourselves that we actually believe. I'm not saying that the truth doesn't matter. It does. But self-deception is how we survive.

Any meaning that people ascribe to their lives is just a delusion. The other-worldly meanings medieval people found in their lives were no more deluded than the modern humanist, nationalist, and capitalist meanings modern people find. The scientist who says her life is meaningful because she increases the store of human knowledge, the soldier who declares that his life is meaningful because he fights to defend his homeland, and the entrepreneur who finds meaning in building a new company are no less delusional than their medieval counterparts who found meaning in reading scriptures, going on a crusade, or building a new cathedral.

Perhaps happiness is synchronizing one's personal delusions of meaning with the prevailing collective delusions. As long as my personal narrative is in line with the narratives of the people around me, I can convince myself that my life is meaningful, and find happiness in that conviction. This is quite a depressing conclusion.

If you will not live in something fairly close to reality, reality will clock you upside the head for it eventually. As individuals, we may dodge this—we often do—which is why individuals often live in denial. As societies, no. The bill is always paid, and it is always paid in full. It's just usually not paid by the people who wrote the checks based on other people's bodies. Which is why, if you aren't powerful—and you probably aren't—you can't afford to live in fantasy-land.

Consequences are paid. Your opinion that they aren't paid is irrelevant, and if you don't have power, the check is being written on your body and those of the people you claim to care about.

Simple things—like heroin would be legalized and cars would be banned if we legislated things on the basis of how many people they kill and the harm they cause to society—don't seem to occur to the most intelligent of people. Cars are essential to life and drugs are bad is the unchallengeable mantra.

Right and wrong, moral and immoral, all shaped by the environment one develops in. It absolutely does take what one might call 'exceptional morality'—or perhaps a less loaded, ego-stroking term like curiosity—in order to break out of the cage placed on one's worldview by their surrounding environment.

It's ok to feel insane once you know its real name, independent enlightenment. Perhaps as a hermit on a mountain, or some jester to the throne. Our mind cannot see what it does not understand. I like to compare it to remembering the first time you looked inside a car's engine compartment. You stood slack-jawed, and maybe watched and learned to imitate how your parents checked their oil and filled their windshield washer fluid. Maybe you put some time into it, and learned to recognize the car's starter, timing belt,

radiator, and power steering unit. Next thing you know, you can find the starter in any car. Even replace it yourself by replacing three or four bolts.

I've always been crazy but it kept me from going insane.

The 10,000 foot view would show that the United States has been making little progress in providing a fair and equal society for minorities, the poor, and ecosystems partly because American politics has become so polarizing.

This political polarization is tearing us apart and preventing us from working together. The biggest reason for this polarization is the fact that people in each sphere of the political spectrum give others the status of Demigod. These Demigods have also been self-appointed and we have all allowed this. The definition of a Demigod is a being with partial or lesser divine status, such as a minor deity, the offspring of a god and a mortal, or a mortal raised to divine rank.

What happens is a political thinker or someone in the political media puts out a book, podcast, or article that deeply affected us. We do a little independent research into their work which solidifies our belief into the person and then BAM, they are elevated to Demigod status. We start taking every thought jettisoned from their brain as truth. We stop our own independent research. We lazily expect them to solve all our problems and show us how to live. We find ourselves fitting into their paradigm on life instead of using their work to create our own paradigm.

This is where the polarization occurs. Once I find out you follow a certain political thinker or figure I instantly lash out at you and say well if you follow this person's work that also means you subscribe to X, Y, and Z. And you fall for it and go on the defensive. You do this because you have elevated the person to Demigod status and when I question your Demigod's worldview, to you I am questioning your world. This happens because you fail to follow up on the latest thoughts from your Demigod. You fail to vigilantly conduct your own independent research.

If you continued with your own research with a goal of creating your own paradigm you would respond to my challenge by saying actually I only subscribe to X, not Y and Z or maybe you would subscribe to all three, but at least you independently came to that conclusion. You wouldn't respond to my challenge in such a polarizing way that would turn into a heated confrontation. Maybe if this happened more often things wouldn't be so polarizing and we could work together and accomplish more.

What I am asking you to do is create your own paradigm and continue to question everything. It's ok to disagree with a political figure or thinker on an item. That doesn't mean you have to cut them off from your paradigm. I want you to look at creating your paradigm like creating a meal. What they should both consist of is recipes.

Although scientists discovered over a century ago that humans lived in this hunter-gatherer way for hundreds of thousands of years before the Agricultural Revolution spawned our civilization and culture a mere 10,000 years ago, our history along with our collectively held and lived mythology reduce the human experience to civilization-building. Our collective frame of reference not only omits the vast human experience prior to our history, it excludes the experience of humans flourishing in egalitarian tribes concurrent with our history. There are still today scattered pockets of tribal people who have never known the kind of poverty we take for granted. This vast experience suggests that poverty is a function of culture, not of nature, which is relatively immutable.

So one way we perpetuate the myth of never-ending poverty is by continuing to believe, against the facts, that our history, the history of our culture, our civilization, is the history of humanity itself and that anyone outside or predating this history is a poor, half-human savage. Many of us individually will nod to the facts when confronted by them. This matters little, because mythology is something a culture of people buy into together and give expression to in the way they live as a group.

We tend to see civilization as a single block of wood, something we've modified, cutting pieces here, shaving there, adding over here, subtracting over there. This block of wood is the only block we see, some consider it the only block we have, perhaps there were other blocks in the past, but our ancestors deemed this block best, long ago, and it's all we have.

But just like with an actual block that one begins to carve, there can reach a point where the modifications are too extreme to reasonably get the structure that one would like to see. With immense time and effort, perhaps one could still rehabilitate the block, get it back on track. But perhaps instead, one's limited time on this rock might be spent simply reaching for a new block, utilizing what was learned from the previous mistakes, and starting over anew.

Why keep a pet tiger, if you know you can never train it not to think of you as a tasty snack? Capitalism is designed to exploit the majority, to funnel the economic rewards of their labor into the hands of a minority. You can put it in a cage, and put a muzzle over its mouth. But it's still a tiger. We keep failing to put a strong enough cage around it. Maybe it simply isn't possible. Whatever argument for its greater societal value there may once have been—and frankly, I'd be game to dispute even that, given how many people have been exploited and immiserated by it—that need is long gone. Now, the argument tends to be, well, we can't get rid of it peacefully, because the weapons and their wielders are controlled by capital.

But we can at least see it for what it is, and say the truth. Capitalism is

evil. It is innately corrupting and exploitative. The rationale for its being good relies on Lockean notions that the elite will act in the best interest of those beneath them. But that's been disproved again and again and again. Capitalism has eaten through its restraints again and again and again. The elite today is no more wise and beneficial today than it was in 1815—you could argue that it's worse.

There is no evidence that capitalism works for the many. It needs to be replaced. And in the meantime, let's stop pretending it's either inevitable or positive. It is neither.

No, we don't even know if it can be replaced short of total catastrophe, but we can at least tell the truth about it. Because life/death decisions about things that actually can be done or not done depend on the underlying idea of how everything works and whether or not 'everything' is worth preserving. Especially when the people making the decision think it has nothing to do with these big questions, that it's all about some immediate, isolated problem, so that getting up and acting with blundering force is better than getting caught up in doubt. Ideology loves nothing better than passing itself off as common sense, whereas sense or understanding that can actually be held in common tends to be painfully aware of its own partisanship.

How sick is it that Trump's politically incorrect speech whips liberals and the establishment media into a frothing frenzy, while actions he's undertaken that have brought death and destruction—and will likely bring much more of that—to people and nations that have never threatened the United States are met with approval and relief? It's as if liberals think uncouth rhetoric and posturing are worse than violently murdering people! Oh wait... they do! They fetishize the ceremonial aspects of the democratic process over the actual intended purpose of the process.

I'm sure you believe everything you're saying. But what I'm saying is, if you believed something different you wouldn't be sitting where you're sitting.

It may be hard to accept: it couldn't possibly be true that decent American liberals, or the Jewish owners of a major newspaper, could look at the plain facts of the Holocaust and think a mayoral row over stirrup pumps was more newsworthy. But it's important to acknowledge that this was the case, and to try to make sense of it and understand why. If we think that the media's failure during the Holocaust was a failure to "follow the threads and assemble the big picture," there's not much to explain: as an unprecedented crime unfolds, we can only cast limited blame on journalists who weren't quick enough or savvy enough to sift through the lies and find the truth. If, on the other hand, the news was blaring from the pages of the newspaper, we have evidence of something far more disquieting: the

possibility for ordinary Americans to passively stand by and watch the slaughter of millions of innocent people.

There is no way out of the imagined order. When we break down our prison walls and run towards freedom, we are in fact running into the more spacious exercise yard of a bigger prison.

Cognitive dissonance is often considered a failure of the human psyche. In fact, it is a vital asset. Had people been unable to hold contradictory beliefs and values, it would probably have been impossible to establish and maintain any human culture. If, say, a Christian really wants to understand the Muslims who attend that mosque down the street, he shouldn't look for a pristine set of values that every Muslim holds dear. Rather, he should inquire into the catch-22s of Muslim culture, those places where rules are at war and standards scuffle. It's at the very spot where the Muslims teeter between two imperatives that you'll understand them best.

It seems incredible that something so familiar and important could be misunderstood for so long—and perhaps it is the same with our minds. Perhaps your understanding of your thoughts and feelings is like the Egyptians' understanding of the sun.

It is especially difficult—or even impossible—to perceive how your mind works. As an example, please solve this math equation: $5 \times 8 = x$ If you answered '40,' congratulations—but the real question is how you figured it out. It is unlikely that you got five apples and then counted them eight times over. Instead you likely accessed some mathematical machinery that churned unconsciously and then spit out an answer into your conscious mind. At no point did you ever observe how this was working.

Rather than giving true explanations for their behavior or choices, it seems that people simply provide after-the-fact justifications, just as you might when watching someone else's behavior. We've always discussed how other minds are ultimately inaccessible and a matter of perception, but our own minds may be almost as inaccessible and perceived. What is most striking about our lack of self-insight is not necessarily that we make up explanations but our total confidence in their correctness. We seldom pause to consider that we might be mistaken about our reasons for acting—or anything else. Instead we consistently try to confirm what (we think) we already know, a tendency called the confirmation bias. More technically, the confirmation bias is the systematic distortion in the search, interpretation, and recall of information in order to support preexisting theories

We can do a remarkably effective example of the confirmation bias right here, between us. Take this sequence of three numbers: 2, 4, 8. Your job is to come up with the rule that governs the number progression. Your first guess is likely that we multiply the previous number by two ($x_n = 2 \times x_{n-1}$),

making the next number 16. Nope. Perhaps the trick is to add an extra 2 in each step, giving us the next number of 14 ($2 + 2 = 4$; $4 + 4 = 8$; $8 + 6 = 14$). Nope. Or maybe there is some mysterious link to the Fibonacci sequence? Nope. The rule is simple: each number has to be bigger than the last one. You might now complain that all your other suggestions also fit this pattern, but these other suggestions were too specific and missed the broader point. Theories like $x_n = 2 \times x_{n-1} - 1$ are the equivalent of saying that only Asian people are bad drivers when in fact everyone is a bad driver. The reason that people almost always miss this rule is that they ask questions trying to confirm their hypotheses rather than disconfirm them. People always ask, ‘Is the next number 16?’ and never ask, ‘Is the next number -100 ?’

Confirmation bias both consistently leads us astray and imbues us with confidence, undermining the process of discovery. This is why scientists typically try to disconfirm their hypotheses, or at least the hypotheses of their rivals. This can lead them to be quite skeptical of the established wisdom of anything, whether it involves the unimportance of sanitation with respect to disease (cholera is actually caused by poop) or the firmness of matter (actually mostly empty space). Social psychology really began as a skeptical reaction to intuitive accounts of human behavior, with the most classic example being a study first reported in 1963 by Stanley Milgram.

In the aftermath of the World War II, people all over the world grappled with how average Germans could have been complicit—or worse—in the wholesale slaughter of innocent Jews. The prevailing theory at the time was that Germans were an especially tractable people, but Milgram had other ideas. He believed that even God-fearing Americans could be persuaded to kill others through only polite insistence, and he designed a paradigm to test this hypothesis. In this famous study participants were asked to teach another person a list of words and—in order to help them learn—to shock the “learner” for every mistake. On each trial the shock level increased; Milgram wanted to know how many everyday Americans would continue with the experiment all the way to the end, administering the maximum—and ostensibly lethal—voltage of 450 volts. Most experts believed that only one percent to four percent of people would go all the way (a few sadists), but as you may already know, 65 percent of people obeyed to the deadly end. Of course, participants weren’t happy about it.

“At one point, [the participant] pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered: ‘Oh God, let’s stop it.’ And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experiment and obeyed to the end.”

Neither participants nor observers had imagined the scale of this obedience to authority. This study powerfully demonstrates that we too can do terrible things: the path of least resistance sinks us imperceptibly into moral turpitude.

Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, an approach which starts from not accepting the world as it looks.

So here is the hinge point where skepticism starts to reverse itself. Are we the first society to conclude that this time we're finally right about how the universe works? No—and every previous society who thought they were correct ended up hopelessly mistaken. That, however, doesn't mean that the goal is innately hopeless. Yes, we are not the first society to conclude that our version of reality is objectively true. But we could be the first society to express that belief and is never contradicted, because we might be the first society to really get there. We might be the last society, because—now—we translate absolutely everything into math. And math is an obdurate bitch.

The history of ideas is a pattern of error, with each new generation reframing and correcting the mistakes of the one that came before. In the ancient world, science was fundamentally connected to philosophy. Since the age of Newton, it's become fundamentally connected to math. And in any situation where the math zeroes out, the possibility of overturning the idea becomes borderline impossible. We don't know—and we can't know—if the laws of physics are the same everywhere in the universe, because we can't access most of the universe. But there are compelling reasons to believe this is indeed the case, and those reasons can't be marginalized as egocentric constructions that will wax and wane with the attitudes of man.

Consider an example from 1846, during a period when the laws of Newton had seemed to reach their breaking point. For reasons no one could comprehend, Newtonian principles were failing to describe the orbit of Uranus. The natural conclusion was that the laws of physics must work only within the inner solar system and since Uranus represented the known edge of that system, it must be operating under a different set of rules. But then someone said: Maybe Newton's laws still work. Maybe there's an unseen force of gravity operating on this planet that we have not accounted for in our equations. So let's assume Newton's law is correct and ask, 'If there is a hidden force of gravity, where would that force be coming from? Maybe it's coming from a planet we have yet to discover.'

This is a very difficult math problem, because it's one thing to say, 'Here's a planetary mass and here's the value of its gravity.' Now we're saying we have the value of gravity, so let's infer the existence of a mass. In math, this is called an inversion problem, which is way harder than starting with

the object and calculating its gravitational field. But great mathematicians engaged in this, and they said, ‘We predict, based on Newton’s laws that work on the inner solar system, that if Newton’s laws are just as accurate on Uranus as they are anywhere else, there ought to be a planet right here—go look for it.’ And the very night they put a telescope in that part of the sky, they discovered the planet Neptune.

The reason this anecdote is so significant is the sequence. It’s easy to discover a new planet and then work up the math proving that it’s there; it’s quite another to mathematically insist a massive undiscovered planet should be precisely where it ends up being. This is a different level of correctness. It’s not interpretative, because numbers have no agenda, no sense of history, and no sense of humor. The Pythagorean theorem doesn’t need the existence of Mr. Pythagoras in order to work exactly as it does.

“In physics, when we say we know something, it’s very simple: Can we predict the outcome? If we can predict the outcome, we’re good to go, and we’re on to the next problem. There are philosophers who care about the understanding of why that was the outcome. Isaac Newton essentially said, ‘I have an equation that says why the moon is in orbit. I have no fucking idea how the Earth talks to the moon. It’s empty space—there’s no hand reaching out.’ He was uncomfortable about this idea of action at a distance. And he was criticized for having such ideas, because it was preposterous that one physical object could talk to another physical object. Now, you can certainly have that conversation about why it happens. But an equation properly predicts what it does. That other conversation is for people having a beer. It’s a beer conversation.

So go ahead—have that conversation. ‘What is the nature of the interaction between the moon and the Earth?’ Well, my equations get it right every time. So you can say that gremlins do it—it doesn’t matter to my equation. Philosophers like arguing about semantics. In physics, we’re way more practical than philosophers. Way more practical. If something works, we’re on to the next problem. We’re not arguing why. Philosophers argue why. It doesn’t mean we don’t like to argue. We’re just not derailed by why, provided the equation gives you an accurate account of reality.”

In terms of speculating on the likelihood of our collective wrongness, this distinction is huge. If you remove the deepest question—the question of

why—the risk of major error falls through the floor. And this is because the problem of why is a problem that’s impossible to detach from the foibles of human nature. Take, for example, the childhood question of why the sky is blue. This was another problem tackled by Aristotle. In his systematic essay “On Colors,” Aristotle came up with an explanation for why the sky is blue: He argued that all air is very slightly blue, but that this blueness isn’t perceptible to the human eye unless there are many, many layers of air placed on top of each other. Similar, according to his logic, to the way a teaspoon of water looks clear but a deep well of water looks black. Based on nothing beyond his own powers of deduction, it was a genius conclusion. It explains why the sky is blue. But the assumption was totally wrong. The sky is blue because of the way sunlight is refracted. And unlike Aristotle, the person who realized this truth didn’t care why it was true, which allowed him to be right forever. There will never be a new explanation for why the sky is blue. Unless, of course, we end up with a new explanation for everything.

Still, we must remember that Galileo merely said that the language of nature is written in mathematics. He did not say everything is. And even the truth about nature need not be expressed in mathematics. For most of human history, the language of nature has been the language of myth and ritual. These forms, one might add, had the virtues of leaving nature un-threatened and of encouraging the belief that human beings are part of it. It hardly befits a people who stand ready to blow up the planet to praise themselves too vigorously for having found the true way to talk about nature.

Deceiving Ourselves

“Now I’m sure some of the ‘word police,’ the ‘wordinistas’ over at Webster’s, are gonna say, ‘Hey, that’s not a word!’ Well, anybody who knows me knows that I’m no fan of dictionaries or reference books. They’re elitist. Constantly telling us what is or isn’t true. Or what did or didn’t happen. Who’s Britannica to tell me the Panama Canal was finished in 1914? If I wanna say it happened in 1941, that’s my right. I don’t trust books—they’re all fact, no heart. Face it, folks, we are a divided nation—divided between those who think with their head and those who know with their heart. Because that’s where the truth comes from, ladies and gentlemen—the gut.”

“Man prefers to believe what he prefers to be true.”

There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn’t true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true.

“The end of everything we call life is at hand and cannot be evaded”

The Wuhan Flu doesn’t just make individual people ill—it threatens the whole of society too. Measures used to control the virus destroy people’s livelihoods, trample basic freedoms and, if prolonged, could eventually bring about wholesale societal collapse. However, thus far, talk about the virus has been focused on the medical and epidemiological facts—about which there seems to be an astonishing lack of agreement. We still have no real idea of how dangerous the virus is, nor how easily it spreads, nor how many people at the moment have it. Yet, the absence of real information hasn’t caused governments to move extra cautiously. On the contrary, it has encouraged them to take ever more radical steps.

To understand why, requires an appreciation of how all knowledge—most definitely including scientific facts—is socially constructed, and how human beings, for all the philosophers’ assurances to the contrary, are at heart, irrational animals. We are fearful and gullible creatures whose response to crises is governed by deeply entrenched cognitive biases.

On January 11, 2020, China announced its first death from the virus, a 61-year-old man who had purchased goods in a seafood market. For the following two months the world followed the story essentially as spectators. But then, on March 7, an American public looking forward to the weekend

instead woke to the grim news from Dr. James Lawler, a University of Nebraska Medical Center professor, that about 96 million Americans could become infected with the Wuhan Flu. Of these, Lawler calculated 4.8 million would be hospitalized and nearly half a million—480,000—would die!

For the Western world, watching the virus was no longer a spectator sport. Worse news followed only days later when British experts in London published their research. This seemed to show that without drastic action, not half a million but two and half million Americans faced an imminent and nasty end at the hands of the mystery virus. The detailed and apparently authoritative assessment by Professor Neil Ferguson and his team at Imperial College in London predicted at least half a million deaths in the UK alone.

Soon after, in London, the usually jocular Boris Johnson, the politician who had hung from a zip wire waving a union jack to the delight of the media, took unsmilingly to the airwaves to address the nation. “I must level with the British public,” the Prime Minister said. “Many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time.” The broadcast was followed hours later by emergency regulations shutting down many aspects of normal life and announcing plans to quarantine all elderly people for a period—just to get started—of four months.

At the same time, even as President Donald Trump “hesitated,” over in the US, state legislatures began to rush out their own emergency plans. A bill in Alabama called on individuals to “fist bump” rather than shake hands; New York suspended some mortgage payments for small businesses, and Rhode Island formally requested that Trump “declare a National Emergency for the Wuhan Flu Pandemic.”

The media lapped it up. Years of exaggeration plus a new internet-fueled appetite for clickbait headlines and tantalizing images had left the press no longer minded to separate fact from fiction. Instead, all over the world, media, politicians—and health “experts” too—combined forces to convince the world that it was facing imminent doom.

Information Cascade: a radical shift in ideas and beliefs driven not by carefully assessed and evaluated data but rather by uncritically embraced observation and reinforcement of the views of others.

In an information cascade, the actions and decisions of everyone else become more important than evidence you are directly acquainted with, let alone your own judgment. In this way, a particular view “cascades” down the side of an “informational pyramid”—like a waterfall. How many waterfalls really cascade down pyramids? Not many. But that is not the point. Rather, the insight is that it is often easier for people, if they do not

have either the ability or the interest to find out for themselves, to adopt the views of others. This is without doubt a useful social instinct.

But, in the grim spring of 2020, the news and media coverage, academic research and computer models and, above all, actual policy announcements all became a swirl of self-reinforcing misinformation. In a highly mediatized age, there is a bias towards seeing normal amounts of illness and death as exceptional. Perspective is lost. The seasonal toll of flu (or “flu like illness”), the virus everyone agrees is much less serious than the new one, is between 290,000 and 650,000 people. Worldwide, every year, between four and fifty million symptomatic cases in Europe alone, with a death toll there estimated at between 15,000 and 70,000 each winter. Soon, in America, television anchors broke down in tears reading the news while *The Guardian* ran a characteristically self-serving feature about the “strain” journalists were under.

Now, of course, illnesses are terrible things, and bring in their wake many personal tragedies, this virus no less than any other. But this story rapidly spun out of control with the result that a crucial element of perspective along with accuracy was abandoned early on.

One kind of cognitive bias is “Rear-view mirror syndrome.” This occurs when we evaluate a crisis by trying to find parallels with the past. But the parallels chosen in this case were not, for example, the Swine Flu fiasco, where terrible prophecies came to naught—but rather the great flu epidemic of 1918 and even the Black Death of the Middle Ages. Neither journalists nor politicians seemed to make even the quick trip to Wikipedia where they could have read that:

“The coronaviruses are a group of related viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, coronaviruses cause respiratory tract infections that can be mild, such as some cases of the common cold (among other possible causes, predominantly rhinoviruses), and others that can be lethal, such as SARS, MERS, and the Wuhan Flu.”

Fewer still tried to read even short pieces by specialists like Stanford’s Professor of Public Health, John Ioannidis, to discover that “mild” coronaviruses may be implicated in several thousands of deaths every year worldwide, although the vast majority of them are not documented. Instead, they are lost as noise among 60 million deaths from various causes every year.

On the face of it, it’s quite an information failure when policymakers don’t appreciate the difference between terrifying science fiction scourges

that can wipe out entire species and coronaviruses that actually infect many people every year, and are common especially in the elderly and in hospitalized patients with respiratory illness in the winter. In a normal year, coronaviruses infect millions of people and kill thousands. However, this year every even a solitary case and every early death became headline news. Amazing, high magnification images of the virus exploding out of a human cell added a final ghastly, science fiction aspect to the tale.

Long, long ago, Aristotle, the man who said the Earth is fixed at the centre of the universe, proclaimed that Man was a rational animal; but in 2020, the ‘crisis’ revealed human beings as hopelessly irrational creatures whose thinking is driven not by calm consideration of ‘the evidence’ but rather by various kinds of deeply entrenched thinking errors and cognitive biases. Here are some that throw light on the otherwise inexplicable worldwide response to the Wuhan Flu.

First of all, there’s the bias caused by overconfidence. Overconfidence results from a false sense of your skills and capabilities. And governments are particularly prone to it. One common manifestation is an illusion of control in matters over which you actually have no control—things like the spread of an essentially airborne virus for example, or the “contact tracing” of tens of thousands of people. Illusions of control prompt people to talk with over-optimism about events and timings, such as that the ‘curve of the epidemic will be flattened in two weeks,’ or that ‘a vaccine will be ready by September,’ or that ‘virus spores will only travel a fixed distance of two meters.’ It is all linked to infantile delusions of control rooted deep in our reptile brain that something will happen because we want it to. The flipside of overconfidence is ‘loss aversion’ and fear, things that with the Wuhan Flu lead people to prioritize the threat of illness over concerns about writing off trillions of dollars of business and undermining the structures of society.

And, of course, fear is also at the heart of the phenomenon called “Herd Mentality.” The classic instance of this is finance, but herds rush about in many areas, from management innovations to everyday consumer fashions for clothes or foods. When people opt to follow others on the sole basis that if so many people are doing something, well, ‘there must be a good reason for it,’ you have the potential for collective suicide. Indeed, the public health measures that have shut down large swaths of the economy could cause their own health catastrophe, as lost jobs lead to poverty and hopelessness. What we need is to control the panic; in the grand scheme, we’re going to be fine—provided we don’t let these dipshits fuck it up.

Unfortunately, since deaths drive clicks, much of the media instead plays the role of “availability entrepreneurs,” placing excessive weight on images that are particularly vivid—such as halls full of grim-looking beds inside

emergency hospitals or workers clad in full biohazard gear lowering coffins into graves.

And just as herd thinking means everyone must join the rush. Groupthink requires everyone to defer to authority and individualism to give way to imitation. Shared ‘social facts’ reduce anxiety by offering a sense of order and control. Indeed, in a crisis, contrarians are swiftly attacked by ‘mind guards.’ A quick trip to Twitter will illustrate this. Here, people I’ve conversed with for years have told me in no uncertain terms, to “just stop” disputing the consensus, while even well-entrenched commentators like Peter Hitchens and Simon Jenkins, used to thousands of grovelling, approving comments on their articles, are attacked for daring to suggest that governments might be reacting inappropriately to the Wuhan Flu.

Tolerating ambivalence and ‘not knowing’ plays a key role in maintaining openness to new information. In contrast, anxiety during a perceived crisis leads to over-commitment to preferred narratives, and a failure to recognize their provisional nature. It blocks out certain facts, such as that, for example, a surely noteworthy 99% of Italian Wuhan Flu fatalities had several “comorbidities,” to use the now prevalent jargon term. Research into 355 deaths found that just three of the victims, 0.8 percent, had been clear of illnesses before they were infected. Yet reports didn’t make a clear distinction between deaths “precipitated” by the virus and those “caused” by it.

Above all, groupthink suppresses and distorts the collective memory. Very recent history records multiple times when viruses sparked pandemic scares in the West, and how each time the evidence for them was twisted to fit various agenda including the interests of Big Pharma—but lessons from past cannot be benefited from. This kind of collective amnesia is very convenient for certain people. It would otherwise be notable that Neil Ferguson of London’s Imperial College, one of the leading voices calling for radical social distancing and lockdown measures to combat the “threat” of the Wuhan Flu, was likewise pressing very similar strategies, based on very similar arguments during earlier epidemics, such as Swine Flu—which turned out to be much less dangerous than his models predicted—as well as the “Foot and Mouth” one in which he insisted that all the cows, not only from infected farms but neighbouring farms too, had to be slaughtered—which they were, producing apocalyptic scenes of vast funeral pyres. There never was a good argument for the policy and in due course it was seen as a dreadful fiasco.

Well folks, I guess be thankful he didn’t offer that solution for this one—or maybe Bill Gates is keeping that plan under wraps for now, saving it for if the poors get too uppity? Remember Billy, we’re coming for those

billions; you're going to need to ride a fucking bus, bud. And no more global pandemic D&D in ritzy hotels for you.

After such false alarms, the world was supposed to have become more skeptical, and the WHO, in particular, to have changed its approach to pandemics. Instead, only a decade after the Swine Flu fiasco, it is striking how much the public and political coverage has again coalesced around certain myths and misunderstandings of the virus and how dissenting voices have been marginalized—meaning confined to specialist and “fringe” publications—while a false “consensus” of “all the experts” is created.

“With all respiratory diseases, the only thing that stops the disease is herd immunity. About 80% of the people need to have had contact with the virus, and the majority of them won't even have recognized that they were infected, or they had very, very mild symptoms, especially if they are children. So, it's very important to keep the schools open and kids mingling to spread the virus to get herd immunity as fast as possible. We are experiencing all sorts of counterproductive consequences of not well-thought-through policy

I have been an epidemiologist for 35 years, and I have been modeling epidemics for 35 years. It's a pleasure to have the ability to help people to understand, but it's a struggle to get heard.”

In a world in which scientists with computers have replaced priests with crucifix as the sources of unchallengeable truth and wisdom, the history of science shows that scientific progress is not and has never been solely and calmly about facts—far less, Platonic truths—at all, but is instead, a brutal fight in which the dominant view (or paradigm) invariably seeks to suppress its rivals. Kuhn's theory of so-called paradigm shifts should remind us how easily faulty reasoning can flourish and become entrenched. But it doesn't.

For better or for worse, the philosophy of science should remind us that individuals can influence the way we see the world. For better, Louis Pasteur did it by challenging Aristotle's thousand-year dogma that life is continually springing out of everyday chemicals in the air, mud, and water, discovering germs and microorganisms. For worse, activist researcher Ancel Keys managed to persuade governments and populations alike in the 1960s and 70s, that “fatty foods” like cheese and butter really were killing everyone. And now it seems that a handful of activist mathematical modelers of epidemics have managed to change the way we view viruses—the invisible other half of the human biome, essential to life.

The problem is, there are really two kinds of human thinking: fast and slow. ‘Slow’ is when you work things out. ‘Fast’ is what we use in a crisis. We have evolved in desperate times to jump to conclusions, ignoring gaps in information and data. This leap before you look mindset may have had evolutionary advantages. However, in the face of societal crises such as the Wuhan Flu, it is careful, slow thinking that is needed. Alas, it is fast thinking that we get.

Take the work of the computer modelers, for example:

“Every variable is dependent on a number of choices and knowledge gaps. And if every individual piece of a model is wobbly, then the model is going to have as much trouble standing on its own as a data journalist who has spent too long on a conference call while socially isolated after work.”

“There is no master plan in the background being followed here. There is a lot of research being done in real time, which is feeding into policy, to try and work out: is there in some sense an optimal strategy which keeps the NHS functioning, allows more economic and social activity to continue than is going on at the moment and gets us through the next, frankly, 18 months? I don’t know quite what that will look like or even if it’s completely feasible. We don’t have a clear exit strategy at the moment.”

However, it seems that even with life and death issues of public health, the strategy for computer modelers and governments alike is—in the words of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau centuries ago on social life in general—to start by saying:

“Let us begin then by laying facts aside, as they do not affect the question.”

All of which highlights the thinking error dubbed, “GIGO,” for ‘Garbage In, Garbage Out’—according the pronouncements of computers (and computer models) far more weight than anything produced by a human being; even though, in reality, what the computer says is determined by the information fed into it by humans. As early as 1964, a researcher warned that even “extremely short exposure to a relatively simple computer program could produce powerful delusional thinking in normal people.” And unfortunately, we are not talking about normal people in this case, but politicians. For these, the fact, so cheerfully acknowledged by Ferguson in interviews, that the data he fed his computer models was largely provisional and debatable,

did not detract from the enormous authority given to the computer's eventual pronouncements. And, what the computer models suggested, in their unchallengeable way, was that so-called self-isolation and social distancing was the universal solution. The 'Italian model' for dealing with the virus was to be backed up by medical staff in cumbersome protective clothing; soldiers patrolling the streets; and legally enforced, profound changes to the lives of the whole population.

Another cognitive bias is the so-called "Narrative Fallacy." With things like the Wuhan Flu, we have been offered many stories, but one of the most compelling is that about people going out, passing the virus on, and killing other people. Notice too, that we are subliminally wired to expect this kind of three-part story—the beginning, the middle and then the end. Advertisers know the power of triples, but so do media propagandists and political advisors. In the UK, the Prime Minister gave public addresses with not one but three messages strapped to his podium:

"Stay home. Protect the NHS. Save lives."

Newspapers described the virus as a tiny, streamlined machine, which engulfs the cells deep in the tiny air sacs of the lung, hijacks their command and control mechanisms, before finally killing them and spewing out more of the infectious virus. In a mediatized age, storytelling is doubly important. The bias recognizes that humans are story-telling animals who naturally try to arrange facts and events in a sequence. Alas, sometimes the story takes on greater authority than it really deserves, propelling us towards a supposed conclusion.

Speaking of storytelling, a harrowing series of tweets by an Obama-era health official outlined how the largest US cities and hospitals would be overrun with Wuhan Flu cases by the end of March and a million Americans would die. The tweets by Andy Slavitt, the former acting administrator of Medicare and Medicaid under President Barack Obama, helped shift public opinion in the US.

"What are mayors, governors and their staffs reporting? That people are jamming the bars. I get it. Home from work. Cooped up. Crisis mentality. We need to let steam off. Shared experience. But stop that. All the bars and restaurants are closed now across Europe."

Describing the situation in Italian hospitals in particular, and what it might mean for the US, he tweeted:

“Every report describes this as a tsunami. And if it happens like a tsunami, in major cities we will have tens of thousands more cases than we have beds and we will have one ventilator for every eight people who need one.”

And there again you have the tell-tale fingerprint of an information cascade. The policy was right because “every report” says it is right. Another clue as to the quality of his diagnosis came in his final tweet about the origins of the crisis. It was a Republican President’s mismanagement that had caused it:

“The original sin is Trump’s months-long denial and his dismantling of public health and response infrastructure.”

Thus politicians cannot help but play their usual games even as the world teeters on the brink of disaster. Which without doubt, it was doing. Only not because of the health crisis that Slavitt and so many others foresaw, a crisis caused by a biological virus—but because of a social and economic rupture caused by rash actions and misinformation.

But let’s not deceive ourselves that it is only politicians who misread information and rush about like fools. Consider two small stories making up the big virus tale. One was the rumor that it was being transmitted by people with no symptoms. A report documenting transmission by an asymptomatic individual had been published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on January 30. Of course, transmission by people without symptoms would be a huge problem. A few weeks later, however, it turned out that the specific patient did have symptoms, it was just that the researchers had er. . . not asked. Similarly, the respected medical journal *The Lancet* published on February 24 a shocking account by two Chinese nurses about their front-line experience fighting the Wuhan Flu. Only it turned out that the account was not quite what it seemed: it was not a first-hand account. The authors soon retracted their contribution which was as a letter. Such examples show how sensationalism affects even the most prestigious scientific journals.

A further reasoning error occurs when people trust information they have read in several places, without appreciating that the views may feed off each other. Journalists, for example, read each other’s reports and feel reassured to be part of a consensus. Politicians read the reports and shift policies to fit the journalists expectations. In the Wuhan Flu crisis, many journalists felt it was their duty to direct readers thinking in one direction only. Dissenting voices were drowned out. Instead, terrifying predictions and lack of actual data were the context for near universal calls for a

strict policy of social isolation, and for medical systems to move quickly to reorganize and prioritize resources ready for the expected mass epidemic.

The immediate result was radical lockdowns of whole populations—actions that were unprecedented in peacetime. The longer term result was that the global economy and society sustained serious damage from an epidemic that otherwise accounted for “less than 0.01% of all 60 million annual global deaths from all causes and that kills almost exclusively people with relatively low life expectancy.”

And all the time, even as media and politicians rushed frantically from rash idea to rasher policy, the facts were there in plain sight—only no one was prepared to look at them. No one even attempted to explain how social distancing measures and lockdowns could be maintained for months, even years potentially, without major consequences to the economy, society, and mental health. Let alone how unpredictable effects including financial crisis, unrest, civil strife, war, and a ripping of the social fabric could be avoided. Instead, what people were fed were soundbites. Like this one from London’s otherwise ‘liberal’ radio station, LBC:

“If you’re still planning to go out this weekend despite bars being closed, first listen to this remarkable call from an intensive care doctor who warned: ‘If you go out, it’s going to kill people.’”

Lockdown was the most disastrous part of a policy taken by many countries and American states that was supposed to “slow down” the spread of the virus, yet we must accept it had popular support. Even though, the idea was to discourage people from leaving their homes, for walks or cinemas or cafés, and to require them to stay in claustrophobic proximity with each other in their homes for weeks on end. In France, President Macron made long, emotional appeals to his “compatriots” to join in a national struggle against “an invisible enemy,” before listing respectfully those who had fallen already. All public spaces were closed and citizens (like myself) were forbidden to leave their homes for weeks on end, except to buy essential foodstuffs in approved shops. And to do this, they had to clutch an official document downloaded from the government website, setting out their reasons for leaving their house. The interior minister, Christophe Castaner, ordered 100,000 military police to spread around the country to enforce the lockdown. Of course, such people are immune from the virus—and can’t spread it either. Such a thought was no more irrational than the rest of the government’s plans. In the US, President’s Trump’s decision to close America’s borders made no scientific sense—and nor does health screening at borders as it cannot pick out people who may carry viruses but not yet

have symptoms—even if in partisan political terms is seemed to reinforce his campaign themes of a strong fortress America—the one with a wall along the Mexico border.

Tying together all the plans however was the central conviction that we had to “Flatten the Curve.” That is, to spread out the load of virus cases and relieve pressure on health services. This had rapidly become the One Thing Everyone Agrees. Yet even that simple relationship—lots of cases, overloading health services, so better to spread them out—is not entirely straightforward. Because spreading infections out over a longer period of time can just as easily mean that instead of being overwhelmed during a short, acute phase, health services remain overwhelmed for a more protracted period. When health services are overwhelmed, people die. And destroying livelihoods, disrupting social life, and locking people in their homes for months kills people too.

In the absence of data, prepare-for-the-worst reasoning leads to extreme measures of social distancing and lockdowns. Unfortunately, we do not know if these measures work. School closures, for example, may reduce transmission rates. But they may also backfire if children socialize anyhow, if school closure leads children to spend more time with susceptible elderly family members, if children at home disrupt their parents ability to work, and more. School closures may also diminish the chances of developing herd immunity in an age group that is spared serious disease. So perhaps it is worth taking a moment to look at the background of one of the experts whose call for a swift clampdown on all social contact led to dramatic shifts in policy in both the UK and the US.

Neil Ferguson hails from Imperial College London—a university with profitable links to the pharmaceutical industry. Just days after the paper was published, Ferguson’s department of biomathematics announced it was sharing in £20 million of emergency the Wuhan Flu research investment courtesy of the UK government. Not bad for one paper! But the most revealing thing about Neil Ferguson and his department is that they had exactly the same concerns and exactly the same policy advice during the so-called Swine Flu crisis back in 2009.

Flashback to June 11 that year, and the World Health Organization was declaring a “six-level alert”—its grimmest ever—for a new pandemic sweeping the world. This was the so-called Swine Flu or H1N1 virus, and despite having in previous years been found to have been wrong about the dangers of several other viruses, the WHO once again, sounded the deathly warning that “this early pandemic and flu is somewhat similar to the 1918–1919 pandemic swine flu that killed millions.” Exactly what this strain would do in the Fall and Winter of 2009 and into 2010 was unclear,

the WHO said, but “everyone needs to be prepared.”

Naturally, governments everywhere respected the advice of the World Health Organization, a UN agency which after all does so much good work combating disease and guiding research related to public health. And so, after the Swine Flu warning, they promised schools and offices would be closed where necessary. Facemasks were bought in the millions, and vaccines were stockpiled. And also as part of their response, a fount of ‘advice’ was offered to the public. For example, people were told, when back at home in the evening, to disinfect dishes, cups, and utensils by thoroughly soaking in detergent and washing and rinsing thoroughly everything by hand or in the dishwasher. Everyone was to wash their hands frequently. And if, despite staying away from work, ordering the shopping by phone, and disinfecting the dishes, they still fell victim, there was advice on “the symptoms”—fever, chills, coughing, fatigue, congestion, muscle and bone ache, and vomiting and intestinal upset; and then death.

No wonder governments spent so much to combat the threat. No wonder, more specifically, that governments swiftly came up with large amounts of money to buy huge amounts of vaccine from pharmaceutical companies. Yet, at the end of the day, Swine Flu proved to be a paper tiger in the West, just as the skeptical doctors had indicated. The 2009 swine flu epidemic killed hundreds of thousands, mostly in Africa and Southeast Asia. Annoyingly, for Western governments and their advisors, almost no people could be found to be said to have died from H5N1, even though ordinary flu regularly kills several tens of thousands of people each winter. However, for a while, this virus was *the* public health concern, we could say the fashion.

Quite possibly more people, suffering from other complaints, died from the “emergency precautions” surrounding the virus, such as being refused entry to doctors surgeries. But these could hardly be added to the statistics. And all over the (rich) world, millions of germ masks and vaccines began to deteriorate in storage, unused and unusable. Back then, an erroneous piece of expert advice cost an unknown number of lives and enormous sums of money and resources.

Not long after, two independent reports put a belated spotlight on the fact that three of the crucial experts arguing for expensive programs of vaccine preparation—by companies like Roche (the makers of Tamiflu) and GlaxoSmithKiline (the makers of Relenza)—were also paid consultants for the companies. Now, maybe individual researchers aren’t knowingly skewing research reports in order to make money, either for themselves or their institutions. But the structural pressures are there and they can create the same effect. Research is a business and so its conclusions are skewed towards the needs of the paymasters.

And you may well ask, how big a business is an epidemic? The answer is that they can be a very big deal indeed. In the US alone, Congress had appropriated \$7.65 billion in June to fight the 2009 pandemic. In the UK, in order to deal with the Swine Flu threat, the impressively titled and ennobled Chief Medical Officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, said that a £1 billion emergency program of vaccination was needed. If it sounds a lot for a small country, remember, without it up to 65,000 people would die! The most “optimistic assessment” was for 19,000 deaths. His fears were confirmed by virologists such as one who added that without immediate action he had calculated that soon half the population could be infected. Imagine, tens of millions of people dying—and only the government able to save them.

But the funds made available for the Wuhan Flu are on a totally different scale. Even with the number of cases globally still relatively tiny, in March 17, 2020, the World Bank had set aside \$14 billion to help its members to respond to the threat. What sort of things was the money to be spent on? One component was to pay for everyone in the population to be tested for the virus. Vaccines make for profits, but testing is a great earner too. Often in this case tests were to be followed by the isolation of anyone who tested positive. Even though carrying out mass tests on the asymptomatic population could be useless—the contagions are constantly evolving, a person who tests negative today could contract the disease tomorrow.

Governments wouldn't wish to implement pointless and even dangerous polices though, would they? Alas, the herd memory is short, nor are herds known for their willingness to pause and reflect. Otherwise they might have learned lessons from 1976, when President Gerald Ford's administration reacted at speed to the swine flu outbreak, ignoring the World Health Organization's words of caution and vowing to vaccinate “every man, woman and child in the United States.” After 45 million people were vaccinated, the flu turned out to be mild. Worse, researchers discovered that some of the vaccinated—roughly 450 in all—had developed Guillain-Barré syndrome, a rare disorder in which the body's immune system attacks the nerves, leading to paralysis. At least 30 people died. Or from 2017, when a rushed campaign—endorsed by the WHO—to vaccinate nearly one million children for mosquito-borne dengue in the Philippines was halted for safety reasons. The Philippine government indicted 14 state officials in connection with the deaths of ten vaccinated children, saying the program was launched “in haste.”

But back to the earlier Swine Flu outbreak in the UK, the one where the Chief Medical Officer swept aside skeptical voices, and instead advised the British government to order without further delay 32 million face masks to go with that £1 billion-plus worth of vaccines. In France and other European

countries, a similar story had played out—another billion-dollar supply of vaccines stockpiled here, another mountain of unused face masks there.

With hindsight it seems just silly—and expensive. Yet it’s worth recalling that for a few months the Swine Flu pandemic was also genuinely terrifying ‘everyone.’ Like the Wuhan Flu, it had appeared around March and rapidly spread throughout many places on the planet, all doubtless helped by sniffing travelers on airplanes. The Center for Disease Control in the US started a website page to keep track of the death toll for US states and territories: by June 2009 the counter registered 6,506 cases and 436 deaths. The next month, a special counter on the World Health Organization website registered total cases already at 177,457 with a toll of 1,462 deaths.

Admittedly, the figures were not yet exceptional, but the question everyone was asking was how many more might die soon? Basing their view on US statistics, and the lack of a jab for swine flu, experts thought there would be “about 300 million” at risk initially: “typically, anyone who has not had the vaccine.” For a few weeks back then too, it had seemed to a terrified public that the only real way to avoid dying was to ‘Get vaccinated as soon as possible.’ Advice, in other words coming from the drugs industry funded labs that certainly suited the industry. Unfortunately—for Big Pharmas profits—the vaccines would be available only in early October.

And just as in the spring of 2020, there were endlessly repeated helpful hygiene tips, such as to:

- Avoid putting fingers and hands to the mouth or eyes since these are portals of entry for microbes.
- Stay away from large crowds, and all infected people.
- Remember to wear a face mask—certainly if going out of the house.
- Wash hands regularly, before eating or drinking and after visiting the restroom.

With Swine Flu, much of the advice related to safety at school. But with the Wuhan Flu, even though school-age children were recognized as very low risk, schools were immediately shut down.

We should be suspicious of experts recycling old advice. After all, they may be guilty of two more cognitive biases: the phenomenon known as “one model thinking” whereupon only evidence that fits the model is visible. There is either a duck or a rabbit, but not both, to use the example that Wittgenstein made famous, but originated in 1892 issue of *Fliegende Blätter*, a German humour magazine. And there is “Confirmation Bias,” which

is the idea that people seek out information and data that confirms their pre-existing ideas while ignoring contrary information however potentially significant for the decision. The almost non-existent political and media examination of the range of views and strategies for the Wuhan Flu shows that this is one of the most dangerous biases of them all.

All work requires effort. All goals require conviction. All conviction is entwined with doubt. Belief gets us where we are going, but what saves a man when he gets lost?

“The easiest thing of all is to deceive oneself; for we believe whatever we want to believe.”

There have been many psychology experiments that show that people can be exemplary thinkers when they are highly motivated and feel that they have the ability to understand things. In these situations, people typically will buckle down, consider all the information that they encounter until they understand it fully, and then make a carefully reasoned judgment. But when people aren't motivated, such as when they are considering a new proposed law that won't affect them directly, or when they feel that they don't have the ability to fully understand a complex problem, then they show a curious response: they start to attend to things that are really quite irrelevant to the quality of the information. They'll be persuaded just because an argument comes from an attractive person, or from someone who has an impressive sounding title, or by whatever information is presented first, or by a snappy sound-bite that sticks in their mind. That is, when a problem is too challenging, we try to conserve our cognitive resources to make a judgment that feels 'good enough.' We become what psychologists call a "cognitive miser." Thinking takes effort, especially for complex problems, so we use mental shortcuts—what psychologists term "heuristics"—that appear to give us a satisfying answer.

When estimating the frequency of an event, for example, we often base our estimates on how many relevant examples we can bring to mind. This is known as the "availability heuristic." If we want to estimate the likelihood of being killed by a shark versus being killed by a cow, we think of the number of incidents of each of these that we know. Because fatal shark attacks are so noteworthy, they receive much more press attention than fatal encounters with cows, and thus most people can more readily bring to mind examples of shark-caused deaths than cow ones.

Our estimates of the ratio of shark and cow attacks are also influenced by how well an event fits with our existing beliefs—this is known as the

“representativeness heuristic.” Some ideas just are easier to imagine because we have some preexisting expectations and stereotypes that guide our thinking. When it comes to sharks, we think of them as all teeth—efficient cold-blooded killing machines—and we can easily imagine how they could tear up a lone swimmer or surfer. In contrast, people usually think of cows as lumbering docile grazers—gentle beasts that seem content chewing their cud. Attacking humans just doesn’t seem to be representative cow behavior. The availability and the representativeness heuristics make us feel that shark-caused deaths are more common than cow-caused deaths, when in actuality, deaths from cows are far more common. Our mental heuristics provide us with quick, satisfying, and often completely incorrect answers.

Before the discovery of Australia, people in the Old World were convinced that all swans were white, an unassailable belief as it seemed completely confirmed by empirical evidence. The sighting of the first black swan might have been an interesting surprise for a few ornithologists—and others extremely concerned with the coloring of birds—but that is not where the significance of the story lies. It illustrates a severe limitation to our learning from observations or experience and the fragility of our knowledge. One single observation can invalidate a general statement derived from millennia of confirmatory sightings of millions of white swans. All you need is one single black bird.

The Black Swan is the result of collective and individual epistemic limitations (or distortions), mostly confidence in knowledge; it is not an objective phenomenon. The most severe mistake made in the interpretation of the Black Swan is to try to define an objective Black Swan that would be invariant in the eyes of all observers. The events of September 11, 2001, were a Black Swan for the victims, but certainly not to the perpetrators.

Why do we formulate theories leading to projections and forecasts without focusing on the robustness of these theories and the consequences of the errors? It is much easier to deal with the Black Swan problem if we focus on robustness to errors rather than improving predictions.

I don’t particularly care about the usual. If you want to get an idea of a friend’s temperament, ethics, and personal elegance, you need to look at him under the tests of severe circumstances, not under the regular rosy glow of daily life. Can we understand health without considering wild diseases and epidemics? Indeed the normal is often irrelevant.

Models and constructions, these intellectual maps of reality, are not always wrong; they are wrong only in some specific applications. The difficulty is that a) you do not know beforehand (only after the fact) where the map will be wrong, and b) the mistakes can lead to severe consequences. These models are like potentially helpful medicines that carry random but

very severe side effects.

I stick my neck out and make a claim, against many of our habits of thought, that our world is dominated by the extreme, the unknown, and the very improbable—improbable according our current knowledge—and all the while we spend our time engaged in small talk, focusing on the known, and the repeated. This implies the need to use the extreme event as a starting point and not treat it as an exception to be pushed under the rug. I also make the bolder—and more annoying—claim that in spite of our progress and the growth in knowledge, or perhaps because of such progress and growth, the future will be increasingly less predictable, while both human nature and social sciences seem to conspire to hide the idea from us.

The human mind suffers from three ailments as it comes into contact with history. They are:

Illusion of Understanding: How everyone thinks he knows what is going on in a world that is more complicated (or random) than they realize.

Retrospective Distortion: How we can assess matters only after the fact, as if they were in a rearview mirror (history seems clearer and more organized in history books than in empirical reality).

Overvaluation of Factual Information: The handicap of authoritative and learned people, particularly when they create categories—when they ‘Platonify.’

The studious examination of the past in the greatest of detail does not teach you much about the mind of History; it only gives you the illusion of understanding it. History and societies do not crawl. They make jumps. They go from fracture to fracture, with a few vibrations in between. Yet we (and historians) like to believe in the predictable, small incremental progression.

From the standpoint of the turkey, the non-feeding of the one-thousand-and-first day is a Black Swan. For the butcher, it is not, since its occurrence is not unexpected. So you can see here that the Black Swan is a sucker’s problem. In other words, it occurs relative to your expectation. You realize that you can eliminate a Black Swan by science—if you’re able—or by keeping an open mind. Of course you can create Black Swans with science, by giving people confidence that the Black Swan cannot happen—this is when science turns normal citizens into suckers.

Consider the following story:

A nonbeliever in the gods, was shown painted tablets bearing the portraits of some worshipers who prayed, then survived a

subsequent shipwreck. The implication was that praying protects you from drowning. The nonbeliever asked, “Where were the pictures of those who prayed, then drowned?”

The drowned worshipers, being dead, would have a lot of trouble advertising their experiences from the bottom of the sea. This can fool the casual observer into believing in miracles. We call this the problem of silent evidence. The idea is simple, yet potent and universal. The problem, of course, is that unless they are drilled into us systematically, or integrated into our way of thinking, these great observations are rapidly forgotten.

But that we got here by accident does not mean that we should continue to take the same risks. We are mature enough a race to realize this point, enjoy our blessings, and try to preserve, by becoming more conservative, what we got by luck. We have been playing Russian roulette; now let’s stop.

Evolutionary fitness is something that is continuously touted and aggrandized by the crowd who takes it as gospel. The more unfamiliar someone is with the wild Black Swan-generating randomness, the more he or she believes in the optimal working of evolution. Silent evidence is not present in their theories. Evolution is a series of flukes, some good, many bad. You only see the good. But, in the short-term, it is not obvious which traits are really good for you, particularly if you are in the Black Swan-generating environment. This is like looking at rich gamblers coming out of the casino and claiming that a taste for gambling is good for the species because gambling makes you rich! Risk taking made many species head for extinction! This idea that we are here, that this is the best of all possible worlds, and that evolution did a great job seems rather bogus in the light of the silent-evidence effect. The fools, the Casanovas, and the blind risk takers are often the ones who win in the short term. Worse, in a Black Swan environment, where one single but rare event can come shake up a species after a very long-run of “fitness,” the foolish risk takers can also win in the long-term!

There are professions where experts play a role, and others where there is no evidence of skills. Which are which?

Professions that deal with the future and base their studies on the non-repeatable past have an expert problem (with the exception of the weather and businesses involving short-term physical processes, not socioeconomic ones). I am not saying that no one who deals with the future provides any valuable information—newspapers can predict theater opening hours rather well—but rather that those who provide no tangible added value are generally dealing with the future.

Another way to see it is that things that move are often Black Swan-prone. Experts are narrowly focused persons who need to tunnel. In situations where tunneling is safe, because Black Swans are not consequential, the expert will do well.

There is actually a law in statistics called the law of iterated expectations: If I expect to expect something at some date in the future, then I already expect that something at present. Consider the wheel. If you are a Stone Age historical thinker called on to predict the future in a comprehensive report for your chief tribal planner, you must project the invention of the wheel or you will miss pretty much all of the action. Now, if you can prophesy the invention of the wheel, you already know what a wheel looks like, and thus you already know how to build a wheel, so you are already on your way. The Black Swan needs to be predicted!

But there is another form of this law of iterated knowledge. It can be phrased as follows: To understand the future to the point of being able to predict it, you need to incorporate elements from this future itself. If you know about the discovery you are about to make in the future, then you have almost made it.

Assume that you are a special scholar in Medieval University's Forecasting Department specializing in the projection of future history—for our purposes, the remote twentieth century. You would need to hit upon the inventions of the steam machine, electricity, the atomic bomb, and the Internet, as well as the institution of the airplane onboard massage and that strange activity called the business meeting, in which well-fed but sedentary men voluntarily restrict their blood circulation with an expensive device called a necktie. This incapacity is not trivial. The mere knowledge that something has been invented often leads to a series of inventions of a similar nature, even though not a single detail of this invention has been disseminated—there is no need to find the spies and hang them publicly. In mathematics, once a proof of an arcane theorem has been announced, we frequently witness the proliferation of similar proofs coming out of nowhere, with occasional accusations of leakage and plagiarism. There may be no plagiarism: the information that the solution exists is itself a big piece of the solution.

This multiplicative difficulty leading to the need for greater and greater precision in assumptions can be illustrated with the following simple exercise concerning the prediction of the movements of billiard balls on a table. If you know a set of basic parameters concerning the ball at rest, can compute the resistance of the table (quite elementary), and can gauge the strength of the impact, then it is rather easy to predict what would happen at the first hit. The second impact becomes more complicated, but possible; you need to be more careful about your knowledge of the initial states, and more precision

is called for. The problem is that to correctly compute the ninth impact, you need to take into account the gravitational pull of someone standing next to the table. And to compute the fifty-sixth impact, every single elementary particle of the universe needs to be present in your assumptions! An electron at the edge of the universe, separated from us by 10 billion light-years, must figure in the calculations, since it exerts a meaningful effect on the outcome.

Now, consider the additional burden of having to incorporate predictions about where these variables will be in the future. Forecasting the motion of a billiard ball on a pool table requires knowledge of the dynamics of the entire universe, down to every single atom! We can easily predict the movements of large objects like planets (though not too far into the future), but the smaller entities can be difficult to figure out—and there are so many more of them. Note that this billiard-ball story assumes a plain and simple world; it does not even take into account these crazy social matters possibly endowed with free will. Billiard balls do not have a mind of their own.

Operation 1: The Melting Ice Cube Imagine an ice cube and consider how it may melt over the next two hours while you play a few rounds of poker with your friends. Try to envision the shape of the resulting puddle.

Operation 2: Where Did the Water Come From? Consider a puddle of water on the floor. Now try to reconstruct in your mind's eye the shape of the ice cube it may once have been. Note that the puddle may not have necessarily originated from an ice cube.

The difference between these two processes resides in the following. If you have the right models—and some time on your hands, and nothing better to do—you can predict with great precision how the ice cube will melt. This is a specific engineering problem devoid of complexity, easier than the one involving billiard balls. However, from the pool of water you can build infinite possible ice cubes, if there was in fact an ice cube there at all. The first direction, from the ice cube to the puddle, is called the forward process. The second direction, the backward process, is much, much more complicated. The forward process is generally used in physics and engineering; the backward process in non-repeatable, non-experimental historical approaches. In a way, the limitations that prevent us from unfrying an egg also prevent us from reverse engineering history.

Now, let me increase the complexity of the forward-backward problem just a bit by assuming nonlinearity. Take what is generally called the “butterfly in India” paradigm. A small input in a complex system can lead

to nonrandom large results, depending on very special conditions. A single butterfly flapping its wings in New Delhi may be the certain cause of a hurricane in North Carolina, though the hurricane may take place a couple of years later. However, given the observation of a hurricane in North Carolina, it is dubious that you could figure out the causes with any precision: there are billions of billions of such small things as wing-flapping butterflies in Timbuktu or sneezing wild dogs in Australia that could have caused it. The process from the butterfly to the hurricane is greatly simpler than the reverse process from the hurricane to the potential butterfly.

This brings me to a greater problem with the historian's craft. I will state the fundamental problem of practice as follows: while in theory randomness is an intrinsic property, in practice, randomness is incomplete information. Nonpractitioners of randomness do not understand the subtlety. Often when they hear talk about uncertainty and randomness, philosophers, and sometimes mathematicians, wonder whether the randomness addressed is "true randomness" or "deterministic chaos" that masquerades as randomness. A true random system is in fact random and does not have predictable properties. A chaotic system has entirely predictable properties, but they are hard to know.

But there is no functional difference in practice between the two since we will never get to make the distinction—the difference is mathematical, not practical. If I see a pregnant woman, the sex of her child is a purely random matter to me (a 50 percent chance for either sex)—but not to her doctor, who might have done an ultrasound. In practice, randomness is fundamentally incomplete information. And, the mere fact that a person is talking about the difference implies that he has never made a meaningful decision under uncertainty—which is why he does not realize that they are indistinguishable in practice. Randomness, in the end, is just unknowledge. The world is opaque and appearances fool us.

“The real purpose of scientific method is to make sure Nature hasn't misled you into thinking you know something that you actually don't.”

Corporations realized that you could create the impression of controversy simply by asking questions, even if you actually knew the answers and they didn't help your case.

What oil, tobacco, and pharmaceutical companies have done in the past is hire scientists to do research they want kept secret. When the best scientists have evidence that would work against you, but they're not able to present it to the public, well then, you've essentially bought some silence.

“Once again, scientific claims were being published in scientific journals, where only scientists would read them, but unscientific claims were being published in the mass media.”

I am deeply suspicious of statistics. The same data can be used to support very different views in both the life sciences and social sciences, including economics. Moreover, the methods used to produce figures are often debatable, to say the least, and the reliability of the result can only be judged by someone with a degree in advanced statistics. The main illusion produced by all these figures is that they represent reality. In the majority of cases, however, they are doing something else. They are creating a certain image of reality. That image reflects expectations, the product of an ideology we are not always aware of. People then make decisions without reflecting—after all: the figures speak for themselves.

Misinterpretation of ‘no effect’ studies has led to a popular joke in math circles. Two statisticians, on a hunting trip in the woods, spot a deer and each take aim. One misses three feet to the right. The other misses three feet to the left. They rejoice: “We got him!”

The media gives tremendous weight and coverage to the first study published on a research question, and essentially ignores all of those that come later. This bias is unsurprising—fame goes to the discoverer, not to the person who got there a few months later, or who just followed up on the original work. But even in science, the judgment of greatness is a retrospective one that only history can render, and journalism is well known to be only the first draft of history. When a new finding is announced, journalists and other observers might be hard-pressed to say, ‘I won’t report this story until I see it replicated by at least two other laboratories.’ The first report of a new scientific finding is analogous to the front-page coverage granted to a high-profile criminal indictment; the news that the results didn’t hold up winds up in the back pages—if it is covered at all—next to the story about the suspect’s eventual exoneration.

Correlation does not imply causation. This principle needs to be taught because it runs counter to the illusion of cause. It is particularly hard to internalize, and in the abstract, knowing the principle does little to immunize us against the error. Fortunately, we have a simple trick to help you spot the illusion in action: When you hear or read about an association between two factors, think about whether people could have been assigned randomly to conditions for one of them. If it would have been impossible, too expensive, or ethically dubious to randomly assign people to those groups, then the study could not have been an experiment and the causal inference is not supported.

The Simpsons provides one of the best illustrations of the dangers of turning a temporal association into a causal explanation. After a bear is spotted in Springfield, the town initiates an official Bear Patrol, complete with helicopters and trucks with sirens, to make sure no bears are in town.

HOMER: Ahhh. . . not a bear in sight. The bear patrol must be working like a charm.

LISA: That's specious reasoning, Dad.

HOMER: Thank you, honey.

LISA: *picking up a rock from the ground* By your logic, I could claim that this rock keeps tigers away.

HOMER: Ooooh. . . how does it work?

LISA: It doesn't work—it's just a stupid rock. But I don't see any tigers around here, do you?

HOMER: Lisa, I want to buy your rock.

Around 40 percent of people still believe in the Mozart effect, despite the scientific evidence against it. Lest you think that this is just a silly belief that has no real importance, consider some of the implications. Parents holding this belief might think that they are doing just as much, if not more, for their children by sitting them in front of a baby DVD or playing classical music than by interacting with them. Daycare centers, schools, and other institutions might follow suit. The fad of playing Mozart to babies could substitute for much better practices, ones that might actually help the social and intellectual development of children. In other words, a belief in the Mozart effect might make children worse off than they would have been otherwise, as suggested by a study of baby DVDs. If such a sizable number of people continue to believe in the Mozart effect despite its debunking, what about other beliefs in hidden mental powers that have not received as severe a public lashing as the Mozart effect?

A single vivid example that illustrates a causal argument may be taken as proof unless we think carefully about the information we haven't been given—and thinking about what is missing from a story does not come naturally.

Anecdotes are inherently more persuasive than statistics. Precisely because anecdotes capitalize on the power of narrative, they hold considerable sway over all of us. You might know from reading Consumer Reports that Hondas and Toyotas have excellent reliability. Consumers Union, the publisher of Consumer Reports, surveys thousands of car owners and compiles their responses to generate their reliability ratings. But your one friend who complains that his Toyota is perpetually in the shop and

insists that he would never buy another one can have more power than the aggregated reports of thousands of strangers. We can relate to the experiences—especially the suffering—of a single car owner. We can't relate to the statistical facts about thousands. For a story to be powerful, persuasive, and memorable, we need to be able to empathize. Quentin Tarantino, maker of ultra-violent films, explains the importance of empathy this way:

“A beheading in a movie doesn't make me wince. But when somebody gets a paper cut in a movie, you go, ‘Ooh!’”

It makes sense that anecdotes are compelling to us. Our brains evolved under conditions in which the only evidence available to us was what we experienced ourselves and what we heard from trusted others. Our ancestors lacked access to huge data sets, statistics, and experimental methods. By necessity, we learned from specific examples, not by compiling data from many people across a wide range of situations.

Imagine that I cart a pig into your living room and tell you that it can talk. You might say ‘Oh, really? Show me.’ I then wave my wand and the pig starts talking. You might respond, ‘My God! That's amazing!’ You are not likely to say, ‘Ah, but that's just one pig. Show me a few more and then I might believe you.’ If you're convinced that you've seen a talking pig, no amount of scientific evidence that pigs are incapable of talking would convince you. Instead, scientists would need to prove to you that the pig you saw didn't actually talk—that smoke and mirrors were used to create an illusion of a talking pig. And the more people circulate similar anecdotes, all equally fooled into believing the magic is real, the more science will struggle.

We use stories and anecdotes to convey our arguments because narratives are compelling, memorable, and easily understood. But people tend to believe convincing, retrospective stories about why something happened even when there is no conclusive evidence of the event's true causes.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) emphasizes its educational mission, and especially its spread of the story of drunk driving. MADD mobilized the image of the drunk driver who kills the innocent victim. More than 82 percent of drunk-driving fatalities are either the driver himself (66 percent) or a fellow occupant (16 percent). The MADD protagonists are almost always innocent bystanders; sometimes a passenger occupant, but never the driver himself.

In most cases, neither drunk driving nor driving while talking on a cell phone lead to accidents. In part, that is because most driving is predictable and lawful, and even if you aren't driving perfectly, the other

drivers are trying not to hit you. The situations in which such impairments are catastrophic, though, are those that require an emergency reaction to an unexpected event. A slight delay in braking might make the difference between stopping short of the boy in the street and running him over.

Researchers have looked at how such distractions affect perception and awareness. About 30 percent of the participants missed the unexpected object when they were just doing a tracking task. However, participants who performed the task while talking on a phone missed the unexpected object 90 percent of the time! Simply having a conversation on a phone tripled the chances that they would fail to see something unexpected. This sobering finding shows that cell phone conversations dramatically impair visual perception and awareness. These impairments are due to the limits of attention and not due to the nature of the phone; even though both tasks seem effortless, both demand our attention. Intriguingly, the cell phone conversation didn't impair the subjects' ability to do the tracking task—it just decreased their chances of noticing something unexpected. This finding may explain why people falsely think that cell phones have no effect on their driving: People are lulled into thinking that they drive just fine because they can still perform the primary task (staying on the road) properly. The problem is that they're much less likely to notice rare, unexpected, potentially catastrophic events, and our daily experience gives us little feedback about such events.

Expertise helps you notice unexpected events, but only when the event happens in the context of your expertise. Put experts in a situation where they have no special skill, and they are ordinary novices, taxing their attention just to keep up with the primary task. And no matter what the situation, experts are not immune to the illusory belief that people notice far more than they do.

To reduce the effects of inattention blindness, one can deliberately reexamine things with an eye toward the unexpected. The unexpected should become the target of focused attention. Devoting attention to the unexpected is not a cure-all, however. We have limited attention resources, and devoting some attention to unexpected events means that we have less attention available for our primary task. It would be imprudent to ask radiologists to take time and resources away from detecting the expected problem in an x-ray ('Doctor, can you confirm that this patient has a pulmonary embolism so that we can begin treatment?') to focus instead on things that are unlikely to be there ('Doctor, can you tell us whether we left anything behind in this patient's body?'). A more effective strategy would be for a second radiologist, unfamiliar with the case and the tentative diagnosis, to examine the images and to look for secondary problems that

might not have been noticed the first time through.

It is hard to look for multiple things at once, to distinguish similar-looking objects, and to remain vigilant over long periods of time performing the same task. Our underappreciation of these constraints can have dire consequences for our safety and security. We expect airport baggage scanners to spot weapons in luggage, but they regularly fail to notice contraband items planted by authorities during tests of security procedures. The task of security scanners is much like the task of radiologists—though the training is, shall we say, much less extensive—and it is difficult if not impossible to see everything in a briefly viewed image. That’s especially true given that the things being searched for are rare.

In a 2009 national survey of fifteen-hundred people, researchers included several questions designed to probe how people think memory works. Nearly half (47%) of the respondents believed that “once you have experienced an event and formed a memory of it, that memory doesn’t change.” An even greater percentage (63%) believed that “human memory works like a video camera, accurately recording the events we see and hear so that we can review and inspect them later.” People who agreed with both statements apparently think that memories of all our experiences are stored permanently in our brains in an immutable form, even if we can’t access them. It is impossible to disprove this belief—the memories could in principle be stored somewhere—but most experts on human memory find it implausible that the brain would devote energy and space to storing every detail of our lives—especially if that information could never be accessed.

It was also found that 83 percent of people believe that amnesia, or sudden memory loss, results in the inability to recall one’s name and identity. This belief may reflect the way amnesia is usually portrayed in movies, television, and literature. For example, when we meet Matt Damon’s character in the movie *The Bourne Identity*, we learn that he has no memory of who he is, why he has the skills he does, or where he is from. He spends much of the movie trying to answer these questions. But the inability to remember your name and identity is exceedingly rare in reality. Amnesia most often results from a brain injury that leaves the victim unable to form new memories, but with most memories of the past intact. Some movies, such as *Memento*, do accurately portray this more common syndrome, known as “anterograde” amnesia.

When we perceive something, we extract the meaning from what we see (or hear, or smell) rather than encode everything in perfect detail. It would be an uncharacteristic waste of energy and other resources for evolution to have designed a brain that took in every possible stimulus with equal fidelity when there is little for an organism to gain from such a strategy. Likewise,

memory doesn't store everything we perceive, but instead takes what we have seen or heard and associates it with what we already know. These associations help us to discern what is important and to recall details about what we've seen. They provide "retrieval cues" that make our memories more fluent. In most cases, such cues are helpful. But these associations can also lead us astray, precisely because they lead to an inflated sense of the precision of memory. We cannot easily distinguish between what we recall verbatim and what we construct based on associations and knowledge.

What is stored in memory is not an exact replica of reality, but a re-creation of it. We cannot play back our memories like a DVD—each time we recall a memory, we integrate whatever details we do remember with our expectations for what we should remember.

It is well known that effortful imagining can blur the boundary between fantasy and reality, as evidenced by findings that imagining events that never happened increases the likelihood of having false memories of them.

In a clever study, psychologists asked subjects to view a doctored photograph showing the subject enjoying a hot air balloon ride as a child. The subjects were each interviewed several times, and were asked each time to recall the event, or if they could not recall it, to imagine that it had happened to themselves. Although none of the subjects had ever taken a hot air balloon ride, the photograph and attempts to recall it led some of them to incorporate information about the image into their personal narrative memories. Half the subjects created a false memory about the balloon ride, some embellishing their memories substantially beyond what was shown in the photograph.

The ability to change memories using doctored photographs has Orwellian ramifications. If we can induce false memories simply by editing images, it might be possible to literally revise history, changing the past by doctoring it. Using a similar approach, researchers showed subjects an edited version of the famous photograph of a single person standing in front of a column of tanks during the 1989 protests at Tienanmen Square in Beijing. In the original version of the photograph, only the lone protester was visible on the wide road. The doctored version shows crowds of people lining a narrower road on both sides of the tanks. When they were quizzed about the historical facts of Tienanmen Square only moments later, those who viewed the doctored photograph believed that far more people had been at the protest.

Beware of memories accompanied by strong emotions and vivid details—they are just as likely to be wrong as mundane memories, but you're far less likely to realize it. We treat confidence as an honest signal of a person's professional skill, accurate memory, or expert knowledge. But the confidence

that people project, whether they are diagnosing a patient, making decisions about foreign policy, handling a pandemic, or testifying in court, is all too often an illusion.

You mistake your knowledge of what happens for an understanding of why it happens, and you mistake your feeling of familiarity for genuine knowledge. Students will sometimes ask how they could have worked so hard but still failed a test. They will often say that they read and reread the textbook and their class notes, and that they thought they understood everything well by the time of the exam. And they probably did internalize some bits and pieces of the material, but the illusion of knowledge led them to confuse the familiarity they had gained from repeated exposure to the concepts in the course with an actual understanding of them. As a rule, reading text over and over again yields diminishing returns in actual knowledge, but it increases familiarity and fosters a false sense of understanding. Only by testing ourselves can we actually determine whether or not we really understand. That is one reason why teachers give tests, and why the best tests probe knowledge at a deep level. Asking whether a lock has cylinders tests whether people can memorize the parts of a lock. Asking how to pick a lock tests whether people understand why locks have cylinders and what functional role they play in the operation of the lock.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the illusion is how rarely we bother to do anything to probe the limits of our knowledge—especially considering how easy it is to do this. Before telling someone that you know why the sky is blue, all you have to do is simulate the ‘why’ game with yourself to see whether you actually know. We fall prey to the illusion because we simply do not recognize the need to question our own knowledge.

A belief, the reasoning behind which cannot be clearly articulated, is a belief that has not been examined thoroughly enough

Chapter Eight

Fake News

“Where my uncle was an enormous fool, as many talented people are, was that he mistook his gift for intelligence. He was a great big famous film person. He looked better and talked better and had enormous charm. So he thought he was also far more intelligent than Mr. Goebbels. Goebbels was ten-thousand times smarter than my uncle. Film people, actors, are puppets. We are silly. We are silly folk.”

Media myths aren’t harmless. They can scare people, reinforce their biases and become tools of manipulation.

Here is a double dose of media-driven myth, in an article that touched on the influence network television once exerted. To back up that claim, the Sun cited two moments hallowed in broadcast journalism. One was Edward R. Murrow’s legendary See It Now program in March 1954, in which he took on the dreaded and powerful US senator Joseph R. McCarthy. The other was Walter Cronkite’s special report on CBS in February 1968, in which the respected network anchorman declared that US forces in Vietnam were mired in a stalemate. Murrow’s program supposedly led to the downfall of McCarthy and put an end to the senator’s communists-in-government witch hunt. Cronkite’s assessment supposedly forced President Lyndon Johnson to recognize that the American war effort in Vietnam was doomed. “If I’ve lost Cronkite,” the president purportedly said, “I’ve lost Middle America.”

Both anecdotes are well known and even cherished in American journalism. They almost always are invoked in the way the Sun presented them, as telling examples of media power, of journalists at their courageous best. Memorable though they may be, both anecdotes are misleading: neither the Murrow program nor the Cronkite special produced the outcomes so frequently associated with them. Both anecdotes are media-driven myths—dubious, fanciful, and apocryphal stories about or by the news media that are often retold and widely believed. Media-driven myths are tales of doubtful authenticity, false or improbable claims masquerading as factual. In a

way, they are the junk food of journalism—alluring and delicious, perhaps, but not especially wholesome or nourishing.

Media-driven myths are neither trivial nor innocuous. They can and do have adverse consequences. Notably, they tend to distort understanding of the role and function of journalism in American society, conferring on the news media far more power and influence than they necessarily wield. Media myths often emerge from an eagerness to find influence and lasting significance in what journalists do, and they tend to give credit where credit is not entirely due. The heroic-journalist myth of Watergate is a telling example.

The myth holds that the reporting of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in the *Washington Post* brought down Richard Nixon. In reality, the *Post* and other news organizations were marginal factors in unraveling the Watergate scandal. Nixon's fall was the consequence of his criminal conduct, which was exposed in the convergence of many forces, newspaper reporting being among the least decisive. So media myths can be self-flattering, offering heroes like Woodward and Bernstein to a profession more accustomed to criticism than applause.

Media myths also tend to minimize or negate complexity in historical events and present simplistic and misleading interpretations instead. Edward Murrow no more took down Joseph McCarthy than Walter Cronkite swayed a president's views about the war in Vietnam. Yet those and other media myths endure, in part, because they are reductive: they offer unambiguous, easily remembered explanations of complex historic events. Similarly, media myths invite indulgence in the "golden age fallacy," the flawed but enticing belief that there really was a time when journalism and its practitioners were respected and inspiring—the time, say, of Murrow or Cronkite or Woodward and Bernstein. Confronting media myths discourages the tendency to regard prominent journalists in extreme terms—as heroes or villains. Piercing the myths surrounding Murrow and Cronkite render them less Olympian and less remote.

Another hazard of media myths lies in their capacity to feed stereotypes. The misleading if euphonic epithet, bra burning, emerged from a demonstration on the Atlantic City boardwalk in 1968 to become a shorthand way of denigrating the emergent feminist movement and dismissing it as trivial and even a bit odd. The widely misreported pandemic of "crack babies" in the late 1980s and early 1990s seemed to confirm the worst pathologies associated with inner-city poor people. The highly exaggerated news reports of nightmarish violence and wanton criminality in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina's landfall in 2005 defamed a battered city and impugned its residents at a time of their deep despair.

Revisiting the myth of the crack baby allows insights into a tendency among journalists to neglect or disregard the tentativeness that characterizes serious scientific and biomedical research, and to reach for certainty and definitiveness that are not often found in preliminary findings. The tendency of journalists to push hard on tentative data has been apparent in coverage of more recent drug scares, notably that of methamphetamine in 2004 and 2005. Parallels in exaggerated coverage of “crack babies” and “meth babies” were striking. “Meth addicts are pouring into prisons and recovery centers at an ever-increasing rate, and a new generation of ‘meth babies’ is choking the foster-care system in many states,” *Newsweek* magazine reported in 2005. The methamphetamine scourge seemed to know no bounds. “Anytown, USA, can be turned into a meth den almost overnight,” *Newsweek* declared.

“Proving that the press corps has no memory, they’re at it again, proclaiming without any scientific evidence that a generation of damaged ‘meth babies’ is on the way.”

Beyond methodological complications was an apparent bias, at least in some quarters, against studies that reported few or no adverse effects from prenatal cocaine exposure. A team of researchers reported in 1989 that research indicating adverse effects was significantly more likely to be accepted for presentation at the Society of Pediatric Research than were studies showing few or no effects.

“This bias may lead to distorted estimation of the potential of cocaine to cause birth defects, and thus cause women to terminate their pregnancy unjustifiably.”

The rejected research showing few or no adverse effects tended to be better grounded methodologically. This strengthens the suggestion that most negative studies were not rejected because of scientific flaws, but rather because of bias against their non-adverse message. The subconscious message may be that if a study did not detect an adverse effect of cocaine when the common knowledge is this is a “bad drug,” then the study must be flawed.

Such is the enduring power of the propaganda that today most folks would have great difficulty in accepting the following. This is a short summary of historical realities leading up to World War I that are at complete odds with the official narrative, the political discourse, and the school textbooks:

- It was Great Britain (supported by France and Russia) and not Germany who was the principal aggressor in the events and actions that led to the outbreak of war.

- The British had for twenty years prior to 1914 viewed Germany as its most dangerous economic and imperial rival, and fully anticipated that a war was inevitable.
- In the UK and the US, various factions worked feverishly to ensure the war went on for as long as possible, and scuttled peacemaking efforts from the off.
- Key truths about this most consequential of geopolitical conflicts have been concealed for well over one-hundred years, with no sign the official record will change.
- Very powerful forces—including a future US president—amongst US political, media, and economic elites conspired to eventually convince an otherwise unwilling populace in America that US entry into the war was necessary.
- Those same forces and many similar groups in the UK and Europe engaged in everything from war profiteering, destruction/forging of war records, false-flag ops, treason, conspiracy to wage aggressive war, and direct efforts to prolong the war by any means necessary, many of which will rock folks to their very core.

“I have yet to see a piece of writing, political or non-political, that does not have a slant. All writing slants the way a writer leans, and no man is born perpendicular.”

—E.B. White

Observers of the twenty-first century news business often bemoan the slippage between reporting and opinion. Many cable shows and online outlets now operate from an explicitly ideological perspective rather than promising objectivity the way newspapers often do. Erasure of the lines between fact and opinion, however, actually brings journalism back to where it was more than a century ago.

For much of the nineteenth century, many publications were written in first-person. Writers expressed opinions, used flowery language, and attempted to instill good morals in their audiences. But by the 1880s, Americans were becoming increasingly interested in scientific theories, realism, and documented facts.

This taste for science and factual information made its way into the newspapers of the day. In a trade journal for literary and journalistic professionals, one contributor argued that news writing demanded “the

complete elimination of the writer's individuality" and called for reporters "to be the unmoved observer of events, to see things exactly as they are without regard to possible motives which may have produced them." With this new commitment to empiricism came a new aesthetic.

"The most successful journalists are those able to give the facts, the whole facts, and nothing but the facts, in brief, pithy sentences, the majority of which contain not more than a dozen words."

This was also the heyday of yellow journalism, when many newspapers employed stunts and even fakery to push an agenda or just to sell papers. But even papers that embraced sensationalism generally prided themselves on factual reporting. At the New York World, cards hanging on the walls of the city newsroom read:

"Accuracy! Accuracy! Accuracy! Who? What? Where?
When? How? The Facts—The Color—The Facts!"

The increasing focus on facts led to a widespread belief that editorial pages were on their way out. One writer declared that increasingly educated readers were "just as competent to form an opinion upon the news" as "some man or woman sitting in an editorial chair." If the authoritative, opinionated editor was falling out of favor, the new focus on fact-based reports brought increased respect for the reporter, generally represented as a masculine adventurer ready to brave a fire or a riot to bring back the story.

Not everyone appreciated the focus on facts. In 1891 an old-guard journalist and historian complained about journalism's shift from discussing "the questions and answers of contemporary life" to merely "collecting, condensing, and assimilating the trivialities of the entire human existence." He had a point: random collections of facts are of no particular value. Inevitably, reporters and editors must choose which facts to present, and how to present them. And analysis from a particular point of view may help news consumers understand what to make of the facts they're handed. Ultimately all journalism involves some kind of mix of fact and opinion.

The state has always been very selective with the information that people receive, in order to persuade them to accept lives of suffering servitude to rich and powerful elites. Throughout most of recorded history this was mostly achieved with the mutually beneficial cooperation of the church, whose network of priests provided a direct conduit of controllable information to the ignorant masses. Once the printing press was invented, and more and more people learnt how to read for themselves, additional systems had to

be found for ensuring they received the “right information”—information rulers wanted them to receive. These systems evolved into what are today widely referred to as the “mainstream media.”

The twentieth century saw the mismanagement of public information undergo seismic changes. From the unbelievably crass propaganda that deceived people into supporting the abomination known as the First World War at the start of the century, to the highly sophisticated telling of half-truths and outright lies at the close of the century that deceived people into supporting the illegal and cynical wars of the United States as well as ignoring the catastrophic environmental destruction of the planet that started the sixth mass extinction of species—state manipulation of public information, controlled by the mainstream media, plumbed new depths of depravity.

“We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society.

The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan. As soon as you sacrifice this slogan and try to be many-sided, the effect will piddle away, for the crowd can neither digest nor retain the material offered.”

If you blame Facebook, Trump, or Putin for ushering in a new and frightening era of post-truth, remind yourself that centuries ago millions of Christians locked themselves inside a self-reinforcing mythological bubble, never daring to question the factual veracity of the Bible, while millions of Muslims put their unquestioning faith in the Quran. For millennia, much of what passed for news and facts in human social networks were stories about miracles, angels, demons, and witches, with bold reporters giving live coverage straight from the deepest pits of the underworld. We have zero scientific evidence that Eve was tempted by the Serpent, that the souls of all infidels burn in hell after they die, or that the creator of the universe doesn’t like it when a Brahmin marries an Untouchable—yet billions of people have

believed in these stories for thousands of years. Some fake news lasts for ever.

I am aware that many people might be upset by my equating religion with fake news, but that's exactly the point. When a thousand people believe some made-up story for one month—that's fake news. When a billion people believe it for a thousand years—that's a religion, and we are admonished not to call it 'fake news' in order not to hurt the feelings of the faithful (or incur their wrath). Note, however, that I am not denying the effectiveness or potential benevolence of religion. Just the opposite. For better or worse, fiction is among the most effective tools in humanity's toolkit. By bringing people together, religious creeds make large-scale human cooperation possible. They inspire people to build hospitals, schools, and bridges in addition to armies and prisons. Adam and Eve never existed, but Chartres Cathedral is still beautiful. Much of the Bible may be fictional, but it can still bring joy to billions and can still encourage humans to be compassionate, courageous, and creative—just like other great works of fiction, such as *Don Quixote*, *War and Peace*, and *Harry Potter*.

You cannot organize masses of people effectively without relying on some mythology. If you stick to unalloyed reality, few people will follow you.

In the vast majority of cases people begin to sanctify the Bible or the Vedas or the Book of Mormon only after long and repeated exposure to other people who view it as sacred. We learn to respect holy books in exactly the same way we learn to respect currency bills. Hence in practice there is no strict division between 'knowing that something is just a human convention' and 'believing that something is inherently valuable.' In many cases, people are ambiguous or forgetful about this division. To give another example, if you sit down and have a deep philosophical discussion about it, almost everybody would agree that corporations are fictional stories created by human beings. Microsoft isn't the buildings it owns, the people it employs or the shareholders it serves—rather, it is an intricate legal fiction woven by lawmakers and lawyers. Yet for 99 percent of the time, we aren't engaged in deep philosophical discussions, and we treat corporations as if they were real entities in the world, just like tigers or humans.

Humans have this remarkable ability to know and not to know at the same time. Or more correctly, they can know something when they really think about it, but most of the time they don't think about it, so they don't know it. If you really focus, you realize that money is fiction. But usually you don't focus. If you are asked about it, you know that football is a human invention. But in the heat of the match, nobody asks you about it. If you devote the time and energy, you can discover that nations are elaborate yarns. But in the midst of a war you don't have the time and energy. If you

demand the ultimate truth, you realize that the story of Adam and Eve is a myth. But how often do you demand the ultimate truth?

Truth and power can travel together only so far. Sooner or later they go their separate ways. If you want power, at some point you will have to spread fictions. If you want to know the truth about the world, at some point you will have to renounce power. You will have to admit things—for example about the sources of your own power—that will anger allies, dishearten followers or undermine social harmony. Scholars throughout history faced this dilemma: do they serve power or truth? Should they aim to unite people by making sure everyone believes in the same story, or should they let people know the truth even at the price of disunity? The most powerful scholarly establishments—whether of Christian priests, Confucian mandarins or communist ideologues—placed unity above truth. That’s why they were so powerful.

The twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance:

1. The growth of democracy
2. The growth of corporate power
3. The growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy

All of the tactics used by the oil, beverage, and banking industries to influence lawmakers at every level of government were pulled straight from the cigarette makers’ playbook: Distract people from the real problem; generate fear; split communities with rhetoric, pitting one group against another; encourage people to doubt scientific conclusions; question whether there really is a problem; and say one thing in public while working secretly to do the opposite. This, regrettably, has become common practice in the corporate world. If there is one message—and one that is actually true—it is this: Always look behind any public argument to see how your emotions are being manipulated. And count on it. They are.

Here are actions that you, as an embattled CEO (or your trade association), must take:

1. Hire a big and well-connected PR firm, preferably one that has established a reputation not so much for public relations as for public deception. The firm should pay little or no attention to the Public Relations Society of America’s Code of Ethics, which, among other things, insists that PR practitioners disclose who they are working for

and refrain from engaging in deceit. Fortunately, many of the biggest firms pay little heed to such ethical guidelines. They are more than happy to take your money to...

2. Set up and operate a coalition or front group, which, if at all possible, should have words like 'American' or 'freedom' or 'choice' in its name. You can launder your money through your PR firm so that no one has to know you have any association with the front group. The PR firm will also...
3. Recruit third parties to list as members of your front group. Depending on the scope of your problems and the issues you are battling, the members can range from mom-and-pop bodega owners and motel operators to the US Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Business, both of which, by the way, have long track records of lending their names to stealth campaigns. Your PR firm will also maximize the effectiveness of your third parties by helping them...
4. Write letters to the editor and op-eds and place them in local and national publications. In fact, the PR firm will do all the writing and placing. The third parties won't have to do a thing except lend their names. The letters and op-eds will convey all the key messages that you yourself would convey but cannot because doing so would be perceived, correctly, as self-serving. To be sure those letters and op-eds get published in the right places, your PR firm must...
5. Cultivate close relationships with editors and publishers. Chances are, your firm will have PR pros on staff who once worked at the publications and other news outlets important to you and your industry. Because of their relationships with key reporters, those PR people will also be able to...
6. Influence the tone and content of articles that those reporters write about your company and your industry. This is especially important if you are in the midst of a well-publicized crisis. To bolster your point of view and give reporters an all-important angle, your PR firm might need to...
7. Conduct a bogus survey or slice and dice data with the intent of misleading, or "lying with statistics." And your firm's PR pros will also know how to...

8. Feed talking points to TV pundits and frequent contributors to op-ed pages. They will know how to get talk show hosts with big audiences like Rush Limbaugh or Tucker Carlson or Rachel Maddow to say things on the air to support your point of view and discredit your opponents. Lastly, using varying tactics that will depend on the nature of your problem, your PR firm will. . .
9. Develop and carry out a duplicitous communications campaign. Whenever you need to comment publicly, your firm will help you make sure that what you say is perceived to be positive, that you are seen as being responsible and cooperative, and that the public and lawmakers feel that they can count on you to do the right thing and be honest and straightforward. This is the charm offensive. To distract from the fact that your product is widely considered to be a problem, your PR firm will develop a creative campaign to position your company or industry as part of the solution. It will also broaden the issue to take attention off your maligned product, and it will stress how many people your company employs and how much it contributes to the local or national economy. Behind the scenes, your firm will be using the front groups and their devious tactics to do the necessary dirty work for you.

The best public relations is invisible. While it's easy to spot advertising—the stuff that blatantly urges you to go buy something—PR subtly convinces you to change the way you think. Advertising urges you to do something now; PR is patient. Advertisers pay for the time and space devoted to their messages. Good PR usually gets free media space because it is presented as unbiased information.

We may be headed for a world in which there is as yawning a disparity in accurate knowledge as there is in wealth. The elite will be deeply informed, and there will be a huge difference between what they know and what most other Americans know. We could be heading for a well-informed class at the top and a broad populace awash in opinion, spin, and propaganda.

How does mass media end up producing news from the perspective of the flawed ideology of powerful interest groups? Government restrictions on the media and private industry and oligarchic control of the media interact together to present selectively controlled information. Each node in the transfer of information from world to audience via the media must be cleared through a kind of checkpoint: federal government acceptance, local government acceptance, corporate ownership acceptance, corporate sponsor acceptance—the last is to assure corporate profits. Given the

interdependence of the nodes, these pressures tend to lend themselves to coalescing around a rough pattern of uniform interests (just think of the role of advertising in every show one watches on television). The interdependence also allows the whole media system to be rapidly deployed in the service of propaganda in times of supposed emergency.

The facts make it beyond reasonable doubt that even in liberal democracies political leaders and private industry conspire in some, perhaps occasionally unconscious, way with the media to deceive the public into acting on false beliefs. The mechanisms are furthermore not mysterious. The case of the Iraq war in 2003 in the United States is an example in which political and economic elites exploited a free press to convince a large majority of American citizens of beliefs that lacked so much real world evidential support that those very elites later repudiated being associated with them. It is plausible to suppose that the multi-trillion dollar cost of the Iraq War, not to mention the lives lost on both sides, was not in the interest of the nearly 70 percent of Americans convinced by the flawed ideology of patriotism and demonization used to motivate it.

We thus have provided evidence that the highly privileged group will in fact be able to exploit the mechanisms of the media and public schools to produce beliefs that are contrary to the interests of the majority of people who are served by them.

The media conglomerates are not the only industry whose owners have become monopolistic in the American economy. But media products are unique in one vital respect. They do not manufacture nuts and bolts: they manufacture a social and political world.

We need a media that covers grassroots movements, that seeks to understand and explain the complex forces that shape our society, a media that empowers people with information to make sound decisions on the most vital issues of the day: war and peace, life and death. Instead, the media system in the United States, increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer multinational corporations, spews a relentless stream of base “reality” shows (which depict anything but reality), hollow excuses for local news that highlight car accidents and convenience store robberies while loaded with ads, and the obsessive coverage of traffic, sports, and extreme weather (never linked to another two words: climate change). Perhaps most harmful of all, we get the same small circle of pundits who know so little about so much, explaining the world to us and getting it so wrong.

Never has there been so much information about so much of our lives in such an accessible form. In the course of a day, the average person in a Western city is exposed to as much data as someone in the fifteenth century would encounter in their entire life.

One way in which the news media complicate economic debates is by using large numbers without providing context. This issue comes up in most policy areas but likely has the greatest relevance in budget debates. The United States is a huge country with more than 320 million people, and as a result its government has a huge budget, at least in terms of the amount of money that ordinary people see in their daily lives. This means that when we hear that the federal government is spending, say, \$17 billion a year on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the core government welfare program, we are likely to think it's a great deal of money. After all, none of us will see \$17 billion in our lifetime or anything remotely close to this sum.

The media's pattern of reporting is likely a major factor behind this misunderstanding, and it could be easily countered if reporters made it a standard practice to put huge numbers in a context that is understandable to their audience. The most obvious way would be to report the number as a share of the budget. In the case of TANF, if people continually heard it reported as 0.4 percent of the federal budget it is unlikely they would believe the program was a major factor.

Will the fake news crisis be the cause of democracy's collapse? Or is it just a consequence of a deeper, structural malaise that has been under way for much longer? While it's hard to deny that there's a crisis, whether it's a crisis of fake news or of something else entirely is a question that every mature democracy should be asking.

Our elites are having none of it. Their fake news narrative is itself fake: it's a shallow explanation of a complex, systemic problem, the very existence of which they still refuse to acknowledge. The ease with which mainstream institutions, from ruling parties to think tanks to the media, have converged upon "fake news" as their preferred lens on the unfolding crisis says a lot about the impermeability of their world view.

The big threat facing Western societies today is not so much the emergence of illiberal democracy abroad as the persistence of immature democracy at home. This immaturity, exhibited almost daily by the elites, manifests itself in two types of denial: the denial of the economic origins of most of today's problems; and the denial of the profound corruption of professional expertise.

The first type manifests itself whenever phenomena like Brexit or Donald Trump's electoral success are ascribed primarily to cultural factors such as racism or voter ignorance. The second type denies that the immense frustration many people feel towards existing institutions stems not from their not knowing the whole truth about how they operate but, rather, from knowing it all too well.

Blinded by these two denials, policymakers prescribe more of what alienates voters in the first place: more expertise, more centralization, more regulation. But, since they can't think in terms of political economy, they inevitably end up regulating the wrong things.

The moral panic around fake news illustrates how these two denials condemn democracy to perpetual immaturity. The refusal to acknowledge that the crisis of fake news has economic origins makes the Kremlin—rather than the unsustainable business model of digital capitalism—everyone's favourite scapegoat.

The second type of denial turns a blind eye to the corruption of today's expert-based knowledge. When think tanks gladly accept funds from foreign governments; when energy firms fund dubious research on climate change; when even the Queen—what a populist, she—questions the entire economics profession; when the media regularly take marching orders from PR agencies and political spin doctors; when financial regulators and European commissioners leave their jobs to work on Wall Street—could anyone really blame the citizens for being skeptical of experts?

The death of political engagement has been caused by parties who do not respond to the real needs and policy positions of the populace, and who subvert the system to silence voices other than their own. It is not that people do not desire to be engaged—their efforts at engagement are being deliberately thwarted. The obvious option left for them was to withdraw their support from those who have done nothing to deserve it.

To hear professional journalists complain about this problem without acknowledging their own culpability further undermines one's faith in expertise. Democracy may or may not be drowning in fake news, but it's definitely drowning in elite hypocrisy.

Caught between the two denials, the elites will never stop searching for innovative solutions to the problem of fake news—much as they never stopped searching for innovative solutions to climate change. The two issues do have a certain similarity: just as climate change is the natural byproduct of fossil capitalism, so is fake news the byproduct of digital capitalism.

Media elites, by virtue of their position, adore the status quo. It rewards them, vests them with prestige and position; welcomes them into exclusive circles; allows them to be close to—if not themselves wielding—great power while traveling their country and the world; provides them with a platform; fills them with esteem and purpose. The same is true of academic elites, and financial elites, and political elites. Elites love the status quo that has given them, and then protected, their elite position.

I am not suggesting that there is some Wall Street censorship committee secretly sequestered somewhere that tells the MSM what to cover and what

not to mention, but rather that the people who rise to positions of authority in the media—just as in politics—already know the accepted parameters of discourse or they would not have gotten to where they are.

Journalism tends toward the autobiographical unless reporters and editors make a determined effort to separate themselves from the frame of their own experiences.

The media compose the pictures of a preferred reality, and their genius is that of the nervous careerist who serves, simultaneously, two masters—the demos, whom they astound with marvels and fairy tales, and the corporate nobility, whose interests they assiduously promote and defend. Anybody who rises to prominence in their ranks—as editor, political columnist, publisher, anchorperson, theater critic—learns to think along the accommodating lines of an English butler bringing buttered scones to the Prince of Wales.

The vast distance between perceived reality and the official version of reality is characteristic of totalitarian systems. The state abolishes liberty and rights while claiming to uphold and defend them.

Today too many journalists, driven by careerism, identify with the powerful people they cover, rather than with the interests of their readers. The bigger the stake the journalist has or aspires to have in the corporate system the more she or he will defend it. Self-interest, not public interest, becomes the motivating factor. A careerist does not rock the boat. A journalist who doesn't rock the boat has no business being a journalist.

Click—now we are at CNN, where the bloviators are delving into the question of whether we should attack Iran over its downing of one of the United States' flying death robots. The matter at hand—the only matter for the folks at CNN—is one of expedience, the utilitarian value of a military response, the “cost” to the United States in treasure and manpower, the “value” of the diplomatic and political “gain” of such an attack. We are talking about war here; we are talking about murder, though nothing of that is said. We are talking about killing children, and I pause on that thought a moment—torn to bits, their heads torn off, their limbs scattered, their intestines unspooled.

And with that image, the noise of the liars on CNN fades away, and I think to myself: ‘These people aren't journalists. They are the hideous abomination of journalism.’ But many of you readers know this, of course, and know too the real function of journalists in a robust democracy: they are the hemorrhoids on people and institutions that hold power. They afflict them. They climb up in their assholes, inflamed, growing ever more painful by the day, until, ideally, they explode and cause a deranged blood-poisoning that destroys the person or institution they have settled on hemorrhoiding.

There you have it, the whole purpose of journalism. They are not here

to provide solutions, policies, compromises, collaborations; they are not here to assuage or comfort or find workable ways forward, or to explain away the evils that men do—murder and more murder, of little children, in the name of, you know, “national security.”

No, at their best, the journalist is a saboteur; they place demolitions under corrupt structures and blow them up and walk away, with middle finger raised and laughter in their mouths.

The role of journalism is afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted.

“It’s odd. As a journalist, I’d regularly talk to people after tragedies in their lives; after the worst moments, after deaths and killings, I would try to ask as politely as possible, ‘How do you feel?’ I wondered sometimes how and why they would talk to me. I understand now. Getting people to pay attention makes you feel less helpless.”

In the 1930s, the term ‘muckraker’ wasn’t necessarily pejorative. It was used first in 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt to describe the new breed of reporter that had risen with the expansion of newspapers at the end of the nineteenth century, the breed that performed valuable work in exposing and attacking abuses of power by unregulated corporations and corrupt politicians. Roosevelt did, however, have certain reservations about the role:

“The men with the muck-rakes are often indispensable to the well-being of society; but only if they know when to stop raking the muck, and to look upward to the celestial crown above them, to the crown of worthy endeavor. There are beautiful things above and round about them; and if they gradually grow to feel that the whole world is nothing but muck, their power of usefulness is gone.”

Sometimes reporting is finding out what you don’t know, sometimes it’s hearing something said that everyone knows, but that no one has had the guts to say, because they aren’t supposed to say it.

Journalism, by definition, is publishing something that somebody doesn’t want to be published. Everything else is just PR. It is not enough for journalists to see themselves as mere messengers without understanding the hidden agendas of the message and myths that surround it.

Rule number one of Astroturfing: Redirect criticism from ideas to individuals.

There are three arguments most likely to sustain popular apathy toward any issue or problem:

1. Denying that the issue exists.
2. Insisting that it's a good thing rather than a bad thing.
3. Conceding that it's a problem but claiming that it can't possibly be solved.

A democracy requires an informed electorate. The media fought tooth and nail to keep the US electorate uninformed.

“Conventional wisdom is what you say over and over again to people who don't pay attention.”

Poorly educated white voters are essentially fooled into voting against their own economic interests in favor of partisan ideologies that reward the wealthy, usually by means of straw man arguments about ethnic and religious minorities.

This is vexing for observers, and one might expect it to vex the movement's true believers even more. Their grandstanding leaders never deliver, their fury mounts and mounts, and nevertheless they turn out every two years to return their right-wing heroes to office for a second, a third, a twentieth try. The trick never ages; the illusion never wears off. Vote to stop abortion; receive a rollback in capital gains taxes. Vote to make our country strong again; receive deindustrialization. Vote to screw those politically correct college professors; receive electricity deregulation. Vote to get government off our backs; receive conglomeration and monopoly everywhere from media to meatpacking. Vote to stand tall against terrorists; receive Social Security privatization. Vote to strike a blow against elitism; receive a social order in which wealth is more concentrated than ever before in our lifetimes, in which workers have been stripped of power and CEOs are rewarded in a manner beyond imagining.

Others have for decades been conned into thinking they were loathsome minorities whose best path to influence is to make peace with the mightier “center,” which inevitably turns out to support military interventionism, fewer taxes for the rich, corporate deregulation, and a ban on unrealistic “giveaway” proposals like free higher education. Those are the realistic, moderate, popular ideas, we're told.

But it's a Wizard of Oz trick, just like American politics in general. There is no numerically massive center behind the curtain. What there

is instead is a tiny island of wealthy donors, surrounded by a protective ring of for-sale major-party politicians—read: employees—whose job it is to castigate too-demanding voters and preach realism.

Those politicians do so with the aid of dependably alarmist sycophants in the commercial media, most of whom, whether they know it or not, technically inhabit the low end of the one percent and tend to be amazed that people out there are pissed off about stuff.

In the States, the centrist Oz has maintained its influence in large part thanks to another numerical deception. We've been taught that our political spectrum is an unbroken line moving from right to left, Republican to Democrat, and that the country is split in half between the two groups.

The nominal battle between Democrats and Republicans is simply the public, overt, electoral expression of struggles among the ruling elite for maintenance of society. It isn't that there is a monolithic power structure, rather what we have here is one that seeks to hide its existence or diminish its observable impact. The godfather of modern ~~propaganda~~ public relations, Edward Bernays, referred to this as the "invisible government" which rules by promoting only ranges of apparent options for soap, cars, or politicians. Today, the more popular nomenclature is "Deep State" or the permanent apparatuses of power comprised primarily by the intelligence agencies, military, and economic elite. This is, again, not to say there are no differences among these elite or their electoral political avatars—Democrats and Republicans. It is, however, that those differences are magnified so as to appear as the obvious limits of what is possible. Absence of difference is easily recognized and challenged. Appearance of difference or limitations set on differences are more easily distilled via highly weaponized forms of media, messaging and symbol and are, therefore, harder to identify and combat.

The concept of a deep state in America is not some kind of wacko conspiracy theory. It doesn't refer to some cloaked cabal of Jewish elites who meet in the forest to sacrifice children and greet each other with esoteric handshakes as in the straw man that so many corporate media outlets are fond of attacking, but refers rather to the self-evident fact that unelected power structures exist in America, and power structures tend to form alliances. The donor class, Wall Street, Silicon Valley, big oil, the military-industrial complex, various aspects of the intelligence community, the corporate media, national security officials; all of these overlapping and interconnected groups undeniably exist, undeniably wield immense power, and are undeniably not elected by the American people. There is no factual basis on which to deny any of these things; the only thing that can rationally be debated is how they behave. The term 'deep state' exists for use in that dialogue.

I believe that the corporate-owned news media in the US, and the cable news punditocracy in particular, does us all a grave disservice in how they cover presidential candidates from the moment they announce their candidacies through to the general election. Moreover, I believe that they exert an undue influence on our elections, essentially stacking the deck in favor of some candidates and to the detriment of others. In essence, I believe that they are undermining our democratic process and that reforms are needed to end this corrosive influence if we want to actually have free elections.

In schools and campuses across the country, tens of thousands of students are in the midst of media and news literacy courses. Employing online tools with names like Checkology, Allsides, and The Trust Project, following online courses like “Making Sense of the News,” or like scores of classrooms across the nation and around the world, using materials from Stonybrook University’s Center for News Literacy, students are busy learning how to verify sources, detect falsified photos, trace Twitter hoaxes and determine the difference between ‘news’ and ‘fake news.’

Some argue that while often inappropriately named, “fake news” is real. And while hoaxes with severe consequences—often perpetuated by the very outlets now complaining the term is applied to them—such as yellow journalism and propaganda have been around for centuries, starting a few years ago, fake news has suddenly become pernicious and dangerous.

The academy—and the funders—have stepped up with analyses, books, centers, tools, and many millions of dollars. Fighting fake news is not only urgent, it’s also a big business. But are students being taught to think critically? And what kind of news consumers are produced by these courses and tools?

Let’s look at just two of the many news-focused media literacy tools.

Checkology, from the News Literacy Project (NLP), offers middle and high school teachers online exercises and lessons. The project also has a quiz page, “Get Smart About News,” and a weekly newsletter, “The Sift,” with “teachable moments,” analyses and potential classroom exercises.

Funded by grants from corporate publishers, foundations, an audio technology company, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the NLP raised almost \$1.5 million in 2017 and \$2.8 million the year before.

The Checkology course offers four of its “lessons” for free; for a fee, there are another six, with exercises and other resources.

Corporate media journalists from NBC, the Washington Post and Noticias Univision introduce the first three lessons. They emphasize the importance of “verification,” “multiple sources,” “context,” and “fairness.” In the third lesson, the student is a reporter “on the scene” of an accident, and

has to gather facts, verify details and report. In another lesson, students learn about investigative journalism and the importance of “questioning authority.” All of that is great.

But the lessons also reveal a very status-quo, middle-of-the-road approach to journalism and its roles in society. For example, while NBC’s Tracie Potts tells students to beware of information that might be designed to deceive, she also draws divisions between information meant to “inform” and two other purposes: meant to “document” and to “persuade.” She implies that one ought to be wary of stories that aim to convince a person “to adopt a particular perspective,” even when the arguments are based on facts. Given the historic importance of politically committed journalism, from Thomas Paine through Ida B. Wells to I.F. Stone, this compartmentalization does no favors to students or journalists.

A reporter covering almost any subject has to research and report and then decide where the truth lies, even if that truth is not the currently accepted truth. Even the Society of Professional Journalists calls on reporters to “seek the truth and report it.” That might include laying out new facts and arguments in a way that is meant to persuade a viewer or reader, to convince him or her of the correct version of an issue (like climate change) or an event (like the Wuhan Flu panic).

In another lesson, Univision’s Enrique Acevedo reinforces the middle-of-the-road approach, stressing the need to avoid “bias” and the importance of “presenting the facts and context in a neutral manner,” and by emphasizing “balance,” which he describes as:

“Representing multiple sides of an issue, event, or controversy without giving unfair weight to one side or point of view.”

That kind of advice might be useful and important when covering the scene of an accident, but what if—for example—a journalist is reporting on a more complex issue, like conflict in Iraq, protests over food prices in Latin America, or the opioid crisis in the US? In all three of those examples, the context chosen by the reporter will depend on ideological and political orientations, of both the reporter and the news outlet.

Will the context stick to raw data, like protest deaths or price hikes or overdoses? Or will it go further—probing, for example, the role of US imperialism and the War on Terrorism, draconian tariff policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund, or how the commodification of just about everything, neoliberal capitalism, and extreme individualism in the US might be at least partially responsible for addiction and “deaths of despair”?

“Whatever their objective truth, the facts do not speak for themselves. Someone must give them meaning and impact. We will never be ‘objective’ again, instead journalists must make clear what we stand for, and how.”

Stonybrook’s Center for News Literacy is arguably the most influential news literacy educator out there. Over 10,000 people have enrolled in—but not necessarily finished—the six-module “Making Sense of the News: News Literacy Lessons for Digital Citizens” on Coursera, according to that website. It was designed in part by the Center.

More importantly, the Center offers a full 15-module, college-level course which it says has been taken by “over 10,000 students” at Stonybrook, and has also been used or adapted by over 30 US universities. The Center also says it collaborates with universities or programs in eight other countries.

Like the Checkology course, the Stonybrook course offers a myriad of tools, guiding the student (and the teacher) through—for example—the definition and importance of facts, context, verification, “journalistic truth,” sourcing, indirect and direct evidence, and transparency. The course also takes on more complex issues like cognitive dissonance and filter bubbles. Each module comes with slides and documentation, using examples from recent, everyday social media and newsfeeds to which students can relate.

But there are also some troubling aspects to the course. For example, Lesson 6 repeatedly stresses that reporting can only be considered reliable journalism if it’s verifiable, and if the journalist and media outlet are accountable, both of which are good guidelines. But it also emphasizes that they must be “independent,” defined as “free from the control, influence, or support of interested parties.” Native advertising, for example, is not independent because it is “trying to sell or promote something,” one slide notes.

But aren’t shareholders and hedge funds and for-profit media outlets also trying to sell something? Corporate outlets can and do produce good journalism, but mega-companies like GateHouse Media—which owns over 600 papers in 39 states—and Digital First Media are both owned by hedge funds, and have both proven that profit is the bottom line. For example, GateHouse regularly earns double-digit returns for shareholders while also slashing budgets for reporters, editors, and even closing down newsrooms. A 2018 report from University of North Carolina on the “new media barons” that looked at hedge-fund- and private-equity-owned newspapers noted that the “standard operating formula” has included “aggressive cost-cutting, the adoption of advertiser-friendly policies” and “the sale or shuttering of under-performing newspapers.”

The course also emphasizes the need for sources to be, among other things, “independent” and “authoritative/informed.” What are the definitions of those terms? That depends on who uses them. Would a reporter from a mainstream outlet be likely to quote an authoritative economist who is not a cheerleader for capitalism in a story about a hike in the minimum wage? Maybe even an avowed socialist? Probably not.

Also troubling (but unsurprising) are the slides illustrating “journalism,” like one where a student sees that journalism equals outlets like NBC, the Washington Post and National Public Radio. Where are the alternative, progressive, and radical outlets doing excellent, law-changing and life-saving work? A brief list from this country might include Democracy Now!, WSWS, In These Times. These nonprofit outlets and/or their journalists have regularly won awards for journalistic excellence, uncovered truths, rigorously verify, and supply context.

Both Checkology and the Stonybrook courses also reinforce tired tropes of what is and what is not “newsworthy.” While the Checkology’s “What is News?” lesson lies behind a paywall, a News Literacy Project article explains that Chicago Sun-Times’ Paul Salzman hosts it, and that he stresses four factors:

1. Timeliness
2. Importance to “the public”
3. Whether a subject is “interesting”
4. Whether it’s “unusual enough to warrant attention”

The Stonybrook course and its online Coursera spin-off emphasize ten “universal news drivers,” including “importance,” “prominence” and “conflict,” and also “unusualness” and “relevance.”

But in both cases, the approach is quite limited. For example, who is or are “the public,” and what is “important” to it/them? Is the public the older folks (above 65) who are mostly likely to get news from TV or cable news shows, according to the Pew Research Center? Or younger people, who look at Vox and Vice on their telephones? Or immigrants of varying backgrounds who might listen to Spanish-language radio (local or international) and read a local weekly? Do a non-union waitress working three jobs and a hedge fund manager have the same news and information “interests”?

What about “conflict”? Do corporate media outlets cover protests and conflict in some poor country that doesn’t much interest the US, such as Haiti these days, the same way as they cover them in a place where

Washington is happy to spar with a semi-nemesis (China), like Hong Kong? Do the approved-of journalists and outlets dig deep to expose the roots of those conflicts, even if that might involve exposing some uncomfortable truths?

These two news literacy educational assets, and many others, offer tools that can be useful to teachers and students, but they are also dangerous. At the very moment when the digital universe offers students access to news and information from hundreds of sources in the US and worldwide, the courses present extremely middle-of-the-road approaches. They are a far cry from the media literacy concepts promoted and taught in what is arguably the birthplace of modern media literacy: Ontario, Canada, where media literacy has been required since 1987. One of the eight key concepts reads:

“Media messages have commercial implications. Media literacy aims to encourage awareness of how the media are influenced by commercial considerations, and how they impinge on content, technique, and distribution. Most media production is a business, and so must make a profit.”

But neither Checkology nor the Stonybrook courses bring up the issues of ownership, commercial implications, and profit. Not surprisingly, these days—in the US, at least—there are a whole slew of media literacy education groups that steer clear of the “commercial implications” concept. A recent study talks about the split between those who see media literacy as “a critique of capitalism” and those who do not. They also note:

“Capitalist interests have long aimed to use media to train students as well as consumers.”

Political-economy-shy orientations do students a great disservice. Even the most basic communication theory textbooks at least mention how mass media can (and often do) reinforce the political, social, and economic status quo. In the oft-used *Media & Culture: Mass Communication in a Digital Age* textbook, the authors note the exponential gap in the wages of a CEO to the average worker. One reason, they explain, has to do with the mass media and its reinforcement of status quo, “common sense” thinking and discourse:

“In convincing consumers and voters that the interests of the powerful were common sense and therefore normal and natural, companies and politicians created an atmosphere and context in which there was less challenge and criticism.”

Unfortunately however, the two main news literacy tools do not explore what basic, middle-of-the-road textbooks do. Instead, they limit their critical thinking lessons and tools to much narrower margins. And that's not surprising. As media critics have pointed out repeatedly, one of the ways to control people's thinking is by:

“Creating the illusion that there's a debate going on, but making sure that that debate stays within very narrow margins.”

Charts like one from Allsides confirm this thesis and reinforce the idea that trustworthy journalism takes place between those margins, implying that the middle of the road is the safest place to be. For example, Allsides tells visitors that a “Center” rating means “the source or writer rated does not predictably show opinions favoring either end of the political spectrum.” Is that really true for the Wall Street Journal, The Hill, and Bloomberg, all of which are rated “Center”? The chart also diametrically opposes outlets like New Yorker and The Nation (“Left”) to the “Right,” which features, for example, Fox News Opinion and Breitbart. But are the latter two outlets as consistently fact-based as New Yorker and The Nation, both of which publish award-winning journalism?

The media outlets that Allsides could call “Center,” “Lean Left” and “Lean Right” are more accurately called ‘mainstream,’ and with good reason. The publishers, editors, and journalists do not question the status quo or so-called “common sense.” Indeed, as the New York Times editorial page editor acknowledged, they are unblinkingly “in favor of capitalism,” even though it has had so many negative outcomes. Allsides nevertheless lumps together the Times' opinion section with outlets like The Nation and Jacobin as “Left,” which suggests that the political spectrum used by this media literacy project does little or nothing to help news consumers understand the ideologies of news media.

Until the many well-funded news literacy and anti-fake news websites, tools, and courses take a truly critical and open-minded approach, and teach students to really question authority all the way up the chain, including economic systems, foreign policy, accepted history, and more, they will have to be used with caution. Learning how to detect faked photos is great, but without teaching our students how to think critically about where they get their news, and about the orientations of those outlets, we are simply channeling them towards status quo journalism. While mainstream outlets can and do provide critical contributions, their investigations and outrage are mostly only poking at the edges of structural causes.

The propaganda in the mainstream news is actually quite important, because in order to try and figure out anything, you have to try and decide what's real and what isn't. And so much of it isn't real.

We've whitewashed over MLK, like we do all of our history. What does it say about a country when it's so scared about the truth

The history of the civil rights movement has been rewritten into a very tame, straightforward march of good. It didn't really happen that way, you know. A couple of things always get left out. One is the slow movement of the federal government towards dismantling segregation. As third world nations were getting independence following WWII and being attracted towards communism, US treatment of its non-white population was becoming a major international propaganda loss. Eisenhower was explicit on this problem.

A second is that there were less mellow groups in the civil rights struggle. Beside Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, who were big scary blacks advocating Black Power, Martin Luther King was reassuring. You can interpret this as 'See, civility wins' or as I interpret it: it takes incivility to move power to even a less scary option.

A third is that civil rights were perceived and addressed as a Southern sin. It's always fun to feel righteous beside your brother's error. With the federal government and Northern popularity, King led a movement that successfully addressed racial laws in Georgia and Mississippi. He was notably less successful in Chicago and Boston. In fact, his efforts in the North have been dropped from the memory of the civil rights movement. It was after he moved from confronting Southern legal segregationists to confronting Northern economic segregationists that he lost popularity. He regained it after his assassination when his message could be sentimentalized into "I have a dream." Civility in the South did not win over Southern power; it was national power that did so. Civility to politicians will not win over national power if there are no outside forces making it the better deal for elites.

If you read conservative speeches and writings of the time, from Jesse Helms to James Kilpatrick, you find lots of criticism of the civil rights movement, both for content and for means. Martin Luther King was—if not a communist, which J. Edgar Hoover insisted he was—doing wrong by breaking the law. In the way of all power, they insisted that there are other, better ways of trying to change the laws.

What are the current equivalents of international pressure, aggressive accountability groups, and domestic power centers that are bringing pressure on elites? I don't see any. All I see is the need to put pressure on the elites ourselves.

During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance.

Every society honors its live conformists and its dead troublemakers.

Lies are a vital and necessary part of authoritarian rule. If the truth were identified fully and in plain language that could be easily understood by everyone, the revolution would begin in ten minutes. The ruling class knows this very well, so lies are the gruel we ingest every day.

The primary aim of official propaganda is to generate an ‘official narrative’ that can be mindlessly repeated by the ruling classes and those who support and identify with them. This official narrative does not have to make sense, or to stand up to any sort of serious scrutiny. Its accuracy is not the point. The point is to draw a Maginot line, a defensive ideological boundary, between the truth as defined by the ruling classes and any other truth that contradicts their narrative.

Imagine this Maginot line as a circular wall surrounded by inhospitable territory. Inside the wall is normal society, gainful employment, career advancement, and all the other considerable benefits of cooperating with the ruling classes. Outside the wall is poverty, anxiety, social and professional stigmatization, and various other forms of suffering. Which side of the wall do you want to be on? Every day, in countless ways, each of us are asked and have to answer this question. Conform, and there’s a place for you inside. Refuse, and well... good luck out there.

In openly despotic societies, the stakes involved in making this choice—to conform or dissent—are often life and death. In our relatively liberal Western societies the consequences of not conforming to the official narrative—for those of us who are not militant guerrillas—are usually subtler. Despite that, the pressure is still intense. Conforming to the consensus reality generated by these official narratives is price of admission to the inner sanctum, where the jobs, money, professional prestige, and the other rewards of Capitalism are. Conforming does not require belief. It requires allegiance and rote obedience. What one actually believes is completely irrelevant, as long as one parrots the official narrative.

In short, official propaganda is not designed to deceive the public—no more than the speeches in an actor’s script are intended to deceive the actor who speaks them—it is designed to be absorbed and repeated, no matter how implausible or preposterous it might be. Actually, it is often most effective when those who are forced to robotically repeat it know that it is utter nonsense, as the humiliation of having to do so cements their

allegiance to the ruling classes. This phenomenon being a standard feature of the classic Stockholm Syndrome model, and authoritarian conditioning generally.

Television, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, social media, are used to flood the minds of the populace with a certain view of life, particular ideas, values, and carefully edited facts. Political and economic slogans are repeated like mantras over the airwaves, until they infect the populace and are repeated parrot-like by apathetic, ill-informed voters. Education systems are designed to support the message, enabling the most malleable minds to be conditioned into, for example, competition and conformity. Organized religion reinforces the pervasive values and imposes its own, often cripplingly repressive doctrine on the faithful. Creative independent thinking—the principle quality of inquiry, analysis, and response—is for the most part lost within the fogs of dogma and stereotype that are wrapped around the minds of the unsuspecting virtually from birth. The world is presented as hostile, competitive, full of pain and difficulties. Material satisfaction and pleasure is sold as happiness, desire constantly fed—creating agitated noisy minds, discontent, and anxiety, all of which deny or greatly inhibit the possibility of that most democratic quality, free thinking.

The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum. Imperialism and its consequences—economic, psychological, and physical violence—are largely off limits. We can discuss racism against blacks in the police force, but not racism as a feature of the imperial state. We can discuss corruption on Wall Street, but not finance as a critical tool of imperial exploitation. We can discuss whether policing borders is racist, but not the role of immigration in creating reserve armies of labor for use by the ruling corporatocracy. We can discuss gay rights and gender pay scales, but not how imperialism destroys the lives of countless women and gays in nations we target. We can discuss the Syrian war, but not Syria as a new chapter in imperialism's history of slaughter. So long as we debate and march for issues that do not challenge the ruling class power and wealth, nothing structural will change. Racism, bigotry, gender discrimination, financial exploitation of Main Street by Wall Street, debt peonage, wage serfdom, foreign wars of dubious provenance, the canonization of war criminals past and present, and much more will continue unabated.

We underestimate at our peril the kind of onslaught of received opinion from the media, from the sort of cultural establishment, basically kind of ruling out of court any notion of fundamental change. Ridiculing it as ridiculous, to the extent that, you know, when you start to talk about wanting a better world you see the eyes rolling. What kind of despicable

pass have we come to, that such an aspiration raises scorn? And yet that's where we are, for huge numbers of the political establishment.

Much of our shared understanding of reality is constructed through the mass media. In the 1970s, a media theorist formalized this idea, arguing that the mass media's portrayal of reality affected us all, particularly if we consumed a large diet of such media. The research claims two important things about this mediated reality:

1. Mediated reality is often a stable, repetitive, pervasive, and virtually inescapable pattern of images and ideologies that creates a deep sense of common, shared reality.
2. Mediated reality is often wrong.

Advanced capitalist societies manufacture the social subjects as consumers of mass culture—as they are consumers of McDonald's hamburgers or Starbucks coffee—which is to say their desires are the creations of a culture industry, receptacles of a massive body of disinformation that do not just entertain and preoccupy them but, in fact, engineer them as passive receptacles of an ideological domination beyond their recognition or critique. They are given a false sense of autonomy to choose.

What today we call 'Western Media' is the paramount example of the production of news as commodity fetishism. Such news outlets as BBC, CNN, New York Times are brands under which this commodity that calls itself Western Media manufactures both a truth to be reckoned with and in effect the normative consciousness of the person who consumes that news and thinks herself informed. They may think themselves objective news outlets that occasionally feature or air a commercial for an airline or a washing detergent. But they are themselves a brand just like the other brands they advertise.

This Western Media has historically posited itself initially as the opposite of the news as used to be broadcast in the Soviet Bloc, or China, or the Third World in general, which was branded as "state-controlled," "propaganda," and therefore false, and thereby posited itself as "independent," "objective," "fair," and "truthful."

Everything can be perverted and distorted, millions of people can be deceived, if you use the monopoly of the media.

Destroying the ability to compare and to see things from the universal perspective has been one of the most successful endeavors of the Western indoctrination drive—dispersed through education, media disinformation, and culture. It has effectively influenced and pacified both the people in the

West itself, and those living in its present and former colonies—particularly the local elites and their offspring.

It makes my blood boil, and then run cold, considering that the effect is to reject real reality and substitute ‘The Narrative.’ These words are utterly failing to convey the horror I feel. We’re a nation of people who don’t know our own recent history. We don’t know where we are, how we got here, or what our true trajectory is.

I think the theft of reality itself is one of the worst crimes possible. Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities. And that’s the whole point. Wars don’t just happen. The depredations of the powers that be, which power their dominance, depend on the participation of us mopes. Toward that end, NYT, WaPo, the rest of the Establishment media, steal from us our real reality and substitute their own absurdities.

I just can’t cram into these words how horrified I am, to be living amongst millions of people who don’t know the truth of our time and are thus ever so easily led to believe absurdities and then rush to commit the atrocity du jour. And to know that those entrusted with the power of the “papers of record” are daily making us crazier and crazier.

Our humanity rests, is embedded in, our perceptions and beliefs about reality. They’re stealing from us our humanity by stealing reality itself. I just can’t put it strongly enough!

If it wasn’t for this redoubt of reality—pretty sure I’d lose what’s left of my damn mind. Thank you all so much for keeping it real.

I look at mankind and I see a species in an awkward transitional phase, like how the ancestors of birds probably were before they really got that whole flying thing down. We’ve evolved these gigantic brains which give us a capacity for abstract thought that has enabled us to out-survive and out-thrive other competing organisms, but we haven’t yet moved into a mature relationship with that newfound capability. A human brain can make someone so crazy and miserable that he’ll blow it out of his own skull with a gun, a weapon which we invented using that same capacity for abstract thought.

Humans, to put it simply, have an unhealthy relationship with narrative. If you have ever experienced a moment of mental stillness, you know how peaceful and pleasant that experience is. It is natural and harmonious. It’s only once you add in the believed mental chatter that we suffer, we hate, we fight each other, and we can be manipulated by narratives inserted into our mental processes by plutocrat-owned media.

There is nothing inherent in the human organism which makes suffering natural or necessary; it’s only the babbling believed narratives in our minds

that generate suffering. The same is true of our susceptibility to mass media manipulation.

Truth doesn't require intellect to believe. Intellect isn't proof against deception. Intelligent isn't the same as less ignorant and unintelligent isn't the same as more ignorant. But yes, many people believe what they are told. Many people are more ignorant than you and I—and perhaps a few are less.

Large groups of people can be made to believe the same, whether true or false. This is quite common. Intellect does give an advantage in evaluating the merits of an idea. But skeptical inquiry isn't always going to lead to fact. It can as easily lead to a wrong idea that fits the facts one has accepted. Confirmation bias can mislead.

At any rate, there are smart more ignorant people and dumb less ignorant ones.

Outrage discourse and programming may be effective at increasing advertising revenues and political support, but the mainstreaming of outrage in American political culture undermines some practices vital to healthy democratic life. Outrage tactics such as ideological selectivity, vilification of opponents, and fear mongering make talking politics beyond our most intimate circles extraordinarily difficult, complicating our ability to have meaningful discussions about politics in our communities. We also see outrageous voices wielding disproportionate influence in elections, independently vetting candidates, anointing or tarring the contestants, particularly during primaries.

In spite of the negative tenor of much of the content, fans feel refreshed by the programs. In many ways, outrage venues serve as political churches. The faithful attend, hear their values re-articulated in compelling ways, and leave feeling validated and virtuous for having participated.

The aggregate audience for outrage media is immense. The estimate for talk radio is roughly 35 million listeners daily. It is the second most popular radio format in the nation, falling only slightly behind the number one format: country music. Nielsen data suggest the nightly outrage programs on cable attract close to 10 million viewers. The audience is composed largely of those who are most likely to vote, most likely to donate to political causes, and most likely to be politically active in many other ways. For example, 78 percent of listeners to talk radio voted in the 2010 election as compared to 41 percent of the eligible electorate. In short, the outrage audience is quite large, politically active, and valuable to both advertisers and politicians.

Those who have least to say are granted the greatest number of platforms on which to say it.

Trolling doesn't take brains. But it works, and it will keep working, until we learn to see through the provocations in real time.

Why is a fragmented media environment hospitable to outrage? Think of the case of television: During the era of big-three network dominance, when programming choices were based on garnering the largest possible number of viewers from the mass audience, the goal was to offend the fewest, to program the least objectionable content. Today, the broadcast networks must work to attract a large audience amid an expansive sea of cable channels. In contrast, cable networks can produce content aimed at smaller, more homogeneous audiences. With this niche-orientation, individual cable channels can afford to offend segments of the market that are not their target audience. In fact, many cable television programs, radio shows, and blogs deliver niche audiences to advertisers specifically through the use of objectionable programming, which is dramatic, entertaining, and shocking enough to "break through the clutter" in a crowded field of cable choices.

While the proliferation of outrage discourse in the media and its concomitant role in direct dialogue about politics is anathema to the values of some, there are others far more open to diverse forms of political expression. Many have persuasively challenged the privileging of rational-critical discourse as exclusionary and anti-democratic because it elevates a set of voices already at the political center and devalues the contributions of voices that have historically been pressed to the margins, such as those of women, the poor, foreign-born. These critics argue that emotional, opinion-based accounts of lived experience are deemed less legitimate than those drawing dispassionately on facts presented as objective precisely because power has been at play in establishing what we take for granted as common sense. Therefore under the pretense of inclusion, deliberation may mask domination. Critics focusing on inequalities tend to home in on one or more of the following: calling attention to these subtleties of power in public discourse, broadening the range of political expressions seen as legitimate, and validating the multiple, coexisting publics where those whose needs are not met gather to deliberate independently.

Meaningful deliberation requires new ways of framing social reality. Performative communications including jokes, shared personal stories, and use of irony, often help people understand things in new ways, proving pivotal for meaningful political discussion. Even if such devices fail to enhance understanding, it seems likely that they enhance the pleasures of and proclivity toward participation in political life. Public participation depends on feelings of pleasure, which may be derived from rational argumentation, but also through more playful forms of argument, such as the clever use of dramatic techniques to place moral conflict into bold (and usually overstated)

relief. This satisfaction is motivating increasing civic participation: If an individual hates Elon Musk or Paul Krugman or Warren Buffett, it is more likely that that person will participate in the public sphere.

“The process of fact-checking has one unavoidable problem—there’s almost no way to verify a story that the writer has fabricated entirely, because you can’t disprove a negative. It’s unreasonable for a magazine fact-checker to start from the premise that the reporter concocted a story out of thin air, since only a psychopath would do so. It would be like a doctor initiating every medical examination by asking the patient if she’s lying about feeling sick.”

The pioneering adherents of propaganda back in the day might never have dreamt how sophisticated and all-encompassing the practice would become, nor would the citizenry at large have anticipated the extent to which the industry has facilitated an entrenched, rapacious plutocracy at the expense of our economic opportunity, our financial and material security, our physical, social and cultural environment, our values and attitudes, and increasingly, our basic democratic rights and freedoms.

We now live in the Age of the Big Shill—cocooned in a submissive void—an era where nothing can be taken on face value yet where time and attention constraints (to name just two) force us to do so; where few people in public life can be taken at their word; where unchallenged perceptions become accepted reality; where “open-book” history is now incontrovertible not-negotiable, upon pain of imprisonment fact; where education is about uniformity, function, form, and conformity, all in the service of imposed neoliberal ideologies embracing then prioritizing individual—albeit dubious—freedoms.

More broadly, it’s the “Roger Ailes” of this world—acting on behalf of the power elites who after all are their paymasters—who create the intellectual systems which control expression through the communications structures, whilst ensuring these systems require only the discreet use of censorship and uniformed men. They are the shapers and molders of the discourse that passes for the accepted lingua franca of the increasingly globalized, interconnected, corporatized political economy of the planet. Throughout this process they will always try to change the established language.

Whether this decision-making is taking place inside or outside the legislative process, these processes are well and truly in the grip of the banks and financial institutions and transnational organizations. In whose interests are they going to be more concerned with? We saw this all just after the Global

Financial Crisis (GFC) when the very people who brought the system to the brink, made billions off the dodge for their banks and millions for themselves, bankrupted hundreds of thousands of American families, were called upon by the US government to fix up the mess, and to all intents given a blank cheque to so do.

That the US is at even greater risk now of economic implosion is something few serious pundits would dispute, and a testament to the effectiveness of the snow-job perpetrated upon Americans regarding the causes, the impact, and the implications of the 2008 meltdown going forward.

And here we are, a mere twelve years later. Getting force-fed, non-stop yet another narrative designed to funnel immense wealth into the hands of a few, and in many cases, make these parasites look good in the process. Things politicians could not have dreamed of months ago, ushered in, cheered on, defended—or criticized for not being extreme enough—by every “credible outlet.”

“Things will never be the same.”

In most cases, one accepts almost by definition such disconnects—read: hidden agendas—are the rule rather than the exception, hence the multi-billion foundation—and global reach and impact—of the propaganda business. This in itself is a key indicator as to why organizations place so much importance on this aspect of managing their affairs. At the very least, once corporations saw how the psychology of persuasion could be leveraged to manipulate consumers and politicians saw the same with the citizenry and even its own workers, the growth of the industry was assured.

As Leni Riefenstahl noted when asked if those embracing the “submissive void” included the liberal, educated bourgeoisie?

“Everyone. Propaganda always wins. . . if you allow it.”

Chapter Nine

Mediated Reality

“Unceasingly we are bombarded with pseudo-realities. Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.”

We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and the prophecy didn’t, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by Orwellian nightmares. But we had forgotten that alongside Orwell’s dark vision, there was another—slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley’s vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity, and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny “failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.” In 1984 people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

As uncanny as these Nostradamuses might seem, however, they were not so much attempting to foretell the future as they were documenting their concerns about their own place and time. For example, when Orwell and Huxley penned their masterpieces, they did so as commentaries on the rise of a controlling, manipulative scientific establishment, as well as the dangers of totalitarianism in the 1930s and 40s. That their dire extrapolations about the future have proven to be so accurate is less a reflection of their skills as fortunetellers as it is our unmitigated failure to heed their warnings. Likewise, if we fail to take notice of the alarm bells being sounded by contemporary writers, filmmakers, and activists, we will have only ourselves to blame when freedom falls.

Anyone who is even slightly familiar with the history of communications knows that every new technology for thinking involves a trade-off. It giveth and taketh away, although not quite in equal measure. Media change does not necessarily result in equilibrium. It sometimes creates more than it destroys. Sometimes, it is the other way around. We must be careful in praising or condemning because the future may hold surprises for us. The invention of the printing press itself is a paradigmatic example. Typography fostered the modern idea of individuality, but it destroyed the medieval sense of community and integration. Typography created prose but made poetry into an exotic and elitist form of expression. Typography made modern science possible but transformed religious sensibility into mere superstition. Typography assisted in the growth of the nation-state but thereby made patriotism into a sordid if not lethal emotion.

It is an argument that fixes its attention on the forms of human conversation, and postulates that how we are obliged to conduct such conversations will have the strongest possible influence on what ideas we can conveniently express. And what ideas are convenient to express inevitably become the important content of a culture. I use the word 'conversation' metaphorically to refer not only to speech but to all techniques and technologies that permit people of a particular culture to exchange messages. In this sense, all culture is a conversation or, more precisely, a corporation of conversations, conducted in a variety of symbolic modes. Our attention here is on how forms of public discourse regulate and even dictate what kind of content can issue from such forms.

To take a simple example of what this means, consider the primitive technology of smoke signals. While I do not know exactly what content was once carried in the smoke signals of American Indians, I can safely guess that it did not include philosophical argument. Puffs of smoke are insufficiently complex to express ideas on the nature of existence, and even if they were not, a Cherokee philosopher would run short of either wood or

blankets long before he reached his second axiom. You cannot use smoke to do philosophy. Its form excludes the content.

The clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation. I might add that my interest in this point of view was first stirred by a prophet. In studying the Bible as a young man, I found intimations of the idea that forms of media favor particular kinds of content and therefore are capable of taking command of a culture. I refer specifically to the Decalogue, the Second Commandment of which prohibits the Israelites from making concrete images of anything:

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth.”

I wondered then, as so many others have, as to why the God of these people would have included instructions on how they were to symbolize, or not symbolize, their experience. It is a strange injunction to include as part of an ethical system unless its author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of a culture. We may hazard a guess that a people who are being asked to embrace an abstract, universal deity would be rendered unfit to do so by the habit of drawing pictures or making statues or depicting their ideas in any concrete, iconographic forms. The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking. Iconography thus became blasphemy so that a new kind of God could enter a culture. People like ourselves who are in the process of converting their culture from word-centered to image-centered might profit by reflecting on this Mosaic injunction. But even if I am wrong in these conjectures, it is, I believe, a wise and particularly relevant supposition that the media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social preoccupations.

Each medium, like language itself, makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility. Which, of course, is the meaning of ‘the medium is the message.’ This aphorism, however, is in need of amendment because, as it stands, it may lead one to confuse a message with a metaphor. A message denotes a specific, concrete statement about the world. But the forms of our media, including the symbols through which they permit conversation, do not make such statements. They are rather like metaphors, working by unobtrusive but powerful implication to enforce their special definitions of reality. Whether we are experiencing the world through the lens of speech or the printed word

or the camera, our media-metaphors classify the world for us, sequence it, frame it, enlarge it, reduce it, color it, argue a case for what the world is like.

A clock recreates time as an independent, mathematically precise sequence; writing recreates the mind as a tablet on which experience is written; the telegraph recreates news as a commodity.

“The invention of firearms equalized the vassal and the noble on the field of battle; the art of printing opened the same resources to the minds of all classes; the post brought knowledge alike to the door of the cottage and to the gate of the palace.”

Our conversations about nature and about ourselves are conducted in whatever languages we find it possible and convenient to employ. We do not see nature or intelligence or human motivation or ideology as ‘it’ is but only as our languages are. And our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture.

There is a tribe in western Africa that has no writing system but whose rich oral tradition has given form to its ideas of civil law. When a dispute arises, the complainants come before the chief of the tribe and state their grievances. With no written law to guide him, the task of the chief is to search through his vast repertoire of proverbs and sayings to find one that suits the situation and is equally satisfying to both complainants. That accomplished, all parties are agreed that justice has been done, that the truth has been served. You will recognize, of course, that this was largely the method of Jesus and other Biblical figures who, living in an essentially oral culture, drew upon all of the resources of speech, including mnemonic devices, formulaic expressions and parables, as a means of discovering and revealing truth.

In oral cultures proverbs and sayings are not occasional devices—they are incessant. They form the substance of thought itself. Thought in any extended form is impossible without them, for it consists in them. To people like ourselves any reliance on proverbs and sayings is reserved largely for resolving disputes among or with children.

- “First come, first served.”
- “Possession is nine-tenths of the law.”
- “Haste makes waste.”

These are forms of speech we pull out in small crises with our young but would think ridiculous to produce in a courtroom where “serious” matters

are to be decided. Can you imagine a bailiff asking a jury if it has reached a decision and receiving the reply:

“To err is human but to forgive is divine”

Or even better:

“Let us render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to
God that which is God’s”

For the briefest moment, the judge might be charmed but if a serious language form is not immediately forthcoming, the jury may end up with a longer sentence than most guilty defendants. Judges, lawyers, and defendants do not regard proverbs or sayings as a relevant response to legal disputes. In this, they are separated from the tribal chief by a media-metaphor. For in a print-based courtroom, where law books, briefs, citations, and other written materials define and organize the method of finding the truth, the oral tradition has lost much of its resonance—but not all of it. Testimony is expected to be given orally, on the assumption that the spoken—not the written—word is a truer reflection of the state of mind of a witness.

A similar paradox exists in universities, and with roughly the same distribution of resonances; that is to say, there are a few residual traditions based on the notion that speech is the primary carrier of truth. But for the most part, university conceptions of truth are tightly bound to the structure and logic of the printed word. To exemplify this point, consider the still widely practiced medieval ritual known as a “doctoral oral.” I use the word ‘medieval’ literally, for in the Middle Ages students were always examined orally, and the tradition is carried forward in the assumption that a candidate must be able to talk competently about his written work. But, of course, the written work matters most.

In one case, the issue of what is a legitimate form of truth-telling was raised to a level of consciousness rarely achieved. The candidate had included in his thesis a footnote, intended as documentation of a quotation, which read: “Told to the investigator at the Roosevelt Hotel on January 18, 1981, in the presence of Arthur Lingeman and Jerrold Gross.” This citation drew the attention of no fewer than four of the five oral examiners, all of whom observed that it was hardly suitable as a form of documentation and that it ought to be replaced by a citation from a book or article. “You are not a journalist,” one professor remarked. “You are supposed to be a scholar.”

Perhaps because the candidate knew of no published statement of what he was told at the Roosevelt Hotel, he defended himself vigorously on the grounds that there were witnesses to what he was told, that they were

available to attest to the accuracy of the quotation, and that the form in which an idea is conveyed is irrelevant to its truth. Carried away on the wings of his eloquence, the candidate argued further that there were more than three-hundred references to published works in his thesis and that it was extremely unlikely that any of them would be checked for accuracy by the examiners, by which he meant to raise the question: Why do you assume the accuracy of a print-referenced citation but not a speech-referenced one?

The answer he received took the following line: You are mistaken in believing that the form in which an idea is conveyed is irrelevant to its truth. In the academic world, the published word is invested with greater prestige and authenticity than the spoken word. What people say is assumed to be more casually uttered than what they write. The written word is assumed to have been reflected upon and revised by its author, reviewed by authorities and editors. It is easier to verify or refute, and it is invested with an impersonal and objective character, which is why, no doubt, you have referred to yourself in your thesis as 'the investigator' and not by your name; that is to say, the written word is, by its nature, addressed to the world, not an individual. The written word endures, the spoken word disappears; and that is why writing is closer to the truth than speaking. Moreover, we are sure you would prefer that this commission produce a written statement that you have passed your examination (should you do so) than for us merely to tell you that you have, and leave it at that. Our written statement would represent the truth. Our oral agreement would be only a rumor.

The candidate wisely said no more on the matter except to indicate that he would make whatever changes the commission suggested and that he profoundly wished that should he pass the oral, a written document would attest to that fact. He did pass, and in time the proper words were written.

The concept of truth is intimately linked to the biases of forms of expression. Truth does not, and never has, come unadorned. It must appear in its proper clothing or it is not acknowledged, which is a way of saying that the truth is a kind of cultural prejudice. Each culture conceives of it as being most authentically expressed in certain symbolic forms that another culture may regard as trivial or irrelevant.

As a culture moves from orality to writing to printing to video, its ideas of truth move with it. Every philosophy is the philosophy of a stage of life, every epistemology is the epistemology of a stage of media development. Truth, like time itself, is a product of a conversation man has with himself about and through the techniques of communication he has invented.

Since intelligence is primarily defined as one's capacity to grasp the truth of things, it follows that what a culture means by intelligence is derived from the character of its important forms of communication. In a purely

oral culture, intelligence is often associated with aphoristic ingenuity, that is, the power to invent compact sayings of wide applicability. The wise Solomon, we are told in First Kings, knew three-thousand proverbs. In a print culture, people with such a talent are thought to be quaint at best, more likely pompous bores. In a purely oral culture, a high value is always placed on the power to memorize, for where there are no written words, the human mind must function as a mobile library. To forget how something is to be said or done is a danger to the community and a gross form of stupidity. In a print culture, the memorization of a poem, a menu, a law, or most anything else is merely charming. It is almost always functionally irrelevant and certainly not considered a sign of high intelligence.

Although the general character of print-intelligence would be known to anyone who would be reading this book, you may arrive at a reasonably detailed definition of it by simply considering what is demanded of you as you read this book. You are required, first of all, to remain more or less immobile for a fairly long time. If you cannot do this—with this or any other book, though perhaps especially this book—our culture may label you as anything from suffering ADHD to simply undisciplined; in any case, as suffering from some sort of intellectual deficiency. The printing press makes rather stringent demands on our bodies as well as our minds. Controlling your body is, however, only a minimal requirement. You must also have learned to pay no attention to the shapes of the letters on the page. You must see through them, so to speak, so that you can go directly to the meanings of the words they form. If you are preoccupied with the shapes of the letters, you will be an intolerably inefficient reader, likely to be thought stupid.

If you have learned how to get to meanings without aesthetic distraction, you are required to assume an attitude of detachment and objectivity. This includes your bringing to the task what some have called an “immunity to eloquence,” meaning that you are able to distinguish between the sensuous pleasure, or charm, or ingratiating tone (if such there be) of the words, and the logic of their argument. But at the same time, you must be able to tell from the tone of the language what is the author’s attitude toward the subject and toward the reader. You must, in other words, know the difference between a joke and an argument. And in judging the quality of an argument, you must be able to do several things at once, including delaying a verdict until the entire argument is finished, holding in mind questions until you have determined where, when or if the text answers them, and bringing to bear on the text all of your relevant experience as a counterargument to what is being proposed. You must also be able to withhold those parts of your knowledge and experience which, in fact, do

not have a bearing on the argument.

And in preparing yourself to do all of this, you must have divested yourself of the belief that words are magical and, above all, have learned to negotiate the world of abstractions, for there are very few phrases and sentences in many books that require you to call forth concrete images. In a print-culture, we are apt to say of people who are not intelligent that we must “draw them pictures” so that they may understand. Intelligence implies that one can dwell comfortably without pictures, in a field of concepts and generalizations. To be able to do all of these things, and more, constitutes a primary definition of intelligence in a culture whose notions of truth are organized around the printed word.

In *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, there appears a remarkable quotation attributed to Michael Welfare, one of the founders of a religious sect known as the Dunkers and a long-time acquaintance of Franklin. The statement had its origins in Welfare’s complaint to Franklin that zealots of other religious persuasions were spreading lies about the Dunkers, accusing them of abominable principles to which, in fact, they were utter strangers. Franklin suggested that such abuse might be diminished if the Dunkers published the articles of their belief and the rules of their discipline. Welfare replied that this course of action had been discussed among his coreligionists but had been rejected. He then explained their reasoning in the following words:

“When we were first drawn together as a society, it had pleased God to enlighten our minds so far as to see that some doctrines, which we once esteemed truths, were errors, and that others, which we had esteemed errors, were real truths. From time to time He has been pleased to afford us farther light, and our principles have been improving, and our errors diminishing. Now we are not sure that we are arrived at the end of this progression, and at the perfection of spiritual or theological knowledge; and we fear that, if we should feel ourselves as if bound and confined by it, and perhaps be unwilling to receive further improvement, and our successors still more so, as conceiving what we their elders and founders had done, to be something sacred, never to be departed from.”

Franklin describes this sentiment as a singular instance in the history of mankind of modesty in a sect. Modesty is certainly the word for it, but the statement is extraordinary for other reasons, too. We have here a criticism of the epistemology of the written word worthy of Plato. Moses himself

might be interested although he could hardly approve. The Dunkers came close here to formulating a commandment about religious discourse: ‘Thou shalt not write down thy principles, still less print them, lest thou shall be entrapped by them for all time.’

Whenever language is the principal medium of communication—especially language controlled by the rigors of print—an idea, a fact, a claim is the inevitable result. The idea may be banal, the fact irrelevant, the claim false, but there is no escape from meaning when language is the instrument guiding one’s thought. Though one may accomplish it from time to time, it is very hard to say nothing when employing a written English sentence. What else is exposition good for? Words have very little to recommend them except as carriers of meaning. The shapes of written words are not especially interesting to look at. Even the sounds of sentences of spoken words are rarely engaging except when composed by those with extraordinary poetic gifts. If a sentence refuses to issue forth a fact, a request, a question, an assertion, an explanation, it is nonsense, a mere grammatical shell.

A written sentence calls upon its author to say something, upon its reader to know the import of what is said. And when an author and reader are struggling with semantic meaning, they are engaged in the most serious challenge to the intellect. This is especially the case with the act of reading, for authors are not always trustworthy. They lie, they become confused, they over-generalize, they abuse logic and, sometimes, common sense. The reader must come armed, in a serious state of intellectual readiness. This is not easy because he comes to the text alone. In reading, one’s responses are isolated, one’s intellect thrown back on its own resources. To be confronted by the cold abstractions of printed sentences is to look upon language bare, without the assistance of either beauty or community. Thus, reading is by its nature a serious business.

The farm boy following the plow with book in hand, the mother reading aloud to her family on a Sunday afternoon, the merchant reading announcements of the latest clipper arrivals—these were different kinds of readers from those of today. There would have been little casual reading, for there was not a great deal of time for that. Reading would have had a sacred element in it, or if not that, would have at least occurred as a daily or weekly ritual invested with special meaning. For we must also remember that this was a culture without electricity. It would not have been easy to read by either candlelight or, later, gaslight. Doubtless, much reading was done between dawn and the start of the day’s business.

What reading would have been done was done seriously, intensely, and with steadfast purpose. The modern idea of “testing a reader’s comprehen-

sion,” as distinct from something else a reader may be doing, would have seemed an absurdity in 1790 or 1830 or 1860. What else was reading but comprehending? As far as we know, there did not exist such a thing as a “reading problem,” except, of course, for those who could not attend school. To attend school meant to learn to read, for without that capacity, one could not participate in the culture’s conversations. But most people could read and did participate. To these people, reading was both their connection to and their model of the world. The printed page revealed the world, line by line, page by page, to be a serious, coherent place, capable of management by reason, and of improvement by logical and relevant criticism.

It may be true that the primary motivation of the writers of the United States Constitution was the protection of their economic interests. But it is also true that they assumed that participation in public life required the capacity to negotiate the printed word. To them, mature citizenship was not conceivable without sophisticated literacy, which is why the voting age in most states was set at twenty-one, and why Jefferson saw in universal education America’s best hope. And that is also why the voting restrictions against those who owned no property were frequently overlooked, but not one’s inability to read.

Telegraphy made relevance irrelevant. The abundant flow of information had very little or nothing to do with those to whom it was addressed; that is, with any social or intellectual context in which their lives were embedded. The phrase ‘water everywhere without a drop to drink’ may serve as a metaphor of a decontextualized information environment: In a sea of information, there was very little of it to use. A man in Maine and a man in Texas could converse, but not about anything either of them knew or cared very much about. The telegraph may have made the country into “one neighborhood,” but it was a peculiar one, populated by strangers who knew nothing but the most superficial facts about each other.

Since we live today in just such a neighborhood—now sometimes called a “global village”—you may get a sense of what is meant by context-free information by asking yourself the following question: How often does it occur that information provided you—on morning radio or television, or in the morning newspaper, or by the morning scroll through your social media feed—causes you to alter your plans for the day, or to take some action you would not otherwise have taken, or provides insight into some problem you are required to solve? For most of us, news of the weather will sometimes have such consequences; for investors, news of the stock market; perhaps an occasional story about a crime will do it, if by chance the crime occurred near where you live or involved someone you know. But most of our daily news is inert, consisting of information that gives us something to

talk—or be outraged—about but cannot lead to any meaningful action. This fact is the principal legacy of the telegraph: By generating an abundance of irrelevant information, it dramatically altered what may be called the ‘information-action ratio.’

What steps do you plan to take to reduce the conflict in the Middle East? Or the rates of inflation, crime, and unemployment? What are your plans for preserving the environment or reducing the risk of nuclear war? What do you plan to do about NATO, Big Oil, the CIA, the NSA, affirmative action, and Big Tech? I shall take the liberty of answering for you: You plan to do nothing about them. You may, of course, cast a ballot for someone who claims to have some plans, as well as the power to act. But this you can do only once every two or four years by giving one hour of your time, hardly a satisfying means of expressing the broad range of opinions you hold. Voting, we might even say, is the next to last refuge of the politically impotent. Or perhaps you’ll give your opinion to a pollster, who will get a version of it through a desiccated question, and then will submerge it in a Niagara of similar opinions, and convert them into—what else?—another piece of news. But maybe you’ll just talk about it on social media where it will be analyzed, filtered, turned into data about you and quite possibly—yes, you guessed it—turned into a piece of news.

Thus, we have here a great loop of impotence: The news elicits from you a variety of opinions about which you can do nothing except to offer them as more news, about which you can do nothing.

We may say then that the contribution of the telegraph to public discourse was to dignify irrelevance and amplify impotence. But this was not all: Telegraphy also made public discourse essentially incoherent. It brought into being a world of broken time and broken attention. The principal strength of the telegraph was its capacity to move information, not collect it, explain it, or analyze it. In this respect, telegraphy was the exact opposite of typography. Books, for example, are an excellent container for the accumulation, quiet scrutiny, and organized analysis of information and ideas. It takes time to write a book, and to read one; time to discuss its contents and to make judgments about their merit, including the form of their presentation. A book is an attempt to make thought permanent and to contribute to the great conversation conducted by authors of the past.

Therefore, civilized people everywhere consider the burning of a book a vile form of anti-intellectualism. But the telegraph demands that we burn its contents. The value of telegraphy is undermined by applying the tests of permanence, continuity, or coherence. The telegraph and now social media and the clickbait internet is suited only to the flashing of messages, each to be quickly replaced by a more up-to-date message. Facts push other facts

into and then out of consciousness at speeds that neither permit nor require evaluation. To the telegraph, intelligence meant knowing of lots of things, not knowing about them.

Ever since the process was named it has been the custom to speak of photography as a 'language.' The metaphor is risky because it tends to obscure the fundamental differences between the two modes of conversation. To begin with, photography is a language that speaks only in particularities. Its vocabulary of images is limited to concrete representation. Unlike words and sentences, the photograph does not present to us an idea or concept about the world, except as we use language itself to convert the image to idea. By itself, a photograph cannot deal with the unseen, the remote, the internal, the abstract. It does not speak of 'man,' only of a man; not of 'tree,' only of a tree. You cannot produce a photograph of 'nature,' any more than a photograph of 'the sea.' You can only photograph a particular fragment of the here-and-now—a cliff of a certain terrain, in a certain condition of light; a wave at a moment in time, from a particular point of view.

And just as 'nature' and 'the sea' cannot be photographed, such larger abstractions as truth, honor, love, falsehood cannot be talked about in the lexicon of pictures. For 'showing of' and 'talking about' are two very different kinds of processes. Pictures need to be recognized, words need to be understood. This means that the photograph presents the world as object; language, the world as idea. For even the simplest act of naming a thing is an act of thinking—of comparing one thing with others, selecting certain features in common, ignoring what is different, and making an imaginary category. There is no such thing in nature as 'man' or 'tree.' The universe offers no such categories or simplifications; only flux and infinite variety. The photograph documents and celebrates the particularities of this infinite variety. Language makes them comprehensible.

In a peculiar way, the photograph was the perfect complement to the flood of telegraphic news-from-nowhere that threatened to submerge readers in a sea of facts from unknown places about strangers with unknown faces. For the photograph gave a concrete reality to the strange-sounding datelines, and attached faces to the unknown names. Thus it provided the illusion, at least, that the news had a connection to something within one's sensory experience. It created an apparent context for the "news of the day." And the news of the day created a context for the photograph. But the sense of context created by the partnership of photograph and headline was, of course, entirely illusory.

You may get a better sense of what I mean here if you imagine a stranger's informing you that the illyx is a subspecies of vermiformplant with articulated leaves that flowers biannually on the island of Aldononjes.

And if you wonder aloud, ‘Yes, but what has that to do with anything?’ imagine that your informant replies, ‘But here is a photograph I want you to see,’ and hands you a picture labeled Illyx on Aldononjes. ‘Ah, yes,’ you might murmur, ‘now I see.’ It is true enough that the photograph provides a context for the sentence you have been given, and that the sentence provides a context of sorts for the photograph, and you may even believe for a day or so that you have learned something.

But if the event is entirely self-contained, devoid of any relationship to your past knowledge or future plans, if that is the beginning and end of your encounter with the stranger, then the appearance of context provided by the conjunction of sentence and image is illusory, and so is the impression of meaning attached to it. You will, in fact, have learned nothing—except perhaps to avoid strangers with photographs—and the illyx will fade from your mental landscape as though it had never been. At best you are left with an amusing bit of trivia, good for trading in cocktail party chatter or solving a crossword puzzle, but nothing more.

As Irna Phillips, inventor of the first radio soap operas, explained:

“Sincerity, honesty, genuineness—true values. If the woman listener is made conscious of these standards in the story itself, how little effort it would take to make her conscious of these same standards with the product advertising.”

In *Fortune* magazine, Phillips revealed her own recipe for engaging female listeners.

“You appeal to: the instinct for self-preservation, sex, the family instinct, or all three together if you can manage.”

Over the 1920s and 1930s, CBS produced a series of pamphlets emphasizing the power of broadcasting to reach into the minds of its listeners. One entitled “You Do What You’re Told” argued that since people tended to obey human voices, radio advertising would be more compelling than existing print forms. Radio, according to the pamphlet, “presents the living voice of authority,” giving it the “supple power to move people and mold them, to enlist them and command them.” It is worth remembering that we, who now swim in a sea of voices transmitted, recorded, and even synthesized, are conditioned to exhibit less of this reflex. This is the attention merchant’s eternal dilemma: too little advertising and the business can’t grow; too much and the listener grows resentful and tunes out. Though of course we have our own weaknesses to exploit.

Progressive critics argued that radio, once imagined as a public service, had been hijacked by commercial interests. Broadcast radio was, in its early days, thought of as a miracle of science, a sacred and blessed realm that ought be free from commercial intrusion. It was to be for the education, entertainment, and enlightenment of the public, and should always deliver “the best of everything” as John Reith of the BBC put it. But over the late 1920s and early 1930s the commercial radio network, embodied by NBC and CBS, had pulled radio very far from that original conception, and resistance was growing.

Bernays convinced CBS that nothing would burnish the CBS brand so much as building its reputation for news coverage. The old propagandist’s instinct was shrewd indeed. For news would give CBS executives license to brag to Congress how diligently CBS was covering public affairs, while at the same time having news coverage made it clear that the network had the power to favor or ignore individual politicians, making CBS a political force to be reckoned with. Ultimately CBS created what was the nation’s first broadcast news service to compete credibly with print.

Radio’s reach and power caused Minister Joseph Goebbels to declare German radio the “towering herald of National Socialism,” a force equal to creating a nation with “one public opinion.” His broadcast chief bragged that “with the radio we have destroyed the spirit of rebellion.” By means of this attention infrastructure, one man could at will reach the minds of the entire nation, whether they cared to hear him or not. The Third Reich was the first dictatorship which made the complete use of all technical means for domination of its own country. Through technical devices like the radio and loudspeaker, 80 million people were deprived of independent thought. It was thereby possible to subject them to the will of one man.

“It is also almost like a giant eye on life itself and can easily become the vehicle for masterpieces of a magnitude and power never achieved before in the arts, given the artists to create them and the audience to support them. For this very reason, it would also become the worst cultural opiate in history, buy and corrupt all talent, and completely degrade the sensibility of the country. Everything depends on the use to which television is put.”

Given TV’s novelty and limited offerings, early audiences were not fickle channel surfers. Contemporary accounts suggest something much more like the deeply immersive experience of motion pictures. Indeed, the lights were usually turned off for viewing, and there was little or no conversation. One

only got up to change the channel. “We ate our suppers in silence, spilling food, gaping in awe,” said one woman in 1950.

“We thought nothing of sitting in the darkness for hours at a stretch without exchanging a word except ‘who’s going to answer that confounded telephone?’”

With a great many Americans, sometimes even a majority, watching the same programs, exposed to the same information, every day—or if not exactly the same, the same theme with slight variations—a kind of convergence was inevitable. Sitting in silence, everyone would receive the same impulses and impressions, find themselves focused on the same centers of interest, experience the same feelings, have generally the same order of reactions or ideas, participate in the same myths—and all this at the same time.

That there were three channels to choose from hardly mattered:

“It was as if the whole nation had gathered at a gigantic three-ring circus. Those who watched the bicycle act believed their experience was different from that of those who watched the gorillas or the flame eater, but everyone was at the circus. What was missing was the exaltation of the rally, the thrill of losing oneself in the common experience for as we all watched from our separate living rooms, it was as if we sat in isolation booths, unable to exchange any responses about what we were all going through together. Everybody was engaged in the same act at the same time, but we were doing it alone. What a bizarre situation!”

The 1950s would be remembered as a decade of conformity, and while the reasons may be many and complex, one cannot exclude the most salient: the historically anomalous scale of attention capture effected by television, together with the homogeneity of the stuff created to do the capturing.

“It involves not this individual or that, but the industry as a whole. There is something radically wrong with the fundamental national policy under which television operates. There is no competition in television except among competitors trying to sell the attention of their audiences for profit. As a result, while television is supposed to be ‘free,’ it has in fact become the creature, the servant, and indeed the prostitute, of merchandising.”

It is interesting to consider what vision the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s might have achieved if it could have reversed the commercialization of human attention. Its leaders aspired to an age when commercial television and its advertising would face mass indifference and wilt into irrelevance. Once people had tuned out the establishment sources of information, advertising would be recognized as a form of propaganda and carefully avoided. Starved of requisite attention, it would collapse as it nearly did in the 1930s. In its place, the public mind would attend to realities that weren't commercial contrivances—nature, spiritual paths, friends, family, and lovers. Media, if any were needed, would be things like live concerts or perhaps programming in the public interest.

A cynic might say the 1960s vision of the alternative future was just sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, with, perhaps, some public radio thrown in. There's little question that the revolt of the 1960s did lead part of a generation away from the attention merchants of the 1950s. But industry calibrated an effective response and perhaps ultimately read the public mood more accurately than any guru. For they had detected the essence of the spirit of liberation: for most people it was not an end of desire (as in some Buddhist sense), or a wish for solitary withdrawal (in a monastic sense), or even, as Leary had hoped, a spiritual longing equal to motivating an inward turn. Rather, after decades of relative conformity and one of ultimate conformity, what had been uncorked was powerful individual desires and the will to express them. Above all, most simply wanted to feel more like an individual. And that was a desire industry could cater to, just like any other.

The most confident among the advertisers knew that the 1960s would not extinguish consumerism, for a simple reason: desire's most natural endpoint is consumption, and advertisers, after honing their art for half a century, knew how to convert all manner of desire into demand for products. And young people's desires were no exception.

“They [the hippies] are in the peak acquisitive years, and their relative affluence enables them to consume goods and services at a rate unheard of for their age level.”

Of course as we now know, the promise of liberation would be used for further repression. Liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination, for the free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves, and free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear. This is where an intellectual loses his guruship: leading his followers toward a conceptual bridge too far. If the people wanted

liberation, and if Pepsi was selling it, most people seemed to think, why not just buy it from them?

The main reason why the hoped-for attentional revolution of the 1960s and 1970s ultimately failed had nothing to do with the message, which was, in fact, powerfully delivered and readily embraced. Rather, the failure was owing to one often unremarked fact: over the 1960s and 1970s, most people simply did not stop watching television.

“The public was as they had been for years, sitting home in their living rooms, staring at blue light, their minds filled with TV images. One movement became the same as the next one; one media action merged with the fictional program that followed; one revolutionary line was erased by the next commercial, leading to a new level of withdrawal, unconcern, and stasis. In the end, the sixties were revealed as the flash of light before the bulb goes out.”

Even a show as beloved and hilariously subversive as MASH can be understood to exemplify the kind of opposition that actually perpetuates the status quo. Alan Alda starred as Hawkeye Pierce, an irreverent but deeply humane surgeon sick of the military and uptight people in general. Here was a man of the 1950s that any partisan of the counterculture could love. It was an example of a show that let the writers feel they were still reaching the people with an occasional revolutionary message, fitted ingeniously into the dialogue. At the same time, MASH kept tens of millions of Americans, would-be counterculturals among them, faithfully tuned to commercial television during prime time. If the contest really was, as Leary and others proposed, for the minds of the people, it was lost when America renewed its contract with the attention merchants. The broadcasters had adjusted the terms: now it was free, relevant entertainment in exchange for attention. But in the end, everyone would remain easily accessible to advertisers.

As for the advertisers themselves, Pepsi had shown that they could make the adjustment to the new sensibility even more nimbly than the broadcasters. A gang of hip new “revolutionary” agencies with young staff surged to success with innovative ways of doing things that mimicked the new younger thinking. These agencies—“the creatives”—mounted a serious challenge to the approaches, and the billings, of advertising firms established over the 1910s through 1920s and still dominant through the 1950s.

What was the secret to how the attention industries cheated death yet again, even when the whole zeitgeist of the late 1960s and ‘70s was seemingly

against them? The success may finally be put down to the saving logic of capitalism. For what makes capitalism so powerful is its resilience and adaptability. The game is never lost, only awaiting the next spin of the wheel. As a mode of production, capitalism is a perfect chameleon; it has no disabling convictions but profit and so can cater to any desire, even those inimical to it. In the sixties hip became central to the way American capitalism understood itself and explained itself to the public. And so even disgust with the falseness, shoddiness, and everyday oppressions of consumer society could be enlisted to drive the ever-accelerating wheels of consumption.

Show business is not entirely without an idea of excellence, but its main business is to please the crowd, and its principal instrument is artifice. If politics is like show business, then the idea is not to pursue excellence, clarity, or honesty but to appear as if you are, which is another matter altogether. And what the other matter is can be expressed in one word: advertising.

The television commercial is not at all about the character of products to be consumed. It is about the character of the consumers of products. Images of movie stars and famous athletes, of serene lakes and macho fishing trips, of elegant dinners and romantic interludes, of happy families packing their station wagons for a picnic in the country—these tell nothing about the products being sold. But they tell everything about the fears, fancies, and dreams of those who might buy them. What the advertiser needs to know is not what is right about the product but what is wrong about the buyer. And so, the balance of business expenditures shifts from product research to market research. The television commercial has oriented business away from making products of value and toward making consumers feel valuable, which means that the business of business has now become pseudo-therapy. The consumer is a patient assured by psycho-dramas.

As Xenophanes remarked twenty-five centuries ago, men always make their gods in their own image. But to this, television politics has added a new wrinkle: Those who would be gods refashion themselves into images the viewers would have them be.

‘Rear-view mirror thinking’ describes the assumption that a new medium is merely an extension or amplification of an older one; that an automobile, for example, is only a fast horse, or an electric light a powerful candle. To make such a mistake in the matter at hand is to misconstrue entirely how television redefines the meaning of public discourse. Television does not extend or amplify literate culture. It attacks it. If television is a continuation of anything, it is of a tradition begun by the telegraph and photograph in the mid-nineteenth century, not by the printing press in the fifteenth. What is television? What kinds of conversations does it permit? What are the

intellectual tendencies it encourages? What sort of culture does it produce?

But it is not time constraints alone that produce such fragmented and discontinuous language. When a television show is in process, it is very nearly impermissible to say, 'Let me think about that' or 'I don't know' or 'What do you mean when you say...?' or 'From what sources does your information come?' This type of discourse not only slows down the tempo of the show but creates the impression of uncertainty or lack of finish. It tends to reveal people in the act of thinking, which is as disconcerting and boring on television as it is on a Las Vegas stage. Thinking does not play well on television, a fact that television directors discovered long ago. There is not much to see in it. It is, in a phrase, not a performing art. But television demands a performing art, and so what the networks gave us was a picture of men of sophisticated verbal skills and political understanding being brought to heel by a medium that requires them to fashion performances rather than ideas.

As more and more of the population fills more and more hours of the day with entertainment, this leaves fewer hours for activities that promote intelligence, compassion, or interest in anything that falls outside their own Internet-dominated microcosms. When one's "accomplishments" in life and self-image become focused on things like scoring the most kills in a video war game or being able to see one's favorite rock star in person or having one's favorite sports team win a game—all possible before the Internet but now carried to much greater extremes—what passion is left for the real world, for the problems of fellow human beings? Would it be taking the point too far to suggest a parallel with the Romans, who kept the masses distracted from real-world problems by enticing them into the Colosseum to watch such spectacles as gladiators battling to the death?

The difference with football is the ethical compliance, particularly for casual spectators with little emotional investment. The audience for the Brickyard 400 is a marginalized audience; they all know what happens when cars crash into walls at 140 mph. The audience for Cheyenne Frontier Days is a marginalized audience; they all know what happens when a 2,200-pound bull lands on a cowboy's neck. These are fully invested fans who aren't alarmed or confused by the inherent dangers of their niche obsession. They know what they're getting into. No UFC fan is shocked by the sight of a man knocked unconscious. Football, however, appeals to a swath of humanity many magnitudes larger. It attracts people who haven't necessarily considered the ramifications of what they're witnessing—people who think they're relaxing at home on a Sunday afternoon, nonchalantly watching the same low-stakes distraction as everyone else. So when this type of person is suddenly confronted with the realization that what he is watching might

be killing the people who participate—or if he was to actually see a player killed on the field, which seems increasingly inevitable—he is overcome with guilt and discomfort (and bewilderment over how he's supposed to feel about economically supporting a game that mildly terrifies him).

The sheer scale of football's popularity likewise creates an opportunity for media grandstanding—self-righteous pundits denounce football the same way histrionic gatekeepers denounced booze in 1919 and *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1985. Over time, this fusion of public discomfort and media theatrics generates a political meaning. It now means something to support football. Those who self-identify as enlightened believe it means something tragic. And in ten years, that sentiment might reflect most of the US population. But it won't represent all of the population. It will never represent all of the population, even if it becomes the dominant way to think and feel. And that will make it unkillable. When any idea becomes symbolically dominant, those who dislike the idea will artificially inflate the necessity of whatever it opposes. This is why I can imagine a world where football continues to thrive—not in spite of its violence, but because of it. And not in some latent, unspoken context—openly, and without apology.

In the present moment, football operates as two parallel silos, both of which are shooting skyward and gaining momentum. One silo reflects the overall popularity of the sport, which increases every year. The other silo houses the belief that the game is morally reprehensible, a sentiment that swells every day. Somehow, these two silos never collide. But let's assume such a collision eventually happens, and the silo of popularity collapses on impact. It stops rocketing upward and is obliterated into a pile of bricks. That brick pile will be titanic, and it won't disappear. Neither will the people who built that silo, or those who lived inside it, or those who grew up worshiping its architecture. So they will use those bricks as weapons. They will throw them at the other silo. And since the game will no longer appeal to the casual fan, certain innate problems will turn into strengths.

There is a reason why smart people tend to be wrong as often as their not-so-smart peers—they work from the flawed premise that their worldview is standard. The contemporary stance on football's risk feels unilateral, because nobody goes around saying, 'Modern life is not violent enough.' Yet this sentiment quietly exists. And what those who believe it say instead is, "I love football. It's the last bastion of hope for toughness in America." It's not difficult to imagine a future where the semantic distance between those statements is nonexistent. And if that happens, football will change from a popular leisure pastime to an unpopular political necessity.

Football could lose 75 percent of its audience and matter just as much as it does now, assuming the people who stick with the game view it as a

sanctuary from a modern world they distrust. Over time, it could really, really mean something to love football, in a context that isn't related to sports at all. It could be a signifier for an idea that can't be otherwise expressed—the belief that removing physicality from the public sphere does not remove it from reality, and that attempts to do so weaken the republic. Football could become a dead game to the casual sports fan without losing a fraction of its cultural influence. It could become the only way for a certain kind of person to safely access the kind of controlled violence he sees as a critical part of life.

Should physical differences matter more than intellectual differences? Should the ability to intimidate another person be rewarded? Is it acceptable to scream at a person in order to shape his behavior? Should masculinity, in any context, be prioritized? The growing consensus regarding all of these questions is no. Yet these are ingrained aspects of competitive sports, all the way back to Sparta. A key reason college football came into existence in the late nineteenth century was that veterans who'd fought in the Civil War feared the next generation of men would be soft and ill prepared for the building of a republic 'We gotta give these boys something to do,' these veterans believed. 'Hell, they'll probably go through life without killing anyone!' We inject sports with meaning because they are supposed to mean something. So what happens when the things they signify are no longer desirable traits? It would mean the only value sports offer is their value as an aerobic entertainment commodity. And that would make it the equivalent of a fad, with the inherently finite life span all fads possess.

The spectator-viewer gap for the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl was massive—the human attendance was under 18,000 while the TV audience approached 1.5 million. This prompted USA Today to examine the bizarre possibility of future bowl games being played inside gigantic television studios, devoid of crowds. Crazy as that may sound, there would be some real practicality to this. With no concern for a live audience, the entire event could be constructed to maximize the TV experience. The whole facility could serve as a camera, and the visuals would be unprecedented. But this kind of fantastical speculation speaks to a broader change in how sports are now perceived. It reframes football as a simulation, not that far removed from a movie. The sole purpose of the event would be to fill a three-hour window of programming on ESPN2, and—if a better, cheaper alternative could be aired in its place—the game would have no purpose at all. Yes, the players would still be real. Yes, the hitting would still hurt. But if all this is merely a distraction to stare at on a pixelated screen, why would the human element remain essential? Robot players would work just as well. CGI players would work even better. It could literally be a video game,

controlled and manipulated by a computer. Then we wouldn't have any problems at all. It would just be a TV show that provides an opportunity for gambling.

There is nothing wrong with entertainment. As some psychiatrist once put it, we all build castles in the air. The problems come when we try to live in them. The communications media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with telegraphy and photography at their center, called the peek-a-boo world into existence, but we did not come to live there until television. Television gave the epistemological biases of the telegraph and the photograph their most potent expression, raising the interplay of image and instancy to an exquisite and dangerous perfection. And it brought them into the home.

As recently as a decade ago one might have said we were by now well into a fourth or fifth generation of children for whom television has been their first and most accessible teacher and, for many, their most reliable companion and friend. To put it plainly, television was the command center of the new epistemology. There was no audience so young that it is barred from television. There was no poverty so abject that it must forgo television. There was no education so exalted that it is not modified by television. And most important of all, there was no subject of public interest—politics, news, education, religion, science, sports—that did not find its way to television. Which means that all public understanding of these subjects was shaped by the biases of television. Television was the command center in subtler ways as well. Our use of other media, for example, was largely orchestrated by television. Through it we learned what telephone system to use, what movies to see, what books, records, and magazines to buy, what radio programs to listen to. Television arranged our communications environment for us in ways that no other medium had the power to do.

Until the internet. The internet provides all of these things along with the increased democratization of information dissemination. This has allowed the information overload and ability to be manipulated to increase dramatically for the average person.

All that has happened is that the public has adjusted to incoherence and been amused into indifference. Which is why Aldous Huxley would not in the least be surprised by the story. Indeed, he prophesied its coming. He believed that it is far more likely that the Western democracies will dance and dream themselves into oblivion than march into it, single file and manacled. Huxley grasped, as Orwell did not, that it is not necessary to conceal anything from a public insensible to contradiction and narcotized by technological diversions. Although Huxley did not specify that television would be our main line to the drug followed by the even more effective

internet, he would have no difficulty accepting the observation that these are the soma of his *Brave New World*.

We're absolutely dying to give ourselves away to something. To run, to escape, somehow. And there's some kinds of escape that end up, in a twist, making you confront yourself even more. And then there are other kinds that say, 'Give me money, and in return I will make you forget who you are, that you have a pimple on your cheek, and that your gas bill is due.' And that that's fine, in low doses. But we don't stop at low doses.

The technology gets better and better at doing what it does, which is seduce us into being incredibly dependent on it, so that advertisers can be more confident that we will watch their advertisements. And as a technology system, it's amoral. It doesn't have a responsibility to care about us one whit more than it does: It's got a job to do. The moral job is ours.

Why are we watching five to ten hours a day of this? I mean, why do some people get 75 percent of their calories from candy? That's something that a little tiny child would do, and that would be all right, it's a natural exploration of limits. But we're post-pubescent. Somewhere along the line, we're supposed to have grown up. But if some of the most intelligent, promising, and educated people go into designing the candy, creating the demand for candy, then it's impossible to turn down.

NCIS, CSI, Bones—these really commercial, really reductive shows that we so love to sneer at. Are also tremendously compelling. Because the predictability in popular art, the really formulaic stuff, the stuff that makes no attempt to surprise or do anything artistic, is so profoundly soothing. Even the densest or most tired viewer can see what's coming. And it gives you a sense of order, that everything's going to be all right, that this is a narrative that will take care of you, and won't in any way challenge you. It's like being wrapped in a chamois blanket and nestled against a big, generous tit, you know? And that, OK, art-wise maybe not the greatest art. But the function it provides is deep in a certain way. That all this stuff is like deadly serious and really deep all the time. I mean, it doesn't mean that you should go around being some kind of scholar of pop culture and dismantling all the stuff. But that it's—that we find, that art finds a way to take care of you, and take part. Kind of despite itself.

“I think one of the reasons that I feel empty after watching a lot of TV, and one of the things that makes TV seductive, is that it gives the illusion of relationships with people. It's a way to have people in the room talking and being entertaining, but it doesn't require anything of me. I mean, I can see them, they can't see me. And, and, they're there for me, and I can, I can

receive from the TV, I can receive entertainment and stimulation. Without having to give anything back but the most tangential kind of attention. And that is very seductive.

The problem is it's also very empty. Because one of the differences about having a real person there is that number one, I've gotta do some work. Like, he pays attention to me, I gotta pay attention to him. You know: I watch him, he watches me. The stress level goes up. But there's also, there's something nourishing about it, because I think like as creatures, we've all got to figure out how to be together in the same room. And so TV is like candy in that it's more pleasurable and easier than the real food. But it also doesn't have any of the nourishment of real food.

What has happened to us, that we're now willing—and I do this too—that I'm willing to derive enormous amounts of my sense of community and awareness of other people, from television? But I'm not willing to undergo the stress and awkwardness and potential shit of dealing with real people. And that as the Internet grows, and as our ability to be linked up, like—I mean, you and I coulda done this through e-mail, and I never woulda had to meet you, and that woulda been easier for me. Right?

Like, at a certain point, we're gonna have to build some machinery, inside our guts, to help us deal with this. Because the technology is just gonna get better and better and better and better. And it's gonna get easier and easier, and more and more convenient, and more and more pleasurable, to be alone with images on a screen, given to us by people who do not love us but want our money. Which is all right. In low doses, right? But if that's the basic main staple of your diet, you're gonna die. In a meaningful way, you're going to die."

What is the realest fake thing we've ever made on purpose? For as long as I can remember, whenever I watch any scripted TV show, part of my consciousness interrogates its relationship to reality. Could this happen? Does this look the way it would actually look? Does this work the way it would actually work? It does not matter if the details are factually impossible—if I'm watching *Game of Thrones*, I can readily accept that dragons exist. Yet I still wonder if the dragons on my TV are behaving in the way I believe real dragons would behave in reality. I still question the veracity of those dragons, and I instinctively analyze the real-world

plausibility of a scenario that's patently impossible. This is just the way I am, and I never had to try. So I am ready for this question.

We're not supposed to think about TV in this way. Television critics who obsess over the authenticity of picayune narrative details are like poetry professors consumed with penmanship. To attack *True Detective* or *Lost* or *Twin Peaks* as 'unrealistic' is a willful misinterpretation of the intent. We don't need television to accurately depict literal life, because life can literally be found by stepping outside. Television's only real-time responsibility is to entertain. But that changes as years start to elapse. We don't reinvestigate low culture with the expectation that it will entertain us a second time—the hope is that it will be instructive and revelatory, which sometimes works against the intentions of the creator.

Take, for example, a series like *Mad Men*: Here was a show set in the New York advertising world of the 1960s, with a dogged emphasis on precise cultural references and era-specific details. The unspoken goal of *Mad Men* was to depict how the sixties really were. And to the present-day *Mad Men* viewer, that's precisely how the show came across. The goal was achieved. But *Mad Men* defines the difference between ancillary verisimilitude and premeditated reconstruction. *Mad Men* cannot show us what life was like in the sixties. *Mad Men* can only show how life in the sixties came to be interpreted in the twenty-first century. Sociologically, *Mad Men* says more about the mind-set of 2007 than it does about the mind-set of 1967, in the same way *Gunsmoke* says more about the world of 1970 than the world of 1870. Compared to *The Andy Griffith Show* or *Gilligan's Island*, a mediated construct like *Mad Men* looks infinitely more authentic—but it can't be philosophically authentic, no matter how hard it tries. Its well-considered portrait of the sixties can't be more real than the accidental sixties rooted in any 1964 episode of *My Three Sons*. Because those 1964 accidents are what 1964 actually was.

My interest is utility. It's a formalist assessment, focusing on all the things a (normal) person is not supposed to (normally) be cognizant of while watching any given TV show. Particularly:

- The way the characters talk
- The machinations of the world the characters inhabit.
- The manner in which the show is filmed and presented
- The degree to which 'realness' is central to the show's ethos

That first quality is the most palpable and the least quantifiable. If anyone on a TV show employed the stilted, posh, mid-Atlantic accent of

stage actors, it would instantly seem preposterous; outside a few notable exceptions, the goal of televised conversation is fashionable naturalism. But vocal delivery is only a fraction of this equation. There's also the issue of word choice: It took decades for screenwriters to realize that no adults have ever walked into a tavern and said, "I'll have a beer," without noting what specific brand of beer they wanted (an interaction between Kyle MacLachlan and Laura Dern in the 1986 theatrical film *Blue Velvet* is the first time I recall seeing the overt recognition of this). What's even harder to compute is the relationship between a period's depiction of conversation and the way people of that period were talking in real life. Did the average American father in 1957 truly talk to his kids the way Ward Cleaver talked to Wally and the Beaver? It doesn't seem possible—but it was, in all likelihood, the way 1957 suburban fathers imagined they were speaking.

I classify "the machinations of the world" as the unspoken, internal rules that govern how characters exist. When these rules are illogical, the fictional world seems false; when the rules are rational, even a sci-fi fantasy realm can seem plausible. Throughout the 1970s, the most common narrative trope on a sitcom like *Three's Company* or *Laverne and Shirley* was "the misunderstanding"—a character infers incorrect information about a different character, and that confusion drives the plot. What always felt unreal about those scenarios was the way no one ever addressed these misunderstandings aloud, even when that was the obvious solution. The flawed machinations of the seventies sitcom universe required all misunderstandings to last exactly twenty-two minutes.

But when a show's internal rules are good, the viewer is convinced that they're seeing something close to life. When the rom-com series *Catastrophe* debuted on Amazon, a close friend tried to explain why the program seemed unusually true to him. "This is the first show I can ever remember," he said, "where the characters laugh at each other's jokes in a non-obnoxious way." This seemingly simple idea was, in fact, pretty novel—prior to *Catastrophe*, individuals on sitcoms constantly made hilarious remarks that no one seemed to notice were hilarious. For decades, this was an unspoken, internal rule: No one laughs at anything. So seeing characters laugh naturally at things that were plainly funny was a new level of realness.

The way a TV show is photographed and staged—this is point number three—are industrial attributes that take advantage of viewers' preexisting familiarity with the medium: When a fictional drama is filmed like a news documentary, audiences unconsciously absorb the action as extra-authentic; a scene shot from a single mobile perspective, like most of *Friday Night Lights*, always feels closer to reality than scenes captured with three stationary cameras, like most of *How I Met Your Mother*. It's a technical choice that

aligns with the fourth criterion, the extent to which the public recognition of authenticity informs the show's success (a realization that didn't happen in earnest until the 1980s, with shows like *Hill Street Blues*). Now, it's possible that—in two-hundred-fifty years—those last two points may be less meaningful to whoever is excavating these artifacts. Viewers with no relationship to TV won't be fooled by the perspective of the camera, and people living in a different time period won't intuitively sense the relationship between the world they're seeing and the world that was. But these points will still matter a little, because all four qualities are interrelated. They amplify each other. And whatever television program exemplifies these four qualities most successfully will ultimately have the most usefulness to whatever future people end up watching them. For these (yet-to-be-conceived) cultural historians, TV will be a portal into the past. It will be a way to psychically contact the late twentieth century with an intimacy and depth that can only come from visual fiction, without any need for imagination or speculation. It won't be a personal, interpretive experience, like reading a book; it will be like the book is alive. Nothing will need to be mentally conjured. The semi-ancient world will just be there, moving and speaking in front of them, unchanged by the sands of time.

All of which leads to one central question: What TV show will this be?

Removed from context, it's a question that can also be asked like this: What is the realest fake thing we've ever made on purpose?

But I know this matters. I know there is something critical here we're underestimating, and it has to do with television's ability to make the present tense exist forever, in a way no other medium ever has. It's not disposable, even if we want it to be. And someday, future potatoes will prove this.

Writing a blog and writing a book have almost no psychological relationship. They both involve a lot of typing, but that's about as far as it goes. A sentence in a book may be written a year before it's published, with the express intent that it will still make sense twenty years later. A sentence on the Internet is designed to last one day, usually the same day it's written. The next morning, it's overwritten again (by multiple writers). The Internet experience is not even that similar to daily newspaper writing, because there's no physical artifact to demarcate the significance of the original moment.

This limitation is not a failure. It proved to be an advantage. It naturally aligns with the early-adoption sensibility that informs everything else. Even when the Internet appears to be nostalgically churning through the cultural past, it's still hunting for 'old newness.' A familiar video clip from 1986 does not possess virality; what the medium desires is an obscure clip from 1985

that recontextualizes the familiar one. The result is a perpetual sense of now. It's a continual merging of the past with the present, all jammed into the same fixed perspective. This makes it seem like our current, temporary views have always existed, and that what we believe today is what people have always believed. There is no longer any distance between what we used to think and what we currently think, because our evolving vision of reality does not extend beyond yesterday. And this, somewhat nonsensically, is how we might be right: All we need to do is convince ourselves we always were. And now there's a machine that makes that easy.

"I am often wrong," wrote satirist and critic H. L. Mencken, a statement that would seem more disarming were it not for the fact that Mencken so often opened his quotations by suggesting his forthcoming thoughts were worthless.

"My prejudices are innumerable, and often idiotic. My aim is not to determine facts, but to function freely and pleasantly."

I get this. I understand what he's getting at, and sometimes I relate to it: Since our interior thoughts are (ultimately) arbitrary and meaningless, we might as well think whatever we prefer thinking. This was especially important to a guy like Mencken, who was against US participation in World War II and hated Franklin Roosevelt. He was quite willing to concede that his most intensely held opinions weren't based on factual data, so trying to determine what the factual data actually was would only make him depressed. It's a worldview that—even if expressed as sarcasm—would be extremely unpopular today. But it's quietly become the most natural way to think about everything, due to one sweeping technological evolution: We now have immediate access to all possible facts. Which is almost the same as having none at all.

Consider the nature of revisionism. He noted how—as a fifth-grader—he was told that the cause of the Civil War was slavery. Upon entering high school, he was told that the cause was not slavery, but economic factors. At college, he learned that it was not economic factors but acculturated regionalism. But if he had gone to graduate school, the answer to what caused the Civil War would (once again) be slavery. Now, the Civil War is the most critical event in American history, and race is the defining conflict of this country. It still feels very much alive, so it's not surprising that teachers and historians want to think about it on disparate micro and macro levels, even if the realest answer is the simplest answer. But the Internet allows us to do this with everything, regardless of a subject's significance. It can happen so rapidly that there's no sense the argument has even evolved, which generates an illusion of consistency.

There's a common philosophical debate about the nature of time. One side of the debate argues that time is happening in a linear fashion. This is easy to understand. The other side argues that all time is happening at once. This is difficult to comprehend. But replace the word 'time' with 'history,' and that phenomenon can be visualized on the Internet. If we think about the trajectory of anything—art, science, sports, politics—not as a river but as an endless, shallow ocean, there is no place for collective wrongness. All feasible ideas and every possible narrative exist together, and each new societal generation can scoop out a bucket of whatever antecedent is necessary to support their contemporary conclusions. When explained in one sentence, that prospect seems a little terrible. But maybe that's just because my view of reality is limited to river-based thinking.

During a period when many retired eighties-era pro wrestlers died—the Ultimate Warrior, Dusty Rhodes, Rowdy Roddy Piper, et cetera—the outpouring of media recognition regarding these deaths was significant. The obituaries framed these men as legends, and perhaps that's how they deserve to be framed. But what's been weird about this coverage is the unspoken viewpoint. Logically, it seems like a remembrance of Dusty Rhodes should include some version of the following: 'We didn't think this guy was important, but he was. Culturally, we were wrong about pro wrestling.' Because during the 1980s, almost no one thought pro wrestling mattered at all. Even the teenage males who loved it rarely took it seriously. But this is not how these remembrances were delivered. Instead, the unspoken viewpoint was of course these people were important, and of course we all accept and understand this, and of course there is nothing remotely strange about remembering Dusty Rhodes as a formative critic of Reagan-era capitalism. Somebody once believed this, which means it was possible for anyone to have believed this, which means everyone can retroactively adopt this view as what they've always understood to be true. No one was ever wrong about wrestling. We were always right about it.

Chapter Ten

Fame Fetish

“As a reporter, you live for those anecdotal mistakes. Mistakes are where you find hidden truths. But as a person, anecdotal mistakes define the experience of being misunderstood; anecdotal mistakes are used to make metaphors that explain the motives of a person who is sort of like you, but not really.”

Our need to feel social connection explains why people often embellish their relationships with other people. Every time you think of celebrities as close friends or imagine that you and your hunky mail carrier have a deep personal connection, you are creating what are called “parasocial relationships.” Unlike normal two-sided relationships, parasocial relationships are felt by only one person—but to that one person they are undoubtedly real, even when they involve characters on TV. Loneliness makes people imagine a loving bond with other minds, and this love can make even imaginary minds real.

Somehow, somewhere along the line, our natural inclination to learn from the most successful among us got twisted into doomed attempts to emulate people who might as well be mythic figures. The most famous actors have personal trainers, teams of graphic designers, and PR representatives whose sole goal is to hide every sign of aging and unmarketable personal habit from public view. No amount of crunches and face-lifts will turn you into a myth, or a god, and yet that’s what our most famous people have become.

When the old gods withdraw, the empty thrones cry out for a successor, and with good management, or even without management, almost any perishable bag of bones may be hoisted into the vacant seat.

“Other gods are either far away, or do not have ears, or do not exist, or pay no attention to us, whereas you we see present, not wooden or stone but real.”

We must draw a distinction between what might be called honest illusions and dishonest ones. When you make dinosaurs attack spaceships, no one

actually thinks that's real. Much as with a stage magician, half the fun is that everyone knows a trick is being played—they just don't know exactly how it's done. When you subtly enhance the appearance of celebrities, in contrast, you are trying to change viewers' unconscious assumptions about what everyday reality—in this case, of men's and women's bodies—ought to be like, so as to create an uncomfortable feeling that their lived reality is itself an inadequate substitute for the real thing. Where honest illusions add joy into the world, dishonest ones are intentionally aimed toward convincing people their worlds are a tawdry and miserable sort of place.

The fetish of celebrity permeates our own social lives, now that we are able to gaze at the carefully curated images and utterances of people we are actually acquainted with.

Whatever happens in the wiring of a brain that allows a young child to so easily pick up a second language, the digital natives have acquired a new way of absorbing and interacting with our wholly digital world.

“Social media has completely shaped the brains of the younger people I work with. One thing I am often mindful of in a session is this: I could be five or ten minutes into a conversation with a young person about the argument they have had with their friend or girlfriend, when I remember to ask whether this happened by text, phone, on social media, or face-to-face. More often the answer is, ‘text or social media.’ Yet in their telling of the story, this isn't apparent to me. It sounds like what I would consider a ‘real,’ face-to-face conversation. I always stop in my tracks and reflect. This person doesn't differentiate various modes of communication the way I do. The result is a landscape filled with disconnection and addiction.”

Our understanding of addiction is too narrow. We tend to think of addiction as something inherent in certain people—those we label as addicts. Heroin addicts in vacant row houses. Chain-smoking nicotine addicts. Pill-popping prescription-drug addicts. The label implies that they're different from the rest of humanity. They may rise above their addictions one day, but for now they belong to their own category. In truth, addiction is produced largely by environment and circumstance. Steve Jobs knew this. He kept the iPad from his kids because, for all the advantages that made them unlikely substance addicts, he knew they were susceptible to the iPad's charms. These entrepreneurs recognize that the tools they promote—engineered to be irresistible—will ensnare users indiscriminately. There isn't a bright line

between addicts and the rest of us. We're all one product or experience away from developing our own addictions.

To put it bluntly, if I kidnap you, tie you down, and shoot you up with heroin for two months, I can create physical dependence and withdrawal symptoms—but only if you go out and use after I free you will you actually become an addict. Addiction isn't about breaking your brain, or hijacking your brain, or damaging your brain. People can be addicted to behaviors, and even to the experience of love. Addiction is really about the relationship between the person and the experience. It isn't enough to ply someone with a drug or a behavior—that person also has to learn that the experience is a viable treatment for whatever ails them psychologically.

Wanting is much harder to defeat than liking. When people make decisions, they privilege wanting over liking. Wanting is much more robust and big and broad and powerful. Liking is anatomically tiny and fragile—it's easily disrupted and it occupies only a very small part of the brain. In contrast, it's not easy to disrupt the activation of an intense want.

There is an extremely simple, highly amusing, and instructive parlor game which can be played at any party by arranging for the auction of a dollar. The auctioneer auctions off a dollar bill to the highest bidder, with the understanding that both the highest bidder and the second highest bidder will pay. If one person is willing to pay eighty cents for the dollar bill, and another person, the second-highest bidder, is willing to pay seventy cents, the auctioneer takes in one dollar and fifty cents—a tidy profit of fifty cents. Both bidders pay, but only the highest bidder gets the dollar bill. This is a great deal, obviously, because she's paying eighty cents for a bill that's literally worth a dollar. For the second-highest bidder, though, it's a terrible deal. He pays seventy cents for precisely nothing.

I played this game in my lecture, but I auctioned off a twenty-dollar bill. Bids started at one dollar, and rose in increments of one dollar. A dozen voices immediately shouted “one dollar!” because paying a dollar for a twenty-dollar bill is a great investment. I heard “two dollars!” and then “three dollars!” Some of the students stopped bidding early on, but others continued past ten dollars, on toward the magic twenty-dollar mark.

When you watch people taking part, you can see on their faces the exact moment when they realize that the game is a trap. When the number of active bidders inevitably drops to just two, one of those people has to pay for absolutely nothing. For example:

Person A: Sixteen dollars!

Person B: Seventeen dollars!

... *pause*...

Person A: Eighteen dollars!

Person B: Nineteen dollars!

Were this a normal auction, the game would end here. There's no reason for Person A to shout out 'Twenty dollars!' unless he really doesn't like Person B and would rather make zero profit—paying twenty dollars for a twenty-dollar bill—than watch Person B earn a dollar.

But this is a trap, and so the bidding escalates:

Person A: Twenty dollars!

... *pause*...

Person B: Twenty-one dollars!

... *longer pause*...

Person A: Twenty-two dollars!

... *even longer pause*...

Person B (*more quietly*): Twenty-three dollars.

Sometimes the game goes on to triple or even quadruple the bill's worth.

No one wants to pay a huge sum of money for nothing, which makes the Twenty Dollar Auction Game a terrific way to raise money for charity. The Dollar Auction game shows that an early hook fuels many addictive behaviors. The experience seems innocuous at first, but eventually you realize that things might end badly. For the students, the hook was the slim chance of winning twenty dollars at a heavy discount.

Humans learn empathy and understanding by watching how their actions affect other people. Empathy can't flourish without immediate feedback, and it's a very slow-developing skill.

When a society churns out millions of lonely, overworked children, why wouldn't they turn to a boundless source of companionship and escape? That seems like a rational response to their disaffection. What brings about their undoing isn't that they're suffering from a disease, but rather that this digital world is so clearly superior to the real world they're supposed to be inhabiting instead. The teens themselves recognize this. They're sophisticated in ways that escape the adults who grew up in a relatively primitive world.

Some argue that social media creates a "Filter Bubble." The platform's algorithms supply us with the material that we like to read and will feel

moved to share. It might seem easy to see the intellectual and political perils of this impulse. The algorithms unwittingly supply readers with texts and videos that merely confirm deeply felt beliefs and biases; the algorithms suppress contrary opinions that might agitate a user. Liberals are deluged with liberal opinions; vegetarians are presented with endless vegetarian agitprop; the alt-right is fed alt-right garbage; and so on. The algorithms shield us from the sort of challenging disagreement that might change our minds or help us to better understand the views of our fellow citizens.

But, is the change not simply that there are now more diverse bubbles? How was the domination of media by a select few corporations not at least as bad? The establishment has always forced bubbles onto the masses, however now the masses have a chance to break free of that. Of course the danger does exist of creating one's own bubble, but this is clearly still better than having one involuntarily imposed on you. What many seem to in fact be objecting to is the democratization of gatekeeping.

There are two distinct kinds of social media, one is real names and the other is avatar based. The real name one is the one that causes the problems because it focuses on attacks on real people and peer pressure marketing and other addictive elements—really quite bad, in the way it is applied—that are actively socially evil. Pseudonym-based social media is entirely different, right off the bat, no real names, all effectively make believe and anonymous, just people making up stuff and playing with social media.

Real name social media pretends to be The News rather than a fabrication of the news—marketing made to look like news—and the fake identities of influencers who the person portrays themselves as, rather than how they really are. They are in reality the for-profit publishers of propaganda, marketing lies as the truth. As publishers should be held fully legally liable for the content they publish. With avatar based social media, from the start, the identity is specifically and purposefully fake, a thing to play with on social media, it is not your identity, it is its own fantasy play identity.

So the comparison, one for fun and play, essentially the core truth or fiction as the players choose to play; the other, a hostile den of hate and lies, where people attack each other, where corporate PR fakes troll forums with their lies, where politicians pretend to be someone they are not, where lies are wall to wall, pretending to be the truth, a sick exercise in psychopathic marketing. Go to real name social media to torture yourself, to addict yourself to little natural opioid hits of empty fake approval. You are the dog repeatedly kicked who desperately keeps going back for the entirely fake pat because it's all you seem to have.

People often say that online behavior would improve if every comment system forced people to use their real names. It sounds like it should be

true—surely nobody would say mean things if they faced consequences for their actions? Yet the balance of experimental evidence over the past thirty years suggests that this is not the case. Not only would removing anonymity fail to consistently improve online community behavior—forcing real names in online communities could also increase discrimination and worsen harassment. We need to change our entire approach to the question. Our concerns about anonymity are overly-simplistic; system design can't solve social problems without actual social change.

The idea that anonymity is the real problem with the internet is based in part on misreadings of theories formed more than thirty years ago. In the early 1980s, many executives were unsure if they should allow employees to use computers and email. Managers worried that allowing employees to communicate across the company would enable labor organizing, conflict, and inefficiency by replacing formal corporate communication with informal digital conversations. As companies debated email, a group of social psychologists published experiments and speculations on the effects of “computer-mediated communication” in teams. Their articles inspired decades of valuable research and offered an early popular argument that anonymity might be a source of social problems online.

In one experiment, the researchers asked computer science students who were complete strangers to make group decisions about career advice. They hosted deliberations around a table, through anonymous text chat, or through chat messages that displayed names. They also compared real-time chat to email. They found that while online decisions were more equitable, the decisions also took longer. Students also used more swear words and insults in chat conversations on average. But the researchers did not find a difference between the anonymous and non-anonymous groups. Writing about unanswered questions for future research, they speculated in 1984 that since computers included less information on social context, online communications might increase social conflict and disputes with employers. As these speculations became cited thousands of times, the call for more research was often taken as scientific fact. Their later, correlational findings were also misinterpreted as true effects. Along the way, their nuanced appeal for changes in social norms was lost and two misconceptions became common:

1. Social problems could be attributed to the design of computer systems.
2. Anonymity is to blame.

These ideas aren't reflected in the research. In 2016, a systematic review of 16 lab studies found that on average, people are actually more sensitive

to group norms when they are less identifiable to others. While some non-causal studies have found associations between anonymity and disinhibited behavior, this correlation probably results from the technology choices of people who are already intending conflict or harm.

Under lab conditions, people do behave somewhat differently in conversations under different kinds of social identifiability, something psychologists call a “deindividuation effect.” Despite the experimental evidence, the misconception of online anonymity as a primary cause of social problems has stuck. Since the 1980s, anonymity has become an easy villain to blame for whatever fear people hold about social technology, even though lab experiments now point in a different direction.

Beyond the lab, what else does research tell us about information disclosure and online behavior? Roughly half of US adult victims of online harassment already know who their attacker is, according a nationally-representative study in 2014. The study covered a range of behaviors from name calling to threats and domestic abuse. Even if harassment related to protected identities could be “solved” in one effort to move to ‘real names,’ more than half of US harassment victims, over 16 million adults, would be unaffected.

Conflict, harassment, and discrimination are social and cultural problems, not just online community problems. In societies including the US where violence and mistreatment of women, people of color, and marginalized people is common, we can expect similar problems in people’s digital interactions. Lab and field experiments continue to show the role that social norms play in shaping individual behavior; if the norms favor harassment and conflict, people will be more likely to follow. While most research and design focuses on changing the behavior of individuals, we may achieve better results by focusing on changing climates of conflict and prejudice.

Revealing personal information exposes people to greater levels of harassment and discrimination. While there is no conclusive evidence that displaying names and identities will reliably reduce social problems, many studies have documented the problems it creates. When people’s names and photos are shown on a platform, people who provide a service to them—drivers, hosts, buyers—reject transactions from people of color and charge them more. Revealing marital status on DonorsChoose caused donors give less to students with women teachers, in fields where women were a minority. Gender- and race-based harassment are only possible if people know a person’s gender and/or race, and real names often give strong indications around both of these categories. Requiring people to disclose that information forces those risks upon them.

Companies that store personal information for business purposes also

expose people to potentially serious risks, especially when that information is leaked. In the early 2010s, poorly-researched narratives about the effects of anonymity led to conflicts over real-name policies known as “Nymwars.” This provided the justification for more advanced advertising-based business models to develop, which collect more of people’s personal information in the name of reducing online harm. Several high-profile hackings of websites have revealed the risks involved in trusting companies with your personal information.

We also have to better understand if there is a trade-off between privacy and resources for public safety. Since platforms that collect more personal information have high advertising revenues, they can hire hundreds of staff to work on online safety. Paradoxically, platforms that protect people’s identities have fewer resources for protecting users. Since it’s not yet possible to compare rates of harassment between platforms, we cannot know which approach works best on balance.

It’s not just for trolls: identity protections are often the first line of defense for people who face serious risks online. According to a US nationally-representative report by the Data & Society Institute, 43% of online harassment victims have changed their contact information and 26% disconnected from online networks or devices to protect themselves. When people do withdraw, they are often disconnected from the networks of support they need to survive harassment. Pseudonymity is a common protective measure. One study on the reddit platform found that women, who are more likely to receive harassment, also use multiple pseudonymous identities at greater rates than men.

Requirements of so-called “real names” misunderstand how people manage identity across multiple social contexts, exposing vulnerable people to risks. Teenagers commonly manage multiple nickname-based Facebook accounts for different social contexts. Requiring a single online identity can collapse those contexts in embarrassing or damaging ways. In one instance a college admissions officer considered rejecting a black applicant after seeing gang symbols on the student’s social media page. The admissions officer hadn’t considered that the symbols might not have revealed the student’s intrinsic character; posting them might have been a way to survive in a risky situation. People who are exploring LGB and transgender identities often manage multiple accounts to prevent disastrous collapses of context, safety practices that some platforms disallow.

Clear social norms can reduce problems even when people’s names and other identifying information aren’t visible. Social norms are our beliefs about what other people think is acceptable, and norms aren’t de-activated by anonymity. We learn them by observing other people’s behavior and

being told what's expected.

People sometimes reveal their identities during conflicts in order to increase their influence and gain approval from others on their side. News comments, algorithmic trends, and other popular conversations often become networked battlegrounds, connected to existing conflict and discussions in other places online. Rather than fresh discussions whose norms you can establish, these conversations attract people who already strongly identify with a position and behavior elsewhere, which means that these large-scale struggles are very different from the small, decision-making meetings tested in anonymity lab experiments. Networks of “counterpublics” are common in democracies, where contention is a basic part of the political process. This means that when people with specific goals try to reframe the politics of a conversation, they may gain more influence by revealing their preexisting social status. For example, in high-stakes discussions like government petitions, one case study from Germany found that aggressive commenters were more likely to reveal their identity than stay anonymous, perhaps in hopes that the comments would be more influential.

Abusive communities and hate groups do sometimes attempt to protect their identities, especially in cultures that legally protect groups while socially sanctioning them. But many hate groups operate openly in the attempt to seek legitimacy. Even in pseudonymous settings, illegal activity can often be traced back to the actors involved, and companies can be compelled by courts to share user information, in the few jurisdictions with responsive law enforcement. Yet law is reactive and cannot respond to escalating risks until something happens. In pseudonymous communities that organize to harm others, social norms are no help because they encourage prejudice and conflict. Until people in those groups break the law, the only people capable of intervening are courageous dissenters and platform operators.

Advocates of real-name policies understand the profound value of working on preventing problems, even if the balance of research does not support their beliefs. Designers can become seduced by the technology challenges of detecting and responding to problems; we need to stop playing defense. Designers need to see beyond cultural assumptions. Many of the lab experiments on ‘flaming,’ ‘aggression,’ and ‘anonymity’ were conducted among privileged, well-educated people in institutions with formal policies and norms. Such people often believe that problem behaviors are non-normative. But prejudice and conflict are common challenges that many people face every day, problems that are socially reinforced by community and societal norms. Any designer who fails to recognize these challenges could unleash more problems than they solve.

Designers need to acknowledge that design cannot solve harassment

and other social problems on its own. Preventing problems and protecting victims is much harder without the help of platforms, designers, and their data science teams. Yes, some design features do expose people to greater risks, and some kinds of nudges can work when social norms line up. But social change at any scale takes people, and we need to apply the similar depth of thought and resources to social norms as we do to design.

Finally, designers need to commit to testing the outcomes of efforts at preventing and responding to social problems. These are big problems, and addressing them is extremely important. The history of social technology is littered with good ideas that failed for years before anyone noticed. The idea of removing anonymity was on the surface a good idea, but published research from the field and the lab have shown its ineffectiveness. By systematically evaluating your design and social interventions, you too can add to public knowledge on what works, and increase the likelihood that we can learn from our mistakes and build better systems.

Prairie dogs have more in common with redwood trees and bison than the casual observer might guess. All three thrived in great numbers before the European invasion of North America; all three suffered severe decreases in their population at the hands of the newcomers, declining by 96–99%; and all three are still, incredibly, under assault.

The redwoods covered about 2,000,000 acres in 1850, from Monterey County in California to the Chetco River in Oregon. Now, only a few isolated islands remain. Despite this, the Redwoods still need to be defended.

The bison's range once stretched from Idaho to Virginia, and Minnesota to Texas, and the animals numbered 25–30 million. By 1890, settlers had hunted them down to a few hundred. The famous Yellowstone herd, which is based out of the national park, is descended from just 23 individuals and currently numbers less than 5000. Despite this, some are still captured and sent out of the park for slaughter each year.

Prairie dogs are a keystone species originally found throughout the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain states of the US. Though once quite common, over the past century their population has plunged by over 98% due to the activities of the US Occupation, with cascading effects to other fauna and flora. Despite this, they too still need to be defended.

Prairie dogs differ from the Redwood and the Bison in one important aspect: unlike the previous two, they enjoy very little legal protection. Only two of the five species of prairie dog are officially listed as under threat, but these laws are rarely enforced. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has so far turned down all petitions to list the other three species. At the local level, few pro-prairie dog laws exist and in fact some counties actually require the eradication of prairie dogs on private land.

So killing prairie dogs is still a common occurrence. For instance, in Longmont, Colorado, a prairie dog colony was exterminated for no urgent reason and against the wishes of local residents. It was this story that brought the plight of the prairie dogs to my attention and inspired me to investigate further.

Prairie dogs are classified into five different species in the genus *Cynomys*, of which four are found in the United States: Gunnison's prairie dog (*C. gunnisoni*), the white-tailed prairie dog (*C. leucurus*), the black-tailed prairie dog (*C. ludovicianus*) and the Utah prairie dog (*C. parvidens*). The fifth species, the Mexican prairie dog (*C. mexicanus*) is only found south of the border. Of these, only two have conservation status: the Utah is "threatened" under the US Endangered Species Act and the Mexican is designated "endangered" by CITES.

Prairie dogs are mostly herbivorous, living off of leaves and seeds, though they sometimes also eat insects. Prairie dogs are a keystone species, meaning that they have a disproportionately large effect in their ecosystem relative to their abundance. In fact, over 200 vertebrate species and a number of invertebrate species are directly or indirectly dependent on prairie dogs for their own survival. For example, over 90% of the diet of black-footed ferrets (*Mustela nigripes*) is prairie dog, and their numbers fell to a low of 18 individuals in 1986 due to the decline in their food source.

Additional predators who consume prairie dogs are foxes, coyotes, badgers, eagles, and red-tailed hawks. Still other animals nest or shelter in prairie dog burrows, permanently or temporarily, including burrowing owls, mountain plovers, rattlesnakes, salamanders, turtles, and rabbits.

Prairie dogs also have a significant effect on the plants in their range. Their selective foraging promotes a high diversity of plant species, which is appreciated by other browsing herbivores such as bison and pronghorn antelope.

The burrowing activity of the prairie dog positively affects soil structure and health through aeration and by helping rainwater to percolate into it and be retained. This boosts the growth of flowering plants, which in turn benefits insects, birds, and other creatures.

Prairie dogs are social animals who live in colonies that people call "towns." Each town is made up of several to many groups. Each group is comprised of one to several adult females and zero to several adult males plus their offspring. Each group has its own territory which is staunchly defended by males and females alike.

Females are fertile for only about five hours on one day a year in the spring. They bear litters of 4–5 babies and, like cats, there is multiple paternity within each litter. That is, the female can be impregnated by

multiple fathers. Though the young reach maturity in three months, about half of them typically die before reaching breeding age themselves.

Within groups, individuals express a variety of social behaviors including chittering, kissing, and in the case of black-tailed prairie dogs, monkey-like communal grooming. Perhaps most impressive, though, is prairie dog language. Researchers studying the alarm calls made by Gunnison's prairie dog have led to fascinating findings.

First, they noticed that prairie dogs seemed to be making different alarm calls depending on what predator was approaching. So they recorded audio of a variety of calls along with video of the escape responses that followed them. Then the researchers played back the recordings in the field and were able to confirm through observation that calls consistently correlated with responses.

Next, using computer-generated sonograms, they measured the frequency and time values of the pattern of chirps within each call. This was painstaking work, as each individual chirp is only about 1/10th of a second in length. But the labor paid off.

What researchers found was that alarm calls describe individual predators based not only on species—such as coyote, human, hawk, or domestic dog—but had additional signifiers for attributes such as size, shape, and color. For example, differently sized and colored dogs got different calls. So did a human wearing a blue shirt versus the same human wearing a yellow shirt. The structures of the calls, then, are analogous to the nouns and adjectives of human language.

Even abstract shapes were greeted by different sounds, as found when they presented the prairie dogs with illustrations of a circles, triangles, or a colored oval. In these cases, the prairie dogs were describing to each other things that they had never seen before.

In a further parallel to human language, researchers discovered that the same sounds were vocalized with different “dialects” or “accents” by Gunnison's prairie dogs throughout their range around the Four Corners area. After examining sonograms of the calls of other species of prairie dog, the scientists tentatively concluded that they contrast enough from each other to constitute separate languages that would be comprehensible only to their native speakers. Researchers compared this to the differences among human languages such as English, Spanish, French, et cetera.

“Prairie dog language is, at the present time, the most sophisticated animal language that has been decoded.”

The vast majority of the Europeans who participated in the invasion of North America did not have the same interest or respect for prairie dogs.

Violence has been the far more usual hallmark of interaction. The main threats to prairie dogs have been agriculture, development, and introduced disease. It's also been common to shoot them for sport as a form of target practice.

Farmers have long killed prairie dogs because they forage on a wide variety of vegetation in their environs, which includes crops if they are planted in prairie dog territory.

Ranchers have targeted them under the false beliefs that domesticated animals break their legs in the holes (which has never been documented) and that in competing for vegetation with prairie dogs, domesticated animals suffer. This second point is highly debatable. No real evidence exists proving it. Furthermore, bison, who have a diet similar to cows, suffered no apparent adversity from sharing habitat with the prairie dog for millennia. In fact, bison have shown a preference for grazing on the edges of prairie dog towns.

As for development, it's an unfortunate fact for the prairie dogs that they've simply been in the way of urban sprawl. They make their towns on flat, open spaces that are also ideal for houses, malls, and parking lots. Prairie dog towns have also fallen victim to resource extraction activities such as fracking and oil-drilling. Solar and wind farms would also disrupt or destroy their habitat of course.

A large number of prairie dogs have died of the plague, which entered the US in 1900. Carried by fleas, it rapidly spread through many wildlife populations. Unfortunately for prairie dogs, they are particularly susceptible and 90–100% in a town die within two weeks of its introduction.

Human extermination of prairie dogs over the last century has been accomplished through land-clearing, firearms, poison, and explosive gas. These methods are variously quick or agonizing, which is to say more or less “humane.”

One of the most brutal methods is to gas them with aluminium phosphide, an inorganic compound that is lethal to most animals including humans. It is sold under various brand names such as Fumitoxin, Weevilcide, and Phostoxin. Aluminium phosphide is what was used to attack the colony at Longmont, Colorado, on the morning of Friday, November 10th, 2017.

“Four men working for Rocky Mountain Wildlife Services (not to be confused with the Dept of Ag's Wildlife Services but still as vile and heinous) set out to methodically place paper doused in fumitoxin in the homes of over 300 prairie dogs, just so a development company could be spared from humanely relocating them to another place. This colony resided on the edge of open space and habitat to an array of other beautiful and majestic

species, some threatened like the burrowing owl and a family of bald eagles. There are also other bird species like falcons and hawks and of course, along with raccoons, fox, coyote, and the list goes on.”

Fumitoxin is a poison that, once ingested, causes that living being to bleed out, destroying the internal organs. It is an inhumane, slow, and painful death. As bad as this is, it’s worse once you know the backstory. This wasn’t a case of prairie dogs being killed for an imminent construction project or agricultural endeavor, as poor as these excuses would be, given our over-built, over-farmed environment. No, apparently the motivation was, at least in part, real life hatred for prairie dogs and the humans who defend them.

The City of Longmont actually has a law on the books that requires developers to “make a good faith effort” to relocate prairie dogs. Doing so is a part of the permitting process for approving new construction. The developer in this instance was Sun Construction, owned by Steve Strong and Andy Welch, who, as we shall see, are the villains in this tale.

Relocating prairie dogs is not easy. Challenge #1 is finding an appropriate chunk of real estate where the prairie dogs will be welcome. Challenge #2 is winning the approval of the County Commissioners of the receiving county. Challenge #3 is the official blessing of Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW), which requires that the developer submit a Wild To Wild Relocation application. Then there are the logistics of the relocation process itself, such as prepping the new spot and trapping the prairie dogs at the old one, et cetera.

Prairie Protection Colorado (PPC) took care of Challenge #1: They found enthusiastic hosts at the Rocky Flats Wildlife Refuge, which is actively seeking prairie dogs as part of restoring a healthy prairie ecosystem that could support the reintroduction of black-footed ferrets. Refuge staff “felt confident” that the commissioners of Jefferson County would sign off on the relocation since the refuge is on federal land, which would cover Challenge #2.

Unfortunately, this left Challenge #3—submitting the paperwork—in the hands of Sun Construction. First they asked the city for a waiver from the relocation requirement. When the city refused, Sun pulled their application to develop the property, even though this meant giving up on a seven-figure project. This left them legally free to exterminate the prairie dogs. Which they did, on November 10th, as told above.

So why did Steve Strong and Andy Welch and Sun Construction kill all the prairie dogs? The way PPC set up the relocation deal financially, it

would not have cost more than extermination. But money was clearly not their primary concern since they were willing to let go of a big project rather than take the simple step to save the animals. This is aberrant behavior for Capitalists. When you can't count on corporations to follow the profit motive, how else do you explain their behavior?

“It is very clear that the killing of 300 animals, in broad daylight, in the middle of Longmont by a barbaric poison was meant as a message to advocates. After all, they are not even developing this parcel; there was no reason to kill these animals.”

What we see in the slaughter of these innocents in Colorado is the same thing that drives the annual massacre of Yellowstone bison and the continued logging of redwood trees. Yes, there is greed, but there is more than that, too. There is also naked hatred.

After the extermination, Prairie Protection Colorado published three different posts about the event on their Facebook page. These posts included Sun Construction's publicly advertised contact information, including their phone number (303-444-4780), email address (info@sunconstruction.com), and their web address (sunconstruction.com). Also named were Steve Strong and Andy Welch, whose role as owners is also a matter of public record.

Soon afterwards, Facebook deleted one of the posts and sent a warning to PPC that they would unpublish their entire page if they didn't voluntarily delete any other posts similar to it. So PPC removed the other two posts and reposted new stories without the contact information, along with the following notice:

“Facebook has required us to remove several posts due to concerns that they don't conform to FB's community standards. We have done so and apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused our followers.”

Two days later, they added:

“Sun Construction's owners are watching this page, and they obviously reported our content to Facebook which resulted in our having to remove posts naming them as the individuals that called for this inhumane and horrific mass annihilation.”

Here we see one of the serious issues with using Facebook for political activism. Although social media is de facto the public realm the way it is treated by its users, it is not so de jure, that is, according to the law. In the

real world, Strong and Welch might not like having their names trumpeted in the town square, but unless a threat is being made against them or they are being slandered—neither of which was the case with PPC’s posts on Facebook—they have no legal recourse for complaint. They’ve simply got to grin and bear it. Of course, they can also make their case for their actions in the same square. These are basic principles of free speech in an open society (which, yes, is under assault).

Facebook, on the other hand, is a privately owned virtual space that can and does police the speech of its users who have no legal recourse except to its Terms of Service. Whereas US Constitutional free speech has been subject to nearly constant refinement and redefinition through the courts over the decades—and so it is fairly clear at this point what it encompasses, for better or worse—Facebook’s terms are a matter of a corporate caprice. The terms are interpreted subjectively, by both people and by algorithms.

All of this is to say that two human beings, Steve Strong and Andy Welch, who orchestrated the painful deaths of close to 300 animals—of a species that has been driven to the edge of extinction—successfully requested that they not be named as the responsible parties in a *de facto* public forum by appealing to that forum’s “community standards.”

One might wonder which terms the Facebook moderators felt that PPC violated. Did they “bully, intimidate, or harass”? Was it “hate speech”? Or “misleading, malicious, or discriminatory”? We will probably never know, nor does PPC have a “right” to be informed.

In the real world, PPC certainly did none of those things, and Strong and Welch wouldn’t have a legal leg to stand on. But Facebook is not the real world and in the realm of social media, there are no rights. Their “community standards” might sound reasonable, but in reality they are no more than mealy-mouthed nonsense, precluding honest discourse and enforcing authoritarian conformity. Note how much of the terminology is borrowed from the language of identity politics, but is here turned on its head and used to protect the actions of the oppressor from the critique of the oppressed. Disgusting.

In the case of PPC and Sun Construction, an unequal power dynamic exists; you have mainstream corporate owners on one hand and marginal, underfunded activists on the other. It is essentially impossible for PPC to “bully” Sun. The same dynamic exists between Facebook itself and its individual users, but to a much greater degree. Sun’s Strong and Welch are, in the end, just individuals and if enough of their community—including friends and family—told them to shape up their act, they just might do it. Facebook, though, is operatively unassailable.

Liberalism has a particularly confused notion of ‘free will.’ Humans

obviously have a will, they have desires, and they are sometimes free to fulfil their desires. If by 'free will' you mean the freedom to do what you desire—then yes, humans have free will. But if by 'free will' you mean the freedom to choose what to desire—then no, humans have no free will. If I am sexually attracted to men, I may be free to realize my fantasies, but I am not free to feel an attraction to women instead. In some cases I might decide to restrain my sexual urges or even try a sexual conversion therapy, but the very desire to change my sexual orientation is something forced upon me by my neurons, egged on perhaps by cultural and religious biases. Why does one person feel ashamed of his sexuality and strives to alter it, while another person celebrates the same sexual desires without a trace of guilt? You can say that the former might have stronger religious feelings than the latter. But do people freely choose whether to have strong or weak religious feelings? Again, a person may decide to go to church every Sunday in a conscious effort to strengthen his weak religious feelings—but why does one person aspire to be more religious, while another is perfectly happy to remain an atheist? This may result from any number of cultural and genetic dispositions, but it is never the result of free will.

And in order to understand ourselves, a crucial step is to acknowledge that the 'self' is a fictional story that the intricate mechanisms of our mind constantly manufacture, update, and rewrite. There is a storyteller in my mind that explains who I am, where I am coming from, where I am heading to, and what is happening right now. Like the government spin doctors who explain the latest political upheavals, the inner narrator repeatedly gets things wrong but rarely, if ever, admits it. And just as the government builds up a national myth with flags, icons, and parades, so my inner propaganda machine builds up a personal myth with prized memories and cherished traumas that often bear little resemblance to the truth.

In the age of Facebook and Instagram you can observe this myth-making process more clearly than ever before, because some of it has been outsourced from the mind to the computer. It is fascinating and terrifying to behold people who spend countless hours constructing and embellishing a perfect self online, becoming attached to their own creation, and mistaking it for the truth about themselves. That's how a family holiday fraught with traffic jams, petty squabbles, and tense silences becomes a collection of beautiful panoramas, perfect dinners, and smiling faces; 99 percent of what we experience never becomes part of the story of the self.

It is particularly noteworthy that our fantasy self tends to be very visual, whereas our actual experiences are corporeal. In the fantasy, you observe a scene in your mind's eye or on the computer screen. You see yourself standing on a tropical beach, the blue sea behind you, a big smile on your

face, one hand holding a cocktail, the other arm around your lover's waist. Paradise. What the picture does not show is the annoying fly that bites your leg, the cramped feeling in your stomach from eating that rotten fish soup, the tension in your jaw as you fake a big smile, and the ugly fight the happy couple had five minutes ago. If we could only feel what the people in the photos felt while taking them!

Social media supposedly replaced cyberspace with something more “real,” but what it created in fact was just another realm of unreality, one that, on account of looking real, was more misleading. Here was a place where friends always congratulated and celebrated; where couples did little but eat at nice restaurants, go on vacation, or announce engagements or newborns; and where children never cried or needed diaper changes or hit each other. On social media, all happy families were alike; the others may have each been unhappy in their own way, but they were not on social media, or at least not popular. Of course, all human communication is slightly inauthentic, but in person or even on the telephone there are limits to our exaggerations. The sugared-cookie-cutter self-styling enabled by social media made America seem a Lake Wobegon online.

All desire is a desire to be, to enjoy an image of fulfillment such as we have observed in others. This is the essential problem with the preening self unbound by social media, and the democratization of fame. By presenting us with example upon example, it legitimates self-aggrandizement as an objective for ever more of us. By encouraging anyone to capture the attention of others with the spectacle of one's self—in some cases, even to the point of earning a living by it—it warps our understanding of our own existence and its relation to others. That this should become the manner of being for us all is surely the definitive dystopic vision of late modernity. But perhaps it was foretold by the metastatic proliferation of the attention merchants' model throughout our culture.

Calling it a business model as opposed to mere narcissism at least provides an excuse, insofar as many careers excuse what would otherwise be considered unhealthy or insane behavior.

Religious puritanism has a protective effect against celebrity worship. People who believe strongly in the rules prescribed by their deity have a clear guide for how they should live their lives. They don't feel as strong a need to look to the examples of other people.

One major traditional function of religion has been to help assuage and moderate the believer's fear of death. Belief in a God generally comes with a belief in some sort of afterlife. And as fewer and fewer of us believe in literal life after death, we start looking for a less literal sort of immortality: fame.

The truth is, whether you believe in a god or not, we're all looking for some sort of cheat sheet to the big existential questions. Why are we here? How should I act? What is it OK for me to have sex with? Even monkeys know those answers don't all come from within. And while some people get their answers from philosophy, from history, or from the admirable people in their own lives, a lot of us will always look to the person who seems to be having the most fun.

Researchers have devised two sentences to provoke what they call "mortality salience" in respondents. That's a fancy way of saying 'make them actively fear the reaper.' Once you've primed them with these lines:

1. "Please describe the emotions the thought of your own death arouses in you."
2. "Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you physically as you die and once you are physically dead."

Your subjects will feel their mortality is salient as shit, and presumably give you honest answers about how death's grim inevitability makes them feel.

On the playing field, every single mistake a player makes is pointed out and criticized until corrected. By design, on the field of real life, the athlete rarely faces similar accountability. Sadly, and too often with tragic repercussions, athletes don't distinguish right from wrong because they actually have no idea of what is right and what is wrong. Rules don't apply. Acceptable standards of behavior don't apply. Little infractions become bigger ones, and adults turn a blind eye. If someone gets into trouble, the first move is for an authority figure, usually in the form of a coach, to get them out of it. When that doesn't work, whether they're high school quarterbacks or pro-ball pitchers, one of two things happens. Sometimes, especially at the high school level, the community rallies around the accused, wanting to believe that "boys will be boys." We don't want to admit that in all these stories, it's not about the individual, or the individual sport, but about the culture we have allowed to grow around them. It is in vogue now to blame and condemn athletes. They should be held accountable for their behavior. But we are just as culpable, allowing them to exist in a realm all their own and not caring a bit about what we have turned them into—as long as they bring us victory.

Representative democracies are part of a personality driven celebrity culture where people are encouraged to support their chosen personalities or groups in any action they take. This has changed from recent history, where celebrity culture existed but was moderated. People were encouraged

to choose principles they supported and ensure those principles were met by any action, regardless of the actor. The advantage of a personality driven system to those in power is it allows them to disregard the principles agreed to in a social contract. It also makes favour swapping and influence peddling the preferred methods of negotiation rather than simply negotiating each action on its own merits, a situation apparent in representative governance assemblies such as the United Nations. When any criticism of an action taken by Person A is met by cries that you must then support Person B, we are dealing with a personality driven system. When similar actions that make Zimbabwe's President Mugabe an alleged war criminal make the former United States President Obama a Nobel Peace Prize winner, we are dealing with a personality driven system.

Chapter Eleven

American Fascism

“Power is always gradually stealing away from the many to the few, because the few are more vigilant and consistent.”

While nationalism teaches me that my nation is unique and that I have special obligations towards it, fascism says that my nation is supreme, and that I owe my nation exclusive obligations. My nation is the only important thing in the world, and I should never prefer the interests of any group or individual over the interests of my nation, no matter what the circumstances are. Even if my nation stands to make but a paltry profit from inflicting much misery on millions of strangers in a far-off land, I should have no qualms supporting my nation. Otherwise, I am a despicable traitor. If my nation demands that I kill millions of people, I should kill millions. If my nation demands that I sacrifice my family, I should sacrifice my family. If my nation demands that I betray truth and beauty, I should betray truth and beauty.

Unfortunately, when people talk of the ills of fascism they often do a poor job, because they tend to depict fascism as a hideous monster while failing to explain what is so seductive about it. This is why today people sometimes adopt fascist ideas without realizing it. People think, ‘I was taught that fascism is ugly, and when I look in the mirror I see something very beautiful, so I cannot be a fascist.’ It is a bit like the mistake Hollywood movies make when they depict the bad guys—Voldemort, Lord Sauron, Darth Vader—as ugly and mean. They are usually cruel and nasty even towards their most loyal supporters. What I never understand when watching such movies is why anyone would be tempted to follow a disgusting creep like Voldemort. The problem with evil is that in real life, it is not necessarily ugly. It can look very beautiful.

Christianity knew this better than Hollywood, which is why traditional Christian art tended to depict Satan as a gorgeous hunk. That is why it is so difficult to resist Satan’s temptations. That is also why it is difficult to deal with fascism. When you look in the fascist mirror, what you see there isn’t ugly at all. When Germans looked in the fascist mirror in the 1930s,

they saw Germany as the most beautiful thing in the world. If today Israelis look in the fascist mirror, they will see Israel as the most beautiful thing in the world. They will then want to lose themselves inside that beautiful collective.

Who needs repression when one can convince the chicken to walk freely into the slaughterhouse.

Fascism always has two faces. One is paternal, benevolent, entertaining, and kind. The other is embodied in the executioner's sadistic grin. Janus-like, fascism seeks to present itself to a captive public as a force for good and promises protection against enemies, real or imagined. But defy its ideology, challenge its power, demand freedom from fascism's iron grip, and you are confronted by the death's head. Fascism, expressed through corporate tyranny, was able to effectively mask its true intentions behind its friendly face—we were successfully stripped of power, shorn of our most cherished rights, and impoverished.

We have undergone a corporate coup d'état in slow motion. Our democracy is a fiction. It is a useful fiction in the hands of the corporate state, which seeks to mask its absolute power, but it no longer exists. The consent of the governed is a cruel joke. Citizens have been demobilized as a political force. Our politics is a form of legalized bribery. We, like the natural world, have become mere commodities in the hands of corporations to exploit until exhaustion or collapse.

And yet, the civic, patriotic, and political language we use to describe ourselves remains unchanged. We continue to hold up the Founding Fathers—although they supported slavery, the genocide of Native Americans, and the political disenfranchisement of the masses—and the sanctity of the constitution. But the America we celebrate is an illusion. It does not exist. Our government and judiciary, wholly owned subsidiaries of the corporate state, have no real sovereignty. Capitalism, as Karl Marx understood, when it finally dominates government, is a revolutionary force. And this revolutionary force, this friendly fascism, is plunging us into a state of neo-feudalism, perpetual war, ecological disaster, and a dystopian nightmare.

You cannot use the word 'liberty' when your government, as ours does, watches you twenty-four hours a day and stores all of your personal information in government computers in perpetuity. You cannot use the word 'liberty' when you are the most photographed, monitored, and eavesdropped population in human history. You cannot use the word 'liberty' when it is impossible to vote against the interests of Goldman Sachs or General Dynamics. You cannot use the word 'liberty' when the state empowers militarized police to use indiscriminate lethal force against unarmed citizens in the streets of American cities and torture tens of thousands of citizens,

most poor people of color, in the largest system of solitary confinement in the largest prison system on earth. This is the relationship between a master and a slave.

We the people seem to have the freest book trade in the world. Certainly we have the biggest. Cruise the mighty Amazon, and you will see so many books for sale in the United States today as would require more than four-hundred miles of shelving to display them—a bookshelf that would stretch from Boston’s Old North Church to Fort McHenry in South Baltimore. Surely that huge catalog is proof of our extraordinary freedom of expression: The US government does not ban books, because the First Amendment won’t allow it. While books are widely banned in states like China and Iran, no book may be forbidden by the US government at any level (although the intelligence agencies censor books by former officers and officials).

Where books are banned in the United States, the censors tend to be private organizations—church groups, school boards, and other local (busy)bodies—roused to purify the public schools or libraries nearby. Despite such local prohibitions, we can surely find any book we want. After all, it’s easy to locate those hot works that once were banned by the government as too “obscene” to sell, or mail, until the courts ruled otherwise on First Amendment grounds—*Fanny Hill*, *Howl*, *Naked Lunch*. We also have no trouble finding books banned here and there as “antifamily,” “Satanic,” “racist,” and/or “filthy,” from *Huckleberry Finn* to *Heather Has Two Mommies* to *Harry Potter*, just to name a few.

And yet, the fact that those bold books are all in print, and widely read, does not mean that we have the freest book trade in the world. On the contrary: For over half a century, America’s vast literary culture has been disparately policed, and imperceptibly contained, by state and corporate entities well placed and perfectly equipped to wipe out wayward writings. Their ad hoc suppressions through the years have been far more effectual than those quixotic bans imposed on classics like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Fahrenheit 451*. For every one of those bestsellers scandalously purged from some provincial school curriculum, there are many others—we can’t know how many—that have been so thoroughly erased that few of us, if any, can remember them, or have ever heard of them.

How have all those books dropped into the memory hole in these United States? As America does not ban books, other means—less evident, and so less controversial—have been deployed to vaporize them. Some almost never made it into print, as publishers were privately warned off them from on high, either on the grounds of “national security” or with blunt threats of endless corporate litigation. Other books were signed enthusiastically—then dumped, as their own publishers mysteriously failed to market them, or even

properly distribute them. But it has mainly been the press that stamps out inconvenient books, either by ignoring them, or—most often—laughing them off as “conspiracy theory,” despite their soundness (or because of it).

Once out of print, those books are gone. Even if some few of us have not forgotten them, and one might find used copies here and there, these books have disappeared. Missing from the shelves and never mentioned in the press (and seldom mentioned even in our schools), each book thus neutralized might just as well have been destroyed en masse—or never written in the first place, for all their contribution to the public good.

Unchecked corporate power will inevitably lead to corporate fascism. It is characterized by anonymity. It purports to pay fealty to electoral politics, the constitution, and the iconography and symbols of American patriotism, but internally has seized all of the levers of power to render the citizen impotent. The process by which we have been chained and shackled is incremental and often unnoticed until it has concluded. A friendly fascist power structure in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, or today’s Japan would be far more sophisticated than the “caesarism” of fascist Germany, Italy, and Japan. It would need no charismatic dictator nor even a titular head, it would require no one-party rule, no mass fascist party, no glorification of the State, no dissolution of legislatures, no denial of reason. Rather, it would come slowly as an outgrowth of present trends in the Establishment. We would be mesmerized by the entertaining shadows on the wall of the Platonic cave as we were enslaved. It would be too late when we woke up.

When I think of the new dangers from reactionary forces, I remember the famous words used toward the end of the Franco-led rebellion against the Spanish republic:

“I have four columns marching on Madrid and a fifth column inside the city itself.”

Today, I see five columns marching against the people of the United States and our democratic institutions.

The first is a motley array of fanatical freebooters. The so-called Moral Majority and its descendants whips up militarism in an effort to stem anti-militarist tides among other evangelicals. The Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazis stir up racism and anti-semitism. Well-financed frenetics lead frenzied campaigns on the so-called “social issues,” stirring up both sexism and heterosexism. The so-called “right to life” opponents of abortion often condone the destruction of life through military adventurism and the restoration of the death penalty. Political hucksters capitalize on the fear of “crime in the streets” by promoting the quick fixes of more execution

and imprisonment, despite clear evidence that these are no more capable of deterring crime than the phlebotomy (bloodletting) used in the Middle Ages was capable of curing disease.

Together, these groups focus attention on the many scapegoats—Blacks, Hispanics, Jews, feminists, lesbians, gays, transgenders, socialists, anti-war people and low-income criminals—needed by the larger forces leading a new class war against the unemployed, the unemployable, and the working poor. In addition to fostering a violence-vigilante culture, they distract attention from the many shared interests of the poor majority and promote divisive tensions among the heterogeneous elements of the low- and middle-income population.

The second is a far-flung suicide squadron. With passionate intensity and compulsive conviction, its leaders flash their instruments of suicidal destruction. Overstating the dangers of a Russian attack on Western Europe or the latest nemesis in the Persian Gulf, they flaunt their machismo by reserving the right to make a first strike against the anyone they like. Understating the destructive power of US and NATO forces, they seek the charisma—and for the corporations involved, the cost-free capital—derived from resolute dedication to that power’s increase.

For the men and women in military training camps, this glorification of violence is enshrined in the training song:

Kill, Kill
Hate, Hate
Murder, Murder
Mutilate

Behind this bravado is the tacit knowledge that the enlargement of overkill capacity breeds insecurity in the first instance and, in the case of nuclear weapons, if ever used, would destroy its users. The unspoken theme song, even more ominous than the “Kill, Kill” chant, is:

Spread our missiles
far and wide
Defend ourselves
by suicide

The third is a big money battalion. Under the cover of the maxim “there is no free lunch” administration after administration has been giving the truly rich the largest corporate welfare program in US history—through not only military contracts but also an immense variety of tax giveaways, loans, loan guarantees, regulatory or deregulatory favors, bailouts. The

huge handouts promote capital flight, robotization, commodity speculation, merger-mania, condo-mania, speculation in urban and rural real estate and the construction (triply subsidized by federal, state, and local government) of luxury hotels and skyscraping office buildings.

As a reward for initiative in extracting these benefits from the federal, state, and local treasury, top executives get more than free lunch. They get free breakfasts, dinners, cocktail hours, theater tickets, country clubs, vacation resorts, and executive planes, boats, and limousines. They enjoy free, round-the-clock services by devoted retinues of in-house and out-house academics, lawyers, accountants, public relations people, call-girls, call-boys and other experts. The bill for all this corporate and sensory gratification is paid, of course—but not by them. The money comes, rather, from the pockets of the great majority of Americans. The so-called “trickle down” “job-creator” theory is merely a justification for the actual policy of moving money upward. This is done by cutting income maintenance programs for lower and middle income people, encouraging or tolerating higher unemployment and imposing higher taxes on payrolls and consumption.

The members of the fourth column are sappers of the Constitution. With the active help of every occupant of the White House, they are burrowing deeply under almost every provision of the Bill of Rights. The Department of Justice itself has become a staging ground for those undermining the civil rights of minorities and the First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendment rights of all people. Sixth and Seventh Amendment rights to jury trials are being sidetracked by plea bargaining in criminal cases and “rent-a-judge” schemes in civil cases. Invasions into the area of personal sexual behavior threaten to undermine the Ninth and Tenth Amendments on rights retained by or reserved to the people. And who can forget the all-seeing eye of the three-letter agencies.

The fifth column is inside our minds. It is composed of the ruling myths that camouflage, encourage, and legitimate the other four columns. These myths go far beyond ‘nice guy’ imagery. They establish America’s symbolic environment. The Reagan administration triggered a great leap forward in the mobilization and deployment of corporatist myths. Many billions of tax-exempt funds from conservative foundations have gone into the funding of such think tanks as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute.

Distributing general propaganda, however, is perhaps the scariest operation of the fifth column. Expanded government intervention into the lives of ordinary people is glorified under the slogan “getting the government off our backs.” Decriminalization of corporate bribery, fraud, and the dumping of health-killing wastes is justified under the banner of “promoting free enter-

prise” and countering “environmental extremists.” Private greed, gluttony, and speculation are disguised in “free market” imagery. Business corruption is hidden behind smokescreens of exaggerated attacks on the public sector. Like Trojan horses, these ideas penetrate the defenses of those opposed to any new corporatism. They establish strongholds of false consciousness and treacherous terminology in the minds not only of old-fashioned conservatives but also of the most dedicated liberals and left-wingers. Hence on many issues the left seems bereft, the middle muddled, and the right not always wrong.

“This is not a new world: It is simply an extension of what began in the old one. It has patterned itself after every dictator who has ever planted the ripping imprint of a boot on the pages of history since the beginning of time. It has refinements, technological advancements, and a more sophisticated approach to the destruction of human freedom. But like every one of the superstates that preceded it, it has one iron rule: Logic is an enemy, and truth is a menace.”

I am uneasy with those who still adhere strictly to President Eisenhower’s warning in his farewell address against the potential for the disastrous rise of power in the hands of the military-industrial complex. All these decades later, it should be clear to the opponents of militarism that the military-industrial complex does not walk alone. It has many partners: the nuclear-power complex, the technology-science complex, the energy-auto-highway complex, the banking-investment-housing complex, the city-planning-development-land-speculation complex, the agribusiness complex, the communications complex, and the enormous tangle of public bureaucracies and universities whose overt and secret services provide the foregoing with financial sustenance and a nurturing environment. Equally important, the Big Business-Big Government partnership has a global reach. It is rooted in colossal transnational corporations and complexes that help knit together a “Free World” on which the sun never sets. These are elements of the new despotism.

There is an old adage that the cure for the weaknesses of democracy is more democracy. The reason it sounds hollow is that ‘democracy,’ like ‘fascism,’ is used in many entirely different—even contradictory—ways. When one uses the term to refer only to the formal machinery of representative government, the maxim is a meaningless cliché. Much tinkering with, and perhaps improvements in, democratic machinery might even be expected on the road to serfdom. But if democracy is seen in terms of the decentral-

ization and counterbalancing of power, then the subject for analysis is the reconstructing of society itself.

Both welfare spending and warfare spending have a two-fold nature: the welfare system not only politically contains the surplus population but also expands demand and domestic markets. And the warfare system not only keeps foreign rivals at bay and inhibits the development of world revolution—thus keeping labor power, raw materials and markets in the capitalist orbit—but also helps to stave off economic stagnation at home.

The term ‘welfare state’ also contains a germ of truth. Under pressure from communist regimes and movements, the governments of all major capitalist countries have out-Bismarcked Bismarck in taking over socialist demands and enacting a host of programs to provide state-ordained floors under living and working standards. In a broader sense, however, the welfare state idea is fundamentally misleading. The welfare provided is not the general well-being of the people. It is welfare, rather, in the narrow and restrictive sense of public assistance to the poor and other programs (usually financed by the lower and middle classes themselves) to take the rough edge off capitalist exploitation, promote docility among the exploited, and thereby help form a more perfect capitalism. If this be the general welfare it is subwelfare, the level of which has been grudgingly attuned to the amount of domestic pacification required in a particular country or at a particular time.

Thus, in Britain and Western Europe, with stronger left-wing movements to be contained, the levels of subwelfare have been higher than in the United States, where the productive capacity itself could have supported the highest levels of welfare in the capitalist world. Under President Truman’s Fair Deal (1946–52) dramatic proposals for raising the low US levels, although never approved by Congress, helped placate the many liberal leaders who had been less than enthusiastic about the Cold War and the Korean War. John F. Kennedy’s pleas to “get the country moving again” linked a more interventionist attitude at home with one abroad. Although President Johnson’s Great Society programs were stunted as money and energy went to the war in Asia, the various initiatives in social security, public assistance, health care, education, housing, job-training, and local uplift were cited by administration spokesmen as they begged for liberal and minority tolerance of intervention overseas. Many of these welfare programs, in fact, subsidized banks and other corporations under the banner of providing them with incentives for “doing good” for the poor. Indeed, in most countries of modern capitalism, big business makes at least as much money from welfare as from warfare. Hence there is some logic in using the term ‘warfare-welfare state.’

Since World War II, the government of every major capitalist country has engaged in some form of economic planning, albeit sometimes under the label of ‘policy coordination’ or ‘program integration.’ The central function of these planning efforts is to strengthen capitalist performance by:

- Helping maintain market demand.
- Extending welfare-state programs as a means of doing this while also pacifying protest.
- Designing fiscal, monetary, and regulatory policies to support more profitable corporate operations in specific sectors.
- Mediating conflicts among various interests in the corporate world.

At the local level, this kind of planning has been backed up by zoning regulations, land-use plans, and public improvement programs that have helped subsidize both suburban growth and astronomical increases in urban and suburban land values.

Government ownership and “mixed enterprises” in certain sectors of capitalist society have tended to:

- Help corporate capital pull out of less profitable activities and move to greener fields.
- Promote technological rationalization of backward industries.
- Provide government capital for use by private corporate interests.
- Tax the lower classes by selling government-monopolized products at higher prices.
- Subsidize private business by giving them government goods and services at low prices.

In addition, both government planning and government ownership perform the invaluable service of mobilizing liberals, and socialists—and sometimes communist revolutionaries also—behind the policies needed for a more perfect capitalism.

“With the coming of science and technology, it is fair to say that we can get ten dollars out of nature for every dollar that we can squeeze out of man.”

The two oldest business commandments—“buy cheap, sell dear” and “let the buyer [or borrower] beware”—had to be expanded to a full decalogue which included the following:

- Risk other people’s money.
- Make money out of shortages.
- Use only those new technologies that are more profitable.
- Shift social costs to others.
- Conceal assets and income.
- Squeeze workers as much as possible.
- Buy political influence.
- Help build a powerful establishment.

Each of these maxims, of course, operated under the umbrella of ‘anything goes if you can get away with it.’

Mystery has always hovered around the masters of power and wealth. The oligarchs of agricultural kingdoms wrapped themselves in witchcraft and divinity to conceal their weaknesses and magnify their strengths. They were helped by priests, scribes, courtiers, royal chamberlains, and old-style bureaucrats. As industrial capitalism accumulated power and wealth, the old mysteries were replaced and dwarfed by the new mysteries of high finance, market manipulations, convoluted and lucrative legalisms, pressure-group politics, and a labyrinth of new bureaucracies.

The number of people actively involved—even at the very top—is too large for any meeting or convention hall.

“America is run largely by and for about 5,000 people who are actively supported by 50,000 beavers eager to take their places. I arrive at this figure this way: maybe 2,500 megacorporation executives, 500 politicians, lobbyists, and Congressional committee chairmen, 500 investment bankers, 500 partners in major accounting firms, 500 labor brokers. If you don’t like my figures, make up you own.”

I am convinced these figures are far too small. If there are 4,000–6,000 at the top, they are probably able to deploy at least five times as many in executive management; who in turn operate through at least ten times as

many junior and contingent members. My total ranges between a quarter and a third of a million. Even without adding their dependents, this is a far cry from a small handful of people. Yet in relative numbers this large number of people is still a “few.” A third of a million people numbers less than two tenths of one percent of the US population of about 315 million; and with their immediate family members this would still be less than one percent. It is less than one hundredth of one percent of the “Free World” under the shared leadership of the United States. Seldom, if ever, has such a small number of people done so much to guide the destinies of so many over such vast expanses of the planet.

“Wherever there is great property there is great inequality.
For one very rich man, there must be at least five-hundred poor,
and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many.”

It becomes apparent that a few thousand corporate overseers make strategic decisions on the volume and location of investment, the changing pattern of employment in many countries, the kinds of products that are produced, the level of prices and interest rates, and the content of mass advertising. Instead of government planning there is boardroom planning that is accountable to no outside agency: and these plans set the order of priorities on national growth, technological innovation, and, ultimately, the values and behaviors of human beings.

You don't have to control everything to be in total control. In the modern world this seeming paradox is a systemic reality. In the past, classic totalitarian governments sought to literally control every aspect of biopower. As it turned out, this was a very inefficient and self-defeating way to maintain and increase scientific knowledge and technology, capital accumulation, and total effective power over the long-term. Modern totalitarian arrangements are far more culturally efficacious, superficially unobtrusive, stylistically democratic, and, most importantly, surgically precise.

In addition, modern totalitarian elites not only demand *de facto* control over society as such, but they also desire, as part of their inner ideological ethos, the exercise of that power to reproduce itself under maximum conditions of ease, pleasure, and comfort. Thus, the creation and maintenance of a consumerist society both materially and ideologically aids in the reproduction of neo-totalitarian power.

A consumerist society is to a large extent a self-regulating mechanism for the constant pursuit of public spectacle and private stimulation. The senses and general life instincts are caught in a web of the pursuance of small pleasures. In this way, pleasure itself becomes an insidiously saccharine

form of domination. Yet, from time to time, consumerist relations must be guided, reinforced, and given new goals and reflationary impetus from above.

The political structure in modern, surgical totalitarianism is set up in such a way as to give the appearance of active participation, psychological inclusion, and periodic mass mobilization. However, all consequential decision-making takes place behind this fraudulent structure and represents the true commanding heights of power. The political superstructure serves, at best, as perennial decoy and public delusion.

The modern commanding heights of power require massive amounts of data. It is through the acquisition, manipulation, and active forward interpretation of information that surgical totalitarianism is able to pick and choose its battles. At its most extreme, new “realities” are creatively and cynically constructed from its daily catch of strategic knowledge. The goal is always the same: distract, delude, deflate any possible challenge to the system through active suppression, co-option (the preferred method), and, or, complete elimination.

In this way, any possible threats can be foreseen relatively far in advance and organizational strategies can be conceived for either their containment or elimination. The surgical nature of these methods allows for the relative negative freedom of civil society to generally evolve and reproduce itself in partial self-awareness in so far as it continues to demonstrate no substantive subversive tendencies to liquidate either the material reality and/or ideological superstructure of its own dependency on neo-totalitarian forms of power.

In the end, the system presents itself as perversely elegant, efficient, self-perpetuating, and, even, on a physical level, pleasant. All bodily pleasures are on offer. Entertainment becomes incarceration. All is seemingly permitted while nothing is truly allowed. Critical dissent is tolerated because the mechanisms of mass blindness are secure.

It would be and has been a crucial mistake for leftists of all kinds to think that capitalism is the root cause of the modern day pursuit of total power. On the contrary, surgical totalitarianism utilizes capitalism as just another source of power but not its ultimate ground. Power precedes capitalism. Hierarchy encodes the means and forces of production no matter what they are just as hierarchy projects a self-sustaining superstructure to deceive and deflect its potential challengers. Capitalism is but a modern day tool of hierarchical power. The real enemy is not capital but surreptitious hierarchy.

Chapter Twelve

Consumer Addicts

“When I first began my experience as a consumer I thought that the best way to do my family marketing was to ask the dealer his price and then Jew him down.”

To enjoy a good life, we need food, security, and protection from the elements, and we must use energy and resources to provide these goods. Attempts by psychologists to measure subjective well-being support the obvious conclusion that raising consumption levels above the poverty line is fundamental to our sense of well-being and contentment. A basic minimum of material consumption is the indispensable foundation for a good life. Yet the story of “growth” is also at least 50 percent wrong.

It is wrong in two important ways: It offers an impoverished understanding of the good life and it is steering us toward ecological chaos. We all know that beyond a certain level—and that level may not be very high—well-being depends less and less on material consumption. If you’ve just had a great meal, you won’t increase your well-being by immediately eating five more; restraint is a source of well-being as well as consumption. Indeed, many components of the good life do not require more consumption, because they are renewable resources. They include friendship, empathy, kindness and generosity, good conversation, a sense of beauty, a sense of physical well-being and security, a sense of contentment, a sense of intimacy, a sense of humor, and a delight in good ideas. Measures of increasing consumption cannot capture these psychic goods.

In March 1968, not long before he was assassinated, Robert Kennedy said in a speech at the University of Kansas:

“Our gross national product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts the destruction of our redwoods and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty

of our poetry or the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

The very world around them, as gorgeously as they see and describe it, tends to exist for them only insofar as it evokes impressions and associations and emotions and desires inside the great self.

Instead of citizens, it produces consumers. Instead of communities, it produces shopping malls. The net result is an atomized society of disengaged individuals who feel demoralized and socially powerless. In sum, neoliberalism is the immediate and foremost enemy of genuine participatory democracy, not just in the United States but across the planet, and will be for the foreseeable future.

“Is freedom just another word for many things to buy?”

Most advertising can be viewed as grafting stories of its own onto the mental narratives in our minds.

There is a gap between the true complexity of the world and the narratives the public uses to understand it. When it comes to war, foreign policy, domestic policy, the consent of the governed has been manufactured. It is no longer possible to believe in the original dogma of democracy; that the knowledge needed for the management of human affairs comes up spontaneously from the human heart. Where we act on that theory we expose ourselves to self-deception, and to forms of persuasion that we cannot verify. Any communication is potentially propagandistic, in the sense of propagating a view. For it presents one set of facts, or one perspective, fostering or weakening some stereotype held by the mind. It is fair to say, then, that any and all information that one consumes (pays attention to) will have some influence, even if just forcing a reaction. That idea, in turn, has a very radical implication, for it suggests that sometimes we overestimate our own capacity for truly independent thought. In most areas of life, we necessarily rely on others for the presentation of facts and ultimately choose between manufactured alternatives, whether it is our evaluation of a product or a political proposition. And if that is true, in the battle for our attention, there is a particular importance in who gets there first or most often. The only communications truly without influence are those that one learns to ignore or never hears at all.

Bernays believed in the necessity of enlightened manipulation. Otherwise, he wrote, the public “could very easily vote for the wrong man or want the wrong thing, so that they had to be guided from above.” As he saw it, “the

conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society.”

It is about the large-scale efforts being made, often with impressive success, to channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, and our thought processes by the use of insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social sciences. Typically these efforts take place beneath our level of awareness; so that the appeals which move us are often, in a sense, hidden. The result is that many of us are being influenced and manipulated, far more than we realize, in the patterns of our everyday lives.

“From our desks we sway millions. We change the currents of trade. We populate new empires, build up new industries and create customs and fashions. We dictate the food that the baby shall eat, the clothes the mother shall wear, the way in which the home shall be furnished. Our very names are unknown. But there is scarcely a home, in city or hamlet, where some human being is not doing what we demand.”

Every time you find your attention captured by a poster, your awareness, and perhaps something more, has, if only for a moment, been appropriated without your consent.

Ultimately, it is not our nation or culture but the very nature of our lives that is at stake. For how we spend the brutally limited resource of our attention will determine those lives to a degree most of us may prefer not to think about. We must reflect that, when we reach the end of our days, our life experience will equal what we have paid attention to, whether by choice or default. We are at risk, without quite fully realizing it, of living lives that are less our own than we imagine.

To understand why you believe some of the things you believe and do some of the things you do, it’s important for you to understand what PR people do and how they do it.

While spectators watched, Clark would reach into a sack, pluck out a fresh snake, asphyxiate it with ether, and plunge it into a pot of boiling water. As he did so, fatty remnants of the snake rose to the top, which Clark skimmed and, on the spot, mixed into an elixir. The resulting potion he called “Clark Stanley’s Snake Oil Liniment” and sold to onlookers. The Snake Oil, Clark boasted, had the power to cure many ailments: it was “good for man and beast.” Of Stanley’s life we have only his own account—*The Life and Adventures of the American Cowboy*, by Clark Stanley Better Known as the Rattlesnake King—a slim volume that functioned both as an autobiography and advertising brochure. By his account he was born

in central Texas in the 1850s and hit the cattle trail at age fourteen. After more than a decade as a cowboy, he was invited one day to visit the Hopi Indians to witness their secret snake dance. Befriending the medicine man, who was impressed with Stanley's Colt revolver and "fancy shooting," he was invited to live with the Indians and learn their secrets, including, most precious of all, "the secret of snake oil" that was entrusted to him alone.

It is easy to ascribe the success of such hokum to the gullibility of another age, until we stop to reflect that the techniques successfully used to sell patent medicine are still routinely used today. The lotions and potions of our times inevitably promise youthfulness, health, or weight loss, thanks to exotic ingredients like antioxidants, amino acids, miracle fruits like the pomegranate and açai berry, extracted ketones, or biofactors. There is scarcely a shampoo or lotion for sale that does not promise an extraordinary result owing to essence of coconut, or rosemary extracts, or another botanical. As devotees of technology we are, if anything, more susceptible to the supposed degree of difference afforded by some ingenious proprietary innovation, like the "air" in Nike's sports shoes, triple reverse osmosis in some brands of water, or the gold-plating of audio component cables. For all our secular rationalism and technological advances, potential for surrender to the charms of magical thinking remains embedded in the human psyche, awaiting only the advertiser to awaken it.

As consumerism grew, it also became possible to sell products solving problems that were hardly recognized as such, let alone matters of life and death. Demand was engineered by showing not so much that the product would solve the problem but that the problem existed at all. Bringing subconscious anxieties to the fore was the inspired brilliance behind the great campaigns for mouthwash and toothpaste, two products largely unknown before the 1920s. Creating demand for new products was the first great goal of the early advertising industry. Otherwise the achievements of American mass production would collapse under their own weight.

"The old-fashioned propagandist," wrote Bernays, "using almost exclusively the appeal of the printed word, tried to persuade the individual reader to buy a definite article, immediately." In contrast, Bernays believed it possible to create demand at an even more fundamental level, by changing customs and norms. He asked: What are the true reasons why the purchaser is planning to spend his money on a new car instead of on a new piano? Because he has decided that he wants the commodity called locomotion more than he wants the commodity called music? Not altogether. He buys a car, because it is at the moment the group custom to buy cars. The modern propagandist therefore sets to work to create circumstances which will modify that custom. The skilled propagandist could be not merely an

engineer of demand, then, but a maker of manners, bringing a multiplier effect to the commercial use of attention capture.

It was now that advertising began to see itself in the image of the original propaganda body, the Church; its work as a mission; and its masters as capitalism's new priestly class. The agencies were educating the masses, doing a sort of missionary work on behalf of the great new companies fulfilling the broadest needs and deepest desires of the nation. President Coolidge captured the new image in a 1926 speech:

“Advertising ministers to the spiritual side of trade. It is a great power that has been entrusted to your keeping which charges you with the high responsibility of inspiring and ennobling the commercial world. It is all part of the greater work of regeneration and redemption of mankind.”

In *The Man Nobody Knows*, a 1925 bestseller by adman Bruce Barton, himself the son of a Methodist preacher, Jesus Christ is depicted, not ironically but with earnest reverence, as an early advertising man and small-business owner, managing his team of disciples who “mastered public attention” and came up with winning slogans such as “the meek shall inherit the earth.” Barton reached even deeper when he wrote that advertising was a force “as old as the world. . . ‘Let there be light’ constitutes its charter. All Nature vibrates with its impulse. The brilliant plumage of the bird is color advertising addressed to the emotions.”

There are some things, like a mother's milk, and basic comforts that one might be born wanting; but for such items advertising is hardly necessary. Most other products in the contemporary economy are what one might call acquired tastes. No one is born wanting 4K television, a purse branded by Hermès or Louis Vuitton, or the odor eliminator product Febreze. For the advertisers, by far the most valuable function of advertising, then, is the shaping or creation of demands that would not otherwise exist.

The creation of strong brand loyalties, having little to do with intrinsic value, was a calculated effort to foster irrational attachments by which a brand might survive competition from other brands that were as good or better. The most effective brand advertising, after all, does not try to convince you to make a choice, but rather to convince you that there is no choice—that Coca-Cola is the cola, that Camel is your cigarette, or that Harley-Davidson is the only motorcycle one would consider. It can succeed if it manages to make the brand part of your identity: One might feel the same loyalty to Miller the beer as a resident of Wisconsin feels to the state. True brand advertising is therefore an effort not so much to persuade as to

convert. At its most successful, it creates a product cult, whose loyalists cannot be influenced by mere information: companies like Apple, Hermès, and Porsche are among those that have achieved this kind of immunity to competition, at least among their true believers. What is offered to adherents is not merely a good product (though often it is), but something deeper and more deeply fulfilling—a sense of meaning that comes with the surrender of choice.

Having too many choices is stressful. Facing more than three or four options increases negative effects like regret, heightened expectations, and disappointment. As the choice set grows larger, those negative effects escalate, leading to anxiety. Only one factor mitigates this effect: if participants are not held accountable for their choices.

We would be wise to consider the relationship between control over one's attention and human freedom. Take the most elementary type of freedom, the freedom to choose between A and B, say, chocolate or vanilla. The most direct and obvious way authoritarians abridge freedom is to limit or discourage or ban outright certain options—'NO CHOCOLATE,' for instance. The State might ban alcohol, for example, as the United States once did and a number of Muslim nations still do; likewise it might outlaw certain political parties or bar certain individuals from seeking office. But such methods are blunt and intrusive, as well as imperfect, which is true of any restriction requiring enforcement.

It is therefore more effective for the State to intervene before options are seen to exist. This creates less friction with the State but requires a larger effort: total attention control. Freedom might be said to describe not only the size of our "option set" but also our awareness of what options there are. That awareness has two degrees. One is conceptual: if you don't know about a thing, like chocolate ice cream, you can hardly ask for it, much less feel oppressed by the want of it. The second degree of awareness comes after we know about things conceptually and can begin to contemplate them as real choices. I may be aware that man has gone into space but the idea that I might choose to go there myself, while conceivable, is only a notion until I find out that Virgin Galactic has started scheduling flights.

The advertiser, unless a monopolist, usually remains within the realm of persuasion among a background of choice. True propaganda, by contrast, aims to obliterate that marketplace and the choices as such, by making them seem unthinkable or nonexistent. Only in rare cases is commercial advertising that powerful. Stated differently, Hitler was not just selling a choice, but a comprehensive vision of reality. To make such a sale, the message had to be complete, monolithic, without a single crack or weakness. The State, as Hitler put it, must "serve its own truth uninterrupted," for

“as soon as by one’s own propaganda even a glimpse of right on the other side is admitted, the cause for doubting one’s own right is laid.” Alternative views, like alternative choices, had no place in this scheme, in which the purposes and ideas of the individual are subsumed into that of the whole, in keeping with the Volksgemeinschaft. That this itself can serve as a kind of carrot is often lost amid liberal idealism, which can overestimate how deep our devotion to choice really runs. Choice may be the cornerstone of individual freedom but, as the history of humanity shows, the urge to surrender to something larger and to transcend the self can be just as urgent, if not more so. The greatest propagandists and advertisers have always understood this.

With total attention control, the Nazi Propaganda Ministry was able to sell a new faith, one vested not in the power of choice but in the glory of something greater and of giving oneself over to it. “There are two ways to make a revolution,” Goebbels wrote in 1933. “One can fire at the opponent with machine guns until he recognizes the superiority of those who have the machine guns. That is the simplest way. One can also transform a nation through a revolution of the spirit, not destroying the opponent, but winning him over.” This he meant not in the sense of winning an argument, but actually displacing individual thought and all its conflicting impulses. As Goebbels put it:

“We want to replace liberal thinking with a sense of community that includes the whole people.”

Brands that said or sought to say to a consumer bludgeoned by herd-pressures to achieve, forbear, trim the fat, cut down, discipline, prioritize, be sensible, self-parent, that hey, you deserve it, reward yourself, brands that in essence said what’s the use of living longer and healthier if there aren’t those few precious moments in every day when you stopped, sat down, and took a few moments of hard-earned pleasure just for you? And various myriad other pitches that aimed to remind the consumer that he was at root an individual, one with individual tastes and preferences and freedom of individual choice, that he was not a mere herd animal.

“I do get weary and worn down from it all. I’m always forced to face the fact that I make my money from poor people. A lot of them are on welfare. Sometimes a mother will come in here with a kid, and the kid is dirty and poorly dressed. But the kid wants a hundred-twenty-buck pair of shoes and that stupid mother buys them for him. I can feel that kid’s inner need—this

desire to own these things and have the feelings that go with them—but it hurts me that this is the way things are.”

Like most North Americans of his generation, he tends to know way less about why he feels certain ways about the objects and pursuits he’s devoted to than he does about the objects and pursuits themselves.

“Subprime is the golden egg. If, as a direct marketer, you can identify subprime characteristics, you can do very well.”

The vast majority of all junk mail—be it loans or otherwise—is directed at the subprime market. The best thing you can tell a client is that you can accurately identify subprime individuals. Which is why, when people are asked to fill in lifestyle surveys, they’ll often see questions like ‘Have you ever experienced difficulty getting credit?’ or ‘Have you ever missed a mortgage payment?’ Those are the sorts of triggers that will identify you as potentially subprime. It’s valuable information. It is slightly chilling to realize there are rational, functional people up there employed to spot, nurture, and exploit those down here among us who are irrational and can barely cope. If you want to know how stupid you’re perceived to be by the people up there, count the unsolicited junk mail you receive. If you get a lot, you’re perceived to be alluringly stupid.

At a certain level, our modern consumer society is built on a truth and a lie. The truth is that if you’re living below the threshold of safety and security, a little bit of stuff can create a huge change in your mental and emotional states and the quality of your life. The lie is the siren song of our culture. If that much stuff will generate that much instant happiness, the lie goes, then ten times as much stuff will make you ten times happier.

Materialism and social isolation have been shown to be mutually reinforcing: lonely people seek material goods more compulsively, while materialist individuals are more at risk of loneliness.

Socially educating people not to seek happiness through excessive consumption of stuff is a huge and probably doomed undertaking, however many times it is shown that happiness does not that way lie. There is now a deeply rooted cultural belief that shopping is necessary and a patriotic undertaking for national economic prosperity, and that buying more things makes a person more desirable and improves their status. Entire industries exist to perpetuate this philosophy, even though most people know, deep down, that the majority of the stuff they buy is unnecessary and wasteful of money and resources. Purveyors of green lifestyles and sustainable fashion products have had some success at convincing small sectors of society to buy

products that are less environmentally damaging. Some consumer-targeted campaigns that have focused on ethical issues have been very successful at persuading people not to buy fur or to buy fish caught in a way that doesn't harm dolphins.

Studies have shown, however, that people who take small steps to act sustainably by using a carpooling scheme, for example, then balance their behaviour by being less likely to recycle. In general, driving consumer change through economic incentives or legal restrictions works better than fighting entrenched cultural practices. Feed-in tariffs—which allow residents (not corporations) to sell their home-made energy to the grid at a higher rate than the market norm, providing grants and cheap payback schemes for rooftop solar panels, or simply subsidising grid energy produced from renewables to make it cheaper than that produced from fossil fuels—have been shown to be highly effective ways of stimulating renewable energy uptake. In countries where plastic bags are paid for or banned, there is an immediate drop in their use. Legal restrictions on the energy efficiency and emissions of new houses, cars, and white goods have also spurred change both in consumer perception of what is culturally normal, and in technological investment and progress towards more sustainable product design.

If materials and built products were scaled on their ease of recyclability, for example, and taxes levied on low-performing items, the market would respond: more sustainable products would be made, and there would be concurrent evolution in efficient recycling technology. But so far, governments have shied away from the more radical steps needed to overhaul consumer choice and spur a low-carbon future in which resources are used according to their availability in the Earth's crust, the energy needed to extract them, and the environmental costs arising from their use.

It takes around 3,000 pounds of raw material to make a five-pound laptop,

A tonne of ore usually contains less than three grams of silver; whereas a tonne of discarded mobile phones (6,000 handsets) can contain 3.5 kg of silver, so it makes more sense to mine old handsets—electronic waste now contains precious-metal deposits that are on average forty to fifty times richer than ores mined in the ground.

Around 50 million tonnes of electronic waste, including mobile phones, is now generated annually, containing engineered parts assembled from hundreds of different materials. The international trade in e-waste is highly lucrative but much of it is currently recycled by people, including children, working in conditions where they are exposed to neurotoxic heavy metals, dioxins, and plastics that are burned to get at the precious metals within. At its best, used electronic equipment is cleansed of data, refurbished and

repaired. At its worst, it is shredded and disposed of, wasting the mined materials and other resources that went into manufacturing it, and causing replacements to be made. Manufacturing electronic equipment now uses 320 tonnes of gold and 7,500 tonnes of silver annually, and yet less than 15% of this hoard is recovered.

Capitalism is marvelously adaptive, able to turn the problems it creates into new business opportunities: diet pills, heart bypass operations, insulin pumps, bariatric surgery, face masks, ventilators. But only if it can be done for a profit.

“Advertising is the rattling of a stick inside a swill bucket.”

By taking the side of profit over conscience, business has set our struggle back so far that they have become our oppressors too. Why, some demanded, if Walmart had the power to lower prices, alter CD covers, and influence magazine content, did it not also have the power to demand and enforce ethical labor standards from its suppliers?

Helen Woodward, an influential copywriter in the 1920s, famously warned her co-workers:

“If you are advertising any product, never see the factory in which it was made. Don’t watch the people at work because, you see, when you know the truth about anything, the real inner truth—it is very hard to write the surface fluff which sells it.”

The aim of most manufacturing companies is to optimise the path and frequency from mined materials to product to customer. The earliest example of manufacturers manipulating people into frequently replacing a product may be the so-called “light-bulb conspiracy,” in which a group of companies set up a secret cartel to prevent companies from selling light bulbs with a life span longer than 1,000 hours, even though 100,000-hour bulbs could be produced. Manufacturers of nylon stockings and tights also famously instructed their engineers—who boasted that their nylons were strong enough to pull a car—to make less strong fibres that would fail or ladder. In that way, women would need to replace them more frequently.

This way of selling more products by designing in a set lifespan is known as planned obsolescence, and many politicians and economists believe it to be an economic necessity. The idea was born in the US during the 1930s depression as a way to get the economy moving again and provide employment. By the 1950s, a sophisticated advertising industry and easy credit were persuading people to shop till they dropped. Consumerism was born. The fashion industry is predicated on planned obsolescence, and other

industries are following this high-turnover model and bringing out products that have cosmetic gimmicks or seasonal appeal but which will soon appear dated. Meanwhile, many products are designed to fail or be difficult to repair or upgrade. Television sets have heat-sensitive condensers deliberately fitted on to the circuit board next to a hot transistor. Printers contain chips that are programmed to stop working after a preset number of pages.

In contrast to Western notions of beauty that have everything to do with symmetry, balance, and perfection, in Japan flaws and irregularities are highlighted. And where they might otherwise be overlooked—a cracked pot perfectly repaired—they are brought deliberately to the fore and made to catch the eye. In the case of the broken pot, for example, gold or bright red lacquer might be rubbed into the seams when it is mended. So rude is this interruption to the form of the thing that one hardly sees the original pot anymore. The trace—a sparkling vein; a rivulet in blood-red—these outshine the fact that the object has regained integrity. The fact of having been broken is what matters. The history of a thing—its difficult life—is made to be a part of its attraction.

In the United States, that same pot, clumsily dropped and shattered into shards, might be carefully repaired, the owner, epoxy in hand, taking great care to find all the bits and to reunite them into a seamless, usable whole. More likely, though, the broken ceramic would be blithely swept up and deposited without ceremony in the trash can, and another bowl would be bought on the morrow, or perhaps even ordered online for next-day delivery. Americans don't like dealing with remnants or with imperfect things. We don't want to see that what now serves us perfectly well was once broken or damaged. We want youth and vigor, not old age and a storied life. Repair is not a cultural value. Replacement is.

The idea that even something that works fine should be replaced is now so ingrained in our culture that few question it. But it is a fairly recent concept, brought about by a revolution in the advertising and manufacturing industries, which thrived on twentieth-century changes, including urbanisation, mass production, public broadcast media and globalization, which has turned the entire world into a factory and also a marketplace for the stuff humanity produces. The clothes, steel, gadgets, toys, computers, mobile phones, and cameras that are now so cheap that they can be tossed away and replaced at the smallest fault, are made in low-cost factories where the health and safety of workers is often neglected, where toxic by-products and waste materials are flushed into rivers or left to pollute the soil. Some 20% of China's arable soil is now polluted with heavy metals.

The scale of our globalized buying, selling, and moving of stuff has never been more clearly brought home to me than on the banks of the Panama

Canal, as I watched an awesome ship glide magnificently into one of the locks. Onboard were thousands of containers, the humble steel box, invented six decades ago, that revolutionized global trade and made stuff cheap. The efficiency of container ships for transportation of goods, loading and unloading, vastly lowered the cost of international trade—transport cost is now less than 1% of the price of most goods—meaning that it became cheaper to manufacture goods where labour costs were low.

Thirty years ago, just a handful of camera models would have been around each year, service and repair manuals and spare parts would have been available for each one, as well as a thriving repair industry. But things have changed. Like the majority of consumer electronics, my camera has not been designed to be easily repairable, and the manufacturer no longer releases repair manuals. My camera doesn't come with parts designed to be replaced—the rechargeable battery can be changed when it wears out, but at a similar expense to buying a new camera. In some gadgets the batteries are soldered to the internal circuitry, forcing owners to replace the entire product when the battery dies. As gadgets become progressively cheaper, consumers become ever more willing to “upgrade.”

The turning point was when VCRs came out in the 1980s. Until then, the majority of electronics were made in Europe or America, near to the customers and service technicians who repaired faulty goods with product manuals and parts supplied by the manufacturers. When VCRs came out, most were manufactured in Japan and elsewhere in Asia. As the product manufacture went to Asia, the companies stopped producing service manuals and thousands of repair-shop technicians went out of business. When their product broke, customers threw it out and bought the latest model. And people who bought reconditioned second-hand computers or TVs would also have to buy new.

As a result, most of the big-name companies from Apple to Toshiba now fiercely guard their service manuals, and use copyright law to prevent people from making them public online. The reason they don't issue the manuals is to stifle the resale market, kill the repair business and to strengthen the planned obsolescence of their products. And it also enables companies to significantly mark up different models. For example, the difference between a 16 GB iPad and a 64 GB one is a chip that costs an extra \$7, whereas the price difference for consumers is \$200. If consumers could replace the chip, or change the batteries then the companies would lose a lucrative high-end market.

A lesson in the beyond-short-term viability-curve of advances in consumer technology: First there's some sort of terrific, sci-fi-like advance in consumer tech which always, however, has certain unforeseen disadvantages for the

consumer; and then the market-niches created by those disadvantages are ingeniously filled via sheer entrepreneurial verve; and yet the very advantages of these ingenious disadvantage-compensations seem all too often to undercut the original high-tech advance, resulting in consumer-recidivism and curve-closure.

Americans buy an average of sixty-four items of clothing a year, a little more than one piece of clothing per week. Buying so much clothing, and treating it as if it is disposable, is putting a huge added weight on the environment and is simply unsustainable. Fast fashion's profitability resides in the same place as its appeal—in selling a relentless and unsustainable ocean of new clothes week after week after week.

Price and the pace of fashion are tied together. The more an article becomes subject to rapid changes of fashion, the greater the demand for cheap products of its kind. Today, it's very difficult to convince the average consumer to buy clothing at a reasonable price, and fast fashion gets around this conundrum by selling a treadmill of fresh trends for cheap. But in their race to sell new products, they speed up the pace of fashion, which in turn makes the average consumer even cheaper. Why pay good money for clothes that aren't going to be in style next season? It's a vicious feedback loop.

Most Americans are thoroughly convinced there is another person in their direct vicinity who truly needs and wants all of our unwanted clothes. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Consumers are often just after the name, "a Missoni." CBS writer Ysolt Usigan posted to the Tech Talk blog the day the line went on sale that she was able to land \$200 of "Missoni stuff" from Target.com, including a blouse, a sweater dress, a sweater skirt, and a jumpsuit.

"I don't know what they look and feel like in person. I don't know if they'll fit. I'll worry about that next week when my shipment finally arrives."

Where girls once would have paid at least some attention to the craftsmanship of the product, or even might have sat behind a sewing machine and created their own Missoni-inspired or Karl Lagerfeld look-alike, they can now line up passively to buy disposable versions of it.

There are products people desire more the higher their prices go because they hope this will show other people that they have wealth and status. Clothing is very sensitive to this effect since it deals directly with personal expression and ego. We see it as an extension of ourselves, and it is the most visible way we can strut our stuff. Fashion is the most unique product in this sense because it deals with presenting yourself to the outside world.

The middle class looked to department stores as places where they could buy better-quality goods that allowed them to show off their newfound economic status. And department stores marketed to consumers' increasingly highbrow tastes.

Luxury handbags are one of the biggest scams in the retail world. They are marked up as much as ten to twelve times over the cost of production.

The failure to see the necessity of quick and immediate intervention in financial crisis is based on an economics that fails to take account of such factors as looting, reputation mining, and irrational exuberance. It's based on a faulty logic that would also tell us to do away with fire departments, because there would then be no fires since people would be more careful. Standard economics (the "purely economic model") presumes no civil society, but in fact we live in a community of people who care about one another.

Economists (including those in finance) systematically ignore or downplay the role of trickery and deception in the working of markets. We have already put our finger on a simple reason why they were so ignored: economists' understanding of markets systematically excludes them. The pathology is viewed as mainly due to "externalities." But that fails to see that competitive markets by their very nature spawn deception and trickery, as a result of the profit motive.

There are now more than 750 Cinnabon bakeries in more than thirty countries. Most of us probably take it for granted that there just happens to be such an outlet right where we are waiting for our delayed flight. We fail to appreciate how much effort and expertise went into understanding our weak moments and developing a strategy to take advantage of them. Nor do most of us think of the presence of Cinnabon, which undermines our plans to eat healthily, as the natural result of a free-market equilibrium. But it is: if Rich and Greg Komen hadn't done it, sooner or later someone else would have had a similar—although almost surely not identical—idea. The free-market system exploits our weaknesses automatically.

The problems with a pure free-market can be imagined better if we consider a metaphor for such exploitation. Researchers have succeeded in teaching capuchin monkeys how to use money to trade. In a remarkable beginning for a free-market economy, the monkeys developed an appreciation for prices and expected payoffs; and they even exchanged sex for money. But let's, in our mind's eye, go way beyond the experiments already done. Suppose we opened the monkeys up to trading with humans quite generally. We would give a large population of capuchins substantial incomes and let them be customers of for-profit businesses run by humans, without regulatory safeguards. You can easily imagine that the free-market system, with its taste for profits, would supply whatever the monkeys choose to

buy. We could expect an economic equilibrium, with concoctions appealing to strange capuchin tastes. This cornucopia would give the monkeys their choices; but those choices would be very different from what makes them happy. They love Marshmallow Fluff-filled Fruit Roll-Ups. Capuchins have limited ability to resist temptations. We have every expectation that they would become anxious, malnourished, exhausted, addicted, quarrelsome, and sickened.

Their behavior can be analyzed as if they have two types of what economists call “tastes.” The first type of ‘tastes’ are what the capuchins would exercise if they made the decisions that are good for them. The second type of ‘tastes’—their Fruit Roll-Up tastes—are those they actually exercise. We can view our behavior in the same terms. We can imagine us humans, like the capuchins, as also having two different types of tastes. The first concept of ‘tastes’ describes what is really good for us. But, as in the case of the capuchins, that is not always the basis for all of our decisions. The second concept of ‘tastes’ are the tastes that determine how we really, actually make our choices. And those choices may not, in fact, be “good for us.” The distinction between the two types of tastes and the example of the capuchins gives us an instructive image: we can think about our economy as if we all have monkeys on our shoulders when we go shopping or when we make economic decisions. Those monkeys on our shoulders are in the form of the weaknesses that have been exploited by marketers for ages. Because of those weaknesses, many of our choices differ from what we “really want,” or, alternatively stated, they differ from what is good for us. We are not generally aware of that monkey on our shoulder. So, in the absence of some curbs on markets, we reach an economic equilibrium where the monkeys on the shoulder are substantially calling the shots.

According to the modern version, commonly taught even in introductory economics, a competitive free-market equilibrium is “Pareto optimal.” That means that once such an economy is in equilibrium, it is impossible to improve the economic welfare of everyone. Any interference will make someone worse off. For graduate students, this conclusion is presented as a mathematical theorem of some elegance—elevating the notion of free-market optimality into a high scientific achievement. The theory, of course, recognizes some factors that might blemish such an equilibrium of free markets. These factors include economic activities of one person that directly affect another (called “externalities”); they also include bad distributions of income. Thus it is common for economists to believe that, those two blemishes aside, only a fool would interfere with the workings of free markets. And, of course, economists have also long recognized that firms that are large in size may keep markets from being wholly competitive. But when there are completely

free markets, there is not only freedom to choose; there is also freedom to phish. It will still be true, following Adam Smith, that the equilibrium will be optimal. But it will be an equilibrium that is optimal, not in terms of what we really want; but an equilibrium that is optimal, instead, in terms of our monkey-on-our-shoulder tastes. And that, for ourselves, as for the monkeys, will lead to manifold problems.

This intentionally pallid story is in no way as innocent as it seems. It is not science. But it is powerful rhetoric. The college freshmen, who are the target audience for the textbook, are being given a pronouncement; it will later be implied that not just the purchase of apples and oranges, but all economic decisions are made in this way: the decision-maker has a budget (as in the fruits example for apples and oranges); she makes different choices dependent on the prices; and she makes the choice that yields her most preferred outcome. It is powerful rhetoric, because in the context of the fruit section of the supermarket, it is hard to imagine that anyone would behave differently. The story is convincing for another reason. The freshman reading the textbook is unlikely to put up resistance because she cannot imagine how this parable about apples and oranges will be used with little further question in many different contexts in the remaining pages of the textbook, in her later courses of economics, or—yet further—in her graduate program if she becomes a professional economist. But the textbook rhetoric has gotten her to swallow something whole: this is how people think, quite generally, when they are making decisions. But do they? Almost surely they do in some contexts, such as in the fruit section of Safeway. But the example would have been much less powerful if, instead, it had pictured, for instance, a bride on the pages of *Wedding Magazine*, where budget and price would seem like secondary concerns, in preparation for the Most Important Day of Her Life.

It is useful to look at such a textbook. N. Gregory Mankiw's *Principles of Economics* is an especially good introduction to current economics, and it therefore gives an excellent example, but we could have sampled many others instead. Mankiw's chapter 21, on "The Theory of Consumer Choice," illustrates. As in most modern textbooks, he does not choose the proverbial apples and oranges, but instead Pepsi and pizza. The "budget constraint" is said to be the consumer's income of \$1,000. The consumer's "optimal choice" with a price for Pepsi of \$2 and a price of pizza of \$1 is pictured in a graph. The end of the chapter concludes with a disclaimer:

"Do people really think this way? At some point, however, you might be tempted to treat the theory of consumer choice with some kind of skepticism. And you know that you do not decide by

writing down budget constraints and indifference curves. Doesn't this knowledge about your own decision-making provide evidence against the theory? The answer is no. The theory of consumer choice does not try to present a literal account of how people make decisions. It is a model. The test of the theory is in its applications [predictions]."

This is good rhetoric, but you are not told that "the model" fails to predict Suze Orman's worried clients, and the billions like them. The model may be a good predictor for some things, but it does not tell you when it will not work. Models are like maps: we do not use a map of our neighborhood to travel to Antarctica, just as we would not use a map of Antarctica to travel to the local grocery store.

Standard economics has ignored this difference because most economists have thought that, for the most part, people do know what they want. That means that there is nothing much to be gained from examining the differences between what we really want and what those monkeys on our shoulders are, instead, telling us.

"I think—the thing about the addictive mindset and the addictive continuum, I think some of that stuff is really me, 'cause I see it. I see that, for instance, my nicotine use has taken off on this tour. I mean, I'm somebody who normally chews tobacco five or six times a day, and uses it for work. I'm now smokin' and then chewin'. Chewin' and then smokin'. Wantin' you to buy a Diet Pepsi so I'll know I've got something to spit in, I mean, I can see it. It's the way I as an organism react to stress. But I don't think I'm all that different. I'll bet you've got three or four things, you know, that you're like that with. And one of the things I noticed in the halfway house is the difference between me and like a twenty-year-old prostitute who is dying of AIDS, who'd been doing heroin since she was eleven, is, is a matter of accidents. Choices of substances. Activities to get addicted to. And having other resources, you know? I mean, I really love books and I really love writing, and a lot of these folks never got to find anything else they loved.

I think, I think what you're betraying here is you and I have a somewhat different understanding of 'addict.' I think for you, the addict is the gibbering, life-that-completely-grinds-to-a-halt thing. And for me it's really about a continuum, involving a fundamental orientation. Lookin' for easy pleasurable stuff

outside me to make things all right. And I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it. But I'm saying it's a continuum, and that we slide."

In America, we are never denied the opportunity to amuse ourselves. Tyrants of all varieties have always known about the value of providing the masses with amusements as a means of pacifying discontent. But most of them could not have even hoped for a situation in which the masses would ignore that which does not amuse. That is why tyrants have always relied, and still do, on censorship. Censorship, after all, is the tribute tyrants pay to the assumption that a public knows the difference between serious discourse and entertainment—and cares. How delighted would be all the kings, czars, and führers of the past to know that censorship is not a necessity when all political discourse takes the form of a jest.

Aldous Huxley believed we are in a race between education and disaster, and he wrote continuously about the necessity of our understanding the politics and epistemology of media. For in the end, he was trying to tell us that what afflicted the people in *Brave New World* was not that they were laughing instead of thinking, but that they did not know what they were laughing about and why they had stopped thinking.

The postmodern individual suffers from a strange type of dissociation, a new form of split personality. We condemn the system, are hostile to it, and feel powerless to change it. Yet at the same time we act in a way that reinforces and even extends it. Every decision we make—what to eat and drink, what to wear, how to get about, where to go on holiday—demonstrates this. We are the system that we complain about. Protesting by voting for the ultra-left or ultra-right won't alter this state of affairs. It is not simply a question of making the 'other' change; the painful truth is that we, too, will have to change. Instead of being merely consumers, we must once again become citizens—not just in the voting booth, but above all in the way in which we lead our lives.

One of the things we most need to do is to ditch the cynicism that has taken hold of nearly all of us. We have become wearily pessimistic, taking the neoliberal construction for an exclusive truth. The TINA (There Is No Alternative) syndrome shows that the current crisis is also, and perhaps predominantly, a crisis of the imagination, resulting in fatalistic pronouncements such as 'That's just how people are,' 'We can ride it out,' and 'Let's milk the system.' There can be no doubt that egotism, competitiveness, and aggression are innately human characteristics—the banality of evil is a reality. But altruism, cooperation, and solidarity—the

banality of good—are just as innate, and it is the environment that decides which characteristics dominate.

Instead of consumers, we need once more to become citizens. If we want politics to be governed by the public interest—and that is more necessary than ever—we ourselves must promote that public interest, rather than private concerns. This will require material sacrifices that should ideally go hand in hand with the creation of a new system of ethics. Given the dual processes that shape our identity, any such system will always need to find a balance between autonomy and solidarity, between the individual and the group. The binding element is authority, and the way in which it is exercised. Citizenship isn't just about subjecting ourselves to whomever we have democratically vested with authority, but also about having the courage to assume authority ourselves when a situation demands it. We must have the courage to speak out.

Chapter Thirteen

Bottling Happiness

The Perfect Measure

“Civilization has absolutely no need of nobility or heroism. These things are symptoms of political inefficiency. In a properly organized society like ours, nobody has any opportunities for being noble or heroic. Conditions have got to be thoroughly unstable before the occasion can arise. Where there are wars, where there are divided allegiances, where there are temptations to be resisted, objects of love to be fought for or defended—there, obviously, nobility and heroism have some sense. But there aren’t any wars nowadays. The greatest care is taken to prevent you from loving any one too much. There’s no such thing as a divided allegiance; you’re so conditioned that you can’t help doing what you ought to do. And what you ought to do is on the whole so pleasant, so many of the natural impulses are allowed free play, that there really aren’t any temptations to resist.

And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there’s always soma to give you a holiday from the facts. And there’s always soma to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your mortality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears—that’s what soma is.”

“But the tears are necessary. Don’t you remember what Othello said? ‘If after every tempest came such calms, may the winds blow till they have wakened death.’”

People increasingly believe that the immense systems established more than a century ago to strengthen the nation should actually serve the happiness and well-being of individual citizens. We are not here to serve the state—it is here to serve us. The right to the pursuit of happiness, originally envisaged as a restraint on state power, has imperceptibly morphed into the right to happiness—as if human beings have a natural right to be happy, and anything which makes us dissatisfied is a violation of our basic human rights, so the state should do something about it.

In the twentieth century, per capita GDP was perhaps the supreme yardstick for evaluating national success. From this perspective, Singapore, each of whose citizens produces on average \$56,000 worth of goods and services a year, is a more successful country than Costa Rica, whose citizens produce only \$14,000 a year. But nowadays thinkers, politicians, and even economists are calling to supplement or even replace GDP with GDH—gross domestic happiness. After all, what do people want? They don't want to produce. They want to be happy. Production is important because it provides the material basis for happiness. But it is only the means, not the end. In one survey after another, Costa Ricans report far higher levels of life satisfaction than Singaporeans. Would you rather be a highly productive but dissatisfied Singaporean, or a less productive but satisfied Costa Rican?

Even if we are somewhat happier than our ancestors, the increase in our well-being is far less than we might have expected. In the Stone Age, the average human had at his or her disposal about 4,000 calories of energy per day. This included not only food, but also the energy invested in preparing tools, clothing, art, and campfires. Today, Americans use on average 228,000 calories of energy per person per day, to feed not only their stomachs but also their cars, computers, refrigerators, and televisions. The average American thus uses sixty times more energy than the average Stone Age hunter-gatherer. Is the average American sixty times happier? We may well be skeptical about such rosy views.

It appears that our happiness bangs against some mysterious glass ceiling that does not allow it to grow despite all our unprecedented accomplishments. Even if we provide free food for everybody, cure all diseases and ensure world peace, it won't necessarily shatter that glass ceiling. Achieving real happiness is not going to be much easier than overcoming old age and death. The glass ceiling of happiness is held in place by two stout pillars, one psychological, the other biological. On the psychological level, happiness depends on expectations rather than objective conditions. We don't become satisfied by leading a peaceful and prosperous existence. Rather, we become satisfied when reality matches our expectations. The bad news is that as conditions improve, expectations balloon.

Dramatic improvements in conditions, as humankind has experienced in recent decades, translate into greater expectations rather than greater contentment. If we don't do something about this, our future achievements too might leave us as dissatisfied as ever. On the biological level, both our expectations and our happiness are determined by our biochemistry, rather than by our economic, social, or political situation. According to Epicurus, we are happy when we feel pleasant sensations and are free from unpleasant ones. Jeremy Bentham similarly maintained that nature gave dominion over man to two masters—pleasure and pain—and they alone determine everything we do, say, and think. Bentham's successor, John Stuart Mill, explained that happiness is nothing but pleasure and freedom from pain, and that beyond pleasure and pain there is no good and no evil. Anyone who tries to deduce good and evil from something else—such as the word of God, or the national interest—is fooling you, and perhaps fooling himself too.

Liberal concerns about privacy have traditionally seen it as something which needs to be balanced against security. But today, we have to confront the fact that a considerable amount of surveillance occurs to increase our health, happiness, satisfaction, or sensory pleasures. Regardless of the motives behind this, if we believe that there are limits to how much of our lives should be expertly administered, then there must also be limits to how much psychological and physical positivity we should aim for. Any critique of ubiquitous surveillance must now include a critique of the maximization of well-being, even at the risk of being less healthy, happy, and wealthy.

Our hopes are being strategically channeled into this quest for happiness, in an objective, measurable, administered sense. Questions of mood, which were once deemed subjective, are now answered using objective data. At the same time, this science of well-being has become tangled up with economic and medical expertise. As happiness studies become more interdisciplinary, claims about minds, brains, bodies, and economic activity morph into one another, without much attention to the philosophical problems involved. A single index of general human optimization looms into view. What is clear is that those with the technologies to produce the facts of happiness are in positions of considerable influence, and that the powerful are being seduced further by the promises of those technologies.

One of the foundational neoliberal arguments in favour of the market was that it served as a vast sensory device, capturing millions of individual desires, opinions, and values, and converting these into prices. It is possible that we are on the cusp of a new post-neoliberal era in which the market is no longer the primary tool for this capture of mass sentiment. Once happiness-monitoring tools flood our everyday lives, other ways of quantifying feelings

in real time are emerging that can extend even further into our lives than markets.

This is what now preoccupies our global elites. Happiness, in its various guises, is no longer some pleasant add-on to the more important business of making money, or some new age concern for those with enough time to sit around baking their own bread. As a measurable, visible, improvable entity, it has now penetrated the citadel of global economic management. If the World Economic Forum is any guide, the future of successful capitalism depends on our ability to combat stress, misery, illness, and put relaxation, happiness, and wellness in their place. Techniques, measures, and technologies are now available to achieve this, and they are permeating the workplace, the high street, the home, and the human body.

The positive psychology movement disseminates techniques and slogans through which people might improve their happiness in everyday life, often by learning to block out unhelpful thoughts and memories. The idea that some of these methods might be added to the curriculum of schools, so as to train children in happiness, has already been trialed.

A growing number of corporations employ “chief happiness officers,” while Google has (or maybe had?—who can keep up?) an in-house “jolly good fellow” to spread mindfulness and empathy. Specialist happiness consultants advise employers on how to cheer up their employees, the unemployed on how to restore their enthusiasm to work, and—in one case in London—those being forcibly displaced from their homes on how to move on emotionally.

Is it possible to be against happiness? Philosophers can argue as to whether or not this is a plausible position to take. Aristotle understood happiness as the ultimate purpose of human beings, though in a rich and ethical sense of the term. Not everyone would agree with this. “Man does not strive for happiness,” wrote Friedrich Nietzsche, “only the Englishman does that.” As positive psychology and happiness measurement have permeated our political and economic culture since the 1990s, there has been a growing unease with the way in which notions of happiness and well-being have been adopted by policy-makers and managers. The risk is that this science ends up blaming—and medicating—individuals for their own misery, and ignores the context that has contributed to it.

There is also a sense that when the doyens of the World Economic Forum seize an agenda with so much gusto, there is at least some cause for suspicion. The mood-tracking technologies, sentiment analysis algorithms and stress-busting meditation techniques are put to work in the service of certain political and economic interests. They are not simply gifted to us for our own Aristotelian flourishing. Positive psychology, which repeats the mantra that happiness is a personal choice, is as a result largely unable to

provide the exit from consumerism and egocentricity that its gurus sense many people are seeking.

One of the ways in which happiness science operates ideologically is to present itself as radically new, ushering in a fresh start, through which the pains, politics, and contradictions of the past can be overcome. In the early twenty-first century, the vehicle for this promise is the brain. ‘In the past, we had no clue about what made people happy—but now we know,’ is how the offer is made. A hard science of subjective affect is available to us, which we would be crazy not to put to work via management, medicine, self-help, marketing, and behaviour change policies. But what if this psychological exuberance had, in fact, been with us for the past two-hundred years? What if the current science of happiness is simply the latest iteration of an ongoing project which assumes the relationship between mind and world is amenable to mathematical scrutiny?

Repeatedly, from the time of the French Revolution to the present (and accelerating in the late nineteenth century), a particular scientific utopia has been sold: core questions of morality and politics will be solvable with an adequate science of human feelings. How those feelings are scientifically classified will obviously vary. At times they are “emotional,” at other times “neural,” “attitudinal,” or “physiological.” But a pattern emerges, nevertheless, in which a science of subjective feeling is offered as the ultimate way of working out how to act, both morally and politically.

The spirit of this agenda originates with the Enlightenment. But those who have exploited it best are those with an interest in social control, very often for private profit. That unfortunate contradiction accounts for the precise ways in which the happiness industry advances. In criticizing the science of happiness, I do not wish to denigrate the ethical value of happiness as such, less still to trivialize the pain of those who suffer from chronic unhappiness, or depression, and may understandably seek help in new techniques of behavioural or cognitive management. The target is the entangling of hope and joy within infrastructures of measurement, surveillance, and government.

To understand these trends as historical and sociological does not in itself indicate how they might be resisted or averted. But it does have one great liberating benefit: of diverting our critical attention outward upon the world, and not inward upon our feelings, brains, or behaviour. It is often said that depression is “anger turned inwards.” In many ways, happiness science is ‘critique turned inwards,’ despite all of the appeals by positive psychologists to “notice” the world around us. The relentless fascination with quantities of subjective feeling can only possibly divert critical attention away from broader political and economic problems. Rather than seek to alter our

feelings, now would be a good time to take what we've turned inwards, and attempt to direct it back out again.

Maybe this scientific view of the mind, as a mechanical or organic object, with its own behaviours and sicknesses to be monitored and measured, is not so much the solution to our ills, but among the deeper cultural causes. Arguably, we are already the product of various overlapping, sometimes contradictory efforts to observe our feelings and behaviours. Advertisers, human resource managers, governments, pharmaceutical companies have been watching, incentivizing, prodding, optimizing, and preempting us psychologically since the late nineteenth century. Maybe what we need right now is not more or better science of happiness or behaviour, but less, or at least different. How likely is it that, in two-hundred years' time, historians will look back at the early twenty-first century and say, 'Ah, yes, that was when the truth about human happiness was finally revealed'? And if it is unlikely, then why do we perpetuate this kind of talk, other than because it is useful to the powerful?

Workplaces put a growing emphasis on community and psychological commitment, but against longer-term economic trends towards atomization and insecurity. We have an economic model which mitigates against precisely the psychological attributes it depends upon. In this more general and historical sense, then, governments and businesses created the problems that they are now trying to solve. Happiness science has achieved the influence it has because it promises to provide the longed-for solution.

First of all, happiness economists are able to put a monetary price on the problem of misery and alienation. The opinion-polling company Gallup, for example, has estimated that unhappiness of employees costs the US economy \$500 billion a year in lost productivity, lost tax receipts, and health-care costs. This allows our emotions and well-being to be brought within broader calculations of economic efficiency. Positive psychology and associated techniques then play a key role in helping to restore people's energy and drive. The hope is that a fundamental flaw in our current political economy may be surmounted, without confronting any serious political-economic questions. Psychology is very often how societies avoid looking in the mirror.

Evidence from social epidemiology paints a worrying picture of how unhappiness and depression are concentrated in highly unequal societies, with strongly materialist, competitive values.

“The good and happiness of the members, that is, the majority of the members, of any state, is the great standard by which everything relating to that state must finally be determined.”

Bentham was eighteen years old and the year was 1766 when he came across this. Over the next sixty years, he took this insight and converted it into an extensive and hugely influential doctrine of government: utilitarianism. This is the theory stating that the right action is whichever one produces the maximum happiness for the population overall. There is something telling about the fact that Bentham's eureka moment was not a matter of great intellectual originality. Nor did he ever claim to be much of a philosophical pioneer. In addition to Priestley's influence, Bentham was content to admit that much of his account of human nature and motivation was lifted from the Scottish philosopher David Hume. He had little interest in producing new theories or weighty philosophical tomes, and never took much enjoyment in writing. As far as Bentham was concerned, there was a limit to what any idea or text could hope to achieve when it came to the political or social improvement of mankind. Merely believing that "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" should be the goal of politics and ethics was of little consequence, unless a set of instruments, techniques, and methods could be designed to turn this belief into the founding principle of government.

The great advances of the natural sciences, as he saw it, derived from the ability to avoid the meaningless use of language. Politics and the law had to learn this lesson. In Bentham's view, every noun either refers to something "real" or something "fictitious"—but we often fail to notice the difference. Words such as 'goodness,' 'duty,' 'existence,' 'mind,' 'right,' 'wrong,' 'authority,' or 'cause' might mean something to us, and they have come to dominate philosophical discourse. But, as far Bentham was concerned, there is nothing which these words actually refer to. "The more abstract the proposition is," he argued, "the more liable is it to involve a fallacy." The problem is that we often mistake such propositions for reality.

It's possible to spot elements of Bentham's own life experiences in this psychological theory of politics. Its premise was a tragic one, which spoke of its author's own unhappiness: the one thing which all human beings hold in common is their capacity to suffer. Optimism could only lie in a wholesale reorientation of the state, towards the relief of suffering and the promotion of pleasure. Bentham was known to be unusually empathetic, often to a fault. His sensitive nature made him highly attuned to the unhappiness of others. One of the great virtues of utilitarianism, as a moral philosophy, is this empathetic dimension, its belief that we should take all others' welfare as seriously as our own. Given that humans are not the only species that suffers, many utilitarians also extend this to animals.

Unlike their predecessors, who would allow religious and political authorities to dictate truth from falsehood, right from wrong, the mature and

Enlightened citizen would draw on nothing but his own judgment. The motto of Enlightenment, Kant suggested, was *sapere aude*—dare to know. The critical individual mind was the only authoritative barometer of truth. But for this reason, it was equally important that everybody was using the same yardsticks of comparison, or the whole project would collapse into a relativist babble of subjective perspectives.

These were and remain the options: money or the body. Economics or physiology. Payment or diagnosis. If politics were to become scientific and emancipated from abstract nonsense, it is through economics, physiology, or some combination of the two that the project would be realized. When the iPhone 6 was released in September 2014, its two major innovations were quite telling: one app which monitors bodily activity, and another which can be used for in-store payments. Whenever experts seek to witness our shopping habits, our brains, or our stress levels, they are contributing to the project that Bentham had mapped out. The status of money in this science is intriguing. While political and moral concepts are attacked as empty, nonsensical abstractions, somehow the language of pounds and pence is viewed as having some firm and natural relationship to our inner feelings. The exceptional status attributed to economics from the late nineteenth century onwards, as closer to a natural science than a social one, is one legacy of this worldview.

How can some particular part of our bodies or selves possess its own voice, and how can experts claim to know what it is saying? First and foremost is the distrust of language as a medium of representation. Bentham's fear of the "tyranny of sounds" casts doubt on the capacity of individuals to adequately express themselves. To be sure, Bentham recognized that each person was the best judge of her own private pleasures and happiness in her own life. But for the purposes of a public politics, some other means of knowing what was good for people needed inventing. Variants of mind-reading technology are invented only to get around the apparent problem that language is inadequate to communicate feelings, desires, and values. Whether that technology involves money and prices, or measurements targeted at the human body (such as pulse, sweat, or fatigue monitors), the science of our inner sensations seeks forms of truth that might eventually bypass speech altogether. The final destination of such developments is a form of silent democracy, peopled only by mute physical bodies.

In the monistic worldview of Bentham and Fechner, experiences differ in terms of their quantity, sitting on a scale between extreme pleasure and extreme pain. One thing that this necessarily discounts is the possibility that human beings may have their own considered reasons to be happy or unhappy, which may be just as important as the feelings themselves. In

order to credit individuals with ‘critiques’ or ‘judgments’ or ‘demands’ (or, for that matter, with ‘gratitude’ or ‘acclaim’), we have to recognize that they possess authority to speak for their own thoughts and bodies. This means understanding the difference between, say, ‘despair’ and ‘sadness,’ and the ability of the person using those terms to do so deliberately and meaningfully.

Were, for instance, someone to describe themselves as ‘angry,’ a response focused on making them feel better might entirely miss the point of what they were saying. It might even be deemed insulting. Were someone to be unhappy about the fact that income inequality in Britain and the United States has reached levels not seen since the 1920s, the advice—as given by some happiness economists—that one is best off not knowing what other people earn would seem like a form of hopelessness. In a monistic world, there is merely sentiment, experiences of pleasure and pain that fluctuate silently inside the head, with symptoms that are discernable to the expert eye.

Psychiatrists, therapists, and analysts turn their critical eye upon the subject having the feelings, rather than the object that seems to be causing them. If lifting weights becomes too painful, you’re faced with a choice: reduce the size of the weight, or pay less attention to the pain. In the early twenty-first century, there is a growing body of experts in resilience training, mindfulness, and cognitive behavioural therapy whose advice is to opt for the latter strategy.

The job of intervening, to alter the psychological calculations and feelings of individuals, can be distributed across various types of institution and expert. We classify some as ‘medical’ or ‘managerial,’ others as ‘educational’ or ‘penal.’ But really, these terms are just further abstractions and fictions. All that matters is how effectively they administer their task, of offering the carrots and sticks which alter human activity and experience for the better.

Let’s consider again the foundation of Bentham’s political science:

“Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure.”

By making this claim, Bentham hoped to strip out abstract, unscientific bases for political programmes. But in what sense is his claim about “nature” really any less metaphysical? Since when did nature involve erecting “sovereign masters” over certain species? That sounds suspiciously like metaphysics after all. No matter how scientific his portrait of motivation may claim to be, in its epic generality it is guilty of the same abstraction that Bentham deplored in philosophy. And if it weren’t, then the notion of happiness as the ultimate purpose of government would not be able to hold.

Here's the paradox. If happiness is granted its grand, philosophical and moral status as a "sovereign master," we might agree that this is ultimately what life is all about. But then how could such an entity ever be measured scientifically? Whereas if happiness is anchored firmly in the physical, sensory experience of pleasure and pain, who is to say that such a mundane matter carries any fundamental or political importance? It becomes just a grey mushy process inside our brains. Too often, the utilitarian route out of this dilemma is simply to duck it altogether. If we are asked why happiness matters we can give no further external reason. It just obviously does matter. Is happiness measurement really a way of resolving moral and philosophical debate? Or is it actually a way of silencing it? Once the technocrats are in charge, it is too late to raise any questions of intrinsic meaning or collective purpose.

Economics, as passed down by Adam Smith, was not strictly speaking a science: it lacked the mechanical and mathematical rigor. But by starting from a different premise perhaps this was a domain that was amenable to truly scientific reasoning after all. If the economy could be understood as a mathematical problem, to be solved through the attainment of quasi-mechanical balance, then economics would be placed on genuinely scientific foundations.

The Chicago School complaint against governments was not that they had too much power, but that they used it in an unscientific fashion. In short, policy-makers needed to listen to economists more closely, a view that reveals the most distinctive Chicagoan trait of all: the fundamental belief that economics is an objective science of human behaviour which can be cleanly separated from all moral or political considerations.

At the root of this science lay a simple model of psychology that can be traced back via Jevons to Bentham. According to this model, human beings are constantly making cost-benefit trade-offs in pursuit of their own interests. Jevons explained the movement of market prices in terms of such psychological rationality on the part of consumers, who are constantly seeking more bang for their buck (or less buck for their bang). What distinguished the Chicago School was that they extended this model of psychology beyond the limits of market consumption, to apply to all forms of human behaviour. Caring for children, socializing with friends, getting married, designing a welfare programme, giving to charity, taking drugs—all of these apparently social, ethical, ritualized, or irrational activities were reconceived in Chicago as calculated strategies for the maximization of private psychological gain. They referred to this psychological model as "price theory" and saw no limit to its application.

What if the psychological model or "price theory" itself was faulty?

What if people don't act like rational calculators of private gain, least of all in their domestic, social, and political lives? What if economics isn't fully adequate to understanding why people behave as they do? In the seminar rooms of Chicago economics, these were the questions that could never be raised. All regimes of radical, skeptical, anti-philosophical empiricism require certain propositions which are exempted from scrutiny. In Chicago, that proposition is price theory, which, from the lectures of Viner during the 1930s through to the current pop-economics fad of Freakonomics, has been the central article of faith for an institution that proclaims to have no need for faith.

The central fact about money is that it must perform two contradictory functions at once: to serve as a store of value and as a medium of exchange. When acting as a store of value, it becomes something we cherish and want to hang onto, often by placing it in a bank account. When acting as a medium of exchange, it is something that opens up infinite possibilities to attain other, much more useful and desirable things. This contradiction is manifest in the physical design of money itself, which has to combine a high level of symbolic appeal (in its insignia and shininess) and minimal level of actual physical usefulness.

Thus one way of understanding the history of liberal economics, from Smith onwards, is as an ongoing attempt to deal with the bipolar character of money. As we all instinctively recognize, markets are places where goods or services are exchanged for money of some sort. But what we tend to overlook is how odd such an exchange actually is. How is that a £10 note can be deemed equivalent to, say, a pizza? In order for this exchange to take place, money's dual roles as both medium of exchange (I am willing to get rid of it) and as store of value (the pizza seller is willing to accept it) have to function simultaneously. How can a piece of pure, numerical symbolism serve as equivalent to a doughy, cheesy meal, without either side feeling hard done by? The constant risk is that people either value money too highly or not highly enough. The solution offered by economists is to invent a mysterious entity that lurks magically inside the pizza, which they term "value."

Often, we use the word 'value' to mean price, as when someone says, 'This painting is valued at £1,000.' But it's quite clear from other uses of the term 'value' that it doesn't mean price at all. If I describe the pizza as 'bad value for money,' that suggests it really shouldn't have been exchanged for as much as £10. The value and price of the pizza were not, in fact, equivalent to each other, and the customer was being ripped off. The idea of value allows us to view markets as balancing devices, whose outcome should in principle be fair. By suggesting that value is a quantity like money,

economists are able to show how both sides of an exchange are, ultimately, equivalent. When the market for pizzas is working correctly, they argue, ten of these pounds will buy you an equivalent quantity of value. Rather than exchange a quantity (money) for a quality (pizza), both sides of the equation can be represented in numerical terms. The market becomes imagined as a set of scales, which weigh money and value against each other, until the two are in perfect balance. What the idea of value really says is this: money itself is not the most important thing in life, but it is the perfect measure for anything that we do consider important.

The bizarre philosophical status of whiplash as a form of entirely invisible pain makes it unusually amenable to fraudulent insurance claims. Intuitively, this explains how rates of whiplash diagnosis vary so sharply from one country to the next: in countries such as Britain and the United States, where it is a well-known phenomenon, drivers who have suffered a rear-end collision will be that much more likely to spot the opportunity for some monetary reward.

What if whiplash is necessarily entangled with the pursuit of monetary compensation? And what if fraud of this sort is not some unfortunate, exceptional, and eradicable element of our compensation culture, but an entirely inevitable feature of how our sense of justice and injustice has been colonized by monetary calculation? Deep within the whiplash syndrome, there is the idea of equivalence between the sensations produced via the nervous system and money. The principle states that a certain quantity of subjective feeling can be counterbalanced by an appropriate quantity of money. Admittedly, this principle may be widely abused, in some societies far more than others. But the very fact that it is impossible to know whether it is being abused, or by how much, tells us something about the absurdity of this presupposition. Maybe, instead of searching harder for the truth of physical pain, we should explore if money could ever serve as some neutral, honest, and mathematical representation of our feelings.

By the 1880s, retail culture, based upon widespread circulation of paper money and even some recognizable brands, was established. In the absence of such a culture, an economic theory founded on the premise of individual pleasure-seeking would have looked like crazed utopianism. In short, capitalism could now be viewed as an arena of psychological experiences, in which physical things were merely props for the production of sensations, to be acquired through cash. A commodity was simply anything that can give pleasure, or take away pain.

Man cannot create material things. In the mental and moral world indeed he may produce new ideas; but when he is said to produce material things, he really only produces utilities; or in other words, his efforts and

sacrifices result in changing the form or arrangement of matter to adapt it better for the satisfaction of wants. During the 1980s, it became fashionable to declare that capitalism had suddenly become based upon knowledge, intangible assets, and intellectual capital, following the demise of many heavy industries in the West. In truth, the economy was reconceived as a phenomenon of the mind a whole century earlier. Capitalism became oriented around consumer desire, directed by that most alluring spokesman for our silent inner feelings: money.

As economists saw it, they have no need to know how much pleasure a pizza gives me, but only whether I would prefer to have a pizza or a salad. The way I spend my money is determined by my preferences, and not by my actual subjective sensations. Gradually economists discovered that they could say less and less about what goes on in the minds of consumers, to the point where it's enough to simply observe their use of money and assume the rest.

Take the Exxon Valdez incident. Beyond Exxon's liability for the cost of the clean-up, there was a broader moral question: how to punish the company for the damage they had done to a thousand miles of beautiful coastline? How to counterbalance what they'd done? One of the answers to this question was produced by the state of Alaska. Using a technique known as a willingness to pay survey, a representative sample of citizens in all of the other forty-nine US states were interviewed on how much they would be willing to pay for the Exxon Valdez disaster not to have taken place. They were each provided with information about the extent and impact of the disaster to inform this mental calculation. The answer, so it turned out, was an average of \$31 per household. Multiplied by 91 million households, this produced the calculation that Exxon owed the American public \$2.8 billion. This figure was used to help calculate the final legal settlement of what Exxon had to pay as a fine.

What we witness in this sort of example is economics becoming used as a basis for broad public agreement, well beyond the limits of the marketplace. Techniques invented for the study of equilibrium in small private market exchanges are extended to deliver judgments over major public moral controversies. And think what a strange activity is at work at the heart of this: citizens scattered across America were required to close their eyes and imagine what they personally would pay in order for some distant event not to have happened. They must reach down inside themselves, in search of some number which they believe to be equivalent to the "value" of a clean coastline. How odd it is that a technique based on wild introspection, whose veracity is entirely impossible to prove one way or the other, should attain higher authority than, say, the testimony of judges or elected officials or

wildlife experts.

And yet the political authority of such techniques is growing all the time. Wherever the capacity to reach publicly acceptable agreements recedes, so the recourse to economics to settle disputes has increased. To find out whether it is worth spending money to protect beautiful landmarks, making cultural resources freely available to the public, or increasing transport safety, policymakers increasingly use techniques such as willingness to pay surveys to work out what the hypothetical price of those goods might be. Other techniques include studying the effect of a beautiful park on local house prices, to understand the park's value in money terms. In health care, where limited resources must be spent in the best way possible, the question of "value for money" is a constant problem. Once again, psychological introspection plays a role, with the public being surveyed to discover their numerical evaluation of cancer or blindness, despite typically having no experience of these hypothetical syndromes.

Of course spending on health care requires some basis on which to navigate dilemmas. The problem is money has become the moral *lingua franca* through which this is now done: different health outcomes are given different monetary values by specialist health economists. But as economics is drawn into more and more public issues and moral disputes, so the psychological question of valuation becomes more problematic.

These techniques represent a fudge between a democratic worldview, which demands that the voice of the public be heard, and a Benthamite science, which states that only numbers can be trusted. The unwieldy outcome is that the public may speak, but on the condition that they adopt metrics and prices as their language. In order to have their say, they must mimic a calculator.

Some economists now wonder: could value in fact be a real, chemical substance, varying in quantity, inside our brains? When I decide to spend £10 on a pizza, might this actually be because I will receive an exactly equivalent quantity of dopamine, by way of reward? Some perfect balance is imagined, with cash on one side of the scales, and a commensurate dose of neurochemical on the other. Perhaps it might be possible to identify the exchange rate through which these dollars-for-dopamine trades are undertaken.

Common sense suggests that these are absurd propositions. The sheer unlikelihood that the brain would "naturally" operate according to principles first developed by economists in the 1860s seems overwhelming. Why would anyone believe that, in our fundamental biological nature, we operate like accounting machines? The answer to that question is simple: to rescue the discipline of economics and, with it, the moral authority of money.

The neuroeconomic prejudice is that the mechanical, mathematical view of the mind ought ultimately to be correct. Of course there are anomalies, when neurochemicals are produced in the wrong quantity, or at the wrong time. But by tracing when these occur and building them into our calculations, the mind can be relied upon to perform its balancing act once more. The truth is that whenever policy-makers, economists, or business leaders start to dabble in the neuropsychology of reward or incentives or dopamine, their agenda is really a different one altogether: to ensure that money retains its privileged position as the measure of all value. A financial crisis represents an acute threat to the public status of money, raising the urgency of placing ‘value’ on firm foundations. The brain is simply the latest locus for these foundations, in a history that snakes back to the 1860s. Much of our interest in pleasure and happiness today derives from a tradition of economics that only requires sufficient theory of the mind, as is required by a free market economy. To suggest that such theories can be divorced from that political and cultural context is like trying to understand a set of kitchen scales without any understanding of what cooking involves. Unless the idea of fairness can be disentangled from the notion of “value for money,” with all of the psychological questions that the notion poses, philosophical quandaries such as whiplash will proliferate.

In 2014, British Airways trialed a “happiness blanket,” which represents passenger contentment through neural monitoring. As the passenger becomes more relaxed, the blanket turns from red to blue, indicating to the airline staff that they are being well looked after.

While the scanning technology that promises to unlock the secrets of our feelings is dazzlingly new, the philosophical and ethical questions that result from it are quite old. This points us to a recurring pattern within psychological research that dates back to those first optical tachistoscopes of the 1850s, and it concerns the mesmerizing lure of mind-reading technologies. With every wave of new methods and instruments for scanning the thought processes or sensations of others, so there occurs a resultant belief that hard science has ousted philosophy and ethics once and for all. At the same time, there is always the hope that it is possible to understand another human being without talking to them. But on each occasion, there is still some residual vision of what freedom and consciousness really mean that escapes scientific validation. When psychologists, neuroscientists, or market researchers claim to have liberated their discipline from moral or philosophical considerations once and for all, the question has to be posed: So where do you get your understanding of humanity from, including its various emotional states, drives, and moods? From your own intuition? And what feeds that?

In the years since the first tachistoscopes were introduced, the answer has become increasingly plain. The residual notion of freedom that structures how this science progresses is the freedom to shop. If that is the case then contemporary neuromarketing and facial coding might rightly be accused of being a circular venture. What they discover in the synapses of our brains and the flickering of our eyes is not raw data, to be injected afresh into advertising designs, but is unavoidably interpreted through a consumerist philosophy.

It is thanks to technical methods and instruments, from the tachistoscope onwards, that psychology can claim to be its own objective science in the first place. The seductive power of such instruments has allowed certain individuals to declare that philosophy and ethics are no longer needed. It is here that much of the Benthamite promise of a scientific politics has been channelled, a politics in which hard expertise over the feelings of others replaces the messiness and ambiguity of dialogue. But behind this version is not national government in pursuit of a public interest, rather a corporation in pursuit of a private one.

Many these days assume that human beings are slaves to external incentives, and not actually possessing free will at all. And they have studies replete with colorful images of brains, pop-sci books, and interviews and presentations by charismatic, highly credentialed “experts” to back them up.

Factual truth is not a popularity contest. So what if most people think that they and others have ‘free will’? Thus we come to the heart of the matter: The question whether humans can live in a material world and yet be morally responsible is not empirically testable. It is not a scientific problem. It is a conceptual and ethical impasse that has bedeviled thinkers since antiquity and is still without a resolution. Rest assured, our goal here is not to attempt to solve it; indeed, it may well be unsolvable. What we do want to establish here—and this is a crucial point—is that neuroscience has not resolved it either. Those who believe that the absence of ultimate free will means that moral responsibility is an incoherent notion and that society should therefore abolish blame have already staked out a philosophical claim. Simply amassing more data on the workings of the brain may strengthen their conviction that determinism is correct, but it won’t make their argument against the coexistence of determinism and moral agency any stronger.

Between the middle of the nineteenth century and the first World War, fifty-thousand Americans traveled to Germany and Austria to undertake university degrees and research training to bring back to the United States. This represents one of the biggest exports of intellectual capital in history, especially in areas such as chemistry, physiology, and the new field of

psychology.

Many Germans wondered why were these American students so obsessed with understanding fluctuations in pleasure? Crudely put, they wanted to provide a set of tools for managers. American psychology had no philosophical heritage. It was born into a world of big business and rapid social change, which risked spiralling out of control. If it couldn't offer to alleviate the problems that were afflicting American industry and society, then it had no reason to exist at all. That, at any rate, was the view expressed by leaders of the new league of universities, who were eager to please their corporate benefactors. In the early twentieth century, psychology made an explicit pitch to act as the "master science" through which the American dream might yet be rescued. If individual decision-making itself could be reduced to a hard science, with quasi-natural laws and statistics, then it might still be possible for a multinational, multi-ethnic, industrial, mass society to function, while still upholding the core Enlightenment principle of liberty on which the republic had been founded.

Contained within each of these policy projects is a single ideal: that individual activity might be diverted towards goals selected by elite powers, but without either naked coercion or democratic deliberation. Behaviourism stretches Bentham's dream of a scientific politics to its limit, imagining that beneath the illusion of individual freedom lie the cold mechanics of cause and effect, observable only to the expert eye. When we put our faith in behavioural solutions, we withdraw it from democratic ones to an equal and opposite extent.

Don't appeal to the consumer's existing emotions and desires but trigger new ones. In the 1920s, the risk of Resor and Watson's scientific exuberance was that they overlooked what members of the public actually thought and felt, so confident were they that they could dictate emotional responses from scratch. Corporate America could not depend on this leap of faith alone. Behaviourism's radically scientific view of the mind suggested there was nothing to fear here. There was nothing lurking, hidden, in the dark recesses of the mind that actually existed beyond what could be observed by psychologists. In fact, the very idea of the mind was just a philosophical distraction. The worry this generates is that a brand (or, for that matter, a politician or ideology or policy) might have become unappealing in ways that are apparent to the public but not yet to scientists and elites. The science of desire also required discovering what people wanted, finding out what they hoped for, in addition to trying to shape it.

Button-pressing machines for the capturing of attitudes—like the "worm" that reveals how the audience feels during a presidential debate, or the Facebook "like" button—cut out the use of speech from attitudinal research,

but not the judgment of the attitude-holder. This was the crypto-democratic underbelly of how market research developed as the Great Depression took hold, and elites grew increasingly concerned as to what the masses had in mind.

Once the judgment and voice of the ordinary person is admitted into market research, things can start to shift in a democratic direction. This is an unpredictable and—from the perspective of a corporation, government, or advertising account executive—worrying situation. It contains the possibility that people may report a negative attitude towards consumerism, or even towards capitalism itself. On the other hand, it is precisely the capacity to detect such threats that made these techniques indispensable for corporations and governments. Roosevelt may have conducted endless polls on how the public perceived his policies, but he never once altered a policy in response. Every commission for a new attitudinal study also included the requirement for advice on “how the attitude might be corrected”—in other words: propaganda.

Under the influence of market research, political ideals are quietly converted into economic desire. The cold mechanics of marketing and the critique of capitalism are locked into a constant feedback loop, such that there is no remaining idea of what freedom might look like, beyond that of consumption.

At the heart of the cultural and political battles of the 1960s was an acute relativism which attacked the roots of moral, intellectual, cultural, and even scientific authority. The right to declare some behaviours as “normal,” certain claims as “true,” particular outcomes as “just,” or one culture as “superior” was thrown into question. When the traditional sources of authority over these things attempted to defend their claims, they were accused of offering just one partial perspective, and of using their own parochial language to do so. In place of some values being “better” or “truer” than others, there was simply conformity on the one hand and difference on the other. The core political and philosophical questions posed by the 1960s were these:

- How to take any publicly legitimate decisions, once there are no commonly recognized hierarchies or shared values any longer?
- What will provide the common language of politics, once language itself has become politicized?
- How will the world and society be represented, once even representation is considered to be a biased and political act?

The problem, from a governmental point of view, was that the reach of democracy was extending too far.

In a world where we cannot agree on what counts as ‘good’ and what counts as ‘bad,’ because it’s all a matter of personal or cultural perspective, measurement offers a solution. Instead of indicating quality, it indicates quantity. Instead of representing how good things are, it represents how much they are. Instead of a hierarchy of values, from the worst up to the best, it simply offers a scale, from the least up to the most. Numbers are able to settle disputes when nothing else looks likely to. At its most primitive, the legacy of the 1960s is that more is necessarily preferable to less. To grow is to progress. Regardless of what one wants, desires, or believes, it is best that one gets as much of it as possible.

This belief in growth as a good-in-itself was made explicit by some subcultures and psychological movements. Humanistic psychology, as advanced by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, attempted to reorient psychology—and society at large—away from principles of normalization and towards the quest for ever greater fulfillment. Individuals were perceived to be hemmed in by the dull conformity of 1950s culture, which blocked their capacity to grow. To assume that there was a natural or moral limit to personal growth was to fall back into repressive traditions. It wasn’t long before corporations were making the identical argument about the malign impact of market regulation on profit growth.

Given that labour was central to the classical economic view of capitalism, it must surely be relevant that workers suffer different levels of pain as they go through their day, which then influences how much they are able to produce. It is often said in circumstances of boring or monotonous work that the last hour drags the longest. The longer one spends labouring on a task, the harder it gets. Such insights spoke to an emerging concern among industrialists at the time, that workers were suffering from fatigue, and that the bourgeoisie’s principal source of wealth, namely labor, was gradually becoming depleted. As the nineteenth century wore on, this worry led to an explosion of strange experiments on fatigue and possible ergonomic solutions. And so it was via the subjective experience of work, as an exercise that gradually increases in painfulness, that capitalists became interested in how we think and feel for the very first time.

Physiologists—and industrialists—were growing increasingly concerned by the problem of physical human fatigue, especially in the factory. The Victorians had tended to view inactivity and unemployment as moral failings, associated with drink and “bad character.” But by the 1880s, there was a creeping concern that industrial work was simply grinding people down. Human beings were running out of steam.

It would be perverse to defend Taylorism, but there was at least a transparency about its logic. Workplaces and managers existed to extract value, in the most efficient way possible. Workers were never expected to like this, which was a freedom of sorts. As Ian Curtis, the lead singer of Joy Division who hanged himself aged twenty-three, once said:

“I used to work in a factory and I was really happy because I could daydream all day.”

Labourers in a Taylorist factory brought their physical capabilities into work, to be exploited for sure, but were never expected to give anything more personal or intangible. And this is exactly why managers soon turned their backs on Taylor’s version of scientific management.

Others had some much more far-reaching theories regarding the ways in which the insights of psychology might fundamentally reform and rescue capitalism. By focusing on the entire person in the workplace, including all of their personal concerns and mental well-being, work might provide the labourer with their deepest source of meaning, and offset the risk of industrial upheaval once and for all.

Management, which originated as a technique for controlling slaves on plantations, and developed as a means of running heavy industrial corporations, had become a soft, social and psychological skill.

By the 1980s, an employee’s customer care, service ethic and enthusiasm were not simply mental resources, which existed to help churn out more products: they were the product. The importance of employee happiness and psychological engagement becomes all the greater once corporations are in the business of selling ideas, experiences, and services. Businesses speak of “intangible assets” and “human capital” in the hope of capturing this amorphous workplace ethos, but in practice it is nothing which resembles either an asset or capital. Some other way of conceiving of work is required.

Robbins and Hayek were seeking to muster a fight-back against the Keynesian and socialist thinking that thrived through the Depression, by highlighting the unique intelligence contained in the price system of competitive markets. Coase breathed this in. More importantly, he was exposed to Hayek’s intense skepticism regarding what any social science, including economics, could be capable of knowing.

Coase’s brilliance was to spot within the Chicago School position a final remnant of metaphysical speculation that they themselves were not aware of. Up until this point, the Chicago School still assumed that markets needed to be open, competitive, run according to certain principles of fairness, or else they would become submerged under the weight of monopolies. Markets

needed ground rules if they were to match up to the ideal of being a space of individual freedom. This meant that they still required authorities capable of intervening, once competitors ceased to play fair or grew too powerful, and the market started to fail. Ever the sceptic, Coase did not accept this style of reasoning. Nothing in real economic life was ever that simple. Markets were never perfectly competitive in actuality, so the categorical distinction between a market that ‘works’ and one that ‘fails’ was an illusion generated by economic theory. The question economists should be asking, Coase argued, is whether there is good evidence that a specific regulatory intervention will make everyone better off overall. And by ‘everyone,’ this shouldn’t just mean consumers or small businesses, but the party being regulated as well.

This argument was straight out of Bentham: he was advocating that policy be led purely by statistical data on aggregate human welfare, and abandon all sense of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ altogether. If there isn’t sufficient data to justify government intervention—and such evidence is hard to assemble—then regulators would be better off leaving the economy alone altogether. One of the most far-reaching implications of Coase’s argument was that monopolies are not nearly as bad as economists tend to assume. Compared to a perfectly competitive, perfectly efficient market, then yes, monopolies are undesirable. But this was what Coase disparagingly called “blackboard economics.” If economists opened their eyes and looked at capitalism as it actually existed, they might discover that regulatory efforts to produce efficient markets were often counter-productive. Meanwhile, leaving firms alone to work things out for themselves—using private contracts and compensation where necessary—could actually produce the best available outcome overall; not a perfect outcome, just the best one available. The function of economics was to carefully calculate what should be done, on a case-by-case basis, not to offer utopian visions of perfect scenarios.

To maintain authority amidst various conflicting perspectives on the rights and wrongs of a competitive situation, regulators needed to be staffed by economists who would simply represent the facts. Stigler and his colleagues had little interest in such even-handedness. What they now possessed was a devastating critique of the moral authority of regulators and legislators, who purported to act in the “public interest” but were typically just acting either in their own interests (to create more jobs for regulators) or out of political resentment towards large successful businesses. What regulators and left-wing liberals had singularly failed to recognize was that large, exploitative, monopolistic businesses also generate welfare. In fact, given a free rein, who knew how much welfare they might produce?

From the increasingly bullish Chicagoan perspective, the scale of giant

corporations allowed them to work more efficiently, doing more good for consumers and society at large. The benefit they produced did not happen in spite of their aggressive competitive behaviour, but because of that behaviour. Let them grow as far as they can, as profitably as they can, and see what happens. Why worry about businesses getting too big? Who is to say that they shouldn't be even bigger? By the end of the decade, Friedman was stating the pro-corporate argument even more nakedly. As he put it in a famous article published in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1970, the single moral duty of a corporation is to make as much money as it possibly can.

Regulators had long been striving to protect competitors from larger bullies, but what about the welfare of the bully? Didn't he deserve to be taken into account as well? And—as the Chicago School would later seek to explain—might consumers actually be better off being served by the same very large, efficient monopolists than constantly having to choose between various smaller, inefficient competitors? If the welfare of everyone were taken into account, including the welfare of aggressive corporate behemoths, then it was really not clear what benefit regulation was actually achieving.

There is one deeply counter-intuitive lesson which emerges from this: American neoliberalism is not actually all that enamoured with competitive markets at all. That is to say, if we understand a market as a space in which there is a choice of people to transact with, and a degree of freedom as to whether to do so—think of eBay for example—the Chicago School was entirely comfortable with the notion of businesses restricting this choice, restricting this freedom, on grounds that it produces more utility overall. What Stigler, Friedman, Director, and their colleagues really admired was not the market as such, but the competitive psychology that was manifest in the entrepreneurs and corporations which sought to vanquish their rivals. They didn't want the market to be a place of fairness, where everyone had an equal chance; they wanted it to be a space for victors to achieve ever-greater glory and exploit the spoils. In their appeals to the limitless potential of capital, these Chicago conservatives were making a similar appeal to the logic of growth as the counterculture and the humanistic psychologists were. With the metaphor of “human capital,” the distinction between corporate strategy and individual behaviour dissolved altogether: each person and each firm was playing a long-term game for supremacy, whether or not there was a market present.

In what sense is this winner-take-all economics still competition? Perhaps the clue to the Chicagoan vision lay in their own combative intellectual culture. These professed outcasts, with a chip on their shoulder, believed that no game was ever really lost. Friedman made his career on the basis

of arguing single-handedly against a global Keynesian orthodoxy for nearly four decades, until finally, by the late 1970s, he was perceived to have “won.” Coase no doubt impressed his hosts partly by his willingness to stand up for his minority view, and willing them over. The elites of Harvard, MIT, and the federal government were entitled to enjoy their period of dominance, but they should have taken these upstarts in Chicago a little more seriously from the start. Because when the neoliberals got to taste intellectual and political victory, they would fight just as hard to cling onto it. Chicago-style competition wasn’t about co-existing with rivals; it was about destroying them. Inequality was not some moral injustice, but an accurate representation of differences in desire and power.

The Chicago School message to anyone complaining that today’s market is dominated by corporate giants is a brutal one: go and start a future corporate giant yourself. What is stopping you? Do you not desire it enough? Do you not have the fight in you? If not, perhaps there is something wrong with you, not with society. This poses the question of what happens to the large number of people in a neoliberal society who are not possessed with the egoism, aggression, and optimism of a Milton Friedman or a Steve Jobs. To deal with such people, a different science is needed altogether.

Your Broken Brain

Even after the epic failure of the neoliberal model of 2008, Britain's political class returned to this rhetoric, announcing that the "global race" requires that welfare is slashed and labour markets further deregulated. The need to entrench "competitiveness" as the defining culture of businesses, cities, schools, and entire nations, so as to out-do international rivals, is the mantra of the post-Thatcher era. A science of winning, be it in business, sport, or just in life, now brings together former sportsmen, business gurus and statisticians to extend lessons from sport into politics, from warfare into business strategy, and from life coaching into schools.

It transpires that competition and competitive culture, including that of sport, is intimately related to a disorder that was scarcely discussed in 1977 but which had become a major policy concern by the end of the century. As the 1970s drew to a close, Western capitalist countries stood on the cusp of a whole new era of psychological management. The disorder at the heart of this was depression.

One way of observing the relationship between depression and competitiveness is in statistical correlations between rates of diagnosis and levels of economic inequality across society. After all, the function of any competition is to produce an unequal outcome. More equal societies, such as Scandinavian nations, record lower levels of depression and higher levels of well-being overall, while depression is most common in highly unequal societies such as the United States and United Kingdom. The statistics also confirm that relative poverty—being poor in comparison to others—can cause as much misery as absolute poverty, suggesting that it is the sense of inferiority and status anxiety that triggers depression, in addition to the stress of worrying about money. For this reason, the effect of inequality on depression is felt much of the way up the income scale.

Yet there is more to this than just a statistical correlation. Behind the numbers, there is troubling evidence that depression can be triggered by the competitive ethos itself, afflicting not only the "losers" but also the "winners." What was identified as the socialist fear, that competition makes many people seem inferior, has been proved far more valid than even left-wing 1970s schoolteachers could have imagined; it also tells them that they are inferior.

A series of experiments and surveys has revealed that aspirational values, oriented around money, status, and power, are linked to higher risk of depression and a lower sense of "self-actualization." Wherever we measure our self-worth relative to others, as all competitions force us to, we risk

losing our sense of self-worth altogether. One of the sad ironies here is that the effect of this is to dissuade people, including schoolchildren, from engaging in physical exercise altogether.

The depressive-competitive disorder of neoliberalism arises because the injunction to achieve a higher utility score—be that measured in money or physical symptoms—becomes privatized. Very rich, very successful, very healthy firms or people could, and should, become even more so. In the hands of the Chicago School of economics or the St. Louis School of psychiatry, the logic that says we have a particular political or moral responsibility towards the weak, which may require us to impose restrictions on the strong, is broken. Authority consists simply in measuring, rating, comparing, and contrasting the strong and the weak without judgment, showing the weak how much stronger they might be, and confirming to the strong that they are winning, at least for the time being. Buried within the technocratic toolkits of neoliberal regulators and evaluators is a brutal political philosophy. This condemns most people to the status of failures, with only the faint hope of future victories to cling onto. That school in London “where the pupils are allowed to win just one race each, for fear that to win more would make the other pupils seem inferior” was, in fact, a model of how to guard against a depressive-competitive disorder that few in 1977 could have seen coming. But that would also have required a different form of economy, which few policymakers today are prepared to warrant.

Psychologists have shown that individuals tend to be happiest if they credit themselves for their successes, but not for their failures. This might sound like a symptom of delusion, but it is arguably no more delusional than a competitive, depressive culture which attributes every success and every failure to individual ability and effort.

Few private sector managers are required to negotiate with unions any longer, but nearly all of them confront a much trickier challenge, of dealing with employees who are regularly absent, unmotivated, or suffering from persistent, low-level mental health problems. Resistance to work no longer manifests itself in organized voice or outright refusal, but in diffuse forms of apathy and chronic health problems. The border separating general ennui from clinical mental health problems is especially challenging to managers in twenty-first-century workplaces, seeing as it requires them to ask personal questions on matters that they are largely unqualified to deal with.

The World Health Organization caused a stir in 2001 by predicting that mental health disorders would have become the world’s largest cause of disability and death by 2020. Some estimates suggest that over a third of European and American adults are suffering from some form of mental health problem, even if many are going undiagnosed.

If capitalism is being ground down by the chronic, unspecifiable alienation of those it depends on, then surely solving that problem may also open up possibilities for political reform? The hard economic costs that ennui now places upon employers and governments means that human misery has shown up as a chronic problem that elites cannot simply shove aside.

One report on the topic, sponsored by a number of UK corporations including Barclays Bank, stated with a peculiar absence of compassion:

“Today’s brain-based economy puts a premium on cerebral skills, in which cognition is the ignition of productivity and innovation. Depression attacks that vital asset.”

A UK government report published in 2008 complained that “the fallacy persists that illness is incompatible with being at work,” which doctors were guilty of peddling. A government campaign was launched to dissuade doctors of this, and their official “sick notes” (which were once signed by doctors to declare that an individual shouldn’t work) were replaced by “fit notes,” requiring doctors to describe the remaining ways in which an individual could still be employed, despite any illnesses or disabilities. Doctors were encouraged to sign a draft statement scripted by the state, agreeing that work is good for people.

The philosophical deficit in the science of happiness is dealt with by importing ideas from Buddhism and new age religions.

The psychology of motivation blends into the physiology of health, drawing occasionally on insights from sports coaches and nutritionists, to which is added a cocktail of neuroscientific rumours and Buddhist meditation practices. Various notions of ‘fitness,’ ‘happiness,’ ‘positivity,’ and ‘success’ bleed into one another, with little explanation of how or why. The idea which accompanies all of this is that there is one ideal form of human existence: hardworking, happy, healthy, and above all, rich. A science of elite perfectibility is built on the back of this heroic capitalist vision.

In the eyes of these consultants, unemployment is really a symptom of some broader personal malaise, which manifests itself in inactivity. The solution consists of a range of coaching programmes, combined with “behavioural activation” courses, aimed at restoring the unemployed individual’s self-belief and optimism with ruthless efficiency. As one participant in a course reported, they were shouted at by a self-help guru to “talk, breathe, eat, shit belief in yourself” and that “you are the product—you either believe it or you don’t.”

One of America’s leading workplace happiness gurus, Tony Hsieh, argues that the most successful businesses are those which deliberately and strategically nurture happiness throughout their organizations. Businesses should

employ chief happiness officers to ensure that nobody escapes workplace happiness. But if this sounds like the recipe for inclusive community, it isn't. Hsieh advises businesses to identify the 10% of employees who are least enthusiastic towards the happiness agenda, and then lay them off. Once this is done, the remaining 90% will apparently become "super-engaged," a finding which is open to more than one psychological interpretation.

In the face of workplace ennui and psychological stagnation, the motivational gurus simply demand more willpower. By this account, the activities that might result in happiness, such as socializing or relaxing, are only valuable to the extent that they might restore brain and body to a level of fitness, from which they can then be propelled forwards to the next business challenge. This particular version of utilitarianism means expanding corporate rationality further into everyday life, such that there is now even an "optimal" way of taking a break from work, and simply going for a walk can be viewed as a calculated act of productivity management.

"He believed in the social arrangements of capitalism regardless of what capitalism did to him. Naturally, he was a positive thinker, and in his ability to overlook the world's cruelty and focus exclusively on reforming himself he embodied the 'social anesthetic' side of positive thinking."

Positive thinking is an all-American coping mechanism, practically a national pastime. Author James Rorty noted this during the Great Depression, when he traveled America talking with people forced to seek work on the road. In his 1936 book, *Where Life Is Better*, he was dismayed that so many of his interview subjects seemed so unshakably cheerful:

"I encountered nothing in 15,000 miles of travel that disgusted and appalled me so much as this American addiction to make-believe."

Positive thinking is very preachy and small minded stuff to be honest. It oversimplifies the human experience as if we're all living in some Rocky movie narrative. Sometimes people get injured in ways that they don't come back from. Sometimes those injuries are not visible from the outside. This is all well and good for a Hollywood pep talk scene but not all endings are happy and that's life. This is why we have to take responsibility for how we treat others because you never know the next guy's deal and it's real easy to assume and pass judgment but no one is in any place to do that when so few of us can see past our own nose. It's amazing how many people think that mental illness is fake just because they haven't experienced it

personally or how many people think that their journey is what everyone else is dealing with and whatever worked for them is some universal truth that everyone should heed. That's simple human arrogance.

It's really admirable to encourage people to grow and bounce back but every person has limits, whether they've realized them or not and when we've crossed the threshold of pain and weight and we have no more to give, that's when people check out after being strong for a lifetime of putting their all in. It's one thing to offer help but don't be condescending of another man's struggle just because you think you know what will work and is best for them. The notion that we all have to be happy all the time is just nonsense anyway created by the self-help and pharmaceutical industry. There's nothing wrong with having lows to your highs and occasionally accepting that life is joy and pain, because that's what it means to be human.

Gym teacher pep talks are fine for a charlie horse but someone who's lived more pain than any single person is meant to experience doesn't need your arrogant oversimplification of their life.

Far too often, self-help leaders delivering these pompous philosophies of life and living have no rightful standing to be doing any such thing. There's a tendency on the reader's part to think these people are unimpeachable authorities speaking gospel truth. That's hardly the case. In truth, the only difference between a self-help reader and a self-help writer may be that the writer can write well enough to get a book deal. The end result is that consumers make sweeping changes in their lives based on something their aunt or auto mechanic could have told them.

Within the movement, a teapot tempest raged over whether the real culprit was nature or nurture, or what degree of each. But both camps arrived at the same philosophical end point: You were helpless against the forces that made you what you were. Consequently, Victimization told people to stop beating themselves up: No one wants to make hurtful mistakes, but we're human, and humans err. You gotta let go of all that guilt! You didn't make yourself this way, so it's not your fault. After all, wasn't the very first step out of twelve an admission of powerlessness? Victimization framed guilt as a bad thing, which, by implication if not definition, also framed conscience as a bad thing. By extension, the message became: Your needs are paramount here. It's all about you. Recovering a healthy sense of self entailed forsaking your excessive or unhealthy concern for others—for in the twelve-step universe, such excessive concern came to constitute the pitiable emotional quagmire of codependency. By the concept's heyday in the late 1980s, the term would be applied to just about every interpersonal relationship that fell short of sheer bliss.

In their eagerness to provide additional mechanisms for overcoming guilt and self-loathing, the Victimization movement's spiritual leaders made an important discovery: They could help a constituent better cope with the burden of his failings by redefining them. This insight led to clever semantic distinctions that either made the untoward behaviors sound tamer or, following Bill W.'s example, framed those shortcomings as actual medical or psychological conditions. Such artful use of language became a hallmark of the self-help movement and had dramatic repercussions far beyond the world of self-help. Under this guiding principle, which became known as the "disease model" of bad or unproductive behavior, the roster of newfound conditions naturally mushroomed. Drug abuse, sex addiction, compulsive eating, compulsive lying, compulsive shopping, compulsive gambling—eventually these problems and many others were deemed diseases.

Imagine walking into a coffee shop, ordering a cappuccino, and then, to your surprise, being informed that it has already been paid for. This sounds like a pleasant experience, one which might even make the coffee more pleasurable to drink. Where did this unexpected gift come from? It transpires that it was left by the previous customer. The only snag, if indeed it is a snag, is that you now have to do the same for the next customer to walk in. This is known as a "pay-it-forward" pricing scheme. It is something that has been practiced by a number of small businesses in California, such as Berkeley's Karma Kitchen, and sometimes has been introduced spontaneously by customers themselves. On the face of it, it would seem to defy the logic of free market economics. After all, the basic premise of the price system, as it appeared to William Stanley Jevons and the neoclassical economists, is that I will exchange my money for a pleasure that I experience privately. Money for the shopkeeper is counter-balanced against satisfaction for me. Markets, surely, are places where we are allowed, even expected, to behave selfishly. With its hippy idealism, pay-it-forward would appear to defy the core tenets of economic calculation.

But there is more to it than this. Researchers have looked closely at pay-it-forward pricing and discovered something with profound implications for how markets and business work. It transpires that people will generally pay more for a good, under the pay-it-forward model, than under a conventional pricing system. This is true even when the participants are complete strangers. People don't want to look cheap. They want to be fair, but they also want to fit in with the social norms. Contrary to what economists have long assumed, altruism can often exert a far stronger influence over our decision-making than calculation. If individuals can become seduced into relationships of reciprocity, rather than of selfish calculation, the capacity to influence them is that much greater. So is the opportunity to charge them

more money.

Similar research findings have been made in the workplace. The notion of “performance-related pay” is a familiar one, suggesting, reasonably enough, that additional effort by an employee is rewarded by a commensurate increase in pay. But studies conducted by researchers at Harvard Business School have discovered that there is a more effective way of extracting greater effort from staff: represent pay increases as a gift. When money is offered in exchange for extra effort, the employee may be minded to view the extra money as their entitlement and carry on as before. But when the employer makes some apparently gratuitous act of altruism, the employee enters a more binding reciprocal relationship and works harder.

When it comes to the free market, all corporations dwell in a paradoxical position. They seek all of the freedoms that the market offers for their vested interests, but as few as possible for anybody else. The trick is to maintain maximum autonomy for shareholders and executives while gaining maximum commitment from employees and customers. The last thing a business wants from its customers (or their more valued staff) is for them to remember that they are in a market, with freedom of choice. Freebies are a useful way of disguising what’s really taking place.

Making an explicit moral commitment—even under duress—seems to bind people in certain ways that utilitarian penalties and incentives often do not. It seems that this undermines the cynical, calculative, individualist theory of human psychology, which lies at the heart of Benthamism and orthodox economics. It transpires that we are as much motivated by moral principles as we are by our own selfish interests. Maybe the cold rationality of the market does not have quite the grip on our psychology as we have long feared. Could it be that we are decent, social creatures after all? Perhaps this could be the basis for a new political hope, of a society in which sharing and gift-giving offer a serious challenge to the power of monetary accumulation and privatization.

But there is also a more disturbing possibility: that the critique of individualism and monetary calculation is now being incorporated into the armoury of utilitarian policy and management. The history of capitalism is littered with critiques of the dehumanizing, amoral world of money, markets, consumption, and labour, offered by romantics, Marxists, anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural critics among many. These critics have long argued that social bonds are more fundamental than market prices. The achievement of behavioural economics is to take this insight, but to then instrumentalize it in the interests of power. The very idea of the social is being captured. John B. Watson had promised in 1917 that, in an age of behaviourist science, “the educator, the physician, the jurist and the businessman could utilize

our data in a practical way, as soon as we are able, experimentally, to obtain them.” Behavioural economics has been true to this mission statement. One of its key insights is that, if one wants to control other human beings, it is often far more effective to appeal to their sense of morality and social identity than to their self-interest. By framing notions such as ‘fairness’ and ‘gift’ in purely psychological and neurological terms, behavioural science converts them into instruments of social control.

Viewed from a more cynical perspective—as behavioural economists themselves do—activities such as pay-it-forward and random acts of managerial generosity have a pernicious element, which works through never being made explicit. In abandoning the psychology of pure self-interest, these projects shift to a far more invasive and constrictive alternative, namely the psychology of credit and debt. A psychological sense of social obligation is first manufactured and then harnessed for particular purposes which remain concealed. If utilitarianism is, at its heart, a political logic in which every institution is to be judged in terms of its measured outcome, then the extension of this to encompass our basic moral sensibilities must represent that logic’s final triumph.

The ideology of this new “social” economy depends on painting the old economy as horribly individualistic and materialistic. The assumption is that, prior to the World Wide Web and the Californian gurus that celebrate it, we lived atomized, private lives, with every relationship mediated by cash. Before it became “social,” business was a nasty, individualist affair, driven only by greed. This picture is, of course, completely false. Corporations have been trying to produce, manage, and influence social relationships—as an alternative to purely monetary transactions—since the birth of management in the mid-nineteenth century. Businesses have long worried about their public reputation and the commitment of their employees. And it goes without saying that informal social networks themselves are as old as humanity.

What has changed is not the role of the “social” in capitalism, but the capacity to subject it to a quantitative, economic analysis, thanks primarily to the digitization of social relationships. The ability to visualize and quantify social relations, then subject them to an economic audit, is growing all the time. While the expert practitioners of “social analytics” are best placed to do this, there is also a growing tendency and opportunity for individuals themselves to view their social lives in this mathematical, utilitarian sense. As this happens, the moral dimension of friendship and reciprocity starts to recede, and the more explicitly utilitarian dimension moves to the foreground. Something like pay-it-forward ceases to influence us because we want to fit in with social norms, and more because of the

psychological kick we get out of it ourselves. People start to think of altruism in terms of incentives. Viewing social relations and giving in this tacitly economic way introduces an unpleasant question: what's in it for me? One of the most persuasive answers emerging is that friendship and altruism are healthy, for both mind and body.

Once again, the logic of monetary market exchange is vigorously attacked in positive psychology. The words which recur over and over in positive psychology texts and speech are gratitude, giving, and empathy. In a world that seems cold, calculating, and careless, positive psychology invites its follower to adopt a more ethical stance, based around empathy and generosity. The fact that this stress upon social reciprocity is entirely in keeping with the current spirit of capitalism (clearly manifest in marketing) goes unremarked-upon. But what really leaps out from this new ethical orientation is the way in which it is ultimately justified: giving makes the giver feel happier. Equally, the mental habit of feeling grateful delivers positive mental benefits. The advice is to stop thinking so much of oneself—but the justification is ultimately a self-centred one.

It's like when Oprah Winfrey creates a game show where the whole goal is to give money away to sycophantic strangers: It's an impossible act to criticize, because (of course) charity is wonderful. Yet there's something perverse about high-profile public altruism; it always feels like the individual is trying to purchase 'good person' status with money they could never spend on themselves, anyway. Oprah is doing something good, but not necessarily for the motive of goodness. And the motive matters.

Of course seeing someone else do something, or even imagining doing something ourselves, is not exactly the same as experiencing it directly. For example, we mostly only experience the affective part of the physical pain of others; we really don't have the same intense physical sensations in our body. This means that you'll suffer along with the character on screen trying to cut off his foot, but won't be screaming in agony as though your foot really was being sawed from your leg (but it might ache a little).

“Every week, each of us puts in around \$3.30 to pay for our aid program—about the cost of a cup of coffee.”

Is that how much we want to help the less fortunate? One cup of coffee a week? I just pulled my local paper out of the letterbox, and it has an article on a company that wants to take you up in a plane and let you jump out, at a cost of \$425 per jump. That kind of sum can save a child's life, or restore sight to people who have gone blind and cannot afford a simple operation that Australians take for granted. How can we compare saving

a life, or restoring sight to a blind person, with a brief thrill? I shouldn't pick on skydivers just because the cost per minute is so high. Four days in a grandstand seat for a grand prix costs about the same, and a couple of concert tickets could too, or dinner and wine at a good restaurant, or some new clothes. I'm not saying that no one should be having any fun. I'm just reminding you how much we have, in comparison with the little we give.

Are these emotions the best guide to what we ought to do? According to Make-A-Wish, the average cost of realizing the wish of a child with a life-threatening illness is \$7,500. That sum, if donated to the Against Malaria Foundation and used to provide bed nets to families in malaria-prone regions, could save the lives of at least two or three children (and that's a conservative estimate). If donated to the Fistula Foundation, it could pay for surgeries for approximately 17 young mothers who, without that assistance, will be unable to prevent their bodily wastes from leaking through their vaginas and hence are likely to be outcasts for the rest of their lives. If donated to the Seva Foundation to treat trachoma and other common causes of blindness in developing countries, it could protect 100 children from losing their sight as they grow older. It's obvious, isn't it, that saving a child's life is better than fulfilling a child's wish.

Why then do so many people give to Make-A-Wish, when there are more practical ways of using their charitable dollars? The answer lies, at least in part, in those above-mentioned emotions, which, as psychological research shows, make the plight of a single identifiable individual much more salient to us than that of a large number of people we cannot identify. That is a flaw in our emotional make-up, one that developed over millions of years when we could help only people we could see in front of us. It is not justification for ignoring the needs of distant strangers.

Social science and physiology are converging into a new discipline, in which human bodies are studied for the ways they respond to one another physically. It would seem a little perverse to suggest that policy-makers ignore this evidence of the impact of social networks and altruism on health. And if positive psychology can generate just a little more mutual concern, through self-help and cognitive tips, then why not? Yet there is still a danger lurking in this worldview, which is the same problem that afflicts all forms of social network analysis. In reducing the social world to a set of mechanisms and resources available to individuals, the question repeatedly arises as to whether social networks might be redesigned in ways to suit the already privileged. Networks have a tendency towards what are called power laws, whereby those with influence are able to harness that power to win even greater influence.

A negative frame of mind, including depression itself, is known to be

socially contagious. Happy, healthy individuals can then tailor their social relationships in ways that protect them against the risk of unhappiness. If you find yourself living with or around people with negative outlooks consider balancing out your friend roster say some. The impact of this friend-roster-rebalancing on those unfortunates with the “negative outlooks” is all too easy to imagine. There is something a little sad that the fabric of social life is now a problem which is addressed within the rubric of health policy. Loneliness now appears as an objective problem, but only because it shows up in the physical brain and body, with calculable costs for governments and health insurers. Generosity and gratitude are urged upon people, but mainly to alleviate their own mental health problems and private misery. And friendship ties within poor inner-city neighbourhoods have become a topic of government concern, but only to the extent that they mediate epidemics of bad nutrition and costly inactivity. This is all an attempt to grasp the social world without departing from mathematical, individualist psychology. While this may offer genuine medical aid to needy individuals, trying to understand society in purely psychological terms is also a recipe for narcissism. And the man who initiated it was nothing if not a narcissist.

The vision of social life that fuelled sociometry was undoubtedly a far more individualistic one than that which had inspired sociology up until then. Collective entities emerged only thanks to the spontaneous power of individual egos. They could just as easily be dispensed with again. As far as Moreno was concerned, American culture was founded on specifically this freedom to enter and exit groups. But creating a social science which recognized this individual freedom was far from straight-forward.

Two problems in particular presented themselves. Firstly, the rich, binding, comforting, and sometimes suffocating nature of social life gets eliminated from view. The sorts of data that can be included in a sociometric study are necessarily very simplified. Just as social media sites offer users limits to how they can define themselves romantically (‘single,’ ‘in a relationship’ or ‘it’s complicated’) or in relation to each other (‘friend’ or ‘unfriend,’ ‘follow’ or ‘unfollow’), Moreno’s sociometry would only succeed if nuance were stripped out. The price to be paid for exiting the restricted limits of the Freudian office was that the depths of the human psyche started to disappear from view. To carve a path between a science of society and a science of the isolated individual, sociometry necessarily had to simplify both substantially. Of course such simplification can also be attractive. To act scientifically upon the social world, elites need to have nuance and culture removed. Secondly, what to do with the reams of data that resulted from viewing society as a web of interpersonal relations? How to cope with it all or make sense of it? Moreno had no answer to this. The fact that

social network analysis would not really take off until the 1960s wasn't for want of an adequate underlying theory, but for want of sufficient power to crunch the numbers.

Methods of social analysis are never as politically innocent as they appear. While social network analysis purports to be a simple, stripped-down mathematical study of the ties that bind us, it's worth reflecting on the philosophy that inspired its founder. As far as Moreno was concerned, other people are there to prop up and please individual egos. A friendship is valuable to the extent that it makes me feel better. Once the study of social life is converted into a branch of mathematical psychology, then this produces some worrying effects on how people start to relate to each other. The narcissism of the small boy playing God surrounded by his angels has become another model for how pleasure is now manufactured and measured.

If I identify happiness with fleeting pleasant sensations, and crave to experience more and more of them, I have no choice but to pursue them constantly. When I finally get them, they quickly disappear, and because the mere memory of past pleasures will not satisfy me, I have to start all over again. Even if I continue this pursuit for decades, it will never bring me any lasting achievement; on the contrary, the more I crave these pleasant sensations, the more stressed and dissatisfied I will become. To attain real happiness, humans need to slow down the pursuit of pleasant sensations, not accelerate it.

This Buddhist view of happiness has a lot in common with the biochemical view. Both agree that pleasant sensations disappear as fast as they arise, and that as long as people crave pleasant sensations without actually experiencing them, they remain dissatisfied. However, this problem has two very different solutions. The biochemical solution is to develop products and treatments that will provide humans with an unending stream of pleasant sensations, so we will never be without them. The Buddha's suggestion was to reduce our craving for pleasant sensations, and not allow them to control our lives. According to Buddha, we can train our minds to observe carefully how all sensations constantly arise and pass. When the mind learns to see our sensations for what they are—ephemeral and meaningless vibrations—we lose interest in pursuing them. For what is the point of running after something that disappears as fast as it arises?

People drink alcohol to forget, they smoke pot to feel peaceful, they take cocaine and methamphetamines to be sharp and confident, whereas Ecstasy provides ecstatic sensations, and LSD sends you to meet Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds. What some people hope to get by studying, working, or raising a family, others try to obtain far more easily through the right dosage of molecules. This is an existential threat to the social and economic

order, which is why countries wage a stubborn, bloody, and hopeless war on biochemical crime. The state hopes to regulate the biochemical pursuit of happiness, separating “bad” manipulations from “good” ones. The principle is clear: biochemical manipulations that strengthen political stability, social order and economic growth are allowed and even encouraged (those that calm hyperactive kids in school, or drive anxious soldiers forward into battle). Manipulations that threaten stability and growth are banned. But each year new drugs are born in the research labs of universities, pharmaceutical companies and other criminal organizations, and the needs of the state and the market also keep changing. As the biochemical pursuit of happiness accelerates, so it will reshape politics, society, and economics, and it will become ever harder to bring it under control.

If pupils suffer from attention disorders, stress, and low grades, perhaps we ought to blame outdated teaching methods, overcrowded classrooms and an unnaturally fast tempo of life. Maybe we should modify the schools rather than the kids? It is interesting to see how the arguments have evolved. People have been quarrelling about education methods for thousands of years. Whether in ancient China or Victorian Britain, everybody had his or her pet method, and vehemently opposed all alternatives. Yet hitherto everybody still agreed on one thing: in order to improve education, we need to change the schools. Today, for the first time in history, at least some people think it would be more efficient to change the pupils’ biochemistry.

If science is right and our happiness is determined by our biochemical system, then the only way to ensure lasting contentment is by rigging this system. Forget economic growth, social reforms and political revolutions: in order to raise global happiness levels, we need to manipulate human biochemistry. And this is exactly what we have begun doing over the last few decades. Fifty years ago psychiatric drugs carried a severe stigma. Today, that stigma has been broken. For better or worse, a growing percentage of the population is taking psychiatric medicines on a regular basis, not only to cure debilitating mental illnesses, but also to face more mundane depressions and the occasional blues.

Over half a century after the discovery of antidepressants, it remains the case that nobody has ever discovered precisely how or why they work, to the extent that they do. As has been widely researched and commented on, antidepressants are only marginally more effective than placebos, and the effectiveness of placebos has been growing year on year. Nor could anybody ever make this discovery, because what it means for an SSRI to “work” will differ from one patient to the next. A great deal of attention is paid to how SSRIs alter our understanding of unhappiness, relocating it in our brain neurons; but they also fundamentally alter the meaning of a medical

diagnosis and the nature of medical and psychiatric authority. A society organized around the boosting of personal satisfaction and fulfillment—“self-anchored striving”—would need to reconceive the nature of authority, when it came to tending and treating the pleasures and pains of the mind. Either that authority would need to become more fluid, countercultural and relativist itself, accepting the lack of any clear truth in this arena, or it would need to acquire a new type of scientific expertise, more numerical and dispassionate, whose function is to construct classifications, diagnoses, hierarchies, and distinctions, to suit the needs of governments, managers, and risk profilers, whose job would otherwise be impossible.

Mental illness has become something detectable by observation and classification, which doesn't require any explanation of why it has arisen. Psychiatric insight into the recesses and conflicts of the human self was replaced by a dispassionate, scientific guide for naming symptoms. And in scrapping the possibility that a mental syndrome might be an understandable and proportionate response to a set of external circumstances, psychiatry lost the capacity to identify problems in the fabric of society or economy. Proponents described the new position as “theory neutral.” Critics saw it as an abandoning of the deeper vocation of psychiatry to heal, listen, and understand. Even one of the task force members started to get cold feet:

“I believe that what we now call disorders are really but symptoms.”

Today, 80 percent of the prescriptions that are written for antidepressants in the United States are by medical doctors and primary care practitioners, and not by psychiatrists at all. In a post-1960s era of “self-anchored striving,” what can people possibly hold in common other than a desire for more happiness? And what higher purpose could a psychological expert pursue than the reduction of unhappiness? These simple, seemingly indisputable principles were what emerged from the cultural and political conflicts which came to a head in 1968. The growing problem of depression, experienced as a non-specific lack of energy and desire, combined with the emergence of a drug that seemed selectively to alleviate this, and the need of drug companies, regulators, and health insurers to find clarity amidst such murkiness, meant that psychoanalytic expertise was heading for a fall.

It is often said that depression is the inability to construct a viable future for oneself. What goes wrong, when people suffer our contemporary form of depression, is not simply that they cease to experience pleasure or happiness, but that they lose the will or ability to seek pleasure or happiness. It is not that they become unhappy per se, but that they lose

the mental—and often the physical—resources to pursue things that might make them happy. In becoming masters of their own lifestyles and values, they discover that they lack the energy to act upon them. It is only in a society that makes generalized, personalized growth the ultimate virtue that a disorder of generalized, personalized collapse will become inevitable. And so a culture which values only optimism will produce pathologies of pessimism; an economy built around competitiveness will turn defeatism into a disease. Once the Benthamite project of psychic optimization loses any sense of agreed limits, promising only more and more, the troubling discovery is made that utilitarian measurement can go desperately negative as well as positive.

“Just do it.” “Enjoy more.” Slogans such as these, belonging to Nike and McDonald’s respectively, offer the ethical injunctions of the post-1960s neoliberal era. They are the last transcendent moral principles for a society which rejects moral authority. Enjoyment has become an even greater duty than to obey the rules. Thanks to the influence of the Chicago School over government regulators, the same is true for corporate profitability.

The entanglement of psychic maximization and profit maximization has grown more explicit over the course of the neoliberal era. This is partly due to the infiltration of corporate interests into the APA. In the run up to the DSM-V, published in 2013, it was reported that the pharmaceutical industry was responsible for half of the APA’s \$50 million budget, and that eight of the eleven-strong committee which advised on diagnostic criteria had links to pharmaceutical firms. The ways in which we describe ourselves and our mental afflictions are now shaped partly by the financial interests of big pharma.

A curious shift is taking place in the way that the illness model is applied in psychiatry: symptoms—for example, attention deficit and hyperactivity—are being classified as diseases. The use of snappy acronyms camouflages this to an extent, but the trend is now so well established that it takes some effort to see that it only produces pseudo-explanations. Using this model, a man with high fever (HF) and excessive sweating (ES) would be diagnosed as suffering from HFES. The conclusion would then be that this poor man is feverish and sweaty because he suffers from HFES. Which is just like saying that a woman has attention deficit (AD) and is hyperactive (HA) because she suffers from ADHD. To put it another way: in the current version of the illness model, we constantly run up against circular arguments that only provide the illusion of a scientific explanation. Pronouncements such as ‘ADHD is causing attention deficit in classrooms,’ or ‘A bipolar disorder causes severe mood swings’ are examples of this. The description is presented as the cause of what is being described, and the use of abbreviations means

we don't see through the trick. A final example to round off: someone who experiences sporadic outbursts of uncontrollable rage is said to suffer from IED. IED stands for Intermittent Explosive Disorder. In other words, someone has attacks of rage from time to time because he or she suffers from periodic rage attacks.

Such criticism is easily parried with the claim that only lay people talk like this, and that medical language is both more correct and founded on sound research—there's even checklists and scales! To establish whether this is really true, we need to ask two questions. One has to do with observation and diagnosis, and concerns the reliability of grouping certain symptoms or behaviours under the heading of a single disorder. Does everyone agree with this grouping, and can every clinician use it to reach the same diagnosis in the case of the same patient? The other has to do with causes. What evidence is there for the presumed underlying neurobiological processes and genetic causality of a specific grouping of symptoms?

We can't escape the conclusion that in present-day psychodiagnostics, diagnostic validity—the extent to which a diagnosis indicates a real and unequivocally identifiable disease—is distressingly low. This easily explains the low reliability—the extent to which different doctors concur in their diagnosis of the same patient. The strange thing is that hardly anyone seems to lose any sleep about this, and we all just carry on as if nothing were wrong. How is it possible that, in these days of evidence-based medicine, this state of affairs—which is borne out by plenty of solid evidence—receives little or no attention? There are at least two reasons for this. The first is fairly straightforward: a dominant paradigm leads to blind faith. The second is less obvious: the illness model lets everyone off the hook. No one need feel responsible any more, let alone guilty.

Mental health is produced socially: the presence or absence of mental health is above all a social indicator and therefore requires social, as well as individual solutions. A preoccupation with individual symptoms may lead to a disembodied psychology which separates what goes on inside people's heads from social structure and context. The key therapeutic intervention then becomes to “change the way you think” rather than to refer people to sources of help for key catalysts for psychological problems: debt, poor housing, bullshit jobs, violence, crime.

A diagnostic system of this type clearly influences the goal of treatment: the “too much” must be surgically removed, or the “too little” fleshed out, so that the patient once again complies with social norms. This built-in link between diagnostics and treatment confirms: you only know the full extent of a problem when you see the solutions that are proposed. If a child labelled with ADHD is sitting quietly in the classroom attending

to the lesson, the problem has been solved. In other words, the disorder doesn't really bother the child so much as its parents or teachers. But if the child makes a nuisance of himself or herself, he or she is prescribed Ritalin and an obsolete form of behavioural therapy. This explains a very strange medical finding, namely that medication and behavioural therapy aren't really needed outside school-term times. I would go so far as to say that the aim of most DSM diagnoses is to restore compliance with social norms.

HELPS THE PROBLEM CHILD BECOME LOVABLE AGAIN

—Ritalin Ad

“Whereas the adult comes for treatment largely because of his own distress and at his own initiative, the child comes to our attention because of his family's or his community's initiative. Who, then, are we to classify diagnostically: the child, the family, the community, or all three?”

“I can't make your home less chaotic, I can't run your school differently, I can't get your parents back together or help you with your homework. But I can give you a diagnosis, I can give you medication.”

A doctor in rural Georgia prescribes Adderall and Concerta not because children have real ADHD, but merely to help them in what were financially strapped, subpar schools:

“I don't have a whole lot of choice. We've decided as a society that it's too expensive to modify the kid's environment. So we have to modify the kid.”

Perhaps even more amazing, several experts concede that this approach is not necessarily rare. They agree that, because class sizes have consistently increased while physical education and other services waned, doctors are indeed being forced to rely on medication to keep some kids from getting sucked down failure's whirlpool—Meducation.

Millions of kids today are labeled with a brain disorder they probably do not have, changing their self-image and personal narrative forever. Yet this doesn't seem to bother a lot of powerful people. Whether it's just one child or today's six-million, if we're going to tell a kid that he has a permanent, potentially devastating brain disorder, we'd better damn well be right.

“After a while I felt like I was living someone else’s life. Adderall helped me live someone else’s life. And alcohol helped me escape that. No one ever asked me what I wanted—what I wanted to do.”

We need to figure out why kids are reaching outside of themselves in order to alter reality—it’s as simple as that. Then we need to heal those reasons, those causes. Many don’t even ask questions about why they’re taking medicines, it’s as simple as: ‘You’re depressed so we should probably put you on antidepressants.’

Beware the simple and sovereign explanation.

More than anything else, Kristin had one of those square-peg personalities that didn’t quite fit her world’s round—and shrinking—holes. The human brain has evolved over many thousands of years, yet only in the last hundred, a blip on that time line, have we demanded that each and every young one sit still and pay attention for seven hours a day. Kristin couldn’t.

You’re putting a monkey in a cage. It upsets the monkey, so they say there’s something wrong with the monkey. But some monkeys should be swinging from a tree.

To this day, the United States is one of only two developed nations that allows advertising of ADHD medications—or any other prescription medication—to the general public. The other is New Zealand, but the practice is rendered unprofitable there by the state-run health care system.

“It’s been a while, Professor Brown. Now that we have your blood pressure under control I don’t see you as often. What brings you in today?” The lab-coated, stethoscoped doctor clasped her hands and peered into the patient’s sunken eyes.

The forty-something man explained that his work had slipped. His boss was getting annoyed. “I just need to focus on getting things done,” he groaned.

“Do you find it difficult staying on a task without wandering off onto something else?” she asked.

He did. “I’m just not organized and I don’t understand how people get so much done,” the man explained. “I really have no patience to sit for long periods of time. These are usually important meetings—I just get bored and lose track.”

“I’d like to explore this with you further,” she said. She handed him an adult ADHD rating scale, almost certainly the six- or eighteen-question sheet devised by Harvard and NYU doctors, and asked him to fill it out. Afterward, she reviewed his answers

and grew serious. “You indicate that you interrupt conversations and have trouble waiting in line,” the doctor said. “I’m concerned about your difficulty with procrastinating, missing deadlines and making careless errors. You’ve never been diagnosed with ADHD. Has anyone in your immediate family been diagnosed?”

The man perked up. “Well, actually, yes,” he said. “I was surprised when my son was diagnosed before he went to college. He’s on medication now, and he’s doing well, especially with schoolwork.”

“Well, that is interesting,” she said, her eyes widening. “Because if you have ADHD—which I believe you do—family members often respond well to similar medications.” Her lips cracked into the slightest of knowing grins. “Would you consider giving that a try?”

It took an entire six minutes for the doctor to diagnose her adult patient with ADHD, and to recommend some of the most addictive substances known to medicine. No discussion of their risks. No talk of what other factors might be causing his work distress, if in fact he really was distressed in the first place. Just a few boilerplate questions, a check-off-some-boxes survey, and—voilà!—another patient off the ADHD assembly line.

A spoof by antipsychiatry zealots? A snarky *How to Score Free Blow* Internet script for college students? No. Precisely the opposite. These scenes came straight from an ostensibly serious video series that aimed to teach today’s physicians how to diagnose adult ADHD. It was part of doctors’ Continuing Medical Education—the small courses that states require providers to take so that they stay abreast of new medical developments (and keep their licenses). The videos and Web pages, often absorbed in an hour and ending with a remarkably obliging multiple-choice quiz, have become a primary means by which psychiatry is taught after medical school. But while other professionals, such as lawyers and hairdressers, generally pay to fulfill their fields’ requirements, drug companies often foot the bill for doctors. Symposia held by major organizations, such as the American Psychiatric Association, or more niche groups, such as APSARD, are heavily subsidized by drug makers, who can fund classes and other events that amount to free promotion, to great audience appreciation. A psychiatrist once gazed at the lavish digs at an APA convention and said that without industry money:

“We’d be sitting in the basement of the YMCA.”

Many doctors discourage in-depth analysis, thinking it's a waste of your time or theirs, in part because most insurance companies will not pay them for anything more than a brief assessment. One doctor tried to rationalize his mishandling of a case by saying:

“I hate to say this, but when you put in five hours and get paid for only one, it's hard to make a living.”

You wouldn't tolerate a mechanic telling you, 'Well, I skipped some steps on your brakes because Ford doesn't reimburse me.' If it's not good enough for your car, it's not good enough for your child.

“You take one pill, and next thing you know, the paper's done. I've known people who have over two-hundred pills at one time. One had a jar of like three-hundred or four-hundred. I got diagnosed in maybe ten minutes. My doctor is clueless. Ten bucks a pill, maybe \$25 during finals. It's kind of hard to be like, 'Oh, I shouldn't take this.' It's like, 'Okay I have some shit to get done, and here's a get-shit-done pill.’”

Here's how those pills got from the development stage to your mouth. It works like this: The companies are often running their own trials on their own products. That means they set up the clinical trial, and they get to decide who gets to see any results. So they are judging their own products. They're involving all these poor researchers who have no other source of funding and who have little control over how the results will be written up and presented. Once the scientific evidence is gathered, it's not even the scientists who write it up much of the time. Typically, it's the company people who write up the published scientific reports. This evidence then goes to the regulators, whose job is to decide whether to allow the drug onto the market. But in the United States, 40 percent of the regulators' wages are paid by the drug companies—in Britain, it's 100 percent. When a society is trying to figure out which drug is safe to put on the market, there are meant to be two teams: the drug company making the case for it, and a referee working for us, the public, figuring out if it properly works. But in this match, the referee is paid by the drug company team, and that team almost always wins.

The rules they have written are designed to make it extraordinarily easy to get a drug approved. All you have to do is produce two trials—any time, anywhere in the world—that suggest some positive effect of the drug. If there are two, and there is some effect, that's enough. So you could have a situation in which there are one-thousand scientific trials, and 998 find

the drug doesn't work at all, and two find there is a tiny effect—and that means the drug will be making its way to your local pharmacy.

Of all the studies drug companies carry out, 40 percent are never released to the public, and lots more are only released selectively, with any negative findings left on the cutting room floor.

By exporting an American view of mental disorders as solid scientific entities treatable by trusted pharmaceuticals, we may be inadvertently increasing the spread of such diseases. We assume that people around the world react the same way to stress as we do. We assume that mental illness around the world manifests the same way as it does in the US. We assume that our methods and pills are better ways to manage mental illnesses than local and traditional methods. But are these assumptions correct? Suffering and sadness in many Asian cultures has traditionally been seen as part of a process of spiritual growth and resilience. People in other cultures react to stress differently from us. Even severe illnesses such as schizophrenia may manifest differently outside the US, due to cultural adaptations or degrees of social support. For example, a landmark World Health Organization study of 1,379 patients from ten countries showed that two-year outcomes of first-episode schizophrenics were much better for the patients in the poor countries than in the US, despite a higher proportion of American patients on medications.

One of the last remaining checks on the neurochemical understanding of depression was the exemption attached to people who were grieving: this, at the very least, was still considered a not unhealthy reason to be unhappy. But in the face of a new drug, Wellbutrin, promising to alleviate “major depressive symptoms occurring shortly after the loss of a loved one,” the APA caved in and removed this exemption from the DSM-V. To be unhappy for more than two weeks after the death of another human being can now be considered a medical illness. Psychiatrists now study bereavement in terms of its possible mental health “risks,” without any psychoanalytic or common sense of why loss might be a painful experience.

The main charge that has been levelled against the DSM, since the introduction of the DSM-III in 1980, is that it converts everyday forms of sadness and personality quirks into illnesses. This has been particularly pronounced in the identification of ever more forms of addiction. Until the early 1970s, addiction would only have been understood as referring to syndromes which affect the metabolism, such as alcoholism, and even then its social and cultural dimensions would have been recognized. In the era of the DSM-III and since, new addictions have been identified and diagnosed in relation to all manner of hedonistic practices and experiences, from gambling to shopping to sex. Inevitably, the new diagnostic categories

lend support to biological explanations that the behaviours are hard-wired into certain brains or genes.

What we witness, in the case of a World of Warcraft addict, a social media addict or, for that matter, a sex addict, is only the more pathological element of a society that cannot conceive of relationships except in terms of the psychological pleasures that they produce. The person whose fingers twitch to check their Facebook page, when they're supposed to be listening to their friend over a meal, is the heir to Jacob Moreno's ethical philosophy, in which other people are only there to please, satisfy, and affirm an individual ego from one moment to the next. This inevitably leads to vicious cycles: once a social bond is stripped down to this impoverished psychological level, it becomes harder and harder to find the satisfaction that one desperately wants. Viewing other people as instruments for one's own pleasure represents a denial of core ethical and emotional truths of friendship, love, and generosity.

One grave shortcoming of this egocentric idea of the 'social' is that none (or at least, vanishingly few) of us can ever constantly be the center of attention, receiving praise. Nobody can be God the whole time; mostly they must be the angels who surround the deity. And so it also proves with Facebook. As an endless stream of grandiose spectacles, Facebook has been shown, on balance, to make individuals feel worse about themselves and their own lives. The mathematics of networks means that most people will have fewer friends than average, while a small number of people will have far more than average. The tonic to this sense of inferiority is to make grandiose spectacles of one's own, to seek the gaze of the other, thereby reinforcing a collective vicious cycle. As the positive psychologists are keen to stress, this inability to listen or empathize is a significant contributor to depression.

Our society is excessively individualistic. Markets reduce everything to a question of individual calculation and selfishness. We have become obsessed with money and acquisition at the expense of our social relationships and our own human fulfilment. Capitalism spreads a plague of materialism, which undermines our connectedness, leaving many of us isolated and lonely. Unless we can rediscover the art of sharing, our society will fragment altogether, making trust impossible. Unless we can recover the values associated with friendship and altruism, we will descend into a state of nihilistic ennui. These types of claim have animated various critiques of capitalism and markets for centuries. They have often provided the basis of arguments for political and economic reform, whether moderate attempts to restrain the reach of markets, or more wholesale demands to overhaul the capitalist system. Today, the same types of lament can be heard, but from some very different sources. Now, the gurus of marketing, self-help, behavioural economics, social media, and management are first in line to

attack the individualistic and materialist assumptions of the marketplace. But all they're offering instead is a marginally different theory of individual psychology and behaviour.

The depressed and the lonely, who have entered the purview of policy-making now that their problems have become visible to doctors and neuroscientists, exhibit much that has gone wrong under the neoliberal model of capitalism. Individuals want to escape relentless self-reliance and self-reflection. On this, the positive psychologists have a very clear understanding of the malaise of extreme individualism, which locks individuals into introverted, anxious questioning of their own worth relative to others. Their recommended therapy is for people to get out of themselves and immerse themselves in relationships with others. But in reducing the idea of society to the logic of psychology, the happiness gurus follow the same logic as Jacob Moreno, behavioural economics, and Facebook. This means that the 'social' is an instrument for one's own medical, emotional, or monetary gain. The vicious cycle of self-reflection and self-improvement continues.

If people have become locked in themselves, gazing enviously at others, this poses questions that need institutional, political, collective answers. It cannot be alleviated simply with psychological appeals to the social, which can exacerbate the very problems they aim to alleviate, once combined with digital media and the egocentric model of connectivity which those media facilitate. There is a crucial question of how businesses, markets, policies, laws, political participation might be designed differently to sustain meaningful social relationships, but it is virtually never confronted by the doyens of social capitalism.

We might call this neoliberal socialism. Sharing is preferable to selling, so long as it doesn't interfere with the financial interests of dominant corporations. Appealing to people's moral and altruistic sense becomes the best way of nudging them into line with agendas that they had no say over. Brands and behaviours can be unleashed as social contagions, without money ever changing hands. Empathy and relationships are celebrated, but only as particular habits that happy individuals have learnt to practice. Everything that was once external to economic logic, such as friendship, is quietly brought within it; what was once the enemy of utilitarian logic, namely moral principle, is instrumentalized for utilitarian ends. The logic of neoliberalism, stating that "winners" deserve whatever prizes they can grab, risks usurping the faint glimpse of social reform contained within this agenda. Social neuroscience may prove most decisive here, because it offers a firm physiological basis on which to analyze social behaviour as a component of health, happiness, and wealth. Focused resolutely on the individual brain and body, this science clearly offers as much—and probably

more—to the powerful and rich as it does to the lonely and marginalized. Once social relationships can be viewed as medical and biological properties of the human body, they can become dragged into the limitless pursuit of self-optimization that counts for happiness in the age of neoliberalism.

The reduction of social life to psychology, as performed by Moreno and behavioural economists, or to physiology as achieved by social neuroscience, is not necessarily irreversible. Karl Marx believed that by bringing workers together in the factory and forcing them to work together, capitalism was creating the very class formation that would eventually overwhelm it. This was despite the bourgeois ideology which stressed the primacy of individuals transacting in a marketplace. Similarly, individuals today may be brought together for their own mental and physical health, or for their own private hedonistic kicks; but social congregations can develop their own logic, which is not reducible to that of individual well-being or pleasure. This is the hope that currently lies dormant in this new, neoliberal socialism.

Business ideas and practices do not simply spread of their own accord, not even when they appear to yield clear profits. They need pushing. Sometimes they need cultural and political barriers to be forcefully broken down before they are later adopted, until eventually they come to appear entirely natural. The idea of “scientific advertising,” pioneered in the 1920s by the firm James Walter Thompson (JWT), with support from John B. Watson, is a case in point.

The term ‘data’ derives from the Latin, *datum*, which literally means “that which is given.” It is often an outrageous lie. The data gathered by surveys and psychological experiments is scarcely ever just given. It is either seized through force of surveillance, thanks to some power inequality, or it is given in exchange for something else, such as a monetary reward or a chance to win a free iPad. Often, it is collected in a clandestine way, like the one-way mirrors through which focus groups are observed. In social sciences such as anthropology, the terms on which data is gained (in that case, through prolonged observation and participation) are a matter of constant reflection. But in the behavioural sciences, the innocent term ‘data’ usefully conceals a huge apparatus of power through which people can be studied, watched, measured, and traced, with or without their consent.

Evidently, this political dimension was still visible in the 1920s, when JWT were expanding overseas. In the years since, however, it has receded from view. Questions of what people think or feel, how they intend to vote, how they perceive certain brands, have become simple matters of fact. This is no less true of happiness. Gallup now surveys one-thousand American adults on their happiness and well-being every single day, allowing them to trace public mood in great detail, from one day to the next. We are

now so familiar with the idea that powerful institutions want to know what we're feeling and thinking that it no longer appears as a political issue. But possibilities for psychological and behavioural data are heavily shaped by the power structures which facilitate them. The current explosion in happiness and well-being data is really an effect of new technologies and practices of surveillance. In turn, these depend on preexisting power inequalities.

In other circumstances, this data is being "opened up" on the basis that it is a public good. After all, we the public created it by swiping our smart cards, visiting websites, tweeting our thoughts, and so on. Big data should therefore be something available to all of us to analyze. What this more liberal approach tends to ignore is the fact that, even where data is being opened up, the tools to analyze it are not. Consider New York City's open data regulations: they judiciously leave out the algorithms which are used by government contractors to analyze the data. While the liberal left continues to worry about the privatization of knowledge as enacted by intellectual property rights, a new problem of the privatization of theory has arisen, whereby algorithms which spot patterns and trends are shrouded in commercial secrecy. Entire businesses are now built on the capacity to interpret and make connections within big data.

The spread of narcissism has been harnessed as a research opportunity. When JWT first sought to profile European consumers in the 1920s, this was experienced as an invasion of privacy, as indeed it was. More recently, tolerance for surveys has fallen all over again, though more out of impatience on the part of potential participants than anything else. People simply cannot be bothered to share details of what they like, think, or want with researchers holding clipboards any more. But when Facebook asks its one-billion users that faux-innocent question "What's on your mind?" we pour our thoughts, tastes, likes, desires, and opinions into the company's massive databank without a further thought. When obliged to report on their inner mental states for research purposes, people do so only grudgingly. But when doing so of their own volition, suddenly reporting on behaviour and moods becomes a fulfilling, satisfying activity in its own right. The "quantified self" movement, in which individuals measure and report on various aspects of their private lives—from their diets, to their moods, to their sex lives—began as an experimental group of software developers and artists. But it unearthed a surprising enthusiasm for self-surveillance that market researchers and behavioural scientists have carefully noted. We now have a number of ways in which health and fitness products can be sold alongside quantified self apps, which allow individuals to make constant reports of their behaviour (such as jogging), generating new data sets for the company in the process.

Based on the analysis algorithms give people, they may forget how they actually experience their day-to-day lives and end up with a sunnier or gloomier overall take than is actually representative of their mood. We might consider this to be a form of delusion, although people are of course at liberty to narrate their lives however they see fit.

Moods and decisions, once attributable to the self, begin to migrate to other parts of our body. The cultural imperative to relocate depression in the body has reached the point where scientists now believe that it can be diagnosed through a blood test. What if the patient disagreed? Would they be wrong? More bizarrely, the term ‘brain’ is morphing into an abstract concept, that can refer to various body parts. Some claim to have discovered a “second brain” in the gut, which handles digestion, but which may experience its own moods and mental illnesses.

Where this is explicitly for our own health and well-being—which a great deal of it is developed for—it becomes difficult to mount resistance. On the contrary, many of the new digital apps and analytics tools aimed at uncovering the secrets of happiness and well-being require us to actively cooperate in the measurement of ourselves, and to share data on our mood enthusiastically. There must be obvious benefits available for doing so, or else these forms of measurement would largely cease to work. The problem is that this is never the end of the matter. What begins as a scientific enquiry into the conditions and nature of human welfare can swiftly mutate into new strategies for behavioural control.

Philosophically speaking, there is a gulf separating utilitarianism from behaviourism: the former privileges the inner experience of the mind as the barometer of all value, whereas the latter is only concerned with the various ways in which the observed human animal can be visibly influenced and manipulated. But in terms of methods, technologies, and techniques, the tendency to slip from the former into the latter is all too easy. Inner subjective feelings are granted such a priority under utilitarianism that the appeal of machines capable of reading and predicting them in an objective, behaviourist fashion becomes all the greater. Likewise, what often begins as a basis on which to understand human flourishing and progress—fundamental ideas of enlightenment and humanism—suddenly reappears as a route to sell people stuff they don’t need, work harder for managers who don’t respect them and conform to policy objectives over which they have no say. Quantifying relations among mind, body, and world invariably becomes a basis for asserting control over people and rendering their decisions predictable.

One interesting element of this is that our quasi-private conversations with each other (for instance via Facebook) are viewed as good hard data to be analyzed, whereas the reports we make to interviews or surveys are

considered less reliable. Our conscious statements of opinion or critique are untrustworthy, whereas our unwitting “verbal behaviour” is viewed as a source of inner psychological truth. This may make sense from the perspective of behavioural and emotional science, but it is disastrous from the point of view of democracy, which depends on the notion that people are capable of voicing their interests deliberately and consciously. These developments have generated a new wave of optimism regarding what can be known about the individual mind, decision-making, and happiness. Finally, the real facts of how to influence decision-making may come to light. At last, the truth of why people buy what they buy might come to light. Now, over two centuries after Bentham, we might be about to discover what actually causes a quantifiable increase in human happiness. And in the face of a depression epidemic, mass surveillance of mood and behaviour might unlock the secrets of this disease, so as to screen for it and offer tips and tools to avoid it.

The unspoken precondition of this utopian vision is that society becomes designed and governed as a vast laboratory, which we inhabit almost constantly in our day-to-day lives. This is a new type of power dynamic altogether, which is difficult to characterize purely in terms of surveillance and privacy. The accumulation of psychological data occurs unobtrusively in such a society, often thanks to the enthusiastic cooperation of individual consumers and social media users. Its rationale is typically to make life easier, healthier, and happier for all. It offers environments, such as smart cities, which are constantly adapting around behaviour and real-time social trends, in ways that most people are scarcely aware of. And in keeping with Bentham’s fear of the “tyranny of sounds,” it replaces dialogue with expert management. After all, not everybody can inhabit a laboratory, no matter how big. A powerful minority must play the role of the scientists.

This logic of experimentation allows for policies to be introduced which would otherwise seem entirely unreasonable, or even illegal. Behavioural experiments on criminal activity show that individuals are less psychologically prone to take drugs or engage in low-level crime if the resulting penalty is swift and certain. The association between the act and the result needs to be as firm as possible if punishment is to succeed as a deterrent. In that sense, due process becomes viewed as an inefficient blockage, standing in the way of behaviour change. The much-celebrated HOPE (Hawaii’s Opportunity Probation with Enforcement) programme, which builds directly on this body of evidence, ensures that repeat offenders know they will be jailed immediately if found up to no good.

Projects such as the Hudson Yards quantified community, the Nudge Unit’s fake survey, and HOPE share a number of characteristics. Most

obviously, they are fueled by a high degree of scientific optimism that it may be possible to acquire hard objective knowledge regarding individual decision-making, and then to design public policy (or business practices) accordingly. This optimism is scarcely new; indeed it tends to recur ever few decades or so. The first wave occurred during the 1920s, inspired by Watson and Taylorist principles of “scientific management.” A second occurred in the 1960s, with the rise of new statistical approaches to management, whose most high-profile proponent was US Defense Secretary Robert McNamara during the Vietnam War. The 2010s represent a third wave.

What really drives this behaviourist exuberance? The answer in every case is the same: an anti-philosophical agnosticism, combined with an enthusiastic embrace of mass surveillance. These two things necessarily go together. What the behaviourist is really saying is this: I start with no theory about why people act as they do. I make no presumption as to whether the cause of their decisions is found in their brain, their relationships, their bodies, or their past experiences. I make no appeal to moral or political philosophy, for I am a scientist. I make no claims about human beings beyond what I can see or measure. But this radical agnosticism is only plausible on the basis that the agnostic in question is privy to huge surveillance capabilities. This is why new epochs of behaviourist optimism always coincide with new technologies of data collection and analysis. Only the scientist who can look down on us from above, scraping our data, watching our bodies, assessing our movements, measuring our inputs and outputs, has the privilege of making no presumptions regarding why human beings act as they do.

For the rest of us, talking to our neighbours or engaging in debate, we are constantly drawing on assumptions of what people intend, what they’re thinking, why they have chosen the path they did, and what they actually meant when they said something. On a basic level, to understand what another person says is to draw on various cultural presuppositions about the words they’ve used and how they’ve used them. These presuppositions may not be theories in any strict sense, but more like rules of thumb, which help us to interpret the social world around us. The claim that it is possible to know how decisions are taken, purely on the basis of data, is one that only the observer in his watchtower can plausibly make. For him, theory is simply that which hasn’t yet become visible, and in the age of big data, fMRI, and affective computing, he hopes to be able to abandon it altogether.

We have an unbroken lineal connection to our very first ancestor, the bacterium/protozoa/Protista or organo-chemical molecular combination that jerked into reproductive life when the observable universe was a mere ten-billion years old. That strand of life evolved into billions of life forms (mostly now extinct) including, among the current survivors, us, leaving

a trail of fossil history to prove it. It was a bumpy ride for evolving life: the planet groaned and belched fire; the crust cooled and cracked; tectonic plates drifted aimlessly about, fracturing Pangaea into continental Laurasia and Gondwana; while a cocktail of two bits of hydrogen mixed with one bit of oxygen and violently stirred by bolts of lightning formed the oceans. Survival became paramount. Anything that could not adapt to the violent upheavals was consigned to extinction.

A massive experiment was underway, in which Nature selected the fittest life forms for reproduction—i.e. fishes, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds, and insects, as well as vegetation, viruses, and bacteria—under constantly varying climatic conditions, providing all with the necessary instinctive behaviors needed for survival, including, most importantly, a central nervous system controlled by a brain.

We humans eventually got less furry, descended to the plains, adopted bipedalism, and began to wonder what life was all about. We hunted and gathered, made babies and stone tools and spread across the planet. With not a little hubris, we eventually called ourselves wise (after we had learnt to use speech to communicate in proto-language) and were able to dominate our food supplies and competitors. Eventually we discovered that, as a sapient species, we could work things out. This became an obsession and soon there was no subject on or in the earth, oceans, sky, or space that we did not want to know more about. We just had to know!

This led to obsessive curiosity: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? This desire to know emanated from the brain, which was coupled to a spinal neural stalk, comprising electro-chemical relay stations. The human brain grew and grew in volume and electro-chemical neural complexity, the cranium expanding during evolutionary embryonic development to accommodate it. Our brain—together with the brains of other animals, particularly our primate relatives—gradually became self-aware.

This needs an explanation.

The brain's internal interactions of trillions of neurons, tightly networked three dimensionally and nourished by hormones and oxygen-rich blood, developed into a throbbing autonomous powerhouse. This dynamic state of neural activity may be defined as consciousness—a condition of self-awareness (which is absent in the pathological condition of unconsciousness). The state of consciousness is a platform which energizes the faculty we call mind or the operating system. In this state, the brain's mind started to think, using its neural arsenal and newly acquired language and conceptual skills. True sapience emerged.

Consciousness/unconsciousness and mind are conditional states of being (attributes) and do not exist as physical entities.

The journey of evolution equipped manifest life with sensors, or senses, to allow it to survive and reproduce, a mandate handed down to all life forms from the original ancestor, via Nature. These sensors conveyed the state of the external world to the brain via neural pathways, and, via intricately interwoven somatic nerves, the state of the internal world too. The thinking brain/mind collectively became an interpreter, able to coordinate incoming sensations as well as internal somatic nerve impulses, with regard to its own survival.

The interpreter manipulated and assessed, as a coherent whole, the electro-chemical nervous systems, sensory input/output data, cognitive and memory functions, turning them into thought processes. This is the real causal experiencer—the quasi-self. In its broadest sense, this sequence applies to all life thus endowed.

So, with survival at stake and guided by evolutionary law, the brain formed an identity and sense of agency or selfhood. The brain thus developed into a thinking organ, wearing its accompanying body as a vehicle: with senses for spatial orientation, organs for breathing, legs for locomotion, arms for feeding, all under the interpreter's control, via extremely complex networks of nerves. Since survival was of utmost importance to the evolving organism, automatic responses to dangerous quotidian interactions were hardwired in by nature, allowing for fight, flight, feigning, yielding, and other instinctive survival behaviors. Access to memory allowed the brain's responses, which led us to compete or cooperate, to become options, choices exercised by the faculties of discrimination and volition.

Control of autonomic life operations (heart rate, respiration, blood, hormones, cell metabolism, organ functions, salinity, temperature and moisture control, regulation of pH levels, digestion, immune systems) were denied direct access to the conscious brain by a selected genetic block, or guardian—for self-preservation. These are functions of vital importance to the organism's survival, the responsibility for which, apparently, Nature could not trust to the brain's conscious agency.

So, in the beginning, the physical body was formed by the natural laws of genetic inheritance, the vital awareness of which entered into the brain's consciousness at birth. Further development of the infant's brain took place by way of stimulation, through external and somatic impressions and speech mimicry. The brain became aware of its appendages (body/limbs) and its apparent centrality in the new environment: the brave new world. Nurture, language, and mental activity followed, with the result that the brain assumed an identity and self-awareness and acted, collectively, as an interpreter.

Lawyers and judges have grown up thinking that social science is soft.

Neuroscience gives the courts a hook.

How likely is it that citizens are about to be confronted by the chilling words ‘We have a warrant to search your brain’ anytime soon?

With its implied promise of decoding the brain, it is easy to see why brain imaging would beguile almost anyone interested in pulling back the curtain on the mental lives of others: politicians hoping to manipulate voter attitudes, marketers tapping the brain to learn what consumers really want to buy, agents of the law seeking an infallible lie detector, addiction researchers trying to gauge the pull of temptations, psychologists and psychiatrists seeking the causes of mental illness, and defense attorneys fighting to prove that their clients lack malign intent or even free will. The problem is that brain imaging cannot do any of these things—at least not yet.

The neurobiological domain is one of brains and physical causes. The psychological domain, the domain of the mind, is one of people and their motives. Both are essential to a full understanding of why we act as we do and to the alleviation of human suffering. The brain and the mind are different frameworks for explaining experience. And the distinction between them is hardly an academic matter; it bears crucial implications for how we think about human nature, personal responsibility, and moral action.

Brain imaging often amounts to what I mockingly call neurogeography. The typical outcome is a brain map with an area lighted up in yellow or red: it tells us where things happen in the brain, but rarely do we hear an explanation of what is going on and why.

The problem is that so many neuroimaging studies show so many different patterns. A large part of the reason for this is that brain studies generally rely on a low number of subjects, so as you grow the dataset the actual patterns emerge, whereas with just a few subjects the potential for bias is very large.

It is also important to note that the final brain scan that we see in a magazine or on television rarely portrays the brain activity of a single person. Instead, it almost always represents the averaged results of all participants in the study. Any resemblance between brain scans and photographs is illusory. Photos capture images in real time and space. Functional imaging scans are constructed from information derived from the magnetic properties of blood flowing in the brain. If we removed half of the skull to observe the surface of the living brain in action, we wouldn’t see a multicolored light show as various areas become active during thinking, feeling, and behaving. As striking as they are, scans are far less immediate; at their most accurate, they simply represent local activation based on statistical differences in BOLD signals.

The idea that a specific area in the brain is solely responsible for enabling

a given mental function may be intuitively appealing, but in reality it is rarely the case. Mental activities do not map neatly onto discrete brain regions. For example, Broca's area—once believed to be the brain's one and only language-production center—has been discovered not to have exclusive rights over this capacity. More precisely, it can be thought of as one of the key nodes, or convergence centers, for pathways that process language. Nor is there one designated site in charge of speech comprehension; it too relies on patterns of connectivity across multiple brain regions. Although neuroscientists regard a few cortical regions as being highly specialized for particular operations—such as the perception of faces, places, and body parts, ascribing mental states to others (“theory of mind”), and processing visually presented words—most neural real estate is zoned for mixed-use development. Furthermore, the brain can sometimes reorganize itself after injury so that other areas take over the functions of damaged regions, especially when the injury occurs early in life. For example, the “visual cortex” in blind people can be used to perceive touch, such as the feel of Braille letters.

What's more, a given region may appear deceptively less engaged with a task, on the basis of activation levels, than it really is. In fact, the region could be very important to enabling the task but appear less active because the brain becomes more efficient at tasks it performs repeatedly or automatically. Such a “practice-suppression” effect means that the blood oxygen level required to perform the task is lower than it would be for someone who has never before performed it. It's essential, therefore, to take practice effects into account when one is gauging the relative contribution of various regions.

For the most part, the science which the new laboratory produces is beyond reproach: we are seduced by the idea that, underneath the liberal myth of individual autonomy, every choice has some cause or objective driver, be that biological or economic. What is too often forgotten is that this idea makes no sense whatsoever, absent the apparatuses of observation, tracking, surveillance, and audit. Either we can have theories and interpretations of human activity, and the possibility of some form of self-government; or we can have hard facts of behaviour, and reconstruct society as a laboratory. But we cannot have both.

This is why the capacity to translate bodily and monetary measures into one another is potentially so important right now. It begins to dissolve the boundaries which separate otherwise discrete measures of well-being or pleasure, and to build an apparatus capable of calculating which decision, outcome, or policy is ultimately best in every way. This is a utopian proposition (in the literal sense of utopia as “no place”). There can be

no single measure of happiness and well-being, for the good philosophical reason that there is not actually any single quantity of such things in the first place. Monism is useful rhetorically, and attractive from the perspective of the powerful who yearn for simple ways of working out what to do next. But does anyone actually believe that all pleasures and pains sit on a single index? Sure, we might debate matters as if that were the case, using the metaphor of ‘utility’ or ‘well-being’ with which to do so. But take away its objective neural, facial, psychological, physiological, behavioural, and monetary indicators, and the ghostly notion of happiness as a single quantity also vanishes into thin air.

The main thing is that if unhappiness can be expressed via instruments of measurement, if success can be understood in terms of quantifiable outcomes, then critical and emancipatory projects are ensnared, and their energies are harnessed. Utilitarianism can sanction virtually any type of policy solution in pursuit of mental optimization, including quasi-socialist forms of organization and production on a small scale, where they appear to make people feel better and healthier. It favours human “flourishing” in an open-ended, humanistic sense, which may be achieved through friendship and altruism, as recommended by positive psychologists. But if a definition of optimization were offered which included control over one’s circumstances and one’s time, a voice that exerted power over decision-making, and a sense of autonomy that wasn’t reducible to neural or psychological causality, this simply would not be computable. Such an idea of human fulfillment, in which each individual speaks her mind rather than reveals it unwittingly, where unhappiness is a basis for critique and reform rather than for treatment, and where mind-body problems are simply forgotten rather than targeted through relentless medical research, points towards a different form of politics altogether.

There are a number of critical psychologists over the years who have sought to point this out, by stressing how mental illness is entangled with disempowerment. There are plenty of inspiring ventures and experiments which seek to give people hope partly through restoring their say over their own lives. When the British Office for National Statistics produced its first official data on “national well-being,” it concluded that the happiest residents of the UK were those living in remote and beautiful parts of Scotland, while the happiest workers were those managing forests.

There is a long history of putting mentally troubled people to work on farms. The routines of milking, tilling, and harvesting offer their own form of normality for those who cannot cope with the normality offered in society at large. People who can’t seem to find coherence in their own lives, can’t relate to a conventional job, or have suffered some brutal emotional rupture,

discover that the presence of plants and animals has a calming influence. The harshness of agricultural life may sometimes be part of its value. Crops fail, weather turns bad, but the only plausible response is to laugh and collectively have another go. Neither individual glory nor individual blame are appropriate, in strong contrast to the ethos of twenty-first-century neoliberalism.

Virtually all the scientific analysis of the psychological effects of spending time with plants completely ignores why a person might do so. Gardening and harvesting become merely therapeutic. The relationship between foliage and mood is represented as a simple one of cause and effect. The ethos of Growing Well is entirely different from this. Its organizing principle is that volunteers share the same purpose, of producing and selling good vegetables. The farm is established as an “industrial and provident society,” one of the legal forms available for the creation of co-operatives in the UK. Anyone who has an interest in Growing Well, be it as a customer, a volunteer or a visitor wanting to know more about farming, is encouraged to become a member, who is then able to participate in decision-making. Volunteers are offered the opportunity to engage in management of the business, at whatever level of seniority they would like. This isn’t just about ‘working with your hands’; it is also about expressing a view and taking some control.

The agencies funding Growing Well, and the doctors referring patients to volunteer there, have one theory as to what is going on. Many psychologists and behaviourists have another one entirely. According to the former, the volunteers are medically ill and receiving a form of treatment. According to the latter, they are rediscovering their dignity, exercising judgment, and participating in a business which trades successfully in the local area. In the first theory, the volunteers are passive, without any medically relevant interpretation of their own of their situation. In the second theory, they are active and gaining opportunities to influence the world around them, through interpreting and debating it.

Could it not be that both views are correct? In a superficial sense, it could. People can maintain different ideas of what is going on, based on different types of evidence and scientific methodology. The more fundamental question is what it means for society, for politics, or for personal life stories, to operate according to certain forms of psychological and neurological explanation. A troubling possibility is that it is precisely the behaviourist and medical view of the mind—as some sort of internal bodily organ or instrument which suffers silently—that locks us into the forms of passivity associated with depression and anxiety in the first place. A society designed to measure and manage fluctuations in pleasure and pain, as Bentham envisaged, may be set up for more instances of “mental breakdown” than

one designed to help people speak and participate.

Treating the mind (or brain) as some form of decontextualized, independent entity that breaks down of its own accord, requiring monitoring and fixing by experts, is a symptom of the very culture that produces a great deal of unhappiness today. Disempowerment is an integral part of how depression, stress, and anxiety arise. And despite the best efforts of positive psychologists, disempowerment occurs as an effect of social, political, and economic institutions and strategies, not of neural or behavioural errors. To deny this is to exacerbate the problem for which happiness science claims to be the solution.

At each point in the history of happiness measurement, from the Enlightenment through to the present, hopes for a different social and economic world flicker into view, as unhappiness becomes a basis to challenge the status quo. Understanding the strains and pains that work, hierarchy, financial pressures, and inequality place upon human well-being is a first step to challenging those things. This emancipatory spirit flips swiftly into a conservative one, once the same body of evidence is used as a basis to judge the behaviour and mentality of people, rather than the structure of power. Hope is not so much dashed as ensnared. Critique is turned inwards. This is not necessarily how things have to be. Once the critical eye is turned upon institutions, and away from the emotion or mood of the individual who inhabits them, things start to look very different indeed. Among wealthy nations, the rate of mental illness correlates very closely to the level of economic inequality across society as a whole, with the United States at the top. The nature and availability of work plays a crucial role in influencing mental well-being, as do organizational structures and managerial practices.

If we want to live in a way that is socially and psychologically prosperous, and not simply highly competitive, lonely, and materialistic, there is a great deal of evidence from clinical psychology, social epidemiology, occupational health, sociology, and community psychology regarding what is currently obstructing this possibility. The problem is that, in the long history of scientifically analyzing the relationship between subjective feelings and external circumstances, there is always the tendency to see the former as more easily changeable than the latter. As many positive psychologists now enthusiastically encourage people to do, if you can't change the cause of your distress, try and alter the way you react and feel instead. This is also how critical politics has been neutralized.

This is not to say that altering social and economic structures is easy. It is frustrating, unpredictable, and often deeply disappointing. What is hard to deny, however, is that it becomes virtually impossible to do in any legitimate way once institutions and individuals themselves have become so

preoccupied by measuring and manipulating individual feelings and choices. If there are to be social and political solutions to the problems which cause misery, then the first step must be to stop viewing those problems in purely psychological terms. And yet the utilitarian and behaviourist visions of an individual as predictable, malleable, and controllable (so long as there is sufficient surveillance) have not triumphed merely due to the collapse of collectivist alternatives. It has been repeatedly pushed by specific elites, for specific political and economic purposes, and is experiencing another major political push right now.

What would an escape from this hard psychological science look like? If politics and organization have been excessively psychologized, reducing every social and economic problem to one of incentives, behaviour, happiness, and the brain, what would it take for them to be de-psychologized? One answer is a constant temptation, but we should be wary of it. This is to flip the harsh, rationalist objective science of the mind (and brain) into its opposite, namely a romantic, subjective reveling in the mysteries of consciousness, freedom, and sensation. Confronted by a social world that has been reduced to quasi-mechanical natural forces of cause and effect, the lure of mysticism grows all the greater. In the face of the radical objectivism of neuroscience and behaviourism, which purport to render every inner feeling visible to the outside world, there is a commensurate appeal in radical subjectivism, which claims that what really matters is entirely private to the individual concerned. The problem is that these two philosophies are entirely compatible with one another; there is no friction between them, let alone conflict.

For evidence of this, see how the promotion of mindfulness (and many versions of positive psychology) slips seamlessly between offering scientific facts about what our brains or minds are doing and quasi-Buddhist injunctions to simply sit, be, and notice events as they flow in and out of the consciousness. The limitation of the behavioural and neurosciences is that, while they purport to ignore subjective aspects of human freedom, they speak a language which is primarily meaningful to expert researchers in universities, governments, and businesses. By focusing on whatever can be rendered objective, they leave a gap for a more subjective and passive discourse. New age mysticism plugs this gap.

They analyze official statistics, draw on the lessons of neuroscience, mine data, and trace behaviours to produce their own objective view of what makes people happy. And then they push for new secular religions, meditation practices, and mindfulness, which will provide the narrative through which the non-scientist can master his own well-being. The result is that the powerful and the powerless are speaking different languages, with the latter's consequently incapable of troubling the former's. Nothing like

a public denunciation or critique of the powerful is possible under these conditions.

The language and theories of expert elites are becoming more idiosyncratic and separate from those of the public. How ‘they’ narrate human life and how ‘we’ do so are pulling apart from each other, which undermines the very possibility of inclusive political deliberation. For example, positive psychology stresses that we should all stop comparing ourselves to each other and focus on feeling more grateful and empathetic instead. But isn’t comparison precisely what happiness measurement is there to achieve? Doesn’t giving one person a seven and another person a six work so as to render their differences comparable? The morality that is being offered by way of therapy is often entirely insulated from the logic of the science and technologies which underpin it.

There are those who possess the power of algorithmic analysis and data mining to navigate a world in which there are too many pieces of data to be studied individually. These include market research agencies, social media platforms and the security services. But for the rest of us, impulse and emotion have become how we orientate and simplify our decisions. Hence the importance of fMRI and sentiment analysis in the digital age: tools which visualize, measure, and codify our feelings become the main conduit between an esoteric, expert discourse of mathematics and facts, and a layperson’s discourse of mood, mystical belief, and feeling. ‘We’ simply feel our way around, while ‘they’ observe and algorithmically analyze the results. Two separate languages are at work.

Gradually, our everyday language of moods, choices, and tastes is being translated into terms that correspond to different physical parts of our brains. Neuromarketers can now specify that one advertisement causes activity in a given part of the brain, while a different advertisement does not. This is believed to have significant commercial implications. But to what extent does so much technological progress aid us in a more fundamental problem of social life, that of understanding other people?

To understand what a word means is to understand how it is used, meaning that the problem of understanding other people is first and foremost a social one. Equally, to understand what another person is doing is to understand what their actions mean, both for them and for others who are involved. If I ask the question, ‘What is that person feeling?’ I can answer by interpreting their behaviour, or by asking them. The answer is not inside their head or body, to be discovered, but lies in how the two of us interact. There is nothing stopping me from being broadly right about what they are feeling, so long as that is recognized as an interpretation of what they are doing and communicating, or what their behaviour means. I am not

going to discover what they are feeling as some sort of fact, in the way that I can discover their body temperature. Nor would they be reporting a fact, should they tell me what they're thinking.

And yet we needn't (and mustn't) return to dualism either. To assert the subjective, transcendent, intangible nature of the mind, in opposition to the physical body, is to keep flipping the same dualism on its head, like preaching a mindfulness doctrine that is one half neuroscience and the other half Buddhism. To return to a vision of the mental realm as entirely private and invisible to the outside world is to remain trapped in a state of affairs where we keep asking ourselves neurotic and paranoid questions, such as 'What am I really feeling?' or 'I wonder if he is truly happy.' It is in this sort of confused philosophical territory that the owner of the brain scanner can promise to resolve all moral and political questions, once and for all.

At its most fundamental, the choice between Bentham and Wittgenstein is a question of what it means to be human. Bentham posited the human condition as one of mute physical pain, to be expertly relieved through carefully designed interventions. This is an ethic of empathy, which is extrapolated to a society of scientific surveillance. It also views the division between humans and animals as philosophically insignificant. For Wittgenstein, by contrast, there is nothing prior to language. Humans are animals which speak, and their language is one that other humans understand. Pleasure and pain lose their privileged position, and cannot be treated as matters of scientific fact. You learned the concept 'pain' when you learned language, but it is fruitless to search for some reality of consciousness outside of the words we have to express ourselves. If people are qualified to speak for themselves, the constant need to anticipate—or to try and measure—how they are feeling suddenly disappears. So, potentially, does the need for ubiquitous psychosomatic surveillance

Systematic efforts to understand other people, through their behaviour and speech, are entirely worthwhile. But they are not so different from the forms of understanding that we all make of one another in everyday life. We all face the occasional problem of not being sure what other people mean or intend but have ways of overcoming this. The only possible solution is to use our understanding of ourselves as the basis for the understanding of others, and our understanding of others of our species to further our understanding of ourselves.

Techniques such as surveys may have a valuable role to play in fostering mutual understanding across large and diverse societies. But again, there is too much misunderstanding as to what is going on when a survey takes place. Surveys can never be instruments which represent some set of quasi-natural, objective facts; rather they are useful and interesting ways of engaging with

people, probing them for answers.

Psychology, clearly understood, is a door through which we pass on the way to political dialogue. This is in contrast to the Benthamite and behaviourist traditions which view psychology as a step towards physiology and/or economics, precisely so as to shut the door on politics. Unless something goes wrong, the core questions of psychology are relatively simple: ‘What is that person doing?’ ‘What is that person feeling right now?’ For the most part, the answers to these questions are relatively unproblematic, and the first and most important methodology for answering them is one that we all use every day: just ask them.

That this methodology is not taken more seriously by managerial elites is scarcely surprising. It requires processes of deliberation. It credits people with their own legitimate interpretations and critiques of their own circumstances. It also requires skills to listen, which become submerged in societies that have privileged the power to observe and visualize. Management and government are more secure with the notion of brains “lighting up” or thinking being “no less observable than baseball,” than they are with the prospect of people intentionally expressing their emotions and judgments. For various reasons, making our minds visible seems safer than making them audible. Entire organizational structures would need to change if the behaviourist vision of an automated, silent mind were abandoned in favour of an intelligent, speaking one.

Recognizing that people get angry, critical, resistant, and frustrated is to understand that they have reasons to feel or act in these ways. People express themselves in different ways and with different levels of confidence, but there are good reasons to accept the narratives that people offer about their own lives. If someone is invited to express her feeling—rather than instructed to correctly name or quantify it—she makes it into a social phenomenon. Once people are critical or angry, they can also be critical or angry about something which is external to themselves. Whether or not they are considered an articulate or expert person is scarcely relevant. This is already a less lonely, less depressive, less narcissistic state of affairs than one in which people wonder how their minds or brains are behaving, and what they should do to improve them.

Imagine if just a small proportion of the political will and financial capital that pushes the behaviourist and happiness agendas were diverted elsewhere. What if just a chunk of the tens of billions of dollars that are currently spent monitoring, predicting, treating, visualizing, anticipating the smallest vagaries of our minds, feelings, and brains were spent instead on designing and implementing alternative forms of political-economic organization? The laughter which this would no doubt be met with in the higher echelons of

business, university management and government is a sign of how politically important the techniques of psychological control have now become.

Would an enlightened mental health practitioner or social epidemiologist find it equally funny? I suspect not. Many psychiatrists and clinical psychologists are entirely aware that the problems they are paid to deal with do not start within the mind or body of a solitary individual, or even necessarily within the family. They start with some broader social, political, or economic breakdown. Delimiting psychology and psychiatry within the realms of medicine (or some quasi-economic behavioural science) is a way of neutering the critical potential of these professions. The demand that misery be de-medicalized, in explicit opposition to the interests of the pharmaceutical industry (and its representatives within the American Psychiatric Association) is one that is gathering momentum.

A regime that seeks to stamp out feelings of unhappiness and discontent; the situation sounds dystopian. Not only is unhappiness a normal part of life—and certainly a normal part of being young—it is indispensable for any kind of transformation: of the self, of institutions, of society. Change is driven by the tension between *is* and *ought*—a tension that you have to feel inside your soul.

We tend to think of slavery as a property relation. If someone owns you and you have to do what they say, you're a slave. If no one owns you and you can find a job for yourself, you're free. But Aristotle had a very different view of slavery. For him, a slave is someone who does not choose their own ends. Aristotle divides people into three categories:

1. The virtuous, those who choose their own ends on the basis of what ends they take to be “good.”
2. The vulgar, those who choose their own ends on the basis of what will yield wealth and/or status.
3. The slavish, those who do not choose their own ends and instead act as tools of the virtuous and the vulgar.

So for Aristotle, it doesn't matter whether someone owns you—if you aren't choosing your own ends, you're acting like a slave. Most of us don't get to choose the jobs we believe are best. Most of us have to settle for jobs that will pay us enough to survive. These jobs usually involve working for some individual or organization with its own notion of what is good or worthwhile that we don't entirely share. Aristotle believes that we are what we repeatedly do. If we repeatedly serve as a tool of another rather than act on the basis of our own values, we are repeatedly acting like a slave, and

that makes us slavish. So in a very important sense, most of us are not free. No one owns us, but we are still slaves, because we don't get to choose our own ends.

Aristotle makes an important distinction between 'amusement' and 'leisure.' For Aristotle, 'leisure' is time we spend thinking about what it would be good or worthwhile to do. If we don't have leisure, we can't self-determine our ends. If we cannot self-determine our ends, we are inevitably enslaved. 'Amusement,' by contrast, is about getting ourselves in a psychological condition in which it is possible to return to work. When we engage in amusement, we have free time, but we don't have the mental energy or education to use that free time in a leisurely way. So instead the free time has to be spent rectifying our deteriorated mental state or squandered on frivolous, childlike pursuits.

One of the ways you keep someone enslaved is by denying them leisure. If people have leisure, they start to get their own ideas about what their lives should be for. That makes them less compliant. They might start to organize politically to change their lives and create new and different opportunities for themselves. To deny people leisure, it's necessary to deny them mental energy and to deny them education.

Our system presently accomplishes this in two ways. First, by increasing economic precarity and forcing us to compete ever more heavily for an ever scarcer number of good professional-class jobs, we are pushed to use all of our mental energy trying to satisfy our current or future employers. Nothing is left for leisure, and whenever we have free time we can do nothing but amusement. This is where self-care comes in—self-care is a modern name for amusement. Right now, we feel we have so little free time that it's necessary even to argue for our right to use some of our free time to prepare ourselves to return to work. Looking out for our own mental health has itself been painted as a radical assertion. But it's not radical, because self-care is about surviving, about avoiding burnout, about continuing to be a useful tool. It's amusement, not leisure.

Second, by focusing our universities ever more heavily on job placement, we are ensuring that our young people spend their time at university cultivating résumés for future employers. This means they don't receive an education which is about teaching them how to think about what ends are good or worthwhile. Instead, their training is increasingly vocational in nature, even when the degree is a professional degree like engineering, computer science, law, medicine, or business. These degrees are still about job placement. They don't prepare students to think about what kind of ends are worth having. Students' degrees aren't leisurely, and when they have free time outside of their degrees their energy is depleted and they are

pushed to engage in amusement and self-care to rectify their mental states. Their available time even for amusement is shrinking and rates of mental illness are increasing at universities.

The result is that many people—including many of the people with secure professional-class jobs—never acquire a substantive set of ends for themselves beyond amusement itself. They end up like overgrown high schoolers. In high school, everyone is tired and stressed out all the time, and the result is that high school students are desperate for amusement. It's so important to them that when they are away from school they be permitted to de-stress, and if their home environment is toxic and disallows this the demand for amusement can spill out into all sorts of unhealthy activities. High school students build friend groups around shared amusements. If you watch the same shows, play the same games, read the same books, listen to the same music, buy the same clothes, or do the same drugs, you're cool. If not, you're lame. A mark of maturity is moving on from these aesthetic identifiers and acquiring a life project that is bigger and more meaningful than "have a good time this weekend." But because high school kids spend most of their time and energy doing pointless work assigned to them by other people, they are starved of leisure and desperate for amusement. So their lives are built around instant gratification, hedonism, and self-care.

We are increasingly denying people the temporal and educational resources to grow beyond this, and now adults have childish interests and build their lives around gratifying themselves by purchasing garbage which vaguely relates to whatever lame thing they do on the weekend. There's little ambition beyond this. On some level they know that living their lives for the weekend is more than a bit vacuous. The result is a superabundance of culture which is nihilistic, absurdist, or existentialist in tone, alongside a thriving industry of YouTube pseudointellectuals selling young people books which promise to give their lives meaning. Politically, it also gives rise to new radical and reactionary political movements that sell young people on making their online lives about social causes.

But these people don't have leisure. They are mentally unwell, lack access to non-vocational education, and must spend the bulk of their free time on amusement. Without these things, they cannot think about different sets of ends in a sophisticated way or decide among them. So even in their attempts to find meaning, these people end up slaves—foot soldiers in other people's cults.

Since they need amusement so badly, they not only spend their free time on amusement, they spend their extra money on it too. This prevents even reasonably well-off young people from building up a sum of money they might use to break free, because the extra money they receive will be poured

into expanding or maintaining their collections of objects and experiences related to their child interests. They buy games, art, experiences, all sorts of stuff, just to facilitate amusement. The more objects they buy, the more they must maintain and store. This means there's never enough money to get off the amusement treadmill and pursue leisure, even for people in the nicer professional-class jobs. So the vast majority of people, in both blue collar and white collar jobs, are constantly on the treadmill and never get off.

Desperate for meaning, they look for it in relationships, and marry people who are poor fits out of boredom and existential dread, contributing to high divorce rates, domestic violence, and broken homes, condemning the next generation to a similar existence. They fill their homes with kitschy stuff, imitating their parents' path in lieu of developing one for themselves. The result is entire lives lived without any real meaning at all. The call for self-care is a sad response—it's a demand that people try harder to get amusement when what they really lack is leisure. In this respect it is an intensification of everything that is wrong with modern capitalism, a further retreat into the nostalgic realm of the teenage weekend.

What we need instead is a politics that is committed to restoring our time to us, one which gives us not just sufficient amusement, but access to leisure and the genuine, deep education it requires. As access to universities has expanded, universities have moved away from this kind of education, and there is a real danger that before long virtually no one will have it. We are at risk of creating a society in which no one is meaningfully free, in which no one is capable of self-determining ends. In such a society even the wealthiest people would themselves be slaves to vulgar market values. They would be incapable of envisioning an alternative value set, much less make any kind of real choice between market values and that alternative. When the slaves enslave the slaves, the blind lead the blind, and there is no one left to rescue us from Plato's cave.

One of the central problems in left-wing organizing today is that by putting the lived experience of the oppressed at the center of things, left-wing organizations suffer from a persistent leisure shortfall. When our organizations are run by mentally ill people trying to use left-wing politics to amuse themselves or fill existential voids, they become vehicles for self-care instead of real political organizations with plausible strategic orientations. We need some people in the left to do the thinking, or we won't be able to achieve the institutional and policy changes that are necessary to widen access to leisure. But leisure is in short supply precisely because we haven't yet achieved these changes, and therefore competent, thoughtful leadership is always a scarce commodity in left-wing politics. The more the left fails,

the worse this becomes, because as the position of the worker is eroded by right-wing economic policy, life becomes more precarious, competition becomes fiercer, and amusement deficits pile ever higher. The longer we stay on the amusement treadmill, the harder it is to get off, both individually and collectively. Slavery degrades the slaves, and self-care does not free the self, much less the other.

As the Cult Of Psychology is unequivocally an extension of ruling class power, the pressure to see a therapist in many ways constitutes an attempt at duping the citizen into voluntarily relinquishing any remaining vestiges of privacy. Moreover, the end game of this cult dogma is to manipulate the citizen into surrendering oneself—mind, body, and soul—to the most rapacious power the world has ever known, and to have the masses acknowledge on bended knee, that they and they alone are to blame for their sorrows.

The devious cult-like language with which CoP members are inculcated, teaches them to view the world through a profoundly delusional prism, making rational political discourse all but impossible. And they read the same pernicious rot for years on end, their brains steadily atrophying amidst the onslaught of soulless jargon and lies that they drink like a poison, and which condemn them to a slow and torturous death of mindlessness, soullessness, and the most base and abject dehumanization.

Yet there is no lack of space for these fundamentalists to pray. For their churches are the ruins of our civilization.

“The final end of the State was to make men free to develop their faculties.”

Privacy is required in order to create the conditions for men and women to think independently and critically. We must have intellectual privacy—the protection from surveillance or interference when we are engaged in the processes of generating ideas. Public debate is possible only after the formulation of private opinions—and that requires the freedom to experiment and discard ideas, without worrying about prying eyes. If we believe we’re being watched, we’re far less likely to let our minds roam toward opinions that require courage or might take us beyond the bounds of acceptable opinion. We begin to bend our opinions to please our observer. Without the private space to think freely, the mind deadens—and then so does the Republic.

“The greatest menace to freedom is an inert people.”

Chapter Fourteen

What's Your Type?

The most important rule of speaking type was you had to conceive of personality as an innate characteristic, something fixed since birth and immutable, like blue eyes or left-handedness.

“You have to buy into the idea that type never changes. We will brand this into your brains. The theory behind the indicator supports the fact that you are born with a four-letter preference. If you hear someone say, ‘My type changed,’ they are not correct.”

The insistence on a singular and essential self—a self whose moods and mysteries were crystallized by four simple letters—seems impossibly retrograde amidst the cheerful promises of self-transformation through diet, exercise, travel, therapy, and meditation that we encounter in popular culture every day. Yet it can also be an irresistibly attractive fiction. There was a certain narcissistic beauty to the idea, a certain luminance to the promise that, by learning to speak type, you could learn to compress the gestures of our messy, complicated lives into a coherent life story, one capable of expressing both to ourselves and to others not just who we were but who we had been all along. What type offered us was a vision of individual identity in its most transcendent and transparent form. “Who are you?” the type indicator asked. ‘I am a clear ENTJ.’ ‘I am an ISFP.’ What other language afforded such clarity? Who would not want to believe in it?

The most interesting secrets of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are not the secrets that the skeptics of personality testing might expect. For some time, it has been a well-known fact that the type indicator is not scientifically valid; that the theory behind it has no basis in clinical psychology; and that it is the flagship product of a lucrative global corporation, one whose interests sit at the shadowy crossroads of industrial psychology and self-care. For some time too, critics of typological thinking have issued scathing indictments of personality assessment’s liquidation of the individual. Type performs a rather insidious sleight of hand. It convinces people of their status as rounded and exceptional beings. Yet it does so by flattening human

behavior into a static, predetermined set of traits, traits that often register the interests of the powerful institutions that use personality assessment to rationalize their daily affairs. By the late twentieth century, these institutions included corporations like Standard Oil and General Electric that used type to hire, fire, and promote employees; elite colleges like Swarthmore and Bryn Mawr that used type to admit students; churches that used type to ordain ministers; and government bureaucracies that used type to appoint civil servants. Under the rule of type, the labeling of live human beings emerged as one technique for annihilating individuality—for treating people as interchangeable, and sometimes disposable, parts of an unforgiving social whole. Type was, in short, one of the bluntest and best-disguised tools of modernity: a wolf in sheep's clothing.

None of this is new. What remains unexplained is why, in the face of this knowledge, so many people—two-million a year, in nearly all Fortune 500 companies and US colleges and universities, in community centers and churches and couples' retreats, in the army, the navy, and the CIA—continue not only to embrace the type indicator but to defend its inviolability with the kind of ardor usually reserved for matters of the deepest faith. “Myers-Briggs is like my religion” is a familiar refrain one hears at accreditation sessions.

“It helped me find myself.”

“It changed my life.”

“I was never the same again.”

There is an unwavering belief in type's ability to comprehend who we are—why we work the jobs we work, why we love the people we love, why we behave in the apparently various and contradictory ways we do—a belief that persists despite how shamelessly type classifies individuals and conscripts them into the bureaucratic hierarchies of the workplace, the school, the church, the state, and even their own families. At the heart of this mystery is a set of questions fundamental to all human existence: What is a personality? Where does it come from? Why are we so intent on categorizing it? And, of course, the greatest question of all: Who am I?

One had to deal with “the task of the individual,” Katharine wrote, “who from his own microscopic beginnings must repeat in one lifetime the adventure of his whole race or go to Hell.” She thought that salvation was to be found in cultivating one's personality, which she defined in the oldest, most basic sense of the word: the qualities or capacities of thought that

made a person recognizable as a human being and not an animal—a “brute,” as she deemed the less civilized orders of men.

“We teach a lie when we teach that all men are equal. The lower orders of men are far closer to the higher animals than to the higher orders of men, and we ought to recognize that fact.”

Although her tone brooked no argument, for some time she continued to wonder at her inability to love life, her status as a spectator of the present. The family doctor prescribed all sorts of small diversions to help her connect with reality: a game of tennis with Bert when he came back home for a visit, an outdoor concert with her parents on a warm summer night, a birthday party with the neighborhood children. But she dismissed his suggestions as a waste of time and energy. She knew that she had to direct herself even deeper inward, not outward, if she were to save her soul in this modern world, a world that seemed to have no use for the soul at all. So she chose instead to dwell in her fantasies and her daydreams, detached from the ebb and flow of life around her, frequently alone.

Buoyed by love for her daughter, extinguished by grief over the loss of her son, Katharine was confronted with her second crisis of faith. “Is life worth living?” she wondered as she approached her twenty-fifth birthday.

“Does it mean anything? Is there any point to it? Why live at all? Why beget children who will beget children who will beget more children and keep the tragic life stream going on and on in futile struggle?”

Her existential despair may have seemed hypothetical. It was not. Her son’s death had taught her how precious the lives of her children were, how closely their activities had to be regulated if they were to live long enough to cultivate their personalities and ensure their salvation. Under the shadow of death, she recalled the Darwinian education she had once spurned, the techniques of scientific manipulation she had practiced on lesser organisms at Michigan, poking and prodding and recording the behaviors of frogs and earthworms to see what would kill them and what would keep them alive. She wondered if she could learn to apply these same techniques to the problem of human life, both physical and spiritual. Could she conduct daily trials in living that would shape the outer and the inner worlds of the people she loved best? Could she reconcile her quest for personal salvation with the rational methods of the modern world? Could she make her home into a laboratory of personality research, an institution of scientific experimentation

to rival Lyman's workshop at Johns Hopkins or her father's classroom at Michigan?

Although many forms of personality assessment retain some trace of their creators' personal preoccupations, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was more intimately attuned to its creators' lives from the start. Katharine was a mother, and as a mother, she believed that children needed two things to mature into "civilized adults": "submission to necessary authority" and the "discipline of ambition." She believed that the mark of civilized adulthood was "specialization." A parent had to direct a child to choose one line of work and pursue it zealously, not for personal fulfillment or financial success, but as a meaningful contribution to society—the kind of good deed that would ensure their salvation.

"The architect fathers civilization when buildings are to be erected; actors and musicians father civilization when people require recreation or entertainment; the physician fathers civilization wherever people are ill."

If, as a wife and mother, Katharine could not specialize in something properly professional—if she could not "father civilization" directly—then she could make mothering into the lifeblood of all specialization. She could help children develop the psychological wherewithal to determine what kind of work was best suited to their personalities. Her efforts would have spectacular repercussions. Half a century later, her daughter, convinced that her mother's ideas about specialization applied just as well to workers as it did to children, would make the same pitch for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the questionnaire she would construct, as a premier "people sorting device."

"Not only psychologists, but otherwise intelligent people, quickly become consummate jackasses when they are asked to develop a child's character."

Katharine bristled at the suggestion that parents could simply let their children be.

"As if every child were not, because of the very nature of the situation, an experiment from the moment of birth! As if everything done for him or left undone, from feeding formula to discipline, were not an experiment, every parent an experimenter, and his home an experimental station!"

Absent the microscopes and plants of her formal education, Katharine's home laboratory was nevertheless designed to see what kinds of growing conditions might permit her to control the little lives that, as she had recently discovered, were not hers to control at all. When Isabel was a toddler, she began with "No! No!" drills. Katharine would place her child in front of a bright, tempting object—a glass bowl, a flickering flame—and chant "No! No!" when the child would try to touch it. If Isabel reached too close and too fast, as most toddlers are wont to do, Katharine would slap her hands or spank her with vigor to reinforce the rule. "No! No!" drills were followed by "Come here!" drills, "Don't touch!" drills, and "Just touch!" drills, which mother and daughter repeated nearly every day, of every year, until Isabel turned five.

She had no tolerance for mothers who inflated their children's sense of self-importance. Nor could she abide mothers who, claiming an excess of maternal feeling, refused to spank or slap their children as she had spanked and slapped Isabel.

"The futile, unauthoritative mother is simply ridiculous."

When one mother recoiled from her suggestion that she spank her son Davy when he ran out of her arms and into the street—"I will never use physical violence on my child," she vowed, her voice trembling with indignation—Katharine responded with cool antipathy:

"Nonsense. You use physical violence on your child every day of his life. You used physical violence just now when you picked him up and brought him kicking and screaming out of the street. You use physical violence every time you wash his face, clean his nose, or give him a dose of medicine. For a baby of his age a spanking is medicine. It's the only way to get across to him certain vitally important truths."

For Katharine, emotional women like Davy's mother had obstructed the progress of society with their unwarranted praise, their excessive fawning over their average or below-average children. The ultimate purpose of baby training, she believed, was first to identify "slow" children whose emotional and intellectual development lagged their peers and help them catch up, and then to transform the "average" children into high-functioning adults, each one capable of specializing in a profession based on his personality. Otherwise these children would grow up into adults with no purpose in the world.

“Multitudes of people are utterly worthless or worse than worthless, having no just claims whatsoever upon the civilization which they burden with the dead weight of their existence. This is a sound, incontrovertible judgment, which has to be shunned, because our feeling for the ‘underprivileged’ is so strong that such truths can hardly be mentioned. Our feeling revolts against it.”

In December 1914, there was on the cover of *Woman’s Home Companion* an article with the headline “The Case for the Homemaker,” which begged readers to acknowledge the women who, like Katharine, did the important, if largely invisible, work of raising children.

“The women who count most of all, who are really doing the things worthwhile for the world’s progress, are a quiet lot. Go to any public school, visit any room, and ask the teacher to introduce a child who is well cared for; who is polite; who is considerate of others. Go home with that child and meet one of the women who counts, who really counts.”

As President Roosevelt called the idle engine of the American economy to action, urging business owners and employers to subordinate their interest in profit to the greater good of the nation, Isabel recalled her mother’s disdain for the president and his extraverted feeling politics.

“When we gave suffrage to women we rather violently increased the number of feeling-types in the electorate. I think if you wanted to go back and check this trend in legislation since then there may be some laws because of that.”

She was drawn to the language Jung used to describe the soul, terms like ‘introvert’ and ‘extravert,’ which had very different meanings in 1923 than they do today. What defined Jung’s introvert was not quietude, solitude, or indecision (as many summaries of the Myers-Briggs types would later claim) but her interest in the self, or what Jung, writing in more technical language, called “the subjective factor.” What made an introvert an introvert was her belief in the superiority of her singular orientation to the world—her subjectivity—over and above the expectations and desires of those around her. To the extravert, the introvert came across as “either a conceited egoist or a crack-brained bigot,” for the extravert’s behavior was governed by pure objective conditions.

To illustrate the contrast between the two, Jung offered a simple example. On a blustery winter day, the fact that it was cold outside would prompt

the extravert to don his overcoat, while the introvert, the person who “wants to get hardened,” Jung wrote, “finds this superfluous.” Whereas the extravert resigned herself to the simple fact of the cold, the introvert sought to overcome it by toughening the very fiber of her being. And while the introvert was committed to cultivating herself in whatever way she deemed fit, no matter the circumstances, the extravert fretted over the arrangements of his various “personae,” a term Jung had appropriated from the theater, where it referred to the many distinct characters (*dramatis personae*) that one actor could play in front of an audience. The extravert was as chameleonic as any seasoned actor, forever adapting himself to suit the stages and scenes of life. The extravert “does what is needed of him, or what is expected of him, and refrains from all innovations that are not entirely self-evident or that in any way exceed the expectations of those around him,” Jung summarized. If the self-focused introvert ran the risk of excessive egoism, the extravert ran the risk of excessive normality. The extravert was the weak-willed one, pathologically disconnected from his inner world, lacking in self-possession.

“I have never been imitative. Quite the contrary. The fact that everyone else is doing something gives that thing an aspect of routine, cut-and-driedness, barrenness, which is acutely distasteful.”

Meeting yourself, she warned, could be a profoundly lonely endeavor. As it liberated you, so too did it sever the bonds you had established with other people, other ways of living and loving life. Meeting yourself meant assuming a great and solitary responsibility for your actions, a responsibility that could leave one feeling appallingly alone.

“Your function is to create a man. Some women create children but it is greater to create a man. If you create Murray you will have done something very fine for the world.”

Jung’s stark division of the world of women into opposing types—women who create children, women who create men—did not surprise or alarm her. Nor did his insistence that “a woman suffers a relationship to be and she also suffers it not to be.” In the face of inevitable suffering, the noblest work a woman could do was to help a man recognize the full extent of his powers. Like the sibyls or Beatrice or any of the gracious Greek muses Jung named in *Psychological Types*, she was to serve as a medium, a lightning rod, an inspiratrice for male geniuses.

For both Katharine and Murray the personality of Adolf Hitler had come to stand in for more properly political concerns about fascism: the centralization of authority, the rising tides of nationalism and ethnocentrism, the programs of mass deportation and genocide. In the cold light of historical retrospect, the easy slippage from the personal to the political might seem surprising. Or it might not. For even today, politics remains chained to discourses of personality in ways that are as crude as, if not cruder than, Murray's assessment of Hitler. Most people want to like their democratically elected leaders or want them to be likable or, at the very least, presentable and polite—the kind of man you could invite over for a beer, the kind of woman who might read sweet stories to your children. Sometimes it seems that we are more shocked by violations of common courtesy than we are by unfair or oppressive policies.

The politicization of personality is not wrong in any moral sense. It is simply the inevitable result of a modern democratic process that invites the people to imagine their elected officials as extensions of themselves—their representatives in a very literal sense. The body that Germans saw on display at dozens of rallies and speeches—the flabby muscles, the hollow chest, the ladylike walk—stood in not only for the nation's public preferences but for its people's private lives: their feelings of impotence, their discriminatory states of mind, the stories they had invented to explain the injustice of their place in the world.

How do you kill an icon? How do you rob it of its aura, its immortality? Literally killing Hitler was impossible, Murray advised the OSS. His death at the hands of the Allies would only consecrate Hitler's status as a martyr for the German people. "An Analysis of the Personality of Adolph Hitler" offered a series of predictions for Hitler's future behavior—nine futures in all, arrayed from least to most likely. It was unlikely that Hitler would be imprisoned or murdered by his own troops. More likely was that Hitler would arrange to have himself killed by someone else.

"This would complete the myth of the hero—death at the hand of some trusted follower. Siegfried stabbed in the back by Hagen, Caesar by Brutus, Christ betrayed by Judas. It might increase the fanaticism of the soldiers and create a legend in conformity with the ancient pattern. If Hitler could arrange to have a Jew kill him, then he could die in the belief that his fellow countrymen would rise in their wrath and massacre every remaining Jew in Germany."

For Murray, the most likely of all scenarios was that Hitler would commit suicide in some dramatic fashion, that he would retreat to his fortress at the

Berghof, where he would blow himself up with dynamite, immolate himself upon a funeral pyre, shoot himself in the head with a silver bullet, or throw himself off the parapet. “This outcome, undesirable for us all, is not at all unlikely,” Murray reported to the OSS.

The most desirable outcome was that Hitler would fall into the hands of the United Nations. After a show trial, during which Hitler would be pronounced mentally unbalanced, he would be removed to the psychiatric ward at Saint Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. There he would live out the rest of his days in solitary confinement. A committee of psychiatrists would administer daily intelligence and personality tests to him, and they would film his behavior during these assessments. Murray predicated that he would rant and rave and denounce everyone, even the Germans who had fought and died for him. The most damning clips from the films would be played around the world, in theaters and on television sets, on loop if possible. They would puncture the myth of Hitler that had captivated the public imagination, and they would serve as a warning to anyone else with a will to power. This was what happened to “crack-brained fanatics who try to dominate the world,” Murray wrote as he outlined the Allies’ improbable revenge fantasy. The final Hitler anyone would see would be Hitler exposed, Hitler unhinged. After some time, the clips would stop. Hitler would be left to die in his cell, alone and forgotten.

“The pictures will become quite tiresome after a while and people will get bored with Hitler. Trust science to take the drama out of anything.”

In contrast to a personologist like Murray, another research team were interested not in the singularity of Hitler but in the audience members who had been seduced by Nazi ideology—those prone to the same prejudice, hostility, and irrationality to which Hitler gave voice.

“The task of fascist propaganda is rendered easier to the degree that antidemocratic potentials already exist in the great mass of people.”

The Nazis were effective insofar as they were able to “activate every ounce” of the German people’s antidemocratic potential while stamping out the “slightest spark of rebellion.” It was not enough to expose one fascistic leader as a babbling madman to prevent the rise of fascism elsewhere, when fascism was an extension of industrial modernity. The hierarchical division of society into classes meant that the marks of social repression were impressed

onto the soul long before a demagogic leader ever opened his mouth to speak.

The only solution, the authors believed, was to eliminate the static, biologized understanding of type and substitute a thoroughly self-reflexive test of personality. What the post-war world needed, then, was not a test of selfhood that divided people into normal and abnormal types but a “critical typology”: one whose major dichotomy lay “in the question of whether a person is standardized himself and thinks in a standardized way, or whether he is truly ‘individualized’ and opposes standardization in the sphere of human experience.” The trick was to design a test of type that would, paradoxically, undo the impulse to think typologically. From both a theoretical and a practical point of view, the problem was how to predict any individual’s potential for fascistic behavior—not his explicit preferences, not his past actions, but the latent desires that could push someone to behave like a fascist at some unspecified point in the future.

“People are continuously molded from above because they must be molded if the overall economic pattern is to be maintained, and the amount of energy that goes into this process bears a direct relation to the amount of potential, residing within the people, for moving in a different direction.”

What the history of type after World War II would reveal was not just the maintenance of the economic pattern that the authors bemoaned but its intensification. Type would continue its creeping spread through all the institutional organs of post-war America: the corporation, the college, the hospital, the psychological laboratory.

Isabel, an avid reader of management theorist Elton Mayo’s articles on human relations, which stressed the primacy of employee morale to job performance, knew that the most effective way to increase worker productivity was not to peg workers as normal, antisocial, or manic-depressive. Rather, it was for management to make every worker feel as if he was needed somewhere, doing something, no matter how unglamorous the task; to increase the attention they paid to the psychic lives of their employees. The idea was not to accept work as a grim reality—the proverbial grind—but to set up the ideological conditions under which one would bind oneself to it freely and gladly, as a point of pride and a source of self-validation. As Katharine had written in one of her child-rearing articles:

“We often say of young people who are slow about getting down to the business of becoming adult, that they have not

found themselves yet. We mean that they have not yet found any worldly adult occupation congenial enough to enable them to lose themselves in it.”

To find oneself only to lose that self in work—this was the impulse that shaped the history of type as it passed from Katharine’s to Isabel’s hands.

The benefits of knowing one’s type did not accrue to all workers equally. If a corporation mainly employed unskilled laborers, she dissuaded them from spending too much money evaluating their workers, stripping them of the assumed benefits of self-knowledge. “The type differences show principally in the more intelligent and highly developed half of the population,” she explained, echoing a similar rationale to the one her mother had articulated many years ago to separate the world into its “primitive” and “enlightened” psychological classes. From her experience, executives revealed an extraordinarily high degree of type development by “every criterion we have.” They outstripped every group of workers she had sampled except some top research scientists from the National Bureau of Standards—the government organization where her father, approaching eighty, and now her son, fresh off his Rhodes Scholarship, worked. By contrast, manufacturers, mechanics, and other blue-collar workers demonstrated the weakest type development.

Of course, there existed no controlled study, no real evidence, to validate Isabel’s belief in the inverse relationship between intelligence and the strength of one’s type preferences. But as was the case for the 1940s’ most famous test, the intelligence quotient (IQ) test, evidence mattered less than the indicator’s ability to justify as “natural” or “normal” the division that already existed in the world, a world in which the wealthier, whiter, and more upwardly mobile were found to be more self-aware than everyone else. It did not occur to anyone, even Isabel, as unusual that the strongest preferences were always expressed by successful, self-assured men with ready access to power, whether in the form of cold hard cash or institutional authority.

“As in all applications of scientism it is society’s values that are enshrined. The tests, essentially, are loyalty tests, or rather, tests of potential loyalty. Neither in the questions nor in the evaluation of them are the tests neutral; they are loaded with values, organization values, and the result is a set of yardsticks that reward the conformist, the pedestrian, the unimaginative—at the expense of the exceptional individual without whom no society, organization, or otherwise can flourish.”

Some encouraged all test takers to memorize the following dictums to provide the most “conventional, run-of-the-mill, pedestrian” answers to any given question.

- I loved my father and my mother, but my father a little bit more.
- I like things pretty well the way they are. I never worry much about anything.
- I don't care for books or music much.
- I love my wife and children. I don't let them get in the way of company work.

The comedy of such a list is, at first, the comedy of the person who seems to have no personality—the futility of trying to extrapolate anything from such flat, noncommittal proclamations as “I like things pretty well the way they are” or “I don't care for books or music much.” At the same time, it is the comedy (or tragedy) of a nonpersonality or impersonality constituted entirely by an exaggerated devotion to one's employer, a devotion that outpaces love for one's wife and children, a devotion that yields a studied indifference to reading books and listening to music—solitary and imaginative pursuits (classic introvert characteristics, according to the Briggs-Myers Type Indicator) that threaten to undercut the incessant sociability on which the organization man's personality relies. At heart, though, the comedy of the list is the comedy inherent to faking a personality—any personality, even one characterized by its excessive blandness. To commit these dictums to memory, to recite them as one sits with pencil poised over answer sheet, is to replace the self with a kind of awkward, unhinged machine—a cheerful robot.

The New York Times profiled several mid-level executives who had been asked to undergo MBTI-based career counseling when their personalities started interfering with their abilities to manage happy and high-functioning teams. “I was angry and humiliated at first,” testified a woman whom colleagues had described as “a pain in the neck.” She continued:

“But I was also open to it. I said if the company wants to pay for me to get some coaching, I'm smart enough to realize this is not any different than if I went for computer training.”

Her coach asked her to take the indicator. “The more we talked, the more the light bulb went on,” the woman reported after learning her type, which she chose not to disclose.

“When my boss asks me to do something, I should say, ‘Sure, no problem.’ If I felt somebody asked me something stupid, I might still feel angry, but now I hide it. That’s what I learned.”

Often, the best version of someone was the most complacent version, eager to please both the people she worked for and the people who worked for her. “My people skills needed to be polished,” reported one woman, whose subordinates complained that she acted like “a dictator rather than a mentor.” Learning how to be a mentor meant softening one’s hard edges, making herself more available and pliable to the company’s needs.

What also became apparent throughout the training was that the impulse to treat personality as complete and innate was, in no small part, a convenient way of slotting people into their designated niches in a high-functioning and productive social order. This was another fiction—a dystopian fiction—that most contemporary personality tests continued to trade in: the fantasy of the rational organization of labor.

THE MBTI WILL PUT YOUR PERSONALITY TO WORK!

promises a career assessment flyer, a promise that was echoed by the many leadership guides and self-help books.

“For companies today, business is all about the participative management of things. The old command-and-control approach doesn’t work. You have to bring feeling into it.”

To believe that one was ideally suited to do one’s job still meant to do it well and to do it willingly—to embrace one’s work under the belief that everyone was exactly where he or she was meant to be. Or as one trainee belted out in the middle of an exercise:

“Teamwork makes the dream work!”

A half-century after blistering critiques of type’s relationship to industrial modernity, the false consciousness perpetuated by the language of type remains almost impenetrable.

“You psychologists, you’re always trying to find out what’s wrong with people. And this is not what type is about. Type is about how people reach their own special kind of excellence. This research is just a way for us to understand if people are having trouble on their pathway, how do we help them?”

Chapter Fifteen

Tyranny of Specialists

High-IQ Morons

“Fuckin’ magnets, how do they work? And I don’t wanna talk to a scientist. Y’all motherfuckers lying and getting me pissed.”

For Insane Clown Posse a true understanding of “fucking rainbows” would reduce them to, as Keats put it, “the dull catalogue of common things.” Violent J shakes his head sorrowfully:

“Who looks at the stars at night and says ‘Oh, those are gaseous forms of plutonium?’ No! You look at the stars and you think, ‘Those are beautiful.’”

“It is not easy for uncredentialed people to stand up to the credentialed, even when the so-called expertise is grounded in ignorance and folly.”

The word ‘experienced’ often refers to someone who has gotten away with doing the wrong thing more frequently than you have.

I am most often irritated by those who attack the bishop but somehow fall for the securities analyst—those who exercise their skepticism against religion but not against economists, social scientists, and phony statisticians. Using the confirmation bias, these people will tell you that religion was horrible for mankind by counting deaths from the Inquisition and various religious wars. But they will not show you how many people were killed by nationalism, social science, and political theory under Stalinism or during the Vietnam War. Even priests don’t go to bishops when they feel ill: their first stop is the doctor’s. But we stop by the offices of many pseudo-scientists and “experts” without alternative. We no longer believe in papal infallibility; we seem to believe in the infallibility of the Nobel.

What if the conservation movement—the scientists and professors and regulators—were not saving the planet? Many have long perceived that

the world is steered by experts armed with good facts and good intentions. What if this is false? In the best-case scenario, the well-meaning experts are being whipped by superior opponents. In the worst case, the experts are twiddling their thumbs, drawing salaries from universities and government while the planet burns.

Most modern careers require submitting to specialization, degradation, trivialization, and tyrannization.

It is important to emphasize that in professional environments, the ability to play the role is generally far more important than the ability to actually do the work. The obsession with prioritizing form over content has played havoc with the professions. Why is it that Catch Me If You Can-style imposters can often successfully pretend to be airline pilots or surgeons without anyone noticing they have no qualifications for the job? The answer is that it's almost impossible to get fired from a professional job—even pilot or surgeon—for mere incompetence, but very easy to get fired for defiance of accepted standards of external behavior, that is, for not properly playing the part. The imposters have zero competence, but play the part perfectly; hence, they are much less likely to be dismissed from their positions than, say, an accomplished pilot or surgeon who openly defies the unspoken codes of external comportment attendant on the role.

Is it any wonder that our country has itself appeared to lose all sense of purpose, when our leaders have none of their own? Once, we dreamed of eradicating poverty, reaching the moon, ensuring racial justice, creating a more equitable society. Now—what? What large national project are we pursuing, or even talking of pursuing? So much freedom. So much wealth and power. Such technological sophistication. But in the end, to what end?

Brilliant, gifted, energetic, yes; but also anxious, greedy, bland, and risk-averse, with no courage and no vision—that is our elite today. The meritocracy is also a technocracy. It can solve the problems that you put in front of it, but it cannot tell you whether they're the right ones to be working on. It is trained to operate within the system, never to imagine that we might create a better one. It is oblivious to beliefs, values, and principles—the things the humanities teach you to think about—because it takes them so much for granted that it ceases to remember they exist. It is bereft of intellectual resources more nutritious than today's op-ed or yesterday's position paper. It is the rule of experts, high-IQ morons—people lacking in a wider thoughtfulness. We do need experts, to be sure, but we also need them not to be in charge. The Wuhan Flu panic is an example of the disastrous consequences that can occur as a result.

Some will argue: It isn't about ideology; it's about competence—the technocrat's creed in a nutshell. Competence makes the trains run on time

but doesn't know where they're going.

IQ tests conveniently omit areas of intelligence that most academics are not good at. For example, these tests do not assess the intelligence it takes to be funny and not bore an entire class; to read body language; to see through bullshit; or to stay alive on the streets in a dangerous neighborhood. Psychologist academics routinely have no great intelligence in these areas, and so, of course, these capacities are omitted from IQ tests.

Professionalism is more than an occupational category; it is an ideology. For many, it provides an entire framework for understanding our modern world. As a political ideology, professionalism carries enormous potential for mischief. For starters, it is obviously and inherently undemocratic, prioritizing the views of experts over those of the public. That is tolerable to a certain degree—no one really objects to rules mandating that only trained pilots fly jetliners, for example. But what happens when an entire category of experts stops thinking of itself as “social trustees”? What happens when they abuse their monopoly power? What happens when they start looking mainly after their own interests, which is to say, start acting as a class?

What are we to make of our modern-day technocracy, a meritocracy of failure in which ineffectual people rise to the top and entire professions—accountants, real-estate appraisers, et cetera—are roiled by corruption scandals? The answer is that the professional ideology brings with it certain predictable, recurring weaknesses.

The first of these pitfalls of professionalism is that the people with the highest status aren't necessarily creative or original thinkers. Although the professions are thought to represent the pinnacle of human brilliance, what they are actually brilliant at is defending and applying a given philosophy. Ideological discipline is the master key to the professions. Despite the favorite sixties slogan, professionals do not question authority; their job is to apply it. This is the very nature of their work and the object of their training. Professionals are obedient thinkers who implement their employers' attitudes and carefully internalize the reigning doctrine of their discipline, whatever it happens to be. In addition, the professions are structured to shield insiders from accountability. This is what defines the category: professionals do not have to listen. They are the only occupational group with the recognized right to declare outside evaluation illegitimate and intolerable.

The peril of orthodoxy is the second great pitfall of professionalism, and it's not limited to economics. Every academic discipline is similar: international relations, political science, cultural studies, even American history. None of them are as outrageous as economics, it is true, but each of them is dominated by some convention or ideology. Those who succeed in a professional discipline are those who best absorb and apply its master

narrative.

One final consequence of the ideology of professionalism is the liberal class's obsessive pining for consensus. Most of the Democratic leadership has shared these views for decades; for them, a great coming-together of the nation's educated is the obvious objective of political work. This obsession, so peculiar and yet so typical of our times, arises from professionals' well-known disgust with partisanship and their faith in what they take to be apolitical solutions. If only they could bring Washington's best people together, they believe, they could enact their common-knowledge program.

Figures in the media, as well as teachers in schools, exploit their position as knowledge authorities to issue assertions that are not supposed to be taken as proposals, but as commands. The newscaster telling the audience something like 'austerity is needed to cut down debt' is an order to each audience member to add it to her stock of beliefs. It cannot be a proposal to add it to the common ground, because the relation between the newscaster and the audience is fundamentally asymmetric. He is telling me things, not proposing things that he may himself give up when I present him with a good counterargument. Telling someone something from a position of authority is a command, not an assertion. The social studies teacher in school is not genuinely proposing her claims for debate. Proposing is something one does with an equal.

One cannot command another person to believe something, unless one simultaneously presents evidence for the belief that is to be adopted. I cannot successfully command you to believe that you are on Mars right now. However, in combining epistemic and practical authority, my assertion can have the effect of a command to change one's beliefs. This is what happens when we are in school listening to teachers or watching the news. One can command someone to believe something, by presenting oneself as an epistemic authority, whose expert testimony is sufficient to back up one's practical command.

It is very often the case that members of dispossessed groups seem to lack the required knowledge, or the required confidence, to act to alleviate their own oppression.

No system that usurps the autonomy of persons can be acceptable, even if it is in the name of greater social efficiency or the common good. The lessons of history show that humans are too prone to confuse the furtherance of their own interests with the common good, and their subjective explanatory framework with objective fact.

Samuel Huntington argued that the problems of the United States in the 1970s resulted from "an excess of democracy," and recommended "claims of expertise, seniority, experience, and special talents" in order to "override

the claims of democracy as a way of constituting authority.” Huntington’s recommendation for the United States was to try to reinstall some measure of obedience to authority by making various central domains in life, ones that should be governed democratically, the domain of experts, who are employed to make the masses feel unqualified to weigh in on central decisions about their lives. Huntington is recommending installing obedience to authority in negatively privileged groups, by making them feel unqualified to make autonomous democratic decisions in the face of self-proclaimed “experts” of various sorts.

Huntington’s suggestion for handling the “excess of democracy” was to employ the vocabulary of scientific expertise in a political way.

‘Technicism’ is the view that scientific expertise and technological advancements are the solution to the problems of the human condition. There are two chief dangers in the technicist worldview. First, it seeks to replace a liberal education with vocational technical skills. The technicist educational system therefore seeks to rob us of the capacity for autonomy. Secondly, a technicist culture encourages a tendency to defer one’s practical decisions to the epistemic authority of experts. Some societies are organized so as to restrict the distribution of important forms of authoritative agency to particular ruling elites. In other societies all normal members of society are considered “responsible free agents.” Even in most of these, however, certain people are designated as more equal than others. Why? Because their mastery of a particular cognitive area of discourse or practice seems to make it socially desirable that they be granted the right, under certain circumstances, to intervene in the freedom of other agents. Such privileged people are normally called “professionals.”

Technicism is an ideology that excludes, for example, narrative claims about personal experience as reasons for action or belief. The ideology of technicism is one that restricts genuine reasons in the public sphere to those whose contents contain only scientific or quantitative concepts. The ideology of technicism does not contain concepts for personal experience; it therefore consigns them to the status of mere “convenient rhetoric” or anecdote. The ideology of technicism undermines democracy by undermining the autonomy of those who are unfamiliar with the technicist concepts. The ideology of technicism makes citizens feel unqualified to participate democratically in the formation of the laws that govern their behavior. It is what underlies discounting personal narratives as explanations of patterns of statistics that paint minority groups in an unflattering light. It is employed by those in power to disenfranchise and subordinate those who are not in power, and hence is connected to a distinct social identity, the identity of ruling elites.

The employment of such a radically impoverished conceptual scheme as

the technician one is not just an accident of history. The idea that public reason should be constrained to technocratic concepts is there for a specific purpose: to serve the interests of the ruling elite. In the face of Samuel Huntington's appeal to employ the language of expertise more widely as a mechanism to deal with the "excesses of democracy," it is difficult to reject this further claim. It is a flawed ideology, because, by denying us access to narrative accounts and personal testimony, it blocks us from an understanding of the human suffering that explains the statistics, even when the statistics are factually correct.

Political propaganda is the employment of a political ideal against itself. Someone who presents subjective values, or self-interested goals, as the embodiment of objective scientific ideals is therefore producing prime examples of propaganda.

Professionals are a high-status group, but what gives them their lofty position is learning, not income. They rule because they are talented, because they are smart. A good sociological definition of professionalism is "a second hierarchy"—second to the main hierarchy of money, that is—"based on credentialed expertise." Which is to say, a social order supported by test scores and advanced degrees and defended by the many professional associations that have been set up over the years to define correct practice, enforce professional ethics, and wage war on the unlicensed.

Another distinguishing mark of the professions is their social authority. Professionals are the people who know what ails us and who dispense valuable diagnoses. Professionals predict the weather. They organize our financial deals and determine the rules of engagement. They design our cities and draw the traffic patterns through which the rest of us travel. Professionals know when someone is guilty of a moral or criminal misdeed and they also know precisely what form of retribution that culpability should take. Curriculum Planners know what we must learn; architects know what our buildings must look like; economists know what the Federal Reserve's discount rate should be; art critics know what is in good taste and what is in bad.

Although we are the subjects of all these diagnoses and prescriptions, the group to which professionals ultimately answer is not the public but their peers—and, of course, their clients. They listen mainly to one another. The professions are autonomous; they are not required to heed voices from below their circle of expertise. In this way the professions build and maintain monopolies over their designated fields. Now, 'monopoly' is admittedly a tough word, but it is not really a controversial one among sociologists who write about the professions. Monopolizing knowledge is a baseline description of what professions do; this is why they restrict entry

to their fields. Professions certify the expertise of insiders while negating and dismissing the knowledge-claims of outsiders.

Many believe Snowden more than they believe the government. He does, however, make one statement in *Citizenfour* that to some seems preposterous and wrong: While discussing the alleged greatness of the early, pre-mass-surveillance Internet, he notes that a child in one part of the world could have an anonymous discussion with a verified expert in another part of the world and “be granted the same respect for their ideas.” To many, that does not sound like a benefit. That sounds like a waste of time and energy, at least for the verified expert. The concept of some eleven-year-old in Poland facelessly debating an expert on an equal platform, just because there’s a machine that makes this possible, seems about as reasonable as letting dogs vote. They still can’t accept the possibility of certain experts being totally wrong.

I mean, if we found records of an eleven-year-old girl from 340 BC who contacted Aristotle and told him his idea about a rock wanting to sit on the ground was irrational bullshit, we’d name a college after her.

They assume it must be terrifying to view the world from the perspective that most people are wrong, and to think that every standard belief is a form of dogma, and to assume that reality is not real. And I get what they’re driving at, and I realize that—from their vantage point—any sense of wide-scale skepticism about the seemingly obvious would be a terrifying way to live. There’s an accepted line of reasoning that keeps the average person from losing his or her mind. It’s an automatic mental reflex. The first part of the reasoning involves a soft acceptance of the impossible: our recognition that the specific future is unknowable and that certain questions about the universe will never be answered, perhaps because those answers do not exist.

The second part involves a hard acceptance of limited truths: a concession that we can reliably agree on most statements that are technically unprovable, regardless of whether these statements are objective (‘The US government did not plan the 9/11 attacks’), subjective (‘Fyodor Dostoyevsky is a better novelist than Dan Brown’), or idealistic (‘Murder is worse than stealing, which is worse than lying, which is worse than sloth’). It’s a little like the way we’re biologically programmed to trust our friends and family more than we trust strangers, even if our own past experience suggests we should do otherwise. We can’t unconditionally trust the motives of people we don’t know, so we project a heightened sense of security upon those we do, even if common sense suggests we should do the opposite. If 90% of life is inscrutable, we need to embrace the 10% that seems forthright, lest we feel like life is a cruel, unmanageable joke. This is the root of naïve

realism. It's not so much an intellectual failing as an emotional sanctuary from existential despair. It is not, however, necessary.

Science is inherently reductive; its ethos is to break big problems down into smaller chunks that can be more easily attacked. But this can hinder seeing broader connections and limit the ability to synthesize information in anything resembling real-time.

Many experts lose the creativity and imagination of the less informed. They are so intimately familiar with known patterns that they may fail to recognize or respect the importance of the new wrinkle. The process of applying expertise is, after all, the editing out of unimportant details in favor of those known to be relevant. The mind of the beginner is empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities.

Intuitively, most people think that experts consider more alternatives and more possible diagnoses rather than fewer. Yet the mark of true expertise is not the ability to consider more options, but the ability to filter out irrelevant ones. Of course, it can be these "irrelevant" ones which lead to innovative fixes, but more often than not they won't.

Experts in various fields who predict the future are typically less accurate than a collection of reasonably informed people. Those who know many little things tend to predict better than those who know one area of expertise, although the latter are considered the experts and everybody wants to hear their opinions in the media.

There's also a detriment with our escalating progression toward the opposite extremity—the increasingly common ideology that assures people they're right about what they believe. And note that I used the word 'detriment.' I did not use the word 'danger,' because I don't think the notion of people living under the misguided premise that they're right is often dangerous. Most day-to-day issues are minor, the passage of time will dictate who was right and who was wrong, and the future will sort out the past. It is, however, socially detrimental. It hijacks conversation and aborts ideas. It engenders a delusion of simplicity that benefits people with inflexible minds. It makes the experience of living in a society slightly worse than it should be.

A dozen people picked at random on the street are at least as likely to offer sensible views on moral and political matters as a cross-section of the intelligentsia. But I would go further. One of the principal lessons of our tragic century, which has seen so many millions of innocent lives sacrificed in schemes to improve the lot of humanity, is—beware intellectuals. Not merely should they be kept well away from the levers of power, they should also be objects of particular suspicion when they seek to offer collective advice.

Beware committees, conferences, and leagues of intellectuals. Distrust public statements issued from their clustered, cloistered ranks. Discount their verdicts on political leaders and important events.

Intellectuals—far from being highly individualistic and nonconformist people—follow certain regular patterns of behavior. Taken as a group, they are often ultra-conformist within the circles formed by those whose approval they seek and value. That is what makes them, *en masse*, so dangerous, for it enables them to create climates of opinion and prevailing orthodoxies, which themselves often generate irrational and destructive courses of action. Above all, we must at all times remember what intellectuals habitually forget: that people matter more than concepts and must come first. The worst of all despotisms is the heartless tyranny of ideas.

David Brooks always comes back to his essential conviction, the article of faith that makes a writer like him fit so comfortably at the Times: the well-graduated are truly great people. And on that day in 2008 when Brooks beheld the incoming Obama crew, with their Harvard-certified talent—Lord!—he just about swooned. “I find myself tremendously impressed by the Obama transition,” he wrote. Why? Because “they are picking the best of the Washington insiders”: “open-minded individuals” who are “not ideological” and who exhibit lots of “practical creativity.” They were “admired professionals,” the very best their respective disciplines had to offer. Brooks did not point out that choosing so many people from the same class background—every single one of them, as he said, was a professional—might by itself guarantee closed minds and ideological uniformity. Nobody else pointed this out, either. We always overlook the class interests of professionals because we have trouble thinking of professionals as a “class” in the first place; like David Brooks, we think of them merely as “the best.” They are where they are because they are so smart, not because they’ve been born to an earldom or something.

The top ranks of the professions are made up of highly affluent people. They are not the billionaire Walmart clan, but they have a claim to leadership nevertheless. These two power structures, one of ownership and the other of knowledge, live side by side, sometimes in conflict with one another but usually in comity.

The problem with such broad-brush generalizations about any social stratum, of course, is that there are lots of exceptions, and a group of educated and often sophisticated individuals naturally contains lots of honorable folks who care sincerely about society’s well-being. Many of them understand the madness of a deregulated market system as it spins out of control. But in a sweeping sociological sense, professionals as a class do not get it. This is because inequality does not contradict, defy, or even

inconvenience the logic of professionalism.

On the contrary, inequality is essential to it. Professionals, after all, are life's officer corps. They give the orders; they write the prescriptions. Status is essential to professionalism; achieving a more exalted level in life's hierarchy is the most central dimension of the professionalization project. Inequality is what it's all about. Sometimes the privileges accorded to the professions are enshrined in law—not just anyone is allowed to step into a courtroom and start pleading before a judge, for example—and even when they aren't, they are maintained by artificial scarcity, by a monopoly of expertise. Meritocracy is what makes these ideas fit together; it is the official professional credo—the conviction that the successful deserve their rewards, that the people on top are there because they are the best. This is the First Commandment of the professional-managerial class.

Bill Clinton expressed his thoughts in a December 1992 speech to his “economic summit.” Here is how he proposed to deal with the various economic problems he had identified on the campaign trail:

“Our new direction must rest on an understanding of the new realities of global competition. *The world we face today is the world where what you earn depends on what you can learn.* There's a direct relationship between high skills and high wages, and therefore we have to educate our people better to compete. We will be as rich and strong and rife with opportunity as we are skilled and talented and trained.”

I put Clinton's line about “what you earn” in italics because it may well be the most important passage of them all for understanding how his party—how our entire system—has failed so utterly to confront income inequality. It's a line Clinton repeated a number of times in the course of his years in government, and here, in a single sentence, is the distilled essence of the theory that has governed the politics of work and compensation from that day to this: You get what you deserve, and what you deserve is defined by how you did in school. Furthermore, this is supposedly true both for individuals and for the nation. Everyone says this. Barack Obama says it, David Brooks says it, George W. Bush says it, even Wisconsin governor Scott Walker said it, by implication, when he demanded that the mission of the University of Wisconsin be changed from the “search for truth” to making people employable.

It doesn't take an advanced degree to figure out that this education talk is less a strategy for mitigating inequality than it is a way of rationalizing it. To attribute economic results to school years finished and SAT scores achieved

is to remove matters from the realm of, well, economics and to relocate them to the provinces of personal striving and individual intelligence. From this perspective, wages aren't what they are because one party (management) has a certain amount of power over the other (workers); wages are like that because the god of the market, being surpassingly fair, rewards those who show talent and gumption. Good people are those who get a gold star from their teacher in elementary school, a fat acceptance letter from a good college, and a good life when they graduate. All because they are the best. Those who don't pay attention in high school get to spend their days picking up discarded cans by the side of the road. Both outcomes are our own doing.

These days meritocracy has come to seem so reasonable that many of us take it for granted as the true and correct measure of human value. Do well in school, and you earn your credential. Earn your credential, and you are admitted into the ranks of the professions. Become a professional, and you receive the respect of the public plus the nice house in the suburbs and the fancy car and all the rest. Meritocracy makes so much sense to us that barely anyone thinks of challenging it, except on its own terms.

For Barack Obama, belief in meritocracy is a conviction of the most basic sort. Obama's faith lay in cream rising to the top. The president believed this for the most personal of reasons: because this was the system that had propelled him to the top. Because he himself was a product of the great American post-war meritocracy he could never fully escape seeing the world from the status ladder he had ascended.

What this doctrine means for the politics of income inequality should be clear: a profound complacency. For successful professionals, meritocracy is a beautifully self-serving doctrine, entitling them to all manner of rewards and status, because they are smarter than other people. For people on the receiving end of inequality—for those who have just lost their home, for example, or who are having trouble surviving on the minimum wage, the implications of meritocracy are equally unambiguous. To them this ideology says: forget it. You have no one to blame for your problems but yourself. There is no solidarity in a meritocracy. The very idea contradicts the ideology of the well-graduated technocrats who rule us. Leading members of the professional class show enormous respect for one another—call it “professional courtesy”—but they feel precious little sympathy for the less fortunate members of their own cohort: for the adjuncts frozen out of the academic market for tenure, for colleagues who get fired, or even for the kids who don't get into “good” colleges. That life doesn't shower its blessings on people who can't make the grade isn't a shock or an injustice; it's the way things ought to be.

To the liberal class this is a fixed idea, as open to evidence-based

refutation as creationism is to fundamentalists: if poor people want to stop being poor, poor people must go to college. But of course this isn't really an answer at all; it's a moral judgment, handed down by the successful from the vantage of their own success. The professional class is defined by its educational attainment, and every time they tell the country that what it needs is more schooling, they are saying: 'Inequality is not a failure of the system; it is a failure of you.'

Nor can the leaders of the professional class see the absurdity of urging everyone else to do exactly as they themselves did to make their way to the top. It is as if some oil baron were to proclaim that the unemployed could solve their problems if they just found good places to drill for oil. Or if some mutual-fund manager were to suggest that the solution to inequality was for everyone to put their savings in the stock market.

Look back to the days when government-by-expert actually worked—to some extent at least—and you will notice an astonishing thing. Unlike the Obama administration's roster of well-graduated mugwumps, the talented people surrounding Franklin Roosevelt stood very definitely outside the era's main academic currents. Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's closest confidant, was a social worker from Iowa. Robert Jackson, the US Attorney General whom Roosevelt appointed to the Supreme Court, was a lawyer who had no law degree. Jesse Jones, who ran Roosevelt's bailout program, was a businessman from Texas with no qualms about putting the nation's most prominent financial institutions into receivership. Marriner Eccles, the visionary whom Roosevelt appointed to run the Federal Reserve, was a small-town banker from Utah with no advanced degrees. Henry Wallace, who was probably the nation's greatest agriculture secretary, studied at Iowa State and came to government after running a magazine for farmers. Harry Truman, FDR's last vice president, had been a successful US senator but had no college degree at all. Even Roosevelt's Ivy Leaguers were often dissenters from professional convention. John Kenneth Galbraith, who helped to run the Office of Price Administration during World War II, spent his entire career calling classical economics into question. Thurman Arnold, the Wyoming-born leader of FDR's Antitrust Division, wrote a scoffing and derisive book called *The Folklore of Capitalism*. Just try getting a job in Washington after pulling something like that today.

Whenever you see something defining itself with the 'You're doing it wrong' conceit, it's inevitably arguing for a different approach that is just as specific and limited. When you see the phrase "You're doing it wrong," the unwritten sentence that follows is: 'And I'm doing it right.' This has become the pervasive way to argue about just about everything, particularly in a Web culture where discourse is dominated by the reaction to (and the

rejection of) other people's ideas, as opposed to generating one's own.

Some of us place so much value on being rational that we're unable to recognize that when someone tells you to be rational, they may just be telling you that their ideas weigh more than yours. The rhetoric of rationalism can be used as a seemingly benign disguise for social control.

The United States has more lawyers per capita, 3.65 per thousand, than other wealthy countries, such as Canada (2.2) and Germany (1.3). While the relatively large number of lawyers in the United States is a drain on the economy, factors unique to the United States might explain the higher ratio. Specifically, the rate of incarceration in the United States is far higher than in other wealthy countries, and so the demand for prosecutors and criminal defense lawyers is higher. In addition, the fact that the United States does not provide universal health insurance and has extraordinarily high health care costs means that people would have incentives that do not exist in other countries to pursue legal actions over physical injuries. Finally, regulation and litigation are alternative forms of protection. In countries with more extensive regulation for consumer protection and safety, there may be less need for legal action.

Individual income tax filings is another area that provides a considerable amount of often unnecessary work for lawyers. It should be possible for the IRS to calculate the returns of most low- and moderate-income workers and send the completed forms back to the taxpayer for approval. This is the practice in several European countries. Adopting this approach would radically reduce the need for tax consultants and for lawyers to challenge the work of these consultants.

The greatest crimes of human history are made possible by the most colorless human beings. They are the careerists. The bureaucrats. The cynics. They do the little chores that make vast, complicated systems of exploitation and death a reality. They collect and read the personal data gathered on tens of millions of us by the security and surveillance state. They keep the accounts of ExxonMobil, BP, and Goldman Sachs. They build or pilot aerial drones. They work in corporate advertising and public relations. They issue the forms. They process the papers. They deny food stamps to some and unemployment benefits or medical coverage to others. They enforce the laws and the regulations. And they do not ask questions.

Good. Evil. These words do not mean anything to them. They are beyond morality. They are there to make corporate systems function. If insurance companies abandon tens of millions of sick to suffer and die, so be it. If banks and sheriff departments toss families out of their homes, so be it. If financial firms rob citizens of their savings, so be it. If the government shuts down schools and libraries, so be it. If the military murders children

in Pakistan or Afghanistan, so be it. If commodity speculators drive up the cost of rice and corn and wheat so that they are unaffordable for hundreds of millions of poor across the planet, so be it. If Congress and the courts strip citizens of basic civil liberties, so be it. If the fossil fuel industry turns the earth into a broiler of greenhouse gases that doom us, so be it. They serve the system. The god of profit and exploitation. The most dangerous force in the industrialized world does not come from those who wield radical creeds, whether Islamic radicalism or Christian fundamentalism, but from legions of faceless bureaucrats who claw their way up layered corporate and governmental machines. They serve any system that meets their pathetic quota of needs.

These systems managers believe nothing. They have no loyalty. They are rootless. They do not think beyond their tiny, insignificant roles. They are blind and deaf. They are—at least regarding the great ideas and patterns of human civilization and history—utterly illiterate. And we churn them out of universities. Lawyers. Technocrats. Business majors. Financial managers. IT specialists. Consultants. Petroleum engineers. Positive psychologists. Communications majors. Cadets. Sales representatives. Computer programmers. Men and women who know no history, know no ideas. They live and think in an intellectual vacuum, a world of stultifying minutia. They are the hollow men, the stuffed men. Shape without form, shade without colour. Paralyzed force, gesture without motion.

It was the careerists who made possible the genocides, from the extermination of Native Americans to the Turkish slaughter of the Armenians, from the Nazi Holocaust to the creation of the world's largest open-air prison by Israel. They were the ones who kept the trains running. They filled out the forms and presided over the property confiscations. They rationed the food while children starved. They manufactured the guns. They ran the prisons. They enforced travel bans, confiscated passports, seized bank accounts and carried out segregation. They enforced the law. They did their jobs.

Political and military careerists, backed by war profiteers, have led us into useless wars, including World War I, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. And millions followed them. Duty. Honor. Country. Carnivals of death. They sacrifice us all. In the futile battles of Verdun and the Somme in World War I, 1.8 million on both sides were killed, wounded, or never found. In July of 1917 British Field Marshal Douglas Haig, despite the seas of dead, doomed even more in the mud of Passchendaele. By November, when it was clear his promised breakthrough at Passchendaele had failed, he jettisoned the initial goal—as we did in Iraq when it turned out there were no weapons of mass destruction and in Afghanistan when al-Qaeda left the country—and opted for a simple war of attrition. Haig won if more Germans than allied

troops died. Death as score card. Passchendaele took 600,000 more lives on both sides of the line before it ended. It is not a new story. Generals are almost always buffoons. Soldiers followed John the Blind, who had lost his eyesight a decade earlier, to resounding defeat at the Battle of Crécy in 1337 during the Hundred Years War. We discover that leaders are mediocrities only when it is too late.

“Before the battle of Passchendaele the Tanks Corps Staff prepared maps to show how a bombardment which obliterated the drainage would inevitably lead to a series of pools, and they located the exact spots where the waters would gather. The only reply was a peremptory order that they were to ‘Send no more of these ridiculous maps.’ Maps must conform to plans and not plans to maps. Facts that interfered with plans were impertinencies.”

Here you have the explanation of why our ruling elites do nothing about climate change, refuse to respond rationally to economic meltdown, and are incapable of coping with the collapse of globalization and empire. These are circumstances that interfere with the very viability and sustainability of the system. And bureaucrats know only how to serve the system. They know only the managerial skills they ingested at West Point or Harvard Business School. They cannot think on their own. They cannot challenge assumptions or structures. They cannot intellectually or emotionally recognize that the system might implode. And so they do what Napoléon warned was the worst mistake a general could make: paint an imaginary picture of a situation and accept it as real. But we blithely ignore reality along with them. The mania for a happy ending blinds us. We do not want to believe what we see. It is too depressing. So we all retreat into collective self-delusion.

“One day in 1943 when I was already in Crematorium 5, a train from Bialystok arrived. A prisoner on the ‘special detail’ saw a woman in the ‘undressing room’ who was the wife of a friend of his. He came right out and told her: ‘You are going to be exterminated. In three hours you’ll be ashes.’ The woman believed him because she knew him. She ran all over and warned to the other women. ‘We’re going to be killed. We’re going to be gassed.’ Mothers carrying their children on their shoulders didn’t want to hear that. They decided the woman was crazy. They chased her away. So she went to the men. To no avail. Not that they didn’t believe her. They’d heard rumors in the Bialystok

ghetto, or in Grodno, and elsewhere. But who wanted to hear that? When she saw that no one would listen, she scratched her whole face. Out of despair. In shock. And she started to scream.”

We run heedlessly into the abyss after putting something in front of us to stop us from seeing it.

Adolf Eichmann was primarily motivated by an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement. He joined the Nazi Party because it was a good career move.

“The trouble with Eichmann, was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal.

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such.”

“The most nauseating type of S.S. were to me personally the cynics who no longer genuinely believed in their cause, but went on collecting blood guilt for its own sake. Those cynics were not always brutal to the prisoners, their behavior changed with their mood. They took nothing seriously—neither themselves nor their cause, neither us nor our situation. One of the worst among them was Dr. Mengele, the Camp Doctor I have mentioned before. When a batch of newly arrived Jews was being classified into those fit for work and those fit for death, he would whistle a melody and rhythmically jerk his thumb over his right or his left shoulder—which meant ‘gas’ or ‘work.’ He thought conditions in the camp rotten, and even did a few things to improve them, but at the same time he committed murder callously, without any qualms.”

These armies of bureaucrats serve a corporate system that will quite literally kill us. They are as cold and disconnected as Mengele. They carry out minute tasks. They are docile. Compliant. They obey. They find their self-worth in the prestige and power of the corporation, in the status of

their positions, and in their career promotions. They assure themselves of their own goodness through their private acts as husbands, wives, mothers, and fathers. They sit on school boards. They go to Rotary. They attend church. It is moral schizophrenia. They erect walls to create an isolated consciousness. They make the lethal goals of ExxonMobil or Goldman Sachs or Raytheon or insurance companies possible. They destroy the ecosystem, the economy and the body politic and turn working-men and -women into impoverished serfs. They feel nothing. Metaphysical naiveté always ends in murder. It fragments the world. Little acts of kindness and charity mask the monstrous evil they abet. And the system rolls forward. The polar ice caps melt. The droughts rage over cropland. The drones deliver death from the sky. The state moves inexorably forward to place us in chains. The sick die. The poor starve. The prisons fill. And the careerist, plodding forward, does his or her job.

It is interesting and important to note that many of the petty officials who do absurd and terrible things in the name of paperwork are keenly aware of what they are doing and of the human damage that is likely to result—even if they usually feel they must remain stone-faced when dealing with the public. Some rationalize it. A few take sadistic pleasure. But any victim of the system who has ever asked herself, ‘How can such people live with themselves?’ might take some comfort in the fact that, in many cases, they can’t.

With the collapse of the old welfare states, all this has come to seem decidedly quaint. As the language of anti-bureaucratic individualism has been adopted, with increasing ferocity, by the Right, which insists on “market solutions” to every social problem, the mainstream Left has increasingly reduced itself to fighting a kind of pathetic rearguard action, trying to salvage remnants of the old welfare state: it has acquiesced with—often even spearheaded—attempts to make government efforts more “efficient” through the partial privatization of services and the incorporation of ever-more “market principles,” “market incentives,” and market-based “accountability processes” into the structure of the bureaucracy itself. The result is a political catastrophe. There’s really no other way to put it.

What is presented as the “moderate” Left solution to any social problems—and radical left solutions are, almost everywhere now, ruled out tout court—has invariably come to be some nightmare fusion of the worst elements of bureaucracy and the worst elements of capitalism. It’s as if someone had consciously tried to create the least appealing possible political position. It is a testimony to the genuine lingering power of leftist ideals that anyone would even consider voting for a party that promoted this sort of thing—because surely, if they do, it’s not because they actually

think these are good policies, but because these are the only policies anyone who identifies themselves as left-of-center is allowed to set forth. Is there any wonder, then, that every time there is a social crisis, it is the Right, rather than the Left, which becomes the venue for the expression of popular anger? The Right, at least, has a critique of bureaucracy. It's not a very good one. But at least it exists. The Left has none. As a result, when those who identify with the Left do have anything negative to say about bureaucracy, they are usually forced to adopt a watered-down version of the right-wing critique.

One could go further. The “acceptable” Left has, as I say, embraced bureaucracy and the market simultaneously. The libertarian Right at least has a critique of bureaucracy. The fascist Right has a critique of the market—generally, they are supporters of social welfare policies; they just want to restrict them to members of their own favored ethnic group.

In contemporary American populism—and increasingly, in the rest of the world as well—there can be only one alternative to ‘bureaucracy,’ and that is ‘the market.’ Sometimes this is held to mean that government should be run more like a business. Sometimes it is held to mean we should simply get the bureaucrats out of the way and let nature take its course, which means letting people attend to the business of their lives untrammelled by endless rules and regulations imposed on them from above, and so allowing the magic of the marketplace to provide its own solutions. ‘Democracy’ thus came to mean the market; ‘bureaucracy,’ in turn, government interference with the market; and this is pretty much what the word continues to mean to this day.

“A few weeks ago, I spent several hours on the phone with Bank of America, trying to work out how to get access to my account information from overseas. This involved speaking to four different representatives, two referrals to nonexistent numbers, three long explanations of complicated and apparently arbitrary rules, and two failed attempts to change outdated address and phone number information lodged on various computer systems. In other words, it was the very definition of a bureaucratic runaround. (Neither was I able, when it was all over, to actually access my account.) Now, there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that, were I to actually locate a bank manager and demand to know how such things could happen, he or she would immediately insist that the bank was not to blame—that it was all an effect of an arcane maze of government regulations. However, I am equally confident that, were it possible to investigate

how these regulations came about, one would find that they were composed jointly by aides to legislators on some banking committee and lobbyists and attorneys employed by the banks themselves, in a process greased by generous contributions to the coffers of those same legislators' reelection campaigns."

And the same would be true of anything from credit ratings, insurance premiums, mortgage applications, to, for that matter, the process of buying an airline ticket, applying for a scuba license, or trying to requisition an ergonomic chair for one's office in an ostensibly private university. The vast majority of the paperwork we do exists in just this sort of in-between zone—ostensibly private, but in fact entirely shaped by a government that provides the legal framework, underpins the rules with its courts and all of the elaborate mechanisms of enforcement that come with them, but (crucially) works closely with the private concerns to ensure that the results will guarantee a certain rate of private profit. In cases like this the language we employ—derived as it is from the right-wing critique—is completely inadequate. It tells us nothing about what is actually going on.

Consider the word 'deregulation.' In today's political discourse, deregulation is—like 'reform'—almost invariably treated as a good thing. Deregulation means less bureaucratic meddling, and fewer rules and regulations stifling innovation and commerce. This usage puts those on the left-hand side of the political spectrum in an awkward position, since opposing deregulation—even, pointing out that it was an orgy of this very deregulation that led to the banking crisis of 2008—seems to imply a desire for more rules and regulations, and therefore, more gray men in suits standing in the way of freedom and innovation and generally telling people what to do. But this debate is based on false premises.

Let's go back to banks. There's no such thing as an unregulated bank. Nor could there be. Banks are institutions to which the government has granted the power to create money—or, to be slightly more technical about it, the right to issue IOUs that the government will recognize as legal tender, and, therefore, accept in payment of taxes and to discharge other debts within its own national territory. Obviously no government is about to grant anyone—least of all a profit-seeking firm—the power to create as much money as they like under any circumstances. That would be insane. The power to create money is one that, by definition, governments can only grant under carefully circumscribed (read: regulated) conditions. And indeed this is what we always find: government regulates everything from a bank's reserve requirements to its hours of operation; how much it can charge in interest, fees, and penalties; what sort of security precautions it can or

must employ; how its records must be kept and reported; how and when it must inform its clients of their rights and responsibilities; and pretty much everything else.

So what are people actually referring to when they talk about deregulation? In ordinary usage, the word seems to mean ‘changing the regulatory structure in a way that I like.’ In practice this can refer to almost anything. About the only policies that can’t be referred to as deregulation are ones that aim to reverse some other policy that has already been labeled ‘deregulation,’ which means it’s important, in playing the game, to have your policy labeled ‘deregulation’ first.

The People or a Mob?

Journalism is one of many fields of public influence—including politics—in which credentials function as de facto permission to speak, rendering those who lack them less likely to be employed and less able to afford to stay in their field. Ability is discounted without credentials, but the ability to purchase credentials rests, more often than not, on family wealth.

“Why do Americans think this is a good requirement, or at least a necessary one? Because *They* think so. We’ve left the realm of reason and entered that of faith and mass conformity.”

Almost every endeavor that used to be considered an art best learned through doing now requires formal professional training and a certificate of completion, and this seems to be happening, equally, in both the private and public sectors, since, as already noted, in matters bureaucratic, such distinctions are becoming effectively meaningless. While these measures are touted—as are all bureaucratic measures—as a way of creating fair, impersonal mechanisms in fields previously dominated by insider knowledge and social connections, the effect is often the opposite. As anyone who has been to graduate school knows, it’s precisely the children of the professional-managerial classes, those whose family resources make them the least in need of financial support, who best know how to navigate the world of paperwork that enables them to get said support. For everyone else, the main result of one’s years of professional training is to ensure that one is saddled with such an enormous burden of student debt that a substantial chunk of any subsequent income one will get from pursuing that profession will henceforth be siphoned off, each month, by the financial sector.

In some cases, these new training requirements can only be described as outright scams, as when lenders, and those prepared to set up the training programs, jointly lobby the government to insist that, say, all pharmacists be henceforth required to pass some additional qualifying examination, forcing thousands already practicing the profession into night school, which these pharmacists know many will only be able to afford with the help of high-interest student loans. By doing this, lenders are in effect legislating themselves a cut of most pharmacists’ subsequent incomes.

One result of all this debt is to render the government itself the main mechanism for the extraction of corporate profits. Just think, here, of what happens if one tries to default on one’s student loans: the entire legal apparatus leaps into action, threatening to seize assets, garnish wages, and apply thousands of dollars in additional penalties. The only way graduates

can reduce their student debt burden, according to a 1998 law enacted at the behest of the student loan industry, is to prove in a separate lawsuit that repayment would impose an “undue hardship” on them and their dependents. This is a stricter standard than bankruptcy courts apply to gamblers seeking to reduce their gambling debts. Another result is to force the debtors themselves to bureaucratize ever-increasing dimensions of their own lives, which have to be managed as if they were themselves a tiny corporation measuring inputs and outputs and constantly struggling to balance its accounts.

It’s also important to emphasize that while this system of extraction comes dressed up in a language of rules and regulations, in its actual mode of operation, it has almost nothing to do with the rule of law. Rather, the legal system has itself become the means for a system of increasingly arbitrary extractions. As the profits from banks and credit card companies derive more and more from “fees and penalties” levied on their customers—so much so that those living check to check can regularly expect to be charged eighty dollars for a five-dollar overdraft—financial firms have come to play by an entirely different set of rules.

“Well, you have to understand the approach taken by US prosecutors to financial fraud is always to negotiate a settlement. They don’t want to have to go to trial. The upshot is always that the financial institution has to pay a fine, sometimes in the hundreds of millions, but they don’t actually admit to any criminal liability. Their lawyers simply say they are not going to contest the charge, but if they pay, they haven’t technically been found guilty of anything.”

So you’re saying if the government discovers that Goldman Sachs, for instance, or Bank of America, has committed fraud, they effectively just charge them a penalty fee.

“That’s right.”

Has there ever been a case where the amount the firm had to pay was more than the amount of money they made from the fraud itself?

“Oh no, not to my knowledge. Usually it’s substantially less.”

So what are we talking here, 50 percent?

“I’d say more like 20 to 30 percent on average. But it varies considerably case by case.”

Which means. . . correct me if I’m wrong, but doesn’t that effectively mean the government is saying, ‘you can commit all the fraud you like, but if we catch you, you’re going to have to give us our cut’?

“Well, obviously I can’t put it that way myself as long as I have this job. . .”

So: what would a left-wing critique of total, or predatory, bureaucratization look like? I think the story of the Global Justice Movement provides a hint—because it was a movement that, rather to its own surprise, discovered this was what it was about. Back in the 1990s, “globalization,” as touted by journalists like Thomas Friedman—but really, by the entire journalistic establishment in the United States and most of it in other wealthy countries—was portrayed as an almost natural force. Technological advances—particularly the Internet—were knitting the world together as never before, increased communication was leading to increased trade, and national borders were rapidly becoming irrelevant as free trade treaties united the globe into a single world market. In political debates of the time in the mainstream media, all of this was discussed as such a self-evident reality that anyone who objected to the process could be treated as if they were objecting to basic laws of nature—they were flat-earthers, buffoons, the left-wing equivalents of Biblical fundamentalists who thought evolution was a hoax.

Thus when the Global Justice Movement started, the media spin was that it was a rearguard action of hoary, carbuncular leftists who wished to restore protectionism, national sovereignty, barriers to trade and communication, and, generally, to vainly stand against the Inevitable Tide of History. The problem with this was that it was obviously untrue. Most immediately, there was the fact that the protesters’ average age, especially in the wealthier countries, seemed to be about nineteen. More seriously, there was the fact that the movement was a form of globalization in itself: a kaleidoscopic alliance of people from every corner of the world, including organizations ranging from Indian farmers’ associations, to the Canadian postal workers’ union, to indigenous groups in Panama, to anarchist collectives in Detroit. What’s more, its exponents endlessly insisted that despite protestations to the contrary, what the media was calling globalization had almost nothing to do with the effacement of borders and the free movement of people, products, and ideas. It was really about trapping increasingly large parts of the world’s population behind highly militarized national borders within which social

protections could be systematically withdrawn, creating a pool of laborers so desperate that they would be willing to work for almost nothing. Against it, they proposed a genuinely borderless world.

Much of what is being called ‘international trade’ in fact consists merely of the transfer of materials back and forth between different branches of the same corporation.

Whenever someone starts talking about the free market, it’s a good idea to look around for the man with the gun. He’s never far away. Free-market liberalism of the nineteenth century corresponded with the invention of the modern police and private detective agencies, and gradually, with the notion that those police had at least ultimate jurisdiction over virtually every aspect of urban life, from the regulation of street peddlers to noise levels at private parties, or even to the resolution of bitter fights with crazy uncles or college roommates. We are now so used to the idea that we at least could call the police to resolve virtually any difficult circumstance that many of us find it difficult to even imagine what people would have done before this was possible. Because, in fact, for the vast majority of people throughout history—even those who lived in in large cities—there were simply no authorities to call in such circumstances. Or, at least, no impersonal bureaucratic ones who were, like the modern police, empowered to impose arbitrary resolutions backed by the threat of force.

I was reminded of this a few years ago by none other than Julian Assange, when a number of Occupy activists appeared on his TV show *The World Tomorrow*. Aware that many were anarchists, he asked what he considered a challenging question:

“Say you have a camp, and there are some people playing the drums all night and keeping everyone awake, and they won’t stop, what do you propose to do about it?”

The implication is that police, or something like them—some impersonal force willing to threaten violence—were simply necessary in such conditions. He was referring to a real incident—there had been some annoying drummers in Zuccotti Park. But in fact, the occupiers who didn’t like the music simply negotiated a compromise with them where they would only drum during certain hours. No threats of violent force were necessary. This brings home the fact that, for the overwhelming majority of humans who have lived in human history, there has simply been nothing remotely like police to call under such circumstances. Yet they worked something out. One seeks in vain for Mesopotamian or Chinese or ancient Peruvian accounts of urban dwellers driven mad by neighbors’ raucous parties.

History reveals that political policies that favor “the market” have always meant even more people in offices to administer things, but it also reveals that they also mean an increase of the range and density of social relations that are ultimately regulated by the threat of violence. This obviously flies in the face of everything we’ve been taught to believe about the market, but if you observe what actually happens, it’s clearly true. In a sense, even calling this a ‘corollary’ is deceptive, because we’re really just talking about two different ways of talking about the same thing. The bureaucratization of daily life means the imposition of impersonal rules and regulations; impersonal rules and regulations, in turn, can only operate if they are backed up by the threat of force. And indeed, in this most recent phase of total bureaucratization, we’ve seen security cameras, police scooters, issuers of temporary ID cards, and men and women in a variety of uniforms acting in either public or private capacities, trained in tactics of menacing, intimidating, and ultimately deploying physical violence, appear just about everywhere—even in places such as playgrounds, primary schools, college campuses, hospitals, libraries, parks, or beach resorts, where fifty years ago their presence would have been considered scandalous, or simply weird.

Supporters of the old Prussian bureaucratic state in the nineteenth century, like Hegel or Goethe, insisted that its authoritarian measures could be justified by the fact they allowed citizens to be absolutely secure in their property, and therefore, free to do absolutely anything they pleased in their own homes—whether that meant pursuing the arts, religion, romance, or philosophical speculation, or simply a matter of deciding for themselves what sort of beer they chose to drink, music they chose to listen to, or clothes they chose to wear. Bureaucratic capitalism, when it appeared in the United States, similarly justified itself on consumerist grounds: one could justify demanding that workers abandon any control over the conditions under which they worked if one could thus guarantee them a wider and cheaper range of products for them to use at home. Even the Soviet bureaucracy combined a celebration of labor with a long-term commitment to creating a consumer utopia. It should be noted that when the Reagan administration effectively abandoned antitrust enforcement in the eighties, they did it by shifting the criteria for approval of a merger from whether it operates as a restraint of trade to whether it “benefits the consumer.” The result is that the US economy is in most sectors, from agriculture to book sales, dominated by a few giant bureaucratic monopolies or oligopolies.

Bureaucracies public and private appear—for whatever historical reasons—to be organized in such a way as to guarantee that a significant proportion of actors will not be able to perform their tasks as expected. It’s in this sense that I’ve said one can fairly say that bureaucracies are utopian

forms of organization. After all, is this not what we always say of utopians, that they have a naïve faith in the perfectibility of human nature and refuse to deal with humans as they actually are? Which is, are we not also told, what leads them to set impossible standards and then blame the individuals for not living up to them? But in fact all bureaucracies do this, insofar as they set demands they insist are reasonable, and then, on discovering that they are not reasonable—since a significant number of people will always be unable to perform as expected—conclude that the problem is not with the demands themselves but with the individual inadequacy of each particular human being who fails to live up to them.

For example:

“We expect everyone to work as hard as possible for the common good without expectation of reward! And if you are not capable of living up to such standards, clearly you are a counterrevolutionary bourgeois individualist parasite, and we’ll have to send you to a gulag.”

Now, I admit that this emphasis on violence might seem odd. We are not used to thinking of nursing homes or banks or even HMOs as violent institutions—except perhaps in the most abstract and metaphorical sense. But the violence I’m referring to here is not abstract. I am not speaking of conceptual violence. I am speaking of violence in the literal sense: the kind that involves, say, one person hitting another over the head with a wooden stick. All of these are institutions involved in the allocation of resources within a system of property rights regulated and guaranteed by governments in a system that ultimately rests on the threat of force. ‘Force’ in turn is just a euphemistic way to refer to violence: that is, the ability to call up people dressed in uniforms, willing to threaten to hit others over the head with wooden sticks. It is curious how rarely citizens in industrial democracies actually think about this fact, or how instinctively we try to discount its importance.

This is what makes it possible, for example, for graduate students to be able to spend days in the stacks of university libraries poring over Foucault-inspired theoretical tracts about the declining importance of coercion as a factor in modern life without ever reflecting on that fact that, had they insisted on their right to enter the stacks without showing a properly stamped and validated ID, armed men would have been summoned to physically remove them, using whatever force might be required. It’s almost as if the more we allow aspects of our everyday existence to fall under the purview of bureaucratic regulations, the more everyone concerned colludes to downplay

the fact (perfectly obvious to those actually running the system) that all of it ultimately depends on the threat of physical harm.

Imagine, if you will, some warlike tribe (let's call them the Alphas) that sweeps out of the desert and seizes a swath of land inhabited by peaceful farmers (let's call them the Omegas). But instead of exacting tribute, they appropriate all the fertile land, and arrange for their children to have privileged access to most forms of practical education, at the same time initiating a religious ideology that holds that they are intrinsically superior beings, finer and more beautiful and more intelligent, and that the Omegas, now largely reduced to working on their estates, have been cursed by the divine powers for some terrible sin, and have become stupid, ugly, and base. And perhaps the Omegas internalize their disgrace and come to act as if they believe they really are guilty of something. In a sense perhaps they do believe it. But on a deeper level it doesn't make a lot of sense to ask whether they do or not. The whole arrangement is the fruit of violence and can only be maintained by the continual threat of violence: the fact that the Omegas are quite aware that if anyone directly challenged property arrangements, or access to education, swords would be drawn and people's heads would almost certainly end up being lopped off. In a case like this, what we talk about in terms of "belief" are simply the psychological techniques people develop to accommodate themselves to this reality. We have no idea how they would act, or what they would think, if the Alphas' command of the means of violence were to somehow disappear.

Is it accurate to say that acts of violence are, generally speaking, also acts of communication? It certainly is. But this is true of pretty much any form of human action. It strikes me that what is really important about violence is that it is perhaps the only form of human action that holds out even the possibility of having social effects without being communicative. To be more precise: violence may well be the only way it is possible for one human being to do something which will have relatively predictable effects on the actions of a person about whom they understand nothing. In pretty much any other way in which you might try to influence another's actions, you must at least have some idea about who you think they are, who they think you are, what they might want out of the situation, their aversions and proclivities, and so forth. Hit them over the head hard enough, and all of this becomes irrelevant. It is true that the effects one can have by disabling or killing someone are very limited. But they are real enough—and critically, it is possible to know in advance exactly what they are going to be. Any alternative form of action cannot, without some sort of appeal to shared meanings or understandings, have any predictable effects at all.

What's more, while attempts to influence others by the threat of violence

do require some level of shared understandings, these can be pretty minimal. Most human relations—particularly ongoing ones, whether between longstanding friends or longstanding enemies—are extremely complicated, dense with history and meaning. Maintaining them requires a constant and often subtle work of imagination, of endlessly trying to see the world from others' points of view—interpretive labor. Threatening others with physical harm allows the possibility of cutting through all this. It makes possible relations of a far more simple and schematic kind ('Cross this line and I will shoot you'; 'One more word out of any of you and you're going to jail'). This is of course why violence is so often the preferred weapon of the stupid. One might even call it the trump card of the stupid, since—and this is surely one of the tragedies of human existence—it is the one form of stupidity to which it is most difficult to come up with an intelligent response.

I do need to introduce one crucial qualification here. Everything, here, depends on the balance of forces. If two parties are engaged in a relatively equal contest of violence—say, generals commanding opposing armies—they have good reason to try to get inside each other's heads. It is only when one side has an overwhelming advantage in their capacity to cause physical harm that they no longer need to do so. But this has very profound effects, because it means that the most characteristic effect of violence, its ability to obviate the need for "interpretive labor," becomes most salient when the violence itself is least visible—in fact, where acts of spectacular physical violence are least likely to occur. These are of course precisely what I have just defined as situations of structural violence, systematic inequalities ultimately backed up by the threat of force. For this reason, situations of structural violence invariably produce extremely lopsided structures of imaginative identification.

Curiously, it was Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, who first observed the phenomenon we now refer to as 'compassion fatigue.' Human beings, he proposed, are normally inclined not only to imaginatively identify with their fellows, but as a result, to spontaneously feel one another's joys and sorrows. The poor, however, are so consistently miserable that otherwise sympathetic observers are simply overwhelmed, and are forced, without realizing it, to blot out their existence entirely. The result is that while those on the bottom of a social ladder spend a great deal of time imagining the perspectives of, and genuinely caring about, those on the top, it almost never happens the other way around. Whether one is dealing with masters and servants, men and women, employers and employees, rich and poor, structural inequality—what I've been calling structural violence—invariably creates highly lopsided structures of the imagination. Since imagination tends to bring with it sympathy, the result is that victims of

structural violence tend to care about its beneficiaries far more than those beneficiaries care about them. This might well be, after the violence itself, the single most powerful force preserving such relations.

“A mother who loses a child is a wounded woman. We hear her laugh again, and see her go about her business of surviving, but she has been wounded and the scars go deep. I am grateful for mothers out there who have the strength to go on and to live full, useful lives, and who can continue to love. And I thought of men who need to kill the children of mothers. The black and white winter birds were at my feeder. They do not kill each other. And I thought that perhaps the world should be ruled by small black and white winter birds and, yes, by mothers.

My God has let me know by His scriptures and by His Holy Spirit that I am not required according to His Laws, to bow under laws which trample upon my liberties by which my God has made me a free man. My God is more powerful than you and your illegal laws, and only slaves will bow under those conditions; therefore, all I can say is go to Hell, you and your kind, for such unrighteous demands.”

From the time we were bouncing babes we were taught where to bounce and how. We do as we're told by authority. Through our formative years our parents were authority figures, as were our teachers. Endless government officials from the dogcatcher to the parking-meter lady daily exercise authority over us. The police have unmitigated power. They direct traffic. We follow. They blow their sirens. We pull over. Whatever they demand, we are in the habit of obeying. At work, for all of our lives, our employers tell us what to do, where and when. Our government taxes us, and we pay without a street fight. In retirement we strictly follow the rules we must in order to obtain the benefits of our retirement that we've earned. And even at death our bodies are disposed of according to the law. We do not revolt against authority. We do not scream in the streets when the rights of others are wrested from them. We make no undue disturbance in public places. We stand in line waiting our turn, even if it is painful to do so. We allow people we have never seen and will never see again, under color of authority, to search us at airports. Rarely do we exercise independent judgment, and when we do, our judgments are subject to the scrutiny of authority. Cattle walk quietly down the killing chute to be butchered because they are domesticated and respect our authority. Our minds are polluted with propaganda from the

power structure, and we accept their statements even when they lie to us, including their pronouncement that we are free.

Generations of police sociologists have pointed out that only a very small proportion of what police actually do has anything to do with enforcing criminal law—or with criminal matters of any kind. Most of it has to do with regulations, or, to put it slightly more technically, with the scientific application of physical force, or the threat of physical force, to aid in the resolution of administrative problems. In other words they spend most of their time enforcing all those endless rules and regulations about who can buy or smoke or sell or build or eat or drink what where that don't exist in places like small-town or rural Madagascar. So: Police are bureaucrats with weapons.

If you think about it, this is a really ingenious trick. Because when most of us think about police, we do not think of them as enforcing regulations. We think of them as fighting crime, and when we think of 'crime,' the kind of crime we have in our minds is violent crime. Even though, in fact, what police mostly do is exactly the opposite: they bring the threat of force to bear on situations that would otherwise have nothing to do with it. I find this all the time in public discussions. When trying to come up with a hypothetical example of a situation in which police are likely to be involved, people will almost invariably think of some act of interpersonal violence: a mugging or assault. But even a moment's reflection should make it clear that, when most real acts of physical assault—domestic violence, gang fights, drunken brawls—do occur, even in major cities like Marseille or Montevideo or Minneapolis, the police do not get involved. Police are only likely to be called in if someone dies, or is so seriously hurt they end up in the hospital.

But this is because the moment an ambulance is involved, there is also paperwork; if someone is treated in the hospital, there has to be a cause of injury, the circumstances become relevant, police reports have to be filed. And if someone dies there are all sorts of forms, up to and including municipal statistics. So the only fights which police are sure to get involved in are those that generate some kind of paperwork. The vast majority of muggings or burglaries aren't reported either, unless there are insurance forms to be filled out, or lost documents that need to be replaced, and which can only be replaced if one files a proper police report. So most violent crime does not end up involving the police.

On the other hand, try driving down the street of any one of those cities in a car without license plates. We all know what's going to happen. Uniformed officers armed with sticks, guns, and/or tasers will appear on the scene almost immediately, and if you simply refuse to comply with their instructions, violent force will, most definitely, be applied. Why are

we so confused about what police really do? The obvious reason is that in the popular culture of the last fifty years or so, police have become almost obsessive objects of imaginative identification in popular culture. It has come to the point that it's not at all unusual for a citizen in a contemporary industrialized democracy to spend several hours a day reading books, watching movies, or viewing TV shows that invite them to look at the world from a police point of view, and to vicariously participate in their exploits. And these imaginary police do, indeed, spend almost all of their time fighting violent crime, or dealing with its consequences.

Ancient Egypt in contrast created whole genres of literature to warn young students against adventurous occupations. They would typically begin by asking whether the reader had ever dreamed of becoming the captain of a ship, or a royal charioteer, then go on to describe just how miserable such an apparently glamorous occupation would likely really turn out to be. The conclusion was always the same: don't do it! Become a bureaucrat. You'll have a prosperous job and all you'll be able to order around the soldiers and sailors who will treat you like a god.

Have you ever asked yourself: 'How have I come to accept the cop's argument as the whole truth without questioning how I came to believe it?' But who tells the people's truth? The large majority of law-abiding citizens know little about "what goes on out there." What we think we know we've been taught by decades of fictional TV cop shows sponsored by Power—the insurance companies, the mammoth oil corporations, international banks, car manufacturers, national loan sharks, pill pushers, and the various other offspring of Power. We've been provided entertainment, not the whole truth, by the voice of Power—the media. We've come to believe Power's propaganda in much the same way that we believe our religions—that our police and prosecutors will not prosecute and convict the innocent. Such would be un-American. But blind beliefs, cultural brainwashings, can hasten the end of a free people.

Note that cop movies of the 'rogue cop breaking all the rules' variety, that now seems the default mode for a Hollywood action movie, did not exist at all until the 1970s. In fact for the first half-century of American cinema there were hardly any movies at all that took a policeman's point of view. The rogue cop movie appeared at the moment the Western disappeared and is largely a transposition of Western plots into an urban bureaucratic setting. Clint Eastwood famously defined the transition: from Sergio Leone's *Man with No Name* (1964, 1965, 1966), to *Dirty Harry* (1971). As others have observed, the Western plot is typically an effort to contrive a situation where it is justifiable for a basically decent person to do things that in any other situation would be absolutely unjustifiable. Transposing that onto an urban

bureaucratic environment has disturbing implications: indeed, one might well argue that Jack Bauer is the logical culmination of the genre.

The overwhelming majority of those who end up getting beaten or otherwise brutalized by police turn out to be innocent of any crime. Cops don't beat up burglars. The reason is simple: the one thing most guaranteed to provoke a violent reaction from police is a challenge to their right to define the situation. That is, to say, 'No, this isn't a possible crime situation, this is a citizen-who-pays-your-salary-walking-his-dog situation, so shove off,' let alone the invariably disastrous, 'Wait, why are you handcuffing that guy? He didn't do anything!' It's talking back above all that inspires beat-downs, and that means challenging whatever administrative rubric—an orderly or a disorderly crowd?; a properly or improperly registered vehicle?—has been applied by the officer's discretionary judgment. The police truncheon is precisely the point where the state's bureaucratic imperative for imposing simple administrative schema and its monopoly on coercive force come together. It only makes sense then that bureaucratic violence should consist first and foremost of attacks on those who insist on alternative schemas or interpretations. At the same time, if one accepts Jean Piaget's famous definition of mature intelligence as the ability to coordinate between multiple perspectives, or possible perspectives, one can see, here, precisely how bureaucratic power, at the moment it turns to violence, becomes literally a form of infantile stupidity.

We're staring at something that's staring back, something that's inherently dangerous to a free society. I can no longer ignore what I've known all along—and have never wanted to admit: Too many of America's police are potentially state-sanctioned killers who know if they're called upon to answer for their crimes they'll likely be protected by prosecutors and judges.

The law is not always just, the courts are not always right. Under the law, before you can kill in self-defense you must retreat to the wall, the legal jargon meaning you must retreat to the point where retreat can no longer save you from your attacker. Only then can you kill in self-defense. That law applies to the police.

“I don't worry about the cops. I have nothing to hide.”

If one has been spawned in a fishbowl, how does one know the dangers of the river?

If the power of the police can't be properly monitored and controlled, if our ability to change the police culture is stuck in the dead goo of precedent, the result will produce a police state. That is my promise. Indeed, one may ask, have we become like a sleeping passenger on the bus, and when the bus

arrives at its destination and comes to a jerking stop, will we awaken and ask, 'Are we already here?'

It's one thing to read cold statistics that suggest something's awry. But statistics provide us no real understanding of human pain and helplessness, and they do little to move us toward reform. Thankfully, most Americans haven't had an abundance of firsthand experience with overly aggressive police. Most of us have never been the victim of a police baton across the side of the head, or a Glock 17 in the gut, or found our child dead in the street with six bullets through his body, or lay handcuffed watching our dog bleed out. Most of us have never faced the horror of pleading guilty to a crime we didn't commit to save ourselves from being convicted of a frightening list of added crimes we also didn't commit.

Until we become 'the subject' of a serious, life-threatening encounter with the police, we try to just get along, to raise our kids, love our grandkids, watch our favorite TV programs in the evening, take our deserved two weeks of vacation, and hope for a comfortable retirement and a merciful death. Then one day one of our own, even one of us, becomes the subject. We are arrested. We are thrown in jail, and if we cannot be bonded out we will be imprisoned for months, even years, awaiting trial. We will lose our identity as a member of society. We are provided a number underneath our mug shot, and our history will be forever besmirched by a criminal charge blaring out at the world from our police record. Innocent or not, we will most likely become another number in a penitentiary or a convicted murderer on death row. Such a transforming process puts me in mind of the hawk sitting in a treetop waiting for the sparrow to fly by. At the precise moment of the hawk's strike, the sparrow loses its identity as a fellow bird and becomes the prey. To the police, when we become the subject, we are no longer persons, and we'll be de-feathered, ripped apart, and disposed of in one way or another.

In too much of policing today, officer safety has become the highest priority. It trumps the rights and safety of suspects. It trumps the rights and safety of bystanders. It's so important, in fact, that an officer's subjective fear of a minor wound from a dog bite is enough to justify using potentially lethal force, in one case at the expense of a 4-year-old girl. Or when an Iowa cop shot and killed a woman by mistake while trying to kill her dog. Other cops have shot other kids, other bystanders, their partners, their supervisors, and even themselves while firing their guns at a dog. That mindset is then, of course, all the more problematic when it comes to using force against people.

The absurd cruelties of the American police state keep reaching newer heights. Consider that if you kill a police dog, you could face a longer prison

sentence than if you'd murdered someone or abused a child. If a cop kills your dog, however, there will be little to no consequences for that officer. Not even a slap on the wrist. In this, as in so many instances of official misconduct by government officials, the courts have ruled that the cops have qualified immunity, a legal doctrine that incentivizes government officials to engage in lawless behavior without fear of repercussions.

This is the heartless, heartbreaking, hypocritical injustice that passes for law and order in America today. It is estimated that a dog is shot by a police officer every 98 minutes. The Department of Justice estimates that at least 25 dogs are killed by police every day. The Puppicide Database Project estimates the number of dogs being killed by police to be closer to 500 dogs a day (which translates to 182,000 dogs a year). In one out of five cases involving police shooting a family pet, a child was either in the police line of fire or in the immediate area of a shooting. For instance, a 4-year-old girl was accidentally shot in the leg after a police officer opened fire on a dog running towards him, missed and hit the little girl instead.

At a time when police are increasingly inclined to shoot first and ask questions later, it doesn't take much to provoke a cop into opening fire on an unarmed person guilty of doing nothing more than standing a certain way, or moving a certain way, or holding something—anything—that police could misinterpret to be a weapon. All a cop has to do is cite an alleged "fear" for his safety. Even in the absence of an actual threat, the perception of a threat is enough for qualified immunity to kick in and for the cop to be let off the hook for behavior that would get the rest of us jailed for life.

The epidemic of cops shooting dogs takes this shameful behavior to a whole new level, though. It doesn't take much for a cop to shoot a dog. According to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, all it takes for dogs to pose a sufficient threat to police to justify them opening fire is for the dog to move or bark. Dogs shot and killed by police have been "guilty" of nothing more menacing than wagging their tails, barking in greeting, or merely being in their own yard. For instance, Spike, a 70-pound pit bull, was shot by NYPD police when they encountered him in the hallway of an apartment building in the Bronx. Surveillance footage shows the dog, tail wagging, right before an officer shot him in the head at pointblank range.

Arzy, a 14-month-old Newfoundland, Labrador and golden retriever mix, was shot between the eyes by a Louisiana police officer. The dog had been secured on a four-foot leash at the time he was shot. An independent witness testified that the dog never gave the officer any provocation to shoot him.

Seven, a St. Bernard, was shot repeatedly by Connecticut police in the presence of the dog's 12-year-old owner. Police, investigating an erroneous tip, had entered the property—without a warrant—where the dog and her

owner had been playing in the backyard, causing the dog to give chase.

Dutchess, a 2-year-old rescue dog, was shot three times in the head by Florida police as she ran out her front door. The officer had been approaching the house to inform the residents that their car door was open when the dog bounded out to greet him.

Yanna, a 10-year-old boxer, was shot three times by Georgia police after they mistakenly entered the wrong home and opened fire, killing the dog, shooting the homeowner in the leg, and wounding an investigating officer.

Payton, a 7-year-old black Labrador retriever, and 4-year-old Chase, also a black Lab, were shot and killed after a SWAT team mistakenly raided the mayor's home while searching for drugs. Police shot Payton four times. Chase was shot twice, once from behind as he ran away. "My government blew through my doors and killed my dogs. They thought we were drug dealers, and we were treated as such. I don't think they really ever considered that we weren't," recalls Mayor Cheye Calvo, who described being handcuffed and interrogated for hours—wearing only underwear and socks—surrounded by the dogs' carcasses and pools of the dogs' blood.

In another instance, a Missouri SWAT team raided a family home, killing a 4-year-old pit bull Kiya. Believe it or not, this time the SWAT raid wasn't in pursuit of drugs, mistaken or otherwise, but was intended "to check if the home had electricity and natural gas service."

Size does not matter. There have been countless dog shootings in which a police officer said he felt threatened' and had no choice but to use lethal force, including the killing of a Dalmatian (more than once), a yellow Lab, a springer spaniel, a chocolate Lab, a boxer, an Australian cattle dog, a Wheaten terrier, an Akita, a Jack Russell terrier, a 12-pound miniature dachshund and a 5-pound chihuahua.

Chihuahuas, among the smallest breed of dog (known as "purse" dogs), seem to really push cops over the edge. In Arkansas, for example, a sheriff's deputy shot an "aggressive" chihuahua for barking repeatedly. The dog, Reese's, required surgery for a shattered jaw and a feeding tube to eat. Same thing happened in Texas, except Trixie—who was on the other side of a fence from the officer—didn't survive the shooting.

Let's put this in perspective, shall we? We're being asked to believe that a police officer, fully armed, trained in combat, and equipped to deal with the worst case scenario when it comes to violence, is so threatened by a yipping purse dog weighing less than ten pounds that the only recourse is to shoot the dog? If this is the temperament of police officers bred by the police state, we should all be worried.

Clearly, our four-legged friends are suffering at the hands of an inhumane police state in which the police have all the rights, the citizenry have very

few rights, and our pets—viewed by the courts as personal property like a car or a house, but far less valuable—have no rights at all. So what's to be done?

Essentially, it comes down to training and accountability. It's the difference between police officers who rank their personal safety above everyone else's and police officers who understand that their jobs are to serve and protect. It's the difference between police who are trained to shoot to kill and police trained to resolve situations peacefully. Most of all, it's the difference between police who believe the law is on their side and police who know that they will be held to account for their actions under the same law as everyone else.

Unfortunately, more and more police are being trained to view themselves as distinct from the citizenry, to view their authority as superior to the citizenry, and to view their lives as more precious than those of their citizen counterparts. Instead of being taught to see themselves as mediators and peacemakers whose lethal weapons are to be used as a last resort, they are being drilled into acting like gunmen with killer instincts who shoot to kill rather than merely incapacitate.

These dog killings are a side effect of the new SWAT, paramilitary focus in many police departments, which has supplanted the idea of being an officer of the peace. Thus, whether you're talking about police shooting dogs or citizens, the mindset is the same: a rush to violence, abuse of power, fear for officer safety, poor training in how to de-escalate a situation, and general carelessness. It's time to rein in this abuse of power.

A good place to start is by requiring police to undergo classes annually on how to peacefully resolve and de-escalate situations with the citizenry. While they're at it, they should be forced to de-militarize. No one outside the battlefield—and barring a foreign invasion, the US should never be considered a domestic battlefield—should be equipped with the kinds of weapons and gear being worn and used by local police forces today. If the politicians are serious about instituting far-reaching gun control measures, let them start by taking the guns and SWAT teams away from the countless civilian agencies that have nothing to do with military defense that are packing lethal heat.

Ultimately, this comes down to better—and constant—training in nonviolent tactics, serious consequences for those who engage in excessive force, and a seismic shift in how law enforcement agencies and the courts deal with those who transgress.

In terms of our four-legged friends, many states are adopting laws to make canine training mandatory for police officers. Officers' inclination to take command and take control can cause them to antagonize dogs unnecessarily.

Officers need to realize they're there to neutralize, not control. If they have enough money to militarize the police with Humvees, they have enough money to train them not to kill family members. And pets are considered family.

After all, while postal workers regularly encounter both vicious and gregarious dogs on their daily rounds letter carriers don't kill dogs, even though they are bitten by the thousands every year. Instead, the Postal Service offers its employees training on how to avoid bites. Using live dogs, handlers and trainers put postal workers through scenarios to teach them how to read a dog's behavior and calm a dog, or fend it off, if necessary. Meter readers also have benefited from the same training, drastically reducing incidents of dog bites.

Yet, there will be no end to the bloodshed—of unarmed Americans or their family pets—until police stop viewing themselves as superior to those whom they are supposed to serve and start acting like the peace officers they're supposed to be.

Consider a successful policing initiative in Newark, New Jersey. Cops who walked the beat there, according to the program, were supposed to be highly tolerant. Their job was to adjust to the neighborhood's own standards of order and to help uphold them. Standards varied from one part of the city to another. In one neighborhood, it might mean that drunks had to keep their bottles in bags and avoid major streets but that side streets were okay. Addicts could sit on stoops but not lie down. The idea was only to make sure the standards didn't fall. The cops, in this scheme, were helping a neighborhood maintain its own order but not imposing their own.

“From early 2000 to late 2002, I was working with the New York Direct Action Network—the principal group responsible for organizing mass actions as part of the global justice movement in New York City at that time. I call it a ‘group,’ but technically DAN was not a group at all but a decentralized network, operating on principles of direct democracy according to an elaborate, but quite effective, form of consensus process. It played a central role in ongoing efforts to create new organizational forms. DAN existed in a purely political space. It had no concrete resources—not even a significant treasury—to administer. Then one day someone gave DAN a car.

The DAN car caused a minor, but ongoing, crisis. We soon discovered that, legally, it is impossible for a decentralized network to own a car. Cars can be owned by individuals, or they can be owned by corporations (which are fictive individuals),

or by governments. But they cannot be owned by networks. Unless we were willing to incorporate ourselves as a nonprofit corporation (which would have required a complete reorganization and an abandonment of most of our egalitarian principles) the only expedient was to find a volunteer willing to claim to be the legal owner. But then that person was held responsible for all outstanding fines and insurance fees, and had to provide written permission to allow anyone else to drive the car out of state. And, of course, only he could retrieve the car if it were impounded. One courageous activist did agree to undertake the responsibility, but as a result, weekly meetings were overwhelmed by reportbacks about his latest legal problems. Before long the DAN car had become such an endless source of tribulation that we decided to organize a fundraiser, throwing a big party where we provided a sledgehammer to anyone willing to pay five dollars to take a whack at the thing.”

It struck me there was something profound to this story. Why is it that projects like DAN’s—projects aimed at democratizing society—are so often perceived as idle dreams that melt away as soon as they encounter hard material reality? In DAN’s case, at least, it had nothing to do with inefficiency: police chiefs across the country had called them the best organized force they’d ever had to deal with. It seems to me that the reality effect (if one may call it that) comes rather from the fact that radical projects tend to founder—or at least become endlessly difficult—the moment they enter into the world of large, heavy objects: buildings, cars, tractors, boats, industrial machinery. This in turn is not because these objects are somehow intrinsically difficult to administer democratically—history is full of communities that successfully engage in the democratic administration of common resources—it’s because, like the DAN car, they are surrounded by endless government regulation, and are effectively impossible to hide from the government’s armed representatives.

In America, I have seen endless examples of this dilemma. A squat is legalized after a long struggle; suddenly, building inspectors arrive to announce it will take ten-thousand dollars’ worth of repairs to bring it up to code. Organizers are therefore forced to spend the next several years organizing bake sales and soliciting contributions. This means setting up bank accounts, which means, in turn, adhering to legal regulations that specify how any group receiving funds, or dealing with the government, must be organized (again, not as an egalitarian collective). All these regulations are enforced by violence. True, in ordinary life, police rarely come in swinging

billy clubs to enforce building code regulations, but, as anarchists are often uniquely positioned to find out, if one simply pretends the state and its regulations don't exist, this will, eventually, happen. The rarity with which the nightsticks actually appear just helps to make the violence harder to see. This in turn makes the effects of all these regulations—regulations that almost always assume that normal relations between individuals are mediated by the market, and that normal groups are organized internally by relations of hierarchy and command—seem to emanate not from the government's monopoly of the use of force, but from the largeness, solidity, and heaviness of the objects themselves.

When one is asked to be “realistic,” then, the reality one is normally being asked to recognize is not one of natural, material facts, nor some supposed ugly truth about human nature. Being realistic usually means taking seriously the effects of the systematic threat of violence. When one says ‘let's be realistic here,’ what reality is it we're referring to? What is the hidden reality, the underlying forces, assumed to be moving below the surface of political events?

I have remained committed to the idea that the ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently. In this sense, a phrase like “all power to the imagination” expresses the very quintessence of the Left. From a left perspective, then, the hidden reality of human life is the fact that the world doesn't just happen. It isn't a natural fact, even though we tend to treat it as if it is—it exists because we all collectively produce it. We imagine things we'd like and then we bring them into being. But the moment you think about it in these terms, it's obvious that something has gone terribly wrong. Since who, if they could simply imagine any world that they liked and then bring it into being, would create a world like this one?

Even the rich and powerful will ordinarily concede that the world is a miserable place for most of those who live in it, but still, insist that this is inevitable, or that any attempt to change it will make it worse—not that we actually live in an ideal social order.

Capitalism is not something imposed on us by some outside force. It only exists because every day we wake up and continue to produce it. If we woke up one morning and all collectively decided to produce something else, then we wouldn't have capitalism anymore. This is the ultimate revolutionary question: what are the conditions that would have to exist to enable us to do this—to just wake up and imagine and produce something else?

In the sphere of industry, it is generally those on top that relegate to themselves the more imaginative tasks (i.e. they design the products and organize production), whereas when inequalities emerge in the sphere of

social production, it is those on the bottom who end up expected to do the major imaginative work—notably, the bulk of what I’ve called the ‘labor of interpretation’ that keeps life running.

No doubt all this makes it easier to see the two as fundamentally different sorts of activity, making it hard for us to recognize interpretive labor—for example, most of what we usually think of as women’s work—as labor at all. To my mind it would probably be better to recognize it as the primary form of labor. Insofar as a clear distinction can be made here, it’s the care, energy, and labor directed at human beings that should be considered fundamental. The things we care about most—our loves, passions, rivalries, obsessions—are always other people, and in most societies that are not capitalist, it’s taken for granted that the manufacture of material goods is a subordinate moment in a larger process of fashioning people. In fact, I would argue that one of the most alienating aspects of capitalism is the fact that it forces us to pretend that it is the other way around, and that societies exist primarily to increase their output of things.

Thesis: There appears to have been a profound shift, beginning in the 1970s, from investment in technologies associated with the possibility of alternative futures to investment in technologies that furthered labor discipline and social control.

The Cold War saw frenetic efforts by US industrial planners to find ways to apply existing technologies to consumer purposes, to create an optimistic sense of burgeoning prosperity and guaranteed progress that, it was hoped, would undercut the appeal of radical working-class politics. The famous 1959 “kitchen debate” between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev made the politics quite explicit: “Your communist ‘worker’s state’ may have beat us into outer space,” Nixon effectively argued, “but it’s capitalism that creates technology like washing machines that actually improve the lives of the toiling masses.”

Whether the space race or consumer products, in either case, the initiative really came from the Soviet Union itself. All this is difficult for Americans to remember, because with the end of the Cold War, the popular image of the USSR switched so quickly from terrifying rival to pathetic basket case—the exemplar of a society that “just didn’t work.”

Back in the fifties, many US planners were laboring under the suspicion that the Soviet system quite possibly worked much better than their own. Certainly, they keenly recalled the fact that in the 1930s, while the United States was mired in depression, the Soviet Union was maintaining almost unprecedented economic growth rates of 10 to 12 percent a year,

an achievement quickly followed by the production of the vast tank armies that defeated Hitler—another fact difficult for Americans to remember—and of course, the launching of Sputnik in 1957, followed by the first manned spacecraft, the Vostok, in 1961. When Khrushchev assured Nixon that Soviet living standards would surpass those of the Americans in seven years, many Americans feared he might actually be right.

It's often said that the Apollo moon landing was the greatest historical achievement of Soviet communism. Surely, the United States would never have contemplated such a feat had it not been for the cosmic ambitions of the Soviet Politburo. Even putting things this way is a bit startling. Cosmic ambitions? We are used to thinking of the Politburo as a group of unimaginative grey bureaucrats, but while the Soviet Union was certainly run by bureaucrats, they were, from the beginning, bureaucrats who dared to dream astounding dreams—the dream of world revolution was just the first. Of course, most of their grandiose projects—changing the course of mighty rivers, that sort of thing—either turned out to be ecologically and socially disastrous, or, like Stalin's projected one-hundred-story Palace of the Soviets, which was to be topped by a twenty-story statue of Lenin, never got off the ground. And after the initial successes of the Soviet space program, most projects remained on the drawing board.

But the Soviet leadership never ceased coming up with new ones. Even in the eighties, when the United States was attempting its own last—itsself abortive—grandiose scheme, Star Wars, the Soviets were still planning and scheming ways to transform the world through creative uses of technology. Few outside of Russia now remember most of these projects, but vast resources were devoted to them. It's also worth noting that unlike the Star Wars project, which was a purely military project designed to sink the Soviet Union, most were peaceful: as for instance, the attempt to solve the world hunger problem by harvesting lakes and oceans with an edible bacteria called spirulina, or to solve world energy problems by a truly breathtaking plan to launch hundreds of gigantic solar power platforms into orbit and beaming the resulting electricity back to earth.

By the time of the moon landing of 1968, US planners no longer took their competition seriously. The Soviets had lost the space race, and as a result, the actual direction of American research and development could shift away from anything that might lead to the creation of Mars bases and robot factories, let alone become the technological basis for a communist utopia. The standard line, of course, is that this shift of priorities was simply the natural result of the triumph of the market. The Apollo program was the quintessential Big Government project—Soviet-inspired in the sense that it required a vast national effort, coordinated by an equally vast government

bureaucracy. As soon as the Soviet threat was safely out of the picture, this story goes, capitalism was free to revert to lines of technological development more in accord with its normal, decentralized, free-market imperatives—such as privately funded research into marketable products like touch-pad phones, adventurous little start-ups, and the like. This is, certainly, the line that many began taking in the late-seventies and early-eighties. But it's obviously wrong.

First of all, the amount of really innovative research being done in the private sector has actually declined since the heyday of Bell Labs and similar corporate research divisions in the fifties and sixties. Partly this is because of a change of tax regimes. The phone company was willing to invest so much of its profits in research because those profits were highly taxed—given the choice between sinking the money into higher wages for its workers (which bought loyalty) and research (which made sense to a company that was still locked in the old mind-set that said corporations were ultimately about making things, rather than making money), and having that same money simply appropriated by the government, the choice was obvious. After the financial reforms in the seventies and eighties all this changed. Corporate taxes were slashed. Executives, whose compensation now increasingly took the form of stock options, began not just paying the profits to investors in dividends, but using money that would otherwise be directed towards raises, hiring, or research budgets on stock buybacks, raising the values of the executives' portfolios but doing nothing to further productivity. In other words, tax cuts and financial reforms had almost precisely the opposite effect as their proponents claimed they would.

Antithesis: Yet even those areas of science and technology that did receive massive funding have not seen the breakthroughs originally anticipated.

As one physicist has recently warned students pondering a career in the sciences, even when one does emerge from the usual decade-long period languishing as someone else's flunky, one can expect one's best ideas to be stymied at every point.

“You will spend your time writing proposals rather than doing research. Worse, because your proposals are judged by your competitors you cannot follow your curiosity, but must spend your effort and talents on anticipating and deflecting criticism rather than on solving the important scientific problems.”

It is proverbial that original ideas are the kiss of death for a proposal; because they have not yet been proved to work.

Common sense dictates that if you want to maximize scientific creativity, you find some bright people, give them the resources they need to pursue whatever idea comes into their heads, and then leave them alone for a while. Most will probably turn up nothing, but one or two may well discover something completely unexpected. If you want to minimize the possibility of unexpected breakthroughs, tell those same people they will receive no resources at all unless they spend the bulk of their time competing against each other to convince you they already know what they are going to discover.

It is true that certain capitalist firms of the Silicon Valley sort—the ones that consider themselves cutting-edge—will adopt some version of the old Bell Labs blue sky approach and make sure everyone knows that they are doing so. But these efforts always prove, on investigation, to be largely publicity stunts. In Silicon Valley-style firms, innovation is largely outsourced to start-ups. At present, the most promising research is generally conducted neither in corporate nor in directly government-funded environments but in the nonprofit sector (which includes most universities), but here too, the corporatization of institutional culture ensures more and more time is taken up with grantsmanship.

“Convivial competition is where I (or my team) wish to be the first to prove a particular conjecture, to explain a particular phenomenon, to discover a particular species, star, or particle, in the same way that if I race my bike against my friend I wish to win. But convivial competition does not exclude cooperation, in that rival researchers (or research teams) will share preliminary results, experience of techniques, and so on. Of course, the shared knowledge, accessible through books, articles, computer software and directly, through dialogue with other scientists, forms an intellectual commons.”

Most people who work in corporations or academia have witnessed something like the following: A number of engineers are sitting together in a room, bouncing ideas off each other. Out of the discussion emerges a new concept that seems promising. Then some laptop-wielding person in the corner, having performed a quick Google search, announces that this new idea is, in fact, an old one; it—or at least vaguely similar—has already been tried. Either it failed, or it succeeded. If it failed, then no manager who wants to keep his or her job will approve spending money trying to revive it. If it succeeded, then it’s patented and entry to the market is presumed to be unattainable, since the first people who thought of it will

have “first-mover advantage” and will have created “barriers to entry.” The number of seemingly promising ideas that have been crushed in this way must number in the millions.

A timid, bureaucratic spirit has come to suffuse every aspect of intellectual life. More often than not, it comes cloaked in a language of creativity, initiative, and entrepreneurialism. But the language is meaningless. The sort of thinkers most likely to come up with new conceptual breakthroughs are the least likely to receive funding, and if, somehow, breakthroughs nonetheless occur, they will almost certainly never find anyone willing to follow up on the most daring implications.

Defenders of capitalism generally make three broad historical claims: first, that it has fostered rapid scientific and technological development; second, that however much it may throw enormous wealth to a small minority, it does so in such a way that increases overall prosperity for everyone; third, that in doing so, it creates a more secure and democratic world. It is quite clear that in the twenty-first century, capitalism is not doing any of these things. In fact, even its proponents are increasingly retreating from any claim that it is a particularly good system, falling back instead on the claim that it is the only possible system—or at least, the only possible system for a complex, technologically sophisticated society such as our own.

Bureaucracy enchants when it can be seen as a species of poetic technology, that is, one where mechanical forms of organization, usually military in their ultimate inspiration, can be marshaled to the realization of impossible visions: to create cities out of nothing, scale the heavens, make the desert bloom. For most of human history this kind of power was only available to the rulers of empires or commanders of conquering armies, so we might even speak here of a democratization of despotism. Once, the privilege of waving one’s hand and having a vast invisible army of cogs and wheels organize themselves in such a way as to bring your whims into being was available only to the very most privileged few; in the modern world, it can be subdivided into millions of tiny portions and made available to everyone able to write a letter, flick a switch, or tap an app.

The simplest explanation for the appeal of bureaucratic procedures lies in their impersonality. Cold, impersonal, bureaucratic relations are much like cash transactions, and both offer similar advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand they are soulless. On the other, they are simple, predictable, and—within certain parameters, at least—treat everyone more or less the same. And anyway, who really wants to live in a world where everything is soul? Bureaucracy holds out at least the possibility of dealing with other human beings in ways that do not demand either party has to engage in all those complex and exhausting forms of interpretive labor, where just as you

can simply place your money on the counter and not have to worry about what the cashier thinks of how you're dressed, you can also pull out your validated photo ID card without having to explain to the librarian why you are so keen to read about homoerotic themes in eighteenth century British verse. Surely this is part of the appeal.

In fact, if one really ponders the matter, it's hard to imagine how, even if we do achieve some utopian communal society, some impersonal—dare I say, bureaucratic?—institutions would not still be necessary, and for just this reason. To take one obvious example: languishing on some impersonal lottery system or waiting list for a desperately needed organ transplant might be alienating and distressing, but it's difficult to envision any less impersonal way of allocating a limited pool of hearts or kidneys that would not be immeasurably worse. But we probably shouldn't let rich fucks like Dick Cheney who can hop a plane at a moments notice be on multiple lists around the country.

There is no consensus amongst philosophers about what the word 'rationality' even means. According to one tradition, for instance, rationality is the application of logic, of pure thought untempered by emotions; this pure, objective thought is then seen as the basis of scientific inquiry. This has attained a great deal of popular purchase, but there's a fundamental problem: scientific inquiry itself has proved it cannot possibly be true. Cognitive psychologists have demonstrated again and again that there is no such thing as pure thought divorced from emotions; a human being without emotions would not be able to think at all.

Others prefer a more pragmatic approach, claiming merely that a rational argument can be defined as one that is both grounded in empirical reality, and logically coherent in form. The problem here is that these two criteria don't really have much to do with one another. One is about observation; the other is about reasoning. What do they have in common? Mainly, it seems, that when someone makes an argument that is either delusional or incoherent, we are equally likely to write that person off as not right in the head. On one level, that's fair enough: we do call crazy people 'irrational.' But if so, calling someone, or an argument, 'rational' is saying almost nothing. It's a very weak statement. You're just saying they are not obviously insane.

But the moment you turn it around, you realize that claiming one's own political positions are based on rationality is an extremely strong statement. In fact, it's extraordinarily arrogant, since it means that those who disagree with those positions are not just wrong, but crazy. Similarly, to say one wishes to create a rational social order implies that current social arrangements might as well have been designed by the inhabitants of a

lunatic asylum. Now, surely, all of us have felt this way at one time or another. But if nothing else, it is an extraordinarily intolerant position, since it implies that one's opponents are not just wrong, but in a certain sense, wouldn't even know what it would mean to be right, unless, by some miracle, they could come around and accept the light of reason and decide to accept your own conceptual framework and point of view.

We are used to speaking of 'the state' as a single entity but actually, I think, modern states are better seen as the confluence of three different elements, whose historical origins are quite distinct, have no intrinsic relation with one another, and may already be in the process of finally drifting apart. I will call these sovereignty, administration, and politics.

Sovereignty is usually taken to be the defining feature of the state: a sovereign state is one whose ruler claims a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence within a given territory. Most governments in the ancient world, or for that matter the Middle Ages, never claimed sovereignty in this sense. Nor would it have occurred to them to do so: this was the logic of conquering empires, not of any sort of civilized community.

The second principle is administration, which can and often does exist without any single center of power to enforce its decisions. It could also, of course, simply be referred to as bureaucracy. In fact, the most recent archaeological evidence from Mesopotamia indicates that bureaucratic techniques emerged not just before sovereign states, but even before the existence of the first cities. They were not invented to manage scale, as ways of organizing societies that became too big for face-to-face interaction. Rather, they seem to have been what encouraged people to assemble in such large communities to begin with. At least, this is what the record seems to show. The standardization of products, storage, certification, record-keeping, redistribution, and accounting all seem to have emerged in small towns along the Tigris and Euphrates and its tributaries in the fifth millennium BC, a thousand years before the urban revolution. We don't really know how or why; we don't even know whether there were actual bureaucrats (in the sense of a distinct class of trained officeholders) or whether we are simply talking about the emergence of bureaucratic techniques. But by the time historical records do kick in there certainly are: we find vast temple and palace complexes with a hierarchy of trained scribes carefully registering and allocating resources of every sort.

We can refer to the third principle as politics if one takes that word in what might be termed its maximal sense. Obviously, there is a minimal sense in which anything people do can be said to have a political aspect, insofar it involves jockeying for power. But there are only some social systems in which politics in this sense becomes a spectator sport in its own right, where

powerful figures engage in constant public contests with one another as a way of rallying followers and gathering support. We now think of this as an aspect of democratic systems of government, but for most of human history, it was seen as more of an aristocratic phenomenon. One need only think of the heroes of Homeric, or for that matter Germanic or Celtic or Hindu epics, who are constantly engaged in boasting, dueling, vying to organize the most splendid feasts or most magnificent sacrifices, or to outdo one another with the giving of extravagant gifts.

Such “heroic” social orders, as they’ve been called, represent the quintessence of the political. They recognize no principle of sovereignty, but create no system of administration either; sometimes there is a high king but usually he has very limited power, or is a pure figurehead; real power fluctuates continually as charismatic aristocrats assemble bands of followers, the most successful poaching off their rivals’ retinues, while others crash magnificently, or decline into brooding obscurity. Politics in this sense has always been an essentially aristocratic phenomenon.

Heroic societies are, effectively, social orders designed to generate stories. This takes us back to questions about the very nature of politics. One might well argue that political action—and this is true even on the micro-level—is a matter of acting in a way that will influence other people at least partially by their hearing or finding out about it. Everyday politics—whether in a rural village or corporate office—has everything to do with the manufacture of official narratives, rumors, and accounts. It stands to reason that heroic societies, which turned political self-aggrandizement into an art form, would also have been organized in such a way as to become vast engines for the generation of stories. Everything was turned into a platform for some sort of contest, some narrative of perseverance, treachery, revenge, impossible challenges, epic quests, or magnificent acts of self-sacrifice. This is why poets were so important. The whole point of life was to do things that other people might wish to sing about. Even from the beginning, the inhabitants of bureaucratic societies like Egypt or Babylonia could not avoid developing a certain fascination with the barbarian hinterlands, which quickly became murky lands full of monsters and strange magical powers. And of course, dramatic stories about violent barbarians became even more compelling in ages when actual violent barbarians were no longer much around.

Historically, one of the most effective ways for a system of authority to tout its virtues is not to speak of them directly, but to create a particularly vivid image of their absolute negation—of what it claims life would be like in the total absence of, say, patriarchal authority, or capitalism, or the state. As an ideological ploy, the trick works best when the image is on some level, profoundly appealing. One is first drawn in to the vision of the alternative

world, experiences a kind of vicarious thrill imagining it—only to ultimately recoil in horror at the implications of one’s own desires.

Roman games provide an excellent example. Until the coming of the empire, most Mediterranean cities had had some form of self-governance, with public assemblies debating matters of public concern. In democracies, even legal cases were tried by public juries consisting of hundreds of citizens. Under the Empire, of course, these were stripped of all authority, and eventually disappeared. Instead, the main occasion when large numbers of citizens assembled in public was at the Coliseum or the Circus, for chariot races or gladiatorial games, or to watch criminals be torn to pieces by wild animals. Insofar as those citizens had any experience of voting for anything, it was to put their thumbs up or down over the question of whether some defeated gladiator would be put to death. In other words, the Empire not only justified itself largely by imposing a uniform system of law over its subjects, it also made a point of encouraging those subjects to form organized lynch mobs (the games were often sponsored by the very magistrates who presided over the courts), as if to say, ‘Democracy? Now you know where that will lead.’

This was so effective that for the next two-thousand years, warnings about the perils of democracy—and almost all educated Europeans for most of this period were staunchly opposed to democracy—insisted that “the people” in such a system would inevitably end up behaving like the mob at the Roman circus: riven by violent factionalism, careening irrationally between extremes of mercy and cruelty, between blindly following charismatic idols and destroying them again. And to this day, almost all educated people still feel that, even if they are willing to grudgingly accept a few democratic elements in some aspects of society, they need to be kept entirely separate from the administration of justice and the law.

Some argue that freedom in the classic liberal tradition is not a matter of being able to act without the interference of power, or even threats of violence—since legal systems do threaten those who break the rules with violence—but rather, to act without the interference of arbitrary power. This is not the place to launch into a detailed analysis but the entire formulation thus comes to present a zero-sum view of freedom. ‘Arbitrary’ after all just means “non-determined.” In a system of arbitrary authority, decisions reflect the “will and pleasure” of the despot. But from the perspective of the despot, arbitrariness is freedom. So the people are free if the ruler is not. Powerful people have to follow the rules. But since all citizens have a certain degree of power, so does everyone else. Ultimately, since freedom means protection from the arbitrary (non-rule-bound) power of others, and since power is everywhere, the logic provides a charter for the reduction of

all aspects of human life into sets of transparent rules.

The university is in its own way the quintessential feudal institution, with an endless accretion of customs and traditions, and anthropology, though a relatively new department, had its own traditional ways of going about everything that no one could entirely articulate; indeed, that no one completely understood. But in order to become “transparent” to the administration, they had to start articulating them; in practice, what this meant was that they had to take what had always been a subtle, nuanced form of procedures and turn them into an explicit set of rules. In effect, they had to turn custom into a kind of board game.

Faced with such demands, everyone’s first impulse was just to say, ‘Well, sure, we’ll just write that for the authorities and proceed as we always have.’ But in practice this quickly becomes impossible, because the moment any conflicts crop up, both parties will automatically appeal to the rule-book. Such reforms may aim to eliminate arbitrary personal authority, but of course they never actually do. Personal authority just jumps up a level, and becomes the ability to set the rules aside in specific cases—a sort of miniature version of sovereign power again. However, in practice, the fact that the reforms do not in any sense achieve their stated goals doesn’t have the effect of undermining their legitimacy. Instead, the effect is quite the opposite, since anyone who objects to such personalized power can only do so by demanding even more rules and even more transparency. Suddenly, freedom and justice really do become a matter of reducing everything to a game.

If we think about it, this sort of thing happens all the time—and even in contexts that have nothing to do with arbitrary personal authority. The most obvious example is language. Call it the grammar-book effect. People do not invent languages by writing grammars, they write grammars—at least, the first grammars to be written for any given language—by observing the tacit, largely unconscious, rules that people seem to be applying when they speak. Yet once a book exists, and especially once it is employed in schoolrooms, people feel that the rules are not just descriptions of how people do talk, but prescriptions for how they should talk.

It’s easy to observe this phenomenon in places where grammars were only written recently. In many places in the world, the first grammars and dictionaries were created by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth or even twentieth century, intent on translating the Bible and other sacred texts into what had been unwritten languages. For instance, the first grammar for Malagasy, the language spoken in Madagascar, was written in the 1810s and 1820s. Of course, language is changing all the time, so the Malagasy spoken language—even its grammar—is in many ways quite different than

it was two-hundred years ago. However, since everyone learns the grammar in school, if you point this out, people will automatically say that speakers nowadays are simply making mistakes, not following the rules correctly. It never seems to occur to anyone—until you point it out—that had the missionaries come and written their books two-hundred years later, current usages would be considered the only correct ones, and anyone speaking as they had two-hundred years ago would themselves be assumed to be in error.

Laws emerge from illegal activity. This creates a fundamental incoherence in the very idea of modern government, which assumes that the state has a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence—only the police, or prison guards, or duly authorized private security, have the legal right to beat you up. It's legitimate for the police to use violence because they are enforcing the law; the law is legitimate because it's rooted in the constitution; the constitution is legitimate because it comes from the people; the people created the constitution by acts of illegal violence. The obvious question, then: How does one tell the difference between 'the people' and a mere rampaging mob? There is no obvious answer.

The response by mainstream, respectable opinion is to try to push the problem as far away as possible. The usual line is: the age of revolutions is over (except perhaps in benighted spots like Gabon, Syria, Venezuela, Hong Kong); we can now change the constitution, or legal standards, by legal means. This of course means that the basic structures will never change. We can witness the results in the United States, which continues to maintain an architecture of state, with its electoral college and two-party system, that, while quite progressive in 1789, now makes us appear, in the eyes of the rest of the world, the political equivalent of the Amish, still driving around with horses and buggies. It also means we base the legitimacy of the whole system on the consent of the people despite the fact that the only people who were ever really consulted on the matter lived over two-hundred years ago. In America, at least, "the people" are all long since dead.

We've gone then from a situation where the power to create a legal order derives from God, to one where it derives from armed revolution, to one where it is rooted in sheer tradition—"these are the customs of our ancestors, who are we to doubt their wisdom?" And of course a not insignificant number of American politicians make clear they'd really like to give it back to God again.

This, as I say, is how these matters are considered by the mainstream. For the radical Left, and the authoritarian Right, the problem of constituent power is very much alive, but each takes a diametrically opposite approach to the fundamental question of violence. The Left, chastened by the disasters of the twentieth century, has largely moved away from its older celebration of

revolutionary violence, preferring nonviolent forms of resistance. Those who act in the name of something higher than the law can do so precisely because they don't act like a rampaging mob. For the Right, on the other hand—and this has been true since the rise of fascism in the twenties—the very idea that there is something special about revolutionary violence, anything that makes it different from mere criminal violence, is so much self-righteous twaddle. Violence is violence.

But that doesn't mean a rampaging mob can't be 'the people' because violence is the real source of law and political order anyway. Any successful deployment of violence is, in its own way, a form of constituent power. This is why we cannot help but admire the great criminal, because, as so many movie posters over the years have put it, "he makes his own law." After all, any criminal organization does, inevitably, begin developing its own—often quite elaborate—set of internal rules and regulations. They have to, as a way of controlling what would otherwise be completely random violence. But from the right-wing perspective, that's all that law ever is. It is a means of controlling the very violence that brings it into being, and through which it is ultimately enforced. This makes it easier to understand the often otherwise surprising affinity between criminals, criminal gangs, right-wing political movements, and the armed representatives of the state. Ultimately, they all speak the same language. They create their own rules on the basis of force. As a result, such people typically share the same broad political sensibilities. Mussolini might have wiped out the mafia, but Italian Mafiosi still idolize Mussolini.

In Athens, nowadays, there's active collaboration between the crime bosses in poor immigrant neighborhoods, fascist gangs, and the police. In fact, in this case it was clearly a political strategy: faced with the prospect of popular uprisings against a right-wing government, the police first withdrew protection from neighborhoods near the immigrant gangs, then started giving tacit support to the fascists; the result was the rapid rise of an overtly Nazi party. Roughly half of Greek police were reported to have voted for the Nazis in the last election. But this is just how far-right politics work. For them, it is in that space where different violent forces operating outside of the legal order (or in the case of the police, sometimes just barely inside it) interact where new forms of power, hence order, can emerge.

This is exactly the space that superheroes, and supervillains, also inhabit. An inherently fascist space, inhabited only by gangsters, would-be dictators, police, and thugs, with endlessly blurring lines between them. Sometimes the cops are legalistic, sometimes corrupt. Sometimes the police themselves slip into vigilantism. Sometimes they persecute the superhero, at others they look the other way, or help. Villains and heroes occasionally team up.

The lines of force are always shifting. If anything new were to emerge, it could only be through such shifting forces. There's nothing else, since in the DC and Marvel universes, God, or The People, simply doesn't exist. Insofar as there is a potential for constituent power then, it can only come from purveyors of violence.

And indeed, the supervillains and evil masterminds, when they are not merely dreaming of committing the perfect crime or indulging in random acts of terror, are always scheming of imposing a New World Order of some kind or another. Surely, if Red Skull, Kang the Conqueror, or Doctor Doom ever did succeed in taking over the planet, a host of new laws would be created very quickly. They wouldn't be very nice laws. Their creator would doubtless not himself feel bound by them. But one gets the feeling that otherwise, they would be quite strictly enforced.

Superheroes resist this logic. They do not wish to conquer the world—if only because they are not monomaniacal or insane. As a result, they remain parasitical off the villains in the same way that police remain parasitical off criminals: without them, they would have no reason to exist. They remain defenders of a legal and political order which itself seems to have come out of nowhere, and which, however faulty or degraded, must be defended, because the only alternative is so much worse. They aren't fascists. They are just ordinary, decent, super-powerful people who inhabit a world in which fascism is the only political possibility.

I note in passing that my analysis here is of mainstream comic book fiction, especially in the first several decades. Many may critique this for not taking consideration of the most sophisticated examples of the literature: Frank Knight's Batman, the Watchmen series, V for Vendetta, and other more explicitly political comic plots. And even mainstream comics have become more explicitly political over time—Lex Luthor, for example, became President! Still, if one wants to understand the essence of a popular genre, one does not examine its most sophisticated, high-culture variants. If one wants to understand the essence of a popular genre, one looks at schlock.

The greatest crimes of human history are made possible by the most colorless human beings. They are the careerists. The bureaucrats. The cynics. They do the little chores that make vast, complicated systems of exploitation and death a reality. They collect and read the personal data gathered on tens of millions of us by the security and surveillance state. They keep the accounts of ExxonMobil, BP, and Goldman Sachs. They build or pilot aerial drones. They work in corporate advertising and public relations. They issue the forms. They process the papers. They deny food stamps to some and unemployment benefits or medical coverage to others. They enforce the laws and the regulations. And they do not ask questions.

Good. Evil. These words do not mean anything to them. They are beyond morality. They are there to make corporate systems function. If insurance companies abandon tens of millions of sick to suffer and die, so be it. If banks and sheriff departments toss families out of their homes, so be it. If financial firms rob citizens of their savings, so be it. If the government shuts down schools and libraries, so be it. If the military murders children in Pakistan or Afghanistan, so be it. If commodity speculators drive up the cost of rice and corn and wheat so that they are unaffordable for hundreds of millions of poor across the planet, so be it. If Congress and the courts strip citizens of basic civil liberties, so be it. If the fossil fuel industry turns the earth into a broiler of greenhouse gases that doom us, so be it. They serve the system. The god of profit and exploitation. The most dangerous force in the industrialized world does not come from those who wield radical creeds, whether Islamic radicalism or Christian fundamentalism, but from legions of faceless bureaucrats who claw their way up layered corporate and governmental machines. They serve any system that meets their pathetic quota of needs.

Chapter Sixteen

Big Brother is Watching

Being in public doesn't mean consent to be recorded and tracked and to have all your actions collated and published and commented on. It has never meant that before. It certainly didn't mean that 50 years ago. Technology couldn't do it, and anyone trying to do it manually would have been arrested for stalking you. Just because technology can now do it to everyone at once doesn't make it somehow ok now.

What's your ideal future hold? Chinese social credit scores. That's dystopian. You think that's freedom?

For the first time ever, it will become technologically and financially feasible for authoritarian governments to record nearly everything that is said or done within their borders—every phone conversation, electronic message, social media interaction, the movements of nearly every person and vehicle, and video from every street corner.

Democracy requires accountability and consent of the governed, which is only possible if citizens know what is being done in their name. The presumption is that, with rare exception, they will know everything their political officials are doing, which is why they are called public servants, working in the public sector, in public service, for public agencies. Conversely, the presumption is that the government, with rare exception, will not know anything that law-abiding citizens are doing. That is why we are called private individuals, functioning in our private capacity. Transparency is for those who carry out public duties and exercise public power. Privacy is for everyone else.

It is not that I have something to hide, but nothing I want you to see.

The Fourth Amendment is a bedrock principle for law enforcement officers in the United States. However, technology has enabled the exploitation of loopholes in the interpretation of the Fourth Amendment. Some of the most important loopholes are:

Public Space: The Fourth Amendment protects only “persons, houses, papers and effects.” The Supreme Court has interpreted this language to mean that individuals have no reasonable expectation of privacy

in public. However, technology has reduced the protective confines of private space by enabling surveillance of computer use in one's own home and drones that fly over backyards.

Third-Party Doctrine: The Supreme Court has established the “Third-Party Doctrine,” which states that individuals do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy in information they give to third parties—such as their bank or their phone company. As a result, even sensitive information that is stored with third parties, such as e-mail, can often be obtained without a search warrant.

Metadata: Metadata is data about data—for example, the envelope containing a letter can be considered metadata; the data is the letter itself. The court has traditionally set lower legal standards for searches of metadata than for searches of data. For instance, the post office can take a photograph of the envelope of your letter without a warrant, but it cannot open the letter without a warrant. In the digital era, metadata can reveal a lot, such as all the phone numbers you call, the people you e-mail, and your location. A cell phone emits an electronic pulse every few seconds to the nearest cell phone tower or wifi router, even when not in use. In these pulses are the model of phone, its OS, the location of the phone, and its user.

Border Searches: Courts have largely supported a “border search exception” to the Fourth Amendment, which allows government to conduct searches at the border without obtaining a search warrant. In today's electronic age, that means that agents can—and often do—download the entire contents of an individual's phone or computer at the border. US Customs and Border Patrol says that it conducts about fifteen electronic media searches per day. In March 2013 the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in California set a new limit on device searches at the border, ruling in *United States v. Cotterman* that reasonable suspicion of criminal activity was required for a forensic search of a device—such as using software to analyze encrypted or deleted data, as opposed to performing a more cursory look at documents, photos, or other files.

In the digital age, these loopholes have become large enough to allow for the type of suspicion-less searches that outraged the Founding Fathers.

LAPD surveillance missions often occur at heights of ten-thousand feet or more, making those helicopters invisible to the naked eye, even while they meticulously track a single car or pedestrian for hours at a time.

An Orlando, Florida, company called L-3 CyTerra has developed a “stepped frequency continuous wave” handheld radar system called the RANGE-R. This device, about the size of a walkie-talkie, allows users to see through walls—or ceilings. It is primarily marketed as a tool of great value for search-and-rescue operations, where firefighters might use it to locate someone inside a burning building or even trapped beneath rubble after an earthquake. However, the RANGE-R is also enthusiastically pitched as a near-miraculous device no SWAT team should be without, offering police a tool for determining “the presence and location of assailants or hostages inside a building prior to entry,” the company boasts.

The RANGE-R made national news for all the wrong reasons, however, when, back in February 2013, US marshals used one of the units to determine whether a suspect was inside his home in Wichita, Kansas. The man’s subsequent arrest was later disputed in court on the basis that using radar to, in effect, watch him inside his own home was a form of unconstitutional entry. Its use should thus require a warrant. This argument was based on an earlier Supreme Court case, *Kyllo v. United States*, where the court determined that using thermal-imaging cameras to scan a suspect’s home for signs of a marijuana-growing operation was only legal with the appropriate search warrant. The court did not agree, however, that radar should be subjected to the same limitations, and police use of a RANGE-R remains perfectly legal and does not require a warrant.

Passive tags are not unlike those now used to scan almost every postal shipment. The most complex tags can also be manufactured from phosphors, dyes, and nanomaterials, substances that show up when exposed to air or light or are viewed by special sensors or by multi-and hyperspectral imagers. Perhaps the most tantalizing advance of all is in the field of nanotechnology, where a class of nanomaterials is called quantum dots. By using quantum dot (QD) technology taggants, which can be aerosolized or dispensed in an inconspicuous powder, friendly and suspect individuals can be uniquely marked and covertly tracked. The tags are undetectable in the visible-light spectrum, and they dissolve, minimizing detection in the long-term. A lightweight laser interrogator can simultaneously identify QD-tagged objects from as far away as two kilometers.

The unique capacity of hyperspectral imagers to detect, locate, and identify materials associated with a downed pilot or a captured soldier made long-range search and rescue an early articulation of mission need, a capability made all the more practical with the development of specially formulated material—taggants—with exact spectral features, material so small that it could be worn or carried by a pilot and yet also detected in real time by a hyperspectral sensor. As part of the HyCAS program in

2003, taggants that the human eye could not readily detect were tested and successfully identified in airborne surveillance.

The DEA even created a black box that could process the propeller noise of a small plane and identify it by the specific signature it emitted, based upon minute variations in balance and torque.

“He said that after being released from prison, he spent a lot of time taking long walks around the suburban landscape of Southern California. He began noticing that every twenty-five feet, he would hit a driveway; he’d then walk eight feet across the driveway before hitting another stretch of grass; then another twenty-five feet to the next driveway, and so on, seemingly forever, ‘and the uniformity of that totally echoed the uniformity of the prison environment where I had my cell and my seven feet of wall and then a door. And I remember thinking, Oh my God, man.’ He laughed at the utter despair of it all, having gone from one system of containment to another. How would you get away or escape from this?”

Consider a casino—cameras are everywhere. ATM cameras are wired directly to the casino’s central security network; check-cashing cameras catch every detail of your appearance (even down to your signature); cameras are on the way to the bathrooms; cameras are at the tops of escalators. Indeed, escalators reveal one of the casino world’s preferred tactics. Subtly guiding people onto an escalator almost immediately upon entering a casino might seem to be an example of bad architectural design, but it works as an ingenious security protocol. Nearly every visitor to the building dutifully lines up to have his or her picture taken, not just once but multiple times, from nearly every conceivable angle, as people are carried from the entrance to the gaming floor.

The idea of designing out crime is by no means unique to our era. In nineteenth-century Paris, for example, acting under instructions from Emperor Napoléon III, urban administrator Georges-Eugène Haussmann instituted an extraordinarily ambitious series of urban improvements. He ordered the demolition of entire neighborhoods, the erasure of whole streets from the center of Paris, and the widespread replacement of them both with the broad, leafy, and beautiful boulevards Paris is known for today. This was not motivated by aesthetics, however, but was explicitly a police project, a deliberate—and quite successful—effort to redesign the city so that the streets would be too wide to barricade, the back alleys no longer winding or confusing enough for insurgents and revolutionaries to disappear

or get away. The urban landscape of Paris became a police tool, its urban core reorganized so aggressively that popular uprisings would henceforth be spatially impossible.

This is not the only police project for which Paris is widely known. The idea of lighting the streets of Paris back in the 1600s originally came from the police. Streetlights were one of many new patrol tools implemented by Louis XIV's lieutenant general of police, Gabriel Nicolas de la Reynie. De la Reynie's plan ordered that lanterns be hung over the streets every sixty feet—with the unintended side effect that Paris soon gained its popular moniker, the City of Light. The world's most romantic city takes its nickname from a police operation.

Some long for a smart city that will be able to anticipate—and, more important, interrupt or preempt—certain behaviors, whether that means speeding, committing a burglary, or violating curfew. So-called predictive policing has been much discussed over the past few years, whereby authorities use detailed statistics and algorithms—a city's criminal patterns and rhythms—to “predict” when and where a crime is most likely to occur. A kind of predictive urban design, a geospatial policing project where specific activities become impossible to perform: police can turn off your car engine from miles away or redirect driverless vehicles to clog the road precisely when you're trying to escape. It would be the exact opposite of *The Italian Job*: red lights all the way, an impenetrable phalanx of traffic that only the police can control or navigate.

It's hard to know which is more dystopian: the idea that your every move is being studied by occasionally malign figures of anonymous government authority, or that everything you've done in the public sphere has for years now been secretly recorded for no particular reason, by people who would rather be doing almost anything else. I was reminded of a study I'd once read about surveillance-camera operators in the UK; an anthropologist had gone to work in a CCTV control room for a season to see what life was like behind the screens. While most Brits are convinced they're living through the rise of an all-pervasive surveillance state, being filmed from every conceivable angle at every time of day, the reality was far more diffuse and disorganized. In a particularly stark example, one security-room supervisor admitted that he would arrive at work each day and, first thing, train one of the cameras away from the building he was being paid to protect in order to watch his own car out in the parking lot. He would make himself a cup of tea, read the morning's sports pages, and spy on his car against possible break-ins.

You first spot the apartment from afar, thanks to a light still shining in the kitchen window. Walking closer and pulling the brim of your hat down closer to hide your face, you see the top of what appears to be an

open laptop computer sitting on the kitchen table. No one is there, working or surfing the Internet; in the minute or two you've had to study the place, you haven't noticed any movement inside, no other lights turning on or off. In fact, it looks as if only one light is on in the whole apartment.

You step up onto a small brick perimeter wall across the street to get a better look—just a low fence framing the yard of a multistory housing block—and sure enough, the laptop is sitting there alone, without an owner to be seen. Astonishingly, a digital camera has been left out on the table next to it, as if someone had been transferring photos from one device to the other, only to leave, maybe for the whole night, maybe just for a quick errand. Either way, no one's there right now, and that makes this your best opportunity. Best of all, a living-room window partially hidden behind some bushes is slightly ajar—meaning that whoever lives there has taken zero precautions against burglary and thus practically deserves to be robbed (you tell yourself). It's instant karma—payback for his or her absentminded naïveté. So it's now or never.

With one final scan of the surrounding street and a quick squint up at other windows in case someone might be watching, you confirm you're all alone. It's time to go. You cross the street, pop open the window, and slide in. It's almost too easy. Immediately, you head for the bedroom, both to make sure no one is there sleeping and also to grab a pillowcase to stuff everything in. While you're in there, you notice it's oddly furnished; it's almost as if no one really spends a lot of time here, as if it's just a place to crash, because nothing but a bed and a nightstand are in the room. It feels strange—but you're in now, so it's all about getting the job done, then getting out.

Quickly, you open the bathroom medicine cabinet, hoping to find some medications—but there's nothing. Then you go into the kitchen to pop open the cupboards one by one. Almost nothing is in them, which again seems strange, and you've also noticed that everything feels vaguely dirty, as if whoever lives here hasn't cleaned in a while. Anything you've touched—a doorknob or cabinet handle—has made your fingers feel oily, your palms a bit slick with something you can't see. If not for the laptop, which you head toward to grab, this would not have been worth it; now it's time to go.

Which is exactly when you hear the front door of the apartment burst open, and that word you've been hoping to avoid your whole criminal career echoes into the room around you: "Police!" Two officers sweep through the door, and it's far too late to get back to the open window and escape. You're trapped—or captured, as the case may be.

"Capture houses" are fake apartments run by the police to attract and, as their name implies, capture burglars. They are furnished to be all but

indistinguishable from other apartments, with the important difference that nearly everything inside them has been tagged using a chemical residue only visible under UV light. These chemical sprays and forensic coatings—applied to door handles, window latches, and any portable goods found throughout the properties, including TVs, laptops, and digital cameras—are also known as SmartWater. Tiny internet-connected cameras film each room from various angles. Finally, a small team of officers waits patiently nearby, usually in an apartment next door or across the hall.

All this means that if you are the burglar in question, the local police have designed and furnished an apartment with you in mind. When you are next out and about, casing homes for a possible burglary, and you feel attracted to a certain property, you have to step back and consider the almost science-fiction-like possibility that it was put there specifically to attract you.

What remains so interesting about the idea of a capture house is this larger, abstract notion that the houses, apartments, bars, shops, and businesses standing all around us might be fake, that they exist as a police-monitored surrogate of the everyday world, a labyrinth of law-enforcement stage sets both deceptive and alluring. Indeed, beyond just trapping local burglars, the capture-house program's overriding and perhaps most successful effect lies in inspiring a distinct and quite peculiar form of interpretive unease among local criminals: the uncanny feeling that the very place you are now standing in is somehow not real but a kind of well-furnished simulation, a deliberate mirage or architectural replica run by the local police, overseen by invisible cameras recording your every move. Even if you're looking for signs that a given home or apartment is a capture house, you won't find them. You won't know you've actually broken into a simulation until the police themselves come crashing in, looking for you.

Surveillance Capitalism:

1. A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales.
2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification.
3. A rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power. unprecedented in human history

4. The foundational framework of a surveillance economy.
5. As significant a threat to human nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth.
6. The origin of a new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy.
7. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty.
8. An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above, an overthrow of the people's sovereignty.

In 2000 a group of computer scientists and engineers at Georgia Tech collaborated on a project called the "Aware Home." It was meant to be a "living laboratory" for the study of "ubiquitous computing." They imagined a "human-home symbiosis" in which many animate and inanimate processes would be captured by an elaborate network of "context aware sensors" embedded in the house and by wearable computers worn by the home's occupants. The design called for an "automated wireless collaboration" between the platform that hosted personal information from the occupants' wearables and a second one that hosted the environmental information from the sensors.

There were three working assumptions: first, the scientists and engineers understood that the new data systems would produce an entirely new knowledge domain. Second, it was assumed that the rights to that new knowledge and the power to use it to improve one's life would belong exclusively to the people who live in the house. Third, the team assumed that for all of its digital wizardry, the Aware Home would take its place as a modern incarnation of the ancient conventions that understand 'home' as the private sanctuary of those who dwell within its walls. All of this was expressed in the engineering plan. It emphasized trust, simplicity, the sovereignty of the individual, and the inviolability of the home as a private domain. The Aware Home information system was imagined as a simple "closed loop" with only two nodes and controlled entirely by the home's occupants.

"Because the house would be constantly monitoring the occupants' whereabouts and activities, even tracing its inhabitants' medical conditions. There is a clear need to give the occupants knowledge and control of the distribution of this information."

All the information was to be stored on the occupants' wearable computers "to insure the privacy of an individual's information."

By 2018, the global "smart-home" market was valued at \$36 billion and expected to reach \$151 billion by 2023. The numbers betray an earthquake beneath their surface. Consider just one smart-home device: the Nest thermostat, which was made by a company that was owned by Alphabet, the Google holding company, and then merged with Google in 2018. The Nest thermostat does many things imagined in the Aware Home. It collects data about its uses and environment. It uses motion sensors and computation to "learn" the behaviors of a home's inhabitants. Nest's apps can gather data from other connected products such as cars, ovens, fitness trackers, and beds. Such systems can, for example, trigger lights if an anomalous motion is detected, begin video and audio recording, and even send notifications to homeowners or others.

As a result of the merger with Google, the thermostat, like other Nest products, will be built with Google's artificial intelligence capabilities, including its personal digital "assistant." Like the Aware Home, the thermostat and its brethren devices create immense new stores of knowledge and therefore new power—but for whom? Wi-Fi-enabled and networked, the thermostat's intricate, personalized data stores are uploaded to Google's servers. Each thermostat comes with a "privacy policy," a "terms-of-service agreement," and an "end-user licensing agreement." These reveal oppressive privacy and security consequences in which sensitive household and personal information are shared with other smart devices, unnamed personnel, and third parties for the purposes of predictive analyses and sales to other unspecified parties. Nest takes little responsibility for the security of the information it collects and none for how the other companies in its ecosystem will put those data to use.

A detailed analysis of Nest's policies concluded that were one to enter into the Nest ecosystem of connected devices and apps, each with their own equally burdensome and audacious terms, the purchase of a single home thermostat would entail the need to review nearly a thousand so-called contracts. Should the customer refuse to agree to Nest's stipulations, the terms of service indicate that the functionality and security of the thermostat will be deeply compromised, no longer supported by the necessary updates meant to ensure its reliability and safety. The consequences can range from frozen pipes to failed smoke alarms to an easily hacked internal home system.

By 2018, the assumptions of the Aware Home were gone with the wind. Where did they go? What was that wind? The Aware Home, like many other visionary projects, imagined a digital future that empowers individuals to lead more-effective lives. What is most critical is that in the year 2000

this vision naturally assumed an unwavering commitment to the privacy of individual experience. Should an individual choose to render her experience digitally, then she would exercise exclusive rights to the knowledge garnered from such data, as well as exclusive rights to decide how such knowledge might be put to use. Today these rights to privacy, knowledge, and application have been usurped by a bold market venture powered by unilateral claims to others' experience and the knowledge that flows from it. What does this sea change mean for us, for our children, for our democracies, and for the very possibility of a human future in a digital world?

Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. Although some of these data are applied to product or service improvement, the rest are declared as a proprietary behavioral surplus, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as "machine intelligence," and fabricated into prediction products that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace for behavioral predictions—behavioral futures markets. Surveillance capitalists have grown immensely wealthy from these trading operations, for many companies are eager to lay bets on our future behavior. The competitive dynamics of these new markets drive surveillance capitalists to acquire ever-more-predictive sources of behavioral surplus: our voices, personalities, and emotions.

Eventually, surveillance capitalists discovered that the most-predictive behavioral data come from intervening in the state of play in order to nudge, coax, tune, and herd behavior toward profitable outcomes. Competitive pressures produced this shift, in which automated machine processes not only know our behavior but also shape our behavior at scale. With this reorientation from knowledge to power, it is no longer enough to automate information flows about us; the goal now is to automate us. In this phase of surveillance capitalism's evolution, the means of production are subordinated to an increasingly complex and comprehensive "means of behavioral modification." In this way, surveillance capitalism births a new species of power that we might call 'instrumentarianism.' Instrumentarian power knows and shapes human behavior toward others' ends. Instead of armaments and armies, it works its will through the automated medium of an increasingly ubiquitous computational architecture of "smart" networked devices, things, and spaces.

It has become difficult to escape this bold market project, whose tentacles reach from the gentle herding of innocent Pokémon Go players to eat, drink, and purchase in the restaurants, bars, fast-food joints, and shops that pay to play in its behavioral futures markets to the ruthless expropriation of surplus from Facebook profiles for the purposes of shaping individual

behavior, whether it's buying pimple cream at 17:45 on Friday, clicking 'yes' on an offer of new running shoes as the endorphins race through your brain after your long Sunday morning run, or voting next week. Just as industrial capitalism was driven to the continuous intensification of the means of production, so surveillance capitalists and their market players are now locked into the continuous intensification of the means of behavioral modification and the gathering might of instrumentarian power.

Surveillance capitalism is a rogue force driven by novel economic imperatives that disregard social norms and nullify the elemental rights associated with individual autonomy that are essential to the very possibility of a democratic society. Just as industrial civilization flourished at the expense of nature and now threatens to cost us the Earth, an information civilization shaped by surveillance capitalism and its new instrumentarian power will thrive at the expense of human nature and will threaten to cost us our humanity. The industrial legacy of climate chaos fills us with dismay, remorse, and fear. As surveillance capitalism becomes the dominant form of information capitalism in our time, what fresh legacy of damage and regret will be mourned by future generations? By the time you read these words, the reach of this new form will have grown as more sectors, firms, startups, app developers, and investors mobilize around this one plausible version of information capitalism. This mobilization and the resistance it engenders will define a key battleground upon which the possibility of a human future at the new frontier of power will be contested.

One explanation for surveillance capitalism's many triumphs floats above them all: it is unprecedented. The unprecedented is necessarily unrecognizable. When we encounter something unprecedented, we automatically interpret it through the lenses of familiar categories, thereby rendering invisible precisely that which is unprecedented. A classic example is the notion of the "horseless carriage" to which people reverted when confronted with the unprecedented facts of the automobile. A tragic illustration is the encounter between indigenous people and the first Spanish conquerors. When the Taínos of the pre-Columbian Caribbean islands first laid eyes on the sweating, bearded Spanish soldiers trudging across the sand in their brocade and armor, how could they possibly have recognized the meaning and portent of that moment? Unable to imagine their own destruction, they reckoned that those strange creatures were gods and welcomed them with intricate rituals of hospitality.

This is how the unprecedented reliably confounds understanding; existing lenses illuminate the familiar, thus obscuring the original by turning the unprecedented into an extension of the past. This contributes to the normalization of the abnormal, which makes fighting the unprecedented

even more of an uphill climb.

Our effort to confront the unprecedented begins with the recognition that we hunt the puppet master, not the puppet. A first challenge to comprehension is the confusion between surveillance capitalism and the technologies it employs. Surveillance capitalism is not technology; it is a logic that imbues technology and commands it into action. Surveillance capitalism is a market form that is unimaginable outside the digital milieu, but it is not the same as the “digital.” As we saw in the story of the Aware Home the digital can take many forms depending upon the social and economic logics that bring it to life. It is capitalism that assigns the price tag of subjugation and helplessness, not the technology. That surveillance capitalism is a logic in action and not a technology is a vital point because surveillance capitalists want us to think that their practices are inevitable expressions of the technologies they employ.

For example, in 2009 the public first became aware that Google maintains our search histories indefinitely: data that are available as raw-material supplies are also available to intelligence and law-enforcement agencies. When questioned about these practices, the corporation’s former CEO Eric Schmidt mused:

“The reality is that search engines including Google do retain this information for some time.”

In truth, search engines do not retain, but surveillance capitalism does. Schmidt’s statement is a classic of misdirection that bewilders the public by conflating commercial imperatives and technological necessity. It camouflages the concrete practices of surveillance capitalism and the specific choices that impel Google’s brand of search into action. Most significantly, it makes surveillance capitalism’s practices appear to be inevitable when they are actually meticulously calculated and lavishly funded means to self-dealing commercial ends. Despite all the futuristic sophistication of digital innovation, the message of the surveillance capitalist companies barely differs from the themes once glorified in the motto of the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair:

“Science Finds—Industry Applies—Man Conforms”

In order to challenge such claims of technological inevitability, we must establish our bearings. We cannot evaluate the current trajectory of information civilization without a clear appreciation that technology is not and never can be a thing in itself, isolated from economics and society. This means that technological inevitability does not exist. Technologies are always economic

means, not ends in themselves: in modern times, technology's DNA comes already patterned by the economic orientation. Economic ends are always intrinsic to technology's development and deployment. Economic action determines objectives, whereas technology provides appropriate means. The fact that what is called the technological development of modern times has been so largely oriented economically to profit-making is one of the fundamental facts of the history of technology. In a modern capitalist society, technology was, is, and always will be an expression of the economic objectives that direct it into action. A worthwhile exercise would be to delete the word 'technology' from our vocabularies in order to see how quickly capitalism's objectives are exposed.

An app called Genetic Access Control, was made available on GitHub. The app accessed genomic data on 23andMe (a private company through which you get your genome sequenced) and used that data to restrict users' access to Web sites. The app's developer suggests relatively innocuous uses for the app, including creating "safe spaces," like Web sites that can only be accessed by females. But it's easy to imagine how an app like this could be used for more sinister purposes. Imagine a site that only people with a certain skin color can visit, or a site that only individuals lacking genetic defects could visit. Furthermore, even the more benign uses will create problems, because identity is both genetic and cultural. Some people with a traditionally female body type carry XY chromosomes, and a group that genetically barred non-females would have to decide how to handle that. 23andMe quickly blocked this app's access to their data, but we can probably expect problems like this to pop up again in the future.

And it's not just your personal genetic information. You get half of your genome from your mom and half from your dad—unless you're some weird lab-baby. So if you make your genome public, you're sharing half of each of your parent's genomes. In fact, whenever you share genetic information, you are to some degree compromising the anonymity of all people in your kin group. Imagine you have a twin who is in political office, and you find out that you carry a genetic risk of schizophrenia. Do you have a social obligation to share that information? Do you have a filial obligation to hide it?

Perhaps we need for data analysts some sort of principles which they should adhere, just as doctors do.

Big Data's Hippocratic Oath

- I will remember that I didn't make the world, and it doesn't satisfy my equations.

- Though I will use models boldly to estimate value, I will not be overly impressed by mathematics.
- I will never sacrifice reality for elegance without explaining why I have done so.
- Nor will I give the people who use my model false comfort about its accuracy. Instead, I will make explicit its assumptions and oversights.
- I understand that my work may have enormous effects on society and the economy, many of them beyond my comprehension.

Early commentators on the developing webworld clearly viewed and identified the internet as a communications commons. Even more, movements of tech activists were seen as commonists—asserting the sharing of web resources and the need for alternatives to capitalist ownership and control but in a way that avoided, or refuted, the authoritarian or statist examples of communism. At the same time, some segments of capital readily grasped the enormous commercial potential of this untapped channel of profitability. To do so fully, the cyber commons—like the land commons in England during the late feudal period—would have to be enclosed, brought within the purview of private property owners, as commodities. Many early cyber activists recognized this too and tried to mobilize users and producers to defend the free net and extend the spheres of openness, through tech worker collectives and open source technologies. Over the last decade, of course, the enclosure of the internet as commercial space has expanded massively. The internet has gone from being viewed as a medium of mass communication or interchange to become a mass market (for exchange value). Corporations have used the internet to advance global trade in an immediate fashion, collapsing space and time for commerce. At the same time, corporations have found entirely new commodities and spaces for profit making.

Selling data became a lucrative business for governments at all levels. The state of Florida alone makes about \$62 million a year selling driver's license data. The US Postal Service generates \$9.5 million in revenue a year allowing companies like Acxiom to access its National Change of Address database.

The trackers are deeply intertwined. Government data are the lifeblood for commercial data brokers. And government dragnets rely on obtaining information from the private sector. Consider just one example: voting. To register to vote, citizens must fill out a government form that usually requires their name, address, and, in all but one state, birth date. But few voters realize that those lists are often sold to commercial data brokers.

A 2011 study found that a statewide voter list sold for as little as \$30 in California and as high as \$6,050 in Georgia.

Commercial data brokers combine the voting information with other data to create rich profiles of individuals. For instance, the data broker Aristotle Inc. markets its ability to identify 190 million voters by more than “500 consumer data points” such as their credit rating and size of their mortgage. And guess who buys Aristotle’s enriched data? Politicians, who are sometimes using government money. Aristotle crows that “every US President—Democrat and Republican—from Reagan through Obama, has used Aristotle products and/or services.”

A 2012 study found that fifty-one members of the US House of Representatives bought data from Aristotle using some of their congressional allowances, allowing them to identify their constituents by the age of their children, whether they subscribe to religious magazines, or if they have a hunting license. And thus, the data comes full circle. The government requires citizens to create data and then sells it to commercial entities, which launder the data and sell it back to the government.

The dark data cycle occurs with nearly every type of data. State auto vehicle records are swept into LexisNexis reports, which are enhanced with other data and sold to the Department of Homeland Security. Foreclosure records are compiled in state courts and then collected by data brokers such as CoreLogic, which sells packages of real estate data to clients including the government. An even darker data cycle occurs in the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, where the government can demand that private industry hand over data about their customers. In those circumstances, giant companies such as Google, Yahoo!, AT&T, Verizon, and Microsoft have been forced to hand over customer data to the NSA. The reality is that corporate and government dragnets are inextricably linked; neither can exist without the other.

It has allowed a space in which data has become a valuable commodity at the same time as allowing data to be more accessible than ever to potential consumers. Corporations that hope to capitalize on data try to clear out the online commons and subjugate internet users to the ever encroaching profit motive of online companies. Government bills, laws, and treaties have consistently restricted the rights of internet users and tech workers while affirming or asserting special rights of capital (owners and investors who seek a privately commodified web). In many ways, hacktivism is a response to this contestation of rights.

As in the case of earlier processes of capitalist commodification, the efforts to commodify the internet or communications commons are being met with resistance. As the enclosures of common lands gave rise to the Diggers,

Levelers, and Ranters, communities that took direct action to reclaim the commons, so the efforts to privatize and corporatize the web have given rise to hacktivists and cyber disobedients who take action for a free and open webworld. These new Diggers, Levelers, and Ranters take names such as Anonymous, Lulzsec, Riseup, and TAO (The Anarchy Organization). As in previous periods, the resistance is criminalized by states acting on behalf of propertied interests that profit from enclosure. Cyber disobedients are criminalized because they seek, or succeed, to give away that which capital seeks to own, and sell, for a profit. Restricting access to readily available information is a way to maintain and extend the commodification of data. And the key way in which this commodification can be achieved is by making information a scarce resource, by limiting its accessibility.

Not too long ago, monopolies and oligopolies were illegal in America. This was because our ancestors understood that concentrated economic power was incompatible with democracy and equality in all sorts of ways. Since the days of Ronald Reagan, however, every administration has chosen to drop the enforcement of the antitrust laws except in rare cases. This has come to mean that mergers and takeovers are permitted in nearly all instances, and achieving monopoly has once again become the obvious objective of every would-be business leader. From Big Pharma to Silicon Valley, everyone in the C-suites knows that this is the path to success today. ‘Competition is for losers,’ they say. Unless your startup has a plan for cornering and using market power, you can forget about interest from venture capital.

Unlike the old monopolists, who controlled production, the new monopolists control networks. Antitrust laws often busted up the old monopolists. But the new monopolists have enough influence to keep antitrust at bay.

Whether it is Apple’s mobile hardware and related software, Google’s search engine and content, Twitter’s tweets, Facebook’s connections, Amazon’s shopping platform, or Alibaba’s shopping exchange, huge revenues come from owning a standard platform. To be sure, such platforms can sometimes make it easier for people to introduce their apps or books or videos or whatever other content they want to showcase. But the real power and profits lie with the owners of the platform rather than with the people who make use of it. And as that power and those profits increase, the people who depend on it have less and less bargaining leverage to negotiate good prices for their contributions. Since it costs almost nothing to sell more units, these new monopolists can keep out (or buy out) potential competitors and gain almost complete control—along with the profits and the legal and political leverage control brings.

A handful of giant corporations are reaping the rewards of such network

effects. The larger their networks become, the more data they collect, and therefore the more effective and powerful they become. Consumers may be satisfied with the results, but they will never know what ideas have been squelched or stymied, how much more they are paying than they would otherwise, and how the rules of the game are being changed to the advantage of the owners of the standard platforms.

This was the Big Data economy, and it promised spectacular gains. A computer program could speed through thousands of résumés or loan applications in a second or two and sort them into neat lists, with the most promising candidates on top. This not only saved time but also was marketed as fair and objective. After all, it didn't involve prejudiced humans digging through reams of paper, just machines processing cold numbers. By 2010 or so, mathematics was asserting itself as never before in human affairs, and the public largely welcomed it.

Yet there was clearly trouble if you looked. The math-powered applications powering the data economy were based on choices made by fallible human beings. Some of these choices were no doubt made with the best intentions. Nevertheless, many of these models encoded human prejudice, misunderstanding, and bias into the software systems that increasingly manage our lives. Like gods, these mathematical models are opaque, their workings invisible to all but the highest priests in their domain: mathematicians and computer scientists. Their verdicts, even when wrong or harmful, are beyond dispute or appeal. And they tend to punish the poor and the oppressed in our society, while making the rich richer.

Scheduling software can be seen as an extension of the just-in-time economy. But instead of lawn mower blades or cell phone screens showing up right on cue, it's people, usually people who badly need money. And because they need money so desperately, the companies can bend their lives to the dictates of a mathematical model.

It's almost as if the software were designed expressly to punish low-wage workers and to keep them down. The software also condemns a large percentage of our children to grow up without routines. They experience their mother bleary eyed at breakfast, or hurrying out the door without dinner, or arguing with her mother about who can take care of them on Sunday morning. This chaotic life affects children deeply.

“Young children and adolescents of parents working unpredictable schedules or outside standard daytime working hours are more likely to have inferior cognition and behavioral outcomes.”

The parents might blame themselves for having a child who acts out or fails in school, but in many cases the real culprit is the poverty that leads

workers to take jobs with haphazard schedules—and the scheduling models that squeeze struggling families even harder.

Poor people are more likely to have bad credit and live in high-crime neighborhoods, surrounded by other poor people. Once the dark universe of algorithms digests that data, it showers them with predatory ads for subprime loans or for-profit schools. It sends more police to arrest them, and when they're convicted it sentences them to longer terms. This data feeds into other algorithms, which score the same people as high risks or easy targets and proceed to block them from jobs, while jacking up their rates for mortgages, car loans, and every kind of insurance imaginable. This drives their credit rating down further, creating nothing less than a death spiral of modeling. Being poor in a world of algorithms is getting more and more dangerous and expensive.

The same algorithms that abuse the poor also place the comfortable classes of society in their own marketing silos. They jet them off to vacations in Aruba and wait-list them at Wharton. For many of them, it can feel as though the world is getting smarter and easier. Models highlight bargains on prosciutto and chianti, recommend a great movie on Amazon Prime, or lead them, turn by turn, to a café in what used to be a “sketchy” neighborhood. The quiet and personal nature of this targeting keeps society's winners from seeing how the very same models are destroying lives, sometimes just a few blocks away. Our national motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, means ‘Out of Many, One.’ But algorithms reverse the equation. Working in darkness, they carve one into many, while hiding us from the harms they inflict upon our neighbors near and far.

And those harms are legion. They unfold when a single mother can't arrange child care fast enough to adapt to her work schedule, or when a struggling young person is red-lighted for an hourly job by a workplace personality test. We see them when a poor minority teenager gets stopped, roughed up, and put on warning by the local police, or when a gas station attendant who lives in a poor zip code gets hit with a higher insurance bill. It's a silent war that hits the poor hardest but also hammers the middle class. Its victims, for the most part, lack economic power, access to lawyers, or well-funded political organizations to fight their battles. The result is widespread damage that all too often passes for inevitability.

For example, attempting to calculate the impact that one person may have on another over the course of a school year is extremely complex. Attempting to score a teacher's effectiveness by analyzing the test results of only twenty-five or thirty students is statistically unsound, even laughable. The numbers are far too small given all the things that could go wrong. Indeed, if we were to analyze teachers with the statistical rigor of a search

engine, we'd have to test them on thousands or even millions of randomly selected students. Statisticians count on large numbers to balance out exceptions and anomalies.

Equally important, statistical systems require feedback—something to tell them when they're off track. Statisticians use errors to train their models and make them smarter. If Amazon, through a faulty correlation, started recommending lawn care books to teenage girls, the clicks would plummet, and the algorithm would be tweaked until it got it right. Without feedback, however, a statistical engine can continue spinning out faulty and damaging analysis while never learning from its mistakes. Many of our models behave like that. They define their own reality and use it to justify their results. This type of model is self-perpetuating, highly destructive—and very common. When Mathematica's scoring system tags teachers as failures, the district fires them. But how does it ever learn if it was right? It doesn't. The system itself has determined that they were failures, and that is how they are viewed. "Bad" teachers are gone. That fact alone appears to demonstrate how effective the value-added model is. It is cleansing the district of underperforming teachers. Instead of searching for the truth, the score comes to embody it.

Unfortunately, misinterpreted statistics run through the history of teacher evaluation. The problem started with a momentous statistical mistake in the analysis of the original Nation at Risk report. It turned out that the very researchers who were decrying a national catastrophe were basing their judgment on a fundamental error, something an undergrad should have caught. In fact, if they wanted to serve up an example of America's educational shortcomings, their own misreading of statistics could serve as exhibit A. Seven years after *A Nation at Risk* was published with such fanfare, researchers at Sandia National Laboratories took a second look at the data gathered for the report. These people were no amateurs when it came to statistics—or one would hope, since they build and maintain nuclear weapons—and they quickly found the error.

Yes, it was true that SAT scores had gone down on average. However, the number of students taking the test had ballooned over the course of those seventeen years. Universities were opening their doors to more poor students and minorities. Opportunities were expanding. This signaled social success. But naturally, this influx of newcomers dragged down the average scores. However, when statisticians broke down the population into income groups, scores for every single group were rising, from the poor to the rich. In statistics, this phenomenon is known as Simpson's Paradox: when a whole body of data displays one trend, yet when broken into subgroups, the opposite trend comes into view for each of those subgroups. The damning

conclusion in the *Nation at Risk* report, the one that spurred the entire teacher evaluation movement, was drawn from a grievous misinterpretation of the data.

Such models also tend to punish the poor. This is, in part, because they are engineered to evaluate large numbers of people. They specialize in bulk, and they're cheap. That's part of their appeal. The wealthy, by contrast, often benefit from personal input. A white-shoe law firm or an exclusive prep school will lean far more on recommendations and face-to-face interviews than will a fast-food chain or a cash-strapped urban school district. The privileged are processed more by people, the masses by machines.

When automatic systems sift through our data to size us up for an "e-score," they naturally project the past into the future. The poor are expected to remain poor forever and are treated accordingly—denied opportunities, jailed more often, and gouged for services and loans. It's inexorable, often hidden and beyond appeal, and unfair.

Consider the feedback loop that the Kronos personality test engenders. Red-lighting people with certain mental health issues prevents them from having a normal job and leading a normal life, further isolating them. This is exactly what the Americans with Disabilities Act is supposed to prevent.

You cannot appeal to a model. That's part of their fearsome power. They do not listen. Nor do they bend. They're deaf not only to charm, threats, and cajoling but also to logic—even when there is good reason to question the data that feeds their conclusions. Yes, if it becomes clear that automated systems are screwing up on an embarrassing and systematic basis, programmers will go back in and tweak the algorithms. But for the most part, the programs deliver unflinching verdicts, and the human beings employing them can only shrug, as if to say, 'Hey, what can you do?' Algorithms are an optimized version of the cliché useless and unhelpful bureaucrat.

Do you see the paradox? An algorithm processes a slew of statistics and comes up with a probability that a certain person might be a bad hire, a risky borrower, a terrorist, or a miserable teacher. That probability is distilled into a score, which can turn someone's life upside down. And yet when the person fights back, suggestive countervailing evidence simply won't cut it. The case must be ironclad. The human victims of models are held to a far higher standard of evidence than the algorithms themselves.

Models, despite their reputation for impartiality, reflect goals and ideology. When a parent removes the possibility of eating Pop-Tarts at every meal, they are imposing their ideology on the meals model. It's something we do without a second thought. Our own values and desires influence our choices, from the data we choose to collect to the questions we ask. Models

are opinions embedded in mathematics.

Racism, at the individual level, can be seen as a predictive model whirring away in billions of human minds around the world. It is built from faulty, incomplete, or generalized data. Whether it comes from experience or hearsay, the data indicates that certain types of people have behaved badly. That generates a binary prediction that all people that look like them will behave that same way. Needless to say, racists don't spend a lot of time hunting down reliable data to train their twisted models. And once their model morphs into a belief, it becomes hardwired. It generates poisonous assumptions, yet rarely tests them, settling instead for data that seems to confirm and fortify them. Consequently, racism is the most slovenly of predictive models. It is powered by haphazard data gathering and spurious correlations, reinforced by institutional inequities, and polluted by confirmation bias. And now we are seeking to digitize and systematize these biases.

PredPol doesn't focus on the individual. Instead, it targets geography. The key inputs are the type and location of each crime and when it occurred. That seems fair enough. And if cops spend more time in the high-risk zones, foiling burglars and car thieves, there's good reason to believe that the community benefits. But most crimes aren't as serious as burglary and grand theft auto, and that is where serious problems emerge. When police set up their PredPol system, they have a choice. They can focus exclusively on so-called "Part 1" crimes. These are the violent crimes, including homicide, arson, and assault, which are usually reported to them. But they can also broaden the focus by including "Part 2" crimes, including vagrancy, aggressive panhandling, and selling and consuming small quantities of drugs. Many of these nuisance crimes would go unrecorded if a cop weren't there to see them. These nuisance crimes are endemic to many impoverished neighborhoods. In some places police call them antisocial behavior, or ASB.

Unfortunately, including them in the model threatens to skew the analysis. Once the nuisance data flows into a predictive model, more police are drawn into those neighborhoods, where they're more likely to arrest more people. After all, even if their objective is to stop burglaries, murders, and rape, they're bound to have slow periods—it's the nature of patrolling. And if a patrolling cop sees a couple of kids who look no older than sixteen guzzling from a bottle in a brown bag, he stops them. These types of low-level crimes populate their models with more and more dots, and the models send the cops back to the same neighborhood. This creates a pernicious feedback loop. The policing itself spawns new data, which justifies more policing. And our prisons fill up with hundreds of thousands of people found guilty of victimless crimes. Most of them come from impoverished neighborhoods,

and most are black or Hispanic. So even if a model is color blind, the result of it is anything but. In our largely segregated cities, geography is a highly effective proxy for race.

Just imagine if police enforced their zero-tolerance strategy in finance. They would arrest people for even the slightest infraction, whether it was chiseling investors on 401ks, providing misleading guidance, or committing petty frauds. Perhaps SWAT teams would execute no-knock raids in Greenwich, Connecticut. They'd go undercover in the taverns around Chicago's Mercantile Exchange. Not likely, of course. The cops don't have the expertise for that kind of work. Everything about their jobs, from their training to their bullet-proof vests, is adapted to the "mean streets." Clamping down on white-collar crime would require people with different tools and skills.

The small and underfunded teams who handle that work, from the FBI to investigators at the Securities and Exchange Commission, have learned through the decades that bankers are virtually invulnerable. They spend heavily on our politicians, which always helps, and are also viewed as crucial to our economy. That protects them. If their banks go south, our economy could go with them. The poor have no such argument. So except for a couple of criminal outliers, such as Ponzi-scheme master Bernard Madoff, financiers don't get arrested. As a group, they made it through the 2008 market crash practically unscathed. What could ever burn them now?

My point is that police make choices about where they direct their attention. Today they focus almost exclusively on the poor. That's their heritage, and their mission, as they understand it. And now data scientists are stitching this status quo of the social order into models, like PredPol, that hold ever-greater sway over our lives.

In 2009, the Chicago Police Department received a \$2 million grant from the National Institute of Justice to develop a predictive program for crime. The theory behind Chicago's winning application was that with enough research and data they might be able to demonstrate that the spread of crime, like epidemics, follows certain patterns. It can be predicted and, hopefully, prevented.

'For fucks sake, its goddamn inequality and unfairness coupled with unpopular and punitive laws you ignorant fucks. You made the fucking crime with your shit social policies,' doesn't get you \$2 million.

Chicago Police have implemented a policy of warning the top-400 most likely to commit violent crimes, as decided by an algorithm. And to be fair to Chicago police, they're not arresting people, at least not yet. The goal of the police in this exercise is to save lives. If the four-hundred people who appear most likely to commit violent crimes receive a knock on the door and a warning, maybe some of them will think twice before packing

a gun. But let's consider this case in terms of fairness. He happened to grow up in a poor and dangerous neighborhood. In this, he was unlucky. He has been surrounded by crime, and many of his acquaintances have gotten caught up in it. And largely because of these circumstances—and not his own actions—he has been deemed dangerous. Now the police have their eye on him. And if he behaves foolishly, as millions of other Americans do on a regular basis, if he buys drugs or gets into a barroom fight or carries an unregistered handgun, the full force of the law will fall down on him, probably much harder than it would on most of us. After all, he's been warned. I would argue that the model that led police to his door has the wrong objective. Instead of simply trying to eradicate crimes, police should be attempting to build relationships in the neighborhood. This was one of the pillars of the original “broken-windows” study. The cops were on foot, talking to people, trying to help them uphold their own community standards. But that objective, in many cases, has been lost, steamrolled by models that equate arrests with safety.

We're often faced with a choice between fairness and efficiency. Our legal traditions lean strongly toward fairness. The Constitution, for example, presumes innocence and is engineered to value it. From a modeler's perspective, the presumption of innocence is a constraint, and the result is that some guilty people go free, especially those who can afford good lawyers. Even those found guilty have the right to appeal their verdict, which chews up time and resources. So the system sacrifices enormous efficiencies for the promise of fairness. The Constitution's implicit judgment is that freeing someone who may well have committed a crime, for lack of evidence, poses less of a danger to our society than jailing or executing an innocent person. Big Data models, by contrast, tend to favor efficiency. By their very nature, they feed on data that can be measured and counted. But fairness is squishy and hard to quantify. It is a concept. And computers, for all of their advances in language and logic, still struggle mightily with concepts. They understand ‘beauty’ only as a word associated with the Grand Canyon, ocean sunsets, and grooming tips in *Vogue* magazine. They try in vain to measure ‘friendship’ by counting likes and connections on Facebook. And the concept of fairness utterly escapes them. Programmers don't know how to code for it, and few of their bosses ask them to. So fairness isn't calculated into algorithms. And the result is massive, industrial production of unfairness. If you think of such algorithms as a factory, unfairness is the black stuff belching out of the smoke stacks. It's an emission, a toxic one. The question is whether we as a society are willing to sacrifice a bit of efficiency in the interest of fairness. Should we handicap the models, leaving certain data out?

Would society be so willing to sacrifice the concept of probable cause if everyone had to endure the harassment and indignities of stop and frisk? Chicago police have their own stop-and-frisk program. In the name of fairness, what if they sent a bunch of patrollers into the city's exclusive Gold Coast? Maybe they'd arrest joggers for jaywalking from the park across W. North Boulevard or crack down on poodle pooping along Lakeshore Drive. This heightened police presence would probably pick up more drunk drivers and perhaps uncover a few cases of insurance fraud, spousal abuse, or racketeering. Occasionally, just to give everyone a taste of the unvarnished experience, the cops might throw wealthy citizens on the trunks of their cruisers, wrench their arms, and snap on the handcuffs, perhaps while swearing and calling them hateful names. In time, this focus on the Gold Coast would create data. It would describe an increase in crime there, which would draw even more police into the fray. This would no doubt lead to growing anger and confrontations. I picture a double-parker talking back to police, refusing to get out of his Mercedes, and finding himself facing charges for resisting arrest. Yet another Gold Coast crime. This may sound less than serious. But a crucial part of justice is equality. And that means, among many other things, experiencing criminal justice equally. People who favor policies like stop and frisk should experience it themselves. Justice cannot just be something that one part of society inflicts upon the other.

If building trust is the objective, an arrest may well become a last resort, not the first. This more empathetic approach could lead to warmer relations between the police and the policed, and fewer of the tragedies we've seen in recent years.

Surveillance will change the very nature of insurance. Insurance is an industry, traditionally, that draws on the majority of the community to respond to the needs of an unfortunate minority. In the villages we lived in centuries ago, families, religious groups, and neighbors helped look after each other when fire, accident, or illness struck. In the market economy, we outsource this care to insurance companies, which keep a portion of the money for themselves and call it profit. As insurance companies learn more about us, they'll be able to pinpoint those who appear to be the riskiest customers and then either drive their rates to the stratosphere or, where legal, deny them coverage. This is a far cry from insurance's original purpose, which is to help society balance its risk. In a targeted world, we no longer pay the average. Instead, we're saddled with anticipated costs. Instead of smoothing out life's bumps, insurance companies will demand payment for those bumps in advance. This undermines the point of insurance, and the hits will fall especially hard on those who can least afford them.

Suppose a shady billionaire offered you the following deal:

“I will pay you \$30 a month, and in exchange, you will allow me to brainwash you for an hour every day, installing in your mind whichever political and commercial biases I want.”

Would you take the deal? Few sane people would. So the shady billionaire offers a slightly different deal:

“You will allow me to brainwash you for one hour every day, and in exchange, I will not charge you anything for this service.”

Now the deal suddenly sounds tempting to hundreds of millions of people. Don't follow their example.

“You want to fund the operation of websites through some means other than ads or paywalls.”

Well, see, I don't actually give the least fuck about how people fund their websites. Some sites will have subscriptions, and some subset of people will buy them. Some set of users will allow ads, some will block them. If you have a paywall, or ads, I'll block that shit—if I can't get to your site, I'll use the back button. Sites need traffic to claim to be relevant. Lock everyone out unless they pay, you lose people out of the gate—lock out people with ad-blockers, and you lose relevance.

“Shut down any site that doesn't have a shopping cart and isn't run by a nonprofit organization or as an individual's hobby?”

I simply don't give a fuck how organizations or people fund their sites. But I will keep blocking ad companies until I no longer can, and at which point the internet will have fully transitioned to be nothing but useless commercial shit anyway. I'm saying take anybody who works for an internet ad or analytics company, and beat them soundly with bats or doxx them and their families.

But I'm not willing to operate under the fiction that by visiting your website I have agreed to be ass-raped by the terms and conditions of every parasite you've partnered with—my terms of service are: I reserve the right to block anything I want, and you are free to in turn block me.

If I walked into a physical store and someone tried to collect my details and pass them on to their marketing partners and put a tracker on me, they'd be met with physical violence—digitally speaking I'm just doing the same thing. But I see no reason whatsoever why I should implicitly trust every third-party your site links to or let assholes like Facebook track me on unrelated sites.

In 2007, Facebook launched a service called Beacon that aimed to help people “share” their online shopping activity with their friends. As a result, when Sean Lane bought a diamond ring for his wife on Overstock.com as a surprise gift for Christmas, he was shocked to find that his purchase was automatically posted to all 720 of his friends, including his wife. In 2009, Facebook agreed to pay \$9.5 million to settle a class action lawsuit over Beacon and to shut down the service.

Instead of dropping the idea of turning its users into free product advertisements, however, Facebook revived it in 2011 with a product called Sponsored Stories that allowed advertisers to buy the rights to republish a user’s post and display it to that user’s friends as an advertisement. In 2013, Facebook agreed to pay \$20 million to settle a class action lawsuit over Sponsored Stories.

But rather than do away with the product, Facebook simply added new language to its privacy policy to make it clear to users that Facebook has the right to use its customers’ images and posts in advertisements. In other words, Facebook has been waging a multi-year war to be able to turn its users’ conversations into ads that it can sell. Google has since joined the fray, launching a similar program called “shared endorsements” that will turn users’ reviews, ratings, and comments into advertisements.

There is a study showing that an individual will respond more positively to a politician whose picture is subtly blended with his or her own photo. The change in the photo is undetectable, but it makes the viewer more receptive to the politician’s message. It turns out we like people more if they look like us. Now imagine if a social network were to offer a comparable service, permitting advertisers to blend their spokesperson with the user’s own profile picture. It is not a far leap from our current state of bathtub ads following us around. After all, if food engineers can design junk food to specifically target our taste buds in a way that makes us consume more, and gambling companies can build slot machines that encourage us to play more, why won’t marketers design their online presence to manipulate us in new ways?

In the months leading up to the November 2012 presidential election, Google took its guesses into the political realm in a controversial way. Searchers who looked up Barack Obama saw news about the president threaded into their future searches on other topics. Searchers who looked up Mitt Romney did not see news about the Republican presidential candidate included in subsequent searches. Google said that the disparity was simply the result of the mathematical formula it was using to predict users’ queries.

Google’s technologists viewed their effort as helping us figure out the answer to our needs before we know we have those needs. But it is worth

noting that if a newspaper did the same thing—inserted Obama news into articles about toothpaste for certain readers—it would be roundly called out as biased and intrusive. Similarly, a newspaper would be called out if it placed only gay ads in the papers of subscribers it deemed to be gay, or diabetes treatment ads in the papers of subscribers it guessed had the disease. Does technology immunize Google from something that would not otherwise be socially acceptable?

In a dream world, politicians would navigate countless targeted safe zones so that they could tailor their pitch for every subgroup—without letting the others see it. One candidate could be many candidates, with each part of the electorate seeing only the parts they liked. The convergence of Big Data and consumer marketing now provides politicians with powerful tools to attempt to do just that. They can target microgroups of citizens for both votes and money and appeal to each of them with a meticulously honed message, one that no one else is likely to see. It might be a banner on Facebook or a fund-raising email. But each one allows candidates to quietly sell multiple versions of themselves—and it's anyone's guess which version will show up for work after inauguration.

These tactics aren't limited to campaigns. They infect our civic life, with lobbyists and interest groups now using these targeting methods to carry out their dirty work. In 2015, the Center for Medical Progress, an antiabortion group, posted videos featuring what they claimed was an aborted fetus at a Planned Parenthood clinic. The videos asserted that Planned Parenthood doctors were selling baby parts for research, and they spurred a wave of protest, and a Republican push to eliminate the organization's funding. Research later showed that the video had been doctored: the so-called fetus was actually a photo of a stillborn baby born to a woman in rural Pennsylvania. Plus, Planned Parenthood does not sell fetal tissue. The Center for Medical Progress admitted that the video contained misinformation. That weakened its appeal for a mass market. But with microtargeting, antiabortion activists could continue to build an audience for the video, despite the flawed premise, and use it to raise funds to fight Planned Parenthood.

While that campaign launched into public view, hundreds of others continue to hover below the surface, addressing individual voters. These quieter campaigns are equally deceptive and even less accountable. And they deliver ideological bombs that politicians will only hint at on the record. These groups pinpoint vulnerable voters and then target them with fear-mongering campaigns, scaring them about their children's safety or the rise of illegal immigration. At the same time, they can keep those ads from the eyes of voters likely to be turned off (or even disgusted) by such messaging.

As this happens, it will become harder to access the political messages our neighbors are seeing—and as a result, to understand why they believe what they do, often passionately. Even a nosy journalist will struggle to track down the messaging. It is not enough simply to visit the candidate's web page, because they, too, automatically profile and target each visitor, weighing everything from their zip codes to the links they click on the page, even the photos they appear to look at. It's also fruitless to create dozens of fake profiles, because the systems associate each real voter with deep accumulated knowledge, including purchasing records, addresses, phone numbers, voting records, social security numbers, and Facebook profiles. To convince the system it's real, each fake would have to come with its own load of data. Fabricating one would require far too much work for a research project, and in the worst-case scenario it might get the investigator tangled up in fraud. The result of these subterranean campaigns is a dangerous imbalance. The political marketers maintain deep dossiers on us, feed us a trickle of information, and measure how we respond to it. But we're kept in the dark about what our neighbors are being fed. This resembles a common tactic used by business negotiators. They deal with different parties separately so that none of them knows what the other is hearing. This asymmetry of information prevents the various parties from joining forces—which is precisely the point of a democratic government.

The owners of powerful companies will always have their own interests and agendas. If they have the means to promote and protect their self-interest and deep beliefs, refraining from the opportunity will require restraint that isn't universally present in human beings. That temptation grows even stronger when technology permits hidden-hand interventions in the political process. It's foolish to believe that it can't happen here, when it already has.

At the federal level, this problem could be greatly alleviated by abolishing the Electoral College system. It's the winner-take-all mathematics from state to state that delivers so much power to a relative handful of voters. It's as if in politics, as in economics, we have a privileged one percent. And the money from the financial one percent underwrites the microtargeting to secure the votes of the political one percent. Without the Electoral College, by contrast, every vote would be worth exactly the same. That would be a step toward democracy.

As is often the case, the very same models that inflict damage could be used to humanity's benefit. Instead of targeting people in order to manipulate them, it could line them up for help. In a mayoral race, for example, a microtargeting campaign might tag certain voters for angry messages about unaffordable rents. But if the candidate knows these voters

are angry about rent, how about using the same technology to identify the ones who will most benefit from affordable housing and then help them find it? With political messaging, as with most algorithms, the heart of the problem is almost always the objective. Change that objective from leeching off people to helping them and the model can potentially become a force for good.

While more fairness and justice would of course benefit society as a whole, individual companies are not positioned to reap the rewards. For most of them, in fact, algorithms appear to be highly effective. Entire business models, such as for-profit universities and payday loans, are built upon them. And when a software program successfully targets people desperate enough to pay 18 percent a month, those raking in the profits think it's working just fine.

In our society, where money buys influence, these victims of models are nearly voiceless. Most are disenfranchised politically. Indeed, all too often the poor are blamed for their poverty, their bad schools, and the crime that afflicts their neighborhoods. That's why few politicians even bother with antipoverty strategies. In the common view, the ills of poverty are more like a disease, and the effort—or at least the rhetoric—is to quarantine it and keep it from spreading to the middle class. We need to think about how we assign blame in modern life and how models exacerbate this cycle. Human decision-making, while often flawed, has one chief virtue: it can evolve. As human beings learn and adapt, we change, and so do our processes. Automated systems, by contrast, stay stuck in time until engineers dive in to change them.

In a sense, our society is struggling with a new industrial revolution. And we can draw some lessons from the last one. The turn of the twentieth century was a time of great progress. People could light their houses with electricity and heat them with coal. Modern railroads brought in meat, vegetables, and canned goods from a continent away. For many, the good life was getting better. Yet this progress had a gruesome underside. It was powered by horribly exploited workers, many of them children. In the absence of health or safety regulations, coal mines were death traps. In 1907 alone, 3,242 miners died. Meatpackers worked twelve to fifteen hours a day in filthy conditions and often shipped toxic products. Armour and Co. dispatched cans of rotten beef by the ton to US Army troops, using a layer of boric acid to mask the stench. Meanwhile, rapacious monopolists dominated the railroads, energy companies, and utilities and jacked up customers' rates, which amounted to a tax on the national economy.

Clearly, the free market could not control its excesses. So after journalists like Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair exposed these and other problems, the

government stepped in. It established safety protocols and health inspections for food, and it outlawed child labor. With the rise of unions, and the passage of laws safeguarding them, our society moved toward eight-hour workdays and weekends off. These new standards protected companies that didn't want to exploit workers or sell tainted foods, because their competitors had to follow the same rules. And while they no doubt raised the costs of doing business, they also benefited society as a whole. Few of us would want to return to a time before they existed.

There's no fixing a backward model like the value-added model. The only solution in such a case is to ditch the unfair system. Forget, at least for the next decade or two, about building tools to measure the effectiveness of a teacher. It's too complex to model, and the only available data are crude proxies. The model is simply not good enough yet to inform important decisions about the people we trust to teach our children. That's a job that requires subtlety and context. Even in the age of Big Data, it remains a problem for humans to solve. Of course, the human analysts, whether the principal or administrators, should consider lots of data, including the students' test scores. They should incorporate positive feedback loops. These are the angelic cousins of the pernicious feedback loops we've come to know so well. A positive loop simply provides information to the data scientist—or to the automatic system—so that the model can be improved. In this case, it's simply a matter of asking teachers and students alike if the evaluations make sense for them, if they understand and accept the premises behind them. If not, how could they be enhanced? Only when we have an ecosystem with positive feedback loops can we expect to improve teaching using data. Until then it's just punitive.

The problem is that when we outsource thinking to machines, we are really outsourcing thinking to the organizations that run the machines. Organizing knowledge is an ancient pursuit. Those who toiled in this field over the centuries—librarians and bookstore owners, scholars and archivists—were trained to go about their work lovingly, almost worshipfully. A professional code implored them to treat their cargo as if the world depended on its safe transit through the generations. The tech companies share none of that concern.

The tech companies are destroying something precious, which is the possibility of contemplation. They have created a world in which we're constantly watched and always distracted. Through their accumulation of data, they have constructed a portrait of our minds, which they use to invisibly guide mass behavior—and increasingly individual behavior—to further their financial interests. Their most precious asset is our most precious asset, our attention, and they have abused it.

The somewhat surprising truth is that behavior consistently rewarded is in fact more prone to “extinction” than behavior inconsistently rewarded. Hope springs eternal. Of course, if we pause to consider this we might see it is not so counter-intuitive after all. Most of us will have experienced taking something for granted—a loved one, a service, a safety device, a feeling—and the potential in bustle of everyday experience to undervalue such things.

If, through the right combination of reminders, nudges, and virtual badges, we can get people to be “perfect citizens”—recycle, show up at elections, care about urban infrastructure—should we take advantage of the possibilities offered by smart technologies? Or should we, perhaps, accept that slacking off and idleness, in small doses, are productive in that they create spaces and openings where citizens can still be appealed to by deliberation and moral argument, not just the promise of a better shopping discount courtesy of their smartphone app? If problem solvers can get you to recycle via a game, would they even bother with the less effective and often more difficult path of engaging you in moral reasoning? The difference is that those people earning points in a game might end up not knowing anything about the problem they were solving, while those who had been through the argument would have at least a tiny chance of grasping the issue’s complexity and doing something that would matter in the years to come, not just today.

For those who are worried about the loss of privacy such practices seem to portend, Eric Schmidt tells us that it’s all inevitable anyway, nothing we can do about it.

“In the future, by the time a man is in his forties, he will have accumulated and stored a comprehensive online narrative, all facts and fictions, every misstep and every triumph, spanning every phase of his life. Even the rumors will live forever.”

The aim of such a statement, obviously, is to make Google’s scary business model seem like no big deal, just the future doing what comes naturally. Even so, the scary side keeps peeking through. Schmidt’s single most famous statement, delivered to a CNBC talker in 2009, is a direct rationalization of surveillance-for-profit:

“If you have something that you don’t want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn’t be doing it in the first place.”

The way to react to a world in which you are under observation at all times, in other words, is simply to never step out of line.

The truth is that many Americans may not see looking into a suspect's or defendant's mind without consent as a fundamental affront to human dignity.

We owe it to future generations to make an active choice on the proper balance between privacy and security. Given the different cultural backgrounds that people bring to the table, our best bet may be to think about things from the perspective of someone who knew she would one day be accused of a crime but did not know whether she would be innocent or guilty. With that outlook, we wouldn't go down the road to routine police questioning using brain scans until the science was very settled indeed. We might, however, be supportive of a defendant's right to bring in even imperfect proof of truthfulness. There's no reason that prosecutors and defendants should have to meet the same hurdles when it comes to lie-detection evidence. And in a period of less than absolute certainty, it seems fitting that mind-reading technology should serve as a shield rather than a sword.

Though Facebook will occasionally talk about the transparency of governments and corporations, what it really wants to advance is the transparency of individuals—or what it has called, at various moments, “radical transparency” or “ultimate transparency.” The theory holds that the sunshine of sharing our intimate details will disinfect the moral mess of our lives. Even if we don't intend for our secrets to become public knowledge, their exposure will improve society. With the looming threat that our embarrassing information will be broadcast, we'll behave better. And perhaps the ubiquity of incriminating photos and damning revelations will prod us to become more tolerant of one another's sins. Besides, there's virtue in living our lives truthfully. According to the wise sage, Mark Zuckerberg:

“The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly. Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity.”

The answer is simple: troves of personal data can and will be abused. Consider one of the oldest and supposedly innocuous dragnets of all: the US Census. The confidentiality of personal information collected by the census is protected by law, and yet census data have been repeatedly abused. During World War I, it was used to locate draft violators. During World War II, the Census Bureau provided the names and addresses of Japanese-American residents to the US Secret Service. The information was used to round up Japanese residents and place them in internment camps. It was not until 2000 that the Census Bureau issued a formal apology for its behavior.

And in 2002 and 2003, the Census Bureau provided statistical information about Arab-Americans to the Department of Homeland Security. After bad publicity, it revised its policies to require that top officials approve requests from other agencies for sensitive information such as race, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and sexual orientation.

The United States is not alone in abusing population statistics. Australia used population registration data to force the migration of aboriginal people at the turn of the twentieth century. In South Africa, the census was a key instrument of the state's apartheid system of racial segregation. During the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Tutsi victims were targeted with the help of ID cards that indicated their ethnicity. During the Holocaust, France, Poland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Germany used population data to locate Jews for extermination.

A simple truth: information is power. Anyone who holds a vast amount of information about us has power over us. At first, the information age promised to empower individuals with access to previously hidden information. We could comparison shop across the world for the best price, for the best bit of knowledge, for people who shared our views. But now the balance of power is shifting and large institutions—both governments and corporations—are gaining the upper hand in the information wars, by tracking vast quantities of information about mundane aspects of our lives. Now we are learning that people who hold our data can subject us to embarrassment, or drain our pocketbooks, or accuse us of criminal behavior. This knowledge could, in turn, create a culture of fear.

In a study of psychological effects of Stasi surveillance about thirty individuals who had had direct encounters with the secret police were interviewed. It was found that their fear of another Stasi encounter had prompted them either to become model citizens or to withdraw from society. Researchers concluded that people who encountered the Stasi internalized repression into “the body's wrinkles and the brain's mechanisms.”

It's been known since at least 2008 that mass surveillance in the US suppresses any behavior seen as minority behavior, undesirable behavior, or weak behavior, and this is a huge effect.

This is the truly insidious nature of self-censorship: it does the gag work more efficiently than an army of bullying and meddling media moguls could ever hope to accomplish.

Research shows that covert surveillance can cause anxiety and self-repression in adults. In children, surveillance appears to do something particularly depressing: it undermines their enthusiasm to learn. A landmark 1975 study concluded that adult surveillance of children had the effect of “turning play into work,” dampening the children's enthusiasm for playing

with an interesting puzzle. In the study, children were left alone in a room with a camera pointed at them and told that an adult would be watching them through the camera as they played with the puzzle. The next time the surveilled children were presented with the puzzle in a normal classroom setting, they had far less interest in playing with it than the control group. “The knowledge that one’s performance at a task is being observed and evaluated by someone else appears sufficient to decrease later interest in the task,” wrote the study’s authors.

The children’s enthusiasm for the puzzle declined even further when they were given explicit rewards for playing with the puzzle. Children were shown enticing toys and told that they could play with them if they did a good job on the puzzles. The next time that they were presented with the puzzle in a normal classroom setting, their interest in the puzzle fell even further. The researchers concluded that the best way to interest children in an activity is to “employ the minimal amount of pressure sufficient to elicit or maintain the desired behavior.”

Many of us always cared about privacy, even as kids. As a kid, we were concerned about parental surveillance. Now we are concerned about corporate and governmental surveillance. Over time, our threat model has simply changed.

The limitations to speech we allow to be imposed on us now will impact our governance as surely as moats and mountains did in the past.

“Encryption by itself is not enough. If you don’t influence your government as well, eventually encryption (by you) will be illegal with penalties equivalent to murder.”

Well fuck then, if I’m a murderer either way, might as well do me some real, old-fashioned murdering.

Brandenburg v. Ohio, overturned the criminal conviction of a Ku Klux Klan leader who had threatened violence against political officials in a speech. The Court said that the First Amendment guarantees of free speech and free press are so strong that they “do not permit a State to forbid or proscribe advocacy of the use of force.”

I’m thinking and might have even texted some guy about possibly buying drugs. Better lock me up because thinking or discussing things is the same as doing.

I used my gardening skills to help a friend in IRC with his grow op. Better lock me up for intent to cultivate and distribute.

My friends and I planned how to rob a bank and procured all the necessary materials but didn't rob one. Better lock us up for this horrible crime we've committed against society.

Information is not harmful, direct action is. Open your eyes.

If there has been no harmful action, then there is nothing but speech, information, thoughts and ideas, and tools, which may or may not translate into direct action in the future. Attacks and punishments for anything less than direct action is simply oppressive and unjust.

A greater risk of physical harm is much better than allowing the government to deprive individuals of rights and justice before any harm has been caused.

We don't devote huge amounts of resources to surveil and track corporate executives and their plans around how to possibly skirt some regulation or law to make more money, maybe polluting and sickening some people in the process. This ideology has harmed far more individuals directly than radical Islam yet here we are hunting down these people for their thoughts and discussions and collection of tools without any actual harm to show for it.

“If someone posted online threats to kill X, repeatedly, then met with groups that advocated X's murder, discussed specific technical details of how to kill him, searched for methods and materials to kill him, and the FBI knew all of this, what would you have them do? Wait until the bomb went off?”

There's a lot of words there designed to hide what you're really saying:

What would you have them do? Wait until an actual crime was committed before acting?

And of course you conveniently leave out the option of stopping them during the commission of the crime, when it is quite clear that they are not simply sharing information and thoughts but directly acting.

The object of efficient totalitarian states is to create a climate in which people do not think of rebelling, a climate in which incarceration and state-sanctioned murder are used against only a handful of unmanageable renegades. The totalitarian state achieves this control by systematically shutting down all human spontaneity—and by extension, human freedom—through fear. This fear and loss of spontaneity keep a population traumatized and immobilized and turn the courts, along with legislative bodies, into mechanisms that legalize the crimes of state.

A successful movement must contain a willingness to accept death or suffering as a possible consequence. Or an exit strategy that allows oneself

to get away to live and fight another day. An over militarized police takes care of one and Big Brother takes care of the other.

A system that is overwhelmingly powerful relies on everyone in power to act perfectly—so much has to go right to prevent meaningful abuse.

What advancements are we making impossible today—at the societal level—by creating a mass surveillance society where all laws, rules, and expectations are increasingly expected to be followed, and where the celebration of misfits are emptier words than ever before? Where privacy is no longer guaranteed, but rather prevented, by those governments which are supposed to uphold it?

“He had used the Internet as a teenager to explore ideas and speak with people in faraway places and from radically different backgrounds whom he’d never otherwise have encountered.

‘Basically, the Internet allowed me to experience freedom and explore my full capacity as a human being. For many kids, the Internet is a means of self-actualization. It allows them to explore who they are and who they want to be, but that works only if we’re able to be private and anonymous, to make mistakes without them following us. I worry that mine was the last generation to enjoy that freedom.’”

Freedom is not merely the opportunity to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them—and then, the opportunity to choose.

When people ask me why I care about privacy, I always return to the simple thought that I want there to be safe, private spaces in the world for myself, for everybody. I want there to be room in the digital world for letters sealed with hot wax. Must we always be writing postcards that can—and will—be read by anyone along the way? Do we want to live in a world where we are always at risk of being hacked? A world where we can always be found, we can’t keep secrets, we can be watched even in our own homes, we can be impersonated, we can be trapped in a hall of mirrors, we can be financially manipulated and put in a police lineup?

Perhaps the most famous formulation of what privacy means and why it is so universally and supremely desired was offered by US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis in the 1928 case *Olmstead v. US*:

“The right to be left alone is the most comprehensive of rights, and the right most valued by a free people.”

The value of privacy, he wrote, “is much broader in scope” than mere civic freedoms. It is, he said, fundamental:

“The makers of our Constitution undertook to secure conditions favorable to the pursuit of happiness. They recognized the significance of man’s spiritual nature, of his feelings and of his intellect. They knew that only a part of the pain, pleasure, and satisfactions of life are to be found in material things. They sought to protect Americans in their beliefs, their thoughts, their emotions and their sensations. They conferred, as against the Government, the right to be let alone.”

In the chaos of the great crime bill orgy of 1970, many senators would vote on bills that took predatory swipes at civil liberties protections dating back centuries—with little knowledge of what was actually in them. Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield—the highest-ranking member of the Senate after the vice president—was typical. Mansfield said at one point that he was so overwhelmed, he’d just given up on trying to figure out if some of the laws he was voting on were constitutional. He said he’d just vote for them all and let the courts sort it out.

“The Alice-in-Wonderland nature of this pronouncement is not lost on me; but after careful and extensive consideration, I find myself stuck in a paradoxical situation in which I cannot solve a problem because of contradictory constraints and rules—a veritable Catch-22. I can find no way around the thicket of laws and precedents that effectively allow the Executive Branch of our Government to proclaim as perfectly lawful certain actions that seem on their face incompatible with our Constitution and laws, while keeping the reasons for their conclusion a secret.”

All individuals have a right to privacy. All organizations and actions which affect the public must be completely transparent to the public. These principles do not work in isolation; the fault is not with the principles, but the isolation.

The lack of importance placed on privacy may also be directly related to the rule by extroverts we have been subjected to since the beginnings of society. Until we had the internet, the leaders of large crowds were almost always charismatic people with a gift for public speaking and a natural resistance to personal attack, belonging to powerful demographic groups. As the internet has gained in power to the point where it is a direct threat to those currently holding power, as liquid feedback replaces public shouting

matches, the powerful in the molecular world have sought to expose and control those in the online world. Any involuntary exposure has been met by violent reaction from the internet as it is the first place for many that has ever felt like a safe place to speak. One reason Anonymous and the internet in general has had a low opinion of those who seek personal fame may be that the internet is well populated by those who have been persecuted and had their voices repressed by others who easily acquire fame and social power.

The voices of the 50% of the population who are naturally more introverted and almost everyone eliminated from mainstream forums for one reason or another, are at least as important as those currently heard. This, however, completely changes the society we are accustomed to, if the voiceless suddenly gain voices, if the creators no longer need the marketers, women do not need to speak through men, and children, the elderly, discriminated minorities, the ostracized of all societies can suddenly speak and have their messages amplified as well as anyone else. This would eliminate huge swathes of industry from communication and representative types of roles, everything from politicians, to media, to marketing companies and NGOs. Not at all coincidentally, all of the lobby groups attempting to control the internet, strip privacy and anonymity, and manage access are from the groups who would no longer be required if everyone had a voice.

Assemblies and all other group and public activities have continued the oligarchies of the extroverts.

Even more than privacy, anonymity is viewed as a hostile act by those in power. A culture in which fame is the ultimate achievement cannot understand the value of ownerless ideas and shape-shifting personas. Anonymity has been equated almost exclusively with criminal activity by politicians and lawmakers.

These are the salient points that have actually changed people's minds, or at least made them seriously reconsider their position on privacy, in my day to day encounters. I tend to pick two from these four, and tailor them to the person that I'm talking to, to talk about the things that they probably value the most.

The Society Argument: Privacy may not be critically important to you, but it is crucial to consider how it impacts all of us collectively. There are rights that are taken for granted that can be dismantled if privacy is lost, that will lead to a worse world to live in. The loss of things like doctor-patient confidentiality; attorney-client privilege; the ability to maintain important business secrets, for reporters to maintain

confidential sources, for whistle-blowers to report wrongdoing at their workplaces, and to go about your everyday lives is crucial.

The Chinese censor the news and monitor internet traffic to identify potential dissidents and send them to “reeducation camps.” They are also implementing a national social credit score, where doing things like speaking out against the government, or talking to someone who does, can inhibit your ability to travel, get a job, and live your life. In Bangladesh, bloggers who speak out against Islam are murdered when their online identities are tied to their real ones. The US has had a number of recent incidents where whistle-blowers are being hunted—and no, this is not limited to the Bad Orange Man.

The Security Argument: To understand the impact of mass surveillance it is crucially important to understand the damage that surveillance programs do to worldwide standards and digital security. Making software do what we want it to is the hallmark problem of this century. As things are now, adding complexity to any system makes it less secure, and surveillance does exactly that. The governments of the world are constantly pushing to make systems less secure so that they can continue mass surveillance effectively. These policies lead us down a road where billions of dollars are lost and data breaches are daily news. Even the strongest systems in the world are not impervious to attack, as we saw with the Office of Personnel Management hack that leaked information about active American spies. We should be building the most secure systems we can and not worrying about spying, especially considering the next two arguments.

The Bad Actor Argument: It is important to consider that collected information is permanent, and just because you may support or accept the current administration in your country, it may not be there in the future. You may trust the people who have access to your data now, but will you trust every person who ever has access to your information for the rest of your life? The Axis powers in WWII used detailed dossiers gathered by countries long before the war to effectively find and exterminate Jewish citizens. Or, if we want to look to a more modern slice of history, our Facebook data is actively used against us by political actors, both domestic and foreign. In Egypt they use social media and Internet monitoring to find and punish gay people. The Iranians use the web to find people who violate religious law, who are then charged with “spreading corruption on earth.”

The Utilitarian Argument: The equipment that it takes to conduct mass surveillance is ludicrously expensive, and there's no real evidence that all of that expenditure is even marginally effective. There's better ways to use all of that money, even if you just want to keep more of it in your own pocket.

Not everyone will be convinced. But many people will be, as I've never heard an effective argument against any of these points. It is important to make them consider the real-world consequences that their position has, and to broach the topic in a way that is non-confrontational and allows them to dwell on the new information that you've given them.

Often, this provides a great base of ideas and leads a person who hasn't given the topic much thought at all to grow into a supporter of internet privacy.

Human Sacrifice

Camouflaged Oppression

If we could see the emotional scars, the still raw, red, infected wounds, what would we do? Would a mass of the working class today look any less disfigured than one composed of those eaten by the machines of the industrial revolution?

Structural violence is the war of the billionaires and millionaires against the rest of us, marks and suckers born every second in their eyes. Disaster Capitalism is violence. Parasitic investing is war. Hostile takeovers are. Hedge funds poisoning retirement funds and billions wasted, stolen with fees to “manage” this dirty money are war. Forced arbitration is war. PayDay loans are war. Wells Fargo stealing homes is war. Lead in New Jersey cities’ pipes is war. Hog excrement, toxins, blood, aborted fetuses, and pond scum sprayed onto land near poor communities is war.

Fence-lining polluting industries against poor and minority populations is war. Placing garbage dumps, oil refineries, and other hazardous manufacturing operations in the midst of black communities is a continuation of the Jim Crow policies that have existed in one form or another, legally or illegally, since slavery. The evidence has been before us for decades that the lower class have been getting sick and enduring horrible deaths from the filth that they breathe, eat, drink, and otherwise ingest from the garbage dumps, landfills, incinerators, toxic waste sites, oil refineries, petrochemical plants and other world-class generators of pollution that have been deliberately and relentlessly installed in the neighborhoods where they live, work, worship, and go to school. Government and industry alike have used poor neighborhoods as dumping grounds for the vilest and most dangerous of pollutants.

War is making it illegal to sit on a curb, holding a sign asking for a handout; so is the fact there are millions of empty buildings collecting black mold and tax deferments. War is offshore accounts, and war is a society plugged into forced, perceived, and planned obsolescence.

Human sacrifice props up the social order. We must recognize this still occurs instead of simply looking down on the “savages” we are presumed to have long since surpassed in morality. At least one contemporary practice is the death penalty.

People die. One of the powers of a leader in our society is to decide who dies when, where, how, and most importantly, why.

Haven't the tens of thousands of deaths since Obama and his courtiers gave us Obamacare instead of single payer been sacrificed on the altar of insurance company profits and elite power in general? What about Terror Tuesdays? We even had a Jesuit in on the “disposition.” Is not war at some level a contest to see who can pile up more lucky stiffes on their altars? ‘We can kill more of you, faster, so bow down.’

Or highway deaths. Or deaths from pollution from power plants. Or workplace deaths. Or deaths from despair?

We daily sacrifice thousands for our vaunted “way of life.” But the Steven Pinkers will tell us: ‘Yes, thousands die every day, but that’s what it takes to provide us with our modern way of life. So if you like modern comforts, don’t complain. Plus, it’s better than ever!’

Human sacrifice is alive and well right here and now. We’ve just learned not to see it so explicitly—hard to enjoy modern comforts with knowledge of those we deliberately sacrifice to obtain them. It certainly helps that John Hopkins has not made a fancy video-game-esque dashboard to track such sacrifices, that there is no constantly updated ticker, scrolling below, above, alongside your favorite pretty propagandist. No daily published death counts; no somber, serious press conferences by shitbags like Andrew Cuomo—now there’s a fantastic example of much of what is wrong with American politics in one family: dynastic political power combined with narrative control through the media. Who’s excited for ‘Cuomo 2024’? We are. And Fredo, we hope your sniffles weren’t too bad, and that your tooth is OK—I’m sure you can use your high-quality private health insurance to get it fixed, you’ll be a pretty propagandist once more—we want you healthy so we can use you like the tool you are. Using fever dreams to peddle your authoritarian bullshit—what an asshat.

From forty acres and a mule to the Great Society to subprime, it was the same swindle, over and over and over again: promises that turned into brutal obligations that turned into life-ruining debt and neighborhood-destroying foreclosures for some and massive windfall profits for others.

It is the quiet decisions, the individual judicial rulings and laws and executive orders—generally fashioned by well-meaning people, often in the plain light of day but overlooked for their homeliness, their implications lost in the weeds of their small details—that make possible the fiascos, the

follies, and the excesses that turn governments into the enemies of their constituents. For every Cheney mongering fear and nurturing paranoia, there are many officials quietly going about their business—drafting legislation, writing legal opinions, arguing in court—thinking they are doing the right thing but failing to grasp that in their wish to protect the country, they are in fact betraying it. And in no part of government has that betrayal by accretion, the death of liberty by a thousand cuts, been more momentous, or more disturbing, than in the institutions of justice—the courts, the laws, and the Justice Department.

“By the way, where are we on the slippery moral slope?”

Good question, let us analyze:

- Are we at the top: No. Guantanamo, et cetera.
- Are we at the bottom? No. This new injustice is not all encompassing.
- Are we ascending or descending? This is a new injustice—therefore descending.

We have a vector, but no absolute position.

- Do we have concentration camps? Not for a mass of citizens based on race. No. We are better than those guys.
- Do we have rule of law? Maybe, those in Chicago might disagree, as might many black citizens.
- Do we have an accountable parliament? No. See: health care. We are worse than those guys.

Hey we are both better and worse than those guys—does that put us in the middle?

Conclusion:

- We are on the slippery slope, in motion (not stationary) and sliding downwards.
- The position is sort of in the middle of the slope (with considerable uncertainty—measured by rights lost and gained)
- The velocity is not measurable, because the unit scale is not defined (How many named rights do we have, and how many rights per week abridged).

Process to measure and correct the system:

1. Name and enumerate the rights
2. Measure how many abridged by whom from what group on a time line
3. Deduce velocity and acceleration
4. Invent brakes? This may have something to do with elections and corruption.
5. Apply brakes! Stop the descent.
6. Climb back up slippery slope—needs a solid push from below (Typically considered as climbing over corpses).

Here's what I learned about Fear, American Style: The worst, most terrible things that the United States has done have almost never happened through an assault on American institutions; they've always happened *through* American institutions and practices. These are the elements of the American polity that have offered especially potent tools and instruments of intimidation and coercion: federalism, the separation of powers, social pluralism, and the rule of law. All the elements of the American experience that liberals and conservatives have so cherished as bulwarks of American freedom have also been sources and instruments of political fear. In all the cases I looked at, coercion, intimidation, repression, and violence were leveraged through these mechanisms, not in spite of them.

This is a country which eradicated whole civilizations from coast to coast. This is a country that managed to enslave—to torture and drive unto death, both physical and social—millions of black men, women, and their children, for over two centuries, and then to re-enslave them by another name for another century, not by shredding the Constitution but by writing and interpreting and executing the Constitution. This is a country that managed to mow down trade unionists and dissenters, to arrest and throw them into jail, to destroy vibrant social movements, to engineer a near-complete rout of American social democracy after World War II, to build and fill concentration camps, to pass legislation during the Cold War authorizing internment camps: all without a strongman; indeed, often with the collusion of some of the most esteemed voices of liberty in the country.

This is a country that in the last half-century has managed to undo some of the precious achievements of liberal civilization—the ban and revulsion against torture, the prohibition on preventive war, the right to organize, the

skepticism of the imperial executive—through lawyers, genteel men of the Senate with their august traditions and practices, and the Supreme Court.

When it comes to the most terrible kinds of repression and violence, Fear, American Style has worked because it has given so many players a piece of the pie. The most prized elements of American constitutionalism—shared and fragmented power, compromise and consent, dispersed authority—are the very things that have animated and underwritten Fear, American Style.

Freedom in America is an illusion and the powerful interlocking interests working to the disadvantage of common humanity must be challenged repeatedly and tirelessly.

Unlike political theory, the Constitution not only offers us a picture of reality but through the state's monopoly on violence, it forces citizens to act, or at least to speak, "as if." Acting as if the rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of the individual, and the neutrality of the state, all of which are inscribed in the Constitution, are more than formally true inhibits people's ability to recognize that they are all practically false, that the society set up with the help of the Constitution simply does not operate in these ways.

It is not a matter of reality failing to live up to a set of commendable ideals but of these ideals serving to help mask this reality through misrepresenting what is legal for what is actual, what is permissible in law for what is possible in society.

When does an ideal become a barrier to the realization of what it supposedly promotes? When people are encouraged to treat the ideal as a description, however imperfect, of the real, as in the claim that ours is a society ruled by law, where whatever actually exists that goes counter to this claim is relegated to the role of a passing qualification.

Viewed in this way, the dynamics of who is doing what to whom and why, together with the structural reforms needed to change things, can never be understood.

Freedom has little meaning without reference to power. Those who claim to be on the side of freedom while ignoring the growing imbalance of economic and political power in America and other advanced economies are not in fact on the side of freedom. They are on the side of those with the power.

Gandhi said one of the crucial roles for anyone who wants to change anything is to make the oppression visible—to give it a physical shape.

"If a white man wants to lynch me, that's his problem. If he's got the power to lynch me, that's my problem. Racism is not a question of attitude; it's a question of power. Racism gets

its power from capitalism. Thus, if you're anti-racist, whether you know it or not, you must be anti-capitalist. The power for racism, the power for sexism, comes from capitalism, not an attitude."

—Stokely Carmichael

As nightfall does not come at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there is a twilight when everything remains seemingly unchanged. And it is in such twilight that we all must be most aware of change in the air—however slight—lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness.

We should not judge the past by the standards of the present. Darwin wrote about "savages;" we wouldn't. But then, we use words that our great-grandchildren will be shocked by, too—though which ones: wife? veal chops? But we should not judge the past by the standards of the past either—if we did that, we'd smile politely as some of our ancestors burned books, and nod understandingly as others burned witches—and some of us would be nodding as both our ancestors and their books got burned. We should judge the past by the standards of the best voices that were heard within it.

Europe's use of slaves dropped after the fall of the Western Roman Empire with the increase in serfs and indentured servants and the decrease in trade. Europe was still frequently raided for slaves for all reasons, particularly the Slavs who were so often raided that the condition of slavery became synonymous with their name. Possibly three-million Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Circassians, and Lithuanians were enslaved by Central Asian khanates between 1500–1774 or six-and-a-half-million between 1200 to 1760, in a trade several authors have dubbed the "harvesting of the steppe." The great Russian historian Vasily Klyuchevsky observed:

"If you consider how much time and spiritual and material strength was wasted in the monotonous, brutal, toilsome, and painful pursuit of [the Tatar] steppe predators, one need not ask what people in Eastern Europe were doing while those of Western Europe advanced in industry and commerce, in civil life and in the arts and sciences."

In the era of abolition, slavery was depicted in American colonies as a problem of racial equality. This approach disregards the entire history of global slavery which took place before racism was invented and which hasn't been slowed at all by attempts to eliminate racism. The international focus on one part of the historical trade, labour slaves from Africa to European colonies, in particular the United States, has allowed all other slavery to

operate with varying levels of impunity. When slavery becomes so visible it can't escape notice, it is now called human trafficking. While the new term focuses on the sale of people rather than the use of them, they are both incomplete terms and the only reason to swap one for the other is to pretend that there was a point in history where slavery was abolished and now it is a historical topic. While there may no longer be African slaves picking cotton in the United States, there is unprecedented slave labour in the United States from the rest of the Americas and even more slaves from around the world in the United States sex industry. Despite the fact that there are far more books and papers discussing the end of slavery than the continuation of it, slavery has increased in almost every part of the world.

Slavery, like genocide, is a problem that has been with us in every region and every era. To our credit, both are now almost universally recognized as something we need to overcome, but we are nowhere close to doing so. Both are largely ignored by both media and public, perhaps because those whose job it is to see that these crimes do not go on are helpless to stop them. Despite the attempts at creating peacekeeping forces by the United Nations and others, we have not developed a way for larger society to protect one group of people who another are intent on massacring. Neither do we have any way to stop a lucrative trade economy in any product, particularly when many of those profiting occupy powerful positions. It is easier to pretend these things no longer happen.

It makes sense that slavery and environmental destruction would go hand in hand. In some ways they spring from the same root. Our consumer economy is driven at its most basic level by resource extraction, pulling things from the earth, an extraction that we never actually see. We pull food from the earth, of course, but we also pull our cellphones from the earth, our clothing, our computers, our flat-screen televisions, our cars—it all comes from the earth, ultimately. And pulling things from the earth can be a dirty business. To make our consumer economy hum and grow and instantly gratify, costs are driven down as low as they can go, especially at the bottom of the supply chain; this can lead to abusive conditions for workers and harm to the natural world. Taken to the extreme it means slavery and catastrophic environmental destruction. But all this normally happens far from any prying eyes. It's a hidden world that keeps its secrets.

It turns out that the foundations of our ingenious new economy rest on the forceful extraction of minerals in places where laws do not work and criminals control everything.

Exhausted, hollow-eyed children, wasted sinewy men, and women with blank stares float through the mist like ghosts and cower when swaggering soldiers pass. Their fear is real.

“This is where the girls are butchered like goats. And if anyone is suspected of swallowing precious minerals, they just cut open their bellies.”

The supply chain that reaches from the Bisie mine to the phone in your pocket has around eleven steps, the last two being the retailer where we buy our goods and ourselves, the ultimate consumers of the cellphones, laptops, and everything else. Since most businesses don't want slavery in their products, the lies told to hide slavery cluster most thickly at the beginning of the supply chain. The sense of guilt or responsibility for the origin of the base materials fades at every step on the chain—until it is completely extinguished in the minds of many consumers.

While accountants are pressing hard on their suppliers, it is that same pressure that echoes all the way back to the mines in the Congo. Back in the mines, money is driving slavery, high up the supply chain, money is driving a blind eye to slavery. And the money that ultimately drives both is the spending and bargain hunting by consumers.

At the very beginning of the twentieth century there was an unquenchable demand in America and Europe for an amazing new technology—air-filled rubber tires. The Age of the Railroad was ending. Henry Ford was making cars by the million, bicycles were pouring out of factories, freight was moving in gasoline-powered trucks, and they all ran on rubber. The Congo had more natural rubber than anywhere else. To meet this demand King Leopold II of Belgium, in one of the greatest scams in history, tricked local tribes into signing away their lands and lives in bogus treaties that none of them could read. He sold these “concessions” to speculators who used torture and murder to drive whole communities into the jungle to harvest rubber. The profits from the slave-driving concessions were stupendous.

Wild rubber, as well as elephant ivory for piano keys and decoration, was ripped out of the forests at an incredible human cost. Experts believe that ten-million people died. It is the great forgotten genocide of the twentieth century—the Holocaust marketing team had access to better PR-folks. One witness was an African-American journalist named George Washington Williams. He coined the phrase “crimes against humanity” to describe what he saw.

The same cycle that fueled the slavery and genocide of 1901 continues to revolve today, not just in Congo but around the world. It's a four-step process; simple in form yet complex in the way it plays out. In the rich half of the world step one arrives with great advertising fanfare. A new product is developed that will transform our lives and, suddenly, we can't live without it. Consumer demand drives production that, in turn, requires raw materials.

These materials might be foodstuffs or timber, steel or granite, or one of a hundred minerals from glittering gold and diamonds to muddy pebbles of coltan and tin.

Step two is the inevitable casting of a curse—the “resource curse” that falls on the poorest parts of the world when their muddy pebbles, little-used forest, or some other natural resource suddenly becomes extremely valuable. In a context of poverty and corruption the scramble for resource control is immediate and deadly. Kleptocratic governments swell with new riches that are used to buy the weapons that will keep them in power. But for every bloated dictator there are ten lean and hungry outsiders who also know how to use guns, and they lust for the money flowing down the product chain. Soon, civil war is a chronic condition, the infrastructure of small businesses, schools, and hospitals collapses, the unarmed population is terrorized and enslaved, and the criminal vultures settle down to a long and bloody feed.

Step three arrives as the pecking order stabilizes and gangs begin to focus less on fighting each other and more on increasing their profits. A little chaos is good for criminal business, but too much is disruptive, even for warlords. Black markets also need some stability, and with territories carved up and guns pointing at workers instead of other armed gangs, the lean and hungry men begin to grow fat themselves. Step four builds on this new stability that serves only the criminals. Secure in their power, the thugs ramp up production, finding new sources of raw materials and new pools of labor to exploit. Thus the curse has reached its full power. In that lawless, impoverished, unstable, remote region, slavery and environmental destruction flourish.

The shock of sexual assault is often the beginning of slavery, followed by grinding abuse and dangerous and degrading work that destroys the natural world. Rape is used to break the spirit and make the new slave more pliable, and that slave is then used as a tool against nature, crushing it to fund more violence and more slavery. This cycle of rape, slavery, and ecocide is not the work of lone criminals, but a vicious policy from the very top that brings new meaning to the term ‘total war.’

It is a truth that human beings survive what so often seems to be unsurvivable. At the same time, survivors are changed. The past is never dead. It’s not even past. How do we—and the men and women in the electronics companies who share our responsibility—make this right? The first step is just to admit what we’ve done and stop thinking we’re some kind of victim because conflict minerals have been foisted upon us. Yes, criminals tried hard to conceal what they were doing, but we created the market, rushing headlong into the wonders of our new electronics and demanding that they be cheap and plentiful. The corporations responded to our demand, and

we've done well out of it, but we were heedless of where all this great stuff was coming from. It's time to accept our responsibility. Then we can start to clean up the mess we helped to create.

That's the thing about criminals that commit slavery and ecocide, they hide what they do and make things hard to trace. But if you're making your living dealing in metals, whether in the form of jewelry or cellphones, you have a responsibility to not hurt other people while you make profits. The supply chain may be complicated; the morals are not. And, if we are the beneficiaries of the work of slaves and the devastation of the environment, our responsibility goes far beyond ensuring that we have clean laptops. If others paid for our favorite tools and toys with their bodies and minds, we owe them relief, care, and restitution. Without that their damage will roll like a hereditary disease down through the generations.

“When I was sixteen my father sent me to Dublar Char. My family, my parents, were very poor, and the economy was so bad, my parents sent me there. A recruiter came to our house. He told my parents he would give them 2,000 taka [\$29] if they'd let me come and work. He promised to pay them more later when I had earned more. He said the work was easy, you just cut fish and hang them on racks to dry, and there was plenty of food to eat. My parents needed the money and I wanted to help, so it was agreed and I left with the recruiter.

We traveled all night on a boat, it was cold but all right, and they gave me some rice. There were some other boys on the boat as well. In the morning we reached the island and the recruiter handed us over to a boss. Right away the boss began to shout at us, he told us we had to make our own shelter. He gave us tools and we began to cut poles and palm leaves. As we worked, one of the trees fell on one boy breaking his hand. The bones were pushing out, the skin all lumpy, the boss just sent him to a boat and told them to take him back.

Before we could finish the shelter, boats came to the island with the fish they'd caught that day. Now the work really started. As long as the boats came we had to keep working. First we'd wade into the water and carry baskets of fish to shore. Once several basket loads were spilled out on a mat some of us would begin to cut open the fish and clean them. Some fish had to be cut a certain way, others had to be split just right. As the cleaned and split fish piled up, other boys would run them over to the racks and hang them to dry. The racks were just poles

tied together, some were one level, maybe four feet high, but others were built up and up and you had to climb up eight, ten, twelve feet or more to put fish on the different levels.

It was cold. We were always cold and wet. My clothes would be soaked from wading into the water to the boats, and the fish guts were everywhere, splashing onto us as we cut them open. We sat on the wet ground all night. If we slowed down or stopped the boss would hit us, if we weren't moving fast when we hung the fish on the racks he'd hit us with a long stick he carried. All the time he'd yell at us, calling us filthy names. Some boats brought their catch at night, others just at dawn. Often we'd have to work twenty-four hours straight. Maybe we'd be able to snatch a little sleep. The boss made us keep going as long as there were fish to clean and hang on the racks. The longer I worked, I'd get exhausted and clumsy. Sometimes I'd cut myself with the gutting knife or slip and fall from the drying rack. If you were cut or hurt, you had to keep working. Whenever I made a mistake, the boss would hit me.

About twelve of us slept in the same shelter, and we got one meal a day. The recruiter lied about the food. The boss would give us 250 grams of old dried lentils for the whole group, and we'd make a thin soup. There were bits of fish around but we couldn't eat them. There were fish guts everywhere, everything stank of fish, we didn't want to eat fish, we were sick of fish. Sometimes, if we got really hungry, we'd eat a small handful of fish. With the lentils the boss sometimes gave us two or three potatoes to split between all of us, or maybe some old cauliflower to put in the soup. We'd put a lot of chili peppers in the soup to cover up the rank old lentils. We were hungry all the time.

I got sick. Once I had a fever, I was too sick to work. The boss came and beat me till I got up and went back to work. It was always this way, fevers and diarrhea. While I was there, seven or eight people in the fishing camp died of diarrhea. The guard would just take their bodies into the forest and leave them.

There were two small boys in our hut. The guard was sexually abusing them. He would come and get one or the other of them from the shelter at night. They were really hurt. I felt so guilty that I couldn't protect them. The guard would come at night and take a boy, and we'd want to stop him but we couldn't. If we said anything, the guards would beat us. Finally, after two and a half months a boat came from my village to buy dried

fish. I knew someone on the boat. I talked to the people on the boat and told them what was happening. That night, as we were loading fish, we sneaked the two boys onto the boat. They were hidden behind the baskets of dried fish when the boat left. The people on the boat were frightened, they knew they'd be hurt if they were caught.

That night we were very frightened too. I knew the guard would kill us if he found out, but I had an idea. So early the next morning we went to the guard and said, 'Where are those boys? What did you do with them? We can't find them!' We knew the guard would kill us if he knew the truth. The guard was confused, he just said, 'Oh, maybe they ran into the forest and a tiger ate them. . . .' He never suspected what had happened. He probably thought they had run away into the forest.

I was on Dublar Char six months, the whole winter when the fish are coming. When the season came to an end, the boss let me get on a boat with some of the last fish sold. I was sick and weak, but the boat left me near my village and I was able to get home. I was never paid, my parents never got anything beyond the 2,000 taka the recruiter gave them. Now it is winter again and my father wants me to go because he wants the money, but I said 'no'—now there is a training project and I am learning carpentry. I am making chairs and tables. I make them according to order. I'm doing okay."

—Shumir

"The man who recruited me said nothing about the hard work, but it was bad. As soon as we got to the island, the smell was terrible, I'll never forget it. Then the man said, 'You'll clean fish, and dry and pack fish, and if you don't work, well, we'll be very angry.' So I followed the other boys when the fishing boats would come close to the shore and we'd walk out into the water and carry baskets of fish back to the camp. The baskets were heavy, but you had to carry them, if I couldn't carry one or if I dropped it, I'd be beaten. I'd watch the sea, because I knew when the tide came, the fishing boats would come with their fish.

In the middle of the camp was a big space for cleaning fish, this is where I'd take a basket and dump it on palm-leaf mats spread on the ground. First, everyone dumps their fish, then everyone starts sorting the fish. Each type of fish had to be

sorted into its own pile. Then we'd tie the fish together by their mouths, unless they were knife-fish, then we'd attach their tails together. When they were tied together they were ready to hang on the drying frames. Some fish you cut a little bit to make it dry more quickly, others you made cuts so it could be hung on the rack. There are a lot of different types of fish, but the worst kind is shark. Cutting and cleaning the sharks was the hardest part for me because they are so big, you have to cut out their stomachs and wash them inside. They were heavy. Then you had to cut them in half lengthwise in order to put them to dry.

When you're cutting fish, you cut yourself too; it happens all the time. There were fifteen or twenty other boys there with me. Some were little like me, some were aged fifteen or sixteen, and some were smaller, maybe eight or ten years old. When one load of fish was done, you'd start another. If there wasn't another load, then I'd just sit, but we'd also have to use that time to make food, or repair nets, or collect the dried fish from the racks and pack them into big burlap bags.

We got to sleep if there were no fish to clean, but that might be for only an hour between loads. I felt confused all the time because I had no sleep. Sometimes when I was cutting fish my head would start nodding and I would fall asleep, then the boss would hit me.

See, there's a guard there all the time with a stick. He was a big man, a fat man. He would shout or hit me. If I worked really hard he would be happy, but if I didn't he would swear at me—'son-of-a-bitch,' he called me, or 'pig's-son,' or worse things. I felt so bad when that happened.

Whenever I was tired he'd hit me; basically this was every day. Sometimes I got sick, like with a fever, other boys did too. There was someone who sold medicine, but no money, no medicine, so we never got medicine. One boy had terrible diarrhea and died. And headaches, I had horrible headaches, maybe from carrying the baskets on my head. But this wasn't the worst. The worst thing was the tigers.

Tigers live on the island and in the forest by the camp. At night we'd hear the tigers. When they roar you can hear them from a long way away. We'd never know how close they were. One day a boy was sent into the forest next to the camp to gather wood for cooking. A tiger took him; a couple of days later we found him. He had been eaten. This was the most

frightening thing.

After I escaped, I got back here and started catching crabs with my father. I like being back here and working here. Of course, this is my home. I don't want to go to school anymore, I want to work. I want to work with my dad on his boat. My mom died in childbirth a while back, that was when I went to the island, so it is hard. But I just want to stay here.

There are still a lot of children there. . . .”

—Shankar

Fifty years ago there were no shrimp farms or fish camps like these carved out of the protected forest. In the past, local fishermen worked the waters and took their catch to the markets in nearby river towns. At that time, the Sundarban islands, already a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the great mangrove forest, the largest carbon sink in Southeast Asia, was protected more by its wild remoteness than by the laws setting it aside as a national park.

All that changed when seafood went global. In America and Europe it was a slow, barely noticeable change. In the 1950s a fancy meal might start with shrimp cocktail, four or five shrimp arranged around the rim of a cocktail glass filled with sauce. It was country club food, it cost more than steak, and you turned up your pinkie as you ate it and got to think of yourself as sophisticated in the bargain. Unless you happened to be near the Gulf of Mexico, those fresh little shrimp would have been rushed over a long distance at enormous cost. Adjusted for inflation, those five little shrimp around a cocktail glass in 1950 cost over a dollar each. Today, three dollars will buy you a whole pound of shrimp brought all the way from Bangladesh to your refrigerator.

From a camp like Shumir's or Shankar's, dried fish flow mainly into local markets, for pet food and livestock feed and human food, such as fish stock cubes. You don't think of organized crime being involved in stock cubes, but a wilderness island like Dublar Char makes a perfect slave-based processing site.

If you take somebody far from home, under certain conditions, you can get them to do whatever you want. It could happen to anybody.

“I come from a little village in the north of the country, up near the border with Burkina Faso. It is very poor there, the land is poor, there is little water. Hot winds come down from the Sahara. There are lots of people, but not much work.

When I was six years old, my father died. I don't know how or why. My mother tried to hold us together, but it was hard, we didn't have much to eat. Then, when I was nine, she died too. She just got weaker and weaker and died. My brothers and sisters were given to other families, I don't know what has happened to them. My uncle took me, he wasn't married, so it was just the two of us. By that time I had done two years of school, but when my mother died I had to stop going to school and start working. After a while my uncle decided to leave our village and come south and find work. That was how I came here."

Ibrahim and his uncle were following a trail of words, stories of the golden south where there was plenty of food and good jobs. They joined an exodus so great that the population of northern Ghana fell by a third over the space of ten years. Ibrahim and his uncle tracked the rumors south to the gold mines in Ashanti state—believing that any work involving gold would have to pay well. They'd heard wonderful stories about the jobs in the big company mines: training, equipment, sometimes even housing was provided, and a whopping regular salary. There was even medical care if you needed it. But when Ibrahim and his uncle reached the mining town of Obuasi, there were no jobs for them. To get a job you needed education and recommendations, and they were just two more Northerners in a flood of desperate migrants. The mining companies turned them away. Ibrahim explained what happened next:

"We'd run out of money and we knew no one in the south. We didn't have a place to stay and we were hungry. My uncle was looking everywhere for work, we just wanted to earn a little so we could live. But there were no jobs. Then we met a man who said he could get us a job in a gold mine. He said there would be food and plenty of work, and that the more gold we mined, the more money we could make. So my uncle agreed to join an eight-man crew that would be working together. The man gave us some money to buy food before we went to the mine. He said we would work for three months and then we would be paid according to the amount of gold we had mined.

We had to walk a long way into the forest where the mining camp was hidden. When we got to the mine, we realized this wasn't a legal mine being run by one of the big companies. We were told not to tell anyone about the mine, and there were

guards to warn if anyone came near, but also to keep us from leaving. It was a big camp spread around the entrance to a deep shaft mine, more than four-hundred people were working there.

My uncle became the co-leader of the eight-man work gang. At first we were just carriers, hauling the ore on our backs from deep in the mine to the surface and then carrying it on a path out to the road. This is the lowest job; you only get paid a little according to the amount of ore that you carry. Then, after a while, my uncle began to work with a hammer and chisel at the rock face, this was a better job, but also more dangerous. I was still small, so I did whatever I could to earn and help out. Sometimes I would carry ore, fetch tools, or run errands, I had to do anything anyone ordered me to do.

My uncle was able to protect me, but only a little. He kept me from having to work at the rock face, or deep in the mine, but it was still very hard. I was beaten pretty often. Some men would bully me, one would hit me on the back with the flat side of his machete. Anything I did wrong, any kind of mistake, would bring on a beating. If I overslept I would be beaten. This happened all the time. Sometimes it was the gang leader, sometimes other men in the gang, sometimes it was my uncle who hit me. It was bad, but my uncle and the rest of the gang were working flat out to earn as much as they could in the three months they had to work. They wanted to make a lot so they could send money to their families.

After three months the man who had brought us to the mine—we found out he was also the local gold buyer—came to settle up with my uncle and the work gang. We were expecting to be paid, but he told us that we hadn't earned enough. He said that the gold ore we had mined and carried wasn't worth enough to cover the advance he had given us to buy food plus the cost of tools and food we'd had over the three months at the mine. We didn't make anything! In fact now we owed even more money. It was a big sum and he said we would have to repay that with interest before we could leave the mine. The interest rate was fifty percent. We were shocked, but the boss wasn't angry, he said he would help us and told us not to worry. 'You'll get lucky with some rich ore soon,' he said, 'and make plenty to pay me back. Meanwhile, I'll advance you a little more money so you'll have the food to keep working.'"

You could call it bad luck, or bait and switch, or fraud, but the debt trap is one of the most common ways to trick people into slavery. It has many advantages for the slaveholders: no need for kidnapping or violence, the slaves are motivated and work hard, and the cost of getting slaves is very, very low. It takes little more than slick promises and some food to get desperate people like Ibrahim and his uncle to surrender, unknowingly, into slavery. And once they're enslaved, the debt trap has a powerful force that locks them in bondage—honesty.

Dishonesty feeds on honesty. The very rules of trust and honesty that guided Ibrahim and his uncle in their dealings with other people were a tool used against them. They were poor, but they were honest and religious people. They had a very strong sense that debts must be repaid, and that a person who did not pay their debts was a thief and a sinner. The abuse of this fundamental belief by the gold buyer was very clever, since it was in his interest to string the slaves along with lies as long as possible.

If a slaveholder resorts to violence too soon or too arbitrarily, the workers will realize that they can never work their way out of debt and their pride and honesty can no longer be used to manipulate them. When it becomes clear that the boss is lying, that they are being cheated, then a different set of rules applies. For that reason, the boss will keep appealing to their sense of "fair play." The workers are told they just have to try a little harder, that the boss is trying to help them. The workers are caught in a situation where they believe trust might pay off but running away will pay nothing. To increase his psychological control, the slaveholder boss may choose to actually pay some of the workers occasionally, though late and usually below the agreed rate. The fact that they might get paid (or are paid even a little) gives them hope and keeps them working, especially since the alternative is no work, no money, nothing to support their families, and no way to get home. The crucial truth that workers like Ibrahim and his uncle don't know is that when they realize the truth of their situation and try to get away, violence will fall on them like a hammer.

Just after his tenth birthday the jaws of the debt trap snapped shut and Ibrahim became a slave. There was no ceremony or clear marker as he lost his freedom, but hemmed in by hunger and exhaustion, accepting the "fact" of his crippling debt, and knowing that resistance brought violence, he was just swallowed by slavery. He didn't know it but he was joining the hundreds of thousands of others who, over the centuries, had been enslaved in this very same place as gold fed greed and greed spawned bondage.

The ton of ore Ibrahim mines in a day yields, on average, about ten dollars' worth of gold, but by the time all the "fees" are paid, his share will barely cover the one or two dollars a day needed to pay for that day's

food, and goes nowhere toward clearing his existing debt. Over time it becomes clear to the workers that they are trapped. It's fair to ask why they don't just run away. The answer is simple, as simple as slavery has been throughout history—if you try to leave you'll be hunted down and beaten.

The boss at each mine keeps an eye on the enslaved haulers and chiselers, encouraging them to work harder with blows and abuse. He forces the sick back to work, and if someone tries to slip off, he drags them back and beats them in front of everyone else. If a worker does manage to escape, corrupt local police know they will be paid to track him down. Once caught, after the police have beaten him, he'll be returned to the mine or taken before a judge where another bribe will secure his conviction for defrauding the gold buyer (in his role of moneylender). The cost of the trial and bribe are then added to the worker's debt. The miners learn they can't win, or as one miner said:

“I know this is a crime, but there is nothing I can do about it. If I tried anything my children would go hungry.”

Not even death provides an escape. When a miner dies the debt passes to his next of kin, and the gold buyer's thugs make sure the brother, wife, or child know that they now carry the load.

To look squarely at yourself in slavery is to look down a well of hopelessness. It can be excruciatingly painful to speak honestly about a stolen life, but Ibrahim, sometimes shaking as he spoke, faced his devils and told his story:

“I've worked in several mines, and lived through many raids by police and security guards. When a raid starts, there is usually a warning shot from a lookout, and then everyone runs for their lives. We know that anyone caught will be beaten badly. You just have to sleep in the forest that night, and then sneak back to the mine the next day. It is always the same, everything is destroyed, and anything you didn't carry into the forest is gone. But the gang leader is there with the guards, and you have to go back to work, cleaning up, getting the mine ready to start producing again.

Once, when I was seventeen, the police surrounded the mine and I was grabbed as I ran into the forest. They beat me up and arrested me for illegal mining. After a night in jail I was taken before a judge. I couldn't understand what was happening; it was all going so quickly. Then I heard the sentence—two years in prison, and that was that. I was taken to the town of Kumasi

and locked up. The prison was packed, really crowded, and it was dangerous. Bad things happened there. We got one meal a day. Inside I realized many prisoners were just teenagers like me, and I thought about how the gang leaders and the moneylenders were never arrested, never paid fines.

I feel good that you are listening to me, for the first time someone is letting me talk about my pain. I am happy that I have been listened to and understood. But it also makes me feel very sad that all this is happening to me, and I do not have a clue about how to get out of it. I know from what we have talked about that I am a slave. I want to be remembered. When my story is written and your book is ready, will you send me a copy? I want to show it to others, to show them that I am not completely useless. I just want to show that something good can come out of my life.”

The slavery feeding into a stream of gold baubles that we might give to our loved ones or receive as some reward for our “good deeds” is so immediately heartbreaking that it is hard to see beyond it. It is a crime and an affront to any sense of decency. But there is more to this crime than just slavery. The silicosis, the mercury poisoning, and the environmental destruction mean that families who are not enslaved also suffer, that communities that don’t have anything to do with gold can end up slowly dying of poison and disease. That damage is a widening gyre encompassing all of us, a circle that soon overlaps other circles of slavery and destruction. But that damage also reaches from the physical world and into the special realm of memory.

In the twenty-first century, slavery has brought a dark age of ignorance to the gold region. The enslaved workers know no history and no future. There are virtually no machines, but plenty of constant, mindless toil. As so many times before, memory is a casualty of slavery. It is hard to measure this loss of memory. How do you fathom what is not there; how do you gauge a void? Most of us are replete with memories, and surrounded by aide-mémoires. We don’t just hold a mind full of experiences, we keep photos, letters, videos, cards, gifts, drawings, seashells, feathers, a gold ring perhaps—anything that stores precious or crucial or even frivolous memories for us. It is difficult for those of us who live in freedom, who are so glutted with memory, to imagine a mind that cannot store away the meaningful or the simply enjoyable. Yet, one way that slavery steals life in its essence is by never allowing memories to form.

Slavery steals so much from a person. Free will, movement, having your own money and charting your own way, they are all lost. For an adult who

has come to slavery by making bad choices or just by being tricked, this loss is deeply painful. But what of the little child who is enslaved, and grows up to know nothing but bondage? Their loss is the greatest of all, for they lose the chance to construct from their memories that most precious of mysterious creations: a self.

Seba had been sent from her native Mali to France as a small girl, supposedly to live with a family to learn French and get an education. The reality was brutal slavery as a domestic servant, torture, and sexual assault that lasted from the time she was eight or nine until she was twenty-two. When I met her, Seba had recently been freed and was living with a volunteer foster family. She was receiving counseling and learning to read and write. As we talked, I plied her with questions, based on my assumptions about what slavery must be like, about her life and views and memories, and I soon realized that we weren't really communicating.

Trying a new tack, I pointed to a nearby round lampshade printed to look like a globe of the world, using it to ask some questions about where she was from. Within seconds it was clear—she did not know the world. There was no recognition that this ball represented our earth; that it was anything but a paper lampshade marked with blue and green splotches. I stepped back and started again, asking this bright and verbal young woman about the simplest of things. Yes, she had heard that the world was round. At the same time I found she had no concept of weeks, months, or years, and I came to understand that for Seba her only memory, her only understanding, was an endless round of work and sleep.

Denied the knowledge of time, her memories were strangely amorphous. She knew that there were hot days and cold days, but didn't know that the seasons follow a pattern. If she ever knew her birthday she had forgotten it, and did not know her age. And she was baffled by the idea of 'choice.' She told me she knew she was supposed to like these things called choices, that everyone seemed excited about her having this thing called a choice, but that no one had ever shown her one, so she just played along. It was in these moments that I got my first inkling of the lived reality of slavery. I learned slavery is much more than the loss of freedom, more than not having any choices. The brutality of slavery extends to the theft of our common knowledge, and the denial and destruction of our memories.

We tend to see our memories as who we are, the very stuff of our beings. Without memory we might not cease to exist, but we would cease to be who we are. The denial and destruction of memory is the special crime of slavery. The law might say that slavery occurs when one person has the rights of ownership over another person, but that is simply control, not the denial and destruction of a personality that is the less visible outcome of

slavery. And as this is done to a single slave, it can be perpetrated on whole populations, whole generations of slaves. In the same way slavery denies individual memory, it also massacres the common memory. The millions of slaves taken to the Americas from the Gold Coast and other parts of Africa were pressed hard to forget, worked into a stupor of exhaustion, separated from kin, and stripped of any physical remnant—clothing, charm, or comb—of their past. Often the only survival was a story, a song, or a seed, things that were intangible or seemingly unimportant. Brought together they might form a precious relic, a stew of okra cooked to a chant of words that still carried the rhythm and tone of memories if not their meaning.

When memory is lost, so is a sense of place. The slave has no home that is a refuge or a comfort. When your body is a disposable commodity, it is not hard to see everything reduced to the base valuation of greed. This is how slavery perniciously extends its devastation in new ways. This is how enslavement crushes Ibrahim's family and also consumes the natural world that could sustain them in freedom. The destruction of a single mind in slavery is multiplied out, to other people, and across species, space, and time to the natural world beyond.

Postcolonial independence movements—which so often had the redistribution of unjustly concentrated resources, whether of land or minerals, as their core missions—were consistently undermined through political assassinations, foreign interference, and, more recently, the chains of debt-driven structural adjustment programs—not to mention the corruption of local elites.

A labor inspector tried to dismiss the idea of slavery, but try as he might, he couldn't quite pull it off.

“This is not forced labor, but if they go to the illegal mines to work they borrow money and then get threatened when it is time to repay it. When the workers realize they are not being paid, they're told to just hang on awhile and keep working, then they are still not paid. If they try to leave, the gang leaders drag them back, keep them working, and don't let them off the premises. If they do run away they lose everything, and children are working in this debt labor as well.”

That's a pretty clear description of debt bondage slavery, but officials like the labor inspector are told not to use the word 'slavery.'

It's not just the government trying a cover-up. In African countries that suffered in the transatlantic slave trade, the word is loaded and touchy. Slavery is the great crime that Europeans did to them, not something that

they would allow their citizens to suffer today. In addition, in Ghana in particular, there is a strong taboo against calling anyone a slave, or even suggesting someone is a descendant of a slave. Everyone in Ghana knows that slavery was both an indigenous activity as well as something exploited by the Europeans. They also know who of their neighbors and fellow citizens is actually descended from slaves. It is easy to tell that about a person, their last names testify to it. But to speak of it is completely taboo.

It seems that everyone with power in the gold supply chain—governments, mining companies, local authorities, both large and small illegal operators, and slaveholders—all have an interest in business as usual. It is only the hungry displaced farmer, the young economic migrant, and the enslaved miner who are desperate for change.

Blind eyes are turned at every opportunity; as long as the flow of gold is not interrupted the current state of affairs serves everyone—except the slaves and the natural world, but who speaks for them?

It is hard to know if the great symbolism we invest in our little gold rings is the key to taking slavery out of the mines and protecting the natural world, or the biggest obstacle to those goals. When your gold ring carries the profound emotional investment of symbolizing your love and your marriage, then it should be important to know that no slavery, no dangerous child labor, no mercury poisoning of rivers and streams taints that ring. Yet, for many people, those facts are just too ugly to think about.

Of course, some people want gold as a badge of wealth not love. They use gold as a blatant demonstration of economic superiority, and they don't really care where it comes from. Ropes of bling, chunky gold watches, solid gold MP3 players, and gold-plated car wheels are all just a way of saying:

“This is all about me, and since I have things of obvious value, then I must be important and valued as well.”

It's a sad and pathetically hollow self-worth that depends on shiny jewelry, but it's so common it seems unavoidable, a kind of permanent flaw in human beings. Can people learn to see gold in a new way? All of human history seems to shout 'No!' Human existence is littered with lives damaged and destroyed by the lust for gold. But history also shows us that change might be possible. Remember that for most of human history slaves were an important way of showing off your wealth.

Even in relatively simple societies little penetrated by money, there were ritual needs for substantial expenditures—the payment of bride-price for marriage and the slaughter of a buffalo at the death of a family member. It is widely reported that such ritual needs are the most common reason why the poor become indebted to the rich.

It's not as if it is ordinary for fathers in traditional societies to be able to sell their children. This is a practice with a very specific history: it appears in the great agrarian civilizations, from Sumer to Rome to China, right around the time when we also start to see evidence of money, markets, and interest-bearing loans; later, more gradually, it also appears in those surrounding hinterlands that supplied those civilizations with slaves. What's more, if we examine the historical evidence, there seems good reason to believe that the very obsession with patriarchal honor that so defines tradition in the Middle East and Mediterranean world itself arose alongside the father's power to alienate his children—as a reaction to what were seen as the moral perils of the market. All of this is treated as somehow outside the bounds of economic history.

Focusing on the sex industry would be deceptive, though. Then as now, most women in debt bondage spend the vast majority of their time sewing, preparing soups, and scouring latrines. Even in the Bible, the admonition in the Ten Commandments not to “covet thy neighbor's wife” clearly referred not to lust in one's heart (adultery had already been covered in commandment number seven), but to the prospect of taking her as a debt-peon—in other words, as a servant to sweep one's yard and hang out the laundry.

Once we remove some of our usual blinders, we can see that matters have changed far less over the course of the last five-thousand years or so, than we really like to think.

The peculiar quality of social currencies is that they are never quite equivalent to people. If anything, they are a constant reminder that human beings can never be equivalent to anything—even, ultimately, to one another. This is the profound truth of the blood-feud. No one can ever really forgive the man who killed his brother because every brother is unique. Nothing could substitute—not even some other man given the same name and status as your brother, or a concubine who will bear a son who will be named after your brother, or a ghost-wife who will bear a child pledged to someday avenge his death. In a human economy, each person is unique, and of incomparable value, because each is a unique nexus of relations with others. A woman may be a daughter, sister, lover, rival, companion, mother, age-mate, and mentor to many different people in different ways. Each relation is unique, even in a society in which they are sustained through the constant giving back and forth of generic objects such as raffia cloth or bundles of copper wire. In one sense, those objects make one who one is—a fact illustrated by the way the objects used as social currencies are so often things otherwise used to clothe or decorate the human body, that help make one who one is in the eyes of others. Still, just as our clothes don't really make us who

we are, a relationship kept alive by the giving and taking of raffia is always something more than that. This means that the raffia, in turn, is always something less.

Even the notion that a person can substitute for a person, that one sister can somehow be equated with another, is by no means self-evident. In this sense, the term ‘human economy’ is double-edged. These are, after all, economies: that is, systems of exchange in which qualities are reduced to quantities, allowing calculations of gain and loss—even if those calculations are simply a matter (as in sister exchange) of one equals one, or (as in the feud) of one minus one equals zero. How is this calculability effectuated? How does it become possible to treat people as if they are identical? To make a human being an object of exchange, one woman equivalent to another for example, requires first of all ripping her from her context; that is, tearing her away from that web of relations that makes her the unique conflux of relations that she is, and thus, into a generic value capable of being added and subtracted and used as a means to measure debt. This requires a certain violence. To make her equivalent to a bar of camwood takes even more violence, and it takes an enormous amount of sustained and systematic violence to rip her so completely from her context that she becomes a slave. I should be clear here. I am not using the word ‘violence’ metaphorically. I am not speaking merely of conceptual violence, but of the literal threat of broken bones and bruised flesh; of punches and kicks; in much the same way that when the ancient Hebrews spoke of their daughters in “bondage,” they were not being poetic, but talking about literal ropes and chains.

Most of us don’t like to think much about violence. Those lucky enough to live relatively comfortable, secure lives in modern cities tend either to act as if it does not exist or, when reminded that it does, to write off the larger world “out there” as a terrible, brutal place, with not much that can be done to help it. Either instinct allows us not to have to think about the degree to which even our own daily existence is defined by violence or at least the threat of violence and to overstate the importance—or at least the frequency—of things like war, terrorism, and violent crime. The role of force in providing the framework for human relations is simply more explicit in what we call “traditional societies”—even if in many, actual physical assault by one human on another occurs less often than in our own.

Corralling the Fed, staunching the flow of money into politics, and limiting the predations of Big Government on civil liberties and economic freedoms would be welcome reforms, but they won’t be enough. The moral rot has hollowed out not just these institutions of governance and power, but the entire social order and the mode of production

Slavery, animal abuse, domestic violence, environmental destruction—

these are the issues we cannot focus on because we continue to allow a small minority to control the levers of power, monopolize the discourse, gain unprecedented wealth. We are constantly cleaning up—poorly—the mess caused by these systemic, fundamental aspects of our societal structure that we lose focus, deem unimportant, other tragic acts of harm. These issues are caused by us, our flawed ideas, ideologies, which promote greed, selfishness, destruction.

“The gangs make life dangerous and noisy for ordinary people living here. Constant war with the police, who use helicopters day and night, adds to the general mayhem of bikes roaring up and down and fireworks and crackers exploding in warning of a police presence. Their reputation for violence and crime tarnishes all the residents, who are discriminated against in job applications, health care and other ways. In almost all situations, it is easier to join a gang than battle against mainstream society for a place in its ranks.”

“I am a farmer from Echarte village near Cusco. It’s a very poor area. I had some pigs and grew cocoa and vegetables, but there was drought and our productivity went down. One day in 2003, a man came into the village and asked if we wanted a better life in Lima. He said we would live in a nice house and find good jobs and a good school for our two little boys. I thought about it with my wife for a few months, because we didn’t want to leave our families and our home.

But the drought got worse. We paid the man 1,500 soles and packed up a few belongings and left the countryside. We were told to meet the man at 5:00 with the money and a few sheets of plywood or *esteras* [bamboo sheeting]. When we met him, there were lots of other families just like us waiting there. We were taken to a sand dune and told to fence off an area of the dune and start constructing our houses from the material we brought with us. He helped arrange for a private company to connect us to the electricity and cable TV for a fee.

We have no water or sanitation. Our toilet is a silo, a hole we dig in the floor of the room and cover with plywood. Every couple of years, it gets full so we make another hole. It takes ten years for the whole of the floor space to be full of shit, and I don’t know what we’ll do then.”

How do you best act cruelly? It's to take something that's the dearest thing to that person away from them.

Owning Things Absolutely

Occasionally you hear people on the Right, or just grumpy small business owners, asserting that taxation is a form of legalized robbery. Some even compare it to slavery—Grover Norquist, commenting on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s plan for a 70 percent marginal tax rate on multi-millionaires, asked: If “slavery is when your owner takes 100% of your production, what is the word for 70% expropriation?” Right-wing libertarians sometimes quote Frederick Douglass talking about how his wealth was taken by his master in order to grouse about having their wealth taken by their own “master,” Big Government.

It’s hard to think anyone who says this really believes it. In this country, slavery was a condition under which people could be beaten to death if they refused to work, under which women could be raped, their children sold away from them. A slave could be told to do a task and punished for not doing it, a slave could be prohibited from marrying or forced to marry. Ocasio-Cortez proposed that if you earn over 10 million dollars per year, every additional dollar should be taxed highly. To compare these two situations seems to me to involve such a detachment from reality that I hardly even know where to begin. It trivializes the harms of slavery, by comparing the condition of the slave to the condition of the present-day American super-wealthy—the freest, most privileged people in human history. If you think high marginal tax rates are slavery, then I’m sure you wouldn’t mind changing places with an actual slave. After all, it’s the same. They wouldn’t be losing anything, right? And if they think they would be losing something, well, that something is precisely the difference between having to pay your taxes and being a slave.

I could make you a list of about 400 ways in which being taxed is not like slavery. For one thing, you get to vote on tax policy! If slavery involved getting to choose your government, getting to choose which labor you did and for how long, and having a large pile of money, it might look more like the situation of the contemporary rich. But those things were not features of the system. Nevertheless, serious philosophers on the right have argued that taxation is a form of “forced labor.” Some have made the argument that taxing someone means forcing them to work. They argue that if you do believe in self-ownership you must agree that this means that people own their time, talents, and labor. They argue the standard Lockean argument for private property: that we produce goods by mixing our labor and talents with resources and goods in the natural world. This mixing generates the ownership of the items we have modified and made valuable. Now, if the

government taxes our income it is taking away our time, talents, and goods produced by our labor. Taxation is the taking of our labor and talents by force which means that the taking means effectively that the government owns our talents and labor and so owns us. According to them, taxation means that the government takes away our self-ownership which is called slavery.

There is so much slippery sophistry in this one paragraph. First, the “standard Lockean argument for private property” is bonkers, based far more on assertion than reasoning. The question it tries to answer is: How do “unowned” things come to be “owned” things in the first place? Or, since a property right is “the right to exclude others from use of a thing, by force if necessary,” the question is: How come people have a “right” to exclude others by force from things that were once held in common by all? The world was once unowned, but now people have private property. Why did they get to declare things their property? Now, historically speaking, they declared things their property largely by seizing them from those who were using them. But this makes the foundations of private property rights seem very shaky, hence the argument that people obtain property by “mixing their labor” with unowned things.

The “labor mixing” theory is vague and unhelpful. If I go into a public forest, and I carve a tree into a totem pole, do I now own the tree? After all, the totem pole is a fruit of my labor. What if I carve my name into it? If I open a can of soup into the ocean, spreading the soup far and wide, do I own the ocean? Who decides when I have put in adequate labor for a thing to become mine? This idea that you can claim pieces of the commons and call them ‘yours’ is what leads some to declare that “property is theft.” By fencing off a park and calling it mine, I am stealing it from other people. They used to have access to it, and now they don’t.

The philosophy of property rights is important, because the big holes in it make angry conservative appeals to “entitlement” somewhat nonsensical. If I live on stolen land, taken from a people who held the land as a commons, what on earth am I talking about when I say that it’s my land and that I’m entitled to the fruit of the labor I put into it?

“Seizing the results from someone’s labor is equivalent to seizing hours from him and directing him to carry on various activities. If people force you to do certain work, or unrewarded work, for a certain period of time, they decide what you are to do and what purposes your work is to serve apart from your decisions. This process whereby they take this decision from you

makes them a part-owner of you; it gives them a property right in you.”

I am not sure why “seizing the results from someone’s labor” is “equivalent” to “directing him to carry on various activities.” Stealing someone’s wallet means they’ll have to work some more if they want to have the same amount of things as before (or they’ll have to sit around and wait for some more capital income to accrue), but they won’t be punished or killed for not laboring. Theft and forced labor are different, and while this is an argument that taxation is theft, it’s not a good argument that it’s forced labor, because the labor isn’t forced. We do have legalized forced labor in the United States, actually, thanks to the Thirteenth Amendment—which explicitly permits slavery as punishment for crimes—but it is in prisons rather than boardrooms.

Is taxation theft, then? Well, first, I want us to be careful: Deciding whether taxation is ‘theft’ doesn’t actually tell us whether taxation is justified. The word ‘theft’ is used to imply that taxation is illegitimate, but it could be that taxation is both a kind of theft and is completely acceptable. How? Because Jean Valjean or Aladdin and his little monkey were correct to steal that loaf of bread. It wasn’t ‘not stealing.’ But it was fine. Unless you believe property rights are absolutes, that there is no other moral consideration that can override them, then we have to weigh the “sanctity of ownership” against other factors like people’s lives. Even the staunchest libertarians do not think property rights are absolutes—and if you press them on where to draw the line, they squirm, as you can see in this fascinating exchange between a libertarian and a socialist.

The libertarian says that obviously, if something he owned were necessary to save the universe, his property rights wouldn’t trump everything else. But when the socialist asks him “Why?” he flounders and sputters until the moderators steps in to save him. He struggles because once he announces a principle for why certain outcomes are bad enough that they justify overriding property rights, it won’t take much to make the case that today’s socialists are justified in seeing widespread material deprivation as bad enough to trump property rights.

I don’t think the question of whether taxation is theft is particularly relevant, then, because I think a more important question is what differing conceptions of rights produce in terms of justice. And I don’t think respect for the property rights of the wealthy is morally justified. A friend of mine is a teacher in the Detroit school system. She tells me that her kids are bright and gracious and wonderful, but they are poorer than you might realize. Many go to bed hungry, and are hungry at school. Many are homeless and

do not know where they will be spending the night. They do not have changes of clothes, they pass out in class because they couldn't get any rest. You can't ask them about what toys they like to play with, because they don't have them.

Now, Jeff Bezos has a net worth of \$140,000,000,000—or maybe it's more now. He could change every single one of these children's lives with the money he makes in about nine seconds. I do not really give a damn whether we decide that it's theft for the state to seize a portion of this wealth, because whatever value we might assign to respecting property rights is outweighed a thousandfold by the needs of others. The "utility" differences are staggering: an amount of money that is literally negligible to a billionaire can be of immeasurable assistance to someone who is rationing their insulin. The justice of massive expropriation is clear regardless of where we come down on taxation being a form of "legalized robbery" or not.

But there are still good reasons why it's not sensible to refer to taxation as a kind of theft. For one thing, taxation is foundational to a functional market economy. It's impossible to imagine a world in which everyone received their pre-tax income. The government is critical to the existence of the economy: Property rights are enforced by courts, money is issued by the government, the military "protects" us. There is no world in which pre-tax income could ever meaningfully belong to its recipients, because without taxes, there is no government, and government is necessary to create the roads, sewers, streetlights, courts, et cetera that make obtaining the income possible. The hand of government in creating the economy is present in myriad ways people don't notice. Consider limited liability and bankruptcy protection, two ways the state interferes significantly with property rights in ways favored by business. A corporation is incorporated, it makes money because it exists within a legal structure established by the state, with a set of legal protections afforded by the state.

There is a dimension of the 'taxation is theft' argument that I think is worth mentioning: the interesting conception of 'force' involved. The argument is quite simple: Taxation is a threat—give the Leviathan your money or go to jail, and if a private citizen did that they would be a mugger. But there's another important aspect to this: Not only are you not forced to earn an income or be rich, but you could always go and live somewhere else. Perhaps a floating artificial city, perhaps Bermuda, perhaps the moon. There is an important argument that if you choose to continue living in the United States, you accept its social contract.

You could immediately object by saying that this is not a meaningful choice: A dictator could say 'I haven't restricted free speech by banning newspapers, because they could always go and publish in some other country.'

Not everyone has the ability to go and live on the moon. Funnily enough, this is kind of a leftist argument: ‘Choice’ is not just a matter of whether you consent, but about the pressures that cause you to feel like you have to consent. It’s actually what leads us to argue that capitalists are the ones committing systemic theft, by forcing you to work longer hours than you would have if they hadn’t used a portion of your productivity to make other people rich. People on the right say that you “consent” to your employment conditions, but for poor workers that’s no different from saying that you consent to the restrictions on your speech imposed by a dictator by choosing not to flee the country.

We can imagine the United States as one big company town, or a block of residences governed by a condo association. The free market argument is that you don’t have liberties at work, or rights against private entities, because you contracted with them. If Facebook owns the city, and you live there, then you can’t complain about the rules Facebook imposes. You can’t say that Facebook’s security officers violated the Fourth Amendment in searching you, because the Fourth Amendment doesn’t apply to private entities. Corporations are kind of private dictatorships: By stepping onto their turf, you obey their rules, and you don’t have any kind of democratic decision-making power—as you, at least theoretically, do with the United States government. You can’t vote for your boss.

Let’s accept, then, that the left theory of coercion is correct: Just because people enter an institution voluntarily, doesn’t mean they lack rights vis-à-vis the institution, even if the contract says so. Wouldn’t that mean taxation is theft? Now, part of me wants to strike a bargain: If conservatives will say that employers steal surplus value from employees, I will say that taxation is theft, albeit perfectly justified and democratically voted-for theft that is returned to you in the form of countless important services. There’s another element to choice, though, which is that choice depends on your meaningful capacity to do otherwise. The ability of a rich person to leave the country and go work elsewhere is greater than the ability of a poor person to do so, because money is power. And rich citizens do sometimes give up their citizenship to avoid taxes.

More importantly, though: I do not believe that billionaires have any property right to their wealth in the first place. They have a legal right, but that doesn’t mean very much. Legal rights are created by laws, and so if you change the laws you change the rights. The question is whether there is some kind of natural entitlement to wealthy people having their vast wealth, and there isn’t. Property is, after all, theft to begin with, and just because you managed to obtain something lawfully under a legal system set up by people in your economic class doesn’t mean I have to respect your “natural”

right to it.

This is not to say that I believe nobody deserves to have their possessions protected: As I say, I am somewhat flexible and pragmatic in my approach, meaning that I do think people without much wealth should have their things treated as their things and respected, but I don't think people with a lot of wealth should have that same presumption. I think property, a.k.a. the right to use force to exclude others, should exist to the extent necessary, and the less you have, the more necessary it is to be able to exclude others from using the things you have. Some socialists draw a distinction between "personal possessions" and "private property." They think people should have their possessions, like heirlooms, clothes, a bicycle, respected, because these things are for personal use. A factory, on the other hand, is not for personal use, and should be held in common by its workers. Now, don't ask me to start putting every object on earth in one or the other of these categories. But it's a place to start in trying to distinguish the differences between Jeff Bezos' ownership of the Washington Post (which enables him to tell people what to do—and fire them if he likes—as well as influence the national narrative) and my ownership of my pants (which entitles me only to wear them).

Property is not really a relation between a person and a thing. It's an understanding or arrangement between people concerning things. The only reason that we sometimes fail to notice this is that in many cases—particularly when we are talking about our rights over our shoes, or cars, or power tools—we are talking of rights held, as English law puts it, "against all the world"—that is, understandings between ourselves and everyone else on the planet, that they will all refrain from interfering with our possessions, and therefore allow us to treat them more or less any way we like. A relation between one person and everyone else on the planet is, understandably, difficult to conceive as such. It's easier to think of it as a relationship with a thing. But even here, in practice this freedom to do as one likes turns out to be fairly limited. To say that the fact that I own a chainsaw gives me an "absolute power" to do anything I want with it is obviously absurd. Almost anything I might think of doing with a chainsaw outside my own home or land is likely to be illegal, and there are only a limited number of things I can really do with it inside. The only thing "absolute" about my rights to a chainsaw is my right to prevent anyone else from using it.

If you think about it, this really is an odd place to start in developing a theory of property law. It is probably fair to say that, in any part of the world, in any period of history, whether in ancient Japan or Machu Picchu, someone who had a piece of string was free to twist it, knot it, pull it apart, or toss it in the fire more or less as they had a mind to. Nowhere else

did legal theorists appear to have found this fact in any way interesting or important. Certainly no other tradition makes it the very basis of property law—since, after all, doing so made almost all actual law little more than a series of exceptions. How did this come about? And why? Perhaps the notion of absolute private property is really derived from slavery. One can imagine property not as a relation between people, but as a relation between a person and a thing, if one's starting point is a relation between two people, one of whom is also a thing. This is how slaves were defined in Roman law: they were people who were also a *res*, a thing.

The emphasis on absolute power begins to make sense as well. The word 'dominium,' meaning absolute private property, was not particularly ancient. It only appears in Latin in the late Republic, right around the time when hundreds of thousands of captive laborers were pouring into Italy, and when Rome, as a consequence, was becoming a genuine slave society. By 50 BC, Roman writers had come to simply assume that workers—whether the farmworkers harvesting peas in countryside plantations, the muleteers delivering those peas to shops in the city, or the clerks keeping count of them—were someone else's property. The existence of millions of creatures who were simultaneously persons and things created endless legal problems, and much of the creative genius of Roman law was spent in working out the endless ramifications.

In earliest Roman law slaves were still people, but of diminished worth, since injuries against them counted as 50 percent those of a free person. By the late Republic, around the time of the emergence of the concept of *dominium*, slaves had been redefined as *res*, things, and injuries to them had the same legal status as injuries to farm animals.

One need only flip open a casebook of Roman law to get a sense of these. This is from the second-century jurist Ulpian:

“Again, Mela writes that if some persons were playing ball and one of them, hitting the ball quite hard, knocked it against a barber's hands, and in this way the throat of a slave, whom the barber was shaving, was cut by a razor pressed against it, then who is the person with whom the culpability lay is liable under the *Lex Aquilia* [the law of civil damages]? Proclus says that the culpability lies with the barber; and indeed, if he was shaving at a place where games are normally played or where traffic was heavy, there is reason to fault him. But it would not be badly held that if someone entrusts himself to a barber who has a chair in a dangerous place, he should have himself to blame.”

In other words, the master cannot claim civil damages against the ballplayers or barber for destroying his property if the real problem was that he bought a stupid slave. Many of these debates might strike us as profoundly exotic—could you be accused of theft for merely convincing a slave to run away?; if someone killed a slave who was also your son, could you take your sentimental feelings toward him into account in assessing damages, or would you have to stick to his market value?—but our contemporary tradition of jurisprudence is founded directly on such debates.

In creating a notion of dominium, then, and thus creating the modern principle of absolute private property, what Roman jurists were doing first of all was taking a principle of domestic authority, of absolute power over people, defining some of those people (slaves) as things, and then extending the logic that originally applied to slaves to geese, chariots, barns, jewelry boxes, and so forth—that is, to every other sort of thing that the law had anything to do with. It was quite extraordinary, even in the ancient world, for a father to have the right to execute his slaves—let alone his children. No one is quite sure why the early Romans were so extreme in this regard.

It's telling, though, that the earliest Roman debt law was equally unusual in its harshness, since it allowed creditors to execute insolvent debtors. The early history of Rome, like the histories of early Greek city-states, was one of continual political struggle between creditors and debtors, until the Roman elite eventually figured out the principle that most successful Mediterranean elites learned: that a free peasantry means a more effective army, and that conquering armies can provide war captives who can do anything debt bondsmen used to do, and therefore, a social compromise—allowing limited popular representation, banning debt slavery, channeling some of the fruits of empire into social-welfare payments—was actually in their interest. Presumably, the absolute power of fathers developed as part of this whole constellation in the same way as we've seen elsewhere.

Debt bondage reduced family relations to relations of property; social reforms retained the new power of fathers but protected them from debt. At the same time, the increasing influx of slaves soon meant that any even moderately prosperous household was likely to contain slaves. This meant that the logic of conquest extended into the most intimate aspects of everyday life. Conquered people poured one's bath and combed one's hair. Conquered tutors taught one's children about poetry. Since slaves were sexually available to owners and their families, as well as to their friends and dinner guests, it is likely that most Romans' first sexual experience was with a boy or girl whose legal status was conceived as that of a defeated enemy.

What made Roman slavery so unusual, in historical terms, was a con-

juncture of two factors. One was its very arbitrariness. In dramatic contrast with, say plantation slavery in the Americas, there was no sense that certain people were naturally inferior and therefore destined to be slaves. Instead, slavery was seen as a misfortune that could happen to anyone. As a result, there was no reason that a slave might not be in every way superior to his or her master: smarter, with a finer sense of morality, better taste, and a greater understanding of philosophy. The master might even be willing to acknowledge this. There was no reason not to, since it had no effect on the nature of the relationship, which was simply one of power.

The second was the absolute nature of this power. There are many places where slaves are conceived as war captives, and masters as conquerors with absolute powers of life and death—but usually, this is something of an abstract principle. Almost everywhere, governments quickly move to limit such rights. At the very least, emperors and kings will insist that they are the only ones with the power to order others put to death. But under the Roman Republic there was no emperor; insofar as there was a sovereign body, it was the collective body of the slave-owners themselves. Only under the early Empire do we see any legislation limiting what owners could do to their (human) property: the first being a law of the time of the emperor Tiberius (dated 16 AD) stipulating that a master had to obtain a magistrate's permission before ordering a slave publicly torn apart by wild beasts.

However, the absolute nature of the master's power—the fact that in this context, he effectively was the state—also meant that there were, at first, no restrictions on manumission: a master could liberate his slave, or even adopt him or her, whereby—since liberty meant nothing outside of membership in a community—that slave automatically became a Roman citizen. This led to some very peculiar arrangements. In the first century, for example, it was not uncommon for educated Greeks to have themselves sold into slavery to some wealthy Roman in need of a secretary, entrust the money to a close friend or family member, and then, after a certain interval, buy themselves back, thus obtaining Roman citizenship. This despite the fact that, during such time as they were slaves, if their owner decided to, say, cut one of his secretary's feet off, legally, he would have been perfectly free to do so.

The relation of *dominus* and slave thus brought a relation of conquest, of absolute political power into the household, in fact, made it the essence of the household. It's important to emphasize that this was not a moral relation on either side. With the Romans as with the Athenians, for a male to be the object of sexual penetration was considered unbecoming to a citizen. In defending a freedman accused of continuing to provide sexual favors to

his former master, Haterius coined an aphorism that was later to become something of a popular dirty joke: *impudicitia in ingenuo crimen est, in servo necessitas, in liberto officium*—to be the object of anal penetration is a crime in the freeborn, a necessity for a slave, a duty for a freedman. What is significant here is that sexual subservience is considered the “duty” only of the freedman. It is not considered the “duty” of a slave. This is because, again, slavery was not a moral relation. The master could do what he liked, and there was nothing the slave could do about it.

This allows us to understand precisely how Liberals like Adam Smith were able to imagine the world the way they did. This is a tradition that assumes that liberty is essentially the right to do what one likes with one’s own property. In fact, not only does it make property a right; it treats rights themselves as a form of property. In a way, this is the greatest paradox of all. We are so used to the idea of “having” rights—that rights are something one can possess—that we rarely think about what this might actually mean. In fact (as Medieval jurists were well aware), one man’s right is simply another’s obligation. My right to free speech is others’ obligation not to punish me for speaking; my right to a trial by a jury of my peers is the responsibility of the government to maintain a system of jury duty. The problem is just the same as it was with property rights: when we are talking about obligations owed by everyone in the entire world, it’s difficult to think about it that way. It’s much easier to speak of having rights and freedoms. Still, if freedom is basically our right to own things, or to treat things as if we own them, then what would it mean to ‘own’ a freedom—wouldn’t it have to mean that our right to own property is itself a form of property? That does seem unnecessarily convoluted. What possible reason would one have to want to define it this way?

Historically, there is a simple—if somewhat disturbing—answer to this. Those who have argued that we are the natural owners of our rights and liberties have been mainly interested in asserting that we should be free to give them away, or even to sell them. Modern ideas of rights and liberties are derived from what came to be known as “natural rights theory.” It is one of the great ironies of history that this was always a body of theory embraced not by the progressives of that time, but by conservatives. Liberty was property and could be exchanged in the same way and in the same terms as any other property—sold, swapped, loaned, or otherwise voluntarily surrendered. It followed that there could be nothing intrinsically wrong with, say, debt peonage, or even slavery. And this is exactly what natural-rights theorists came to assert. In fact, over the next centuries, these ideas came to be developed above all in Antwerp and Lisbon, cities at the very center of the emerging slave trade. After all, they argued, we don’t really know what’s

going on in the lands behind places like Calabar, but there is no intrinsic reason to assume that the vast majority of the human cargo conveyed to European ships had not sold themselves, or been disposed of by their legal guardians, or lost their liberty in some other perfectly legitimate fashion. No doubt some had not, but abuses will exist in any system. The important thing was that there was nothing inherently unnatural or illegitimate about the idea that freedom could be sold.

Before long, similar arguments came to be employed to justify the absolute power of the state. Thomas Hobbes was the first to really develop this argument in the seventeenth century, but it soon became commonplace. Government was essentially a contract, a kind of business arrangement, whereby citizens had voluntarily given up some of their natural liberties to the sovereign. Finally, similar ideas have become the basis of that most basic, dominant institution of our present economic life: wage labor, which is, effectively, the renting of our freedom in the same way that slavery can be conceived as its sale.

It's not only our freedoms that we own; the same logic has come to be applied even to our own bodies, which are treated, in such formulations, as really no different than houses, cars, or furniture. We own ourselves, therefore outsiders have no right to trespass on us. Again, this might seem an innocuous, even a positive notion, but it looks rather different when we take into consideration the Roman tradition of property on which it is based. To say that we own ourselves is, oddly enough, to cast ourselves as both master and slave simultaneously. 'We' are both owners (exerting absolute power over our property), and yet somehow, at the same time, the things being owned (being the object of absolute power). The ancient Roman household, far from having been forgotten in the mists of history, is preserved in our most basic conception of ourselves—and, once again, just as in property law, the result is so strangely incoherent that it spins off into endless paradoxes the moment one tries to figure out what it would actually mean in practice.

Just as lawyers have spent a thousand years trying to make sense of Roman property concepts, so have philosophers spent centuries trying to understand how it could be possible for us to have a relation of domination over ourselves. The most popular solution—to say that each of us has something called a 'mind' and that this is completely separate from something else, which we can call 'the body,' and that the first thing holds natural dominion over the second—flies in the face of just about everything we now know about cognitive science. It's obviously untrue, but we continue to hold onto it anyway, for the simple reason that none of our everyday assumptions about property, law, and freedom would make any sense without it.

When “human rights abuses” are evoked in the newspapers, it is only when governments can be seen as trespassing on some victim’s person or possessions—say, by raping, torturing, or killing them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, like just about all similar documents, also speaks of universal rights to food and shelter, but one never reads about governments committing human rights abuses when they eliminate price supports on basic foodstuffs, even if it leads to widespread malnutrition, or for razing shantytowns or kicking the homeless out of shelters.

At this point we can finally see what’s really at stake in our peculiar habit of defining ourselves simultaneously as master and slave, reduplicating the most brutal aspects of the ancient household in our very concept of ourselves, as masters of our freedoms, or as owners of our very selves. It is the only way that we can imagine ourselves as completely isolated beings. There is a direct line from the new Roman conception of liberty—not as the ability to form mutual relationships with others, but as the kind of absolute power of “use and abuse” over the conquered chattel who make up the bulk of a wealthy Roman man’s household—to the strange fantasies of liberal philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, about the origins of human society in some collection of thirty- or forty-year-old males who seem to have sprung from the earth fully formed, then have to decide whether to kill each other or begin to swap beaver pelts.

European and American intellectuals, it is true, have spent much of the last two-hundred years trying to flee from the more disturbing implications of this tradition of thought. Thomas Jefferson, that owner of many slaves, chose to begin the Declaration of Independence by directly contradicting the moral basis of slavery, writing “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights”—thus undercutting simultaneously any argument that Africans were racially inferior, and also that they or their ancestors could ever have been justly and legally deprived of their freedom. In doing so, however, he did not propose some radically new conception of rights and liberties. Neither have subsequent political philosophers. For the most part, we’ve just kept the old ones, but with the word ‘not’ inserted here and there. Most of our most precious rights and freedoms are a series of exceptions to an overall moral and legal framework that suggests we shouldn’t really have them in the first place. Formal slavery has been eliminated, but—as anyone who works for someone else can testify—the idea that you can alienate your liberty, at least temporarily, endures. In fact, it determines what most of us have to do for most of our waking hours, except, usually, on weekends. The violence has been largely pushed out of sight. But this is largely because we’re no longer able to imagine what a world based on social arrangements

that did not require the continual threat of tasers and surveillance cameras would even look like.

One might well ask: If our political and legal ideas really are founded on the logic of slavery, then how did we ever eliminate slavery? Of course, a cynic might argue that we haven't; we've just relabeled it. The cynic would have a point: an ancient Greek would certainly have seen the distinction between a slave and an indebted wage laborer as, at best, a legalistic nicety. Still, even the elimination of formal chattel slavery has to be considered a remarkable achievement, and it is worthwhile to wonder how it was accomplished. Especially since it was not just accomplished once. The truly remarkable thing, if one consults the historical record, is that slavery has been eliminated—or effectively eliminated—many times in human history.

In Europe, for instance, the institution largely vanished in the centuries following the collapse of the Roman empire—a historical achievement rarely recognized by those of us used to referring to these events as the beginning of “the Dark Ages.” On the popular level, slavery remained so universally detested that even a thousand years later, when European merchants started trying to revive the trade, they discovered that their compatriots would not countenance slaveholding in their own countries—one reason why planters were eventually obliged to acquire their slaves in Africa and set up plantations in the New World. It is one of the great ironies of history that modern racism—probably the single greatest evil of our last two centuries—had to be invented largely because Europeans continued to refuse to listen to the arguments of the intellectuals and jurists and did not accept that anyone they believed to be a full and equal human being could ever be justifiably enslaved.

A Hollow State

Democratic Delusions

The decayed condition of American democracy is difficult to grasp, not because the facts are secret, but because the facts are visible everywhere.

An important indication of the erosion of the democratic ideal, which no longer envisions a rough equality of condition but merely the selective promotion of non-elites into the professional-managerial class. Ambitious people understand, then, that a migratory way of life is the price of getting ahead. It is a price they gladly pay, since they associate the idea of home with intrusive relatives and neighbors, small-minded gossip, and hidebound conventions. The new elites are in revolt against “Middle America,” as they imagine it: a nation technologically backward, politically reactionary, repressive in its sexual morality, middlebrow in its tastes, smug and complacent, dull and dowdy. Those who covet membership in the new aristocracy of brains tend to congregate on the coasts, turning their back on the heartland and cultivating ties with the international market in fast-moving money, glamour, fashion, and popular culture.

It is a question whether they think of themselves as Americans at all. Patriotism, certainly, does not rank very high in their hierarchy of virtues. “Multiculturalism,” on the other hand, suits them to perfection, conjuring up the agreeable image of a global bazaar in which exotic cuisines, exotic styles of dress, exotic music, exotic tribal customs can be savored indiscriminately, with no questions asked and no commitments required. The new elites are at home only in transit, en route to a high-level conference, to the grand opening of a new franchise, to an international film festival, or to an undiscovered resort. Theirs is essentially a tourist’s view of the world—not a perspective likely to encourage a passionate devotion to democracy.

The market in which the new elites operate is now international in scope. Their fortunes are tied to enterprises that operate across national boundaries. They are more concerned with the smooth functioning of the system as a whole than with any of its parts. Their loyalties—if the

term is not itself anachronistic in this context—are international rather than regional, national, or local. They have more in common with their counterparts in Brussels or Hong Kong than with the masses of Americans not yet plugged into the network of global communications. These are people who live in a world of abstract concepts and symbols, ranging from stock market quotations to the visual images produced by Hollywood and Madison Avenue, and who specialize in the interpretation and deployment of symbolic information. Contrast them with the two other principal categories of labor: routine production workers, who perform repetitive tasks and exercise little control over the design of production, and in-person servers, whose work also consists of routine, for the most part, but must be provided person-to-person and therefore cannot be sold worldwide.

We have lost our respect for honest manual labor. We think of creative work as a series of abstract mental operations performed in an office, preferably with the aid of computers, not as the production of food, shelter, and other necessities. The thinking classes are fatally removed from the physical side of life—hence their feeble attempt to compensate by embracing a strenuous regimen of gratuitous exercise. Their only relation to productive labor is that of consumers. They have no experience of making anything substantial or enduring. They live in a world of abstractions and images, a simulated world that consists of computerized models of reality—hyperreality—as distinguished from the palpable, immediate, physical reality inhabited by ordinary men and women. Their belief in the social construction of reality—the central dogma of postmodernist thought—reflects the experience of living in an artificial environment from which everything that resists human control (unavoidably, everything familiar and reassuring as well) has been rigorously excluded. Control has become their obsession.

In their drive to insulate themselves against risk and contingency—against the unpredictable hazards that afflict human life—the thinking classes have seceded not just from the common world around them but from reality itself. The culture wars that have convulsed America since the sixties are best understood as a form of class warfare, in which an enlightened elite (as it thinks of itself) seeks not so much to impose its values on the majority (a majority perceived as incorrigibly racist, sexist, provincial, and xenophobic), much less to persuade the majority by means of rational public debate, as to create parallel or “alternative” institutions in which it will no longer be necessary to confront the unenlightened at all.

People feel bound by democratic elections only when they share a basic bond with most other voters. If the experience of other voters is alien to me, and if I believe they don’t understand my feelings and don’t care about my vital interests, then even if I am outvoted by a hundred to one, I have

absolutely no reason to accept the verdict. Democratic elections usually work only within populations that have some prior common bond, such as shared religious beliefs and national myths. They are a method to settle disagreements between people who already agree on the basics.

“I have this feeling that whoever’s elected president no matter what promises you make on the campaign trail—blah, blah, blah—when you win, you go into this smoky room with the twelve industrialist, capitalist scumfucks that got you in there, and this little screen comes down. . . and it’s a shot of the Kennedy assassination from an angle you’ve never seen before, which looks suspiciously off the grassy knoll. . . And then the screen comes up, the lights come on, and they say to the new president: ‘Any questions?’”

When I stand behind the curtain in the polling booth, liberalism instructs me to consult my authentic self, and choose whichever party or candidate reflects my deepest desires. Yet the life sciences point out that when I stand there behind the curtain, I don’t really remember everything I felt and thought in the years since the last election. Moreover, I am bombarded by a barrage of propaganda, spin, and random memories which might well distort my choices. Just as in the cold-water experiment, in politics too the narrating self follows the peak-end rule. It forgets the vast majority of events, remembers only a few extreme incidents and gives a wholly disproportional weight to recent happenings. For four long years I may repeatedly complain about the President or PM’s policies, telling myself and anyone willing to listen that he will be the ruin of us all. However, in the months prior to the elections the government cuts taxes and spends money generously. The ruling party hires the best copywriters to lead a brilliant campaign, with a well-balanced mixture of threats and promises that speak right to the fear center in my brain. On the morning of the elections I wake up with a cold, which impacts my mental processes, and causes me to prefer security and stability over all other considerations. And voila! I send the man who will be the ruin of us all back into office for another four years.

Under dictatorship, people are enslaved but they know it. Here, the politicians constantly lie to people and they become immune to these lies because they have the privilege of voting. But voting is rigged and democracy here is a gigantic profusion of lies and clever brainwashing.

The right to vote also includes the right to not vote. If it didn’t then voting wouldn’t be a right, but an obligation. If you chose to not vote, then

your effect is the same as spoiling your ballot or leaving the ballot blank. Though, is it even possible to do such a thing with a voting machine?

Criticism of government policy or action is part of the day-to-day workings of democracy. Citizen engagement with how government works is a fundamental feature of a properly-functioning democracy. Democracy doesn't happen only every four years in a voting booth. One could turn the trope on its head: If you aren't routinely engaged with politics, why should you be allowed to vote every four years?

“A Democratic Spirit is one that combines rigor and humility, i.e., passionate conviction plus a respect for the convictions of others. As any American knows, this is a difficult spirit to cultivate and maintain, particularly when it comes to issues you feel strongly about. Equally tough is a DS's criterion of 100 percent intellectual integrity—you have to be willing to look honestly at yourself and at your motives for believing what you believe, and to do it more or less continually. This kind of stuff is advanced US citizenship. A true Democratic Spirit is up there with religious faith and emotional maturity and all those other qualities that people spend their whole lives working on.

A Democratic Spirit's constituent rigor and humility and self-honesty are, in fact, so hard to maintain on certain issues that it's almost irresistibly tempting to fall in with some established dogmatic camp and to follow that camp's line on the issue and to let your position harden within the camp and become inflexible and to believe that the other camps are either evil or insane and to spend all your time and energy trying to shout over them. It seems to be a natural law that camps form only in opposition to other camps and that there are always at least two with regard to any difficult issue.”

When we speak of democracy today, we refer, more often than not, to the democratization of “self-esteem.” The current catchwords—diversity, compassion, empowerment, entitlement—express the wistful hope that deep divisions in American society can be bridged by goodwill and sanitized speech. We are called on to recognize that all minorities are entitled to respect not by virtue of their achievements but by virtue of their sufferings in the past. Compassionate attention, we are told, will somehow raise their opinion of themselves; banning racial epithets and other forms of hateful speech will do wonders for their morale. In our preoccupation with words, we have lost sight of the tough realities that cannot be softened simply by

flattering people's self-image. What does it profit the residents of the South Bronx to enforce speech codes at elite universities?

In the first half of the nineteenth century most people who gave any thought to the matter assumed that democracy had to rest on a broad distribution of property. They understood that extremes of wealth and poverty would be fatal to the democratic experiment. Their fear of the mob, sometimes misinterpreted as aristocratic disdain, rested on the observation that a degraded laboring class, at once servile and resentful, lacked the qualities of mind and character essential to democratic citizenship. They thought democratic habits—self-reliance, responsibility, initiative—were best acquired in the exercise of a trade or the management of a small holding of property. A “competence,” as they called it, referred both to property itself and to the intelligence and enterprise required by its management. It stood to reason, therefore, that democracy worked best when property was distributed as widely as possible among the citizens.

The point can be stated more broadly: Democracy works best when men and women do things for themselves, with the help of their friends and neighbors, instead of depending on the state. Not that democracy should be equated with rugged individualism. Self-reliance does not mean self-sufficiency. Self-governing communities, not individuals, are the basic units of democratic society. It is the decline of those communities, more than anything else, that calls the future of democracy into question. Suburban shopping malls are no substitute for neighborhoods. The same pattern of development has been repeated in one city after another, with the same discouraging results. The flight of population to the suburbs, followed by the flight of industry and jobs, has left our cities destitute. As the tax base shrivels, public services and civic amenities disappear. Attempts to revive the city by constructing convention centers and sports facilities designed to attract tourists merely heighten the contrast between wealth and poverty.

The city becomes a bazaar, but the luxuries on display in its exclusive boutiques, hotels, and restaurants are beyond the reach of most of the residents. Some of those residents turn to crime as the only access to the glittering world seductively advertised as the American dream. Those with more modest aspirations, meanwhile, are squeezed out by high rents, gentrification, and misguided policies intended to break up ethnic neighborhoods that allegedly stand in the way of racial integration.

Democracy requires a vigorous exchange of ideas and opinions. Ideas, like property, need to be distributed as widely as possible. Yet many of the “best people,” as they think of themselves, have always been skeptical about the capacity of ordinary citizens to grasp complex issues and to make critical judgments. Democratic debate, from their point of view, degenerates

all too easily into a shouting match in which the voice of reason seldom makes itself heard. Horace Mann failed to see that political and religious controversy is educative in its own right and therefore tried to exclude divisive issues from the common schools. His eagerness to avoid sectarian quarrels is understandable enough, but it left a legacy that may help to explain the bland, innocuous, mind-numbing quality of public education today.

Some argue public opinion is a weak reed. It is shaped more by emotion than by reasoned judgment. The very concept of a public is suspect. The public idealized by the progressives, a public capable of the intelligent direction of public affairs, is a phantom. It exists only in the minds of sentimental democrats.

“The public interest in a problem is limited to this: that there shall be rules. The public is interested in law, not in the laws; in the method of law, not in the substance.”

Substantive questions can safely be left to experts, whose access to scientific knowledge immunizes them against the emotional symbols and stereotypes that dominate public debate. This argument rests on a sharp distinction between opinion and science. Only the latter, they think, can claim to be objective. Opinion, on the other hand, rests on vague impressions, prejudices, and wishful thinking.

This cult of professionalism had a decisive influence on the development of modern journalism. Newspapers might have served as extensions of the town meeting. Instead they embraced a misguided ideal of objectivity and defined their goal as the circulation of reliable information—the kind of information, that is, that tends not to promote debate but to circumvent it. The most curious feature in all this, of course, is that although Americans are now drowning in information, thanks to newspapers and television and the internet and social media, surveys regularly report a steady decline in their knowledge of public affairs. In the “age of information” the American people are notoriously ill informed. The explanation of this seeming paradox is obvious, though seldom offered: Having been effectively excluded from public debate on the grounds of their incompetence, most Americans no longer have any use for the information inflicted on them in such large amounts. They have become almost as incompetent as their critics have always claimed—a reminder that it is debate itself, and debate alone, that gives rise to the desire for usable information. In the absence of democratic exchange, most people have no incentive to master the knowledge that would make them capable citizens.

The most basic problem for democracy raided by propaganda is the possibility that the vocabulary of liberal democracy is used to mask an undemocratic reality. If so, there could be a state that appeared to be a liberal democracy. It would be a state the citizens of which believed was a liberal democracy. But the appearance of liberal democracy would be merely the outer trappings of an illiberal, undemocratic reality. There is no corresponding existential threat for authoritarian regimes. It is utterly standard to mask the nature of an authoritarian regime with the use, for example, of revolutionary or socialist vocabulary. This is not a threat to the authoritarian nature of the regime. In contrast, masking the undemocratic nature of a state with democratic vocabulary is an existential threat to a democratic regime.

A democratic culture is one in which everyone has a say in the policies and laws that apply to them. A corporate or managerial culture is quite distinct from a democratic culture. Yet public culture in the United States, since the industrial revolution, has been dominated by a managerial ethos. By 1900, the acceptance of the business philosophy was so general that it has to be considered one of the basic characteristics of American society in this period. During the industrial revolution, the idea of success as material success and the business ideology of management were a heavy emphasis in popular journalism. It was during this time that politicians also started to speak of themselves as businessmen running corporations, something that survives today not only in the United States, but in the European Union.

In 1941, James Burnham published a book, *The Managerial Revolution*, predicting the end of an era in which communism faced off against capitalism, and Stalinism against democracy. Burnham argued that the future would be “a managerial society” in which heads of multinational corporations would have de facto policy control over individual states. He argued that in a managerial society “managers can maintain their ruling position only through assuring for themselves control of the state,” a task that is “not so simple” in a democracy, which guarantees “freedom for minority political expression.”

“The economic structure of managerial society seems to raise obstacles for democracy. There is no democracy without opposition groups. Opposition groups cannot, however, depend for their existence merely on the good will of those who are in power.”

But since in the managerial society of the future “all major parts of the economy will be planned and controlled by the single integrated set of

institutions which will be the managerial state,” there is “no independent foundation for genuine opposition political groups.” Burnham raises the possibility that in the future, the United States, as well as other alleged liberal democracies, will be managerial states instead of democracies, yet ones that use the vocabulary of liberal democracy to conceal their true nature.

In a managerial society, the greatest good is efficiency. In a democratic society, by contrast, the greatest good is liberty, or autonomy. There are many different senses of ‘liberty’ and ‘autonomy.’ But in none of these senses does it mean the same thing as ‘efficiency.’

One reason Plato gives for rejecting democracy is that it leaves life-decisions, such as the pursuit of a career, in the hands of those whom he regarded as unfit to make the decision—unfit because it would reduce social efficiency. His argument assumes that democratic participation in government has only instrumental value, determined by its efficiency in promoting interests that are quite distinct from it. Against Plato, however, we might value control over what happens to us, and shared responsibility for it, even at some cost in efficiency. Each of us values himself as an agent who to some extent plans his life; and each of us shows respect for others as agents of the same sort, in so far as we decide collectively about our lives. Plato rejected democracy as a system, because by concentrating on liberty, it failed to maximize efficiency. A managerial society is a society ruled by technocrats who make decisions on behalf of the masses. It is, since Plato’s time, regarded as a system that is opposed to democracy, rather than one exemplifying it.

He argues only philosophers are capable of caring first and foremost about the common good. Philosophers will be able to make sure the state is efficient for all. In a managerial state one can expect that what ‘efficiency’ means is efficiency for those who control the resources, or efficiency for the managers, or those who own the companies, rather than the managed. But even if there were a state controlled by Plato’s ideal philosophers, who somehow manage it to be more efficient for all, such a state is not a democracy.

One would expect, in a managerial culture, even Plato’s ideal one, that hard work would be a central value, and respect would be accorded on the basis of one’s ability to work hard. Thus one might expect that accusations of laziness would be particularly stinging. A democratic culture is different. Efficiency may be a value, but it is not a democratic value. In a democratic culture, someone who is a bad worker, or lazy, still deserves equal respect. Are alleged liberal democracies now exploiting confusion between democratic values and managerial values to advance antidemocratic policies?

The use of democratic language to mask an antidemocratic worldview that places market efficiency at its center, rather than liberty, is a pervasive and important misuse of democratic vocabulary. The usurpation of liberal democratic language to disguise an antidemocratic managerial society is at the basis of the American public school system as it was restructured between 1910 and 1920.

But liberal democratic cultures seem on the surface free from propaganda; politicians and television hosts shy away from the claim that they are delivering overt propaganda. In liberal democracy, propaganda standardly occurs masked.

Suppose we are in a state that supposedly follows liberal democratic ideals. But the reality diverges deeply from those ideals. For example, perhaps the citizens do not treat one another with equal respect, of the sort governing conversation or exchange between equals. What will be needed to keep the state stable, to keep the citizens from fomenting dissent, is some way to hide the gap between illiberal reality and professed liberal ideals. For example, perhaps the liberal democratic ideals are used to refer to a political system that tolerates massive political inequality (as some think when 'liberalism' is used to refer to neoliberalism). Propaganda in this context is more complicated. The liberal ideals themselves are propagandistically used. It is the propagandistic use of the liberal democratic vocabulary that is responsible for many cases in which we do not notice gaps between ideals and reality.

Vehicle of Propaganda: An institution that represents itself as defined by a certain political ideal, yet whose practice tends to undermine the realization of that ideal.

A school in a liberal democracy is intended to make its students into informed citizens who have the information necessary for informed participation in political deliberation. Suppose the school intentionally leaves out certain information, for example, about the country's systematic injustice toward certain groups. The students it produces therefore have incomplete information, but believe the information to be complete. The school therefore undermines the ideal of having fully informed citizens. A school that produces partially informed citizens who believe they are fully informed is a vehicle of propaganda, even if it never produces any actual propagandistic claims.

Similarly, if a television news station or newspaper presents itself as reporting all relevant news for political decision-making in a country, yet withholds crucial information for decision-making, it too is a vehicle of

propaganda, even if it never produces any actual propagandistic utterances. It is a vehicle of propaganda in virtue of undermining the political ideal it represents itself as embodying, that of fully informing its audience.

Undermining Propaganda: A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to erode those very ideals.

There are certain traditional views of liberalism that privilege market exchange. But it is nevertheless undermining propaganda to present even these views as the view that what now passes for market exchange in the United States is this kind of liberalism, the kind of view of liberalism espoused by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith has a very particular conception of market exchange, one connected to political equality. But the system of market exchange prevalent in the United States is one that has systematically barred certain minorities from participation in contracts, for example, blacks from fair mortgages. It also typically involves unfair exchanges between rich and poor. If so, it is undermining propaganda to represent the liberalism of Adam Smith as connected to market exchange as historically practiced in the United States. Market exchange as historically practiced in the United States does not have the connection to political equality, fair exchange between equals that is at the heart of traditional conceptions of liberalism that emphasize market exchange.

The kind of propaganda that is most threatening to liberal democracy is a species of undermining propaganda we may call demagoguery. Demagoguery is propaganda in the service of unworthy political ideals. What counts as demagoguery therefore depends on moral and political facts. Demagoguery can come in the form of strengthening unworthy political ideals.

There is a simple and compelling argument, known since Plato, which would lead us to expect that even apparently robust liberal democracies are such in name only. The argument is as follows: A certain form of propaganda, associated with demagogues, poses an existential threat to liberal democracy. The nature of liberal democracy prevents propagandistic statements from being banned, since among the liberties it permits is the freedom of speech. But since humans have characteristic rational weaknesses and are susceptible to flattery and manipulation, allowing propaganda has a high likelihood of leading to tyranny, and hence to the end of liberal democracy.

A great many words have some kind of social meaning, that is, not-at-issue content, even a word as innocuous as ‘mother.’ These social meanings, like the social meaning of slurs, cannot be divorced from the use of these

expressions either. The words with the most political efficacy are presumably going to be the seemingly innocuous ones, those words that do not appear to be slurs but are associated with a social meaning that is disabling in some way.

Not only politics but also everyday discourse involve apparently innocent words that have the feature of slurs, namely, that whenever the words occur in a sentence, they convey the problematic content. The word ‘welfare,’ in the American context, is not on any list of prohibited words. Yet the word ‘welfare’ always conveys a problematic social meaning, whenever it is used.

One kind of linguistic propaganda involves repeated association between words and social meanings. Repeated association is also the mechanism by which conventional meaning is formed; it is because people use ‘dogs’ to refer to dogs, repeatedly, that ‘dogs’ comes to refer to dogs.

When the news media connects images of urban Blacks repeatedly with mentions of the term ‘welfare,’ the term ‘welfare’ comes to have the not-at-issue content that Blacks are lazy. At some point, the repeated associations are part of the meaning, the not-at-issue content. This does not mean that someone hearing the term ‘welfare’ automatically comes to believe that Blacks are lazy. It does mean that they may have to shift to different vocabulary, or consciously resist the effects of the association, in conversation or otherwise, to deter the propagandistic effect.

The effect of propaganda in a liberal democracy is to erode respect for a targeted group. In humans, respect for a group or a person is characteristically based upon empathy for them. One characteristic effect of propaganda in a liberal democracy will be to erode empathy for the perspectives of a group in a population, while presenting itself as not so doing. This means that there will be expressions that have normal contents, which express these contents via a way that erodes empathy for a group.

In conversations between members of the dominant group and members of the subordinate group, the members of the subordinate group feel pressure to accept the negative stereotypes of their own group. For example, when a white US citizen is speaking to a Black US citizen about the “problems in the inner city,” there will be pressure, just to move the conversation forward, for the Black citizen to say that she recognizes that many people in the inner city are in fact lazy and violent. So there will be pressure, just for conversation ease, to accept the stereotype of one’s group, and of course then to personally distance oneself from that stereotype. Subordinate group members may be led to accept, however provisionally, the negative stereotype of their group, simply to enter smoothly into any conversation about their group with members of the dominating group.

There is a commonly held view that politics is simply about power and

interests, and the political vocabulary is only ever used strategically. The rhetoric of political and moral ideals is just one more weapon in a game whose object is to seize power and, along with it, the goods of society.

Buddhism, which proclaimed the equality of all men, has generated the theocracy of Tibet; and the religion of Christ, which seemed especially made for the poor and humble, has generated the Roman theocracy. The decline of the old elite and its increasing arrogance at the time of the Reformation can be clearly seen in the emergence of the robber barons. As usual, the new elite leaned on the poor and humble; as usual, the poor and humble believed in the promises made to them; as usual they were deceived, and the yoke weighed even heavier on their shoulders than before. Similarly, the revolution of 1789 produced the Jacobin oligarchy and ended with the imperial despotism. This is what has always happened because the elite are able to weaponize the masses' ignorance and lack of coordination.

Supporting Propaganda: A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to increase the realization of those very ideals by either emotional or other non-rational means.

There are certain examples of supporting propaganda that are perfectly acceptable in a democracy. For example, cigarette packs in many democratic countries carry stark warnings, such as "cigarettes kill." These are clearly intended to overwhelm rational and emotional capacities to further the realization of ideals, in this case, the ideal of health. But propagandistic warning labels on cigarettes seem democratically acceptable, in a way that other propaganda is not.

What is the difference? We can think of a Ministry of Health as tasked to look out for the physical health of a democratic nation when its citizens do not have time to do the relevant research. In a sense, therefore, we task the ministry of health with giving us warnings that will convey a message that will have the effect of doing all the work of informing us about the relevant health issue. In the case of warning labels on cigarette packs, presumably the idea is that we have tacitly granted our permission to the ministry of health to take such steps. If we have not tacitly granted our permission in this manner, then such warning labels are democratically problematic.

In totalitarian societies, there is an official Ministry of Propaganda. Because of that, it is easy in such societies not to take propaganda seriously. But because propaganda can be sincere, the danger propaganda poses in totalitarian societies is that it is not taken seriously. The danger propaganda poses in democratic societies is entirely different. Part of the propaganda

of states that consider themselves liberal democracies is that they do not allow propaganda. So the distinctive danger propaganda poses in liberal democracies is that it is not recognized as propaganda. When effective propaganda is demagogic, it undermines the democratic legitimacy of the goal it is used to motivate.

There is no problem in totalitarian societies recognizing something as propaganda. Claims that are propaganda are those that emerge from the Ministry of Propaganda. The problem in totalitarian societies lies in figuring out which pieces of propaganda are to be taken seriously. It is only natural in liberal democratic societies to take at least the news media seriously. The problem in democratic societies lies in figuring out which apparently non-propagandistic claims are in fact propaganda.

One might argue that whatever the problems of democracy in the United States are, propaganda is not one of them. After all, despite intensive and successful efforts by the wealthiest Americans to dismantle campaign finance laws, polling reveals that Americans continue to support campaign finance reform. Furthermore, one might think that there is no significant problem for democracy, because Americans do not rank campaign finance reform high on their list of priorities. But both of these arguments result from a failure to understand the strategy taken by sophisticated propagandists. Americans do think that there is a serious problem about campaign financing, and they do think that there is a serious problem about climate change. The propaganda that has been employed against them has been in the service of convincing them that the kind of laws that they want passed are invariably in the service of agendas most of them oppose.

For example, 80 percent of Americans think that actual campaign finance reform laws are or would be corrupt, having the purpose of “helping current congress members get reelected” rather than of improving the system. Similarly, in a statement on May 7, 2001, from the Bush White House spokesperson Ari Fleisher, in response to a question about whether the president would urge Americans to change their world-leading energy-consumption habits, he replied:

That’s a big no. The president believes that it’s an American way of life, that it should be the goal of policy-makers to protect the American way of life. The American way of life is a blessed one. The president considers Americans’ heavy use of energy a reflection of the strength of our economy, of the way of life that the American people have come to enjoy.

In the case of climate change, the function of corporate propaganda has been to push the idea that climate change legislation is not in the service

of doing anything about the climate, but rather in the service of changing lifestyles to accommodate a socially progressive agenda—climate change policy as gay marriage.

Suppose that Snowbelt voters support federal government social programs by a 70–30 margin, while Sunbelt voters oppose those programs by a 70–30 margin. To keep things simple, also suppose that there are 100 million voters in all, initially divided as 60 million in the Snowbelt and 40 million in the Sunbelt. Sixty percent of congressional seats and hence roughly 60 percent of electoral votes will be in the Snowbelt and 40 percent in the Sunbelt.

It's easy to see that nationwide 54 percent of the voters support the social programs and 46 percent oppose them. Suppose now that a random mix of 20 million northerners move to the Sunbelt. Of those migrants, 70 percent (14 million) support government social programs and 30 percent (6 million) oppose them. Assume as well that there is no change of political values among the 100 million Americans, so that a 54–46 majority nationwide continues to support the social programs. Nonetheless, with the new demography, Congress is now likely to vote down the programs.

Here's why. In the new Sunbelt, there will now be 60 million voters. The old 40 million Sunbelt residents oppose government programs by a vote of 28 million versus 12 million. The new residents—who have arrived from the Snowbelt—support government programs by a margin of 14 million to 6 million. In total, therefore, 34 million voters of the new Sunbelt (57 percent) will oppose government social programs and 26 million (43 percent) will support them. The South will still be a majority anti-government region, though less decisively than before the in-migration from the North. Yet now it will command a majority of seats in Congress and in the Electoral College and will elect an anti-government majority to Congress and the presidency. Even though there is no change in national opinion—which is still a majority in favor of the social programs—the rise of the Sunbelt population by itself is enough to shift Washington from a pro-government majority to an anti-government majority. Demography is not quite destiny, but it plays a major role.

Underlying effective propaganda are certain kinds of group identities. Some group identities lead to the formation of beliefs that are difficult to rationally abandon, since abandoning them would lead them to challenge our self-worth. When our own identity is tied up with that of a particular group, we may become irrational in these ways. When this occurs, when our group affiliates are such as to lead us to these kinds of rigidly held beliefs, we become especially susceptible to propaganda. In the United States, the two-party system works as a way to manufacture an artificial group identity, akin to an ethnic or national one or an allegiance to a sports team. Part of

the identity seems to consist in allegiance to certain conclusions on a range of “hot button” political issues. On those issues, political party affiliation does seem to result in rigidly held belief and loyalty in the voting booth.

Allegiance to the group identity forged by political party affiliation renders Americans blind to the essential similarities between the agendas of the two parties, similarities that can be expected to be exactly the ones that run counter to public interest, in other words, those interests of the deep-pocketed backers of elections to which any politician must be subservient in order to raise the kind of money many believe is necessary to run for national office. Satisfaction at having one’s group win seems to override the clearly present fundamental dissatisfaction with the lack of genuine policy options. If the function of the two parties is to hide the fact that the basic agenda of both is shared, and irrational adherence to one of the two parties is used propagandistically to mask their fundamental overlap, then we can see how Burnham’s prediction may have come to pass, despite the existence of two distinct political parties.

Political party affiliation is a method to deceive citizens to import partiality that is a normal and healthy part of certain practices, such as being a sports fan, into a realm in which it is not appropriate, namely, political decisions. Political party affiliation is illiberal. Beliefs that are connected to one’s identity will be difficult to abandon. So it will be difficult to abandon the beliefs connected to one’s identity as a political party member. But these will be politically important beliefs, which will now be much less resistant to rational revision. An ideology that is partial becomes democratically problematic when it affects political judgment about policies that might address the injustices that the ideology overlooks. As long as a partial perspective is kept within its proper domain—for example, sports talk radio—it is not flawed. But as soon as it is imported into discourse and reasoning about the public good, it functions as illiberal.

Flawed ideological beliefs corrode rational debate. In a healthy democracy, the goal of a public official should be to dissolve them, rather than rely on them. Relying upon them only strengthens them and makes them much more problematic barriers in subsequent debate.

In front of the camera, both parties cooperate in generating periodic deficit “crises” to cudgel their opponents and get them to give way on their more central priorities. A great deal of maneuvering on domestic policy can be understood as the strategic deployment of the “deficit” charge against your opponent while working behind the scenes to keep the money machine going for your own purposes.

“The United States is also a one-party state,” Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, once observed in defending his own one-party system.

“But with typical American extravagance, they have two of them.”

Democratic citizenship requires taking yourself to be subject to the laws that emerge from a “fair and honest” process of deliberating among one’s fellow politicians and the public, even when those laws are not the ones that you yourself support. The ideals of public reason are central to democratic political philosophy, because it is through debate that is fair and honest that the democratic legitimacy of a policy emerges. Democracy is a system of government that, minimally, preserves the liberty of its citizens by ensuring that they are not subject to arbitrary restrictions. If a polity agrees to laws governing all of its citizens, the rules must be fairly decided upon by the entire public, with the full participation of all the citizens, for the rules to not illegitimately restrict the liberty of some of the citizens.

Suppose you are part of a group jointly deliberating about a policy the group intends to adopt. Perhaps it is a town hall meeting about whether to allow fracking in exchange for the building of a school or some jobs. Suppose you are in the group, and the policy runs counter to your own self-interest. For example, perhaps your house has a well fed by a spring that is likely to be poisoned by the fracking. You are initially therefore opposed. However, the main advocate of the policy produces an argument that the policy is best for all, and convinces the majority to adopt the policy. Suppose that you later find out that the main advocate was lying, or otherwise employing deceit. Furthermore, the reason that the main advocate pushed for that policy is that she was paid to do so. In such a situation, you would feel tricked. You would feel that the decision to adopt that policy was not legitimate. You would feel that the group’s demand that you adhere to the policy was also not a legitimate demand. If they forced you to adhere to the policy, you have legitimate grounds to feel coerced.

In contrast, suppose that you are part of a group deliberating about a policy that the group is contemplating adopting. The main advocate of the policy gives persuasive arguments that it is in the overall best interest of the community to adopt the policy. The policy runs counter to your own self-interest, but you see that the arguments are correct, and that the policy is in fact best for the community as a whole. The advocate is honest, and her arguments are good. You vote against it, but you lose. In this case, you don’t really feel that you have a complaint. The policy was arrived at via fair deliberation. If the group demands that you adhere to the policy, you don’t have legitimate grounds to feel coerced.

The first case we discussed, the decision to allow fracking, was one in which an unfair process led to a policy that was bad for the community at large. The second case we discussed involved a fair process that led to a policy that was good for the community at large. These are what one might

think of as pure cases. The deliberation and policy were both unfair and bad, or fair and good, respectively. What about the impure cases? That is, what about a fair deliberative process that leads, because of false beliefs due to a flawed ideology, for example, to a policy that is bad for the community? Or what about an unfair deliberative process that bypasses some of the community's unreasonable and irrational members to arrive at a policy that is good for the community?

The policies that result from discussion involving deception and trickery are not democratically legitimate. The person who loses out in a discussion subject to devious machinations is analogous to someone who has lost her freedom in an unjust war. Governance by the rules that emerge from such a process results in domination, rather than preservation of autonomy. In order for the principles decided upon by a group of autonomous agents to have binding force on each of them, without loss of autonomy, the procedure by which the joint decision is made must lend legitimacy to the result. As we have seen, if there is no constraint that the people who are party to the deliberation not simply mislead and lie and evade in order to further their own interests, the results of the deliberation will not be democratically legitimate.

A significantly unequal distribution of the goods of society leads to expectations on behalf of those who benefit that they will receive more of the goods of society than they in fact deserve. Failure to receive the goods one is accustomed to receiving will be a disruption of one's expectations that is prone to be mistaken as a violation of justice. There will be a motive from self-interest not to correct the resulting "moral error." That is another way of saying that large and unjust distributions of goods will lead those that are its beneficiaries to adopt a flawed ideology. The existence of flawed ideologies explains the efficacy of demagoguery, the kind of propaganda that undermines democratic deliberation. The notion of equality at the basis of democracy is political, not material. However, because large material inequalities lead to the formation of flawed ideologies that undermine democracy, some kind of general material equality is quite likely a prerequisite for states to be capable of following democratic ideals.

In contemporary American politics, appearances belie reality. Although the text of the Constitution has changed but little since FDR's day, the actual system of governance conceived by the framers—a federal republic deriving its authority from the people in which the central government exercises limited and specified powers—no longer pertains. Citizens disgusted with what many see as a perpetual mess in Washington yearn for a restoration of a mythical Old Republic. The democratic techniques of a free society place checks upon the power of the ruler and administrator and thus prevent it

from becoming vexatious. To the extent that this offers an apt definition of democracy, then, American democracy in our time has suffered notable decay. Checks upon the power exercised by the ruler have eroded badly, with frequently vexing results. Since 1940, a succession of national security emergencies, real and imagined, have permitted the federal government to assume a vast array of new responsibilities at the expense of state and local authorities.

As the chief executive achieved supremacy, the legislative branch not only lost clout but gradually made itself the object of ridicule. David Addington, chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, pungently described the philosophy of the Bush administration this way:

“We’re going to push and push and push until some larger force makes us stop.”

Americans can no longer afford to underwrite a government that does not work. A condition of quasi-permanent crisis stretching across generations has distorted our Constitution with near-disastrous results. To imagine at this juncture that installing some fresh face in the White House, transferring the control of Congress from one party to the other, or embarking upon yet another effort to fix the national security apparatus will make much of a difference is to ignore decades of experience. Yet if presidents have accrued too much power, if the Congress is feckless, if the national security bureaucracy is irretrievably broken, the American people have only themselves to blame. They have allowed their democracy to be hijacked. The hijackers will not voluntarily return what they have stolen.

You don’t need a government that doesn’t serve its citizens—what the hell’s the point?

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“He is a government official of a type that happily is becoming more common—one of those men who appreciate that they represent the public and that they are expected to look after the interests of the public and not the interests of any class. No wonder he is so cordially hated by those who heretofore fattened at the expense of public health and well-being.”

The state’s role as regulator was exchanged for that of enabler, and instead of the commons being protected, it was divvied up amongst the highest bidders.

Although relatively few legislators are overtly dishonest, in the sense of taking bribes or kickbacks, a subtler form of corruption pervades both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Congress may not be a den of iniquity, but it is a haven for narcissistic hacks, for whom self-promotion and self-preservation take precedence over serious engagement with serious issues. To judge by the impassioned rhetoric heard on Capitol Hill, one might think otherwise. Yet even as they take turns denouncing one another, the two parties tacitly collaborate to maintain a status quo that both find eminently satisfactory. To be sure, party loyalists and ideologues of various stripes maintain the pretense that issues of decisive importance are at stake. Right-wingers charge tax-and-spend liberals with being socialists or worse. Self-styled progressives accuse conservatives of conspiring to send women into back alleys to end unwanted pregnancies. But this amounts to little more than theater.

The problem with the existing system of government is not that it differs from what the authors of the Federalist Papers intended or from what elementary school students learn about in social studies. The problem is that what we have doesn’t work. The gross incompetence of those who preside over the federal apparatus is appalling and unacceptable. Washington ought to symbolize enlightened governance. Instead, a system conceived “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity” poses a clear and present danger to those it is meant to serve. This is the political crisis confronting Americans today.

Granted, everyone makes mistakes. Nobody bats a thousand. To err is human. Yet these familiar rationalizations simply won’t do. Some mistakes, even honest ones, cannot be forgiven.

When an industry doesn't want a law enacted but fears a public backlash if it openly opposes the proposed law, it quietly makes sure that there aren't enough funds to enforce it. This was the case when the food industry went along with the Food Safety Modernization Act, which became law in 2011, after thousands of people were sickened by tainted food. Subsequently, the industry successfully lobbied Congress to appropriate so little to enforce it that it has been barely implemented. Defanging laws by hollowing out the agencies charged with implementing them works because the public doesn't know it's happening. The enactment of a law attracts attention. There might even be a signing ceremony at the White House. News outlets duly record the event. But the defunding of the agencies supposed to put the law into effect draws no attention, even though it's the practical equivalent of repealing it.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and its state partners has only about 2,000 inspectors charged with protecting the safety of 130 million workers in more than eight-million workplaces. That is about one inspector for every 59,000 workers. Over the years, congressional appropriations to OSHA have dropped. The agency had been systematically hollowed out. So, too, with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, charged with automobile safety. Its \$134 million budget for 2013, supposedly enough to address the nation's yearly toll of some 34,000 traffic fatalities, was less than what was spent protecting the US embassy in Iraq for three months of that year.

Reducing required reporting to government sounds like a good idea if you think data collection makes companies inefficient. But keep in mind all those statements by politicians—especially those who affiliate themselves with business—that government should be run like a business. Corporations collect and analyze mountains of internal data to understand their operations. To set policy, to keep the competitive playing field level and the regulated field fair to investors and customers alike, government also needs lots of reliable data. When companies have this data internally and regulators do not, it creates what economists call an asymmetry, meaning one-sided knowledge. Asymmetry creates regulatory blindness. One-sided information lets the companies game the system for their benefit because it obscures what policy-makers understand. Lack of information makes already cautious regulators even more hesitant, and it emboldens companies, strengthening their confidence that conduct they want to keep private is likely to remain unobserved.

Fudging figures, doctoring reports, and creative accounting may seem minor, though deplorable, offenses. But they are not minor. When it comes to nuclear plant safety, the value of accurate, complete, and reliable

paperwork cannot be underestimated. In the United States, NRC inspectors audit only about five percent of the activities at nuclear plants, according to senior managers at the commission. Most of these audits involve reviewing the records of tests and inspections performed by plant workers. The NRC inspectors themselves witness only a very small fraction of actual tests and inspections. To put this another way: when workers feel free to prepare fictional accounts of tests and inspections, nuclear safety assurances begin morphing from nonfiction to fiction as well.

“If the Federal Aviation Administration operated on the same rules as pipeline safety regulators, I wouldn’t get on a plane.”

Instead of replacing corroded pipelines, the owners just de-rate them. ‘De-rating’ means reducing the maximum pressure allowed from, say, 1,500 pounds per square inch to 1,200 pounds. As corrosion eats through more of a pipeline’s steel wall, the pressure maximum may be reduced again and again based on calculations estimating the rate of corrosion. In theory, if the engineers guess right about the rate of corrosion, the pipeline will keep operating at lower and lower pressures until it is no longer profitable and will then be replaced or abandoned. In the meantime, as if engaged in some sort of life-or-death power game, they bet on the balance of corrosion and pressure.

The federal officials whose responsibility is to keep us safe from pipeline explosions have been granting “special permits” for segments of high-pressure pipelines that are supposed to be inspected under a 2002 law. While the federal Department of Transportation calls them “special permits,” that is just another euphemism for inspection-rule waivers. In reading some of these waivers, one might notice that they seemed not to say what was presumably intended.

Five safety waivers were issued to Empire Pipeline LLC, a subsidiary of National Fuel Gas in suburban Buffalo, New York, for nearly two miles of pipelines because of the difficulty involved in inspecting the pipes, which vary in diameter. As written, the permits set limits: Empire Pipeline may pump gas through when corrosion has eaten through 72 percent of the pipeline wall not covered by the safety waiver and, where the safety waiver is in effect, 80 percent along segments. It would in fact seem the permit was actually intended to say the reverse—requiring repairs at 28 percent corrosion for the main areas and 20 percent for the waived areas. When notified, both Empire’s president, Ronald Kraemer, and the Secretary of Transportation’s office did not follow-up. If the Empire pipeline ever blows

up, it will be in part thanks to the studied inaction of both the company and the government when notified of this potentially lethal paperwork error.

Just where is this one-third-mile-long pipeline? Unless you know the proprietary mile marking system that the pipeline company uses, you cannot tell. Does it run through a wheat farm or along Church Street? Past a wooded lot or a hospital? If you request map coordinates, street intersections or street addresses at the start and end of the section, neither Empire nor the Transportation Secretary's office nor their agency's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration will tell you. The reason for this secrecy, is official concern that terrorists might blow up the pipeline segments. With easily identifiable pipelines in places like Manhattan, terrorists aren't likely to target a section of pipeline in the Finger Lakes region of New York. But this misguided secrecy on the part of federal pipeline safety regulators does mean that people along the Empire Pipeline route are ignorant of the fact that they are living, shopping, playing, and going to schools near pipelines that have been given inspection waivers and are still allowed to operate when pipeline walls may be 80 percent corroded.

Although the means to inspect inside pipelines exist, the principal method of detecting gas leaks is to fly overhead and look for desiccated grass and trees—leaking natural gas kills plant life at the roots. That may be adequate for slow leaks, but not sudden ruptures which can create sparks.

“The compressor stations have been refitted to handle higher pressure and higher volumes of gas. So you would think that means more and more careful supervision, but just the opposite has happened. Now in compressor stations, fewer people are utilized and more reliance is put on computers. Fortunately we have not had a major disaster at a large compressor station for some time, but when we do, I believe it will make the pipeline explosions look like small fireworks.”

There's a final irony. The pipeline monopolies whose prices are regulated by the government get to include in their rates the cost of insurance to pay for losses from pipeline disasters. As pipelines age and as more people live near pipelines, the risk of disaster increases—and so does the cost of insurance. But because pipelines are monopolies, they get to add the higher insurance costs to the rates they charge. So you get to pay more even as you are put in greater danger.

“I have to look at the entire industry, not just what is best for public health.”
—USDA Official

That we do not experience more episodes of illness is nothing less than miraculous, a tribute more to our healthy immune systems, the benefits of cooking and food preservation, and plain good luck than to federal oversight.

The story of consumer protection in the United States is often the story of a country playing defense, an account of government regulators waking up, time and time again, to yet another public health crisis. The 1906 food and drug law, which established federal food regulation, was propelled into being largely by a series of scandals over food processing, including the gruesomely spectacular case of the Chicago meatpackers. The 1938 law, which created the modern US Food and Drug Administration, was passed following the deaths of dozens of children who were poisoned by a cough syrup legally sweetened with the antifreeze ingredient diethylene glycol. A 1956 decision by the FDA to ban some of the old coal-tar dyes arose from the sickening of children by Halloween candy that contained unsafe levels of orange and red coloring agents. A 1976 law authorizing the agency to regulate medical devices was passed after some 200,000 women reported injuries from an intrauterine birth control device called the Dalkon Shield.

More recently, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), a sweeping update to the FDA's protective authority, was signed into law after one of the most severe food-poisoning outbreaks in American history, one that continued for months—from late 2008 to early 2009—and derived from one of the country's most trusted and ordinary food staples. The cause was a line of peanut butters made by the Virginia-based Peanut Corporation of America. The company used factories that were deliberately unregistered to avoid government attention. Many of the jars and containers of peanut butter, produced in notably unsanitary conditions, contained the pathogenic bacteria salmonella. People in forty-six states were sickened; the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention linked the products to an estimated nine deaths and up to 22,000 illnesses. To the dismay of consumers and legislators alike, the source of the contamination was identified not by the federal government but by state laboratories in Minnesota, Georgia, and Connecticut, harking back to nineteenth-century failures in enforcing nationwide consumer protection.

The CFPB's entire budget is equal to just two percent of what JPMorgan Chase set aside in reserves for its litigation expenses in 2013. If it doesn't blow shit up or kill people, you don't get much.

Many recommend a unified and central framework for managing federal food safety programs, one that is headed by a single official and which has the responsibility and control of resources for all federal food safety activities. This recommendation envisions an identifiable, high-ranking, presidentially appointed head, who would direct and coordinate federal activities and

speak to the nation, giving federal food safety efforts a single voice. The structure created, and the person heading it, should have control over the resources Congress allocates to the food safety effort; the structure should also have a firm foundation in statute and thus not be temporary and easily changed by political agendas or executive directives. The most viable means of achieving these goals would be to create a single, unified agency headed by a single administrator.

To ensure safe food Congress should provide the mandate, authority, and funding necessary to achieve:

- A single agency accountable for providing consistent and coordinated oversight of food safety, from farm to table
- Revision of the 1906 safety inspection laws to permit oversight of microbial pathogens
- Institution of Pathogen Reduction: HACCP, with performance standards verified by pathogen testing, at every step of food production
- A national food safety plan that sets priorities, adopts strategies, ensures accountability, and monitors progress
- Recall authority, access to records, and penalties for lapses in safety procedures
- Uniform food safety standards for states, consistent with federal policies
- Standards for imported foods equivalent to those for domestic foods
- Food safety to take precedence over commercial considerations in trade disputes
- Universal food safety education for commercial food handlers
- A national system for monitoring cases and outbreaks of foodborne disease and their causes
- Research on methods to control microbial contamination and illness, and on prevention strategies

Foolish Farming

Big Ag's Stranglehold

Prior to the invention of the railroad, much of the nation functioned as an archipelago of many different communities, each supporting a largely self-contained economy. Especially in communities apart from major natural waterways or canal systems, a farmer could spend his entire life farming the same plot of land, selling his crops to the same local customers, with minimal impact upon business in other states. After the growth of the railways, this same farmer's crops could travel to one of several central hubs, where the railroads could take them anywhere in the country or even to a port that would bring them overseas. The nation's economy was interconnected in a way that America's colonial ancestors could never have anticipated, and this unity made a new kind of business arrangement possible.

The very same railroads that enabled a farmer in Iowa to sell his crops in New York also placed him in competition with farmers throughout the nation—and the same was true of virtually every other business in the country. Timber mills, mines, and manufacturers who once supplied their entire community now risked being undercut by a business hundreds of miles away, and they also had a new opportunity to cut into that company's bottom line. It wasn't long before often-distant competitors began joining together in trusts and similar combinations to gain advantage over their smaller rivals.

The consequences for borrowing money and failing to repay it are clear, certain, and often devastating. But it wasn't always this way. An early nineteenth-century Massachusetts lending company helped create the debt system we know today. The Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company (MHLIC) was created in 1823 and quickly became the largest financial institution in New England. Despite its name, its main business during its first two decades was investing Boston elites' wealth in mortgages on farms west of the city.

There was nothing new about farm loans, but prior to the 1820s they

typically operated in a personal way. Borrowers and lenders often knew each other socially, and in most cases people wouldn't sue their neighbors. Local debts were often carried on the books for years and paid off only at a farmer's death. MHLIC created a new, bureaucratic way of doing business. Farmers in need of loans applied to lawyers who served as regional agents. Chief Executive Nathaniel Bowditch and the corporation's loan committee then decided whether to issue credit, using strict procedures for determining whether a farm operation was creditworthy. In evaluating the farmers, agents considered their work routines, spending, drinking habits, and—especially—punctuality.

For farmers the focus on punctual payments took some getting used to. Borrowers often wrote to explain that they couldn't make an annual payment on time because of bad weather or, sometimes, for no particular reason. One wrote:

“I should have sent this before but have been absent on a Journey and it slipped [sic] my mind before I left.”

When payments were even slightly late, however, the company sent notices threatening lawsuits and foreclosures. Some farmers and rural politicians worried that foreclosures could bring farms under corporate ownership, turning yeoman farmers into tenants and corporations into a new aristocracy. In reality, the MHLIC rarely followed through on its threats. Bowditch noted in internal messages that it would hurt the company's reputation to be perceived as seizing an unlucky farmer's land.

What the company really wanted was to teach farmers to accept the demands of the growing financial order, which was impersonal and precision-oriented. Bowditch was personally fixated on regularity, punctuality, and precise record-keeping. This sometimes rubbed fellow elites the wrong way when he applied the same standards to the loans they took out. But it was the reason he'd been recruited to run the MHLIC. When farmers and populists suggested that the company's behavior was cold-blooded, Bowditch insisted that they were simply rational and even-handed.

When one rural borrower asked permission to send in his payment late, the Company responded:

“The interest on your note must be paid immediately—the officers of the Co. have no power to suspend the By-Law.”

As if it were a law of physics. That attitude may sound familiar to anyone who's ever had to deal with a twenty-first century debt-collecting bureaucracy.

The people who were once radical are now reactionary. Though they speak today in the same aggrieved language of victimization, and though they face the same array of economic forces as their hard-bitten ancestors, today's populists make demands that are precisely the opposite. Tear down the federal farm programs, they cry. Privatize the utilities. Repeal the progressive taxes. All they ask today is a little help nailing itself to that cross of gold.

"It was his own fault, of course," wrote the historian Vernon L. Parrington of the Midwestern farmer's predicament of the 1890s. Due to his own political slackness the farmer had allowed himself to become the common drudge of society. While capitalism had been perfecting its machinery of exploitation he had remained indifferent to the fact that he himself was the fattest goose that capitalism was to pluck. He had helped indeed to provide the rope for his own hanging. He had voted away the public domain to railways that were now fleecing him; he took pride in the county-seat towns that lived off his earnings; he sent city lawyers to represent him in legislatures and in Congress; he read middle-class newspapers and listened to bankers and politicians and cast his votes for the policy of Whiggery that could have no other outcome than his own despoiling.

Consider what used to happen in Oelwein, Iowa, before the large-scale consolidation in the 1980s and '90s of almost every niche of the food-production chain. Corn farmers would have bought seed from the local seed company. Once harvested, that corn would go to a grain elevator, also locally owned. It would be shipped to a small feedlot in order to fatten cattle raised in Nebraska, Wyoming, Florida, or Arizona; or perhaps it would go to a dairy in northern Missouri, a chicken farm in Indiana, or a pork outfit in Kansas. The variables were infinite, and the market was dynamic. The barge, truck, or railroad car that carried the grain was likely independently owned, too, as would have been the pigs, cows, and chickens it fed. At each stage, the price would have to be "discovered" as multiple potential customers vied to handle the product, with competition keeping the price "true," or fair, in the context of the marketplace. Eventually, the Oelwein corn used to feed sows in Topeka might return to Oelwein in the form of hocks to be disassembled, packaged, and shipped at the Iowa Ham plant. From there, a whole new market, just as complex and multifaceted, would take over in order to distribute the food and sell it at a retail level, perhaps at the grocery (once locally-owned). The farmers would have been the essential building blocks in a vibrant system in which the variables contributed at all stages to what's called the "social capital" of rural communities. In circulatory terms, there was blood flow even in the capillaries.

Beginning with the precedent set in 1987 with the IBP takeover of Hormel

in Ottumwa—and the subsequent takeover of Iowa Ham by Gillette—a few companies would come to control most of the US food business. Today, according to sociologists, the dynamism essential to the marketplace has been lost because there is no longer a multifaceted context. Price discovery no longer happens; the value chain is controlled by a limited number of entities. Seed is not sold; it's biogenetically engineered by companies like Monsanto, which entered a joint venture with Cargill in 1998. Cargill—not the farmer—owns the corn that is grown, too, because it's more than likely that the farmer, who would once have chosen a buyer for his crop, has been contracted to sell only to Cargill. In the Illinois and Ohio river valleys, Cargill owns 50 percent of the grain elevators and other storage facilities. Along with Tyson, Swift and Co., and the National Beef Packing Company, Cargill owns 83.5 percent of the beef packing industry. Cargill, Hormel, ConAgra, and Carolina Turkey own 51 percent of turkey production and packing. Cargill is number one in flour milling; number two in ethanol production and in animal feed plants, producing nine-million tons a year; and number three in soybean crushing. If you are a corn farmer almost anywhere from Pennsylvania to Iowa, you are likely to work for Cargill in at least one of several ways. Even in places like Fayette County, Iowa, where Cargill's presence is implicit rather than explicit, family farms must grow to an enormous size in order to compete. This squeezes out all but the heartiest souls who care enough about their way of life to essentially take a vow of poverty.

As usual, there are many factors at work in the farm crisis, but the main cause is the five or six huge agribusiness conglomerates that buy raw materials from farmers and process and package them for export or for sale in grocery stores. People who have never lived in a farm state often think of all agriculture interests as essentially identical: farmers and agribusiness all want the same things, they believe. But in reality the interests of the two are more like those of the chicken and Colonel Sanders. And Colonel Sanders has been on an unbroken winning streak now for twenty-some years, with farm legislation, trade policy, and a regulatory climate all crafted to strengthen the conglomerates while weakening farmers. For shareholders and upper management of companies like Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) and Tyson, the result has been miraculous, a heaven on earth. For towns like Emporia, it has been ruinous.

The farm is where Americans learned their first lessons in the pitfalls of laissez-faire economics a hundred years ago. Farming is a field uniquely unsuited to the freewheeling whirl of the open market. There are millions of farmers, and they are naturally disorganized; they can't coordinate their plans. Not only are they easily victimized by powerful middlemen—as they

were by the railroads in the Populists' day—but when they find themselves in a tough situation—when, say, the price they are getting for wheat is low—farmers do not have the option of cutting back production, as every other industry does. Instead, each of those millions of farmers works harder, competes better, becomes more efficient, cranks out more of the commodity in question and thus makes the glut even worse and pushes the prices still lower. This is called an “overproduction trap,” and it can only be overcome by a suspension of competition through government intervention. Such intervention is what the Populists and the farmers' unions fought for decades to secure; it finally came with the New Deal, which brought price supports and acreage set-asides and loan guarantees.

For agribusiness, however, farm overproduction is the ideal situation. From their perspective, lower farm prices means higher profits and even greater power in the marketplace. Overproduction and all-out competition between farmers are thus to be encouraged by all available political means. While farmers are naturally disorganized, agribusiness moves in the opposite direction: like all industries, it seeks always to merge and acquire and choke off competition. And, also like other industries, it was finally permitted to do these things in the deregulatory climate of the Reagan–Clinton era.

In the eighties agriculture experts generally agreed that if four companies controlled over 40 percent of market share in a given field, it was no longer competitive. Today, however the four largest players process 81 percent of the beef, 59 percent of the pork, and 50 percent of the chicken produced in the United States. The same phenomenon is at work in grain: the largest four process 61 percent of American wheat, 80 percent of American soybeans, and either 57 percent or 74 percent of American corn, depending on the method. It is no coincidence that the internal motto of Archer Daniels Midland, the grain-processing giant notorious for its political clout and its price-fixing, is reported to be “the competitor is our friend and the customer is our enemy.”

These percentages are estimates, of course, because accurate figures have become more difficult to obtain. Trade journals have come under pressure to not publish some of this information and government agencies often say that to reveal the proportion of a market controlled by a single firm in such a concentrated market is revealing proprietary information.

Agribusiness had acquired most of this stranglehold by the mid-nineties, but farmers were not yet totally in their grasp, thanks to the various farm programs enacted in the thirties. This escape route was closed off in 1996 under the ironically named Freedom to Farm Act, which effectively terminated certain price supports, threw all acreage open to cultivation, and generally brought a close to the New Deal system of agriculture regulation. It

also launched the nation's remaining farmers into a desperate overproduction spiral, a frantic race to compete in which the devil, as usual, takes the hindmost. Written by Kansas senator Pat Roberts and supported by the other Republican members of the state's delegation, Freedom to Farm was one of the many bold deregulatory initiatives that marked the New Economy era; farmers, it was believed, now had the tools to compete effectively on the free market. Everything was different now. They didn't need the government telling them what to do (that farmers had themselves demanded the New Deal programs was forgotten by then); they could grow whatever they wanted in whatever quantities and trust to the market to give them a fair price. Markets were great. Markets made everything fine.

From a high of over \$6.50 in 1996, the average price of a bushel of wheat (the dominant crop in Kansas) fell to \$2.25 in 1999, the same price that it had fetched in the disaster years of the mid-eighties. At such a rate, failure was inevitable for everyone except the largest and most efficient farms. In fact, the crisis got so bad so fast that the federal government resumed making massive payouts to farmers in order to stop the bleeding—not as price supports this time, but simply on the basis of production, so that the larger farms, the ones that needed the money the least, got the most. In Kansas in 2000 and 2001, such federal handouts were actually greater than what farmers earned from farming itself. For ADM, Cargill, ConAgra, and the rest of the food trust, Freedom to Farm couldn't have been better if they had written the law themselves. The processor or feedlot operator now paid substantially less for his wheat and corn than what it cost to grow the wheat and corn; for his finished goods he continued to charge shoppers at the grocery store the same price as before.

Ask a free-market economist about all these goings-on, and he or she will tell you that what happens to the farmers doesn't matter as long as consumers get cheap beef, bread, and potatoes. The problem, however, is that when an industry becomes so concentrated that its component companies have unchallenged market power—as is clearly the case with the food trust—there is nothing forcing them to pass along the savings to the consumer. So while the farmers work themselves into an ever deeper hole, prices in supermarkets remain roughly the same. According to the findings of one professor of agriculture, food prices for consumers have grown by 2.8 percent since 1984 while the prices that farmers receive for producing the same food have fallen by 35.7 percent. The middlemen keep the difference.

Freedom to Farm is a license to a couple of multinational grain companies to steal the product produced by the farmers. The gigantic subsidies handed out since the law was passed in 1996 are merely an indirect subsidy to large-scale corporations and livestock operations.

One can characterize the changes in rural America in terms of Karl Marx's critique of the theory of political economy posited by Adam Smith. With many buyers and many sellers there is perfect competition and no need for government intervention. Smith's "invisible hand of capitalism" works, in theory, to effect the highest amount of economic blood flow at all levels. In reality, Marx's counter-theory has unfortunately proved more insightful. Strapped with the mandate to "grow or die," businesses are encouraged to cannibalize competition until there are no longer many buyers and many sellers, but rather, many buyers and an increasingly limited number of sellers. The flow of capital is dammed up. Once competition has been annihilated, the surviving companies, like Cargill, begin to effect political decisions through their enormous lobbying capabilities. The government no longer governs unimpeded: it does so in tandem with the major companies, just as Marx predicted. It was a century ago that Teddy Roosevelt made his reputation by "busting up the trusts" that had become too powerful. Those "trusts," not coincidentally, were in large part the industrial meat-packers of the early twentieth century.

By 1996, Cargill—with the help of Monsanto and its stable of seed companies—controlled massive shares of almost every food-related market. It was among the top five beef and pork packers, beef-feedlot owners, turkey-farming operators, and ethanol producers. It was number one in animal-feed plants and grain elevators, and number two in flour milling, dry corn milling, wet corn milling, and soybean crushing. Cargill was also moving aggressively into the transportation business, namely river barges, railroad cars, and trucking companies, as well as acquiring grocery store chains. As a result of this centralization most rural economic development specialists discount agriculture as a contributor to rural development. That's to say that, whether you're talking about Oelwein, Algona, or Ottumwa, Iowa, between 1980 and 1995, the lifeblood of those towns ceased to provide the same life that it had offered for over a hundred years.

It was an astonishing sea change in a very short period. Just a quarter century ago when family businesses were the predominant system in rural communities, researchers talked of multiplier effects of three or four—meaning that each dollar generated by farmers in Oelwein would exchange hands three or four times before leaving the community. Today that number is down to one. Historically, farming communities were models of rural economic health, and mining communities like those in the Appalachians were an indicator of a crippling system of centralization. Today, farming and mining communities are indistinguishable. Oelwein and Algona are statistically related to Elk Garden, West Virginia.

It's worth noting that the reason your dinner moves an average of fifteen-

hundred miles to get from its source to your plate is because the source—or sources, really—is determined by companies like Tyson and Cargill and ConAgra, based on where they can pay the cheapest labor costs.

There has also been a rise of the contract system under which an increasing percentage of farm products are now delivered to the processor. In some areas of farm production, in fact, actual markets—in which cattle or hogs, say, are bid up or down by competing buyers—have almost completely disappeared. Farmers are merely “growers” now, workers who provide labor and land to produce some commodity that is under contract from start to finish to the conglomerate. Animals are raised by contract with the all-powerful meatpackers, a price agreed upon long before the creature changes hands.

Beginning in the sixties the big thinkers of the meat biz figured out ways to routinize and de-skill their operations from beginning to end. Not only would this allow them to undercut the skilled, unionized butchers who were then employed by grocery stores, but it would also let them move their plants to the remotest part of the Great Plains, where they could ditch their unionized big-city workers and save on rent. By the early nineties this strategy had put the century-old stockyards in Chicago and Kansas City out of business altogether. As with every other profit-maximizing entity, the industry’s ultimate preference would probably be to have been done with this expensive country once and for all and relocate operations to the third world, where it could be free from regulators, trial lawyers, and prying journalists. Sadly, for the packers, they are prevented from achieving that dream by various food regulations. So instead they bring the workers here, employing waves of immigrants from Southeast Asia, Mexico, and points south.

There were other advantages for the packers in moving to distant and isolated towns. In the big cities, they had always been conspicuous targets for reformers and reporters; you couldn’t pass through Chicago without catching a whiff of the stockyards and being instantly reminded of *The Jungle*. On the High Plains the packers are just about the only game in town. And they use their power accordingly. They threaten to close down a plant if they don’t get their way on some issue or other. They play towns off against one another the way pro sports franchises do. Who will give the packers the biggest tax abatement? Who will vote the fattest bond issue? Who will let them pollute the most? If they can’t flee to another country, well, they’ll just bring those countries’ conditions here to the US it seems.

This is economic growth, yes, but it is the sort of growth that makes a city less wealthy and less healthy as its population increases. Nor does the situation improve much as the decades pass. It has been twenty years now since the packers first moved to Garden City, and two anthropologists who

have studied the region now warn of a permanent breakdown in middle-class life; of a strategy of development that forever puts a town, despite its best efforts, at the mercy of the meat industry's insatiable appetite for cheap labor and the social turmoil that follows from it.

The Garden City saga bespeaks the acceptance of a marginal class, and passive exploitation of it, as a permanent feature of the social system by a nation's middle and upper classes. Anthropologists caution us in their sober way about a recipe for "growth" that blandly accepts a permanent impoverished class. They may be too polite to say it aloud, but they know that poverty rocks. Poverty is profitable. Poverty makes stocks go up and labor come down.

In 1999, Cargill-Excel placed newspaper advertisements in the poor, industrial border towns of Juárez and Tijuana offering two free months' rent to workers who could make it to Ottumwa from Mexico. For Cargill and the rest of the meat-packing conglomerates, employing illegals would appear to have been the best of all possible situations, for the simple reason that these employees, lacking legal identification, didn't technically exist, and therefore had no rights. Nor were they apt to argue with the harsh conditions of an industry that continues today to have the highest rate of employee injury in the United States.

A failed 2001 federal criminal case brought against a Tyson plant in Shelbyville, Tennessee, made clear that corporations would essentially not be held liable for employing or recruiting illegal immigrants to work in the plants. Despite the fact that two Shelbyville managers were caught on tape by federal investigators asking human traffickers for five-hundred undocumented workers over four months, Tyson's defense team successfully maintained that it's too difficult for Tyson employees to determine who's who among legal and illegal employees. The ruling institutionalized the notion that employers of immigrants are not beholden to offering the same rights to workers that other companies must, for the simple reason that they don't know—and don't need to know—who works for them. Alternatively, how can there be any hope of enforcing laws on people who are not who they say they are? According to two former employees of the Cargill-Excel plant in Ottumwa—both of whom were in the United States illegally—the going rate on stolen social security cards at the plant in 2005 was one-thousand dollars, though the most prolific vendor offered the equivalent of a package deal if you wanted more than one.

A Banana Tale

A discarded banana peel quickly became a gooey mess. People actually did slip, fall, and sometimes injure themselves when they stepped on them. So common an occurrence, Charlie Chaplin was even asked how to make something so tired seem new. How, for example, could one make a fat lady, walking down Fifth Avenue, slip on a banana peel and still get a laugh? It's been done a million times. Do you show first the banana peel, then the fat lady approaching, then she slips? Or do you show the fat lady first, then the banana peel, and then she slips? Chaplin's answer:

“Neither. You show the fat lady approaching. Then you show the banana peel; then you show the fat lady and the banana peel together; then she steps *over* the banana peel and disappears down a manhole.”

What we know as a movie gag was real enough that in 1909 the St. Louis city council passed an ordinance prohibiting persons from “throwing or casting” a “banana rind” on public streets or sidewalks. Another regulation the official body passed that year forbid anyone from allowing a “bear to run at large.”

Such private efforts were of little help. It took a public agency to solve the banana peel problem. In New York, a former Civil War colonel named George Waring used his military experience to fashion the city's department of street sweeping. The wild pigs that once roamed the street, eating any organic matter they could find (this is not a joke), were replaced by uniformed workers, who tidied specific beats and deposited the waste they collected into public composting facilities.

Everywhere bananas have appeared, they've changed the cultures that embraced them. In the most ancient translations of the Bible, the “apple” consumed by Eve in the Garden of Eden is the more suggestive banana. The Koran also situates the banana in the sacred garden. There, Eden's forbidden tree is called the *talh*, an archaic Arabic word that scholars usually translate as “tree of paradise” (or sometimes even more directly as “banana tree”). The Islamic sacred text describes the tree as one whose “fruits piled one above another, in long extended shade, whose season is not limited, and whose supply will not be cut off.” Sure enough, that description matches the concentric rings of banana bunches and the plant's multigenerational life span.

But let's swing back to the Judeo-Christian Bible, for a moment. In the Western story of Eden, Adam and Eve are said to react to their nakedness by

covering themselves with “fig leaves.” Fig greenery might cover the essentials, barely. Perhaps Eve was the inventor of the first thong? However, it is more likely that Adam’s banana hammock was made of actual banana leaves. Banana leaves have been used to make clothing—as well as rope, bedding, and umbrellas—in many parts of the world, a practice that continues even today. In this case, the word for the Edenic fruit isn’t mistranslated, just misunderstood: Bananas have been called figs throughout history. Alexander the Great, after sampling the fruit in India, described it as such, as did Spanish explorers in the New World. The clincher comes from ancient Hebrew. In that language, the language of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament, including Genesis) a word for the forbidden fruit translates directly: It is called the “fig of Eve.”

In the African nations surrounding Lake Victoria, the word for food, translated from Swahili, is also the word for banana. In Central America, bananas built and toppled nations: a struggle to control the banana crop led to the overthrow of Guatemala’s first democratically elected government in the 1950s, which in turn gave birth to the Mayan genocide of the 1980s. In the 1960s, banana companies—trying to regain plantations nationalized by Fidel Castro—allowed the CIA to use their freighters as part of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Over and over again, the banana is linked with triumph and tragedy: Banana workers in Honduras wrote epic novels, poems, and songs about the difficult conditions they worked under. Eli Black, the chairman of Chiquita, threw himself out the window of a Manhattan skyscraper in 1974 after his company’s political machinations were exposed. The term ‘banana republic’ reflects the excess of influence banana producers wielded throughout the twentieth century.

It isn’t fair to blame the banana industry for all of Colombia’s problems. But it is important to point out that in that country and throughout Latin America, the destabilization resulting from banana-related interventions created a tradition of weak institutions, making it difficult for true democracy and fair economic policies to take hold. The Latin American tradition of governments not supported by the general population, and propped up by overseas commercial interests, was created under the authorship of United Fruit.

Items that we consider mealtime standards today didn’t exist until United Fruit invented them. Company research found that mothers were feeding mashed bananas to their babies, for example. So United Fruit hired doctors to endorse the practice and launched advertisements to drive the point home. In 1924 the company scored what would be its biggest culinary hit: The United Fruit test kitchens suggested that the perfect breakfast for a busy, modern family would consist of bananas sliced into corn flakes

with milk. It wasn't just the recipe that broke new ground. It was also the coupons, pioneered by the company, packed inside cereal boxes, redeemable for free bananas that the cereal companies, not the fruit importer, paid for. The company made sure that children knew about bananas, too. It set up an official "education department," devoted to publishing textbooks and curriculum materials that subtly provided information about the fruit.

Europe had unified and in doing so had become an even bigger market for bananas than the United States. (Not by much: Continental consumption averages about 30 million tons of the fruit annually versus 26 million tons in the United States.) Among the lesser-known elements of Europe's consolidation were programs designed to aid former colonies. That included the Caribbean banana plantations Chiquita had mostly abandoned as Panama disease moved from island to island. Now, those small farms, growing Cavendish but no longer owned by Chiquita, were given preferential treatment by European governments—the measures were designed to ensure the economic health of those now-independent countries. The result? Chiquita, which had held 20 percent of the European market, suddenly found itself with less than half that.

The company had to do something with all those excess bananas, so it sold them in the United States, creating a banana glut that caused prices to plummet. Chiquita's lawyers and lobbyists argued that the European regulations were both unfair and illegal under World Trade Organization rules, a case of government policy mandating preferential treatment to specific companies in what was supposed to be an open market. They went directly to US officials—at that time, the Clinton administration—and in 1996 the United States lodged an official protest with the agency. The day after the meeting with administration officials, the banana mogul donated \$500,000 to the Democratic Party—sackfuls of cash or coin dropped on a desk were so much more honest. One of the things that seemed to be forgotten in the fight was why the European tariffs were enacted in the first place: to help the banana-growing islands keep jobs and emerge from poverty. In an interview, one Dominican farmer imagined the consequences of an outcome favorable to Chiquita, which would return the banana industry to the grown-where-they're-cheapest status quo:

"If they squeeze us out, we will be the ones that will suffer. When you take away a man's daily bread, you take away my livelihood. You send me to common crime. You force me to traffic in drugs."

With Panama disease, in every case, the failure of the banana companies to enforce proper quarantine and isolation practices hastened the spread.

The banana moguls knew what Panama disease was. They knew what it did. They knew how it spread. But they refused to use any of this knowledge for positive change. It was as if the power of the banana, which had changed both the nations that consumed it and those that grew it, had addicted United Fruit and its rivals to just one method of growth: blunt marauding through the tropics without considering the consequences of, or alternatives to, standard procedure. Now that nature had answered back, the banana companies seemed deaf and baffled. When Black Sigatoka came along, they tried a different tactic.

Five lawsuits were filed against Dole on behalf of banana workers in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama. The suits alleged that the former Standard Fruit had, since the 1970s, knowingly used a pesticide called DBCP—mostly to fight Black Sigatoka—that made workers sterile (the chemical is banned in the United States). In August 2007, Dole CEO David DeLorenzo testified in a Los Angeles courtroom that his company safeguarded the health of workers by instituting screening programs and offering free medical care. Company documents uncovered during the case confirmed that the fruit importer did test employees—and also ignored reports that came back positive. At one point, Dow Chemical, the manufacturer of DBCP, told Dole that the chemical was dangerous and that it would no longer sell it to the banana producers. Dole threatened Dow with a breach-of-contract lawsuit, and the spraying continued.

Our Synthetic Century

“The rains are getting worse and more unpredictable every year—we don’t even have proper seasons any more—but I will persevere with farming for as long as I can. It is a good kind of work to make food for people.”

“Initially, I wanted to be a doctor or a dental surgeon. But I ended up in the agricultural field and I think that was the best thing that could have happened to me. Our professor used to tell us: this is the best faculty. Look at the doctors, they cannot treat patients if they themselves are hungry. Look at the patients, they cannot recover unless they have food. Look at the lawyers, without food nobody can work and you are the ones that can provide it.”

Rachel Carson’s 1962 book *Silent Spring* and the ensuing campaign to ban the pesticide DDT created the new prototype. Carson’s book was an alarm call not just about the damage DDT was wreaking on birds’ eggs but about the ecological blind spots of an entire industrial order. The response, though, was narrowly focused, specific and measurable: ten years after the book first hit shelves, DDT’s production and use had been banned in the United States. There soon emerged something like a standard structure to the life cycle of an environmental issue in the years after *Silent Spring*.

A problem would be identified as significantly acute and urgent, often by scientists or environmental groups or both in concert. Public awareness was then raised through protest, publicity stunts, and media campaigns. Government officials were persuaded of the necessity to act. New regulation was proposed, debated, drafted, passed. Affected industries were obliged, often reluctantly, to comply. There was a symmetry to it.

A rogue Greenpeace boat blocks a whaling ship’s harpoons, the subsequent media attention plants “Save the Whales” in the public consciousness, and in due course an international moratorium on commercial whaling is enacted. Industrial phosphates pouring into the Great Lakes are identified as the cause of biodiversity-killing algal blooms, and toxic chemicals known as PCBs are found leaking into waterways. Their use and disposal become tightly controlled. Sulphur dioxide emissions from power plant smokestacks, clear-cut logging, a refrigeration chemical destroying the atmosphere’s vital ozone layer—one after another, specific environmental contaminants and pollution streams are identified, campaigns mounted, and problems reduced, if rarely solved completely. If the ground-level reality of such campaigns was

often much more precarious and complex, the entirety of it was nonetheless fixed in time and place. Environmental crises were discrete phenomena that could be assessed, addressed, contained.

Since World War II, we have been living inside an explosion of synthetic chemicals: from 1 billion pounds in the 1940s to more than 400 billion pounds in the late 1980s. Even these numbers barely hint at the ubiquity of chemicals in our synthetic century. By 2004, the US chemical industry was producing more than 138 billion pounds of seven petrochemicals—ethylene, propylene, butylenes, benzene, toluene, xylenes, and methane—from which companies make tens of thousands of consumer products. Today, industries worldwide generate 300 billion pounds of plastics a year.

It is only in this context—a country bathed in man-made chemicals—that one can understand why the United States is in the midst of a cancer epidemic. The cancer establishment—made up by the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society, trade associations like the Chemical Manufacturers Association, and the chemical industry—has fundamentally misled the American people into searching for a miraculous “cure.” Rather than vigorously examining the myriad poisons we are forced to encounter every day, these groups warn people to be careful about their “lifestyle.” Blame for cancer falls on consumers, not on the poisons that cause illness. From the perspective of the industries that make these chemicals, it’s a brilliant strategy. For the rest of us, it’s a tragedy.

John Quarles, a Nixon man who became a deputy administrator of the EPA in the early 1970s, found industry influence, disinformation, and propaganda against the EPA so insulting he wore his title of ‘bureaucrat’ with pride.

“I am part of the faceless, gray government machine, one of those government officials whom cartoonists make fun of and editorialists stick pins in, who are blasted with criticism by public leaders from Barry Goldwater to Ralph Nader. I am also an environmentalist, a chief official of the United States Environmental Protection Agency since its creation in December 1970, and in that capacity, too, I have been the object of heated criticism. The agency has been the target of the power industry, the steel industry, the auto industry, labor unions, farmers, editorialists, and private citizens. Its actions have been attacked as arbitrary, unreasonable, narrow-minded, impractical, and un-American. Much of this condemnation has been based on misunderstanding.”

What does this industry influence mean in practice? With few exceptions, environmental statutes allow chemicals to be dumped on the market without ever having been tested. In the case of the pesticides law, for instance, the EPA is authorized to demand pre-market health and environmental testing of new products. But in practice, the chemical industry plays a major role in writing those regulations and has a powerful hand in restraining the EPA from enforcing its rules. The chemical industry's allies in Congress and the White House raise no objections. The truth is, most toxic chemicals enter the market without ever being tested for health and environmental effects, and this is just the way the chemical industry likes it. The Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, the cosmetic provisions of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act, and all other federal laws require no testing for the chemicals or other products entering the market. Only the pesticides act and the food sections of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act require testing of chemicals likely to enter the food we eat. This does not prevent industry marketers from saying that their products "meet EPA standards."

In almost all cases, these chemicals had been certified by both industry and the EPA as having an "acceptable" impact on the environment, or posing only "acceptable" risks to people. Human beings, we were told, had a "tolerance level" for each of them. As long as we use the chemicals "properly," we would be safe. The EPA uses the term 'tolerance' to describe how much of a certain pesticide will be tolerated in a given amount of food. But there is very little science behind these tolerance levels; their sole purpose is to provide legal cover for the companies who make the chemicals, the farmers who use them, and the manufacturers who process food. As long as the government sets even bogus health standards, companies have legal cover if their products make people sick.

A new principle of toxicology has, it seems, become firmly entrenched in the literature: no matter how lethal a poison may be for all other forms of animal life, if it doesn't kill human beings instantly, it is safe. When nevertheless it unmistakably does kill a human, this was the victim's own fault—either he was "allergic" to it (the uncompensable sin!) or he didn't use it properly.

In 1949, thirteen years before Rachel Carson alerted the world to the unseen dangers of pesticides, A. D. Pickett, a field entomologist in Nova Scotia, Canada, blamed farmers for a chain of deadly ecological reactions. Posterity, he said, would condemn us "as despoilers on account of the indiscriminate dissemination of poisons." Man, he reminded us, is merely one in a vast multitude of species making a living on earth.

“For thousands of years man accepted insects as part of the normal environment over which he had little or no control, and it is only within the last half century that we have actually made any real attempt to reduce their effectiveness as competitors.”

Pickett urged North Americans to return to an agricultural and food system that would render farm chemicals obsolete. We could grow crops primarily for “the purpose of satisfying man’s food requirements and not as a means of making particular human activities commercially profitable regardless of the overall effect on human welfare.”

A foundational myth of industrialized agriculture is that sprays have something to do with increasing the yields of crops. But we have known since for at least forty years that pesticides actually stifle the yield of growing crops, as you would expect from poisons that indiscriminately kill insects, plants, and countless other forms of life. In 1970 a study showed that after dusting the pollen of alfalfa with melipax, a toxaphene-like spray, no more than 10.5 percent of the grains would germinate, compared to 62.1 percent of the pollen left clear of the deadly dust. With only 0.3 percent of fribal emulsion, another poison similar to toxaphene, only 28.2 percent of grains germinated, compared to 81.5 percent of the grains sprouting in the absence of the toxin.

The scientific results are powerful, and clearly counter to the prevailing mythology of agricultural pesticides. But this brand of science has been hard to come by for one simple reason: most academic scientists, when they examine America’s agricultural system, don’t ask the right questions. Their work is funded largely by agribusiness, so—naturally—scientists tend to believe this system is the best in the world, and that pesticides make that system possible. Such delusions become intransigent beliefs, both within and without the government.

It’s hardly a surprise. Resilient agricultural systems are diverse—genetically diverse, and diverse in crops and techniques. And Monsanto already knew that plants could grow resistant to glyphosate because they got the resistant genes from plants growing in an outfall outside a glyphosate factory.

The worst thing is that even in intensive agriculture, the use of general herbicides is largely unnecessary. Years back a friend was doing research on an alternative to a spring spraying of newly planted wheat fields in the UK. They were looking at the alternative of covering the soil with about 50mm (2 inches or so) of low grade mulch to choke out weeds, planting the wheat on the mulch. Not only did it work just as well as a spray, it would have been an excellent way to promote the use of composting as a form of waste

treatment for organic waste, and it would cut down on soil erosion. But the problem seems to have been creating the chain—supporting composters to invest in the facilities, guaranteeing a supply to farmers at the right time. No private business saw this as profitable enough to do, only government could do it. But nobody was interested.

Every year, more land is sealed beneath buildings and roads. And because cities have usually grown from settlements on the most fertile land, vast urban centres are now squatting on some of our best soils.

Monoculture farming has more in common with engineering than with natural systems. And since engineers were redesigning and plumbing the country to water the developing giant farms, Rachel Carson thought of pesticides as crude weapons like “a cave man’s club hurled against the fabric of life.” She connected this violence with the still-fashionable ambition of modern industry to “control nature.” That idea—that modern people could dream of controlling the natural world—made Carson very angry. She lambasted such thinking as hubris. This kind of thinking and ambition, Carson said, mirrored a “Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed nature exists for the convenience of man.”

“It is our alarming misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against the insects it has also turned them against the earth.”

In its early days, pesticides seemed to represent a triumph of Western science and technology: both a proven weapon to subdue the “undesirable” aspects of nature and an elixir of cleanliness and even health. “The great expectations held for DDT have been realized,” ran an advertisement in *Time* magazine in 1947.

“Exhaustive scientific tests have shown that, when properly used, DDT kills a host of destructive pests, and is a benefactor of all humanity. Today, everyone can enjoy added comfort, health, and safety through the insect-killing powers of DDT products. [DDT] helps to make healthier, more comfortable homes [and] protects your family from dangerous pests. Use DDT powders and spray—then watch the bugs ‘bite the dust.’”

Though you may be forgiven for thinking otherwise, for several decades, honey producers in the United States were worried that protesting the death of their bees would bring down the wrath of industrial farmers, who will either wipe them out with sprays or ruin them by suggesting that honey

and pollen may be full of tiny capsules of nerve gas and numerous other poisons. This explains a depressing catch-22: even as their bees continue to die, honey producers have been largely silent; they are willing to lose some of their hives as a price for the social contract they have with the farmers whose insecticides kill their bees. The Beekeepers Association of Texas, for instance, opposed state regulations creating a buffer zone between sprayed fields and other property. A beekeeper in Corpus Christi, Texas, who supported buffer regulations was nearly wiped out—by farmers who sprayed his hives directly. The farmers wanted to teach him a lesson about whistle-blowing. Beekeepers keep their mouths shut in order to survive, and farmers want to believe their crops are not harming people. No consumer would buy honey with pesticides in it.

The problem is not that we don't know, but that government and industry refuse to do what is best for all of us, and for the natural world. The environment, science, and public health be damned.

Part of the issue is that no one looks at the problems from a broad perspective, such as the overall effect of all these chemicals on crops, the environment, and society at large. Instead, farmers identify a single-level problem—a pest, a fungus—and say: 'This poison solves this problem.' Then, when the pest becomes immune or a new one comes along, there's always another poison to deploy. There is a tragic lack of holistic thinking in the agricultural establishment. The consequences of the industrial scale of agriculture go beyond chemicals, of course. If farmers deplete rivers, they find ways to tap (and then deplete) water from the depths of the earth, as is now happening with the Ogallala Aquifer in the Great Plains or the sinking of parts of the Central Valley in California.

In such a single-minded, convoluted system, one pays attention only to the myriad technical problems of keeping crops and animals alive and multiplying. This eliminates asking complex biological and social questions, much less philosophical ones. What happens when our insecticides kill most insects? What are birds supposed to eat? Herbicides kill the microorganisms responsible for the movement of nutrients to the growing crop. What does this do to the nutritional value of the food we eat? The practitioner of one-crop farming does not ask questions like these. The farmer who has become heavily dependent on herbicides does not see the ecological tragedy taking place in his soil. He is oblivious to the dead fish that float to the surface after rains flush his pesticides into the river. He refuses to acknowledge the danger in the poisoned crops he feeds to animals and people, including, inevitably, his own children.

Farmers and their families often pay a high price for their chemical addiction, suffering an increased frequency of cancers of the stomach, prostate,

bone and connective tissue, blood, lymph tissue, and bone marrow. Compared to non-farmers, Iowa farmers develop these cancers from 40 to 100 percent more frequently. In general, studies show Iowa farmers—and probably all farmers using pesticides—are subject to higher than expected mortality rates from certain types of cancer. In a study of white male Iowa residents dying from 1971 to 1978, for example, it was concluded that farmers had statistically significant elevated mortality rates from the following six cancer types: lip cancer, stomach cancer, prostatic cancer, lymphatic cancer, leukemia, and multiple myeloma. These results were consistent with an Iowa study based on the years 1964–1970 and with studies completed in other states. The more bushels of corn and soybeans the large farmers of Iowa produce, in other words, the more cancer they harvest—and sell to the rest of us.

Pesticides have been linked to various cancers, endocrine problems, and poorer health in general. They are impossible to contain—traces of DDT have been found in animals living in the deep sea and are present in the breast milk of every nursing female animal on Earth, including humans.

Rats and mice exposed to toxin levels similar to those found in groundwater all over the United States suffer measurable damage to their immune, endocrine, and neurological systems. Among other impacts, this damage has made the animals more aggressive. Other studies complement these findings, revealing that children exposed to pesticides in utero or at preschool age turn out to be highly aggressive, with diminished intelligence and decreased stamina. It's cliché at this point but this is the creation of Idiocracy by pesticide exposure coupled with poor culture. RoundUp—it's what plants crave!

A 2007 study reported that premature births and birth defects in the United States peak at the very time (from April through July) when farmers spray and fertilize their crops and the residues of those poisons are at their greatest concentrations in the country's surface water. What we put into the environment can have pandemic effects, harming pregnancy and even the development of the infant and child.

We now know that pesticides injure man's genetic material in precisely the same way that radiation does. And what is so awful about such a genetic injury is that it is permanent—it can't be recalled, corrected, or somehow restricted to the victim, unless you also castrate that individual. So with an ever greater number of pesticide poisons loose in the environment, we as a society are creating a generation of people who will be weak in facing the future. We are then changing, irreversibly, the future itself. The price for that change is—or should be—unacceptable to any people with dignity and respect for themselves and love for their children.

On a global level, a quarter or more of the food produced for human consumption is lost or squandered—left in the field, ruined by poor storage, wrecked in packaging, spoiled in transport, rejected in markets, or simply thrown away by consumers. The exact amount depends on the definition of ‘waste,’ which varies dramatically in different studies, and how it is measured, which also varies. In wealthy places, most of the waste comes from people not eating food they have bought. By contrast, the losses in poor nations are concentrated in the field, storage, and transport. Cutting waste obviously would reduce the need to increase harvests. Unfortunately, it will not be easy. In poor nations it would require significant improvements to agricultural infrastructure—costly investments that are difficult for cash-strapped nations to make. Reducing losses in rich nations would involve changing the behavior of huge numbers of busy people, an equally challenging endeavor.

The tomatoes we get at the supermarket are selected for long-distance travel from California and for long shelf life, unlike the garden variety we grow for good taste. As with wild fruit, the nutrients that make them taste good also cause their rapid spoilage, and our commercial varieties of fruit are selected, like many winter fruits, for longevity.

Net necrosis is a purely cosmetic defect, yet because McDonald’s believes—with good reason—that we don’t like to see brown spots in our french fries, farmers must spray their fields with some of the most toxic chemicals now in use, including an organophosphate called Monitor. Monitor is a deadly chemical, it is known to damage the human nervous system.

“I won’t go into a field for four or five days after it’s been sprayed—not even to fix a broken pivot.”

That is, the farmer would sooner lose a whole circle to drought than expose himself or an employee to this poison.

One farmer is working hard to adjust his fields to the logic of nature, while the other is working even harder to adjust his fields to the logic of monoculture and, standing behind that, the logic of an industrial food chain. One small case in point: when I asked the first what he did about net necrosis, the bane of the other’s potato crop, I was disarmed by the simplicity of his answer:

“That’s only really a problem with Russet Burbanks. So I plant other kinds.”

The industrial farmer can’t do that. He’s part of a food chain—at the far end of which stands a perfect McDonald’s french fry—that demands he grow Russet Burbanks and nothing else.

In 1954, insects destroyed about 10 percent of America's food crops. In 1980—more than twenty-five years and untold tons of pesticides later—insects and disease destroyed nearly four times as much food—some 37 percent, worth about \$85 billion. Without even raising the harrowing questions of environmental and human health, it seems reasonable to ask a simple question: Has it been worth it? If farmers grew food entirely without using pesticides, they would lose about 41 percent of their crops, according to some studies. This would lead to a rise in the price of food of about 5 to 10 percent. Yet when we consider the significant damage done by fully armed chemical farmers, growers, and ranchers, this seems a modest price to pay. A 2003 study calculated the environmental and societal damages from the legal use of pesticides to be about \$12 billion per year.

Is industrialized agriculture as benign—or even as effective—as its industrial patrons seem to think? Or is it just a con game, a successor to the nineteenth-century patent medicine hustle? Another way of asking this question: Have we been duped?

The larger the farm, the more sprays per acre, and the heavier the costs; the smaller the farm, the less pesticide sprayed per acre, and the less cost to the farmer. Farms under 24 acres paid about a third (per acre) of what farms over 50 acres paid for pesticides, yet the largest farms sprayed nearly five times as much as the smallest grower and nearly twice as much as a medium-size grower. Large and medium-size growers used twice as much fungicide as the small farmer. The intensity and level of sprays of the large capital-intensive grower is significant. In the end, if an informed consumer had a choice between eating onions from a large farm (sprayed with 52 different chemicals) and onions from a small farm (sprayed with 11 different chemicals), the owner of the larger farm would probably not be able to sell his onions. At one time farmers knew enough to graze cows next to onion fields. They knew that cow dung provided food parasites that controlled the onion maggot. Once industrial farms insisted on devoting all their fields to a single crop (such as onions), the onion maggot flourished and created an ideal market for toxic sprays.

Totalitarian agriculture was not adopted in our culture out of sheer meanness. It was adopted because, by its very nature, it's more productive than any other style—and there are many other styles. Totalitarian agriculture represents productivity to the max, as Americans like to say. It represents productivity in a form that literally cannot be exceeded. Many styles of agriculture—not all, but many—produce food surpluses. But, not surprisingly, totalitarian agriculture produces larger surpluses than any other style. It produces surpluses to the max. You simply can't outproduce a system designed to convert all the food in the world into human food.

On average, an American farmer today grows enough food each year to feed a hundred people. Yet that achievement—that power over nature—has come at a price. The modern industrial farmer cannot grow that much food without large quantities of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, machinery, and fuel. This expensive set of “inputs,” as they’re called, saddles the farmer with debt, jeopardizes his health, erodes his soil and ruins its fertility, pollutes the groundwater, and compromises the safety of the food we eat. Thus the gain in the farmer’s power has been trailed by a host of new vulnerabilities.

Farmers in the US grow five times as much corn per acre as African smallholders, and synthetic fertilizers are key to this. Their invention altered the nitrogen cycle and changed our planet. More than 100 million tonnes of nitrogen are removed from the atmosphere each year by the fertilizer industry, helping feed half the world’s people. The problem is, only a fraction of this nitrogen ends up in our food. The excess lingers in soils, lakes, and oceans, fertilizing massive blooms of algae that can be toxic and use up the dissolved oxygen, suffocating other species.

In the 1990s Kenya passed Israel to become Europe’s biggest provider of cut flowers, which now exceed coffee as its main source of export income. This fragrant turn of fortune, however, incurs a debt that may keep compounding long after flower lovers are no longer around. A flower, like a human, is two-thirds water. The amount of water a typical floral exporter therefore ships to Europe each year equals the annual needs of a town of 20,000 people. During droughts, flower factories with production quotas stick siphons into Lake Naivasha, a papyrus-lined, freshwater bird and hippo sanctuary just downstream from the Aberdares. Along with water, they suck up entire generations of fish eggs. What trickles back whiffs of the chemical trade-off that keeps the bloom on a rose flawless all the way to Paris. Lake Naivasha, however, doesn’t look quite so alluring. Phosphates and nitrates leached from flower greenhouses have spread mats of oxygen-choking water hyacinth across its surface. As the lake level drops, water hyacinth—a South American perennial that invaded Africa as a potted plant—crawls ashore, beating back the papyrus. The rotting tissues of hippo carcasses reveal the secret to perfect bouquets: DDT and, 40 times more toxic, Dieldrin—pesticides banned in countries whose markets have made Kenya the world’s number-one rose exporter. Long after humans and even animals or roses go, Dieldrin, an ingeniously stable, manufactured molecule, may still be around.

“If man were to faithfully follow the teachings of Miss Carson, we would return to the Dark Ages, and the insects and diseases and vermin would once again inherit the earth.”

“We’ve heard the benefits of pesticides. We have heard a great deal about their safety, but very little about their hazards, very little about their failures, their inefficiencies. And yet the public was being asked to accept these chemicals, was being asked to acquiesce in their use, and did not have the whole picture. So I set about to remedy the balance there.

We still talk in terms of conquest. We still haven’t become mature enough to think of ourselves as only a tiny part of a vast and incredible universe. I think we’re challenged as mankind has never been challenged before, to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves.”

Farmers can only mirror a mismanaged society. They need guidance and direction and appropriate research from the land grant universities, which, sadly, take their cues from pesticide companies and the rest of the agroindustrial complex. Ideally, the EPA, the USDA, and the state governments ought to intervene by teaching farmers how to practice safe agriculture. In reality, the academic-agribusiness complex is rife with cultural arrogance, failing to see that its system cannot continue in a future energy- and chemical-limited environment that is necessary if we are to maintain a viable culture for future generations.

It’s obvious that it costs a lot of money and energy to produce all the food we need to maintain our population at seven billion. But there is an additional, hidden cost that has to be counted in life-forms. Put plainly, in order to maintain the biomass that is tied up in the seven billion of us, we have to gobble up two-hundred species a day—in addition to all the food we produce in the ordinary way. We need the biomass of those two-hundred species to maintain this biomass, the biomass that is in us. And when we’ve gobbled up those species, they’re gone. Extinct. Vanished forever. In other words, maintaining a population of seven billion humans costs the world two-hundred species a day. If this were something that was going to stop next week or next month, that would be okay. But the unfortunate fact is that it’s not. It’s something that’s going to go on happening every day, day after day after day—and that’s what makes it unsustainable, by definition. That kind of cataclysmic destruction cannot be sustained.

Humans kill around 1,600 animals every second for food, and that doesn’t even count the marine life.

Superfarms already exist in Saudi Arabia and the US, housing more than 100,000 live animals.

At the beginning of the twentieth century barely 10 percent of the world’s grain harvest went to animals, mostly horses, mules, and oxen used as farm

labor. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the figure had risen considerably, though by exactly how much is difficult to calculate: perhaps 40 percent, the great majority of it destined for dairy and meat animals.

Just how much grain is required to produce a pound of beef, pork, or chicken?

Beef farmers in the Midwest buy 650-pound steer that have been raised on pasture and feed them leavings in the form of silage (mowed grass and clover, wheat, and maize plants that are cut after harvest) and distillers' grains (maize, rice, or barley from which the starches have been stripped to make products like beer, ethanol, or high-fructose corn syrup). The feedyards where steer are fattened before slaughter surround ethanol and corn-syrup plants like moons around a planet. As a result, the animals form a critical component of the overall grain industry—but actually eat less grain themselves than one might think. Every uptick in meat consumption is associated with a bump in grain production. But the precise amount of the increase is not straightforward. For beef, it is affected by a host of other factors, including the subsidies for ethanol, the price of corn syrup (and the sugar for which it is a substitute), and the demand for leather, bone, fat (an ingredient in airplane lubricants), keratin (extracted from hooves and used in fire-extinguishing foam), and other meat by-products.

Matters are just as complex for pork, chicken, and farm-raised fish. Almost no matter what the scenario, though, if tomorrow's newly affluent billions are as carnivorous as Westerners today, the task facing tomorrow's farmers will be huge. Between 1961 and 2014, the world's meat production more than quadrupled. Simply reproducing that jump could easily require doubling the world's grain harvest.

It takes around fifteen pounds of grain or soybeans to produce a pound of meat. The United States actually uses 95 percent of its soybean crop (the second largest in the world) as animal food, mostly for pigs. Leaving aside the fact that the soybeans could have fed hungry people much more efficiently, there's another problem: high-input annual crops like soybeans and corn release about 1,000 pounds of CO₂ per acre per year which comes to 144 billion tons of annual carbon emissions in the United States from these two crops alone.

1 pound of beef = 10 pounds of feed, 1,000 gallons of water, 200 square feet of pasture (2 acres per cow)

1 pound of pork = 5 pounds of feed, 600 gallons of water, 175 square feet of pasture (2/3 acre per pig)

1 pound of chicken = 2.5 pounds of feed, 150 gallons of water, 75 square feet of pasture (100 square feet per chicken)

1 pound of fish = 1.5 pounds of fish meal, variable amounts of water

1 pound of insects = 2 pounds of feed, 1 gallon of water, 2 cubic feet of land space

It was not until 2006 that the European Union banned the use of antibiotics in animal feed as performance enhancers. The kind of performance being enhanced here is the ability of an animal to not die of infections in a crowded and dirty pen. Antibiotics are a great way to “enhance” this “performance.” In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration is working on a voluntary plan to phase out the use of some of these antibiotics in regular farming.

Currently, around two-billion people live on a primarily meat-based diet, while three billion are malnourished.

Converting food stocks to fuel is a crime against humanity. What has to be stopped is the growing catastrophe of the massacre by hunger in the world. It takes 510 pounds of corn to make 13 gallons of ethanol, which is enough corn to feed a child for a year in Zambia or Mexico.

In August 2012, after an emergency G20 meeting over food prices, the director general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture programme called on the US government to suspend its biofuels quota for the maize harvest, after a months-long drought and heatwave destroyed much of the crop. Cattle farmers around the world backed the call, fearing costly animal feed over the winter. But what the US feared more was a rise in the gasoline price: so it maintained its biofuels quota. In that year, at least, the battle between hungry people and thirsty cars was won by the latter.

Chapter Twenty

The Origin of Modern Sick

Manufactured Illness

“Every hour wounds. The last one kills.”

When Upton Sinclair was threatened with a lawsuit by J. Ogden Armour, of the meatpacking firm, he replied with a letter to the *New York Times*. Sinclair wrote that he had seen:

“The selling for human food of the carcasses of cattle and swine which have been condemned for tuberculosis, actinomycosis, and gangrene; the converting of such carcasses into sausage and lard; the preserving of spoiled hams with boric and salicylic acid; the coloring of canned and potted meats with aniline dyes; the embalming and adulterating of sausages—all of these things mean the dealing out to hundreds and thousands of men, women, and children of a sudden, horrible, and agonizing death.”

Ever cheeky, Sinclair added:

“One-hundredth part of what I have charged ought, if it is true, to be enough to send the guilty man to the gallows. One-hundredth part of what I have charged ought, if it is false, to be enough to send me to prison.”

“The discovery that tables may groan with food and that we may nevertheless face a form of starvation has driven home the fact that we have applied science and technology none too wisely in the preparation of food.”

—*New York Times Editorial, 1941*

“The boats were shaped like booties, fully enclosed, capsule-like cylinders with benches on both sides long enough to fit 73 110-pound Koreans hip to hip and knee to knee—but they could only fit from 45 to 60 of the much larger Americans, depending on the number of 250-pounders aboard.”

Since the 1970s, American farmers have been producing an overabundance of calories—one of the great unspoken secrets and a major problem for the food industry. The industry’s dilemma is that the average American can eat only so much of that food—about 1,500 pounds per year—and the total number of eaters in this country is growing by only one or two percentage points per year. Yet Wall Street demands that food corporations grow at a considerably faster rate. What to do? Add “value” to cheap raw ingredients by processing them (i.e., transform a few pennies’ worth of grain and sugar into five dollars’ worth of breakfast cereal); spend billions to market these products as aggressively as possible (to children, by using sugar and cartoon characters, and to their parents, by making dubious health claims); use every trick of food science and packaging to induce us to eat more of these products than we should; and then, just to make sure no one tries to interfere with this profitable racket, heavily lobby Congress and nutrition scientists to keep anyone in power from so much as thinking about regulation or officially whispering that maybe we should eat a little less of this stuff. It’s pretty much that simple. Many of the nutritional problems of Americans—not least of them obesity—can be traced to the food industry’s imperative to encourage people to eat more in order to generate sales and increase income.

‘Let’s see what’s on the agenda today.’ For thousands of years the answer to this question remained unchanged. The same three problems preoccupied the people of twentieth-century China, of medieval India, and of ancient Egypt. Famine, plague, and war were always at the top of the list. For generation after generation humans have prayed to every god, angel, and saint, and have invented countless tools, institutions, and social systems—but they continued to die in their millions from starvation, epidemics, and violence. Many thinkers and prophets concluded that famine, plague, and war must be an integral part of God’s cosmic plan or of our imperfect nature, and nothing short of the end of time would free us from them.

In most countries today overeating has become a far worse problem than famine. In the eighteenth century Marie Antoinette allegedly advised the starving masses that if they ran out of bread, they should just eat cake instead. Today, the poor are following this advice to the letter. Whereas the rich residents of Beverly Hills eat lettuce salad and steamed tofu with

quinoa, in the slums and ghettos the poor gorge on Twinkie cakes, Cheetos, hamburgers, and pizza. In 2014 more than 2.1 billion people were overweight, compared to 850 million who suffered from malnutrition. Half of humankind is expected to be overweight by 2030. In 2010 famine and malnutrition combined killed about one-million people, whereas obesity killed three-million.

I would argue that many of the ways in which we get sick today have a corporate, almost capitalist origin. We've also got this bizarre notion that finally came true, that our bodies don't really matter.

The World Health Organization (WHO) pinpoints four factors as the main causes of death before the age of 86:

1. Poor diet
2. High blood pressure
3. Obesity
4. Tobacco use

Three of the four are diet related. The National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine came to the same conclusions, finding that diet and activity patterns—far ahead of tobacco, alcohol, drug abuse, gun violence, and car accidents—are the primary factors behind premature deaths in this country.

No more than 10 percent to 20 percent of risk for the primary causes of death comes from our genes. Only about five percent to ten percent of cancer cases are attributable to genetic defects, with the other 90 percent to 95 percent rooted in lifestyle and environment. Colon cancer, the second most lethal cancer in the country, is the cancer most directly affected by what you eat. According to the WHO, 80 percent of all heart disease, stroke, and Type 2 diabetes can be prevented.

People think heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are inherited, not realizing that what they've actually inherited are the eating habits of their parents and grandparents. People are exposed as children to a certain way of eating that they carry into their adulthood. They pass it on to their children. That's why they develop the same diseases their parents and grandparents may have had before them, but it is not inevitable.

They really want to believe, 'I don't have control over this. This happened to my parents, so just give me the drugs. I don't need to change because it's inevitable.' Think of the Greek Fates, particularly the third goddess, "the inevitable," standing with her shears over the cradle—the thought

of predestination can bring a peculiar comfort to many. It takes away responsibility. The majority of conditions that kill people in this country are completely preventable for most of us. It's up to us to take that responsibility and change—change the culture and the real, actual, deadly epidemics.

“Much of what we know about diet comes from studies going back to rural Africa and rural China in the 1920s, where Westerners set up missionary hospitals. They saw millions of people, and to their surprise, they weren't suffering from Western diseases. There were populations where high blood pressure rates were zero. Heart disease rates were zero. Thousands of autopsies found no heart attacks. It's not like these Western-trained doctors couldn't recognize heart attacks. The diseases weren't present. If you want to avoid them, you have to change your diet. Lifestyle medicine pioneers started asking, ‘What if we put people with advanced chronic disease on the diet followed by these populations that don't get the diseases in the first place? Maybe we could slow it down.’ Instead, something miraculous happened. The diseases started to reverse.”

In the early years of the twenty-first century we live in a brave new world of billion-dollar pharmaceuticals and space-age medical procedures. It's no big deal for surgeons to inflate tiny balloons inside congested blood vessels, leaving behind a stent (a permanent wire mesh to prop an artery open), or harvest an artery from a patient's leg and splice it around the heart. We can also suck fat out of your butt and put it in your lips—now there's medical progress.

And yet our rates of chronic disease are smashing through the roof. In 2012, half the US adult population had at least one chronic health condition. One out of four adults had at least two. Eighty-six percent of health care spending in 2010 covered people with one or more chronic conditions, with \$315 billion allocated to heart disease and stroke. Cancer that same year cost \$157 billion; diabetes, \$245 billion. In 2008, obesity-related causes racked up \$147 billion in medical costs. Drugs, hospitals, and surgeries.

“The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will instruct his patient in the care of the human frame, in diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease.”

Such a prediction has not come true. Because doctors cannot teach what they do not know. Medicine now is about the use of drugs and surgeries to

suppress symptoms associated with the disease, and they do a brilliant job. It just doesn't have anything to do with health.

Nutrition is the poor sister of medical education. Why? First, nutrition is viewed with disdain. Physicians feel, 'We're practicing real medicine, suturing wounds and fixing fractures. Nutrition? Boring. Send them to the dietitian.' Second, physicians don't want to open that discussion because they don't know much about it. And finally, we have to look at the physician's own diet. That's what really keeps nutrition from being recognized as a keystone of disease treatment. Between these three fortresses—the disdain, the ignorance, and the doctors' own unwillingness to change—nutrition doesn't enter the examination room.

In 2009, only 25 percent of accredited US medical schools required their students to take a single dedicated course in nutrition. The National Academy of Medicine recommended, back in the 1980s, that medical schools provide a minimum of 25 hours of nutrition instruction. Thirty years later, the few schools offering courses on diet and disease provided on average less than 24 hours of nutritional instruction, with most students getting only 11 to 20 hours, out of the thousands of hours spent in medical school. And once students graduate, they don't even get that.

The primary organization responsible for physicians' continuing medical education, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), has a 37-page booklet outlining the continuing education requirements for cardiologists. They include interpreting a minimum of 3,500 electrocardiograms, and interpreting "a minimum of 100 radionuclide studies to include SPECT myocardial perfusion imaging and ventriculograms." Nutrition education is not mentioned once. ACGME asserts, in its 36 pages of requirements for doctors of internal medicine, that "internal medicine is a discipline encompassing the study and practice of health promotion, disease prevention"—and yet again, not a single nutrition-related requirement is included.

You might be wondering why a carnivorous animal like a cat doesn't get the same cancers that humans get from eating large amounts of meat. One answer may lie in our guts. The human body has a very long digestive tract, with extra surface area to extract nutrients, and process all the fiber in plants. If you eat a high-fiber diet—by which I mean a plant-based diet—fiber will carry out the carcinogens and the excess hormones. An animal like a cat is built for a meat-based diet. They have a very, very short intestinal tract, so the carcinogens don't stick around. It's a completely different system. Cats and other carnivores move food through their intestinal tracts in under 4 hours. But food stays in our human bodies for 18.

Your skin covers about twenty square feet. Your lungs, if you were to

flatten out all the tiny air pockets, could cover hundreds of square feet. And your intestines? Counting all the little folds, some scientists estimate that your gut would blanket thousands of square feet, vastly more expansive than your skin and lungs combined. What you eat may very well be your primary interface with the outside world. That means that regardless of the carcinogens that could be lurking in the environment, your greatest exposure may be through your diet.

Adventists believe god calls on them to care for their bodies, treating them with the respect a divine creation deserves. They exercise regularly and do not smoke, drink alcohol, or take illicit drugs. They advocate:

“A well-balanced vegetarian diet that avoids the consumption of meat coupled with intake of legumes, whole grains, nuts, fruits, and vegetables, along with a source of vitamin B12.”

Loma Linda, a town in Southern California, is home to about nine-thousand Adventists and is one of the world’s five longevity “Blue Zones”—the only one in the United States—where people live notably longer, healthier lives, often past 100. The five Blue Zones are:

- Nicoya, *Costa Rica*
- Ikaria, *Greece*
- Sardinia, *Italy*
- Okinawa, *Japan*
- Loma Linda, *United States*

Residents of all five Blue Zones eat plant-based diets, accented infrequently, if at all, with animal protein. About 50 percent of Adventists are vegetarians, who eat no meat but do eat dairy and eggs. But there are also large numbers of Adventist vegans, who don’t eat any animal protein at all, as well as those who eat small amounts of fish and/or meat. Because they live close together in the same environment, and share the same healthy lifestyle, the dietary distinctions among them take on a special value for researchers.

I’ve known people who try a plant-based diet, but then say:

“I got so weak. I couldn’t get out of bed.”

The insinuation is always that the absence of animal protein—real protein—sapped them. But your body does not use protein for energy. Your

body uses carbohydrates or fat for energy. This idea that a person becomes weak and tired because of protein deficiency is absolutely not true. There's no biochemical explanation for that.

“Most of my patients, in fact, feel fantastic when they shift their diet. I've been doing this for 30 years. I've had 15,000 people on an in-patient basis, and I haven't yet come across someone whose symptoms were caused by a deficiency of dead flesh, coagulated cow pus, or any other animal products. Physically, human beings are able to adopt a plant-based diet and thrive. Psychologically? It might be like an alcoholic saying, 'I can't quit drinking because of my constitution.'”

Not eating enough calories is one of the problems sometimes experienced by people new to a plant-based diet. Whole plant foods are much less calorically dense than animal foods. If your caloric intake suddenly drops, people can feel lousy. So you need to eat more to get the same number of calories. Good news for people who like to eat.

“One of my friends was plant-based for three years, and then felt really weak. She had a sip of bone broth and felt better.”

Come on.

“No, I've heard it a few times: 'I had some chicken and I felt all better.'”

That is crazy psychological placebo nonsense. It's actually not possible. Now, if she said, 'I started eating meat again, and a couple months later I felt much better,' then maybe she was iron-deficient. But there is no disease on the planet where you eat a piece of chicken or a can of tuna, and the clouds part and the sun comes out.

“Or what about people who say, 'I know my body, I just need meat'?”

That's like saying, 'I need meat because I'm a Capricorn.' It makes no biological sense. Are there people who simply can't change their diet? There certainly are. Now, you have to ask, 'Are they given all the information? Are they given all the motivation? Do they have the opportunity and the environment to support this?' Most of the time, when I have a patient who can't change their diet, it's because of their surroundings. Environment is huge. Culture is huge.

Going vegan is a significant dietary change for a lot of people. As with any change, you're probably going to notice some different feelings. But if your idea of a plant-based diet is Oreos, French fries, Diet Coke, and lots of processed meat alternatives, you're not going to feel great. The same would be true if you ate nothing but kale and broccoli, shunning grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. Both those diets would certainly turn you into a tired, sick vegan. What you need in your meal plan is a dash of knowledge.

“Human beings have evolved to eat meat. Look at our canine teeth!”

Look at the canines on a panda. When your cat yawns you see protruding razor teeth used to kill prey, to scrape hide and pull meat off bones. Our canine teeth are no bigger than our incisors. That happened at least three-and-a-half-million years ago. Our teeth are designed for grinding, which is good for vegetables, fruits, grains, and beans. Not so good for killing and eating a raw animal. Try eating roadkill without tools. Lots of herbivores have canines. The canines in several primates are very long, almost like the canines in carnivores, but they're used for defense and fighting each other. Human canines have become small and rounded. They're useless for ripping anything other than an envelope. With our 30-foot-long gastrointestinal tract, there's no question that humans are herbivores.

What can't you get in a plant-based diet that you can get in meat? Are there any healthy things found only in animal products? Every nutrient from meat, dairy, and eggs can be found, in a form that is as healthy or healthier, in plants. Many people might worry, ‘Will I get the nutrition I need on a plant-based diet?’ The fact is, you're not getting the nutrition you need on a meat-based diet.

Let's look at iron. Iron deficiency is one of the most common nutritional deficiencies in both the United States and the world. People on a plant-based diet are no more likely to be iron deficient than meat eaters. There are two types of dietary iron: heme iron (found in animal tissue like meat) and non-heme iron (found in plants). “Heme” comes from “hemoglobin,” the molecule in red blood cells. An easy way to remember: animals bleed (heme); plants do not (non-heme). Heme iron is more easily absorbed than non-heme iron. Sounds like a good thing, right? The higher bioavailability of iron from muscle tissue and blood, though, is a serious drawback disguised—and often trumpeted—as a benefit. The body will keep absorbing iron from animals, even when no more is needed. Non-heme iron, however, allows the body to control the amount absorbed. If the body has enough iron, the intestines can dial down the absorption of plant iron. If the body needs more, it can

turn up the absorption. Our digestive systems block the intake of plant iron—if we already have a sufficient supply in our bodies—about five times more efficiently than animal iron.

Getting our iron from plants protects us from excess iron, which is a dangerous thing. Once it's absorbed, there are very limited ways to get rid of it. It's trapped in the body. Iron is a pro-oxidant that can damage DNA. Iron from meat has been associated with higher risks of heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, and even cancer. Scientists can tell, by examining tumors, how much meat the cancer patient has eaten. You can avoid heme iron by getting your iron from sources like lentils, tofu, chickpeas, peas, cashews, soybeans, blackstrap molasses, quinoa and other whole grains, dark leafy vegetables, fortified cereals, and broccoli. You can also boost your iron absorption by up to five times if you eat iron-rich foods along with vitamin C. Delicious iron/vitamin C combos include lentil soup with green peppers; rice and beans with salsa; stir-fried broccoli and tofu; bran cereal topped with strawberries; and hummus with lemon juice. A lot of vegetables, like broccoli and bok choy, are sources of both iron and vitamin C.

All protein is made by plants. I'll state that again for the record: all protein is made by plants. What distinguishes protein from carbs and fats is the presence of nitrogen. Only plants have the ability to take nitrogen from the air, break those molecules apart, incorporate that nitrogen into amino acids, and make protein. Animals eat plants and reprocess those amino acids into their own tissues. All animal protein is simply recycled plant protein. And you really want to get your protein directly from plants, because plant proteins have a much more beneficial effect on our physiology. It is not necessary to eat animal tissue in order to get protein. If anything, we need less protein.

That's nutritional blasphemy. Our nation is obsessed with protein. Protein has what researchers call a "health halo effect," an idolization of the nutrient that doesn't have much to do with science.

"Protein is one of those rare things that has a lot of different meanings to a lot of different people and they are all positive."

People eat protein to lose weight. People eat it to gain weight. People eat it for energy. Most of us believe we should eat as much protein as possible. Just 10 percent to 35 percent of your total calories, however, should come from protein. That's the recommendation from the Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine, National Academies. According to the American Council on Exercise, a 145-pound person requires 52.7 grams of protein daily, using the Recommended Dietary Allowance figure of 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight.

American males over the age of 20 eat an average of 98.9 grams of protein a day. American females over the age of 20 eat an average of 68 grams of protein per day. This means that men, on average, are eating enough protein to sustain a 273-pound man. Women are eating enough protein for a 187-pound woman. I know America has issues with obesity, but still, that's a bit much.

Human breast milk is the fluid designed by evolution over millions of years as the perfect food for human babies. It has the lowest protein content in any mammalian milk—rat milk, donkey milk, any milk that's ever been tested. That gives you a sense of human protein requirements. Protein overload is one of the reasons formula is not optimal. One cup of human milk contains 2.5 grams of protein, compared to 7.9 grams in cow's milk, and 8.7 grams in goat's milk.

Here in America, calcium and milk are synonymous, just like protein and meat. It's another nursery school belief, inculcated in us as toddlers and never examined since. What is calcium? It's a mineral. And where are minerals found? In the soil. And why do cows have calcium in their milk? Because they eat the grass. But three out of four cows raised specifically for dairy are not consuming grass, and so that the dairy industry can live up to the marketing claims that it's a high-calcium food, what do they do to the cows' feed? They supplement their feed. You could supplement your feed. We'd skip a lot of problems. Or you could go right to the source and get your calcium from the green leafy vegetables, the highest source of calcium. Cow's milk has 189 mg of calcium in every 100 calories. Kale has 257 mg per 100 calories, tofu 287, collard greens 539, and bok choy has 775 mg. Now sure, that's a shitton of leaves, but nuts, seeds, legumes all contain calcium as well.

If I could flay all the skin off you and boil the flesh off your skeleton, all the bones in your body would weigh about 35 pounds. A bull moose grows a full rack of antlers in three months. They're made of solid bone. A mature bull's antlers weigh 80 pounds, more than twice the amount of your entire skeleton. That moose grows his rack of antlers while eating nothing but green, leafy plant foods.

Eating cheese and other dairy products is also linked to feminization in men. This is ironic, considering that men often refuse soy out of fear it will take the edge off their masculinity. Yet they have no qualms about Philly cheese steaks, whey protein shakes, and three-cheese pizzas, all loaded with the sex steroid hormones of a pregnant bovine mammal. In one experiment, a group of young men ages 19 to 21 were asked to drink a quart of cow's milk in 10 minutes. Within the hour, their estrogen levels shot up 60 percent, while their testosterone levels plummeted dramatically. Another

study was titled, “Dairy Food Intake in Relation to Semen Quality and Reproductive Hormone Levels Among Physically Active Young Men.” The “physically active young men” ate a large amount of cheese in particular, and regardless of their overall dietary patterns, the motility of their sperm declined considerably and the quality of their semen deteriorated.

The egg industry has remarkable parallels with the behavior of the tobacco industry. The egg industry has been slapped on the wrist repeatedly for decades, by institutions such as the USDA, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the US Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court, for “false and misleading advertising that eggs had no harmful effects on health.” In 1977, the National Commission on Egg Nutrition, a major trade group, was convicted of false advertising by the US Court of Appeals and ordered to “cease and desist from disseminating any advertisement” that “represents that there is no scientific evidence that eating eggs increases the risk of heart attacks, heart disease, atherosclerosis, arteriosclerosis, or any attendant condition.”

The FTC has twice brought cases against Eggland’s Best, Inc., in 1994 and 1996, for making “deceptive” advertising claims like:

“Imagine eating delicious, real, whole eggs and not raising your serum cholesterol. People did. In clinical tests of Eggland’s Best eggs. They ate a dozen a week while keeping within the limits of the Surgeon General’s low-fat diet. And... their serum cholesterol didn’t go up.”

The USDA has reminded the egg industry repeatedly that, due to laws against false advertising:

“You can’t couch eggs/egg products as ‘healthy’ or ‘nutritious.’ Nutritious and healthy carry certain connotations, and because eggs have the amount of cholesterol they do, plus the fact that they’re not low in fat, these words are problematic.”

This is a list of advertising claims about eggs that the USDA has told the egg industry they cannot use, because they’re not true:

- “A rich source of protein”
- “Low in saturated fat”
- “Nutritional powerhouse”
- “Eggs contribute nutritionally”
- “Relatively low in calories”
- “Healthful”
- “Relatively low in fat”
- “Eggs contribute healthful components”

See, under the FDA, a food can only be labeled ‘healthy’ if it is low in saturated fat and contains 90 mg or less of cholesterol per serving.

One weekly serving of fish during pregnancy can build up more mercury in your unborn baby than injecting a dozen mercury-containing vaccines straight into their fetal bodies. Fetuses are far more sensitive to mercury than adults. Mercury in the diets of pregnant women is linked to birth defects, intellectual and developmental disabilities, seizures, and cerebral palsy in their babies.

The American Diabetes Association has taken money from, among others:

Kraft Foods Makers of Velveeta processed cheese, Oscar Mayer processed meat, and Lunchables processed kids’ meals

Campbell Soup Company Makers of canned salt water

Cadbury-Schweppes The world’s largest confectioner and producer of foods like the Cadbury Crème Egg and Dr. Pepper

Coca-Cola Makers of sugar water

Hershey’s Makers of candy, sugar milk, frozen sugar milk

Dannon One of the largest dairy yogurt producers

Kroger Processed food supplier

Walgreens Another processed food supplier

Bumble Bee Foods Makers of processed canned meats and dead dolphins

The American Diabetes Association also flirted seriously with Burger King for almost a year, until BK came out with a burger with more fat than had ever been seen on the fast-food market. Now that’s just going too far.

But wait, there’s more. In the ADA’s 2017 “Banting Circle Elite” level of corporate sponsorship, which requires a gift of at least \$1 million, you’ll find:

- AstraZeneca
- Eli Lilly
- Merck
- Novo Nordisk
- Sanofi
- Janssen Pharmaceuticals

In the next tier down, requiring a gift of only \$500,000, is Pfizer and Medtronic. These drug companies are in the booming business of helping people manage the symptoms of their Type 2 diabetes.

“Dr. Ratner at the ADA only wanted to talk about people living longer with diabetes. Once I mentioned eliminating diabetes or prevention, he shut down the conversation. Diet and cure? Whoa, let’s not go there.”

Lets do another one—the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association has received money from:

- Texas Beef Council
- Cargill
- South Dakota Beef Industry Council
- Kentucky Beef Council
- Nebraska Beef Council
- Tyson Foods
- AVA Pork
- Unilever
- Trauth Dairy
- Domino’s Pizza
- Perdue
- Idaho Beef Council
- Bristol-Myers Squibb
- Eli Lilly
- GlaxoSmithKline
- Novartis
- Pfizer
- Sanofi
- Merck
- AstraZeneca

The final members on that list were among fistfuls of pharmaceutical companies which contributed \$21,470 in 2010 to fund an AHA program on “emerging strategies with statins,” and nearly \$100,000 for projects such as “debating controversial topics in cardiovascular disease.” I wonder what controversial topics AstraZeneca had in mind.

One more, the Susan G. Komen breast cancer charity. You’ve got:

- Kentucky Fried Chicken (eat a breast to save a breast?)
- Eggland’s Best
- Yoplait
- Dietz & Watson
- Trident Seafoods
- Walgreens

“I have no doubt that the major health-related organizations have the best intentions of the American public at heart. But once these groups say, ‘The best thing to reduce your risk of cancer, heart disease, and diabetes is to reduce or eliminate your consumption of meat, dairy, and egg products’—that would be the end of their funding. That would bring the entire catastrophe down upon their heads, and they would essentially disappear as organizations. That means you are not going to be hearing the truth, as far as nutrition goes, from these organizations. He that pays the piper calls the tune.”

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) is the nation’s largest trade group for registered dietitians, representing some 75,000 nutrition professionals. One of AND’s major sponsors is the National Dairy Council. They give AND money every year, and they get to have a huge booth at the annual expo. So you walk in, and there’s the National Dairy Council promoting itself to nutritionists who are telling Americans how to eat. They also sponsor scientific sessions, so dietitians can learn why lactose intolerance is no big deal, sponsored by the National Dairy Council. And they offer continuing education units so nutritionists can continue to hear about the wonders of dairy while fulfilling mandated requirements.

It’s not only the National Dairy Council that American nutritionists are getting their information from. McDonald’s sponsored and catered the 2017 annual conference of the California Dietetic Association, an affiliate of AND. AND also publishes “Nutrition Fact Sheets” to help people make healthier choices. Guess who writes those “Fact Sheets”? The food industry. Not only that, but they pay AND \$20,000 per “Fact Sheet.”

“What’s really sad, is that we cannot trust the information from these leading health organizations, because they’re taking money from the very industries that are causing the problems these groups are supposed to be helping to prevent.”

Phytates, a natural compound found in plant seeds—and therefore in all seeds, nuts, beans, and whole grains—have been shown through in vitro studies—ones performed in an environment outside a living being, such as a test tube—to suppress the development of practically all human cancer cells tested, including breast, cervix, colon, liver, pancreas, prostate, and skin cancers. Healthy cells were not affected. Phytates also increase the activity of your body’s natural killer cells that track down and clear out cancer cells.

The connection between vitamin A deficiency and night blindness is now well understood, and has to do with our rods, the cells in our retinas

that allow us to see in low light. Rods contain a pigment called rhodopsin, also known as visual purple for its reddish-purple color, that immediately bleaches when it's exposed to light—similar to what happens if you expose undeveloped photographic film to the sun. This bleaching breaks down the visual purple into new chemicals that translate light waves into nerve signals in the brain that create the images we see. Our bodies need vitamin A to recycle these chemicals back into visual purple so they can be used again. You can actually observe this recycling happening whenever you're blinded by a bright light like a camera flash: the sudden light bleaches the visual purple in your rods, and it takes several moments for your body to “unbleach” it—using vitamin A—so that you can see again. Our bodies are able to recycle most of the vitamin A, but not all of it; every new unbleaching cycle uses up a bit more. If this vitamin A isn't replaced by your diet, you won't be able to replenish your rods' visual purple. And if you can't replenish your rods' visual purple, you won't be able to see in low light. You become night blind.

There have been at least twelve confirmed deaths by water poisoning in sports events and thousands of close calls. Instead of too little to drink, they were dying from too much. They'd gulped so much fluid, they'd diluted their blood sodium concentration and caused their brains to swell. The Sports Drink Giants had been fantastically successful at tricking people into believing that, unlike every other creature on Earth, humans were too stupid to know when to drink. Cows and puppies and infants have it covered, but not you—no, you need to be told. The terrible irony was that by inventing a fake health scare, the Drink Giants had created a real one. They'd scared people into believing they were drinking too little, and fooled them into drinking too much. It was death by marketing. The “Science of Hydration” is propaganda conceived by marketers who wished to turn a collection of kitchen chemicals into a multi-billion dollar industry. To their credit, they succeeded. To their unending shame, they cost the lives of some of those they were pretending to protect.

We've been brainwashed into being repulsed by the mention of the word 'fat' but the real heart danger is sugar. It's a corrosive that damages arterial walls, creating grooves that allow plaque to adhere. Which means the only real solution for cardiovascular disease and global obesity is pure scorched earth. Ten companies produce 80 percent of processed foods in the world, and they're creating billions and billions of dollars in profits by poisoning people. If you don't take addictive foods out of the environment along with improving the societal and environmental conditions which contribute to the addictive behavior, you'll never cure the addiction. Some argue this is going too far.

Whereas in ancient agricultural societies human violence caused about 15 percent of all deaths, during the twentieth century violence caused only five percent of deaths, and in the early twenty-first century it is responsible for about one percent of global mortality. In 2012 about 56 million people died throughout the world; 620,000 of them died due to human violence (war killed 120,000 people, and crime killed another 500,000). In contrast, 800,000 committed suicide, and 1.5 million died of diabetes. Sugar is now more dangerous than gunpowder.

When we speak of sugar, we often mean a particular molecule extracted from sugar beet or sugar cane, but there are more than a hundred different kinds of sugar. If, historically, we had developed a sugar industry based on endive sugar, our sweets would not cause tooth decay. Sweetness is not in itself unhealthy, we simply eat only the most unhealthy kind of sweetness.

With Type 2 diabetes genetics plays a huge role. That risk is brought out by the interaction of diet, exercise, environment, genetic propensity—you need all of that together for the disease to occur. If the disease requires all those factors, then—maybe?—genetics wasn't playing such a “huge” role. For instance, there are two populations of Pima Indians who are virtually genetically identical. The ones in central Mexico are subsistence farmers: thin, with virtually no diabetes. The other group lives on an Arizona Indian reservation. They're obese, with a 50 percent prevalence of diabetes. Another example is the case of first-, second-, and third-generation Japanese, starting in Japan, who move to Hawaii, and then to Seattle. You see a progressive increase in the development of Type 2 diabetes the farther they get from Japan, and as more generations pass.

What's happening in Japan that's different from Seattle? There's no question that lifestyles are different. They're walking more. Their diet is clearly very different. There's no question that the Western-type diet seems to correlate with an increased risk of diabetes.

Almost 40 years ago there was a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, showing that a plant-based diet slashed the insulin requirements of men with Type 2 diabetes by more than half. Some of the men had been living with diabetes for 20 years, injecting 20 or more units of insulin every day. They were not allowed to lose weight—if the numbers on the scale dropped, they had to eat more (grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables). And not only did they dramatically reduce their insulin requirement; half of the subjects were able to get off insulin completely. Did I mention how long this took? About 16 days.

In the State Prison of Southern Michigan in the 1970s, there was—quite by accident—an experiment carried out. Because of the way the prison was built, half the prisoners' cells looked out over rolling farmland and trees,

and half looked out onto bare brick walls. An architect studied the medical records for these different groups of prisoners (who didn't differ in any other way), and found that if you were in the group who could see the natural world, you were 24 percent less likely to get physically or mentally sick.

If we had a medication for which preliminary results showed such efficacy, we would be all over researching that medication. Here is a treatment that has very few side effects, is not expensive, doesn't require a trained or licensed professional to prescribe it, and has pretty good evidence of efficacy so far. But the research is very hard to find funding for because a lot of the shape of modern biomedical research has been defined by the pharmaceutical industry, and they're not interested because it's very hard to commercialize nature contact. You can't sell it, so they don't want to know. We'll have to wait for the virtual reality "therapeutic worlds" And just think, then we could do away with prisoners' windows altogether—well the few they've got left anyway.

When a controversial fact is finally absorbed into public consciousness, a revolution happens. What was heresy becomes self-evident. The earth revolves around the sun. Global warming is driven by human activity. Smoking kills. Animal protein kills. Think of all those years in which it was considered rude if you told a guest not to smoke in your house—some of you are going to be far too young for this one. We put up with that crap for a long time before it became acceptable to say no. Nobody wants a smoker in their house, because you're breathing the toxic by-products of their bad habit. But someone else eating a burger doesn't affect you does it?

Diet is not a personal choice. I understand how people think it is, but in reality, our individual food choices affect our nation, our planet, billions of animals, and they affect us as a human species.

"I brought cattle to slaughter when I was a kid. They were scared. You hang them up by their leg and slit their throats. It takes a while to wake up to it. I don't know why it took me so long."

Transglutaminase creates strong bonds between proteins, the company says, and thus "transforms worthless cuts of meat or fish without commercial value into standardized portions with a high added value." Now we're talking a language that everyone can understand.

Speaking for enzyme companies, the European Food Information Council argues that "the concept of acceptable risk is intrinsic to the notion of pushing back the frontiers of science." Of course, the issue for most people is, 'Do I and my family really want to be part of a human experiment at the

cutting edge of enzyme technology?’ Don’t spend too long thinking about that question. You aren’t being consulted on the question, and so, your opinion doesn’t matter.

The idea that women’s choices in the kitchen needed to be “officially” approved by nutritional scientists represented an important perception shift in who could be trusted to decide what Americans should eat—and the insecurity caused by this shift left the public vulnerable to any person or product that claimed to offer answers. But such an idea also hid an even more frightening assumption: that any un-careful homemaker—that is, any woman who didn’t follow the nutritional advice of outside experts—was playing Russian roulette with her family’s health. Like any truly successful health guru knows: You can’t just be a cheerleader, you also need to be a fearmonger.

We have been groomed to see natural, unprocessed food as a seething mass of sinister bacteria that can only be rendered safe by the controlling hand of technology. Case in point, under the tabloid-style headline “Kitchen sink squalor,” NHS Choices warns us that “most people think of the toilet as the most contaminated part of the house, but in fact the kitchen sink typically contains 100,000 times more germs than a bathroom or lavatory.” Scary or what? This is typical of the tone of government food hygiene advice, wherein home cooks are portrayed as dangerously ignorant, exposing their nearest and dearest to life-threatening hazards. In government food hygiene campaigns, no mention is made of the much more extensive food poisoning risks of factory food production, or of how the modern food distribution system can facilitate the spread of a problem to thousands of homes, thousands of miles away, in a matter of hours. The effect of this slanted emphasis on domestic food poisoning risk is to undermine the confidence of home cooks in our ability to prepare safe food. It makes us crave the apparent safety of processed, manufactured food and drink. In the opinion of one Twitter correspondent:

“A factory is what we call a hygienic, efficient place to prepare food. It’s safer than a farmhouse kitchen.”

Such sentiment is widespread amongst generations that have never learned to cook and so are heavily dependent on processed food and takeaway. Bring on those protective additives please!

We buy foods that claim their added vitamins and dietary chemicals will “support a healthy metabolism,” without demanding an explanation of how that has been proved—or what it actually means. We feel reassured when a food or cosmetic has been studied in “clinical trials,” even if the label

provides no information about where or how said trials were conducted, or what they actually found. Instead, inspired by the same joint forces of hope and fear that yeast cakes, thiamin, and war evoked in our predecessors, we continue to believe that if we follow the right experts' advice, we'll be able to stave off sickness and disease; as long as advertisements employ the magic word 'science,' we are willing to accept claims that otherwise might crack under the pressure of common sense.

Enrichment: Replacing micronutrients that processing has destroyed.

Fortification: Adding micronutrients at higher amounts than were originally present or introducing micronutrients to foods that never naturally contained them.

Perhaps this about-face was a recognition of the public relations time bomb that could explode if and when the public learned the truth about vitamins' vulnerabilities during processing; perhaps it was simply an attempt to capitalize on the trendiness of the things. Regardless, one thing is clear: once food companies began to fortify and enrich products—and to recognize the enormous profits that vitamins could help them achieve—they never looked back. In retrospect, food companies' embrace of vitamins occurred at a very fortuitous moment. Like a repentant thief replacing stolen silver before anyone noticed it was gone, manufacturers could replace the vitamins that food processing had removed before most of the public knew they were missing. Rather than being perceived as correcting a flaw, fortification and enrichment could therefore be advertised in purely positive terms, the addition of something good rather than the correction of something bad.

As a result, food companies changed their tune toward vitamin measurement techniques as well. Now they were seen as tools rather than liabilities, able to confirm marketing claims of what nutrients food processing had added instead of revealing what it had destroyed. The serendipity of this timing still affects us, for a reason that is both straightforward and profound: processed-food manufacturers have never had to publicly admit the potential nutritional inferiority of their products. Instead, they were—and are—free to highlight the benefits of enrichment and fortification without acknowledging why the addition of vitamins (or minerals) was necessary to begin with—even arguing, as the president of the Grocery Manufacturers Association did in 1956, that “today's processed foods have a food value at least equal, and often superior to, raw produce.” And indeed, fortified and enriched products are still largely perceived in one of two favorable lights: they're just as good as their unprocessed, unrefined counterparts,

or they're even better. The flip side—that this fortification is necessary because refinement has made the food inferior—is rarely acknowledged or discussed.

In the past, American products, especially medicines, were adulterated so frequently that they carried the same stigma that many Chinese products do today. European countries began embargoes against American food. At one point, adulteration was such a concern that the US Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery stopped buying drugs from domestic pharmaceutical companies and began making them itself.

Consider the case of Elixir Sulfanilamide. The company later claimed not to have been aware that diethylene glycol, which is related to a main ingredient in antifreeze, can cause kidney failure, convulsions, and a painful and prolonged death—even though there is evidence that Massengill had done preliminary safety testing with diethylene glycol ten months earlier and found that a solution containing three percent diethylene glycol caused kidney damage in rats. Elixir Sulfanilamide contained 72 percent. Either way, it didn't take long for the tragedies to begin. By early October, a doctor in Tulsa, Oklahoma, reported that ten of his patients had immediately died after taking the elixir. More quickly followed.

On November 1, 1937, a woman from Tulsa named Marie Nidiffer wrote a heartbreaking, handwritten letter to President Roosevelt about the night her six-year-old daughter, Joan, had died:

“The first time I ever had occasion to call in a doctor for her and she was given the Elixir of Sulfanilamide. Today our little home is bleak and full of despair. . . Even the memory of her is mixed with sorrow for we can see her little body turning to and fro and hear that little voice screaming with pain and it seems as tho it drives me insane.”

Within months of the product's launch, an estimated 107 people, mostly children, had died.

The Generally Regarded as Safe (GRAS) list includes many additives and chemicals that were in use at the time of the list's creation and were grandfathered in without any clinical trials.

“When people are facing health insurance that they can't afford, and treatments for cancer that sometimes result in side effects that are just as awful as the cancer, they're ready for a cure—they're desperate for one. They would like to believe that there is some kind of conspiracy that's keeping them from knowing the true facts that could keep them healthy. What they

didn't understand, though, was that this view was manipulated by people who stood to make a lot of money, and they did make a lot of money—billions of dollars.

Believe me, I appreciate as a physician the appeal of a simple cure. Of course, we would all rather take some miracle pill than undergo more arduous and sometimes uncertain treatments. But, unfortunately, cures don't come packaged as neatly as we hope, and patients, who would forsake therapies that offer some real benefit for the siren song of empty promises, have a lot to lose."

The supplement industry argument wasn't about safety. It wasn't about efficacy. It was about whether rule-obsessed, megalomaniacal bureaucrats should be allowed to limit Americans' right to make decisions about their own health. This argument—that access to vitamins is a matter of personal freedom—was a brilliant tactical move, and it has defined the discussion on supplement regulation ever since. The Proxmire amendment was tacked onto a health bill and passed the Senate with a vote of 81–10. Enacted on April 23, 1976—and still in effect today—the amendment made it illegal for the FDA to ever establish standards for supplements, classify them as drugs, or require that they only contain useful ingredients. It forbade the FDA from ever setting limits on the quantity or combination of vitamins, minerals, or other ingredients that a supplement could contain, unless the FDA could prove (usually after the product was on the market) that the formulation was unsafe—an extremely important shift of responsibility.

Imagine, for example, that penicillin mold—one of the world's first and most important antibiotics—had been sold as a dietary supplement and that contaminated batches had begun to kill people. If that happened today, it's possible that the resulting stigma would prevent penicillin from ever being pursued as a legitimate drug. Also, why would a drug company invest time and money into developing a drug if people could already buy its active ingredient as an over-the-counter supplement?

The industry would hone this tactic into a potent weapon. A specialist in nutrition and food safety at the Congressional Research Service in the Library of Congress, was responsible for answering the hundreds of questions from Congress members that these letters provoked, particularly in regard to the erroneous claim that the FDA wanted to regulate all dietary supplements like prescription drugs. As she recalled:

"When I pointed out to some industry lobbyists that what they were telling people to say in these letters wasn't true, they just shrugged and said, 'It works.'"

Despite the fact that, thanks to the Proxmire amendment, dietary supplements can contain nearly any combination of dietary ingredients in any dosage, today's supplement manufacturers do not have to prove that their products are safe or effective before selling them. Instead, the burden of proof is on the FDA to demonstrate that supplement products are unsafe after the products are already on the market. Thanks to DSHEA and all the consumers, industry representatives, and politicians who supported it, America's supplements have largely been made exempt from nearly a century's worth of tighter regulation for food and drugs.

Indeed, it's so difficult to do so that the FDA has banned only one dietary ingredient since the 1994 passage of DSHEA: ephedra—or, more precisely, ephedrine alkaloids—a dangerous stimulant often obtained from the plant *ma huang*. Despite overwhelming evidence of its dangers—it's thought to have contributed to the deaths of more than a hundred people—it took more than a decade of legal struggles and the highly publicized ephedra-related death of Steve Bechler, a twenty-three-year-old pitcher for the Baltimore Orioles, before the FDA succeeded. However, even today you can still find products being sold online that contain forms of ephedra. The whole experience was so difficult and so costly that, in the words of the Government Accountability Office in 2009, banning further dietary ingredients—even though there are several definitively known to be dangerous—“is not a very viable option.”

While it can be difficult to quantify the precise effects of a particular law, in the case of DSHEA, several figures stand out. The tightened regulations in the amended 1938 Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act greatly decreased the number of medications on the market—it was largely responsible for Smith Kline's decision in the 1950s to discontinue all but 60 of its 15,000 therapeutic products. In contrast, when DSHEA was passed, America's supplement market contained about 4,000 dietary supplement products. Today, there are more than 85,000. Consider this chilling description of the state of America's drug market after the passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act:

“The law still permitted, as muckrakers vehemently pointed out, that the human population of the United States be guinea pigs for all experiments with medicinal drugs. No testing was required before the drugs were sold, and if the federal government was concerned about any drug, it had to prove in court that the drug was harmful to a substantial number of people before removing it from the market. If the danger was subtle, a cumulative effect over a long period, or if it affected, say, only

one in a thousand people, the damage would likely continue indefinitely.”

It’s now more than a hundred years later. But, thanks to DSHEA, you could be forgiven for thinking that he is describing the state of America’s supplement regulation today.

The supplement industry readily acknowledges its dependence on DSHEA. The Council for Responsible Nutrition, a major industry trade association, states in a Q&A about supplement regulation on its website:

“If dietary supplements were regulated like drugs, there would likely be no dietary supplement industry.”

They go on to claim that if supplements were regulated as drugs, “supplements would cost what drugs cost.” That is highly debatable, since few people argue that dietary supplements should be regulated as prescription drugs. It is also debatable given the massive mark-ups involved in prescription pharmaceuticals. A better comparison might be over-the-counter drugs, which include not just obvious things like Tylenol but products with drug-like attributes, such as toothpaste with fluoride, deodorants with antiperspirant, and anti-dandruff shampoo, all of which are technically considered drugs by the FDA (they all have Drug Facts panels on their boxes) but are certainly not prohibitively expensive.

Originally, the industry had wanted supplement labels to be allowed to claim the product would treat, cure, or prevent a disease. When FDA officials and lawmakers refused—that is, after all, the definition of a drug—the politicians created structure/function claims as a compromise. Structure/function claims do not have to be pre-approved; a manufacturer must simply alert the FDA to the structure/function claim within thirty days after marketing the product and have some sort of substantiation for the claim on hand that hypothetically could be used to demonstrate that it is “truthful and not misleading.” Perhaps these loose standards are part of the reason why, in a late-night concession to the FDA, the supplement industry agreed to one other requirement: when a supplement uses a structure/function claim, its label must include a statement, set off by an asterisk, that will be familiar to anyone who has bothered to read the box:

“These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.”

The compromise enabled the bill to be released from committee and passed. But while structure/function claims will hold up in court, they’re

also, from a commonsense perspective, fundamentally absurd. Why would you take a supplement, after all, if you didn't think it could treat, cure, or prevent something? Are there really people who would buy a product that "improves regularity" without hoping it might also treat constipation? Structure/function statements—which are now nearly ubiquitous on dietary supplement labels—allow companies to make far more assertions than they're permitted to in the more strictly regulated category of food health claims, and few consumers know the difference. Nor do consumers realize the circular process some companies use to create them. As an employee in the supplement industry once explained it:

“We use focus groups to decide what to say in claims. We hear what people want, and then we put that on the label.”

Even vitamins come with caveats, though they're rarely divulged unless it's required. For example, prescription prenatal vitamins—which are standard multivitamins with some extra folic acid and iron—come with a “patient prescription information” sheet that's mandatory for all drugs. It includes a long list of possible side effects and interactions, including how the tablets could potentially reduce the absorption of other drugs like common antibiotics and thyroid medications, or mask the signs of a vitamin B12 deficiency. The sheet also lists possible side effects (diarrhea, constipation, upset stomach), tells you what to do if you have signs of a serious allergic reaction, and suggests that you tell your doctor or pharmacist about any other medications or nutritional supplements you are taking at the same time in case there might be additional interactions. The same formulation as an over-the-counter supplement would not require this information or warning.

A 2007 paper published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* suggested that many doctors might not recognize the need to put supplements under special scrutiny, since they are just as clueless about supplement regulation as their patients. Of 335 residents and attending physicians at fifteen different internal medicine residency programs, the study found that “one third of physicians were unaware that dietary supplements did not require FDA approval or submission of safety and efficacy data before being marketed,” a similar percentage believed there were regulations to ensure supplement quality (at the time there were not), and “most physicians” were unaware that serious adverse events due to the use of supplements should be reported to the FDA.

Many of our most common assumptions about food and health come from data sets whose foundations, if we dig into the details, look more like sand than cement.

But solving the mysteries of human nutrition is a bit like peeling an onion: the more layers you pull back, the more layers you find underneath. As the limitations of MREs and the continued uncertainties over the RDAs themselves demonstrate, even a hundred years after the failure of purified diets and the discovery of vitamins, we still don't know how to reverse engineer perfect food. Nature is simply too complex. Indeed, it might well be an impossible goal—for how could we ever be confident that we weren't missing something? This question applies not just to MREs but to infant formula, fortified breakfast cereals, meal replacement shakes, multivitamins, and every other human-designed food we come into contact with each day. Indeed, the very idea that we might know precisely which chemicals each of our bodies needs (and in which quantities and combinations) brings to mind the innocence—and arrogance—of chemists at the turn of the twentieth century whose artificial foods failed because they didn't know about vitamins. Like our predecessors, we, too, are likely leaving out compounds whose importance we don't yet recognize or understand. The story of vitamins is definitely one of scientific triumph, but it's also a cautionary tale, a reminder that the most important issue in nutrition isn't just what we know; it's what we don't.

For-Profit Shitheads

Some might argue that most doctors contribute very little to human health or happiness but are mainly just dispensers of placebos. This may or may not be the case; frankly, I don't have the competence to say; but if nothing else, the oft-cited fact that the overwhelming majority of improvement in longevity since 1900 is really due to hygiene, nutrition, and other public health improvements and not to improvements in medical treatment, suggests a case could be made that the very poorly paid nurses and cleaners employed in a hospital are actually more responsible for positive health outcomes than the hospital's very highly paid physicians.

“And then also the little-mentioned advantage to being destitute and in possession of a Health Card that's expired and not even in your name: hospitals show you a kind of inverted respect; the place bows to your will not to stay; they all of a sudden defer to your subjective diagnostic knowledge of your own condition, which post-seizure condition you feel has turned the corner toward improvement: they bow to your quixotic will: it's unfortunately not a free hospital but it is a free country: they honor your wishes and compliment your mambo and say Go with God. It's a good thing you can't see what you look like, though.”

The United States has 2.6 physicians per 1,000 people, compared with 2.8 in the United Kingdom, 3.3 in France, and 4.0 in Germany. But the relatively low density in the United States is a matter of deliberate policy. In 1997, the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education decided to limit medical school enrollments in the United States, which had previously been growing more or less in step with population growth. More importantly, the federal government caps the number of residency slots that Medicare supports, which is an effective limit on the number of residents in the United States. Since a US residency is a requirement for practicing medicine in the United States, the cap on Medicare-supported residency positions effectively limited the number of practicing physicians in the country.

US limits for residents stands at eighty hours per week, including twenty-four-hour shifts. By comparison, Europe limits weekly hours to forty-eight,

On her first day as an intern, a three-year-old died after an accident. When she cried as the parents were informed of the death, she was scolded by the chief resident as unprofessional. She learned the lesson so well that years later, she delivered the news of an infant's death to grieving parents

with perfect composure and stoic distance. The father felt compelled to apologize for falling apart, and for the first time, she saw the consequence of that distance: she wasn't a comforter, but a strangely chastising burden to the grief-stricken.

“The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama’s ‘death panel’ so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their ‘level of productivity in society,’ whether they are worthy of health care. Such a system is downright evil.”

—Sarah Palin, August 2009

The ironic thing about Palin’s message was that so-called death panels are actually a very real thing in America. Every single day, death panels at for-profit health insurance corporations determine whether or not it’s worth paying out a certain claim or signing on to a certain lifesaving medical procedure. In those cases, a “subjective judgment” is made on how a cancer patient’s chemotherapy will affect the corporation’s bottom line.

I wish I could read this stuff without becoming almost paralyzed with rage. We the people need single payer. It is the only thing that will work. We need it now. The politicians do not offer single payer as an option because it is the one thing we know we want. They are protecting both the insurance and pharmaceutical companies. It is a disgrace. Insurance and pharma must serve us. We have no goddam obligation to serve them. They do not know how to function rationally. Balance billing? Great business skillz.

While stock repurchasing is also common in other industries to achieve corporate goals, the health insurance industry has been especially rife with share buybacks. Among the top 50 share repurchasers for 2000 to 2008 were the two largest corporate health insurers: UnitedHealth Group at number 23 with \$23.7 billion in buybacks, and WellPoint at number 39, with \$14.9 billion. For each of these companies, repurchases represented 104 percent of net income for 2000–2008. Over this period, repurchases by the third largest insurer, Aetna, were \$9.7 billion, or 137 percent of net income, and the fifth largest, CIGNA, \$9.8 billion, or 125 percent of net income. Meanwhile, the top executives of these companies typically reaped millions of dollars, and in many years tens of millions of dollars, in gains from exercising stock options. A serious attempt at health care reform would seek to eliminate the profits of these health insurers, given that these profits are used solely to manipulate stock prices and enrich a small number of people at the top.

From 2000 to 2008, the ten largest for-profit health insurers paid their CEOs a total of \$690.7 million, according to corporate filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission. As outsized as the CEO pay is, it doesn't capture the full extent of the health insurance industry's wasteful overhead. In 2009, WellPoint employed thirty-nine executives who each collected total compensation exceeding \$1 million, according to company documents gathered by the House Energy and Commerce Committee. And WellPoint spent more than \$27 million on retreats for its staff at resorts in such destinations as Hawaii and Arizona in 2007 and 2008, the documents showed. Compare this lavish executive compensation to that of the administrator of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, who manages the health care of forty-four-million elderly and disabled Americans on Medicare and about fifty-nine-million low-income and disabled recipients on Medicaid. This administrator's pay tops out at \$176,000 a year.

It's not that we can't have a good, workable, affordable system—millions of people in other countries have it, so we know it can be done—it's just that we're the exceptional country that places money and profit as a higher priority than the health of our people.

It's profit-taking from the sick and poor—the most evil behavior imaginable—and the imposition of fierce burdens on those at death's door, simply fighting to survive. Our health care system is inhumane, unethical, and serves only to line the pockets of the rich.

We can't all immigrate to Ecuador for health care. We have to build the nation we need where we are. In ancient Rome the Christian faith began to spread through the empire partly because of the charitable works of the Christians. They believed in and practiced radical poverty, charity to the poor, care of the sick. At church service they distributed food. As capitalism inflicts repeated wounds on the public body maybe we should look back to those practices for inspiration, perhaps not for religious reasons but in service of radical morality.

In the past, the benefits of modern medical science have not been enjoyed by our citizens with any degree of equality. Nor are they today. Nor will they be in the future—unless government is bold enough to do something about it. We should resolve now that the health of this nation is a national concern; that financial barriers in the way of attaining health shall be removed; that the health of all its citizens deserves the help of all the nation.

If we want genuinely good societies, which produce genuinely healthy people, both physically and psychologically, we need to figure out a way to run our society which involves much less coercion and precarity. The whip of hunger; the fear of losing one's job and with it any life worth having, are the ruling fears of our age, and they produce real and genuine ills.

One of the duties of the state is that of caring for those of its citizens who find themselves the victims of such adverse circumstances as makes them unable to obtain even the necessities for mere existence without the aid of others. That responsibility is recognized by every civilized nation. To these unfortunate citizens aid must be extended by government—not as a matter of charity but as a matter of social duty.

The irony today of detractors calling national health care “socialist” must certainly have Bismarck spinning in his grave. It is no paradox that he and those who followed in his footsteps established European health systems as extremely conservative anti-socialists—they were catering to the working classes as leverage against their joining true socialist and labor movements of the day. Strong conservative governments in Europe called this “turning benevolence into power”—a strategy generally credited with creating the social welfare measures that actually kept Communism from becoming a dominant force.

For the second time in the life of many Americans, military action in Europe put an end to any real talk about national health insurance—except for tax exemptions allowed for health benefits so that companies could attract and maintain private-sector workers during the war years. Many employers took advantage of the exemptions, bolstering the nonprofit Blue Cross-type coverages already in the market and leading to the uniquely American employer-based health insurance system.

In 1943, at the height of World War II, when the American armies and industries needed every troop or worker they could find, the Internal Revenue Service tweaked the tax code, granting tax-free status to employer-based health insurance. This didn’t seem to be a big deal, certainly nothing to rival the headlines about the German surrender in Stalingrad or Allied landings on Sicily. At the time, only about nine percent of American workers received private health coverage as a job benefit. But with the new tax-free status, businesses set about attracting scarce workers by offering health insurance. Within ten years, 65 percent of Americans would come under their employers’ systems. Companies already exerted great control over our finances. But in that one decade, they gained a measure of control—whether they wanted it or not—over our bodies. Seventy-five years later, health care costs have metastasized and now consume \$3 trillion per year. Nearly one dollar of every five we earn feeds the vast health care industry.

“No longer will older Americans be denied the healing miracle of modern medicine. No longer will illness crush and destroy the savings that they have so carefully put away over a lifetime so that they might enjoy dignity in their later years. No longer

will young families see their own incomes, and their own hopes, eaten away simply because they are carrying out their deep moral obligations to their parents, and to their uncles, and their aunts.”

—Lyndon Johnson

Attitudes toward HMOs began to change for the worse when the big for-profit insurers began to take over. These insurers knew that the more HMO members they had in a given market, the more leverage they would have over local doctors and hospitals. Not only could the insurers demand deep discounts from doctors once they acquired significant market share, but they could also influence—through their reimbursement policies and coverage guidelines—how the doctors practiced medicine.

It was at that moment that I realized how much was at stake with the industry’s transition from managed care to consumerism. The business model based on managed care had failed, and the only way the insurers could continue to meet shareholders’ expectations was to find a new way to avoid paying for health care. The means now available to them was to shift costs to policyholders.

Although Wall Street constantly pressures companies to reduce their MLRs, this imperative for the first time would collide with national standards, as established by the Obama’s health care reform law. Insurers are mandated now to spend at least 80 percent of premiums on medical care for the individual and small-group market (one-hundred enrollees or fewer) and at least 85 percent for the large-group market. One might think that these new requirements will benefit health care providers and patients, but you can count on insurers to game the system.

They’ve already tried. Within days of Obama’s signing the law, WellPoint told Wall Street analysts that it had decided to “reclassify” certain categories of costs that it had previously counted as administrative expenses and move them to the medical-spending side of the equation, effectively raising its ratios without making any actual changes in behavior. When low MLRs were needed to impress Wall Street investors, insurance companies excluded the cost of nurse hotlines, medical reviews, and disease-management programs from medical costs. Now that the government is demanding minimum MLRs, the insurers want regulators to consider those expenses as medical costs, a clear-cut signal to investors that they will resist efforts to get them to trim profit margins.

From 2007 to mid-2009, insurance and HMO political contributions and lobbying expenses totaled a jaw-dropping \$586 million, according to Public

Campaign. At the height of the battle, the industries were spending nearly \$700,000 a day to influence the political process.

“I started questioning whether for-profit insurers really did play a constructive role in our health care system, as I insisted publicly. But it was all self-talk. I never told anyone I was having doubts. I found that alcohol helped to keep those thoughts at bay, so I drank more than I ever had—although never at work—to keep from dealing with recurring thoughts that I had sold out. As part of my rationalization, I told myself that at least I was occasionally able to make a positive difference in a few people’s lives.

One of my responsibilities, when a health-plan member complained to the media about a treatment or procedure that CIGNA had refused to cover, was to make sure the company’s executives understood what the PR consequences could be if the company didn’t pay. While medical directors always said they would never change a coverage decision based on what the media might or might not do, denials that attracted media attention were often reversed. Whenever that happened, I took some satisfaction in thinking that I might have helped save someone’s life.

I came to realize that many of my fellow employees engaged in the same kind of self-talk to get through the day. They were good people who had families and needed to keep their jobs just as much as I needed to keep mine. We told ourselves that for every horror story we heard, there were many more success stories, many more cases in which CIGNA paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for urgently needed care. And, we reminded ourselves, the media cover the few big wrecks on the freeway, not the thousands of people who make it home safely every day.”

The bad news is that companies are obligated to provide the cost of the benefit only when the patient survives long enough to receive it. If the patient dies before receiving the treatment, the insurer or HMO pays nothing. Because there is no meaningful penalty for denying medically necessary treatment, there is no incentive to approve costly care. Imagine that the penalty for bank robbery was limited to giving back the stolen money. No jail time, no fines, just pay the money back—and only if you are caught. To top it off, the repaid money would be interest free. Would bank robbery increase under such circumstances? That’s the situation HMOs and insurers enjoy under ERISA.

It's clear that voters were frightened away by the specter—conjured up by the insurance industry and its business and political allies—of government bureaucrats coming between them and their doctors. What Americans got instead was private insurance companies doing exactly the same thing.

Hearing Voices

In the 50s researchers found a patient at Bellevue who'd been committed for the first time to the psychiatric ward for hearing voices. The patient was a machinist whose psychiatric medical profile was completely normal other than a sudden audio aberration. Before the voices appeared, the machinist had displayed no symptoms of insanity. Whereas many a 1950s doctor would have written the man off as crazy, the researchers had another theory to pursue. They believed the man might be hearing voices that were traveling on a radio wave, that the machinist was somehow "tuned in" to a specific radio frequency that other individuals could not hear.

"We found out that his job was the key to the diagnosis."

In the machine shop where the man worked, the machinist's daily routine was grinding metal casings against carborundum wheels for hours at a time. When the research team gave the man a dental examination, it showed that his metal fillings were coated with carborundum dust, or silicon carbide, a semiconductor. The carborundum behaved like the crystal rectifier in the old crystal radio sets of the 1920s. When the subject was placed inside the Faraday Cage, all electrical and radio signals were eliminated. The voices ceased. His teeth were cleaned and he was cured of the 'psychiatric' problem. The man was never crazy to begin with.

"Rather, we found that he was precisely tuned to radio station WOR in New York City."

What is that voice in your head? The one you hear when you're slicing carrots in the kitchen, waiting for a bus, clicking through your emails, or grappling with a dilemma. Is it you speaking to you, or are you the thing that is endlessly spun by that conversation? In which case, where do you go when the voice stops? Does it ever stop? Who is the 'me' or 'you' to whom a young child speaks aloud, and who is the speaker—especially in the stage when that fragile self is still in the process of being formed? Who speaks to the novelist in her study, or to the psychiatric patient in his hospital room? To the church-goer, praying silently in her pew, or to the ordinary voice-hearer, listening in to the transmissions of a fractured self? What are the tattered, dissociated fragments that auditory verbal hallucinations bring into being, protect against and help us to understand?

I sit in my study, typing these words. I hear the next sentence resonating in my head, and a voice repeats it back at me as I watch it taking shape on the screen. I stop, listening to the winter wind howling outside. I look out

of the window at the bright February afternoon. The voice is quiet now, a shadow of the urgent chatter of a moment ago, but it is still there. I mutter aloud to myself, sounding out the sentences I am grappling with. Am I in my head, a product of my restless brain, or am I the echoes of what I hear coming back at me, part of the process by which all of this—my self, these words, this reality—is constructed? There's a brief silence; I've been working hard and I am very tired. But I know that it will start up again before too long: softly, inconspicuously, intimately familiar. The voice in my head will not frighten or demean me, although it will occasionally chastise me and urge me to do better. It will tell me things I didn't know. It will surprise me and make me laugh, and above all it will remind me of who I am. I have heard it before.

Novelists use two main methods for depicting what characters say in their stories. They can present exactly what the character said, usually marking it with speech marks—what is known as direct speech. Or they can report the utterance at second hand, in so-called reported (or indirect) speech. It's the difference between writing:

1. Mary said, "The game was interesting"
2. Mary said that the game was interesting.

Psychologists have shown that direct speech is generally perceived as more vivid than reported speech. One study asked participants to report a conversation that some other people had had, and were instructed either to make the account entertaining or simply to make it informative. When participants were trying to entertain rather than simply convey information, they were more likely to choose direct speech as their medium.

Other researchers have asked what goes on in the brain when people read the two kinds of speech. They began with the hypothesis that, when we read reported speech, we only process the meaning; when we read direct speech we go so far as to sound the speaker's words out in our heads. In line with their predictions, they found differences in brain activation in participants listening to direct versus reported speech. Specifically, listening to direct speech led to greater activation in areas of the right auditory cortex (housed in the temporal lobe), which is known to be particularly important for processing voices. This wouldn't be expected if both kinds of speech led to processing the depicted speech at the same level. The findings provide a neural basis for the observation that direct speech is experienced more vividly than reported speech, because it activates areas of the brain that represent the qualities of voices.

To date, there have been no experimental investigations of whether readers' processing of this kind of depiction of inner speech leads to the voice taking on life in the mind in the way that direct speech does. But there's no doubt that mixing characters' inner speech with a regular authorial voice is one of the ways in which novelists make their prose come alive. Writers can also have a lot of fun with the fact that people often say things that are the opposite of what they're thinking. Fictional characters can go about their internal lives safe in the knowledge that their thoughts will not be overheard by the characters they are conversing with. Eavesdropping on those contradictory messages is one of the pleasures of reading fiction.

But voices can get out of hand. For some individuals, fictional voices can make audible what we would rather remained silent. Voices on the page transport the self beyond its safely policed boundaries, showing us the precarious harmony that is the polyphony of consciousness. They remind us that we are not one, but many.

You sit alone, with no capacity for movement, in a dimly lit place whose dimensions you cannot verify. You know that your eyes are open because of the tears that stream from them endlessly. You are seated with your hands on your knees and no support for your spine, and you are speaking. Without ceasing. It's pretty much all you can do. The voice that you hear sounds alien, and yet it can only be you who is producing it. Sometimes there is more than one voice. Singular or plural, it seems to be able to impose its will on you, giving you no choice but to listen. And yet it is your mouth that is uttering it. You are listening to yourself, but what you are listening to is not 'you.'

A solitary mind is actually a chorus. We can go so far as to say that minds are riddled with different voices because they are never really solitary. They emerge in the context of social relationships, and they are shaped by the dynamics of those relationships. Other people's words get into our heads. This is more than the currently fashionable formulation that we have "social brains," wired up to engage with others from the first days of life (although that is also true). It's saying that our thinking is social. Our minds contain multitudes just as a work of fiction contains the voices of different characters with distinct perspectives. Thinking is a dialogue, and human cognition retains many of the powers of a conversation between different points of view.

Consider creative partnerships such as the one between John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Some kind of internalized creative dialogue must surely be a major part of any such partnership—how otherwise would anything get done? Lennon was not limited to being a musical genius only when McCartney was in the room, and vice versa. Creative partnerships—of which

the history of various art forms is littered with examples—may come to have their power at least in part because the artist recreates an internalized version of the actual dialogue that would have taken place over cups of tea and cigarette breaks. I would go further and say that, once established, the inner dialogue develops to a point where it no longer needs the other contributor.

In whichever form we do it, there are good psychological reasons why conducting dialogues on the page might benefit the creative process. If I'm doing my thinking in writing, as opposed to silently in my head, it will have the benefit of reducing my processing costs, particularly the demand on working memory. For one thing, if I've written my question down, I don't have to divert mental resources towards holding it in memory while I think of how to answer it. The notebook page becomes an external version of the 'open slot' in which we park a perspective while generating a response to it. Giving our thoughts a material, external form helps to cut down the amount of work we need to do to process them.

Something similar happens when we think out loud in private speech. Rather than having to hold a perspective silently in my head, I can voice it out loud and know that it will resonate for a while in my auditory memory. Speaking our thoughts aloud, like writing them down, appears to be a handy way of cutting down the resource costs of doing it all in inner speech. That issue of processing cost may be the secret to understanding the power of dialogic thinking. Creativity involves bringing bits of information to bear on a problem that may not be obviously relevant (thinking about a tack box as a candle-holder, for example). As soon as you express one perspective in words, you drastically constrain the range of possible dialogic responses to it. Conversations have to be about the same thing, or they are not really conversations. To illustrate this, answer this simple question: Have you ever danced with a movie star? To answer this question, you don't have to run through a list of every single person you have ever danced with, and check to see whether any of them are Hollywood A-listers. You simply have to put the idea out there, in a question aimed at yourself, and then answer it, through relatively effortless and automatic reasoning processes.

In sixteenth-century Spain, St. John of the Cross presented an explanation for how divine voices could arise as a result of misattributed inner speech. Building on his predecessor St. Thomas Aquinas's view of thinking as "the interior word," St. John noted how novices at meditation could have the experience of a divine voice when in fact "it is for the most part they who are saying these things to themselves." From its origins in European theology, this view later became established in the medical literature. In his 1886 book *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings*, the British psychiatrist Henry

Maudsley wrote of “a vividly conceived idea which is so intense. . . that it is projected outwards into what seems an actual perception. . . in the case of hearing, an idea so intense as to become a voice.”

A century later, in the late 1970s, Irwin Feinberg proposed that auditory verbal hallucinations might arise as a result of a disorder to the brain systems that usually monitor which actions are self-produced. Like all good ideas, Feinberg’s notion is at its heart a simple one. An individual generates an utterance in inner speech—the kind of ordinary internal conversation we’re all familiar with—but for some reason fails to recognize it as their own work. There are words in the head, but they don’t feel like the words of the self. The individual experiences them as an utterance from without: a heard voice.

There are dangers, though, in trying to work with historical accounts of private, subjective experiences like voice-hearing. Mass literacy is an invention of the modern world, and many of the people whose experiences we might be most interested in would have been unable to read or write. Their testimonies are therefore usually filtered through the belief system and sensibility of someone who could do those things: usually a holy man, like a monk or a priest. These accounts were often highly distorted and fictionalized. We are naturally also limited to artifacts that have survived and can now be interpreted, which, as we go further and further back in time, represent a dwindling number.

Language processing in deaf people seems to be based in very similar regions to those activated in hearing individuals, and covert signing in the deaf seems to recruit a classic “inner speech” network. This suggests that our brains code information about communication in a way that is not specific to any particular sensory channel. That would explain why deaf people who report hearing voices often report a mix of experiences, and it also fits with observations that voices in hearing people are often accompanied by experiences in other senses.

Some have argued that felt presence should be properly understood as a delusion, because it seems not to involve any sensory perception, phantom or genuine. But a more useful way of thinking about it is as a hallucination of a social agent with communicative intentions. When you sense the presence of your baby in your bed, or feel that your deceased partner is in the room with you, you are effectively hallucinating a person: not their voice or their face, but their entire being. The reason might be that there is, or was, a real person there whose presence you have been tracking, just as a shopkeeper might track the movements of a suspicious-looking customer, or a parent might track the whereabouts of her inquisitive toddler. Research in developmental psychology has shown that the ability to keep track of

social agents develops very early in babyhood, or may even be innate. In the case of bereavement, a person whose presence you have been monitoring for a long time, perhaps for decades, is suddenly not there any more. But your brain keeps on expecting their presence and filling in the gap that they have left. It's no wonder that hearing voices is so common in people who have recently lost a loved one.

“I often hear voices. I realize that drops me in the crazy category but I don't much care. If you believe, as I do, that the mind wants to heal itself, and that the psyche seeks coherence not disintegration, then it isn't hard to conclude that the mind will manifest whatever is necessary to work on the job.”

Dissociation refers to the phenomenon whereby thoughts, feelings, and experiences are not integrated into consciousness in the usual way. The connection with hearing voices comes through the finding that people who live through horrific events often describe themselves dissociating during the trauma. Splitting itself into separate parts is one of the most powerful of the mind's defense mechanisms. It is as though there is some drastic attempt by the psyche to remove itself from the horror that is unfolding: drastic because it effectively involves the psyche cleaving itself into pieces.

Dissociation makes sense as a natural reaction to horrific events:

“Some of the most dramatic memories of dissociation I have are acute ones, during actual trauma exposure—the sense of seeing myself on the floor, as if I was just floating above the horror happening below, completely separate from it. It's like your mind knows that the time has come when it's better to lose touch with what's happening to your body and simply breaks free: mental flight.”

Voices may not be memories in the literal sense, but we can learn much about methods for dealing with them by looking at how people learn to live with memories of horrible events. Therapy for traumatic memories, such as those that characterize post-traumatic stress disorder, involves encouraging the sufferer not so much to try to forget the event as to remember it more accurately. That means fitting it into a network of memories in such a way that it can become less intrusive, distorted, and autonomous.

Rumination refers to an obsessive dwelling on the reasons for distress or unhappiness, and it has been associated with several psychiatric symptoms including hallucinations. There have been almost no attempts to investigate whether rumination is a specifically verbal phenomenon, although it seems

likely that it will be in many cases. The auditory modality might be a particularly suitable channel for dwelling on miserable things. You can have a self-sustaining dialogue with an auditory representation, for one thing—particularly one that takes the form of a characterful, agentic ‘other’—in a way that would be difficult with a visual image. Verbal rumination might therefore be the dismal counterpart to creative, open-ended inner dialogue. Perhaps this is even a way of understanding the perspective that voices are a safety mechanism. If negative emotions are channeled into the auditory modality, it might make them slightly easier to deal with. Voices and negative ruminations might be unpleasant, but at least they can be engaged with. In which case, the dominance of inner speech might ultimately reflect its evolved role in making the organism resilient to distress. In a similar way to avatar therapy, giving the troublesome thought a material, external form may make it easier for the sufferer to engage with it, thus reducing the unhappiness it can cause.

Another way of attaining that distance is to understand the voice as coming from a non-physical entity. More people make sense of their voice-hearing experiences within a spiritual framework than they do within any other, whether neuroscientific, trauma-related, or anything else. Given how the feeling of a communicating agency seems so central to voice-hearing, a spiritual interpretation would seem to flow naturally. I am not a religious person, but it seems plausible to me that many believers would see some of their ordinary thoughts as having a supernatural origin, without necessarily describing them in terms of voice-hearing.

Ultimately a heard voice is something that communicates, and an entity that communicates can be represented separately from its actual utterances. If I’m on the phone to someone and there’s a pause in the conversation, I can still represent my interlocutor mentally even though I’m not hearing her voice. Voices are more than fragments of sensory perception or intrusions from memory—they’re kind of like people, really. And the communicative agents that are experienced or hallucinated have intentions—they want things which don’t necessarily map on to what the voice-hearer wants. Something similar can happen with imaginary companions, and with the fictional creations that a novelist comes up with.

When we talk to and listen to ourselves in our own ordinary voices, do we sense the presence of a social agent? Could our multi-voiced inner speech even be one of the ways in which we represent such agents for ourselves, as we fill our minds with the voices of the people we carry with us? Is that ‘you’ in your head really like a person who is communicating with you? If so, what does that mean for what you know of yourself, and for the challenge of keeping track of who you are? One way into this question is to ask whether

our inner speech has a tone of voice, or any of the other qualities that make a voice into something like an agent, capable of expressing emotions and intentions. Try, for example, asking whether your inner speech can ever be sarcastic or insincere. I for one am fairly sure I've said to myself things like 'Today is going really well' when I actually meant the exact opposite. Can you lie to yourself in inner speech, or say to yourself something that you don't really mean? The evidence on the dialogicality of ordinary inner speech certainly suggests that our speaking selves have that multiplicity. And yet these selves don't feel alien; we don't feel that we have been colonized, inhabited, or taken over, as many voice-hearers do. What makes our speaking selves seem like 'us' in the typical case? Whatever it is, its disturbance makes for a thoroughly disorienting experience.

Under the right kinds of stresses and expectations, people can quite readily perceive communicative intentions in signals such as mobile phone ringtones or pager beeps. One recent study showed that it is not uncommon for nursing mothers to hear voices and other sounds in the noise of their breast pumps, such as a repeated, alarming utterance like 'Snap my arm.'

Hallucinations are shaped by the intellectual, emotional, and imaginative powers of the individual, and by the beliefs and style of the culture in which he is embedded. Cultural beliefs will exert top-down effects on hallucinatory experiences in varied ways. An individual's cultural (including religious) background will affect what counts as reality, shape how a hallucination is experienced, and influence the meaning that is attributed to it. For example, a study showed that voice-hearing patients in Ghana and India were more likely than a Californian comparison group to identify their voices as people they knew and to engage them in conversation—a finding that is difficult to reconcile with the view that hallucinations can be entirely explained in terms of biological mechanisms. We need to learn much more about how particular languages confer specific properties on inner speech, and how they might even open up patterns of thought that would not be possible in other languages.

What can we conclude, then, about the importance of these conversations in our heads? We can fairly easily reject the idea that you need language in order to be intelligent. There is an agonizingly complicated philosophical literature on whether thinking depends on language, and my own view should now be plain. For a start, we can't have that conversation unless we are willing to be much clearer on what we mean by thinking. For many of the activities we call thinking, the use of self-directed language is a massive boost, but it is by no means essential. Inner speech is the way in which humans happen to do much of it, but it is by no means the only way. We also need to be clear on what we mean by language.

Some argue words function as psychological tools, capable of enhancing the range of things that can be done with one's mental capacities. But that role can be fulfilled by any sufficiently sophisticated system of signs, and is certainly not restricted to the verbal or auditory. Deafness affects language use in many ways, but there is no reason why deaf people could not do their internal communication in sign language. Many deaf people are in fact bilingual, and bilingualism in all its forms raises profound questions about our inner conversations. In a group, a trick is to ask if anyone speaks two languages. Then ask: 'So what language do you think in?' People always respond to this inquiry in delightful and varied ways, but for me the interesting thing is that the question makes sense. If thinking was not verbal, people would presumably respond to that question with a look of bafflement.

Examples of thinking in the absence of any language are a bit more complicated. In cases of aphasia, people typically lose their language functions (through brain damage or disease) after they have learned to speak—and thus presumably after they have had a chance to learn to talk to themselves. Studying cognitive functions in aphasia is thus not a critical test of the model, because the structures necessary for dialogic thinking will have developed during the period in which language was intact. Developmental disorders such as autism are different again. We don't know much about inner speech in autism, partly because the disorder is defined in terms of problems with language and communication, meaning that getting autistic people to describe their inner experience is going to be difficult. The little evidence that we have suggests that people with autism do use inner speech, but that it appears not to have the dialogic, self-communicative qualities that it has in neurotypicals. That might be a function of how the disorder limits autistic children's opportunities for social interaction as they are growing up. If you are not participating in social dialogues, you cannot really internalize them.

One view is that inner speech has a role in pulling together the plentiful different things that the brain does. A brain that has evolved to fulfill many varied functions will require some way of integrating these different information-processing systems. According to some scholars, language became involved in human cognition (ultimately, in the form of mental voices) because it was able to bind together the outputs of separate, autonomous brain systems. To switch the metaphor, think of inner speech as the thread of a necklace. Different experiences flow through our consciousness: visual images, sounds, music, feelings. But it is inner speech that strings them all together, allowing distinct neural systems to talk to each other by virtue of the way that the internal language network plugs flexibly and selectively

into other systems.

If inner speech has this kind of usefulness, then it is bound to be a boon. If it can actually have a survival function—as suggested by the voice-hearing experiences of those in extreme situations—then there is even more reason for thinking that it will stick around in the face of natural selection. Many voice-hearers can link their experiences to specific episodes of trauma.

“My voices saved my life. I could have just said, ‘It’s not worth living, my dad tried to kill me, nobody cares, better to die.’ And, you know, I could have committed suicide. What my voices did was protect me. I couldn’t look at the truth directly at the time, so voices helped me not to do that.”

Voices have a dual role, as tormentors and protectors. The experience is both an attack on personal identity and an attempt to keep it intact. If we insist on telling people that their voices are neural junk, then a profound part of the experience, and a possible route to relief from its distress, are lost. Our inner voices can help to keep us safe. Doing that internal speaking silently will also have clear evolutionary benefits. Talking to ourselves won’t be much good if it betrays our position to a predator, enemy, or prey. The pressures to keep a lid on our inner conversation might be social as well as evolutionary. One reason why private speech goes underground in middle childhood is probably that talking to yourself out loud is rarely sanctioned in Western schools. There is a growing recognition, though, that audible self-talk remains valuable well into adulthood, which is certainly a change from the way grown-up private speech was perceived in the past.

I suspect that inner speech will turn out to have a substantial role in memory. Verbal rehearsal of material is an important part of the human working memory system (think of that shopping list you recite to yourself as you walk around the supermarket). On a much longer timescale, talking to ourselves might be a big part of how we keep a grip on the past. Children’s development of autobiographical memory is known to be influenced by the kinds of conversation that parents have with them about past events. If children are exposed to talk in which adults elaborate on details, such as the emotions and feelings of the protagonists in the events, they go on to produce richer autobiographical narratives of their own. A study using the Tower of London task found that children who produced more self-regulatory private speech also produced more sophisticated autobiographical narratives. There is also evidence that the memories of adults are mediated by inner speech. Bilingual people find it easier to recall events if they are asked about them in the language they spoke at the time of the event, as compared with

a language they might have learned more recently. This fits with the idea that we code memories verbally, so that they are sensitive to the kind of language with which they are probed.

Such a prominent role for internal language would arguably give it a role in how we become aware of our own selves. Our inner speech is at least faithful to us. It is reassuringly or irritatingly there on tap. It offers us the unfailing if ambiguous company of a guest who does not plan to leave. People who talk to themselves more frequently also score more highly on measures of self-awareness and self-evaluation. Supporting the idea that the narratives we spin about ourselves have a role in anchoring those selves, the study of aphasia has shown that the condition can be accompanied by a diminution of the sense of who one is. An individual, for example, who temporarily lost her ability to speak following a stroke, wrote of “the dramatic silence that had taken residency inside my head,” which accompanied the dwindling of her sense of individuality and ability to retrieve autobiographical memories. When we lose the ability to talk to ourselves, we might also lose something of the sense of who we are.

Human Shoes

Suicide is painless
It brings on many changes

Through early morning fog I see
Visions of the things to be
The pains that are withheld for me
I realize and I can see...

That suicide is painless
It brings on many changes

And I can take or leave it if I please
I try to find a way to make
All our little joys relate
Without that ever-present hate
But now I know that it's too late, and...

That suicide is painless
It brings on many changes

The game of life is hard to play
I'm gonna lose it anyway
The losing card I'll someday lay
So this is all I have to say:

That suicide is painless
It brings on many changes

The only way to win is cheat
And lay it down before I'm beat
And to another give my seat
For that's the only painless feat

That suicide is painless
It brings on many changes

The sword of time will pierce our skins
It doesn't hurt when it begins
But as it works its way on in
The pain grows stronger
Watch it grin, but...

That suicide is painless
It brings on many changes

A brave man once requested me
To answer questions that are key
Is it to be or not to be
And I replied “oh why ask me?”

That suicide is painless
It brings on many changes

Cause suicide is painless
It brings on many changes
And I can take or leave it if I please.
And you can do the same thing if you please.

Why do so many people who experience violence in childhood feel the same way? Why does it lead many of them to self-destructive behavior, like obesity, or hardcore addiction, or suicide? I have spent a lot of time thinking about this. When you're a child, you have very little power to change your environment. You can't move away, or force somebody to stop hurting you. So you have two choices. You can admit to yourself that you are powerless—that at any moment, you could be badly hurt, and there's simply nothing you can do about it. Or you can tell yourself it's your fault. If you do that, you actually gain some power—at least in your own mind. If it's your fault, then there's something you can do that might make it different. You aren't a pinball being smacked around a pinball machine. You're the person controlling the machine. You have your hands on the dangerous levers. In this way, just like obesity protected those women from the men they feared would rape them, blaming yourself for your childhood traumas protects you from seeing how vulnerable you were and are. You can become the powerful one. If it's your fault, it's under your control. But that comes at a cost. If you were responsible for being hurt, then at some level, you have to think you deserved it. A person who thinks they deserved to be injured as a child isn't going to think they deserve much as an adult, either. This is no way to live. But it's a misfiring of the thing that made it possible for you to survive at an earlier point in your life.

Many undesirable outcomes in life arrive incrementally.

“My life can be summed up as dull, miserable, demeaning, undignified, and intolerable. It is a misery created by the accumulation of lots of things which are minor in themselves but,

taken together, ruin what's left of my life. Things like constant dribbling; having to be hoisted everywhere; loss of independence, particularly toileting and washing, in fact all bodily functions (by far the hardest thing to get used to); having to forgo favourite foods having to wait until 10:30 to go to the toilet. In extreme circumstances I have gone in the chair, and have sat there until the carers arrived at the normal time.”

Over one-million people every year take their own lives, more than are murdered or killed in wars. And which countries are leading the way, with rates of depression and anxiety that are unrivaled in the rest of the developed world? America and Japan—perhaps the most technologically advanced societies on the planet, and among the richest. Clearly, technology and affluence alone don't make people happy.

Human endurance is like shoe leather. It can walk over only so much pain and terror before the souls are worn through.

It's time to stop pulling drowning kids out of the river and start heading upstream to see who is pushing them in.

Edgar Allen Poe dealt with impulses such as suicide in an essay called “The Imp of the Perverse.” Poe noted that the impulse could increase to a wish, then to a desire, then to an uncontrollable longing.

“There is no passion in nature so demonically impatient as that of him who, shuddering upon the edge of a precipice, thus meditates a plunge.”

Those who commit suicide are powerless souls. The suicider's world is an interior pain that is almost indescribable. What is foremost to these actors is the stage inside the mind upon which they enact life's loneliest agony. The torment that ultimately plunges a suicider into death is uniquely personal, with tentacles that then touch the rest of us.

Because none of us could have consented to being brought into existence, it is especially important that each one of us at least have the option of ceasing to exist if he or she would rather not endure the hardships that life presents. After all, it is very likely that the high value we attach to life is at least significantly influenced by a brute biological life drive, a strong instinct of self-preservation that is pre-rational, shared with other animals, and then, in the case of humans, rationalized.

Maybe one reason why suicide is often seen as a tragedy is because it pierces the bubble of our shared self-perpetuating reality—our grand collective illusion—that life is worth living. Suicide is an indirect claim that life is purposeless, absurd, not worth living. Suicide pierces this transcendent

collective reality. Suicides somehow violate the unspoken covenant we all have with each other to affirm life, even when there may be little left to affirm.

The suicider does not play the game, does not observe the rules. He leaves the party too soon, and leaves the other guests painfully uncomfortable.

“Joe seemed like one of us ducks floating down the river. We just didn’t realize he was paddling so furiously under the water. Eventually Joe got tired of paddling.”

Things all look the same on the surface, but just below, the substrate is deteriorating. We’re all ducks like Joe Stack desperately paddling to stay afloat. And day by day more and more of us are sinking. Joe Stack thought he was doing what needed to be done. As he wrote in his suicide letter:

“I can only hope that the numbers quickly get too big to be whitewashed and ignored and that the American zombies wake up and revolt. It will take nothing less.”

Sorry, Joe, turns out no one gives a shit. But have you heard about those 5,000 Wuhan Flu deaths—oh, of course not, you’re dead. Due to something far less exploitable by wealthy, powerful narrative-makers—you should see the viewer numbers on the latest episode of Fredo’s Fever Dreams. But, one should not be surprised, after all, it is their owners who are driving people like poor Joe here to take their leave.

“I’ve lived for thirty years (badly), some will say it was too short a life. But these people can not determine the limits of patience and tolerability, for these limits are subjective, not objective.

I tried to be a good person. I’ve made mistakes. I started many new experiments. I have tried to make sense of my life and to set myself a goal, using my abilities. I tried to make an art out of the discomfort.

But the questions never stop and I am tired of having to bear them. I am also sorry to ask these questions. I am tired of my efforts failing to bear fruit. I am tired of having to suffer criticism. I am tired of running to senseless job interviews for a job as a graphic artist.

I am tired of wasting feelings and desires for the other sex that obviously does not need me. I’m tired of being envious. I’m tired of asking myself how it feels to be on the winners’ side.

I am tired of having to justify my existence without having determined it myself. I am tired of meeting the expectations of others, although my own expectations have never been fulfilled. I am tired of making a good face to the evil game, pretending to disappoint myself, to be taken on the arm, to be sorted out and to hear myself say that sensitivity is a particularly great character.

All lies. If sensitivity is really a great character property, researchers would have recognized that by now. But she never was and never will be, because that is the wrong reality.

A reality in which comfort counts, talents and alternatives are not valued; the ambitions ridiculed and dreams as well as everything else that does not fit in the so-called normality, are destroyed. This reality I can not accept as mine.

No one can make any claims to this reality. You can not ask for a job, you can not hope for love, you can not expect recognition, you can not ask for security, and you can not ask for a stable environment.

As for the last point, you will experience your blue wonder in the future, because soon you will not even be able to ask for more food, electricity, or running water, but of course that will not be my problem anymore. The future will be a disaster to which I do not want to contribute my part and not want to be part of it. I wish all those who are ready to face this future good luck.

This is by no means the world in which I should live, and no one can force me to continue to be part of this world. It is a nightmare full of problems, without any identity, without collateral, without clues and meanwhile also without prospects.

There are no prerequisites for me to get through this world, and I do not have the means to create these conditions. I can not look back at what I see, and I do not see any meaning in it: I have nothing to do with all this.

I can not spend the rest of my life struggling just to survive. To fight for the place I need, or for what I am legally entitled to do with the best of the worst in order to get along with as little as possible. I do not care about the minimum, I wanted the maximum, but this is unfortunately not available to me.

With the answer 'No' one can not live but die, and in this world there was never room for what I wanted, so I really did not really exist.

The general state of things is unacceptable to me, and I no longer intend to accept things. I think it is right if someone occasionally reminds the others that we are free, that there is an alternative to suffering: we can stop.

If life can not be a pleasure, it can not become a duty and I have understood that. I am aware that I am hurting you with great pain, but my anger is now so great that it only gets worse if I do not carry out my plan, and I can not bear any more hate.

As a free man, I have come into this world, and as a free man I leave this world, for in this world I have not fallen in the least.

Stop the hypocrisy.

I'm not letting myself be blackmailed by the fact that this is the only one Possibility. My individual model does not work. You are the ones who settle with me, not me with you.

I have always been a nonconformist and have the right to say what I think; to make my own decisions, no matter what price. There is nothing that can not be separated, death is only the means to it. The free will obeys the individual and not the comforts of others.

I know you'll be like a madness, but that's not it. It's just disappointment. I have no more desire: not here and not now.

I can not assert my existence, but my absence is already, and the absolute nothing is still better than a whole, in which you can not be happy if you bow down to your fate.

Mom, Daddy, please forgive me if you can, but I'm back home now. I'm fine.

There was no chaos in my mind. There was order within my mind. This generation takes revenge for a robbery, the robbery of happiness.

I ask all my friends to forgive me. Please do not hate me. I thank you for the wonderful moments we spent together. You are all better than me. This is not an abuse of my origin, but an accusation of treason.

I've been through as long as I could."

Maybe he was tired, like me, of all the fighting, and saw there was no need for fighting. Or if we fought and won there would be more fighting against us. And on and on. Because as a culture, humans have not learned that doing nothing is the greatest common denominator. That doing—and being—*nothing* would bring peace. But the influence for us to be and do is just too much in the Facebook generation.

What that man performed was the ultimate boycott. He will no longer need to buy food, clothes, and shelter from these multinational companies that are raping the earth and exploiting everyone. But until we get the middle class to boycott these companies, people like him and I will suffer. And there is a limit to human pain and suffering.

I found that for people of my circle there were four ways out of the terrible position in which we are all placed. The first was that of ignorance. It consists in not knowing, not understanding, that life is an evil and an absurdity. From people of this sort I had nothing to learn—one cannot cease to know what one does know.

The second way out is epicureanism. It consists, while knowing the hopelessness of life, in making use meanwhile of the advantages one has, disregarding the dragon and the mice, and licking the honey in the best way, especially if there is much of it within reach. That is the way in which the majority of people of our circle make life possible for themselves. Their circumstances furnish them with more of welfare than of hardship, and their moral dullness makes it possible for them to forget that the advantage of their position is accidental and that the accident that has today made me a Solomon may tomorrow make me a Solomon's slave. The dullness of these people's imagination enables them to forget the things that gave Buddha no peace—the inevitability of sickness, old age, and death, which today or tomorrow will destroy all these pleasures.

The third escape is that of strength and energy. It consists in destroying life, when one has understood that it is an evil and an absurdity. A few exceptionally strong and consistent people act so. Having understood the stupidity of the joke that has been played on them, and having understood that it is better to be dead than to be alive, and that it is best of all not to exist, they act accordingly and promptly end this stupid joke, since there are means: a rope round one's neck, water, a knife to stick into one's heart, a bottle of pills, a gun, or the trains on the railways; and the number of those of our circle who act in this way becomes greater and greater, and for the most part they act so at the best time of their life, when the strength of their mind is in full bloom and few habits degrading to the mind have as yet been acquired.

The fourth way out is that of weakness. It consists in seeing the truth of the situation and yet clinging to life, knowing in advance that nothing can come of it. People of this kind know that death is better than life, but not having the strength to act rationally—to end the deception quickly and kill themselves—they seem to wait for something. This is the escape of weakness, for if I know what is best and it is within my power, why not yield to what is best? The fourth way was to live like Solomon and

Schopenhauer—knowing that life is a stupid joke played upon us, and still to go on living, washing oneself, dressing, dining, talking, and even writing books. This was to me repulsive and tormenting, but I remained in that position.

Perhaps the greatest power our minds possess is the ability to cope with pain. Classic thinking teaches us of the four doors of the mind, which everyone moves through according to their need.

First is the door of sleep. Sleeping can be a form of emotional escape and can with sustained effort be abused. Sleep offers us a retreat from the world and all its pain. Sleep marks passing time, giving us distance from the things that have hurt us. When a person is wounded they will often fall unconscious. Similarly, someone who hears traumatic news will often swoon or faint. This is the mind's way of protecting itself from pain by stepping through the first door.

Second is the door of forgetting. Some wounds are too deep to heal, or too deep to heal quickly. In addition, many memories are simply painful, and there is no healing to be done. The saying 'time heals all wounds' is false. Time heals most wounds. The rest are hidden behind this door.

Third is the door of madness. There are times when the mind is dealt such a blow it hides itself in insanity. While this may not seem beneficial, it is. There are times when reality is nothing but pain, and to escape that pain the mind must leave reality behind.

Last is the door of death. The final resort. Nothing can hurt us after we are dead, or so we have been told.

This is very important: time does not heal all wounds—the proverb is fucking bullshit. Time may soften the pain, but it does not erase the memories. Time may separate the past from the present, but it does not mend what has been broken. Time may heal physical wounds, but it does not repair the violation of trust.

Certain actions lead to destruction and loss in a manner and on a scale that forbid correction and amends, that on some occasions we can only accept the certainty of negative consequences that cannot be avoided. Human beings may be capable of remarkable, even wondrous achievement, but limits are inherent in existence itself. Sometimes those limits mean that wounds will never heal, that the pain will never end.

A clinically depressed person cannot even perceive any other person or thing as independent of the universal pain that is digesting her cell by cell. Everything is part of the problem, there is no solution. It is a hell for one.

“Some boy I hardly knew in the room below mine heard me staggering around whimpering at the top of my lungs. He came

up and sat up with me until it went away. It took most of the night. We didn't converse; he didn't try to comfort me. He spoke very little, just sat up with me. We didn't become friends. By graduation I'd forgotten his name and major. But on that night he seemed to be the piece of string by which I hung suspended over hell itself.

I understood the term 'hell' as of that summer day and that night in the sophomore dormitory. I understood what people meant by hell. They did not mean the black sail. They meant the associated feelings. Or the corner it came up out of, inside, if they mean a place. From that day, whether I could articulate it satisfactorily or not, I understood on an intuitive level why people killed themselves. If I had to go for any length of time with that feeling I'd surely kill myself."

Jokes and sarcasm are often too pregnant and fertile with clinical significance not to be taken seriously: sarcasm and jokes are often the bottle in which clinical depressives send out their most plangent screams for someone to care and help them.

"I didn't want to especially hurt myself. Or like punish. I don't hate myself. I just wanted out. I didn't want to play anymore is all. I wanted to just stop being conscious. I'm a whole different type. I wanted to stop feeling this way. If I could have just put myself in a really long coma I would have done that. Or given myself shock I would have done that. Instead.

The last thing more I'd want is hurt. I just didn't want to feel this way anymore. I don't... I didn't believe this feeling would ever go away. I don't. I still don't. I'd rather feel nothing than this. The feeling is why I want to. The feeling is the reason I want to die. I'm here because I want to die. That's why I'm in a room without windows and with cages over the lightbulbs and no lock on the toilet door. Why they took my shoelaces and my belt. But I notice they don't take away the feeling do they."

The so-called 'psychotically depressed' person who tries to kill herself doesn't do so out of hopelessness or any abstract conviction that life's assets and debits do not square. And surely not because death seems suddenly appealing. The person in whom its invisible agony reaches a certain unendurable level will kill herself the same way a trapped person will eventually jump from the window of a burning high-rise. Make no mistake

about people who leap from burning windows: their terror of falling from a great height is still just as great as it would be for you or me standing speculatively at the same window just checking out the view; the fear of falling remains a constant. The variable here is the other terror, the fire's flames: when the flames get close enough, falling to death becomes the slightly less terrible of two terrors. It's not desiring the fall; it's terror of the flames. And yet nobody down on the sidewalk, looking up and yelling 'Don't!' and 'Hang on!,' can understand the jump. Not really. You'd have to have personally been trapped and felt flames to really understand a terror way beyond falling.

So the idea of a person in the grip of It being bound by a 'Suicide Contract' some well-meaning substance-abuse halfway house makes her sign is simply absurd. Because such a contract will constrain such a person only until the exact psychic circumstances that made the contract necessary in the first place assert themselves, invisibly and indescribably. That the well-meaning halfway-house staff does not understand Its overriding terror will only make the depressed resident feel more alone.

"Because I can't stand feeling like this another second, and the seconds keep coming on and on. I don't want to work, or go out, or read, or watch TV, or go out, or stay in, or either do anything or not do anything, I don't want anything except for the feeling to go away. But it doesn't. Part of the feeling is being like willing to do anything to make it go away. Understand that. Anything. Do you understand? It's not wanting to hurt myself it's wanting to not hurt."

When you're out of your skull with desperation and ready to end your struggle and they tell you how it'll all get better and better as you abstain and recover: they somehow omit to mention that the way it gets better and you get better is through pain. Not around pain, or in spite of it. They're telling you remember the pointless pain of active addiction and telling you that at least this sober pain now has a purpose. At least this pain means you're going somewhere, they say, instead of the repetitive gerbil-wheel of addictive pain.

"I think this is my life now, ending one minute at a time and there is no escape."

Whenever people talk about their personal bouts of depression in the abstract, there are two obstructions I hear more than any other: The possibility that one's life is not important, and the mundane predictability of

day-to-day existence. Talk to a depressed person—particularly one who’s nearing midlife—and one (or both) of these problems will inevitably be described. Since the end of World War II, every generation of American children has been endlessly conditioned to believe that their lives are supposed to be great—a meaningful life is not just possible, but required. Part of the reason forward-thinking media networks like Twitter succeed is because people want to believe that every immaterial thing they do is pertinent by default; it’s interesting because it happened to them, which translates as interesting to all. At the same time, we concede that a compelling life is supposed to be spontaneous and unpredictable—any artistic depiction of someone who does the same thing every day portrays that character as tragically imprisoned—January Jones on *Mad Men*, Ron Livingston in *Office Space*, the lyrics to “Eleanor Rigby,” all novels set in affluent suburbs. If you know exactly what’s going to happen tomorrow, the voltage of that experience is immediately mitigated.

Yet most lives are the same, 95 percent of the time. And most lives aren’t extrinsically meaningful, unless you’re delusionally self-absorbed or authentically *Born Again*. So here’s where we find the creeping melancholy of modernity: The one thing all people are supposed to inherently deserve—a daily subsistence that’s both meaningful and unpredictable—tends to be an incredibly rare commodity. If it’s not already there, we cannot manufacture it.

Overmedicalizing human emotions can lead to pathologizing normal reactions.

Critical thinking and intelligence—especially in a world gone mad—is the prerequisite of depression and anxiety. Being well adjusted to a sick, maladjusted society is the antithesis of being well adjusted.

Recent advances in neurobiology focus attention away from human suffering and feelings and toward drugs that influence brain circuits and neurotransmitters. Psychiatry has been famously described by Thomas Szasz as mechanomorphic, treating patients like “defective machines” rather than feeling human beings.

Doctors ignored her complicated inner life, focusing instead on the mechanical details of neurochemistry and medication. Rather than simulating her experiences, her doctors simply relied on their explicit theories about her condition.

“The moment the psych-unit doors locked behind me, I was stripped of my identity as wife, mother, teacher, and writer and transformed into patient, room number, and diagnosis.”

In 1851, a US physician published a paper in the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* in which he described a new disorder. “In noticing a disease that, therefore, is hitherto classed among the long list of maladies that man is subject to, it was necessary to have a new term to express it,” wrote Cartwright, and named the new syndrome drapetomania. Drapetomania was a disease of slaves that caused them to run away. Early symptoms included slaves becoming “sulky and dissatisfied without cause.” Treatment to stop further development of the disease at this point called for “whipping the devil out of them” as a “preventative measure.” Cartwright’s analysis of the “disease” that would make a slave want to run away is similar to our modern tendency to diagnose and medicate depression in those who work long days doing menial tasks in a windowless cubicle.

It is certainly no accident that anti-authoritarian psychiatrists and psychologists are rare. Mainstream psychiatry and psychology meet the needs of the ruling power structure by pathologizing anger and depoliticizing malaise so as to maintain the status quo. In contrast, anti-authoritarians model and validate resisting illegitimate authority, and so anti-authoritarian professionals—be they teachers, clergy, psychiatrists, or psychologists—are not viewed kindly by the ruling power structure.

“Depression is more seductive. Its tool is: ‘Wouldn’t it be way more comfortable to stay inside and not deal with people?’ Grief is an attack on life. It’s not a seducer. It’s an ambush or worse. It stands right out there and says: ‘The minute you try something, I’m waiting for you.’”

Prolonged grief is likely to be medicated as abnormal rather than openly acknowledged as an inevitable part of life.

For most of recorded medical history, clinical and common understanding saw sadness with a cause and sadness without a cause as very different things. One constituted “normal” grief and the other an “abnormal” condition. The second condition was called melancholy. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this melancholy had begun to take on an identity, and even a literal face. Etienne Esquirol, a French psychiatrist at the turn of the nineteenth century, had a series of drawings made to illustrate these features. This kind of physical documentation proliferated, but was, unfortunately, rather vague. Western medicine has—for more than a century—created new classifications, and all the while distinguished between the two kinds of sadness. But in the twenty-first century, and in the very DSM diagnostic criteria, that isn’t necessarily the case. According to the diagnostic manual, grief becomes diagnosable as depression if the symptoms are felt without cause—or with

cause, but for too long. How long is too long? For bereavement, the DSM defines a normal period of sadness to be two months.

The grief exception revealed something that the authors of the DSM—the distillation of mainstream psychiatric thinking—were deeply uncomfortable with. They had been forced to admit, in their own official manual, that it's reasonable—and perhaps even necessary—to show the symptoms of depression, in one set of circumstances. But once you've conceded that, it invites an obvious follow-up question. Why is a death the only event that can happen in life where depression is a reasonable response? Why not if your husband has left you after thirty years of marriage? Why not if you are trapped for the next thirty years in a meaningless job you hate? Why not if you have ended up homeless and you are living under a bridge? If it's reasonable in one set of circumstances, could there also be other circumstances where it is also reasonable?

The problem lies in the concept of 'normal.' Medical knowledge is frequently privileged as more accurate and more important than other forms of understanding or experience. This is especially true in the US, though also of the UK and much of Western Europe. When medical authorities tell us that two weeks or two months is sufficient, it creates a cultural expectation that grieving is, firstly, a short process with recognizable steps, and secondly, something that we must get over in order to return to normal.

The period after World War II was called an "Age of Anxiety" in response to the horrors of warfare. An entire generation reeled, suffering what was considered a natural response to circumstance. Our present age, by contrast, might be called an 'Age of Depression,' and the substitution of that single word makes all the difference. The anxiety of the early twentieth century had been considered normal, in the light of external events, whereas depression in the twenty-first century is understood as a diagnosable condition, an illness, a sickness of soul that should be (and often is) medicated. Screening for depression is ubiquitous in the West.

Instead of saying our pain is an irrational spasm to be taken away with drugs, we should start to listen to it and figure out what it is telling us. In most cases we would have to stop talking about "mental health"—which conjures pictures of brain scans and defective synapses—and start talking about 'emotional health.' Why do we call it mental health? Because we want to make it sound scientific. But it's our emotions.

Our approach today is like putting a Band-Aid on an amputated limb. When you have a person with extreme human distress, we need to stop treating the symptoms. The symptoms are a messenger of a deeper problem. Let's get to the deeper problem. What if depression is, in fact, a form of grief—for our own lives not being as they should? What if it is a form of

grief for the connections we have lost, yet still need?

“We’re such an utterly disconnected culture, we just don’t get human suffering.”

Most substance-addicted and/or depressed people are also addicted to thinking, meaning they have a compulsive and unhealthy relationship with their own thinking. 99% of compulsive thinkers’ thinking is about themselves; that 99% of this self-directed thinking consists of imagining and then getting ready for things that are going to happen to them; and then, weirdly, that if they stop to think about it, that 100% of the things they spend 99% of their time and energy imagining and trying to prepare for all the contingencies and consequences of are never good. Then that this connects interestingly with the early-sobriety urge to pray for the literal loss of one’s mind. In short that 99% of the head’s thinking activity consists of trying to scare the everliving shit out of itself.

“Sarge, no one commits suicide because of what happened to ‘em. They commit suicide because they thought about it too much.”

Like most clinically depressed patients, she appeared to function better in focused activity than in stasis. Their normal paralyzed stasis allowed these patients’ own minds to chew them apart. But it was always a titanic struggle to get them to do anything to help them focus.

We do bad things in our lives that have painful consequences, but most of us don’t spend every day thinking about the worst things we have done. We deal with them at the time, and our lives go on; we have opportunities to try to do better; we create new memories. But a prisoner’s world can be frozen on what is likely the very worst day of their entire life, and every day after it is just a reminder of how they failed—maybe not just because they had committed a crime and feel remorseful, but because they got caught or were unfairly convicted. Whatever the perspective, if they’re in prison, they failed. They are left with nothing to do but recycle the events that got them there, to ruminate endlessly.

Rumination is the practice of turning over negative events in your mind again and again, usually adding layer after layer of self-blame. It is agonizing. It leads to serious negative health consequences like increased stress, depression (which it makes more severe, longer-lasting, and more difficult to treat), anxiety, negative or dysfunctional coping mechanisms, and an overwhelming feeling of being stuck.

Most Americans go to great lengths to escape the monsters that are our own thoughts and imaginations. A study from the University of Virginia found that most people would rather be doing something bad—including hurting themselves by administering shocks—than sitting alone with their thoughts. Is it that when the external stimulation stops, our thoughts come rushing in, and we don't know how to handle it?

“So then at forty-six years of age I came here to learn to live by clichés. To turn my will and life over to the care of clichés. One day at a time. Easy does it. First things first. Courage is fear that has said its prayers. Ask for help. Thy will not mine be done. It works if you work it. Grow or go. Keep coming back.

The thing is that the clichéd directives are a lot more deep and hard to actually do. To try and live by instead of just say. Even if they are just clichés, clichés are (a) soothing, and (b) remind you of common sense, and (c) license the universal assent that drowns out silence; and (d) silence is deadly, pure Spider-food, if you've got the Disease.”

Suicide is an individual act and flows from specific circumstances and a particular state of mind. Generalizations miss the subtleties of each desperate cry. Some suicides are spontaneous acts, spur of the moment decisions—as is often the case in Asian countries, where poison is the most common method of suicide—others may be drawn out over years, in the case of the alcoholic, for example, punctuated perhaps by times of relief and optimism, only to collapse under the weight of life's intense demands once more.

So what can we say about the vast numbers of people who commit slow suicide by a series of acts and inactions that last a long lifetime and render them the living dead, those whom Thoreau so famously said were the mass of people who “lead lives of quiet desperation”? Is the meaning of life for them simply the habit of living they fell into at the start of life before they thought or wondered what's it all about? Or is it the habit they embraced after shrinking back in fear from the disturbing revelations thinking once brought them? Or did they ever seriously question their place in the lethal fraud that is organized society, what Tolstoy called the Social Lie? Why do so many people kill their authentic selves and their consciences that could awaken them to break through the social habits of thought, speech, and action that lead them to live ‘jiffy-lube’ lives, periodically oiled and greased to smoothly roll down the conventional highway of getting and spending and refusing to resist the murderous actions of their government?

If you have a why to live, you can bear almost any how. A meaningful life can be extremely satisfying even in the midst of hardship, whereas a meaningless life is a terrible ordeal no matter how comfortable it is.

“There was a long time in my life where I thought the only thing to do with my self was to destroy it.”

People think others who threaten suicide aren't serious. It's literally a call for help. If they can't get help they will drown in their sorrow. This is another thing that people don't understand, they call all drug users pathetic. When in reality they are just wanting to feel happy and normal like the others.

The truth is we live in a world where we don't listen to people anymore. So often we're just waiting for the next opening to respond. What we need to realize is that sometimes people don't need advice. Sometimes people just need to be heard. Sometimes the greatest gift we can give someone is just to keep our mouths shut and let them empty themselves into our hands. When they're finished, we don't need to do anything with what they've given us. We just need to show them that we're holding it for them till they can catch their breath.

I don't like the phrase 'A cry for help.' I just don't like how it sounds. When somebody says to me, 'I'm thinking about suicide, I have a plan; I just need a reason not to do it,' the last thing I see is helplessness.

I think: Your depression has been beating you up for years. It's called you ugly, and stupid, and pathetic, and a failure, for so long that you've forgotten that it's wrong. You don't see good in yourself, and you don't have any hope.

But still, here you are; you've come over to me, banged on my door, and said, 'HEY! Staying alive is REALLY HARD right now! Just give me something to fight with! I don't care if it's a stick! Give me a stick and I can stay alive!'

How is that helpless? I think that's incredible. You're like a marine: Trapped for years behind enemy lines, your gun has been taken away, you're out of ammo, you're malnourished, and you've probably caught some kind of jungle virus that's making you hallucinate giant spiders.

And you're still just going 'Give me a stick! I'm not dying out here!'

'A cry for help' makes it sound like I'm supposed to take pity on you. But you don't need my pity. This isn't pathetic. This is the will to survive. With *no* hope, running on *nothing*, you're ready to cut through a hundred miles of hostile jungle with nothing but a stick, if that's what it takes to get to safety.

All I'm doing is handing out sticks. You're the one staying alive

If you want to destroy your lives, at least find a new way of doing it. Don't destroy yourselves in the same ways people have done it for thousands of years. A life spent repeating the known follies of the past isn't just tragic, it's embarrassing.

Here is the advice I give everyone I can about this. If you well and truly, absolutely must die then do it through life itself. Run away. You have crippling debt, can't make ends meet, have an abusive spouse, are depressed, et cetera. Leave it all behind. Grab your jacket, some cash, whatever food you might be able to hold onto and just walk out the door. Jump on the back of a freight train or something and just go around. Find where you can be happy or make yourself so busy surviving actual fight-or-flight threats that you don't have time to be bothered by whatever ailed you. Maybe start a revolution and end the source of all this bullshit. What do you really have to lose with this? Anything you might stand to lose, you were already throwing away with death. So change the equation. Experience the world, as many things as you can at any level you can. Who knows? You might find somewhere or something that just makes it all right. You might help create somewhere or something. Worst case? You die in the attempt but if that was the plan at the start then is it really something to hold you back? Good luck with whatever you choose.

All my life I've been so lonesome
 If happiness came, I missed the call
 All my dreams have died and vanished
 And now, I'm so tired of it all

In life and love, I've been a failure
 Too many tears through it all
 Too many broken vows and promises
 And now, I'm so tired of it all

Everything I loved, I lost dear
 Too many times I've watched my castles fall
 My life is full of regretting
 And now, I'm so tired of it all

From this world I'll soon be going
 No one will miss me, after all
 Up there, I pray I'll find contentment
 But now, I'm so tired of it all

“I’m not brave. I was fearless. Fearlessness isn’t a virtue, bravery is. Bravery is doing what you know needs done, despite your fears. Fearlessness is just a lack of fear. Fearless people are those who just don’t care anymore. Fearlessness is a kind of depression, a mental illness.”

“If you feel like crying just let it out. If you try to hold it in it’s just going to tear you up inside.”

Told to me by a policeman when I was 8 or 9. My parents were in a brutal custody battle and my mom had basically kidnapped me and convinced me horrible things would happen if I went back to my dad, which was a lie. On our way back to her house she had the great idea to have me get out of the car and walk to the house, because police would be waiting and she’d get in trouble if I was with her, and they’d take me back to my dad’s house. I reluctantly agreed and walked, in the dark, along a busy road with no sidewalk.

When I got to her house I saw police in the driveway. I tried to go around the woods on the side of the house but they saw me and came and got me. An older policeman took me off to the side and sat me down until my dad could get there to pick me up. He was talking to me and basically trying to make me feel better. I was so scared and confused. I wanted to cry, but I didn’t want to show it. I felt embarrassed. And that’s when he told me: “If you feel like crying just let it out. If you try to hold it in it’s just going to tear you up inside.”

I cried, and I’ll never forget what he told me. Crying is something meant for others to see, so that the people who truly care can offer you support. If you try to hold it in you will just feel worse.

According to Buddhism, the root of suffering is neither the feeling of pain nor of sadness nor even of meaninglessness. Rather, the real root of suffering is this never-ending and pointless pursuit of ephemeral feelings, which causes us to be in a constant state of tension, restlessness, and dissatisfaction. Due to this pursuit, the mind is never satisfied. Even when experiencing pleasure, it is not content, because it fears this feeling might soon disappear, and craves that this feeling should stay and intensify. People are liberated from suffering not when they experience this or that fleeting pleasure, but rather when they understand the impermanent nature of all their feelings, and stop craving them. This is the aim of Buddhist meditation practices. In meditation, you are supposed to closely observe your mind and body, witness the ceaseless arising and passing of all your feelings, and realize how

pointless it is to pursue them. When the pursuit stops, the mind becomes very relaxed, clear, and satisfied. All kinds of feelings go on arising and passing—joy, anger, boredom, lust—but once you stop craving particular feelings, you can just accept them for what they are. You live in the present moment instead of fantasizing about what might have been.

This idea is so alien to modern liberal culture that when Western New Age movements encountered Buddhist insights, they translated them into liberal terms, thereby turning them on their head. New Age cults frequently argue: ‘Happiness does not depend on external conditions. It depends only on what we feel inside. People should stop pursuing external achievements such as wealth and status, and connect instead with their inner feelings.’ Or more succinctly, ‘Happiness Begins Within.’ This is exactly what biologists argue, but more or less the opposite of what Buddha said.

Before the “mental health revolution” beginning in the early 1990s, people with schizophrenia often had a place in society, typically in churches. Tribes were collectivist. In these tribes, the only thing that gets you kicked out, or ostracized, is a major crime like murder or infidelity that threatens the solidarity or culture of the group. Last I heard, schizophrenia is a disease, not a crime.

Locking people away for who they are is social ostracism. Victims of schizophrenia were, for whatever unfair circumstance, born different, had different experiences, and developed a disease that said:

“You see that society that you’ve been experiencing normally like everyone else? Let me fuck up your thoughts and perceptions so they don’t accept you anymore.”

Studies show that ostracism and loneliness have negative physiological effects on the human body. Lonely people are sick more often, take longer to recover, and have unhealthier resting vitals. They have less social support, poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, lower optimism, and more anger, anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

So yeah, when we isolate individuals from the larger part of society by sticking them and their stigmas in an under-funded hellhole together until they’re “safe” or have “found the right treatment plan” (because they need to think like the rest of us do), we might not be treating them as well as we could be.

Real mental health disorders do exist, of course. But I wonder if many of our so-called dysfunctions are really just the appropriate and completely sane reaction to a set of insane circumstances. After all—why would I not feel a deep sense of tragedy when confronted by the fact that my country is

dragging our ecosystem into a chasm of irreversible climate change? And should people not be kept up at night by anxiety or vague, urgent, instincts that something is deeply wrong with how all of us are expected to get up, clock in at work, come home, watch TV, drink, consume, and repeat? Is a person truly “sick” because they become convinced this is not at all how it is supposed to be or that their reality is being shaped by irrational forces beyond their knowledge and control?

“Very interesting. I believe I’ve spent most of my life post-childhood (now in my early 30s) in a state of feeling detached from life, as a passive observer. To me, the people and events around me seem more like characters and scenarios from a novel than they do reality. Rationally, I understand reality is in fact reality, but my default mental state seems to reject that notion. An example: I remember when 9/11 was live on TV, I just shrugged and went to watch something else while eating lunch.

I spend the majority of my time in fantasies, imagining myself elsewhere, or doing something else, or how I could have done something differently. Fantasies of vindictive revenge feature often, even though I’m a passive and peaceful man in ‘the real world.’ I spend a great deal of time distracting myself with story books or story-driven video games, or the occasional TV series. I just have no interest in dealing with reality at all.

That, combined with gradually worsening anhedonia, an inability to motivate myself to initiate activities, no career ambitions, a lack of empathy for people (but enormous empathy for animals) leads me to believe I’m a type of schizoid (perhaps the ‘secret’ subtype given my learned ability to socialize well as needed).

Perhaps I’m something different entirely, since I have no trouble feeling emotions, which I understand to be an issue for many schizoids. I’m also married, which I understand to be odd, although I wouldn’t say I love my wife or feel my relationship is all that beneficial.

Still, what you said about how many people suddenly realize their reality and become detached is fascinating. I generally assume most people, when I bother to think about them, are well-grounded in reality, but I suppose that can’t be true given the lengths many go to in order to pursue uncertainties.”

It takes a lot of heart, self-confidence and energy to find that value in yourself when you have none of the things that society values most. I've been single and without a job for a very long time, mostly due to health issues. After all is said and done, I think that it made me a stronger and more balanced person than I was before.

Still, it wasn't easy. It still isn't always easy. I can see how it would break people, especially if you don't have a support structure. I've actually seen it break people who were in a similar situation even if it was only for a little while. I think that this is really troubling. Especially considering my suspicion that jobs will become even more scarce in the future and the fact that marriage is less of a given these days.

To many people, the judgment of society is essential to their self-worth. I don't have that issue, but many do and it's not their fault nor something they can easily remedy. So this society risks ruining the mental state of so many worthwhile individuals as long as it's prime indicator of value is one's wealth, relationship status, or employment.

Not only is the present rendered irrelevant, but it becomes impossible to shape a better future because your capacity to hope is so diminished. So you just keep on spinning around and round doing the same shit that isn't making you happy and you're not doing anything to become happy.

It may be what in the old days was called a spiritual crisis or whatever. It's just the feeling as though the entire—every axiom of your life turned out to be false, and there was actually nothing, and you were nothing, and it was all a delusion. And that you were better than everyone else because you saw that it was a delusion, and yet you were worse because you couldn't function.

If we consider that the nature of being extreme translates into both big risks and big rewards, then perhaps "mental illness" is one of nature's ways of making a risky bet and hoping it will pay off.

It's like Mother Nature waltzes into the casino every now and then and bellies up to the roulette table to lay all of her money down on double-zero. If she hits it, the payout is big—with someone like an Isaac Newton, who ironically, never married or had kids, but increased the reproductive fitness of humanity for centuries after he lived. But if she comes up with nothing, then she ends up broke and looking to sneak into the all-you-can-eat buffet without being noticed.

Some tendencies of mental illness, in certain situations, may have been beneficial in the roving tribes of our ancestors.

A psychopath obviously poses a big risk, particularly to those who get close to him, but his psychopathic qualities might make him a shrewd leader, even if he's a ruthless one. If it just so happens that a tribe needs a

shrewd, ruthless leader to guide them through an unpredictable and unstable environment, the psychopath might be their best option.

A schizotypal member of the tribe might have been delusional, but he could also be a source of a few hair-brained ideas that ended up paying off in a big way for everyone. Maybe he hallucinates a burning bush telling him to round people up and mass-migrate them to more fertile land. Maybe he hallucinates ten commandments and carves them in stone and declares him and his friends God's chosen people. Maybe this ends up being the beginning of all Abrahamic religions and most of Western civilization.

Paradoxically, the same things that should cause these disorders to fall out of the gene pool are the ones that keep them in it. Their biggest handicap is also their biggest advantage. And the same extremes that hinder individuals could be what provides the "tincture of madness" for their genius and creativity. And, in many ways, we all benefit from it.

Let's look at some strategies and tactics used as part of a three phase process by many psychopaths. Note that this process is a natural outgrowth of their personality and that often it will be more automatic than consciously planned out. First, they assess the value of individuals to their needs, and identify their psychological strengths and weaknesses. Second, they manipulate the individuals (now potential victims) by feeding them carefully crafted messages, while constantly using feedback from them to build and maintain control. Not only is this an effective approach to take with most people, it also allows psychopaths to talk their way around and out of any difficulty quickly and effectively if confronted or challenged. Third, they leave the drained and bewildered victims when they are bored or otherwise through with them.

Recent theory and research in evolutionary psychology suggests that there are genetic reasons for such attitudes and behaviors. In this model, psychopathy is a heritable, adaptive life strategy in which the goal—reflected in the early emergence of aggressive sexuality—is to provide genetic continuity. Passing on one's gene pool can be accomplished in a number of ways, including the careful nurturance of a small number of offspring. The psychopathic pattern appears to be quite different, but equally (or even more) successful: the production of a large number of children, with little or no emotional and physical investment in their well-being. This pattern involves the use of a persistent and callous pattern of deception and manipulation to attract potential mates, a readiness to abandon them and their offspring, and the need to move on to fresh mating grounds.

One of the biggest and most painful mistakes we make is to assume that everyone has much the same capacity as we do for emotional experiences. Because we have little difficulty in putting ourselves in the emotional shoes

of another person, we are surprised at the callous indifference some people appear to show to the pain and suffering of others. What we often fail to realize is that there are some individuals, including psychopaths, whose own emotional life is so shallow that they cannot construct an accurate emotional facsimile of those around them.

Asking one teenager with conduct disorder to identify the emotional state of someone who appeared distressed and afraid, the teenager said:

“I don’t know what that expression is called, but I know it’s what people look like right before I stab them.”

Even when it’s incident-free, living in a constant state of fear—whether it be a violent neighborhood, a war zone, or an abusive household—is draining. The body is always in its hyper-vigilant, ‘ready to run’ mode, which is physically, emotionally, and cognitively exhausting. You are constantly processing excess cortisol and adrenaline, which disrupts your other systems. Among the effects are a weakened immune system, digestive problems (such as ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome), decreased fertility, heart disease, weight gain, metabolic syndrome (sometimes called “prediabetes”), sleep problems, fatigue, memory problems (the hippocampus shrinks), a slowing of cognitive processing, difficulty concentrating and controlling impulses, and depression.

If you believe, or in this case feel, something is true, it has real consequences. It doesn’t matter if there is no monster under your kid’s bed. He’s going to end up shaking, crying, and sleeping with you.

Microscopic Worlds

Consider the Parasite

The Voyager wasn't a hunter. Not an expert and dedicated one, anyway. He had other skills. He was a fisherman. He lived not in a forest clearing like the one at Mambele but in a fishing village along the Ngoko River. He was a river boy from childhood. He knew the water; he knew boats. He owned a canoe, a good one, sturdy and long, made from a mahogany log with his own hands, and he spent his days in it. He was a young man with no wife, no children, and just a bit of an appetite for adventure. He had fallen away from his natal community at an early age, becoming a loner, because his father died and the village came to despise his mother, suspecting her of sorcery based on a piece of bad luck and a grudge. He took this as a deep personal bruise; he despised the villagers in return, screw them, and went his own way. It suited him to be alone. He was not an observant Bakwele. He never got circumcised.

The Voyager ate fish. He ate little else, in fact, besides fish and bananas—and sometimes manioc, which he didn't plant or process himself but which was easily bought with fish. He liked the taste and he loved the idea of fish, and there was always enough. He knew where to find fish, how to catch them, their varied types and names. He drank the river. That was enough. He didn't make palm wine or buy it. He was self-sufficient and contained within his small world. He provided fish to his mother and her two younger children. His mother still lived at the fringe of the old village. His surplus catch he dried on racks, or in wet season smoked over a fire, at his solitary riverbank camp.

Occasionally he made considerable journeys, paddling miles upstream or drifting downstream, to sell a boatload of fish in one of the market villages. In this way, he had tasted the empowerment of dealing for cash. Brass rods were the prevailing currency, or cowrie shells, and sometimes he may even have seen deutschmarks. He bought some steel hooks and one spool of manufactured line, which had come all the way from Marseille. The line was

disappointing. The hooks were excellent. Once he had floated downstream as far as the confluence with the Sangha, a much larger river, powerful, twice as wide as the Ngoko, and had ridden its current for a day—a heady and fearful experience. On the right bank he had seen a town, which he knew to be Ouesso, vast and notorious; he gave it a wide berth, holding himself at midriver until he was past. At day's end he stopped, slept on the bank, and next day reversed, having tested himself enough. It took him four days of anxious effort to paddle back up, hugging the bank (except again at Ouesso), climbing through eddies, but the Voyager made it, relieved when he regained his own world, the little Ngoko River, and swollen with new confidence by the time he beached at his camp. This might have occurred, let's say, in the long dry season of 1916.

On another occasion, he paddled upstream as far as Ngbala, a river town some miles above Moloundou. It was during his return from that journey that he stopped at Moloundou and there, in his boat, where it was tied for the night in a shaded cove just below town, had sex with a woman. She wasn't his first but she was different from village girls. She was a river trader herself, a Buy 'em-Sell 'em, several years older than he was and considerably more experienced. She traveled up and down the Ngoko and the Sangha, making a living with her wits and her wares and sometimes her body. The Voyager didn't know her name. Never heard it. She was outgoing and flirtatious, almost pretty. He didn't think much about pretty. She wore a print dress of bright calico, manufactured, not local raffia. She must have liked him, or at least liked his performance, because she returned to his boat in the shadows the next night and they coupled again, three times. She seemed healthy; she laughed merrily and she was strong.

He considered himself lucky that night—lucky to have met her, to have impressed her, to have gotten at no cost what other men paid for. But he wasn't lucky. He had a small open wound on his penis, barely more than a scratch, where he'd been caught by a thorny vine while stepping ashore from a river bath. No one can know, not even in this imagined scenario, whether the lack of circumcision was crucial to his susceptibility, or the little thorn wound, or neither. He gave the woman some smoked fish. She gave him the virus. It was no act of malice or irresponsibility on her part. Despite swollen and aching armpits, she had no idea she was carrying it herself.

Scientists think that each of the twelve groups (eight of HIV-2, four of HIV-1) reflects an independent instance of cross-species transmission. Twelve spillovers. In other words, HIV hasn't happened to humanity just once. It has happened at least a dozen times—a dozen that we know of, and probably many more times in earlier history. Therefore it wasn't a highly improbable event. It wasn't a singular piece of vastly unlikely

bad luck, striking humankind with devastating results—like a comet come knuckleballing across the infinitude of space to smack planet Earth and extinguish the dinosaurs. No. The arrival of HIV in human bloodstreams was, on the contrary, part of a small trend. Due to the nature of our interactions with African primates, it seems to occur pretty often.

Of the diseases shared by humans and their domesticated animals, twenty-six are found in chickens, forty-two in pigs, forty-six in sheep and goats, and fifty in cattle. Most of the worst scourges of human health until the advent of vaccination in the eighteenth century were imports from our farm animals, including measles, tuberculosis, smallpox, and influenza. Bubonic plague was transmitted to us by fleas from rats living in human settlements. As far as we can tell from the archaeological record, none of these so-called zoonotic diseases (from the Greek *zoon*, for animal, and *nosos*, for disease) afflicted our Paleolithic ancestors—all seem to have arisen in the Neolithic with the spread of farming. Many of the plagues described in the Bible may coincide with the explosion of zoonotic diseases during the emergence of the urban civilizations of the Neolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages.

“These are the constraints within which a molecular biologist studying wild animals labors: the relative availability and other parameters of blood, shit, and piss.”

Humanity is a kind of animal, inextricably connected with other animals: in origin and in descent, in sickness and in health. About 60 percent of all human infectious diseases currently known either cross routinely or have recently crossed between other animals and us.

A zoonosis is an animal infection transmissible to humans. The animal hideaway is known as a reservoir host. The event of transmission, from one species into another, is called spillover.

Zoonoses by definition involve events beyond the ordinary, and the scope of their consequences can be extraordinary too. Every spillover is like a sweepstakes ticket, bought by the pathogen, for the prize of a new and more grandiose existence. It's a long-shot chance to transcend the dead end. To go where it hasn't gone and be what it hasn't been. Sometimes the bettor wins big. Think of HIV.

If you look at the world from the point of view of a hungry virus, or even a bacterium—we offer a magnificent feeding ground with all our billions of human bodies, where, in the very recent past, there were only half as many people. A marvelous target for any organism that can adapt itself to invading us.

Infectious disease is a conflict between man and his parasites which, in a constant environment, would tend to result in a virtual equilibrium, a climax state, in which both species would survive indefinitely. Man, however, lives in an environment constantly being changed by his own activities, and few of his diseases have attained such an equilibrium.

Think of a BSL-4 laboratory—not necessarily AA-5 at USAMRIID but any among a handful around the world in which Ebola is studied. Think of the proximity, the orderliness, and the certitude. Ebola virus is in these mice, replicating, flooding their bloodstreams. Ebola virus is in that tube, frozen solid. Ebola virus is in the petri dish, forming plaques among human cells. Ebola virus is in the syringe; beware its needle. Now think of a forest in northeastern Gabon, just west of the upper Ivindo River. Ebola virus is everywhere and nowhere. Ebola virus is present but unaccounted for. Ebola virus is near, probably, but no one can tell you which insect or mammal or bird or plant is its secret repository. Ebola virus is not in your habitat. You are in its.

Until recently, scientists underestimated the sophistication of parasites. Over most of the past century, the complicated life cycles of these organisms, coupled with their puny size and concealment inside the body, made them exceedingly difficult to study. Largely out of researchers' ignorance, parasites were presumed to be backward, degenerative life forms. Their inability to survive as independent, free-living creatures was seized as proof of their primitive status. The very notion that hosts high up the evolutionary ladder might be jerked around like marionettes by such simpletons—many lacking even a nervous system—seemed absurd. Until the tail end of the twentieth century, our behavioral defenses against parasites were also assumed to be rudimentary. Indeed, the subtlest of these adaptations—manifested as automatic thoughts and feelings—were overlooked almost entirely, probably because they occur at the periphery of our awareness. Scientists are no more cognizant of subconscious impulses than the rest of us, so this subterranean realm appears to have gone uncharted simply because no one thought to look for it.

Though lions, bears, sharks, and weapon-wielding humans may populate our nightmares, parasites have always been our worst enemy. In medieval times, one-third of Europe's population was decimated by the bubonic plague. More people died in the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic than were killed in the trenches of World War I. Malaria, presently among the most deadly infectious agents on the planet, is arguably the greatest mass murderer of all time. Experts estimate the disease has killed half of all people who have roamed the planet since the Stone Age.

Animals traveling in large packs, shoals, or flocks are assumed to do

so for their own benefit—for example, to find mates, deter predators from attacking, or enhance foraging strategies. Maybe it's time to reexamine that assumption in some cases. Perhaps far more often than we realize, parasites might be herding their current hosts straight into the jaws of their next hosts.

Researchers have now discovered that many interactions between predators and prey were not what they appeared to be but rather were “rigged” by parasites. Biologists, who couldn't see what was happening out of view, had been hoodwinked. What's more, parasites were not just swinging a sledgehammer, directly killing and sickening hosts, but also bringing ill upon them by subtly changing their behavior—the ecological implications were enormous. It meant that these tiny organisms were taking animals out of one habitat and putting them in another, with unknown effects that would ripple through the food chain.

Predators may not always be the supreme hunters nature documentaries suggest they are. A significant portion of their catch of the day may be low-hanging fruit brought within their reach courtesy of parasites. Why, after all, work hard for a meal when it will come to you? Perhaps the most heretical notion is simply that one should not assume animals are always acting of their own volition. Numerous crustaceans, mollusks, fish, and truckloads of insects are behaving weirdly because of parasites. Mammals like ourselves appear to be less common victims of their manipulations, but that belief may derive from ignorance. This much is certain: An undiscovered universe of animal behavior will yet be traced to parasites. Their meddling is just harder to prove in some species than others.

Perhaps our biggest handicap is that we're imprisoned by our senses. Quite simply, we rely too heavily on our eyes for our understanding of the world.

The worm is producing a raft of neurochemicals that closely mimicked ones normally found in the cricket. If we don't speak the same language, we can't communicate. So if I'm the worm, I want to talk to you in the same language. Natural selection favors worms that make molecules the cricket can recognize, facilitating “crosstalk” between them. In this way, the parasite can tell the cricket what it wants the insect to do.

Compared to healthy controls, the stricken insects have higher amounts of a protein involved in sight, possibly altering their visual perception. This revelation prompted researchers to explore whether crickets harboring the parasite are attracted to light. Indeed they were, whereas the healthy insects preferred the dark. If you're a cricket that lives in the forest, what in your surroundings is brightest of all at night? An open area filled with water—an excellent reflector of moonlight. By tinkering with the settings

of the cricket's visual system the worm mesmerizes its host. It's effectively whispering to the insect, 'Go toward the light.'

Like most fish, killifish are dark on top and light on the belly. When they roll over on their sides, you see this bright flash—this silver glint. It's almost like someone shining a rescue mirror in your face. The fish that are infected are every bit as healthy as the uninfected fish. They just swim up to the surface and wave hello to the birds that come down and eat them. To figure out how the parasite could coax its host into acting so imprudently researchers analyzed the neurochemistry of infected fish. They found that the parasite was disrupting the regulation of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that influences the anxiety level of many animals, including humans (the popular antidepressant Prozac alters the metabolism of serotonin). Following that lead, the scientists traumatized healthy and infected fish by plucking them out of the water for several seconds at a time. Afterward, the healthy fish showed increased activity in serotonin circuits—a sign that they were under acute stress. In stark contrast, the infected fish had a muted response in those brain circuits. The more parasites the fish had, the less stressed-out the fish. This suggests it's so mellow that it doesn't get anxious in a situation that should make the animal fearful. It's less risk averse, like a fish on Prozac. Which they might also be on given the number of pharmaceuticals in our waterways.

A female jewel wasp performs neurosurgery on a roach. The procedure robs the roach of free will, so when the wasp pulls on one of its antennae, off it trots to her burrow, where it will nourish her offspring.

With the goal of understanding how the wasp dominates her much larger host, mad scientists fed the wasp a radioactive compound that was incorporated into her venom. When the wasp stung a roach, the researchers could then track where the poison went. They discovered that the venom knocked out a vital neural center for decision-making. Basically, information from the roach's eyes and other sensory organs is relayed to this nexus, and after processing these inputs, the insect chooses what to do next. Roaches aren't automatons that react to stimuli in the same way every time. Just like us, they can be unpredictable. They think before acting, which is why they're so good at escaping humans chasing after them with rolled-up newspapers. So when the venom knocks out that central command module, the creature is effectively robbed of free will. Instead of running for its life, it's frozen by indecision. All it takes is a little tug by the wasp to get it over its inertia, and off it trots to its death.

The yellow sac on the underside of this crab holds the young of a parasitic barnacle. It has also infiltrated the inside of the crab and controls it like an amphibious robot.

A human—who loses the battle with toxoplasmosis gondii typically ends up with two-hundred to five-hundred cysts in the brain. And each is more than just a potential dopamine factory. Every cyst also triggers a local immune response that further disrupts the balance of neurotransmitters in the surrounding area. Basically, the body tries to starve the parasite of a chemical it requires to awaken from its dormant state, but that very same chemical is needed by the brain for normal mental functioning, so the containment strategy may come at a cost to the host. The parasite is going to be altering dopamine, GABA, glutamate, and other key neurotransmitters at two-hundred different places in the brain so it's not surprising it's going to be subtly influencing human behavior—or, if the cysts happen to cluster in certain regions, even contributing to psychiatric disease. It's certainly plausible that the organism could exacerbate an underlying mental condition. For instance, we may all exist on a schizophrenic spectrum. Someone without the parasite might already be showing mild symptoms of schizophrenia, but then they get the parasite and their symptoms worsen. The variation from individual to individual in the distribution of the cysts might also explain reports of infected people experiencing personality changes, increased impulsivity, and less fear or poor judgment in potentially dangerous situations such as when to speed up and pass a car.

If the latent infection predisposes you to psychiatric illnesses, should it be treated as a preexisting condition? Should car insurance companies hike your rates on the grounds that you're more likely to get into a crash?

Textbooks today still make silly statements that schizophrenia has always been around, it's about the same incidence all over the world, and it's existed since time immemorial. The epidemiological data contradicts that completely. Save for the ancient Egyptians, virtually no one kept cats as pets until the latter part of the 1700s. The first people to embrace the practice were poets—avant-garde, left-wing types in Paris and London, and it just came to be the thing to do. They called it the “cat craze,” and coinciding with it, the incidence of schizophrenia rose sharply. The disease is so striking in its full manifestations that it should be seen as extraordinary that it wasn't described clearly in the medical literature before 1806, when it was simultaneously described both in England and France. Most compelling, people with schizophrenia are two to three times more likely to have antibodies against the parasite than those who don't have the disorder.

Human genome findings clearly show that schizophrenia has a heavy hereditary component, a discovery that would appear to clash with this position—but perhaps we shouldn't see it this way. So far, the genes that have been most consistently linked to schizophrenia are those that control

how the immune system defends against infectious agents. In families with a high incidence of the mental illness, they say, it may be that the risk factor being passed down is an ineffective immune response to the parasite.

The main problem facing a parasite over the long-term is the issue of transmission: how to spread its offspring from one individual host to another. Various methods and traits have developed toward that simple end, ranging from massive replication, airborne dispersal, environmentally resistant life-history stages (like the small form of *C. burnetii*), direct transfer in blood and other bodily fluids, behavioral influence on the host (as exerted by the rabies virus, for instance, causing infected animals to bite), passage through intermediate or amplifier hosts, and the use of insect and arachnid vectors as means of transportation and injection. It is clear however that no matter by what method a parasite passes from host to host, an increased density of the susceptible population will facilitate its spread from infected to uninfected individuals. Crowded hosts allow pathogens to thrive.

The first rule of a successful parasite? Myxoma's success in Australia suggests something different from that nugget of conventional wisdom. It's not: Don't kill your host. It's: Don't burn your bridges until after you've crossed them.

The parasites responsible for malaria possess wondrously complicated life histories, encompassing multiple metamorphoses and different forms in series: an asexual stage known as the sporozoite, which enters the human skin during a mosquito bite and migrates to the human liver; another asexual stage known as the merozoite, which emerges from the liver and reproduces in red blood cells; a stage known as the trophozoite, feeding and growing inside the blood cells, each of which fattens as a schizont and then bursts, releasing more merozoites to further multiply in the blood, and causing a spike of fever; a sexual stage known as the gametocyte, differentiated into male and female versions, which emerge from a later round of infected red blood cells, enter the bloodstream en masse, and are taken up within a blood meal by the next mosquito; a fertilized sexual stage known as the ookinete, which lodges in the gut lining of the mosquito, each ookinete ripening into a sort of egg sac filled with sporozoites; and then come the sporozoites again, bursting out of the egg sac and migrating to the mosquito's salivary glands, where they lurk, ready to surge down the mosquito's proboscis into another host.

If you've followed all that, at a quick reading, you have a future in biology. This elaborate concatenation of life-forms and sequential strategies is highly adaptive and, so far as mosquitoes and hosts are concerned, difficult to resist. It shows evolution's power, over great lengths of time, to produce structures, tactics, and transformations of majestic intricacy. Alternatively,

anyone who favors Intelligent Design in lieu of evolution might pause to wonder why God devoted so much of His intelligence to designing malarial parasites.

The different attributes of DNA and RNA account for one of the most crucial differences among viruses: rate of mutation. DNA is a double-stranded molecule, the famed double helix, and because its two strands fit together by way of those very specific relationships between pairs of nucleotide bases (adenine linking only with thymine, cytosine only with guanine), it generally repairs mistakes in the placement of bases as it replicates itself. This repair work is performed by DNA polymerase, the enzyme that helps catalyze construction of new DNA from single strands. If an adenine is mistakenly set in place to become linked with a guanine (not its correct partner), the polymerase recognizes that mistake, backtracks by one pair, fixes the mismatch, and then moves on. So the rate of mutation in most DNA viruses is relatively low. RNA viruses, coded by a single-strand molecule with no such corrective arrangement, no such buddy-buddy system, no such proofreading polymerase, sustain rates of mutation that may be thousands of times higher.

Influenza is caused by three types of viruses, of which the most worrisome and widespread is influenza A. Viruses of that type all share certain genetic traits: a single-stranded RNA genome, which is partitioned into eight segments, which serve as templates for eleven different proteins. In other words, they have eight discrete stretches of RNA coding, linked together like eight railroad cars, with eleven different deliverable cargoes. The eleven deliverables are the molecules that comprise the structure and functional machinery of the virus. They are what the genes make.

Two of those molecules become spiky protuberances from the outer surface of the viral envelope: hemagglutinin and neuraminidase. Those two, recognizable by an immune system, and crucial for penetrating and exiting cells of a host, give the various subtypes of influenza A their definitive labels: H5N1, H1N1, and so on. The term 'H5N1' indicates a virus featuring subtype 5 of the hemagglutinin protein combined with subtype 1 of the neuraminidase protein. Sixteen different kinds of hemagglutinin, plus nine kinds of neuraminidase, have been detected in the natural world. Hemagglutinin is the key that unlocks a cell membrane so that the virus can get in, and neuraminidase is the key for getting back out.

One of the things that makes influenza so problematic is its propensity to change. First of all there's the high rate of mutation, as in any RNA virus. No quality control as it replicates. Continual copying errors at the level of individual letters of code. But that's not the half of it. Even more important is the reassortment—the accidental swapping of entire genomic segments

between virions of two different subtypes. It's similar to recombination, as occurs sometimes between crossed chromosomes in dividing cells, except that reassortment is somewhat more easy and orderly. It happens often among influenza viruses because the segmentation allows their RNA to snap apart neatly at the points of demarcation between genes: those eight railroad cars in a switching yard. Sixteen available kinds of hemagglutinin, nine kinds of neuraminidase—you can do the math—144 possible pairings.

The changes are random and most yield bad combinations, making the virus less viable. But random changes do constitute variation, and variation is the exploration of possibilities. It's the raw material of natural selection, adaptation, evolution. That's why influenza is such a protean sort of bug, always full of surprises, full of newness, full of menace: so much mutation and reassortment. The steady incidence of mutations yields incremental change in how the virus looks and behaves. Ergo you need another flu shot every autumn: This year's version of flu is different enough from last year's. Reassortment yields big changes. Such major innovations by reassortment, introducing new subtypes, which may be infectious but unfamiliar to the human population, are what generally lead to pandemics.

The flu virus is most transmissible in the two to three days after a person's exposure to it but prior to the onset of symptoms. Viral shedding peaks during that narrow window of time. Put another way, if you go to a party and wake up the next morning with a sore throat and runny nose, don't assume the people you hugged or shook hands with the night before gave you the bug. Quite likely just the opposite happened: you gave it to them.

But it's not all about human disease. Different subtypes have their affinities for different species of host. H7N7 does well among horses. Dead terns in South Africa, back in 1961, had been infected with H5N3. Only subtypes bearing H1, H2, or H3 as their hemagglutinin cause human flu epidemics, because only those spread readily from person to person. Pigs offer conditions intermediate between what a flu virus finds in people and what it finds in birds; therefore pigs get infected with both human subtypes and bird subtypes. When an individual pig is infected simultaneously with two viruses—one adapted to humans, one adapted to birds—the opportunity exists for reassortment between those two.

Although wild aquatic birds are now known to be the ultimate origin of all influenzas, the viruses reassort themselves in pigs and elsewhere (quail also serve as mixing bowls), and by the time they get into humans, they have generally been assembled from H1, H2, or H3 plus the ten other necessary proteins, some of those in forms borrowed from this or that bird flu or pig flu virus. Other subtypes, featuring H7 and H5, have occasionally tried on

the prospect of targeting people and in all cases so far, the fit has been bad. They infect humans but they haven't acquired transmissibility. They don't pass from person to person. They may kill a lot of poultry, spreading through entire flocks, but they don't travel on human sneezes. Influenza among birds is primarily an infection of the gastrointestinal tract, with transmission occurring by the fecal-oral route; a sick bird shits the virus onto the floor of its coop, or onto the ground of a barnyard, or into the water of a lake or an estuary, and another bird picks it up while pecking or dabbling for food. So you've got to handle a hen, or butcher a duck, to get infected.

Still, with such a variable group of viruses, always mutating, continually reassorting, the next try on could be different. Consequently there's not a hope in hell, at this time, of predicting just what the next pandemic will be. But we can try.

The first criterion is the most obvious: recent pandemics in human history. That would point to the orthomyxoviruses (including the influenzas) and the retroviruses (including the HIVs), among others. The second criterion is proven ability to cause major epidemics in non-human animal populations. This would again spotlight the orthomyxoviruses, but also the family of paramyxoviruses, such as Hendra and Nipah, and the coronaviruses, such as that virus later known as SARS-CoV and of course the latest out of Wuhan (Biolabs?). The third criterion is intrinsic evolvability—readiness to mutate and to recombine (or reassort)—which confers on a virus the potential to emerge into and to cause pandemics in human populations. Examples would be retroviruses, orthomyxoviruses, and coronaviruses. Some of these viruses, coronaviruses in particular, could pose serious threats to human health. These are viruses with high evolvability and proven ability to cause epidemics in animal populations.

In 1996, Reston virus reentered the United States by way of another shipment of Philippine macaques. Sent from the same export house near Manila that had shipped the original sick monkeys to Reston, Virginia, these went to a commercial quarantine facility in Alice, Texas, near Corpus Christi. One animal died and, after it tested positive for Reston virus, forty-nine others housed in the same room were euthanized as a precaution. Most of those, tested posthumously, were negative. Ten employees who had helped unload and handle the monkeys were also screened for infection, and they also tested negative, but none of them were euthanized.

Pigs were left starving in their pens. Some broke out to roam the roadways like feral dogs, foraging for food. Malaysia at that time contained 2.35 million pigs, half of them from Nipah-affected farms, so this could have become an almost medieval problem, like a scene from the Black Death:

herds of infected pigs stampeding ravenously through empty villages. A phalanx of cullers, including soldiers from the army as well as police and veterinary officers, moved into the countryside wearing protective suits, gloves, masks, and goggles. Their assigned task was to shoot, bury, or otherwise dispose of more than a million animals, and to do it quickly, without splashing virus everywhere. Despite all precautions, at least half a dozen soldiers did get infected. There's no easy way to kill a million pigs. Later it was found out to be 1.1 million pigs. The difference might seem like just a rounding error, but if you ever had to kill an "extra" hundred-thousand pigs and dispose of their bodies in bulldozed pits, you'd remember the difference as significant.

Bats come in many, many forms. The order Chiroptera (the "hand-wing" creatures) encompasses 1,116 species, which amounts to 25 percent of all the recognized species of mammals. To say again: One in every four species of mammal is a bat. Such diversity might suggest that bats don't harbor more than their share of viruses; it could be, instead, that their viral burden is proportional to their share of all mammal diversity, and thus just seems surprisingly large. Maybe their virus-per-bat ratio is no higher than ratios among other mammals. Then again, maybe it is higher.

Besides being diverse, bats are very abundant and very social. Many kinds roost in huge aggregations that can include millions of individuals at close quarters. They are also a very old lineage, having evolved to roughly their present form about 50 million years ago. Their ancientness provides scope for a long history of associations between viruses and bats, and those intimate associations may have contributed to viral diversity. When a bat lineage split into two new species, their passenger viruses may have split with them, yielding more kinds of virus as well as more kinds of bat. And the abundance of bats, as they gather to roost or to hibernate, may help viruses to persist in such populations, despite acquired immunity in many older individuals.

Remember the concept of critical community size? Remember measles, circulating endemically in cities of five-hundred-thousand people or more? Bats probably meet the critical community size standard more consistently than most other mammals. Their communities are often huge and usually large, offering a steady supply of susceptible newborns to become infected and maintain the viral presence.

That scenario assumes a virus that infects each bat only briefly, leaving recovered individuals with lifelong immunity, as measles does in humans. An alternative scenario involves a virus capable of causing chronic, persistent infection, lasting months or even years within a single bat. If the infection can persist, then the long average lifespan of a bat becomes advantageous

for the virus. Some of the smaller, insectivorous bats live twenty or twenty-five years. Such longevity, if the bat is infected and shedding virus, vastly increases the sum of opportunities over time for passing the virus to other bats. In the language of the mathematicians: R_0 increases with the lifespan of a persistently infected bat. And a bigger R_0 , as you know, is always good for the pathogen.

Social intimacy helps too, and many kinds of bat seem to love crowding, at least when they hibernate or roost. Mexican free-tailed bats in Carlsbad Caverns, for instance, snuggle together at about three-hundred individuals per square foot. Not even lab mice in an overloaded cage would tolerate that. If a virus can be passed by direct contact, bodily fluids, or tiny droplets sprayed through the air, crowding improves its chances. Under conditions like those in Carlsbad even rabies has been known to achieve airborne transmission.

Speaking of airborne: It's not insignificant that bats fly. An individual fruit bat may travel dozens of miles each night, searching for food, and hundreds of miles in a season as it moves among roosting sites. Some insectivorous bats migrate as much as eight-hundred miles between their summer and winter roosts. Rodents don't make such journeys, and not many larger mammals do. Furthermore, bats move in three dimensions across the landscape, not just two; they fly high, they swoop low, they cruise in between, inhabiting a far greater volume of space than most animals. The breadth and the depth of their sheer presence are large. Does that increase the likelihood that they, or the viruses they carry, will come in contact with humans? Maybe.

Then there's bat immunology—little is known by anyone. Is it possible that the cold temperatures endured by hibernating bats suppress their immune responses, allowing viruses to persist in bat blood? Is it possible that antibodies, which would neutralize a virus, don't last as long in bats as in other mammals? What about the ancientness of the bat lineage? Did that lineage diverge from other mammals before the mammalian immune system had been well honed by evolution, reaching the level of effectiveness seen in rodents and primates? Do bats have a different 'set point' for their immune responses, allowing a virus to replicate freely so long as it doesn't do the animal any harm?

The much darker story remains to be told, probably not about this virus but about another. When the Next Big One comes, we can guess, it will likely conform to the same perverse pattern, high infectivity preceding notable symptoms. That will help it to move through cities and airports like an angel of death.

Moral: If you're a thriving population, living at high density but exposed

to new bugs, it's just a matter of time until the NBO arrives.

During the early twentieth century, disease scientists from the Rockefeller Foundation and other institutions conceived the ambitious goal of eradicating some infectious diseases entirely. They tried hard with yellow fever, spending millions of dollars and many years of effort, and failed. They tried with malaria, and failed. They tried later with smallpox, and succeeded. Why?

The differences among those three diseases are many and complex, but probably the most crucial one is that smallpox resided neither in a reservoir host nor in a vector. Its ecology was simple. It existed in humans—in humans only—and was therefore much easier to eradicate. The campaign to eradicate polio, begun in 1988 by WHO and other institutions, is a realistic effort for the same reason: Polio isn't zoonotic.

And malaria is now targeted again. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced, in 2007, a new long-term initiative to eradicate that disease. It's an admirable goal, a generously imaginative dream, but a person is left to wonder how Mr. and Mrs. Gates and their scientific advisers propose to deal with *Plasmodium knowlesi*. Do you exterminate the parasite by killing off its reservoir hosts, or do you somehow apply your therapeutics to those hosts, curing every macaque in the forests of Borneo?

That's the salubrious thing about zoonotic diseases: They remind us, as St. Francis did, that we humans are inseparable from the natural world. In fact, there is no "natural world," it's a bad and artificial phrase. There is only the world. Humankind is part of that world, as are the ebolaviruses, as are the influenzas and the HIVs, as are Nipah and Hendra and SARS and the Wuhan Flu, as are chimpanzees and bats and palm civets and bar-headed geese, as is the next murderous virus—the one we haven't yet detected.

A Dover newspaper explained confidently:

"The higher the number of deer in an area, the higher the chances are of spreading Lyme disease to humans."

Well, actually, no. That simple formula is as false as the notion that swamp vapors bring malaria. The premise behind such civic efforts is that the landscapes in question contain "too many" deer and that their overabundance accounts for the emergence of Lyme disease since 1975. And it's true enough that there are lots of deer out there. Populations in the northeastern United States have rebounded robustly—because of forest regrowth, absence of big predators, lessened hunting by meat-hungry humans, and other factors—since the hard times of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There might be more deer in Connecticut today than at the time of the Pequot War in 1637. But that abundance of whitetails is

probably irrelevant to the chances you'll catch Lyme disease during a stroll in, say, Cockaponset State Forest. Why? Any infectious disease is inherently an ecological system. And ecology is complicated.

A practical question: Say you're a parent with young children, living here in your Millbrook, Connecticut dream house on three acres of beautiful lawn and shrubbery—what do you want for protection against Lyme disease? There might be a whole range of desperate options. Pesticide spraying by the county? Deer eradication by the state? Thousands of mousetraps deployed in the forest and baited with cheese, snapping away like brushfire? Do you pave your yard and ring it with an oil-filled moat? Do you put flea-and-tick collars on your kids' ankles before they go out to play? No, none of those.

You should feel a lot more comfortable if you know that the landscape would support healthy populations of owls, foxes, hawks, weasels, squirrels of various kinds—the components of the community that could regulate mouse populations. In other words, biological diversity. Risk of Lyme disease seems to go up as the roster of native animals, in a given area, goes down.

Although it's an intricate system, certain points about Lyme disease emerge plainly. We know that walking into a small woodlot is riskier than walking into a nearby large, extensive forest. We know that hiking in the oak woods two summers after a big acorn year is much riskier than hiking in those same woods after an acorn failure. We know that forests that house many kinds of mammals and birds are safer than those that support fewer kinds. We know that the more opossums and squirrels there are in the woods, the lower the risk of Lyme disease, and we suspect that the same is true of owls, hawks, and weasels. As for white-tailed deer: They're involved, yes, but far from paramount, so don't believe everything you've heard.

Dirty Wars

Microbes make up 90 percent of our bodies, so zapping every germ in your path is in a sense anti-human.

Our microbial cells—or selves, for each of us is in reality a super-organism—defy easy classification. A number of strains labeled pathogens actually inhabit us all the time, causing trouble only when we're run-down or when unusual conditions favor their growth. The same species of bacteria may be a helper (a symbiont), a harmless freeloader (a commensal), or a hurter (a parasite), depending on circumstances that are constantly in flux.

It's clear, however, that animals' behavior changes markedly with the composition of their gut microbiota. The most striking proof of this comes from germ-free mice—that is, animals specially reared under sterile conditions to be devoid of gut microbes. A normal healthy mouse with its intestinal microbiota intact is a quick and eager learner. Show it a new object like a napkin ring and it will circle and sniff it with great interest. If placed in a maze, it's keen to explore new passages.

Germ-free mice demonstrate none of this natural curiosity. It's as if they have no recollection of objects and places they've recently explored, for they're just as likely to favor what's familiar over what's new, exciting, or different. These rodents are also oddly fearless. They boldly venture where mice with normal microbiota know not to go. Bright lights and open spaces that scream danger to the average mouse don't deter them in the least. In fact, they're so immune to anxiety that they show no signs of distress even when separated from their mothers at birth for three hours a day—a trauma that would normally lead to lifelong skittishness and social maladjustment. In addition, germ-free mice scurry about their enclosures more than those with normal microbiota. Just as in the case of mice with autism-like features, transferring healthy gut microbiota into the germ-free animals can normalize many of these behaviors—for example, they become more cautious and less active—but only if done before they are four weeks of age. After that, the transplant has no effect, suggesting that microbiota at the start of life shape the very wiring of the brain.

We must assume that such findings are being considered to determine how they can be used to exert control over societies.

Scientists examined how probiotic-fed mice responded to a test widely used by the pharmacological industry to assess the efficacy of medicines used for anxiety and depression. The animals were placed in a small tank of water and forced to swim with no escape route. Panicked, they eventually gave in to despair and became immobile. Untreated animals went only two minutes

before they lost their will to survive. In contrast, mice fed probiotics before the test swam a full forty seconds longer. They behaved as if they were already treated with an antidepressant.

So folks, this is a great example of how antidepressants are not designed to help you. The medication just makes you more able to deal with despair and hopelessness. Also: holy fucking shit you sadistic fucking scientists—fuck you. Throw cats in a bag and toss it in a river: labeled a potential serial killer; toss mice into a tank of despair: maybe get a Nobel.

Scientists gave young mice brief, high-dose pulses of antibiotics to mimic human treatment. When the rodents grew up, they not only weighed more but also had considerably more fatty tissue than their untreated counterparts. And if the animals were fed calorie-rich fare instead of normal chow, weight gain was even more dramatic. This synergistic interaction between the foods we eat and our microbiomes may go a long way toward explaining why the incidence of obesity in the United States is greatest in the South, which combines a love for deep-fried foods with the highest usage of antibiotics in the nation.

Why did gut bacteria evolve to direct our behavior? Here we are on shaky ground, but I offer this educated guess: We humans use our brains to create music, understand mathematics, and ponder the fate of the universe, so we tend to think of the gut as serving the brain rather than the other way around. But when bacteria began to colonize animals, some eight-hundred-million years ago, brains were not so sophisticated. Earthworms are believed to be among the first creatures to harbor gut bacteria, and each wriggling form basically consists of one long digestive tract surrounded by nerve fibers—what we now refer to as the second brain—to coordinate digestion. The main function of the brain in its head—if two tiny clumps of cells can be called that—is to obey orders from below like ‘Eat, eat, eat!’ so as to keep the bacteria teeming inside its tube of a body well fed. The brain above may even have evolved as an outpost of the gut’s nerve network, in which case the second brain came first.

So from the start, gut bacteria have been in very close communication with the brain upstairs and maybe even quite dictatorial in their demands. After all, they greatly outnumber the rest of the cells in the body and clearly have a stake in the safety and welfare of their vessel. And as that vessel has evolved and its range of behavior grown more complex, its microbial inhabitants have, with the ever pressing need of nourishment, been compelled to extend their control beyond simple appetites to the realms of emotion and cognition. Which is why without them an animal can seem rudderless, listless, or downright reckless. Germ-free mice don’t learn very well or remember where they’ve been. They don’t avoid predators. They don’t

become distressed or protest when separated from their mothers, whose nurturance and protection is critical for their survival. But if you colonize them with the normal microbiome for that strain, they calm down and behave in a much more appropriate, cautious manner. You could say that it's in the bacteria's best interest that the host survives and takes fewer risks.

Compared to microbes selected for virulence, they live life at a more leisurely pace and are less intrusive, spreading much more slowly—in a bead of spittle when a mother kisses her child or by a handshake, especially if the owner of one of those hands forgot to wash it after going to the bathroom. They have traded a life of piracy and murder for a more settled existence—a roof over their heads, a warm meal they can count on. Still, like their hosts, they can be opportunistic. If they sense they can get away with it, they may gnaw their way into the stomach or inflict other kinds of harm. And they are at the mercy of monsters like rabies, microbes that have no intention of getting along with any living thing and attack the brain directly, manipulating the host far more effectively, to their and our loss—though, when we die, gut microbes get to eat us. In short, gut bacteria are no more altruistic than parasitic manipulators—it's just that their survival strategy tends to be more closely allied with our own. And because they usually want us to act in ways that promote our well-being, they typically draw less attention to themselves than malicious microbes do. But make no mistake: Their influence on our behavior is dramatic. In fact, I'm not sure we will ever truly be able to separate their motives from our own.

Bathing as a way of keeping the body clean was a privilege of the rich even up to the beginning of the twentieth century. It was around that time that dermatologists in Germany began to call for “a bath a week for every German!” Large companies built bathhouses for their employees and encouraged personal hygiene by issuing them with free towels and soap. The tradition of the weekly bath did not really take hold until the 1950s. Then, typical families took their bath on a Saturday evening, one after another in the same bathwater, and hard-working Dad often got to go in the tub first. Originally, personal cleanliness meant ridding the body of unpleasant smells and visible dirt. As time went on, this concept became increasingly abstract. It's hard for us today to imagine this once-a-week family bathing routine. We spend money on disinfectants to get rid of things we can't even see. The surface in question looks exactly the same after cleaning as it did before—yet just knowing it is clean is extremely important to us.

The higher the hygiene standards in a country, the higher that nation's incidence of allergies and autoimmune diseases. The more sterile a household is, the more its members will suffer from allergies and autoimmune diseases.

Thirty years ago, about one person in ten had an allergy. Today that figure is one in three. At the same time, the number of infections has not fallen significantly. This is not smart hygiene.

If you dilute the bacteria on your plates, cutlery, and cutting board nicely with water, then wipe them over with a kitchen sponge before putting them away, you may as well have licked them clean with your tongue. Kitchen sponges offer the perfect home for any passing microbe—nice and warm, moist, and full of food.

Which is more shocking, to talk about shit, or the fact that kids are dying because we don't talk about shit? Poo is taboo precisely because it's a pile of germs. Were that not the case, we might not mind its scent and would be happy to talk about it.

Surprisingly, most people can't explain their revulsion to these things. A typical answer is: "I don't know. It's just yucky!" The question is trickier than it may seem. That's because what disgusts humans is a really weird mixed bag of filthy, slimy, smelly, sticky, wriggling things. While some of them—for example, rancid meat, curdled milk, and vomit—are easy to link to illness, in many other cases, the connection is far from obvious. Acne, for example. It's not contagious, so why is it disgusting? The likely answer is that pimples resemble the pustules associated with diseases like smallpox, measles, and chickenpox. Rats, cockroaches, snails, and seaweed are widely viewed as disgusting yet none are parasites. They make it onto the list because they can transmit viral and bacterial infections, gastrointestinal bugs, parasitic worms, and cholera, respectively. Earthworms are harmless, but lots of people can't stand to touch them. What makes them repugnant, perhaps, is that they look a lot like parasitic worms in fish and meat that, if swallowed, can burrow into our intestines.

Even those who care for the sick or who have unsavory jobs like cleaning toilets or sewers are frequently stigmatized. Worse, they themselves may develop post-traumatic stress disorder when called upon to perform particularly nasty chores—for example, retrieving the corpses of neglected old people who've been left to rot in their homes. I think it's terribly important we talk about this because it's no good saying, 'Oh, you're being irrational and illogical. Of course nobody thinks you're disgusting because you're sick.' But I'm afraid we do. And we're not going to make much progress unless you acknowledge it and deal with the emotional labor involved in having to overcome disgust.

Infectious diseases spread with alarming efficiency when there are a large number of hosts living near one another, especially under unsanitary circumstances. The advance of agriculture created these very conditions. The first farmers could barely eke out an existence, being one crop failure

away from disaster. Their grain-heavy diet was deficient in many nutrients and overabundant in others (the bacteria that cause cavities thrived on all those carbohydrates, triggering dental woes unknown to hunter-gatherers). Hunger and malnourishment combined to weaken their immune systems, making them more vulnerable to infection. As they became more successful at farming, ironically, their health problems only worsened. Their grain stores attracted insects and vermin that spread disease. With human settlement came piles of human waste and a greater danger that the water people drank was polluted with fecal contaminants. And the chickens, pigs, and other animals that they domesticated brought them in contact with new pathogens for which they had no natural resistance. As these risks mounted, early farmers fell prey to wave upon wave of diseases—many unheard-of in prehistoric times—including mumps, influenza, smallpox, whooping cough, measles, and dysentery, to mention just a few.

This didn't happen overnight. It took thousands of years for agriculture to take off. Few cities in the Middle East had more than fifty-thousand inhabitants prior to biblical times. So the perfect storm was slow to gather, but when it hit, a health crisis of unimaginable disruption and trauma ensued. These new diseases were far more lethal and terrifying than the versions manifested in the untreated and unvaccinated today. We are the heirs of exceptionally hardy people who were unusual in having immune systems that could repel these virulent germs.

It was exactly at this critical juncture that our forefathers went from being not particularly spiritual to embracing religion—and not just passing fads, but some of the most widely followed faiths in the world today, faiths whose gods promised to reward the good and punish the evil. Hunter-gatherers, at least today, sometimes believe that spirits can influence the weather or other events, but these mystical beings are rarely concerned about whether humans behave in a moral fashion. One of the oldest of these enduring belief systems is Judaism, whose most hallowed prophet, Moses, is equally revered in Christianity and in Islam (in the Koran, he goes by the name Musa and is referred to more times than Muhammad). Half the world's population follows religions derived from Mosaic Law—that is, God's commandments as communicated to Moses.

Not surprisingly, given its vintage, Mosaic Law is obsessed with matters related to cleanliness and lifestyle factors that we now know play a key role in the spread of disease. Just as villages in the Fertile Crescent were giving rise to filthy, crowded cities, and outbreaks of illness were becoming an everyday horror, Mosaic Law decreed that Jewish priests should wash their hands—to this day, one of the most effective public-health measures known to science. The Torah contains much more medical wisdom—and by that I

don't mean merely its famous admonishments to avoid eating pork (a source of trichinosis, a parasitic disease caused by a roundworm) and shellfish (filter feeders that concentrate contaminants) and to circumcise sons (this one seems to be debunked by modern research, but such knowledge has not found its way into mainstream views yet). Jews were instructed to bathe on the Sabbath (every Saturday); cover their wells (a good idea, as it kept out vermin and insects); engage in cleansing rituals if exposed to bodily fluids like blood, feces, pus, and semen; quarantine people with leprosy and other skin diseases and, if infection persisted in the community, burn their clothes; bury the dead quickly before corpses decomposed; submerge dishes and eating utensils in boiling water after use; never consume the flesh of an animal that had died of natural causes (a sign that it might have been felled by illness) or eat meat more than two days old (likely on the verge of turning rancid).

When it came time for divvying up the spoils of war, Jewish doctrine required any metal booty that could withstand intense heat—objects made of gold, silver, bronze, or tin—to “be put through fire” (sterilized by high temperatures). What could not endure fire was to be washed with “purifying water”: a mixture of water, ash, and animal fat, basically an early recipe for soap. Equally prescient from the standpoint of modern disease control, Mosaic Law has numerous injunctions specifically related to sex. Parents were admonished not to allow their daughters to become prostitutes, and premarital sex, adultery, male homosexuality, and bestiality were all discouraged, if not banned outright. Religion is an ideal enforcer of good public health, for many of the behaviors most relevant to disease propagation occur behind closed doors, outside of public view. There's simply no way of getting around an omnipresent, all-seeing God ever on the lookout for those who defy His will. Lest His flock be tempted to stray from the fold, the Torah makes clear that there will be a steep health cost. The Lord, it warns, will punish the disobedient with “severe burning fever,” “the boils of Egypt,” “with the scab, and with the itch,” “with madness and blindness”—and, if all that fails, the sword.

Contrary to common assumption, human brains didn't stop changing once people submitted to divine authority and became civilized. They kept on changing—especially, perhaps, in the very regions involved in processing disgust. Admittedly, that's conjecture. But discoveries from the forefront of genetics support this thinking. One of the most surprising findings to emerge from human gene-sequencing data in the past decade is that human evolution has been speeding up in recent times. In fact, adaptive mutations in our species' genome have accumulated a hundred times more quickly since farming got under way than at any other period in human history,

and the closer we move to the present, the quicker the adaptive mutations pile up. Scientists were initially puzzled by this unexpected finding until it finally dawned on them that the catalyst behind this change was ourselves. Humans were radically transforming their environment by taking up the plow, and their bodies and behavior had to adjust to the rapidly shifting landscape. In an evolutionary eyeblink, they had to adapt to new diets and very different lifestyles. Our species' cooperative spirit—our ingenuity and ability to work together—forced us into evolution's fast lane. The quickest-changing sections of the human genome regulate the functioning of the immune system and the brain. Given disgust's role in coordinating our physical and behavioral defenses against infection, it stands to reason that the parts of the brain that the emotion engages could have undergone significant remodeling with the rise of civilization.

That argument is even more convincing when you consider that large segments of populations were decimated by plague and pestilence over that very period. Natural selection would have strongly favored people who believed in God or who, at the very least, were conscientious in obeying religious doctrine that served to protect their health. Most important, it would have favored the survival of people with a punitive streak—that is, those prone to stiffly penalize anyone who broke society's rules. And as agriculture gave way to industry, causing a massive migration from farms to factories and concentrating more people than ever before into sprawling squalid slums, these pressures surely would only have intensified.

Some thinkers have come to view disgust as God's gift to us. They counsel that we should heed the wisdom of repugnance. This voice that wells up inside us warns when a moral boundary has been crossed. They call for people to listen to its outrage at acts like human cloning, abortion, incest, and bestiality.

“Repugnance, speaks up to defend the central core of our humanity. Shallow are the souls who have forgotten how to shudder.”

Needless to say, this is a less rosy view of disgust—and not without cause. As we've seen, it can make prejudice feel right, justifying the stigmatization of immigrants, homosexuals, the homeless, the obese, and other vulnerable groups. Moreover, our natural revulsion to disease has fed into the notion that sickness is God's punishment for sin—a view that still persists around the world even as modern medicine has dramatically advanced.

For example, Orthodox Jews are prohibited from sitting on a chair that a menstruating woman has occupied. Even in more secular pockets of the

world, many couples—both men and women—believe it is wrong to have sex when a woman has her period. Owing to how disgust affects our thinking, it's all too easy for women to be viewed as both polluting and morally offensive and thus deserving of fewer rights than men.

While people may not be able to suppress their moral intuitions, they should challenge these sentiments with reason and logic. It may take long and arduous intellectual work to reach an ethical decision—for example, that slavery should be abolished or it's cruel to eat animals—but with the passage of time our new values can become automatic and intuitive. If more people favored reason tempered with emotion over emotion tempered with reason in making moral decisions, would politics be less polarized? We think of ethical views as wildly different across individuals and across cultures, but the truth is that there's a ton of agreement. Most people think that murder, rape, stealing, lying, and cheating are wrong. What's interesting is where they diverge. Those differences have become a hotbed of political rhetoric and abuse. Where people clash predominantly relates to sexual mores and other social values highly pertinent to the transmission of disease. Which potentially implies something radical: it's parasites that have divided us! So if we could eradicate the worst of them and tamp down our disgust, perhaps people's attitudes would change and political debates would not be so rancorous. Of course, that's absurdly simplistic.

Religious scholars have been very interested in religious commitment, but they can't predict which countries will be religious based on current paradigms. Their theories are not very sophisticated—for example, you learn your religion from your parents. In contrast epidemiological data is a very good indicator of where religious fervor will burn brightest. And the more baroque a religion's sacred rituals and the greater the demands on its adherents, the better it is at keeping the congregation tightly bound together and separate from the members of other sects and their parasites.

In areas that have historically endured a high incidence of infection, people are more likely to be introverted and less prone to seek out novel experiences. Women, and to a lesser extent men, in these regions also report having restricted sexual lifestyles—that is, they have fewer partners over their lifespans and believe sex should be reserved for stable, committed relationships. In short, they don't mingle readily and they tend to follow traditional codes of conduct that might serve as a buffer against disease—for example, washing before prayer, bowing instead of shaking hands, and marrying only within their religious groups. Their traits seemed to be part of a broader package of values—namely, collectivism. An adherence to convention and distrust of foreign ways of doing things are well-known characteristics of collectivist societies. Could disease avoidance be an overlooked function

of that belief system?

Of course not every individual in the US is individualistic and not everyone in China is collectivistic. There's tremendous variation within any given population on these traits. We're just talking about relative prevalence—mean or average values—where you'll see differences between nations. The pattern detected on an international scale holds up within the United States. Americans are the most collectivistic in the very states—mostly in the Deep South—where CDC figures indicate infectious disease was highest. In the early decades of the twentieth century, southerners were considered far less productive than northerners, a sluggishness that was eventually traced to epidemic levels of hookworm that had rendered a large sector of the population anemic. The South in that era was also plagued by malaria, a problem that “required” the draining of swamps and other major efforts to bring it under control. Those combined factors may explain why the region even today remains more clannish than the rest of the country.

The most common criticism is that a correlation between parasite stress and collectivism does not prove that one caused the other. Especially with something as complex and multifaceted as culture, it can be very tricky to control for unrecognized factors that might be behind the association. The theory's progenitors are well aware of that hazard, and though there's no simple solution to the problem, they have found ways to subject their ideas to more rigorous scrutiny. Based on their model, for example, they've generated numerous new predictions and tested them against voluminous bodies of data gathered from many different sectors of the social sciences. So far, they report, their theory has held up well to this barrage of tests. Not only that, but their latest findings lead them to think its explanatory powers are considerably broader than they'd initially proposed. Do you live in a democracy or under a brutal dictatorship? Are you deeply religious? Do women in your country have the same rights as men? Is war frequently erupting around you? Some scientists believe parasite stress has direct bearing on all those questions.

People in those regions are well adapted to coexisting with only some of those strains. So if they move very far away from their own locale, they may encounter novel strains that could sicken or kill them. If a foreigner were to insinuate himself into their group, his germs could be lethal to them and vice versa. That foreigner's genes, should one of them decide to mate with him, would produce children whose immune systems would be less adept at fighting off local scourges. For these reasons people in parasitic hot zones should be reluctant to marry outside their own community. And they should develop all kinds of idiosyncratic markers of communal identity—unique dialects, religious practices, culinary customs, modes of dress, jewelry, music,

and so forth—that allow each group to tell ‘them’ from ‘us.’ In short, the theory predicts that regions teeming with parasites should produce homebodies and a Balkanized social landscape—that is, divided by religions and languages, among other social barriers. Indeed, that’s what was found. Researchers also discovered that people in these zones are more fervent about their faith, as measured by the number of times they pray per week, how often they attend services, and many other indices tracked by ethnographers. Atheism, by contrast, flourishes where there are very low parasite loads.

Although there are now a lot of different pieces of evidence linking pathogen prevalence to various kinds of cultural differences, parasite stress clearly is not the only thing that plays a role in shaping society. If there’s one thing we know in cognitive behavioral sciences, it’s this: Everything is multi-determined. For example, it would be grossly simplistic to conclude that religion is simply a parasite defense. Even if that’s a function it serves, that in no way implies that religion arose to serve that purpose alone or that it continues to exist for that one reason. Similarly, linguistic diversity, types of governance, and outbreaks of violence are no doubt the products of numerous geographic and historical factors, not parasite stress alone.

How parasite stress gets translated into attitudes and personality traits will also need to be clarified. There may have been differential selection for different personality traits in different cultures. There may be different frequencies of alleles (gene variants) for neurotransmitter pathways related to mood and temperament. The brain may sense when the immune system is in overdrive due to chronic infections and in response switch an individual’s mental outlook into a defensive mode manifested by collectivistic thinking.

Humans may even have evolved the ability to read levels of antibodies circulating in other people’s blood, which would tell them whether those around them were harboring lots of parasites. Are we talking about a sixth sense? Why not? Hell, there could be seven to five-hundred senses that allow the brain to detect antibody titers and the duration of immune system activation. When you look at a person, you’re assessing information about their age, all the hormone markers, the symmetry of the face and movement of the person—all this stuff ties to the health stats of an individual. Body odor might also provide information about a person’s immune status. There could be multiple things the brain is reading. We say certain animals have all kinds of abilities to sense things we can’t—but do they know everything they’re doing? What if we don’t know what we are actually perceiving?

Cultural anthropologists have begun to weigh in with their own opinions, and while facets of the model seem feasible to many of them, they also find flaws in its logic. For example, proselytizers regularly come into contact with strangers, and some religious practices—such as ritual bloodletting—

promote, rather than impede, the transmission of disease. Although no theory—especially not one that purports to account for cultural variation—can always make spot-on predictions, these counterexamples still raise troubling questions, and if enough of them accumulate, the theory could crumble under their weight.

Even creatures with no knowledge of the germ theory of disease have an instinct for healing and staying well. Good hygiene, vaccination, therapeutic interventions—these are the pillars of modern medicine. Yet animals of almost every stripe engage in these practices, as did early humans. Indeed, were it not for these evolved defenses, the immune system would quickly be overwhelmed. One of the most familiar but widely misinterpreted examples of this phenomenon is what scientists call sickness behavior. When you're ill, you spike a fever, lose your appetite, and become depressed and listless. Contrary to popular belief, these symptoms don't mean that the disease agent is weakening you but just the opposite—they demonstrate that the brain, in conjunction with the immune system, is mounting a multi-pronged campaign against the invader.

Infectious organisms typically can live only within a narrow temperature range, so fever kills them in droves basically by boiling them—a brilliant defensive tactic, but one that requires a vast amount of energy. To turn up the body's thermostat just one degree Celsius requires roughly the same number of calories that an average adult would expend walking forty kilometers. To funnel that much energy to the battlefield, the brain begins snapping orders: Stop moving about! Stop looking for a mate! Stop foraging for food and spending precious energy digesting it! Stop everything and go to bed! And so you fall into a feverish sleep—Fredo knows what we're talking about. Fever is so important for slaying germs that animals that cannot regulate their own body temperature—for example, locusts, baby rabbits, and cold-blooded creatures like lizards—have found alternative means to cook pathogens: They sunbathe.

Lest anyone doubt that sickness behavior is a defense against pathogens, scientists can induce it without exposing animals to a single germ. They manage this simply by injecting healthy rodents with immune components called cytokines. The once-frisky animals refuse to eat or drink and lose their passion for running in their wheels. Up go their temperatures and down go their heads. They act and feel sick even though they're healthy.

Given that nature's creatures don't come into the world equipped with microscopes or medicine cabinets, how are they so successful at warding off infection? One of their many tricks is to avail themselves of the medicine cabinet in their mouth. When injured by a bite, gash, or scrape, numerous species—among them primates, felines, canines, and rodents—use their

tongue like an antiseptic wipe to clean wounds. Saliva is rich in antimicrobial agents, immune-boosting substances, fungicides, and growth factors for stimulating healing of both skin and nerves. In laboratory experiments, the removal of rodents' salivary glands retarded the healing of their skin wounds. In another study, a sheet of human cells grown in culture was punctured to simulate a wound. The addition of saliva to the petri dish prompted cells in the area of the injury to grow much more quickly than those not so treated. In the right situation the old saying 'go lick your wounds' is very good advice.

Like primates today, our ancestors probably licked their wounds too. Modern humans may continue the tradition, albeit perhaps unknowingly. How many have, after nicking a finger, begun sucking on the cut?

Saliva can prevent germs from entering the body through other routes. After copulating, male rodents, cats, and dogs will furiously lick their penises for several minutes. The liberal application of saliva kills several pathogens that are leading causes of STDs in these species. Their habit also benefits females because it prevents males from passing on infections to their next mates. Interestingly, cattle and horses, which can't lick their own penises, are much more prone to STDs—one of the reasons they're bred by artificial insemination. Humans are also very susceptible to STDs, possibly owing to similar anatomical limitations—a limitation many a teenage boy has tried to defy. Lactating females of many mammalian species have found still another healthful purpose for saliva. They use their tongues to sponge away germs on their nipples before allowing their young to nurse. Rodent pups may even refuse to attach to a tit unless it has first been washed with her saliva.

Chimpanzees have—in Jane Goodall's words—"an almost instinctive horror of being soiled with excrement." When they accidentally come in contact with feces, they grab fistfuls of leaves and vigorously wipe it off. Even sex can quickly lose its appeal if excrement enters into the picture. Goodall reported that when a female chimp signaled her eagerness to copulate by raising her rump to a male, he initially seemed game until he spotted a diarrhea smear on her fur, whereupon he opted to abstain. Another male, no doubt with fewer prospects, eventually took her up on her offer, but not before first meticulously wiping off the offending spot with leaves.

Other animals are equally fastidious when it comes to feces. Mole rats and other small mammals that live inside burrows build underground latrines that are separated from their living quarters and larders. Lemurs in Madagascar have their own version of an outhouse—mounds aboveground, which they visit only to relieve themselves. Cows, sheep, and horses don't graze near fresh dung heaps no matter how lush the grass is in the vicinity of those piles.

Animals that lack our ability to preserve and cook food must of course adopt other behaviors to prevent food-borne infections. For dogs and cats, one such behavior is eating grass. They do so to flush intestinal worms out of their systems. The animals usually can't know if they have intestinal worms so they occasionally eat grass as a form of prophylaxis. Puppies and kittens do this most often because their small size makes them particularly vulnerable to the energy-draining effects of parasites. Our pets inherited this behavior from their wild ancestors. Wolves and cougars, for example, regularly eat grass, which is found in about two to four percent of their scat, sometimes along with worms they've expelled. The consumption of leaves may serve the same function in chimps, bonobos, and lowland gorillas. The leaves they choose always are covered in indigestible hairs, and the animals never chew them, as they would food, but rather swallow the leaves whole—sometimes as many as a hundred at a time. All that roughage dramatically accelerates the movement of food through the GI tract, purging them of at least two species of parasitic worms.

Wild Kodiak and brown bears dig up osha roots (*Ligusticum wallichii* and *L. porteri*), chew on them to release their volatile oils, and then work the paste deep into their pelts. Hinting at the root's medicinal value, the Navajo people use it as an antibacterial and anesthetic salve, and according to their legend, the burly beasts taught them about its healing power.

Wedge-capped capuchin monkeys in Venezuela roll their bodies over millipedes to stimulate the insects to release defensive toxins and then frenetically apply the chemicals to their fur with a liberal quantity of their own drool. The millipedes evolved the toxins to repel their insect enemies, so the monkeys are, in effect, stealing their bug spray. Birds—some two-hundred species of them—use a similar strategy. They crush ants with their beaks, causing them to release their own version of insect repellent, then rub the bugs through their feathers.

We think of vaccines as a sophisticated tool of modern medicine, but animals and humans without MDs have also figured out ways to vaccinate. When an ant gets a deadly fungus, for example, another member of its colony will rush up and lick it, thereby exposing the insect to a tiny dose of the disease agent. This method of inoculation is not without perils—two percent of ants perish. But the vast majority develop heightened immunity to the infection,

A technique for vaccinating against smallpox was used by people in northern Africa long before an eighteenth-century English physician named Edward Jenner received credit for inventing the world's first vaccine against the disease. In this ancient practice, a scab from someone with smallpox was rubbed into a tiny cut on the skin of a healthy person. And just as in

the case of inoculated ants, two percent of those people died. The custom, however, appears to have averted far more tragedies than it caused, lowering the mortality rate from smallpox by 25 percent.

We resort to separating the world into natural and unnatural only because our threadbare cultural inheritance provides us no better rules for making sense of the frightening mysteries all around us. The real problem with vaccines is not their unnaturalness, but the reaction they create when combined with culture: They reveal tremendous failures in our system of sharing knowledge. Unlike the Yolngu, where the elder women are trusted to sort the poisonous seeds from the healthy, in the United States there are few bonds of trust connecting the public to the oracles of our accumulated cultural—and therefore medical—knowledge.

“There are 500,000 people in the United States who can’t be vaccinated. They can’t be vaccinated because they’re on cancer chemotherapy, or they’ve had a bone marrow transplant, or a solid organ transplant, or they’re receiving steroids because they have severe asthma. They depend on those around them being vaccinated.”

In a country of over 320 million, the numbers we are discussing are less than 1% of the population. Such facts are often obscured in the popular arguments for vaccination and how it protects the vulnerable. And of course by foregoing vaccination you are not definitively condemning these others to death, and even from an indirect perspective there are far worse killers. Even from a preventable perspective you won’t find yourself in the top-ten.

So the question is, what level of risk to oneself outweighs the risk to others? The answers are not as black and white as they are presented in mainstream discourse. Especially now that “DNA vaccines” are being toyed with. These vaccines, rather than containing the pathogen, are instead composed of synthetic RNA designed to enter your cells and cause them to produce proteins that mimic the pathogen resulting in an immune response—hijacking the cell processes of your body, what could go wrong? No vaccines of this nature are currently approved for human use, but two recent instances of human testing are telling. In 2016 a Zika vaccine was trialed and in 2020 a Wuhan Flu vaccine began trials. As is often the case, irrational public fear, often stirred up by those in power and positions of authority, allow actions to be taken which, under normal conditions, would be opposed by the general public. How many of you, after months or maybe years of fearmongering, are going to rush to get the shot? After all, think of all those vulnerable people still alive, and think of how many we lost, how could you even think

of being so irresponsible?! Maybe you shouldn't even have a choice in the matter. After all:

“If it looks like you're overreacting, you're probably doing the right thing.”

The Making of a Plague

Are you interested in talking about... things? You know, the kind of things that we're not allowed to talk about anymore? You know, since the The Event?

You are? Great. So, allow me to voice some thought-crimes of my own. But be forewarned: I assure you that you will find at least some of my ideas to be offensive. You will disagree with them strongly. You will become irate. The real question is: What are you going to do to those voicing opinions you disagree with? Engage in dialogue with them? Or demand that agents of the state scrub their speech from the internet and lock them in a cage for their thought-crime?

Well, either way, I've already committed thought-crime numerous times, I might as well share them with you. Are you ready? Let's go.

The monumental importance of the measures taken around the world in the fight for control of the current Wuhan Flu pandemic during the past few weeks motivated us to express through this text a few considerations and comments on this hugely important topic.

"I have never seen anything like this. I am not talking about the pandemic, because I have seen 30 of them, one every year. But I have never seen this reaction, and I am trying to understand why."

We do too, and wish to share our thoughts through these lines.

"History suggests that we are actually at much greater risk of exaggerated fears and misplaced priorities"

Even in the midst of the Wuhan Flu panic, the Millionaire Socialist still barely touches radicality. What is his proposed \$2,000 going to do? It's going to act as a backdoor bailout to the corporations; to the 10%, but mainly the 1%. It's basically a textbook example of the criticism of UBI: absent a complete restructuring of the ownership and production of survival needs, any payments are funneled into the hands of the wealthy, for they control access to survival needs. This is why even Republicans propose such things. It's 2020 after all, you can't just chuck giant sackfuls of money at the rich while the poors suffer—and this time those desperate dirty poors might even give the rich some disease, can't have that.

Plus, it seems quite obvious that given its universal nature, the effect it is likely to have on at least some percentage of the top-30% is to help increase

stock prices, as the few Americans with retirement accounts depleted by the latest crash use the infusions to purchase more financial instruments. This, combined with the nearly free money being pumped out by the Fed are designed to reflate the bubble, the illusion of prosperity and stability.

For others, it will simply be used to pay off debts, funneled to the banks in other words. Or it will be saved.

And of course, he's all for the nationalization of coordinating the medical response, but not the nationalization of the providers. Combined with the pledge to provide all Wuhan Flu treatment for free, this stance acts as a giant government gift to the medical industry. All this is thinly papered over with nice sounding claims about limiting the profiting off of such things.

With nationalization of a clearly key industry off the table, he ignores the solution which would mitigate the issues raised about \$2,000 payments and potentially make them far less needed. Much of the worry faced by individuals currently out of work is the inability to pay rent, utilities, loans, and so on. Were the utilities nationalized, rent simply paid into community housing co-op funds, loans restricted to businesses because all other needs (e.g. education loans) would have been met for free, food provided by community grocery co-ops, and so on, then much of the current stress would not exist.

And if you want to be outraged at someone over Trump's briefly floated plan to "open the country by Easter," you should be outraged at Bernie. If only he had not been such a lazy and/or ignorant piece of shit in the four years since his 2016 sheepdogging. Bernie's continuation of the myth of money will kill more people than Donald Trump.

"Two categories of propaganda must be distinguished. The first strives to create a permanent disposition in its objects and constantly needs to be reinforced. Its goal is to make the masses 'available,' by working spells upon them and exercising a kind of fascination. The second category involves the creation of a sort of temporary impulsiveness in its objects. It operates by simple pressure and is often contradictory (since contradictory mass movements are sometimes necessary)."

The French-Algerian writer Albert Camus' great 1947 novel, *The Plague*, is a warning to us today, but a warning in disguise. When he died sixty years ago at the young age of forty-six, he had already written *The Stranger*, *The Fall*, and *The Plague*, and had won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The outward story of *The Plague* revolves around a malignant disease that breaks out in a town that is quarantined when the authorities issue a

state of emergency. After first denying that they have a problem, the people gradually panic and feel painfully isolated.

Death fear runs rampant, much like today with the Wuhan Flu. The authorities declare martial law as they warn that the situation is dire, people must be careful of associating, especially in groups, and they better obey orders or very many will die. So the town is cordoned off.

Before this happens and the first signs that something is amiss emerge, the citizens of the town of Oran, Algeria, remain oblivious, for they “work hard, but solely with the object of getting rich.” Bored by their habits, heavily drugging themselves with drink, and watching many movies to distract themselves, they failed to grasp the significance of “the squelchy roundness of a still-warm body” of the plague-bearing rats that emerge from their underworld to die in their streets.

“It was as if the earth on which our houses stood were being purged of their secret humors; thrusting up to the surface the abscesses and pus-clots that had been forming in its entrails.”

To them the plague is “unthinkable,” an abstraction, until all their denials are swept aside as the truth emerges from the sewers and their neighbors and families die from the disease.

“Stupidity has a way of getting its way;” the narrator, Dr. Rieux tells us, “as we should see if we were not always so wrapped up in ourselves, plagues and wars take people equally by surprise.” The American people are wrapped up in themselves. Nor do they recognize the true rats. They are easily surprised; fooled would be a better word.

Camus uses a physical plague to disguise his real subject, which is the way people react when they are physically trapped by human rats who demand they obey orders and stay physically and mentally compliant as their freedom is taken from them.

The Plague is an allegorical depiction of the German occupation of France during World War II. Camus had lived through that experience as a member of the French Resistance. He was a writer and editor of the underground Resistance newspaper *Combat*, and with his artist’s touch he later made *The Plague* a revelatory read for today, especially for citizens of the United States, the greatest purveyor of the plague of violence in the world.

We are all infected with the soul-destroying evil that our leaders have loosed upon the world, a plague of killing that is now hidden behind the Wuhan Flu panic that is being used to institute tight government controls

that many will come to rue in the months ahead, just as happened after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The Wuhan Flu is a perfect cover-story for the occupation of the public's mind by a propaganda apparatus that has grown even more devious over the past nineteen years.

Ask yourself: Where is the news about US military operations in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, Asia, et cetera? There is none in the corporate mainstream media, and little in the alternative media as well. Have those operations ceased? Of course not. It's just that the news about them, little that it was, has disappeared. Now it is all about us and the Wuhan Flu. It is about how many of us might die. It is about stocking toilet paper. For the rich, it is about getting to their second or third houses where they can isolate themselves in splendor.

As I write, 50,000 or so Americans are claimed to have died of the Wuhan Flu, and by the time you will read this the number will have climbed, but the number will be minuscule compared to the number of people in the USA and those numbers will be full of contradictions that few comprehend unless, rather than reacting in fear, they did some comprehensive research. But arguments are quite useless in a time of panic when people are consumed with fear and just react.

For we live in plague time, and the plague lives in us. But to most Americans, the Wuhan Flu is the plague, because the government and media have said it is. Like the inhabitants of Oran, the United States is "peopled with sleep walkers," pseudo-innocents, who are "chiefly aware of what ruffled the normal tenor of their lives or affected their interests." That their own government, no matter what political party is in power—both working for deep-state, elite interests led by the organized criminals of the CIA—is the disseminator of a world-wide plague of virulent violence, must be denied and divorced from consensus reality.

When it comes to the plague-stricken deaths visited on millions around the world for decades by the American government, this must be denied by diverting attention to partisan presidential politics, and now the Wuhan Flu that engenders fear, loathing, and a child-like tendency to believe Big Brother. The true plague, the bedrock of a nation continually waging wars through various means—i.e. bombs and economic and medical sanctions, et cetera—against the world, disappears from consciousness. As the US Secretary of State said to 60 Minutes' Lesley Stahl in 1996 when asked if the US sanctions on Iraq that had resulted in the death of 500,000 Iraqi children were worth it:

"We think the price is worth it."

For “decent folks must be allowed to sleep at night,” says the character Tarrou sarcastically; he is a man who has lost his ability to “sleep well” since he witnessed a man’s execution where the “bullets make a hole into which you could thrust your fist.” He awakens to the realization that he “had an indirect hand in the deaths of thousands of people.” He loses any peace he had and vows to resist the plague in every way he can.

“For many years I’ve been ashamed, mortally ashamed, of having been, even with the best intentions, even at many removes, a murderer in my turn.”

The rats are dying in the streets. They are our rats, diseased by us. They have emerged from the underworld of a nation plagued by its denial. Unconscious evil bubbles up. We are an infected people. Worry and irritation—“these are not feelings with which to confront plague.” But we don’t seem ashamed of our complicity in our government’s crimes around the world. For decades we have elected leaders who have killed millions, while business went on as usual. The killing didn’t touch us. As Camus said:

“We fornicated and read the papers.”

He knew better. He warned us:

“It’s a wearying business being plague-stricken. But it’s still more wearying to refuse to be it. That’s why everybody in the world looks so tired; everyone is more or less sick of plague. But that is why some of us, those who want to get the plague out of their systems, feel such desperate weariness.”

Yet the fight against the plague must go on. Tarrou puts it thus:

“All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims, and it’s up to us, as far possible, not to join forces with the pestilences. That may sound simple to the point of childishness; I can’t judge if it’s simple, but I know it’s true.

You see, I’d heard such quantities of arguments, which very nearly turned my head, and turned other people’s heads enough to make them approve of murder; and I’d come to realize that all our troubles spring from our failure to use plain, clear-cut language. So I resolved always to speak—and to act—quite clearly, as this was the only way of setting myself on the right track.”

These days, I keep thinking of an incident that occurred when I was a young investigator of sexually transmitted diseases, working for the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare through the Public Health Service as an epidemiologist. My job was to track down sexually transmitted diseases by finding links of sexual contacts.

One day I went to interview and take a blood sample from a poor woman who had been named as a sexual contact. I knocked on her door on the third or fourth floor of a walk-up apartment building. She looked through the peep hole and asked who it was and I told her my name and what government agency I represented. I could tell she was very wary, but she opened the door. She stood there naked, a very heavy woman of perhaps 300 pounds. She nonchalantly welcomed me in and I followed her as she padded down the hall where she took a housecoat off a hook and put it on.

There is, as you know, an old tale by Hans Christian Anderson called “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” Although the emperor parades around naked, the adults make believe he is clothed. Only a child sees the obvious. I was a 23-years-old naïve young man at the time of this unforgettable incident, but it echoes in my mind as a reminder to myself that perhaps that woman was unconsciously teaching me a lesson in disguise.

The year was 1967, and when I went out to get into my government car with federal license plates—a white man in a white shirt in a white car in a poor black neighborhood—a hail of bricks rained down toward me and the car from the roof opposite. I quickly jumped in and fled as the ghettos were exploding. Soon the National Guard would be called out to occupy them.

Intuition tells me that although the emperor has no clothes and a vast psyops occupation is now underway, too many are too grown-up to see it. It’s an old story continually updated. Like *The Plague*.

CNN recently trotted out Hollywood actor Sean Penn to give the nation expert advice on how to deal with the Wuhan Flu. Did they do this because we live in a meaningless, godless universe where madness reigns and everything is chaos? Close, but no. They wanted Penn to explain to the public that it would be wonderful if the US military were deployed inside US borders to deal with the Wuhan Flu panic, because the US military is the greatest humanitarian force on planet Earth.

“There is no greater humanitarian force on the planet than the United States military. The logistical skills, commitment to service, their care for the people. It’s really time to give the military the full breadth command and control of this operation. I wouldn’t blink, I would have put command and control in their hands a month ago, certainly today.”

The US military is in fact one of the least humanitarian forces on this planet, second only to malaria-laden mosquitoes—and even that’s debatable. No other force is circling the globe murdering people in countless undeclared military entanglements and bullying the world into complying with the interests of a nationless alliance of plutocrats and opaque government agencies at the expense of ordinary humans everywhere. They are the exact opposite of a humanitarian force on this planet.

Medical staff are a force for humanitarianism on this planet right now. Grocery store clerks are a force for humanitarianism on this planet. The US military are the armed thugs of a metastatic globe-sprawling empire run by sociopaths.

Don’t say ‘Thank you for your service’ to veterans whose only contribution to humanity has been helping to murder people for imperialist fossil fuel control agendas and Raytheon profit margins. Say ‘Thank you for your service’ to your local cashier. To do the former is to participate in a cruel collective propaganda operation which only encourages more young people to hurl their bodies into the gears of the US war machine in search of the respect and honor you’re displaying, while to do the latter is to thank someone for actually providing a crucial service to human beings.

The malfunction in Penn’s mind is the result of many malignant factors, but among them is the fact that people who rise to fame and fortune naturally experience a gravitational pull toward elitist echo chambers which cultivate narratives that favor the status quo which gave rise to their fame and fortune. You have a hard time hanging out with normal people because most of them don’t treat you normally anymore, so you find yourself spending time with other rich and famous people, and with people who have a vested interest in the rich and famous.

This dynamic naturally fosters an environment where celebrities are eager to believe positive stories about the system which favors them, and where narrative managers are eager to circulate those stories among influential voices. This is why, with very few exceptions, the closest you’ll ever get to seeing a Hollywood celebrity express an anti-establishment opinion is one of them saying “Fuck Trump” at the Tony Awards. It’s also why every few weeks you’ll see some celebrity tweet something disgusting and then go into a meltdown when thousands of ordinary people react with revulsion; they don’t have ordinary people in their lives giving them feedback on what’s normal anymore, all they have is the elitist echo chamber.

This echo chamber is what led a group of self-quarantining celebrities to believe it would be an awesome idea to share a video compilation where they all badly sing lines from John Lennon’s “Imagine” from inside their mansions with a world full of people who’ve been laid off from their jobs and

are terrified for their futures. The figuratively and literally tone-deaf video was universally panned and people have been mocking it on social media ever since its release, which probably would have come as a surprise to the celebrities themselves since nothing in their insulated day-to-day lives would have told them they could all be collectively rejected with such disgust.

The celebrity “Imagine” project was spearheaded by Israeli actress Gal Gadot, who as an IDF veteran would not have required any Hollywood echo chambering to have undergone deep psychological programming in favor of the empire. Gadot, who famously came under fire for publicly cheerleading the 2014 Gaza massacre, first shared the video on Instagram with the caption “We are in this together, we will get through it together. Let’s imagine together. Sing with us.” Memesters have of course been having fun with this.

Then you’ve got celebrities like Rob Reiner:

“No more fucking around. We’re standing on a precipice. Time to consider a Federal lockdown.”

Reiner is one of the more ham-fisted of the right-wing Democrats who we first saw promoting Russia hysteria, and are now promoting drastic totalitarian measures from their high-profile platforms. If you still hadn’t seen these people for what they are yet, you should definitely be seeing them now.

It is an absolute guarantee that powerful people will use this panic to advance authoritarian measures which they have no intention of rolling back once the Wuhan Flu news cycle is over. They are working to do this currently. This is not a possibility, this is an absolute certainty. We need to make sure we slam on the brakes long before we yield any more ground to the authoritarians than they’ve already shored up over the years. And we need to loudly shout down any celebrities who try to tell us otherwise.

Hollywood is a giant propaganda mill which when it isn’t cranking out movies which are literally funded and controlled by the US war machine is putting on spectacular ninety-minute ‘The global world order is perfectly sane and capitalism is totally working’ infomercial presentations. It is an arm of cultural control which is unrivaled by anything else in this world, so of course it has powerful forces at work within it ensuring status quo loyalism.

Whoever controls the narrative controls the world, and Hollywood celebrities are psyops wrapped in human skin. May our collective disgust with them continue to grow.

The problem is, when this is all said and done, what narrative-mongers seem so often to ignore, likely because they never pay any real price, is that

everything they do has consequences. Words have power, framing has power; they know this, that is why they write and speak the way they do. To use that power so frivolously, carelessly, manipulatively—it's unacceptable.

When the Wuhan Flu panic has finally been exposed for what it is, what remains is the terror, the stress, the fear, manufactured by you sniveling scyphantic propagandists. And you'll all rush to defend your actions, not a fucking one of you will admit that you were wrong—the type of wrong where you just go the fuck away for awhile and reflect on what you've done. No, you'll spin, you'll blame, 'how could we have known?' There were voices telling you, in real time, from the start, how wrong you were. You silenced, marginalized, mocked those voices. That was you. You did that, this is your fault. Your one job is to ensure full understanding of issues, not just an understanding that furthers your own agenda. You can have an agenda—we certainly do—but show some fucking humility for fucks sake.

The common cold, as its name indicates, is the most common human infectious disease and affects people all over the globe. Adults have typically two to three infections per year, and children even more. Rates of symptomatic infections increase in the elderly due to reduced defense mechanisms. Over 200 virus types are implicated, the main ones being rhino-, corona-, adeno- and entero-viruses as well as influenza, parainfluenza, human respiratory syncytial and metapneumoviruses.

Studies out of different countries were reviewed, showing that coronaviruses are present year after year in 7–15% of winter respiratory tract infections (RTI). Every year indeed, these common cold viruses invade the planet in wintertime of the northern hemisphere and mutate to get entry into our organisms, and reproduction inside our cells. We are thus dealing with a cyclic viral planetary invasion with high contagious capacity, in this sense a pandemic, which, because it is so well known and most of the time benign, activates no significant fears in the population and most of the time low interest from microbiologists.

Like SARS of 2002–2003 and the MERS virus of 2012, the Wuhan Flu is a coronavirus which is thought to have mutated from an animal. The next essential characteristic of a virus, after its contagiousness, is its lethality for the human population. A study just published finds that common (i.e. pre-Wuhan Flu mutation) coronaviruses had in France an estimated mortality of 0.8% in 2016. They analyzed, in addition, four common coronavirus strains between 2013 and 2020, which had mortalities between 0.36% and 2.7% (381 other corona strains diagnosed before 2017 were not assigned to this study). The Wuhan Flu displays no higher mortality than its older companions. It must be realized, however, that viral RTIs can be threatening to old, sick, and weakened human beings. The mortality rate of the common cold can

go as high as 8% in elderly nursing homes.

We have at the time no idea of the presence (prevalence) of the Wuhan Flu in the human population. The journal *Le Monde* published a detailed review of 26 countries showing on average 10% of tests being positive, and others cite values between 10–15%. Recall that the presence of common cold coronaviruses in yearly RTIs worldwide is 7–15%. Common cold viruses display a high contagiousness level, due among other factors to the fact that a large majority of their infections, estimated between 80% and 99.5%, are non- or mildly-symptomatic.

As around 20–40% of the population get an RTI in winter, we are led to the conclusion that a very large proportion of the population must harbor common cold viruses including the Wuhan Flu corona strain. Confirming this line of thought, some studies are suggesting that a large part of the population has already been infected by the Wuhan Flu, going through a mild or an asymptomatic infection.

Stress has been shown to be at the source of cell losses in the limbic (behavioral) brain of animals. It is in position to activate excitotoxic, oxidative, immunological, inflammatory, endocrine and vegetative mechanisms, and to cause in certain conditions the potentially fatal failure of multiple organs. One such situation has been described by ethnologists in the context of a ritual performed by the “kurdaitcha man.” It is called “pointing the bone” and causes the so-called “self-willed death,” or “bone-pointing syndrome.” A ritual bone is pointed at the victim, which activates the effect of a “spear of thought” and kills the cursed person over days to weeks, without great suffering. This ritual may have served kurdaitcha men over the millennia when a member of their community would become dangerous. The power of an idea and its related emotion, i.e. fear, is exemplified here in a most impressive and definitive way.

We propose to consider the possibility, in the context of the Wuhan Flu crisis, that a planetary ‘spear of thought’ loaded with fear and capable to kill is active now and threatens the whole of mankind, inducing among other things the development of alveolar and interstitial pneumopathy (AIP) and provoking fear-based chain reactions all over the world. Pre-existing and facilitating factors may be the threat of human extinction by a killer virus as shown impressively in disaster movies, and a current feeling of a doomed and dismal planetary state due to pollution. Images have been displayed all over the world of bad science fiction scenes, with human silhouettes installed in beds surrounded by alien-looking fully masked and dressed-up doctors and nurses, dead streets swept with gross disinfectant systems, the close-up picture of the initiating Chinese doctor with panicky eyes over a ventilation device, “state of war” declarations to the virus by politicians, faked Italian

(but just like all capitalist propaganda, we're sure they've adapted this trope to whatever country you reside in) messages as the one from a mother wanting to convince her child to stay home, emergency military tents filled with persons waiting for the verdict of their test, et cetera.

In addition, it is interesting to consider that both SARS in 2003 and the MERS in 2012 were coronaviruses: they may have paved the way toward a sensitivity of the human environment to a respiratory threat. They were rated as dangerous because they had a high mortality, although their propagation was very limited with a death toll of 770 (SARS) and 850 (MERS) patients worldwide.

The elements for panic generation were in place: death by a killer virus, economic failure and chaos, loss of familial and social support, loss of freedom and isolation due to lockdown measures, helplessness, uncertain future for the human civilization, and the overwhelming fear of losing a loved one without being able to say goodbye. Like the man cursed by the pointing of the bone of the kurdaitcha, the current spear of thought seems to be able to hit different body targets and induce multiple organ failure: for example, cardiomyopathy is described in the high percentage of 33% of Italian patients. Fear and anxiety are felt typically at the cardio-respiratory level, with dyspnea (choking feeling) and heart palpitations.

Let us imagine a person, for example in the north of Italy in February 2020, breathing in some of the most dirty air in the country, coughing and unwell from an RTI. An immediate fear of getting infected by the Wuhan Flu virus arises and dominates his mind. Of course, I take here the example of a man, as the infection risk is higher for males—or so they say! He heard, announced the day before by the WHO, that this virus kills more than the flu (against which he is vaccinated, being 70 years old). He knows that policemen closed the village where he lives, forbidding entry and exit. Being a good citizen, he announces that he suspects a Wuhan flu infection and is taken to the local hospital. At arrival, he is placed in a probably uncomfortable and cold tent, in the middle of other fearful citizens, and his Wuhan Flu test is performed. Other people cough around him, and he waits for the sentence. His heart beats hard and it seems that he cannot breathe well.

His test being positive, he is taken into the hospital by an efficient but stressed medical team, and gets surrounded by masked nurses. He realizes that he is now no longer free to leave this whole nightmare, to get back home. Panic raises its dreadful head, and his defense mechanisms fall down, opening the way to a full-blown—and at his age threatening—viral infection. In this state, our patient may experience one of the three following scenarios:

1. He keeps an upper RTI, with a bit of fever, a solid cough through bronchitis, some difficulty to swallow, and a full nose. He is kept isolated in the hospital, the staff remains efficient but stressed, very busy and distant, and he stays alone with his fears to get full-blown choking feelings leading so many to the intensive care unit and ventilator. He cannot get visits from his family and he stays sick with a solid RTI for the next two weeks. Most probably, this experience will stay imprinted forever in his emotional brain.
2. His age, his long-standing suboptimal pulmonary function, his significant obesity, precipitate a bronchopneumonia with combined viral development and bacterial secondary infection by nosocomial germs, leading to death in a few days. He dies without a last contact with his wife and children.
3. The viral attack on his pulmonary system is moderate and the tissues there begin to recover in the proper manner over a week. He keeps a deep feeling of fear and doom, dyspnea arises, a scan is performed showing the presence of an AIP, and he is taken to the intensive care unit. Over the next few days, the 'spear of thought' proceeds flying, his pre-existing suboptimal health state limits his resources to overcome the reanimation phase, secondary infections arise, heart failure and failure of other organs develop and he dies, far away from his family.

No matter what, around him and at home, other patients suffering from other health problems are treated suboptimally, all energy, material and staff being concentrated on the Wuhan Flu crisis. It is easy to understand how hospital staffs will be submitted to a huge overload:

1. Worried people flow into hospitals, increasing the workload of the medical and nursing teams.
2. Teams are reduced by the absence of burned-out collaborators, by the quarantine of others, and in some situations by the ones kept away by the closing of borders. Again stress and panic develop and create the pervasive impression of exceptional and uncontrollable chaos.

The existence of SARS and MERS episodes in 2003 and 2012 could point to the possibility of mutations of the Wuhan Flu toward a particular pulmonary affinity. Three same or similar, allegedly random mutations are however not likely, and we favor in this context the hypothesis mentioned above of sensitivity of the human environment to a respiratory threat, a spear of thought loaded with fear and threatening the whole human planet.

Of course, you run something through thousands of weasels enough times and who knows what comes out the other side. . .

A dominant characteristic of fear is to always favor information that maintains or amplifies it and repress information which does not. Could it be the reason why the Scandinavian experience is rarely mentioned and if yes, qualified as being nonethical, without discussion of the pros and cons and the risk/benefit ratio of the confinement approach? Fear does not allow good science to be performed, and we badly need good science, now and tomorrow.

We have been given a very clear narrative about the declared Wuhan Flu pandemic. The UK State has passed legislation, in the form of the Coronavirus Act, to compel people to self isolate and practice social distancing in order to delay the spread of the Wuhan Flu. We are told this “lockdown,” a common prison term, is essential. The mainstream media (MSM) have been leading the charge to cast anyone who questions the State’s Wuhan Flu narrative as putting lives at risk. The claim being that questioning what we are told by the State, its officials, and the MSM undermines the lockdown. The lockdown is, we are told, essential to save lives.

It is, however, possible both to support the precautionary principle and question the lockdown. Questioning the scientific and statistical evidence base, supposedly justifying the complete removal of our civil liberties, does not mean those doing so care nothing for their fellow citizens. On the contrary, many of us are extremely concerned about the impact of the lockdown on everyone. It is desperately sad to see people blindly support their own house arrest while attacking anyone who questions the necessity for it. The knee jerk reaction—assuming any questioning of the lockdown demonstrates a cavalier, uncaring disregard—is puerile. Grown adults shouldn’t simply believe everything they are told like mindless idiots. Critical thinking and asking questions is never ‘bad’ under any circumstances whatsoever.

If a system cannot withstand questioning it suggests it is built upon shaky foundations and probably not worth maintaining. Yet perhaps it is what we are not told that is more telling. Among the many things we are not told is how many lives the lockdown will ruin and end prematurely. Are these lives irrelevant? Where are the flashy models and the virtuous tweets and the think-pieces and the outraged questioning by media during press briefings? We are not told that the numbers of deaths reportedly caused by the Wuhan Flu is statistically vague, seemingly deliberately so; we are not told that these deaths are within the normal range of excess winter mortality; we are not told that in previous years excess winter deaths have been higher than they are now. We didn’t need to destroy the economy in response to those periods of loss so why do we need to do so for this?

Before we address what we are not being told, it's worth looking at how the MSM is spreading disinformation. On February 22nd one rag printed a story which absurdly alleged, without a shred of evidence, that Russia was somehow deliberately spreading disinformation about the Wuhan Flu. It reported this uncritically, questioning nothing. Their opening paragraph read:

“Thousands of Russian-linked social media accounts have launched a coordinated effort to spread misinformation and alarm about the Wuhan Flu, disrupting global efforts to fight the epidemic, US officials have said.”

On March 10th the same rag reported another story about disinformation in which it was noted:

“Disinformation experts say, there remains little evidence of concerted efforts to spread falsehoods about the virus, suggesting that the misleading information in circulation is spread primarily through grassroots chatter.”

The irony shouldn't be overlooked. Directly contradicting their own previous disinformation, this MSM pulp assumes we are all so stupid we won't notice their perpetual spin and evidence-free claims. The UK's national broadcaster—the BBC—is perhaps the worst of all the disinformation propagandists. The sheer volume of disinformation they are pumping out is quite breathtaking.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights spells out what freedom of expression means. All human beings are born free with equal dignity and rights. All are afforded these rights without any distinction at all. Article 19 states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

The BBC, who obviously couldn't care less about human rights, gleefully supported the censorship of so called conspiracy theorist David Icke. They did so by spreading disinformation. Icke raised concerns about the possible link between 5G and the spread of the Wuhan Flu. He did not incite violence, as suggested in the BBC's disinformation. The BBC misled the public utterly when they stated:

“Conspiracy theories linking 5G signals to the Wuhan Flu pandemic continue to spread despite there being no evidence the mobile phone signals pose a health risk.”

While I agree with the BBC that there is no evidence of a link between 5G and the Wuhan Flu, we certainly can't rule it out. Because the second half of their statement, that there is no evidence that mobile signals pose a health risk, was a mendacious deceit. There is a wealth of evidence of that risk. The leading medical journal *The Lancet* noted these risks in 2018:

“... mounting scientific evidence suggests that prolonged exposure to radiofrequency electromagnetic radiation has serious biological and health effects.”

Why are the BBC so willing to mislead the public and expose them to unnecessary health harms? Is it deliberate or are they just shoddy journalists? Either way, quite clearly they are habitual peddlers of disinformation. They appear to no better than the worst clickbait sites that have proliferated over recent years. The MSM is responsible for the majority of misinformation and disinformation circulating at the moment. We must diligently verify every claim they make and check the evidence ourselves. They are not to be trusted. As the BBC quite rightly points out:

1. Stop Before You Share
2. Check Your Sources
3. Pause if You Feel Emotional

Some additional tips: If it's the MSM check to see if they offer any evidence at all or if it's just their opinion. If it's their opinion, ignore it. It's almost certainly unfounded. And, if you do feel emotional you have probably just been manipulated by the MSM.

I don't know about you, but I remain unconvinced by the evidence I've seen so far. I have no doubt that there is a health crisis and excess seasonal deaths, but I have seen no evidence at all that the numbers are unprecedented or unusual in any way. I accept that we should exercise the precautionary principle and take steps to limit the risks to the most vulnerable but I do not accept that the lockdown is the best way to go about it. Nor do I see any necessity at all for all the other dictatorial clauses in the Coronavirus Act. I do not consent.

If you think this will all be over soon and won't get worse, I'm afraid you may be disappointed. The UK state have based this lockdown on the scientific rubbish spewed out by ICL. Here's one of the ICL's recommendations:

“The major challenge of suppression is that this type of intensive intervention package—or something equivalently effective at reducing transmission—will need to be maintained until a vaccine becomes available (potentially 18 months or more).”

There is nothing to suggest this isn't the intention of the State. Certainly voices in the US are already indicating their desire for an 18-month lockdown—apparently taking their cue directly from the discredited ICL report and steadfastly ignoring everything else. Nor should we assume the draconian powers seized by the state won't get worse.

Most of this response is being driven by globalist policy emanating, on this occasion, from the World Health Organization. Speaking at the daily WHO press briefing Dr. Michael Ryan, Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, said:

“Lockdowns and shutdowns really should just be part of an overall comprehensive strategy. Most of the transmission that's actually happening in many countries now is happening in the household at family level. Now we need to go and look in families to find those people who may be sick and remove them and isolate them in a safe and dignified manner.”

Given that we now live in a de facto dictatorship there's no reason to believe that states across the globe won't use this as justification to start removing people from their homes. My hope is that sense will prevail and, as it becomes clear the pandemic is waning, public pressure will mount to repeal this dictatorial legislation. However, given some of the comments I have seen on social media over the last two weeks, the panic buying, and attacks upon anyone questioning the State's narrative, it seems many people are so frightened they desperately need to believe the State is trying to save them.

This fear is based upon apparent ignorance of the economic severity of the lockdown and the monumental health risk it poses. People don't seem to want to know there is considerable doubt the Coronavirus Act is even legal in international law. There is also doubt that the Wuhan Flu is an identifiable virus and the statistics we are given may well be based upon tests that can't identify it anyway. There is evidence that the statistics we have been given have been deliberately manipulated to exaggerate the health risk and there is no evidence these excess deaths are “unprecedented.”

Effectively, a small group of policy decision makers have placed an estimated 3.5 billion people under house arrest. It is only possible for them to do so with our consent. Consent is carefully cultivated by controlling the

information we are given. For the vast majority their only source of information is the corporate mainstream media and the public announcements of the State. Evidence strongly suggests the State and the MSM, adhering to a globalist agenda, have colluded to mislead the public into believing the Wuhan Flu threat is far greater than it actually is.

The Wuhan Flu can be fatal for those with pre-existing comorbidities, and possibly even some without, as can other forms of pneumonia and influenza-like respiratory illness. However, while every Wuhan Flu death has been reported, none of the far greater number of people who have died in this year from other respiratory infections have even been mentioned.

Systems have been created to ensure the Wuhan Flu statistics are as terrifying as possible. Their statistical product is so vague it borders upon meaningless. It seems we have been inculcated with misplaced fear to justify the lockdown regime, to convince us to accept it and prepare us for what is to come.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is financed through a combination of assessed and voluntary contributions. Assessed contributions are paid by nation states for WHO membership and figures are released quarterly. Voluntary contributions are additional contributions from member states and “other partners.” For some reason these figures haven’t been reported for more than three years. About 80% of the WHO’s finances come from voluntary contributions. In its most recent 2017 voluntary contribution report the WHO accounted for the \$2.1 billion it received from private foundations and global corporations. This compared to just over \$1 billion voluntarily provided by governments. Contributors included GlaxoSmithKline, Bayer AG, Sanofi, Merck and Gilead Sciences whose drug remdesivir is currently being trialed, alongside the off-patent hydroxychloroquine, as a possible preventative treatment for the Wuhan Flu. The remdesivir trial is part of the WHO’s SOLIDARITY trials. The third-largest single contributor in 2017 was GAVI. Formerly called the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, they contributed nearly \$134 million. GAVI are partnered with the WHO, UNICEF, the Gates Foundation and the World Bank to sell vaccines globally. The World Bank contributed nearly \$146 million themselves and the largest individual payment, by some margin, at nearly \$325 million came from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Though like many other foundations and corporations, through their various networks of interlinked partnerships, their overall contribution was much higher.

Among other beneficiaries of the Gates Foundation’s generosity are the Vaccine Impact Modeling Consortium (VIMC) led by Professor Neil Ferguson. They are based at Imperial College London and are directly funded by the Gates Foundation and GAVI. Their objective is to provide

statistical data analysis for the Gates Foundation and GAVI in order for them to sell more vaccines. Ferguson not only led the team who created the hopelessly inaccurate prediction which the US and UK governments based their lockdown regimes upon, he also co-founded the MRC Centre for Outbreak Analysis and Modeling which worked with the WHO in 2009 to create ridiculous computer models predicting the H1N1 pandemic.

In 2009 the world went crazy after the WHO declared the H1N1 influenza pandemic. This resulted in billions being spent on very expensive H1N1 vaccines and antiviral treatments although it turned out the pandemic was indistinguishable from seasonal flu. The only people who benefited from pointless vaccines and unnecessary medication were the manufacturers GlaxoSmithKline, Roche, and Novartis. Each of these pharmaceutical corporations were among the largest voluntary contributors to the WHO in FY2008–2009. With an \$84 million investment, the Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche were the largest single contributor into the WHO's coffers that year. Luckily, as it turned out, they could afford it because sales of their unnecessary Tamiflu H1N1 medication rocketed to more than £3 billion following the WHO's declared H1N1 pandemic. Which was just a coincidence. The whole debacle resulted in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) launching an investigation into the WHO to look into the issue of a "falsified pandemic."

"The WHO basically held the trigger for the pandemic preparedness plans, they had a key role to play in deciding on the pandemic. Around 18 billion dollars was spent on this pandemic worldwide. Millions were vaccinated for no good reason. It is not even clear that the vaccine had a positive effect, because it was not clinically tested."

"A number of scientists and others are questioning the decision of the WHO to declare an international pandemic. The H1N1 virus is not a new virus, but has been known to us for decades. In Germany, about 10,000 deaths are attributed to seasonal 'flu,' especially among older and frail people. Only a very small number of deaths, namely 187, can be attributed to the H1N1 virus in Germany—and many of those are dubious."

Of course nothing came of it because PACE were making allegations against the World Health Organization. The WHO don't break the rules, they make the rules. Amazingly, probably because no one ever learns anything from history—with the help of a for-profit media which fails

consistently to provide actual informative context—we all believed the WHO this time.

To imagine these huge investments made by pharmaceutical corporations and private foundations don't buy influence is so naive it barely warrants mention. The WHO is essentially a policy lobby group for the powerful globalists who own it. Why an organization with such significant and clear conflicts of financial interests should be considered a global health authority is anyone's guess.

“WHO continues to call on all countries to implement a comprehensive approach with the aim of slowing down transmission and flattening the curve. This approach is saving lives and buying time for the development of vaccines and treatments. As you know, the first vaccine trial has begun. This virus is presenting us with an unprecedented threat”

The Wuhan Flu is not an unprecedented threat.

Everyday, for weeks, the MSM has reported every single UK death which was supposedly due to the Wuhan Flu. This has been central to their effort to convince us of the severity of the pandemic. The reporting always supports the State's narrative that the lockdown is necessary.

Under normal circumstances, when someone dies, a person who knows them well, such as a family member, or someone who was physically close to the person at the time of death, is the qualified informant who can notify the registrar of the circumstances and non-medical details of the death. That is not true for suspected the Wuhan Flu patients. For them a funeral director, who has almost certainly never met the deceased, can be the qualified informant. This places far more emphasis on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) as registration can take place without any input from family or anyone else familiar with the circumstances of the death.

When an MCCD is completed the medical causes are listed sequentially with the immediate cause of death at the top and the underlying cause of death at the bottom of the list. For example, heart failure caused by pneumonia stemming from influenza would list the immediate cause of death as a 'heart attack' and the underlying cause as 'influenza.' That underlying cause is usually diagnosed through positive test results. It is crucial to understand that for the Wuhan Flu to be recorded on the MCCD as the underlying cause of death, there does not need to be any test-based diagnosis of the syndrome. Diagnosis can simply be from observation of symptoms or CT scans.

Even when a sample test is undertaken to identify the Wuhan Flu, questions remain. The RT-PCR test commonly used to test for the Wuhan Flu does not appear to be very reliable, nor is it designed as a diagnostic tool for identifying viruses. A study found wild variations in RT-PCR accuracy. It was found to be between 22–80% reliable depending on how it was applied. This general unreliability has been confirmed by other studies. Further studies show clear discrepancies between RT-PCR test results and clinical indication from CT scans.

Most of these studies indicate RT-PCR failure to detect the Wuhan Flu in symptomatic patients, so-called “false negative” tests. When Chinese researchers conducted data analysis of the RT-PCR tests of asymptomatic patients they also found an 80% false positive rate. Having passed peer review and publication, the paper was subsequently withdrawn for what seem quite bizarre reasons. It was removed from the scientific literature because it “depended on theoretical deduction.” The paper was not testing an experimental hypothesis, it was an epidemiological analysis of the available statistical data. All such statistical analysis relies upon theoretical deduction. The claimed reason for withdrawal suggests that all data analysis is now considered to be completely useless. It seems scientific claims that the Wuhan Flu numbers are underestimated are fine, claims they are overestimated are not. Either way, whether false negative or false positive, there is plenty of evidence to question the reliability of the RT-PCR test for diagnosing the Wuhan Flu.

The MSM has suggested that enhanced RT-PCR testing can detect the virus and, in particular, the amount of it in the patient’s system, the viral load. This is disinformation.

“Quantitative PCR is an oxymoron. PCR is intended to identify substances qualitatively, but by its very nature is unsuited for estimating viral load. These tests cannot detect free, infectious viruses at all. The tests can detect genetic sequences of viruses, but not viruses themselves.”

Reported Wuhan Flu deaths can be registered without a test clearly diagnosing any coronavirus, let alone the Wuhan Flu. The death can be signed off by a doctor who has never seen the patient and can then be registered by someone who has never met the deceased and was nowhere near them when they died. Further provisions then allow for the body to be cremated, potentially against the family’s wishes, ensuring a confirmatory autopsy is impossible, though it is unlikely one will be conducted anyway.

To say this raises questions about the official reported statistics is an understatement. Questions in no way allege either medical malpractice or

negligence. Neither are required for significant confusion to occur because the potential for widespread misreporting of causes of death seems to be a core element of the Wuhan Flu MCCD process the State has constructed.

As I write, the UK is said to have 93,873 cases with 12,107 deaths attributed to the Wuhan Flu. Both the infection and mortality rates are showing a declining trend. Coupled with the data which shows unusually low hospital admissions, with little to no evidence of the widely anticipated “surge,” justification for the State’s lockdown of society and the economy appears painfully thin. The evidence base does not improve when we look at the official data.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) have released analysis of the Wuhan Flu deaths that occurred during March 2020. In total 3,912 deaths were recorded of which 3,372 (86%) listed the Wuhan Flu as the underlying cause of death. Of these, 38 (1%) were cases where the Wuhan Flu was only suspected as the underlying cause, meaning neither a test nor any clear clinical presentation was observed. The problem is that the RT-PCR test, supposedly confirming the Wuhan Flu, doesn’t tell us much either. Of the 3,372 deaths recorded with underlying the Wuhan Flu, approximately 3,068 had at least one comorbidity with the majority having more than two. Not only does the RT-PCR test fail to provide any reliable proof that these people even had the Wuhan Flu, the existence of other comorbidities provides further reason to question if the Wuhan Flu was a contributory factor. Of the 3,912 people who died, 540 of them merely mentioned the Wuhan Flu on the MCCD with no indication that it contributed to the deaths. With at least 91% of patients having comorbidities, there is very little evidence that the people who died with a Wuhan Flu infection wouldn’t have died without. The age profile of the deceased is practically identical to standard all cause mortality in the UK. If the Wuhan Flu is a viral pandemic it is one that behaves like normal mortality.

And yet, despite all this, the MSM reported every one of them to the public as confirmed Wuhan Flu deaths.

Another, perhaps even more alarming possibility has arisen. While heart disease accounts for 14% of the Wuhan Flu comorbidities, reported deaths from heart disease have mysteriously dropped by the corresponding amount during the same period. This clearly indicates that patients dying from other causes, such as heart failure, are being recorded, and certainly reported by the MSM, as dying from the Wuhan Flu. This illustrates a far more complex picture than we have been given to believe. Why have the State and the MSM made so many alarming claims about people dying from the Wuhan Flu when the evidence supporting those claims is, at best, questionable?

None of this is the fault of medical practitioners or bodies like the Office

of National Statistics (ONS). The ONS system has been both reliable and informative for many years. Yet once again, in the case of Wuhan Flu deaths, the State felt it was necessary to make some changes. On March 30th the MSM reported that the UK State had instructed the ONS to change the way they record Wuhan Flu deaths. This habit of states deciding to change the Wuhan Flu mortality data, by adding in people who are assumed to have died from it, appears to be a global policy. The China CDC did the same and the US have added a significant number to their statistics.

In every case the revision increases and never decreases the fatality statistics. Why do states around the world feel the need to do this? Is it because they are concerned about statistical rigour or are they more concerned about justifying their lockdown regimes?

The ONS reported all cause mortality for week 14 ending April 3rd. They recorded 16,387 deaths which was 6,082 higher than the ONS 5-year average. They stated that 21.2% of total deaths “mentioned” the Wuhan Flu. The MSM immediately pounced on this claiming this meant the Wuhan Flu had pushed up the death toll to unprecedented levels. This was outrageous disinformation. That is not what the data showed.

The ONS stated that of the 6,082 excess deaths 3,475 “mentioned” the Wuhan Flu. Of those 1,466 also mentioned influenza and pneumonia. Consequently, while registered deaths are 6,082 above the 5-year average, only 2,009 of those solely mentioned the Wuhan Flu with 4,073 mentioning other underlying causes. It is worth remembering only the Wuhan Flu deaths can be ‘mentioned’ without a clear positive test result.

Therefore, at least 67% of that excess mortality is being caused by other unknown factors that no one seems to care about. The MSM have absolutely no interests at all in this more severe health crisis. Why not? Once again they have completely misled the public and deny the existence of another, more significant reason for concern. Perhaps anticipating this the ONS stated:

“‘Influenza and Pneumonia’ has been included for comparison, as a well-understood cause of death involving respiratory infection that is likely to have somewhat similar risk factors to the Wuhan Flu.”

For the year to date, the ONS showed a comparison of the deaths mentioning the Wuhan Flu and deaths mentioning pneumonia and Influenza. Deaths this year from pneumonia and influenza appear to stand at around 30,000. Quite clearly, according to the ONS, other respiratory infections, like pneumonia and influenza, currently pose a significantly greater threat to

life than the Wuhan Flu. Something is certainly pushing up mortality in the UK but, at the very most, only 33% of that increase is vaguely attributable to the Wuhan Flu. Short of openly stating that the Wuhan Flu is no more deadly than any other pneumonia like illnesses, the ONS appear to be trying to get a message across. Perhaps they can't say it directly.

As the so called pandemic has progressed, more in-depth studies have begun to emerge. Initial findings from Chinese scientists indicate that the Wuhan Flu has an "infection fatality rate" (IFR) of between 0.04% and 0.12%. which is comparable to flu pandemics with an estimated IFR of 0.1%. None of these have required a lockdown regime. Further studies have highlighted the overestimated risk allegedly presented by the Wuhan Flu.

The MSM have recently started floating the idea that the lockdown regime could become "the new normal." According to the State it may be necessary to go in and out of various levels of the regime from time to time, depending on the State's threat assessment. This is based on scientific research bought and paid for by pharmaceutical corporations and private foundations including GlaxoSmithKline (Wellcome Trust). Seeing as it is increasingly evident that the Wuhan Flu threat has been massively overhyped, why would the State and its globalist partners want the economic destruction to continue? Because it delivers on a number of long held globalist objectives: a cashless society, mandatory vaccination, universal basic income, a surveillance state, restricted freedom of movement, and a complete restructuring of the global economy have already been touted as necessary following the pandemic. All of these ambitions and economic realities existed before the pandemic first emerged in China.

The State and Big Tech have already moved towards censoring anyone who questions vaccines. It is vital to understand that the canard of the antivaxxer is a meaningless trope. It is entirely possible to accept that vaccines can contribute towards effective preventative public health programs while, at the same time, questioning the efficacy and purpose of some vaccines. Vaccines are not all the same. The State's and the MSM's insistence that anyone who question any vaccines is some sort of whacked out, new age, science Luddite is total nonsense. No one will be permitted to question vaccines, and that fact alone should be sufficient to raise anyone's suspicion.

From GAVI to the WHO and from the Gates Foundation to Imperial College the response to the Wuhan Flu pandemic has been driven by foundations and pharmaceutical corporations with considerable investments in vaccine development. Of course they would like to see global mandatory vaccination. To just ignore this, because you've been told by the MSM that questioning any vaccine is a "conspiracy theory," not only evidences a lack of critical thinking, it demonstrates a degree of brainwashing.

Global financial institutions, such as the IMF, have been advocating the cashless society for years. A cashless society will allow central banks to control every aspect of your life. Everything you buy can be tracked and your purchases could easily be limited to exclude certain items. Although there is very little evidence that handling cash presents any increased threat of infection, that hasn't stopped the MSM from selling the idea.

In a cashless society, people who don't behave in accordance with State regulations, could be punished financially. Instant fines will be commonplace. We are already seeing how that control can be deployed within a surveillance society as the State and its compliant MSM put the idea of immunity passports into the public imagination. The link between this and mandatory vaccination is obvious. This proposed policy comes straight from the heart of the globalist think tanks.

ID2020 is a globalist initiative which intends to provide everyone on earth with an authorized identity. GAVI, Microsoft, the Gates Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation are among the happy ID2020 alliance who will decide who you are allowed to be. Biometric ID controlled by your friendly ID2020 globalists—Because they care! Comically they claim that proving who you are to the State is somehow a human right. This is utter bullshit. I don't know about you, but I know who I am and so do the people I care about. I couldn't care less who the State thinks I am. Like everyone else on Earth, you were born with inalienable human rights. The State doesn't define what they are, they just choose to ignore them. ID2020 is in no way objective. Your digital biometric ID can be 'good' which means it can also be 'bad.'

“With a 'good' digital identity you can enjoy your rights to privacy, security, and choice.”

Which means you can't if its 'bad.' As long as you are a good citizen, do as you are told, get your mandatory vaccinations and don't step out of line, you can have your rights because megalomaniacs think they are gods who have the power to allow or deny them. Your digital ID will control the information you are allowed to access and your immunity passport will almost certainly be part of your State authorized identity as we move towards something indistinguishable from China's social credit system.

It will be used to monitor your behaviour. Your immunity passport status will depend upon where you go and who with. The State has decided that we all need contact tracing apps to regulate who we meet and limit our freedom of movement. If you meet the wrong person or go to the wrong

area, or perhaps fail to produce your authorization Q-code on demand, then you will be locked down, and maybe tased or beaten.

Perhaps the biggest deception of all is yet to come as the State maneuvers to blame the Wuhan Flu for the economic collapse. The impact of the lockdown regime across the globe has already had a devastating economic impact. All the indicators are that the regime will throw the global economy into a deep depression. The longer it continues the worse it will get. The tendency of some to claim this doesn't matter because saving life is the only concern is hopelessly myopic. The link between poverty and significantly increased mortality is beyond dispute. The cure will definitely be far worse than the disease. As millions are forced into unemployment the outlook isn't good. However, while the State will undoubtedly claim that unemployment has been caused by the Wuhan Flu crisis, in truth the imminent economic collapse was already driving up unemployment before the crisis began.

It isn't the Wuhan Flu but rather the lockdown regime that has sped up destruction of the economy—but that destruction was inevitable anyway. The 2008 credit crunch was a failure of the banks. They speculated in the markets and lost. As a result we have endured a decade of austerity to bail them out. Socialism only applies to those who can afford it. Austerity has reduced essential public services to rubble, and now, when we supposedly need them most, we've all been placed under house arrest to stop us using them while many of the most vulnerable have been ignored. The irony is laughable.

While we've all suffered austerity, the central banks have been printing funny money, blowing up the debt bubble to unimaginable proportions. The result has been increasing consumer debt, staggering levels of corporate borrowing and, though monetarily non-sovereign government deficits have reduced, government debt is off the charts, even in comparison to 2010 levels. This kind of debt-based economy was never sustainable and global financiers have known it for years.

What the globalists needed was a reason to reset the economy without losing power. Perhaps it is another coincidence that the Wuhan Flu lockdown regime just happens to deliver both the mechanism and the excuse to press that global reset button. That it also ushers in all the globalist's desires is just another in a very long line of remarkable coincidences.

Now that global terrorism is no longer a daily threat and global warming has been put on the back burner, the new normal of the ever shifting threat from pandemic seems to be the novel war on terror. Training, funding, and equipping terrorist groups has served the State well in the first two decades of the 21st century but now it is ready to move on to the next phase by exploiting a terror closer to the heart of every home: Disease.

In their totality, for those willing to look, it is transparent that these response measures have coalesced to create the framework for a totalitarian dictatorship. One rolling out at pace in the UK. Similar draconian diktats have sprung up across the globe. A coordinated global effort like this doesn't just happen. It takes years of training and planning. The only people who can't see it are those who, for whatever reason, choose not to.

As if it was planned in advance, billions of people around the globe are being forced step by rapid step into a radically different way of life, one that involves far less personal, physical, and financial freedom and agency. Here is the template for rolling this out.

Step 1: A new virus starts to spread around the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) declares a pandemic. International agencies, public-health officials, politicians, media and other influential voices fan fear by focusing almost exclusively on the contagiousness of the virus and the rising numbers of cases, and by characterizing the virus as extremely dangerous. Within a few days governments at national and local levels also declare states of emergency. At lightning speed they impose lockdown measures that confine most people to their homes—starting with closing schools—and shut down much of the global economy. World markets implode.

The stunned, fearful and credulous public—convinced over the previous few years that their bodies do not have the natural ability to react to pathogens by producing antibodies that confer long-lasting immunity—largely complies willingly.

The first weekly virtual class on local emergency and crisis responses to the Wuhan Flu is held for mayors and other city officials around the world. Coordinated by a handful of American organizations in the academic, medical, financial, political, and transportation spheres, the classes feature guests ranging from Barack Obama to Bill Gates.

Step 2: National, state/provincial, and municipal leaders, as well as public-health officials, start daily press briefings. They use them to pump out frightening statistics and modeling asserting the virus has the potential to kill many millions. Most of this information is hard to decipher and sheds little real light on the natural course of the virus's spread through each geographic area. Officials and media downplay or distort inconveniently low death tolls from the virus and instead focus on alarming statistics produced by compliant academics, social-media influencers, and high-profile organizations. The main message is that this is a war and many lives are at stake unless virtually everybody

stays at home. Mainstream media amplify the trope that the world is at the mercy of the virus.

Simultaneously, central banks and governments hand out massive amounts of cash, largely to benefit the big banks. And they bring in giant private-sector financial firms to manage the process despite these global companies' very poor track record in the 2008–2009 crash. Governments also rapidly start to create trillions of dollars worth of programs that include compensating businesses and workers for their shutdown-related losses.

Step 3: There is a concerted effort by all levels of government and public health to very rapidly ramp up testing for viral RNA, along with production of personal protective equipment. They push aside the need for regulation—including quality standards and independent verification of tests' rates of accuracy—by insisting that fast approval and roll-out are imperative for saving lives.

Models are released that predict snowballing of numbers of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths even under best-case scenarios. At about the same time, public-health officials significantly loosen the criteria for viral infections, outbreaks, and deaths, particularly for the oldest members of society. That increases the numbers of cases and deaths ascribed to the new pathogen.

The media continue to clamour for more testing and for severe punishment of people who aren't completely compliant with the lockdown measures. As a result, there's little backlash as police and military with sweeping new powers enforce these measures and give stiff penalties or even jail terms to those who disobey orders. States also monitor with impunity massive numbers of people's movements via their cell-phones. Vast human resources are focused on tracking down people who have had contact with a virus-positive individual and confining them to their homes. Thus the portion of the public exposed to the virus remains relatively small. It also contributes to social isolation. Among many effects, this enables those in control to even further erase individual and collective choices, voices, and power.

Step 4: When the numbers of cases and deaths start to plateau, local officials claim it's too early to tell whether the virus has finished passing through their population and therefore, restrictive measures must continue. An alternative narrative is that if such measures aren't kept in place there will be a resurgence of cases and deaths. Yet another

is that the continuing climb in elderly persons' deaths means all bets are off for the time being. They admit that initial models incorrectly predicted there would be a tsunami of cases, ICU admissions, and deaths. However, they assert more time is needed before it can be determined whether it's safe to loosen some of the restrictions and let children return to school or adults go back to work. Officials do not try to calculate the overall skyrocketing cost to their populations and economies of the shut-downs and other measures against, nor do they discuss what cost level may be too high.

They and powerful media organizations also push for the massive virus-testing over-capacity to be used to surveil the general population for viral DNA in their bodies. At the same time, the roll-out begins of widespread blood testing for antibodies to the virus.

Meanwhile, new data are published showing the virus has a high capacity to mutate. Scientists and officials interpret this as meaning a larger medical arsenal will be needed to combat it.

Step 5: About two or three weeks later, the dramatic increase in testing for viral DNA produces the desired goal of a significant upsurge in the number of people found positive for the virus. Public-health officials add jet fuel to the surge by adding to their case and death tallies the large number of people who are only suspected—and not lab-test-confirmed—to have had an infection. Politicians and public-health officials tell the populace this means they cannot return to their jobs or other activities outside the home for the time being.

Governments work with public-health agencies, academics, industry, the WHO and other organizations to start to design and implement immunity-passport systems for using the results of the widespread antibody testing to determine who can be released from the lockdowns. This is one of many goals of the seven steps. Meanwhile, government leaders continue to highlight the importance of vaccines for besting the virus.

Step 6: Large-scale human testing of many different types of antivirals and vaccines begins, thanks to a concerted push from the WHO, Bill Gates and his collaborators, pharmaceutical and biotech companies, governments and universities. Large swaths of the population don't have the antibodies to the virus because they've been kept from being exposed to it; they eagerly accept these medications even though they've been rushed to market with inadequate safety testing. They

believe these medical products offer the only hope for escaping the virus's clutches.

Step 7: Soon the new virus starts another cycle around the globe—just as influenza and other viruses have every year for millennia. Officials again fan the flames of fear by positing the potential for millions of deaths among people not yet protected from the virus. They rapidly roll out virus and antibody testing again, while companies sell billions more doses of antivirals and booster vaccines.

Governments simultaneously cede control of all remaining public assets to global companies. This is because local and national governments' tax bases were decimated during Step 1 and they're virtually bankrupt from their unprecedented spending in the war against the virus in the other steps.

The overall result is complete medicalization of the response to the virus, which on a population level is no more harmful than influenza. This is coupled with the creation of permanent totalitarianism controlled by global companies and a 24/7 invasive-surveillance police state supported by widespread blossoming of "smart" technology.

The key players repeat the cycle of hysteria and massive administration of antivirals and booster shots every few months. And they implement a variation of steps 1 to 7 when another new pathogen appears on the planet.

Sounds far-fetched? Unfortunately, it's not. With the arrival of the Wuhan Flu many countries quickly completed Steps 1, 2 and 3. Step 4 is well under way in a large number of jurisdictions. Step 5 is on track to start in early May.

It is fascinating, if you can, to watch the swirling narratives interact, influence, reinforce, break down. The Wuhan Flu panic is full of such displays. The first, and perhaps most important, is how well capitalism's storytelling has prepared people to overreact to such things. The latest updates become the newest chapter released for an unfinished book, and like a Game of Thrones fan desperately hoovering up every little trickle out of or about George R. R. Martin, the people search and scroll and read, desperately trying to figure out what comes next. So much of what they encounter, given the absolute infestation of Hollywood ideology into the mainstream culture, will mimic the somber, serious, dramatic tones and backdrops of 'leaders' they see in films and shows. They've got an endless array of little Aaron Sorkin wannabes churning out fanfic to choose from. Anyone straying from this narrative will be heckled, smeared, shouted down,

called a selfish narcissistic murderer—the fucking irony here is not lost on us, dear reader, as we expect it is not lost on you.

People imagine that when the boots-on-the-ground tyranny arrives, it will be enforced by the police or the military. Newsflash: the boots-on-the-ground tyranny is here, and it is being enforced by your neighbors, Joe Sixpack and Jane Soccermom. Need proof? How about all the new “snitch lines” that are opening up in city after city and state after state all around the globe to help good citizens tattle on neighbors who aren’t practicing proper social distancing?

That’s right. It’s not just guys yelling out their windows in Brooklyn anymore. Now whenever you see someone within two meters of someone else it is your duty as a loyal citizen of the Brave New World Order to actively report them to the authorities so that they can be dealt with by Big Brother. Rest assured, a score card is being compiled for each jurisdiction, and the powers-that-shouldn’t-be are keeping a list of who’s being naughty or nice (Good job, Minnesota!).

Still, while we can all unequivocally and universally agree 100% with the idea that anyone who physically approaches another human being in this Year of the Virus deserves to be charged with manslaughter for their heinous act, maybe, just maybe—and I’m just spit-balling, so forgive me if this seems brash—we’re heading into dangerous territory here. You know, what with the social distancing Stasi becoming the enforcers of our new police state nightmare and all. Call me crazy.

When 9/11 happened, there was a marked and notable intensification in the propaganda glorifying the American military. Not that such propaganda didn’t exist before, but it was nothing like what we’ve seen since “the day that changed everything.” Yes, the hero worship of veterans is one of the hallmarks of the Age of Terror that 9/11 ushered in. So if this pandemic is the new 9/11, what’s the new hero worship? Well, it should be obvious by now: Doctors are the new soldiers. Now we must dutifully show our appreciation for the brave medical workers on the front lines of this new war—or face yet more social castigation. The militarized mindset creeps into ever more crevices of daily life.

You may have noticed the interesting phenomenon making its way around the world. I call it ‘The Totally Spontaneous Balcony Applause Phenomenon.’ Yes, completely out of the blue, all the people under lockdown have decided to show their appreciation for the valiant doctors and nurses in this heroic struggle by going to their balcony at a pre-appointed time and applauding. And no, this totally spontaneous phenomenon is not just occurring in one or two countries. Or three or four countries. But in seemingly every country around the globe. Just like that. Just out of the blue. Must be something

in the zeitgeist, I guess.

Now you'll forgive me for being out of the loop, so I don't know exactly how people decide on the right time to go to their balcony to applaud. Is it done by vote? What if I'm a few minutes late? Will people think I'm clapping for something else? What exactly is the etiquette here? And what if you don't have a balcony? Aren't balconies a bit elitist?

Here's another thought-crime: I find these displays creepy and off-putting. I find the glorification of doctors and nurses unsettling. Not because I think they are all quacks. Not because I think they are all evil. Not because I am not grateful for the work that (some) doctors do (some of the time). Not because I don't recognize the enormous stress that these doctors and nurses are under right now. But because this socially engineered adoration is going to be used to push an agenda exactly like the glorification of veterans was used to push the militarism agenda of the post-9/11 years. This time, we are being asked to glorify doctors and nurses because these are the same trusted experts whose authority cannot be questioned who are going to be giving you the vaccine. You know, The Vaccine.

“We don't want to have a lot of recovered people. To be clear, we're trying—through the shutdown in the United States—to not get to one percent of the population infected. We're well below that today, but with exponentiation, you could get past that three-million people, or approximately one percent of the U.S. population, being infected with Wuhan Flu and the vast majority recovering. I believe we will be able to avoid that with having this economic pain.”

It appears that rather than let the population be exposed to the virus and have most develop antibodies that give them natural, long-lasting immunity to the Wuhan Flu, Gates and his colleagues far prefer to create a vast, hugely expensive, new system of manufacturing and selling billions of test kits, and in parallel very quickly developing and selling billions of antivirals and vaccines.

And then, when the virus comes back again a few months later and most of the population is unexposed and therefore vulnerable, selling billions more test kits and medical interventions.

Pay for success finance deals will be well served by the global vaccine market that is being advanced through Gates's outfit GAVI. Vaccine doses are readily quantifiable, and the economic costs of many illnesses are straightforward to calculate. With a few strategic grants awarded to prestigious universities and think tanks, I anticipate suitable equations framing out a

healthy ROI (return on investment) will be devised to meet global market demands shortly.

Over the past month, the gaze of investigative researchers has been fixed on GAVI, Bill Gates, Gates's associates like Fauci, and the over-size influence they are having on public health policy around the Wuhan Flu. The members of the 2012 Development Impact Bond (DIB) Working Group Report are of particular interest, since DIBs are being considered as a way to finance vaccination campaigns. Among them:

Toby Eccles founder of Social Finance and developer of the social Impact Bond

Owen Barder former Economic Aide to Tony Blair, UK AID

Elizabeth Littlefield JP Morgan, World Bank, OPIC, US Impact Investing Alliance

Vineet Bewtra Lehman Brothers, Deutsche Bank, Omidyar Network

Bob Annibale CitiGroup Community Development

Chris Egerton Warburton Goldman Sachs, Lions Head Partners

Rebecca Endean UK Research and Innovation

Kippy Joseph Rockefeller Foundation, International Development Innovation Alliance

Oliver Sabot Absolute Return On Kids (ARK, UK Charter School), The Global Fund

Steven Pierce USAID

Public health is a servant of bond markets and financiers. A glance at the participants in this working group makes it clear: doses and people and death and suffering are just going to be part of their market analysis. For too many people, openly discussing concerns about vaccines remains a third-rail. But we *do* have to learn how to talk about this to one another, because the stakes are too damn high to shy away from it. I also believe these campaigns and the tracking systems associated with them have been structured as an imperial enterprise and should be treated with profound caution.

The World Bank started promoting the use of a blockchain to track vaccine supplies as early as 2017, the same year they got into the pandemic

bond business. There is an elegant, if twisted, logic in melding vaccine supply chain tracking with blockchain digital identity/health passports. Not unlike Palantir's "philanthropic" endeavors around human trafficking. The ultimate goal of the cloud bosses is to be able to track everyone all the time—Tolkien's all-seeing eye. To be able to lay down the infrastructure of digital oppression while being lauded for humanitarian efforts will be quite a coup if they pull it off. So you have the vaccine tracked on blockchain. You have the quantum dot tattoos (health data bar codes) ready to go. You have the capacity to pressure people into setting up digital health passports linked to their electronic health record (thanks Obama). It makes perfect sense that it would all be linked together.

Total quality management, systems engineering, where the cellular structures of entire communities are unlocked and remade for profit. When I was doing my work into ed-tech, I described the process of data-mining as fracking the minds of children. This is the same thing, but in a medical context—fracking our DNA. Creating an immutable record of doses linked to specific individuals, means investors can assess the 'impact' of inoculations they fund and take their profit. This will be made possible using MIT's Enigma software, which protects "privacy" even as it mines cellular structure for "impact" and turns people into GMOs. Something I've had growing concerns about in recent weeks is knowing the Gates-backed initiatives involve the use of mRNA platforms. Moderna is one of them, and they tout their vaccine system as the "software of life."

So we know that pay for success relies on *measurable* change. We also know these platforms use synthetic biology to re-engineer humans at the molecular level. Precision medicine, while a valuable tool to use against inoperable tumors, could become a huge problem if tweaking our biomes at the population level to suit the whims of global financial markets is normalized. Genetic engineering tied to quarterly returns—now that would be grotesque.

Besides, our country has a nasty history of eugenics and unethical scientific experimentation. What protections are in place to keep "pay for performance" contracts and vaccines from being used to justify 'fixing' people that the market deems 'sub-standard' from a human capital investment point of view? It is not such a jump from taking an impact payment for preventing a projected future illness to genetic modification for more insidious purposes.

We are being conditioned to accept that there will be repeated campaigns of vaccination tied to future outbreaks. Remember, this is meant to be a "permanent crisis." Pay for success demands it. It is the crisis framework that legitimizes intrusive surveillance framed as a public benefit. In this way social systems can be regulated to conform to the expectations of global

technocrats.

Gates also funded the development of quantum dot vaccine tattoos by MIT, which act as health data bar codes viewable under certain lighting conditions. This nanotechnology is used for such diverse purposes as solar power and device displays. One of the companies developing electronic health records that are compatible with quantum dot data tattoo systems is Quantum Materials out of San Marcos, Texas. Their system runs on Azure, Microsoft's cloud computing system.

Now imagine Gates-affiliated entities profiting first from vaccine bonds, then from vaccine development, from the cloud computing software tracking the data and documenting the impact, and finally from returns on the pay for success deals. Meanwhile, the public, those who are actually supposed to be served by health policy, are instead used to generate impact data. This results in healthcare services being platformed, automated, and dehumanized. People will start to lose their humanity, seen only as data, veering into transhumanist territory after repeated system upgrades.

As I write, we can see the mounting toll of the pandemic panic as hospital systems have started to furlough workers. As a consequence, I expect we will soon see human staff reductions, and the roll out of tele-presence medical robots, and more and more doctors on screens where they can operate at a 'safe' distance, never needing a mask or to even touch their patient. It is hard to believe this is where we have arrived in the world. And yet, here we undoubtedly are.

Vaccines will be the bread and butter for impact investors; but then factor in the crushing human and economic costs of global pandemic, and suddenly you're talking real money. Imagine tallying up all the costs associated with the lockdown. That is going to create one *enormous* cost offset for investors moving forward. The longer the lockdown, the bigger the cost offset they will be able to use in "pay for success" pandemic deals. For this first round there is a certain sick market logic in making the situation as dire as possible. Future profits are riding on calculations of harm that are being tallied now.

Many have already looked into Event 201, the coronavirus table-top game Gates funded in partnership with the World Economic Forum and the Johns Hopkins Center For Health Security last October. Another funder was Open Philanthropy, started by Facebook Employee #3, Dustin Markovitz. I highly recommend checking out the videos, especially the highlight reel and the communication and finance sessions. I've seen comments dismissing concern over this event, because the tabletop game wasn't actually the Wuhan Flu, but rather a generic coronavirus. Evidently because authorities had been anticipating a pandemic event, we should just shrug off the fact that a coronavirus outbreak occurred mere months after participants checked

out of the luxury Pierre Hotel with their souvenir virus plushies. Watch the videos—the event was a spectacle. Certainly not a serious strategic venture. Even the program for the prior year’s game, Clade-X was much more buttoned-up and serious.

While the event was held in New York, there were also participants representing Australia, Canada, Switzerland, China, and the United Nations. A glance over the participant list shows high-level executives from Edelman (public relations) and NBC Universal; George Gao, director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention; as well as a number of groups, including Johnson and Johnson and GAVI, that have a stake in vaccine trials underway.

Given Gao’s presence at this event and his participation in the WHO and World Bank’s Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, one wonders at the apparent disintegration of communication channels after the game was over. If Gates, the World Economic Forum, and Johns Hopkins set up Event 201 with the goal of fostering the creation of an integrated global pandemic response strategy, the aftermath of the Wuhan outbreaks and lack of information sharing shows it to have been a spectacular failure. But perhaps the first round was supposed to be a spectacular failure so that it would be easier to show improvement during future outbreaks.

What?! You still question the vaccines? You still dare to defy the authority of these brave doctors and nurses who risked their lives for us? You can’t say that, you disgusting conspiracy mongering thought-criminal, you!

Vaccination is probably the most deceptive tool of imperialism that even anti-imperialists often fail to recognize. It displays a humanitarian face but has the soul of a beast. Its true character is that of a deceptive agent of imperialism. The romanticism of western medicine has masked the true nature and ethos of vaccination. However, a diligent and deeper study of the history of vaccination and the socio-political and cultural context of that history would reveal the true character of vaccination.

Vaccination is the process of introducing a vaccine into the body to produce immunity to a specific infectious organism. It is not the same as immunization—which has been mistakenly used interchangeably with vaccination—which is the process of conferring immunity, not necessarily through vaccination. Immunity is the capacity of the body to protect itself from the development of a disease due to exposure to an infectious organism.

Imperialism is usually defined as expansion of economic activities, especially investment, sales, extraction of raw materials, and use of labor to produce commodities and services beyond national boundaries, as well as the social, political, and economic effects of this expansion. I would define

Imperialism as: Intervention of Monopolistic Power Exploiting the Resources of Impoverished Areas Leading to Increased Social Misery.

If we look carefully into the history of vaccination, we will find that the development of vaccination coincided with the development of imperialism. Medicine and public health have played important roles in imperialism. With the emergence of the United States as an imperial power in the early twentieth century, interlinkages between imperialism, the business elite, public health, and health institutions were forged through several key mediating institutions. Philanthropic organizations sought to use public health initiatives to address several challenges faced by expanding capitalist enterprises: labor productivity, safety for investors and managers, and the costs of care.

In the early 1900s, the capitalist magnate Rockefeller already had a hand in the development of smallpox vaccine. Rockefeller's pioneering virologist Tom Rivers undertook to develop a safer vaccine by growing the virus in tissue culture. The result was an attenuated strain of virus that was better than the earlier vaccines produced in England. It was the first vaccine used in humans to be grown in tissue culture. Rivers' interaction with Rockefeller Foundation scientists, who were then working to make a yellow fever vaccine in Foundation laboratories on the Rockefeller Institute campus, influenced Max Theiler to create an attenuated virus vaccine. Theiler later won a Nobel Prize for this work. Parke-Davis also was a pioneer in vaccine production. The company set up shop in 1907 in Rochester hills, Michigan, pitching a circus tent to house horses and constructing a vaccine-propagating building, a sterilizing room, and a water tank. Parke-Davis was once America's oldest and largest drug maker. It was acquired by Warner Lambert company in 1970, which in turn was acquired in 2000 by Pfizer, which is now the largest pharmaceutical company in the world. Pfizer claims that it was involved in the commercial production of a smallpox vaccine in the early 1900s, that it was the first to develop a heat-stable, freeze-dried smallpox vaccine as well as the bifurcated needle, the first to introduce a combined vaccine for preventing diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus, and had produced more than 600 million doses of the first live trivalent oral poliovirus vaccine. These medical advances coincided with the emergence of what has been called "New Imperialism"—when European states established vast empires mainly in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and almost at the same period, the United States colonized the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Kingdom of Hawaii, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, and for short periods, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Cuba.

Imperialism is driven by the pressure of capital for external fields of investment. The recurrent crises of overproduction and subsequent diminu-

tion of profits and stagnation of capital leads to ever-increasing pressure to expand markets and territories. The tendency for investors to work towards the political annexation of countries which contain their more speculative investments is very powerful. Imperialism is seen as a necessity by the capitalists so they can continue to accumulate wealth. Capitalist greed was hidden behind the curtain of Manifest Destiny and a “mission to civilize colonized people.” It was the Robber Barons of the time, the likes of Rockefeller, Morgan, Carnegie, Cooke, Shwab, Fisk, Harriman and their ilk who actually needed Imperialism and who were fastening it upon the shoulders of the government. They used the public resources of their country for their capitalist expansion. Imperialism, therefore, was adopted as a political policy and practice by the government which was controlled by the business elite. The Government and private corporations sought ways to maximize profits. Economic expansion demanded cheap labor, access to or control of markets to sell or buy products, and extraction of natural resources. They met these demands through plunder and tyrannical rule.

However, the imperialists experienced excess diseases and deaths among their troops, civil servants and traders. They had to do something about it. With the advent of the “Germ Theory” of disease, it was believed that these diseases and deaths were caused by infectious organisms. This belief led to the development of drugs and vaccines that the colonial powers wholeheartedly embraced. That was the beginning of Big Pharma. Initially the advances in medicine were introduced for the protection of colonial troops and civil servants, then for the local people working for the colonial power, and eventually for the whole population. Improved health care was also included with the provision of hospitals and, as for the other measures, these were initially for the military, then for expatriates, and finally for the local people. The pioneer pharmaceutical companies of that time and the financial elite clearly saw the huge profits to be made from vaccination and the provision of pharmaceuticals. Among the most cited justification for colonial rule is the introduction of “modern health care” to the subjugated people. Thus, health became an instrument of pacification of the oppressed and the people were made to believe that colonialism was good for them. However, the introduction of health care technologies like vaccines and drugs are really not out of altruistic intentions of the colonial power but more for the satisfaction of the imperialist’s plunderous desires. In fact, systematic public health regimes originated as military programs in support of imperialist expansion. Private charities entered the field as colonial conquests were consolidated. The colonizer was more concerned with maximizing the exploitation of imperialized labor and extraction of the natural resources of the conquered people.

Since then, the elimination or control of disease in tropical countries became a driving force for all colonial powers. In the colonized world, public health measures encouraged by Rockefeller's International Health Commission yielded increases in profit extraction, as each worker could now be paid less per unit of work, "but with increased strength was able to work harder and longer and received more money in his pay envelope." Rockefeller's research programs promised greater scope for future US military adventures in the Global South, where occupying armies had often been hamstrung by tropical diseases. The Rockefeller programs did not concern themselves with workers' physical productivity alone. They were also intended to reduce the cultural resistance of "backward" and "uncivilized" peoples to the domination of their lives and societies by industrial capitalism. The Rockefeller Foundation discovered that medicine was an almost irresistible force in the colonization of non-industrialized countries. During the US occupation of the Philippines, Rockefeller Foundation president George Vincent was quite frank in saying:

"Dispensaries and physicians have of late been peacefully penetrating areas of the Philippine Islands and demonstrating the fact that for purposes of placating primitive and suspicious peoples medicine has some advantages over machine guns."

Mass vaccination emerged as a major imperialist program, notwithstanding the erroneous, reductionist concept behind it and despite the utter lack of proper safety and efficacy studies. Vaccination was hailed as the savior of colonized people from infectious disease despite clear evidence of adverse effects worse than the original disease. Many of these forced mass vaccination campaigns resulted in disastrous results. For example, in the Philippines, prior to US takeover in 1905, case mortality from smallpox was about 10%. In 1905, following the commencement of systematic vaccination enforced by the US government, an epidemic occurred where the case mortality ranged from 25% to 50% in different parts of the islands. In 1918–1919 with over 95 percent of the population vaccinated, the worst epidemic in the Philippines' history occurred resulting in a case mortality of 65 percent. The lowest percentage occurred in Mindanao, the least vaccinated place owing to religious prejudices. Dr. V. de Jesus, Director of Health, stated that the 1918–1919 smallpox epidemic resulted in 60,855 deaths. In Japan, after compulsory vaccination was mandated, there were 171,611 smallpox cases with 47,919 deaths recorded between 1889 and 1908, a case mortality of 30 percent, exceeding the smallpox death rate of the pre-vaccination period. At about the same time, Australia, one of the least-vaccinated countries in the

world for smallpox, had only three smallpox cases in 15 years. In England and Wales, between 1934 and 1961, not one death from natural smallpox infection was recorded, and yet during this same period, 115 children under 5 years of age died as a result of the smallpox vaccination. The situation was just as bad in the USA where 300 children died from the complications of smallpox vaccine from 1948 to 1969. Yet during that same period there was not one reported case of smallpox in the country.

Similar disastrous results also happened with the polio vaccine. The majority of polio cases actually do not cause symptoms in those who are infected. Symptoms occur in only approximately 5 percent of infections with a case fatality rate of only about 0.4%. Even during the peak epidemics, poliovirus infection resulting in long-term paralysis, was a low-incidence disease that was falsely represented as a rampant and violent paralytic disease by fundraising advertising campaigns to fast track development and approval and release of the Salk vaccine with Rockefeller as the key supporter. Because of outside pressure, the US licensing committee in charge of approving the vaccine did so after deliberating for only two hours without first having read the full research. This hasty approval led to the infamous “Cutter disaster,” the poliomyelitis epidemic that was initiated by the use of the Salk vaccine produced by Cutter vaccine company. In the end, at least 220,000 people were infected with live polio virus contained in the Cutter’s vaccine; 70,000 developed muscle weakness, 164 were severely paralyzed, 10 were killed. Seventy-five percent of Cutter’s victims were paralyzed for the rest of their lives.

When national immunization campaigns were initiated in the 1950s, the number of reported cases of polio following mass inoculations with the killed-virus vaccine was significantly greater than before mass inoculations and may have more than doubled in the US as a whole. Wyeth was also found much later to have produced a paralyzing vaccine. All other manufacturers’ vaccines released in the 1950s were sold and injected into America’s children and millions of vaccines were also exported all around the world.

The “eradication” of smallpox and the seemingly dramatic decline of polio cannot be largely attributed to the vaccines. There never was valid scientific study that supported the claim that the vaccines caused the decline of the disease. The combined effects of social and environmental determinants of what was poliomyelitis at that time were the most likely reasons for the decline. The polio vaccine was propelled more into widespread use by economic, political, and personal interests of imperialists rather than by science and public health interests. It is well established scientifically that the decline in mortality rates of infectious diseases was due largely to socio-economic determinants—improved nutrition, hygiene and sanitation,

et cetera—and the strengthening of natural immunity. Medical intervention using vaccines and antibiotics was late in coming and whatever contribution it made in the overall decline of mortality over time was minuscule at best.

In fact, there is a large body of scientific and narrative evidence that the vaccines cause various acute and chronic adverse effects and likely resulted in delaying the decline of infectious diseases to a relatively insignificant and naturally manageable health problem. Vaccination, an invasive and un-natural induction of immune response, which was largely inappropriate, did not really help but instead, created more problems, among which is the emergence of highly virulent strains of microorganisms. One un-anticipated potentially disastrous adverse effect of vaccination is the disruption of natural immunity among the people in communities. Nevertheless, despite overwhelming contrary scientific evidence, the overwhelming power of the ruling elite successfully implanted the entrenched belief that vaccination had eradicated smallpox and dramatically reduced deaths from polio and other infectious diseases. This widely held belief allowed the global ruling class to hide behind humanitarian posturing and mask their true agenda of global dominance and maximizing profits for Big Business.

After World War II, public health philanthropy became closely aligned with US foreign policy as neocolonialism thrust “development” on Third World nations. The major foundations collaborated with USAID and allied agencies in support of interventions aimed at increasing production of raw materials while creating new markets for Western manufactured goods. The concept of “global health governance” (GHG) arose in the early 1990s, reflecting US confidence that the fall of the Soviet Union would usher in a unipolar world dominated by American interests. This was a vision of diffuse, omnipresent power to be exercised collaboratively by the institutions of global capitalism and guaranteed, in the last resort, by the US military. The Alma Ata principles became moot as structural adjustment programs decimated Third World government investments in public health. Corporate globalization intensified with neoliberal imposition of liberalization, deregulation, and privatization. The new global health governance regime systematically bypassed or compromised national health ministries via “public-private partnerships” and similar schemes.

To soften the resistance against imperialist interventions in health, “emerging infections” were hyped as inevitable and potentially catastrophic and the global health governance scheme was framed within the larger discourse of “security” that arose in the wake of 9/11. Worldwide alarm about bioterrorism provided an opportunity to link together health and national/international security. Not only would health-care workers open the funds for a medical front in the War on Terror, but also military forces

would routinely be mobilized as a response to health disasters. Imperial interventions in the health field began to be justified in the same terms as recent “humanitarian” military interventions. Some analysts denounced the militarization of public health as worryingly authoritarian and strategically counterproductive, but to Bill Gates, the world’s second richest man, it was a welcome development. Gates’ endorsement was especially significant because his foundation had become the leading exemplar of philanthropy in the era of global health governance.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is now by far the world’s largest private foundation; with more than \$50 billion in assets. The bulk of its activities are directed at the people of the imperialized world, where its ostensible mission involves providing birth control and combating infectious diseases. The Gates Foundation exercises power not only by means of its own spending but also through steering an elaborate network of “partner organizations” including nonprofits, government agencies, and private corporations. As the second largest donor to the UN’s World Health Organization (WHO), it is a dominant player in the formation of global health policy. It orchestrates elaborate public-private partnerships and is the chief funder and prime mover behind the Vaccine Alliance, a public-private partnership between the World Health Organization and the vaccine industry. The chief beneficiary of the Gates Foundation’s activities is not the people of the Global South but the Western pharmaceutical industry. The Gates Foundation’s ties with the pharmaceutical- and vaccine-making industry are intimate, complex, and long-standing. Soon after its founding, the Gates Foundation invested \$205 million to purchase stakes in major pharmaceutical companies, including Merck, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and GlaxoSmithKline. The Gates Foundation’s interventions are designed to create lucrative markets for surplus pharmaceutical products, especially vaccines.

The vaccine producing companies belong to the largest interlocking corporations controlled directly or indirectly by a few highly secretive business and power elite who effectively rule the world and impose imperialist policies. Large corporations have become more and more interrelated through shared directors and common institutional investors. In 2004, a team of Swiss systems theorists, utilizing a database of 37 million companies and investors worldwide, studied the share ownerships linking over 43,000 transnational corporations. They found that a core 1,318 companies, representing 20 percent of global operating revenues, “appeared to collectively own through their shares the majority of the world’s large blue chip and manufacturing firms—the ‘real’ economy—representing a further 60 percent of global revenues.” When the team further untangled the web of ownership, it found much of it tracked back to a “super-entity” of 147 even more tightly knit

companies—all of their ownership was held by other members of the super-entity—that controlled 40 percent of the total wealth in the network. In effect, less than 1 percent of the companies were able to control 40 percent of the entire network. Most were financial institutions. The top-20 included Barclays Bank, JPMorgan Chase, and The Goldman Sachs Group.

This business elite is intimately linked to the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR). The CFR, founded in 1921, is a United States think tank specializing in US foreign policy and international affairs. The CFR runs the Rockefeller Studies Program and convenes government officials, global business leaders and prominent members of the intelligence and foreign-policy community to discuss international issues and make recommendations to the presidential administration and the diplomatic community. Some critics and political analysts have called the Council for Foreign Relations the “Shadow Government” that is pulling the strings behind the scene.

The Vaccination Trojan Horse of Imperialism in recent years has become much bigger with the growing power of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which is the main driver of global health policy. Bill Gates is the first private individual to keynote WHO’s general assembly of member countries. One delegate remarked:

“He is treated liked a head of state, not only at the WHO, but also at the G20.”

Oh Billy, you’re going to be so sad once we take it all—you’ll be begging for Lizzie.

The Gates Foundation has been compared to “a massive, vertically integrated multinational corporation (MNC), controlling every step in a supply chain that reaches from its Seattle-based boardroom, through various stages of procurement, production, and distribution, to millions of nameless, impoverished ‘end-users’ in the villages of Africa and South Asia.” It has a functional monopoly in the field of public health. In the words of one NGO official:

“You can’t cough, scratch your head, or sneeze in health without coming to the Gates Foundation.”

With his unprecedented power, Bill Gates was able to initiate an elaborate neoliberal financing scheme for vaccines that inevitably transfers public funds to private coffers. Ostensibly, the scheme is designed to help developing countries to fund their vaccination programs but in reality, these countries are caught in a debt-trap. This so-called “innovative development financing” is a debt-based mechanism that taps capital markets to subsidize vaccine

buyers and manufacturers through an intermediary, the International Finance Facility for Immunization (IFFIm). GAVI floats bonds which are secured by the promise of government donors to buy millions of doses of vaccines at a set price over periods as long as 20 years. Capitalists take a cut at every stage of the value chain while poor countries are supposed to benefit from access to vaccines that might not otherwise be affordable. Bondholders receive a tax-free guaranteed return on investment, suited to an era of ultra-low interest rates. Pharmaceutical firms, meanwhile, are able to peddle expensive vaccines at subsidized prices in a cash-poor but vast and risk-free market. By creating a predictable demand pull, IFFIm addresses a major constraint to immunization scale-up: the scarcity of stable, predictable, and coordinated cash flows for an extended period. Recent Gates Foundation/GAVI activities in Sri Lanka offer a virtual case study in what has been called “pharmaceutical colonialism.” GAVI targeted the country in 2002, offering to subsidize a high priced, patented pentavalent DtwP-hepB-Hib vaccine. In exchange for GAVI’s support, the country agreed to add the vaccine to its national immunization schedule. Within three months of the vaccine’s introduction, twenty-four adverse reactions including four deaths were reported, leading Sri Lanka to suspend use of the vaccine. Subsequently, twenty-one infants died from adverse reactions in India.

The real underlying cause of deaths in epidemics is the dysfunctional health care system brought about by chronic socio-economic underdevelopment characteristic of a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society victimized by imperialism. Corporate hijacking of the health care system with the complicity of government, international institutions, and mainstream medicine deprived the people of their right to health. Profit has become the primary driving factor in addressing a public health problem, not public welfare. Deregulation, privatization and liberalization, the hallmarks of corporate globalization, the new face of imperialism, have practically wiped-out whatever remaining affordable basic needs and social services—especially health services—are available to the majority of the population. Worse, under the guise of economic development, big business juggernauts in mining, plantations, coal, dams and other environmentally destructive and socially disruptive mega-projects have devastated community-empowering and truly sustainable, poverty-alleviating, health-promoting and climate resilient initiatives. The concomitant and worsening assaults—including extrajudicial killings—on fundamental human rights have subjected marginalized people to extreme physical, biological, psychological, and social stress and they have repeatedly been forced to be displaced from their land, homes, crops, and other means of survival. Under these circumstances, infectious disease

epidemics and other serious health problems are bound to arise and worsen. The root cause of epidemics in this country is imperialism. Liberation is the answer, not vaccination.

“Eventually what we’ll have to have is certificates of who’s a recovered person, who’s a vaccinated person. Because you don’t want people moving around the world where you’ll have some countries that won’t have it under control, sadly. You don’t want to completely block off the ability for people to go there and come back and move around. So eventually there will be this digital immunity proof that will help facilitate the global reopening up.”

Be honest, you know that this push is coming. And they are getting the public to sign on with all these ‘spontaneous’ balcony applause sessions. So perhaps you’ll forgive me for not joining in.

It is also interesting to see workers, who previously were underpaid, undervalued, and overworked, be deemed essential workers in critical roles. So, if stocking shelves, manufacturing medical equipment, being a nurse, if all these things are vital to society, why weren’t they being valued and taken care of before? And who doubts once the next crisis du jour springs up and attracts mainstream attention that we will forget these individuals once more?

Our demons now come in the form of graphs, charts. We treat the outputs of models as if they were the word of god, rather than guesses based on incomplete and inaccurate data. And we act as if we’ve progressed quite far from the days where some fuckwad would use his ‘infinite wisdom’ to decide, forgetting that the fuckwad is now some asshole obscured and filtered through some lines of code. I also might add: holy shit, if the media had latched on and fearmongered this hard about climate change models, we’d be well on our way to a greener future—I mean it’s still not good that Anderson Cooper would be acting like a manipulative little fuckboy, but at least then he might be useful for something other than sucking corporate cock.

I am still baffled by the attention that otherwise sane human beings are giving to the latest reported numbers from this or that health agency about the scourge of the Wuhan Flu. People are throwing around CFRs and R0s like they’ve been studying epidemiology their whole lives. In truth, they’re just regurgitating whatever they saw on CNN or were told in the latest Cuomo press conference—it really is convenient to have the pandemic “epicenter” in the media capital of the world.

So what do we make of the baffling discrepancy in death rates from the Wuhan Flu between different countries? Why is Italy's death rate from the disease a staggering 10% while China's is more like 4%? And what does that mean for the 70% of humanity that 'experts' warn will be infected by this virus? And while we're at it, why don't we ask some equally meaningful questions, like: What color is the Easter Bunny? How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? And just how tasty is the cheese that the moon is made of, anyway?

Methods for diagnosing this disease vary so widely from country to country that making comparisons between countries isn't even like comparing apples and oranges. It's like comparing apples and aardvarks. And diagnosing a particular type of viral infection via CT scan? How can we possibly trust the infection numbers that are being generated by such methods? All of that would make the calculation of mortality rates for this disease problematic enough. But, to make matters worse, we don't even have an accurate tally of the number of people who have died from the Wuhan Flu. Take the infamous Italian example, for instance. We're told that the staggering death rates in Italy (roughly 10% if we go by the official numbers at press time) are a sign of just how deadly this new virus can be.

But there's some problems with those numbers:

“The way in which we code deaths in our country is very generous in the sense that all the people who die in hospitals with the Wuhan Flu are deemed to be dying of the Wuhan Flu.”

So how many of the people who are reported as “Wuhan Flu deaths” in Italy actually had ‘Wuhan Flu’ listed as their cause of death? Just 12 percent. What's more, according to the Italian government's own report, half of those who died had three or more other diseases at the time of the death. Nearly 80 percent had at least two other diseases that they were fighting when they died. Only 1.7 percent of those who died had no other disease.

But why listen to me, a conspiracy theorist.

“The data collected so far on how many people are infected and how the epidemic is evolving are utterly unreliable. Given the limited testing to date, some deaths and probably the vast majority of infections due to the Wuhan Flu are being missed. We don't know if we are failing to capture infections by a factor of three or 300. Three months after the outbreak emerged, most countries, including the US, lack the ability to test a large number of people and no countries have reliable data on the

prevalence of the virus in a representative random sample of the general population.”

You cannot honestly present confirmed Wuhan Flu case numbers because due to the nature—and common understanding—of numbers, this will lead most to reach incorrect conclusions. Reporting the death rates alongside the number of confirmed cases is much, much worse than ‘screaming fire in a crowded theater.’ The number of infected is higher—how much unknown—than the “confirmed cases.” No matter how much you test, you will never know this number with certainty. These are the situations where math and statistics most often mislead. We as humans cannot comprehend large numbers, and given a population of over seven billion, most any illness is bound to affect millions. But we deal with multiple of these every year, going about our lives, not grinding everything to a halt.

Recall how quickly the global population has been doubling in recent years, recall how much greater it is than in 1918. Many, many, many more people than died in 1918 need to die in order for this to be comparable in magnitude. More people means more people get infected, more people die, that’s the kind of basic common number sense that’s missing.

OK, so you still insist on taking these phony baloney numbers seriously? Then let’s take another look at that Italian report on those dying with (not of) the Wuhan Flu. The report tells us that the median age of those who have been pronounced dead with (not of) the Wuhan Flu is 78. To put that number in perspective, the average life expectancy in Italy is 82.8.

That means those who are dying with (not of) the disease are within years of reaching the average life expectancy—and, let’s not forget, they are also suffering in the vast majority of cases from at least two other diseases. I venture to say that a similar panic could be raised about just about any viral disease in circulation if it was being reported in the same way as this Wuhan Flu is being reported. After this current madness passes, people will view the public’s blind acceptance of these practices in the same way that we look at the public’s blind acceptance of bloodletting and other methods of medical chicanery from times past.

Since we’re committing thought-crimes here, let’s be blunt: ‘Elderly Patient With Multiple Complications Dies After Contracting Respiratory Illness’ is not a news story. It’s a daily fact of life. But in fact, it is a news story. I have been keeping tabs on how the Canadian MSM have been covering the pandemic panic and saw a segment on one of the national news broadcasts about a woman whose 91-year-old mother died in a nursing home. It was implied that this 91-year-old woman’s life was tragically cut short by the Wuhan Flu and, to make matters worse, her daughter was unable to

hold a funeral or service for her mother because Canada is currently under lockdown. I don't know if I have lost touch with reality or everyone else has, but let me reiterate: This is *not* a news story.

Don't get me wrong: Any such death is doubtless a tragedy for the family involved. My heart genuinely goes out to all those who lose their relatives in such circumstances. But this is not something that we upend our entire civilization over. We do not stop all productive human activity on the planet; institute lockdowns; and begin talking about mandatory vaccinations, internal passports and other abrogations of essential human freedoms on such a basis. In fact, if I were to be dying at the age of 78 due to some viral respiratory illness along with my other 78-year old cohorts, I can guarantee that I would be outraged that the powers-that-shouldn't-be were using my death to upend the liberties that I had spent my life attempting to defend. It is disgusting.

'But what about the young people who die of the disease?' you ask. Fair enough. Again, according to the official reports—which, let me remind you, should not be trusted—there are people under the age of 78 who are dying from the disease as well, albeit in much smaller numbers. And, according to the models from the experts—who, let's remember, are right about everything—there could be hundreds of thousands more deaths before this pandemic runs its course.

Well, that brings me to my ultimate thought-crime: People die.

Sometimes they die of car accidents. Sometimes they die of work-related mishaps. Sometimes they die of old age. Sometimes they die under extremely questionable circumstances while trying to shed light on information that is uncomfortable for the deep state. And, yes, sometimes they die of respiratory illnesses during viral pandemics. I'll go one step further: Our mortality makes us who we are. Humans are blessed and cursed with a knowledge of our own fate. No one makes it out of this life alive. And so the question of what we do with our lives becomes paramount.

But more and more, death is being removed from life. Our elderly are shipped off to nursing homes to wither away so that we don't have to face aging. The funerary industry is neat and anti-septic. Death has become an abstraction. Something that happens somewhere out there, to other people. Not to us, though, surely.

This is what seems to be most at the heart of the Wuhan Flu panic, why the medical establishment is so vocal. They are some of the truest believers in achieving immortality; death, to them, is preventable, often. Look at the efforts so often made to prolong life, long past the point of being worth living. That inclination is then applied to any new threats faced. It has of course been attempted with old threats, the measles anti-vax shaming,

Swine Flu, Ebola—I think there’s one in between these last two, maybe SARS, but who can remember—though they didn’t have the PR agency the Wuhan Flu does. But it never works as well, it’s far easier for people to say: ‘Well, we’ve always lived with this, it’s not so bad, I don’t even think about it really.’ So you need something, might we say, novel.

This entire pandemic madness seems to be predicated on the notion that disease and death are somehow avoidable. That we have conquered such things. Or, at least, that no new disease could ever possibly arise (bioengineered or not) to upset our perfect balance with nature. I mean, yes, many people die of the flu every year, but that doesn’t count. That’s not new.

This is not to say that we shouldn’t work to cure diseases and improve our health. Quite the contrary. It’s just that this current bout of hysteria seems almost anti-human; as if we should be able to transcend our mortal humanity.

“We can’t let these Russian dissension sowers, neo-Nazi accelerationists, and Wuhan Flu-sympathizers confuse us. They want to convince us that Death is, yes, scary, and sad, but inevitable, and natural. How utterly heartless and insane is that?!

No, we need to close our minds to that nonsense. People are dying! This is not normal! Death is our enemy! We have to defeat it! We need to hunt down and neutralize Death! Root it out if its hidey-hole and hang it like we did with Saddam”

We do not understand how common death is, every single day. Around one percent of the world’s population dies every year. Nearly a million die of suicide each year—a number likely to increase as a result of economic devastation, fear, stress, and so on as a result of the panic. Two-hundred-thousand, that’s the average number of deaths due to medical error in the US every year; that’s about five-hundred a day. Where’s the war on that? Well there’s been a war there, but it’s been a war on tort, on making it easier for the medical industry to harm you and not be harmed itself. And in panic we are allowing them to make us guinea pigs once again. You thought the measles vaccine shaming was bad? Just wait until even more decline to be part of the first widescale human trials of so-called “third generation vaccines.” We’re a long way from ants licking ants folks.

“Never let a good crisis go to waste.”

This is religion for the right, the center, the neoliberals. But the ‘left’? Well it just wouldn’t be proper to take advantage of a crisis. Bernie, do us

all on the real left a favour: Get the Wuhan Flu and fucking die. I mean, you probably won't, even if you get it, because you're a prominent millionaire who playacts as a socialist revolutionary; but hey, we can dream can't we?

We allow our oppressors to herd us into their desired pens once again, letting them practice their skills at tracking, cordoning off, isolating, suppressing, experimenting with things they have so little understanding of. Is this really our endless fate? Can we not finally end this awful cycle?

I don't know anymore. Perhaps I'm off my rocker. All I know is that the room to express dissent on these topics is fast disappearing. It's time for those of us who can tolerate thought-crime to circle the wagons. The Thought Police are closing in. So maybe you disagree with me. Maybe you're offended by what I say. Maybe you have your own thought-crimes that you're afraid to express. But if we don't engage in dialogue about these ideas now, what are the chances that this information will be easier to share in the future?

So, what's your thought-crime?

Chapter Twenty-two

Death, Dying, The End

We, only, can see death; the free animal
has its decline in back of it, forever,
and God in front, and when it moves, it moves
already in eternity, like a fountain.

“What are we to make, of a creation in which the routine activity is for organisms to be tearing others apart with teeth of all types—biting, grinding flesh, plant stalks, bones between molars, pushing the pulp greedily down the gullet with delight, incorporating its essence into one’s own organization, and then excreting with foul stench and gasses the residue. Everyone reaching out to incorporate others who are edible to him.”

It is a deathly business, being alive, being an animal.

Fox was here first, and his brother was the wolf. Fox said, people will live forever. If they die they will not die for long. Wolf said, no, people will die, people must die, all things that live must die, or they will spread and cover the world, and eat all the salmon and the caribou and the buffalo, eat all the squash and all the corn. Now one day Wolf died, and he said to the fox, quick, bring me back to life. And Fox said, No, the dead must stay dead. You convinced me. And he wept as he said this. But he said it, and it was final. Now Wolf rules the world of the dead and Fox lives always under the sun and the moon, and he still mourns his brother.

The greatest lie ever told was that there is a mystical afterlife. This lie has been used for millennia to steel the courage of young men before sending them to kill and die in wars. Even worse, most people lie to themselves when confronting suffering and loss, with stories of a better life after this one, despite there being no credible evidence for any such thing. But why is it so damaging to share and believe pleasant fantasies of an afterlife, when nonexistence is both inevitable and too horrific to confront? It is damaging because it leads to bad decisions in this life, the only one we have. Knowing that our lives are so short makes each moment and each interaction more

precious. The happiness and love we find and make in life are all we get. The fact that there is no supernatural being in the universe that cares about us makes it that much more important that we care about one another.

A republic of suffering is made of infinite islands of mourning; we form the archipelago afterward, and only in our minds.

Death is where our distinctions between science, self, and sanctity most often break down.

We don't get it right in this country, we may get it more wrong than any other country in the entire world. The problem isn't necessarily the kind of funeral that takes place, but all that happens (or doesn't happen) after it. After the funeral we are supposed to move on, except of course we can't. It's a slammed door which you cannot reopen, and it's a huge door. So we do get it wrong. We don't have the traditions in place.

My best friend's mother, a breast cancer patient, tried repeatedly to talk about the looming possibility of her own death, only to be told that she should not speak of it. It is a strange irony: the last thing we are supposed (or allowed) to do when preparing to meet death is talk about death. Can you imagine the inverse? We would not plan for the birth of a child without addressing the subject of labour. Major events demand adequate preparation—more than that, they require solemnity, significance. These make up our cultural rituals, and rituals have enormous power.

A useful example of the power of stories as rituals comes from trauma treatment. In March 2012, *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* published the work of Wozniak and Allen about a shelter for abused women in Montana. Care workers had trouble helping their patients to move beyond the trauma they had experienced. Despite extensive counseling, the women frequently found themselves returning to their abusers or moving on to new partners who were similarly abusive. Confounded and frustrated, the shelter psychologists decided to incorporate rites of passage (similar to those practiced by Native Americans) into therapy. Women participated in several ceremonies, one of which had them writing down their weaknesses, their "old selves," and then dropping them into a swift-flowing river. Using this and other rituals, the women let their trauma go symbolically, and one by one they were able to move on with their lives. The women did not necessarily believe in an indigenous worldview, but they did not have to. The rituals themselves had the power to heal.

We decided witches lived in the woods to the west, and that a demon might haunt the woods to the south. Most children believe in monsters. I may have been slightly unusual in that I wrote all of ours down, crafting them into stories that we rehearsed and revised. As we came across new things—new ideas, new monsters—we incorporated them. Children can be

remarkably teleological; our system was fluid but sensibly interested in cause and effect. Dead trees lined the western wood: of course they did, because the witches lived there. One of the trees fell over and crushed a thorn bush. Naturally, the witches were trying to get out, or hoping we would go in. No one told us otherwise. So why not? There may have been trauma in my childhood, but there was also enormous freedom. As I've listened in on the games of other children—my nieces and nephews, and the children of friends—I've noticed the same open, broad thinking. I suspect that most children, given the opportunity to play, will construct equally malleable and magical worlds. Why don't we make new rituals? We did; we have; we do. The trick is to retain their essence later, when we no longer see the world lit up with magic and possibility.

We find ourselves today in a culture of opposites: bent on living forever, but committed to the disposable nature of absolutely everything else. Looking to find meaning isn't an arbitrary quest: it is the human condition, and rituals are human events that help us find that meaning. While the word itself suggests imagery from religious practice, ritual really refers to behaviour—actions performed with intention and significance. They may be as simple as a handshake or as complex as a rite of passage, but they stand for so much more. Rituals are the fabric of our cultural identities and they enable us to proceed through life's great moments.

Our medical establishment is primarily concerned with prolonging life, not with preparing us for death. Death has become the enemy of medicine, to be fought at all costs, regardless of the situation.

An elderly patient suffers a stroke; the news is bad—and it must be delivered. And so the dilemma begins:

“If I'm lucky, the family will recognize that their loved one's life is nearing its end. But I'm not always lucky. The family may ask me to use my physician superpowers to push the patient's tired body further down the road, with little thought as to whether the additional suffering to get there will be worth it.”

No doctor actually possesses these magical powers, of course, and yet many have come to view death as a medical failure rather than life's natural conclusion.

Medicine began as the enemy of sickness and evolved instead to fight off encroachments of death for the adult, regardless of age. When all else fails, medicine aims to deliver the body from the pain of death, if not from death itself, and finally even to take away the pain of grief through psychiatric medicine.

Has modern medicine given us the illusion of immortality?

We usually cannot get outside our own heads to see with fresh eyes; and even if we feel that we don't have the right tools with which to mourn our dead, we certainly don't have time to wrestle with new tools in the moment. This is why multicultural and historical perspectives are so valuable. They unmoor us so that we can look back from a distance and see more of the picture,

Sometimes one's own traditions can seem hollow, smaller, and less vibrant than those taking place elsewhere, but often that is only because we are too near them to see properly. Sometimes the unfamiliar sparkles only because it seems new; we may find that our collective past holds the key to rituals that are richer than we thought. If we have, in fact, lost something that other cultures have retained, perhaps it is the meaning-making process of really thinking about and taking part in ritual.

Though separated by culture, context, and chronicity, all humans must face the coming of death in a way distinct from our nearest mammal cousins. When we witness death, we must grapple with its finality, but also with our own mortality and the knowledge that one day we too will die. Whereas once this was understood as the natural order of things, we now find ourselves conflicted and less willing to see death as natural. If anything, death breaks into our lives as an unexpected surprise.

We know we will one day die, and yet we live. Animals know death when they see it; they even express grief or go looking for their deceased litter-mates, housemates, or masters when they are gone. However, animals largely recognize the event of death rather than the process of expecting death. A mare witnessed her colt being lost to a swollen river. The mother horse ran back and forth along the bank, frantically whinnying. She had witnessed it being buried, but she never expressed any interest in the grave, only in the river. Death happens in a moment, and it's the river she fears, not mortality itself.

To those in terminal pain, who are looking at death in all its faceless ambiguity, it seems perverse that anyone else would try to, and perhaps wrong that they should presume to do so. That moment is so personal, so intimate, so crushing, so full of mixed hopes and despair, it is little wonder most people want to avoid thinking or talking about it. But let us consider again—dying is a process carried out by the living. It is, in fact, the most challenging and daunting experience of life.

Death, like birth, will happen on its own—but a midwife can make it far less painful and protracted.

The "survivor narrative" so frequently forced upon the cancer patient paints them as a victim who is expected to put on a bold face in the midst

of their vulnerability. The metaphor of hard-fought battle has become so usual that rarely do we see an obituary of a cancer patient that doesn't mention their lost "battle" against the disease. But of course, many do die—and if they feel obliged to avoid speaking about death for fear of giving quarter to the enemy, or to remain upbeat in the face of increasingly long odds, that can make the finality of death all the more crushing. Humanity distinguishes itself by expecting death, and yet it still comes unexpected. Contemporary Western culture is built on denial and fear of death rather than acceptance of and preparation for it. But this view is actually rather recent. Most westerners, for most of our history, did not share it. They were not caught between eternal and disposable; they were able to hold those two ideas, event and process, easily in their minds at once. Our ancestors, who did not have the luxury—or burden—of being able to deny death, instead lived with the acceptance of it.

Social historians note that, in some ways, we've arrived at the inverse of our ancestors' beliefs. No longer a "place" and no longer a "journey," the event of death represents a void, a nothingness or a kind of sweet release. By contrast, the process of dying frightens us with its dead ends, dangers, pain, suffering, and confusion. The journey is all on our side of life. Knowledge of the impending death may be uncertain and as a result the journey is characterized by an unsettling, tiresome back-and-forth trajectory that is both wearing on all the participants and even, at times, shameful for everyone.

How could it be shameful? The type of death, of course, has something to do with it—the stigma, for instance, of HIV may still unfairly haunt the dying and their loved ones, while Alzheimer's robs the memory, the dignity, and even the individuality of its sufferers before the end. Most people are treated in the hospital, and so the clinical setting mediates and blurs the decline of the body. But one day, the patient simply does not bounce back. And it's here that we find the shame-faced abandonment that can plague final hours, here where even the most faithful of friends and family might turn away from the wreck of a body once beloved.

The fear of Alzheimer's is the fear of losing your identity while your healthy body walks on into oblivion. It is the fear of becoming a ghost.

I had seen this in our first border collie, when she was sixteen. She'd wake my husband and me in the night, crying and frightened, as if she couldn't remember where she was or who we were. I'd lie on the floor with her and stroke her and kiss her till the light came back into her intense brown eyes, as if her soul had returned from a journey. In all these cases, a piece of these individuals' minds had gone missing.

When she died my dad was at her bedside. He said at that point she

didn't know who he was. But she sat up suddenly and looked straight into his eyes with so much hurt. And so much love. And recognition. And then she laid back down. And that was it.

If we in the West could expand our definition of death to encompass life, we could experience death as part of life and perhaps face death with something other than fear.

The Black Death may not be the start of European history, but in terms of death-preparation, it was the 're-start.' Nothing would ever be the same. Their attempts to grapple with the immensity of loss remains at the heart of Western tradition—and the Western approach to death was remade and reborn through it.

There were no clear targets to blame for the horror and nowhere to go for escape or solace. When tragedy and change on such a scale happens in a single generation, it necessarily shakes the idea that traditions are permanent and immutable.

Corpse Roads were built to allow peasants from afar to bring their dead to the churchyard, which was consecrated by a bishop to make it "holy." No one wanted rotting bodies hauled through their front yards, so the roads were set up on windswept hills and overgrown pastures where no one wanted to go. These coffin-paths still remain in parts of the Netherlands and the UK.

The plague era, the Great Mortality, a time of unremitting death from which Europe emerged cleansed and renewed. But consider: the ubiquity of death had enormous influence on perceptions of death, as well. The rituals of prayers and wakes for the dead had all but been obliterated at the worst of it; in addition, the largely Christian, largely Catholic religious systems had broken down and seeds of doubt about sovereignty had been sown. Many priests died, and those that survived often refused to visit the dying and perform last rites. There are tales of great charity during the time of plague, but also of horrific treatment of minority groups—up to and including vicious massacres. Those who lived through the horrors had to come to terms with the enormity of the disaster. The popularity of *Ars Moriendi*, or *The Art of Dying*—Latin texts that advised the reader how to die a good Christian death—in 1415 attests to how heavily mortality weighed on people's minds, but was also revolutionary in its own right: those texts gave people stewardship over death, dying, and even last rites, allowing people to perform them without need of the Church. This self-stewardship over life's final moments, which would have been unthinkable before the Black Death, marks one of the first major shifts in European grief culture coming out of the middle ages: death traditions began slowly to shift towards individual experience, instead of religious authority.

Of course the funeral cannot really mark the conclusion of the grieving process. It is frequently only the beginning.

It is often said—more often than one might imagine—that nineteenth-century people, because they suffered so many more child deaths than we do, felt them less, or differently, than we might think—or made less of a fetish of them or, because they sometimes photographed bodies, had a set of expectations and rituals for child death radically different from our own. As is seen in the case of the Darwins' mourning, there is no evidence for this at all—just the opposite, actually. Their loss was as complete as ours would be, and their grief as deep. If anything, their grief was deeper, because their shock was less. There was no surprise to buffer it, no sense of a million-to-one shot to place it in the realm of things that never happen. It was not a brick that fell on your head from a skyscraper but the one thing you had always actively dreaded. Parents during the polio era would resonate with that same emotion.

Nothing really prepares us for the too soon loss of someone we love. It is like watching someone sink straight down into the waves, who will never return and never be recovered, while life continues on the surface. This sense, of the ongoing life of the world suddenly cut off irretrievably, of a life going on of which they no longer know a thing, and in which their absence is absolute and permanent, is true grief—no memory can help it; no promise of meeting after can alter it. King Lear's "never's" are the horrible truth; once they was here, and they will never be again.

That feeling of longing—for a person, a place—could smack you, wavelike, delivering actual, physical, pain. It could sneak up on you as a tiny catch somewhere near the middle of your throat. Or it could tug at you with the force of gravity, like a magnetic attraction that was impossible to shake off.

We often say that our world changes after a death like that. But it does not only change; it rocks, it heaves, it shatters. It breaks and bends and twists. The bereaved is like a shaken leaf on roiling waters, and there is nothing at all you can do about it, nothing you can change. A thousand questions may crowd your mind at a time like this: why did we come here? Why wasn't I standing there? Or more drastically world-shifting questions: why did we choose this career? Why did we have to travel? Why didn't we stay safe at home? There is a human desire for someone to be at fault. Sometimes we blame the victim. Sometimes we blame ourselves. But the horrid wound gapes and pulls all the while.

It has been said, "time heals all wounds." I do not agree. The wounds remain. In time, the mind, protecting its sanity, covers them with scar tissue and the pain lessens. But it is never gone.

In ancient Egypt death was not considered enough of a sexual deterrent

for royal embalmers. In the event of a princess dying they were not permitted to begin embalming for at least three days, to make it less likely that they would fornicate with her corpse. There is an obviously gendered element to these early considerations, with women's bodies often the focus of anxiety; even in death, it seems, women have historically been viewed as objects.

The question of defining human life in utero is hopelessly vexed. That is, given our best present medical and philosophical understandings of what makes something not just a living organism but a person, there is no way to establish at just what point during gestation a fertilized ovum becomes a human being. This conundrum, together with the basically inarguable soundness of the principle 'When in irresolvable doubt about whether something is a human being or not, it is better not to kill it,' appears to me to require any reasonable American to be Pro-Life.

At the same time, however, the principle 'When in irresolvable doubt about something, I have neither the legal nor the moral right to tell another person what to do about it, especially if that person feels that s/he is not in doubt' is an unassailable part of the Democratic pact we Americans all make with one another, a pact in which each adult citizen gets to be an autonomous moral agent; and this principle appears to me to require any reasonable American to be Pro-Choice.

Questions of mind at the beginning of life can sometimes continue even after birth, such as in the horrible case of anencephaly, where normal-looking babies are born missing all of their brain except for the brain stem—allowing them to stay biologically alive despite no other mental functioning. Bioethicists suggest that the most ethical choice in anencephaly is to harvest these babies' organs to save the lives of other infants who need them (of children under the age of two who need organ transplants, 30 percent to 50 percent die before receiving them). Of course, it is incredibly difficult to not see a full human mind within your perfect-looking child, even when their lack of brain proves otherwise.

There are many who will think that the existence of twenty-two cases of infant euthanasia over seven years at one hospital in the Netherlands shows that it is a society that has less respect for human life than the United States. But I'd suggest that they take a look at the difference in infant mortality rates between the two countries. The CIA World Factbook shows that the United States has an infant mortality rate of 6.63 per 1,000 live births, the Netherlands 5.11. If the US had infant mortality rates as low as the Netherlands, there would be 6,296 fewer infant deaths nationwide each year. Building a healthcare system in the United States as good as that in the Netherlands—as measured by infant mortality—is far more worthy of the attention of those who value human life than the deaths of twenty-two

tragically afflicted infants.

“No, we don’t bury the bodies or burn them. We leave them out in the open in a sacred place, near a baobab tree, and let the animals eat them. Usually it is the hyena. There is a small ceremony performed by the elders, and we leave food for the passage to the afterlife. We return a few months later to find the bones, and then hide them in the bush. The land we live in is full of the remains of our ancestors, and it connects us to them.”

The entirety of the Hadzabes’ land is a burial ground, with no separate place for the dead to spend their afterlives. They continue on in the landscape after they are dead, and this is part of the reason that the Hadzabe feel such a close connection to their territory. Land, to the Hadzabe, is not just about something that provides subsistence, though of course that is important—it’s also a tangible connection with their ancestors. The land and the people are inseparable, and this connection is the essence of their mythos. To attempt to separate them or to exploit the land in some way would be an insult to the entire Hadzabe worldview. It was and is unthinkable.

Why wash a body before putting it in the dirt? Why sit awake with someone now permanently asleep? Even the practice of embalming the body (which prevents decay) before interring it in the ground (where it is supposed to decay) struck me as a very strange thing to do. With only a minor leap of morbid imagination, care of the newly dead began to resemble care of the newly born.

Called the “Dead Body Bill,” the “Dissecting Bill” and the “Blood-stained Anatomy Act,” it allowed the unclaimed bodies of paupers to be given to the anatomy schools. The 1834 Poor Law that followed added to the unease for the labouring poor in Britain. An article for the *Spectator* published in 1838 claims:

“If they were poor they imprisoned them, then starved them to death, and after they were dead they butchered them.”

Across the pond, the means of securing specimens may seem barbaric now, but could be very workmanlike; a good resurrectionist would have an extensive network that included undertakers, graveyard workers and even other doctors who might be called to the deathbed of a patient and so provide first notification. Details from the notes of a prolific Nashville resurrectionist: The process required three men and a wagon, and took about an hour in good weather; the coffin would be uncovered and the top broken to allow access to the body, which would be drawn forth by a rope tied

around the neck. The bodies were stripped of incriminating identification and the dirt, flowers, and other grave arrangements were replaced to disguise interference. In good times the resurrectionist would take ‘standing orders,’ and in the US, an active interstate trade commenced—furnished almost completely by ‘black bodies disinterred from southern graves.’

In Britain, the practice was largely the same, though the at-risk population was the white poor. The graves of paupers were not deep and a single one might have as many as four bodies stacked on one another. Resurrectionists in urban areas worked late at night, using wooden shovels to avoid the tell-tale ‘clank’ of digging.

In a sky burial the undertaker will unwrap the body while ritual prayers are spoken or sung from afar. While this is going on, vultures and birds of prey gather in the sky, circling and waiting for the ritual dissection. The body will, by these means, be broken down for easier consumption by the birds, whose lives will be enriched by the person’s flesh and blood. Scarcely anything will be left, and nothing wasted. The soul has moved on to the next stage, awaiting rebirth; the body—as a vessel—has been made to serve a new purpose.

The Wari live in the rainforests of Brazil. Until as late as 1960, they disposed of dead bodies primarily through mortuary cannibalism. To the Wari, this practice symbolized their deep respect and honour of their loved ones—but it also allowed them to deal with the loss. The funeral engages the whole community; the dead man lies on a mat, painted red and starting to bloat in the heat. Mourners walk round and round, wailing in sorrow and also to frighten unfriendly spirits away. They are not going to bury this body, however. The body is about to be dismembered and roasted for consumption.

An anthropologist describes the scene as reaching a “fevered pitch” before the body is first cut open. Mourners pile together, struggling to hold the body or to press themselves to it in grief for the coming separation. The men of the village begin dismemberment, removing organs first and then severing the head and cutting the joints before placing limbs upon the roasting rack (inedibles, like hair and entrails, are burned). The elders of the village explain that only the cutting of the body is emotionally difficult—to eat the remains, on the other hand, is good and right. The meat is not eaten from bones, but cut up, almost ritually, and placed on clean mats. Only relatives (but not immediate relations—spouses or children) eat the body, usually the dead person’s in-laws. They eat slowly, weeping while eating. They must consume all or most of the body. Not being able to do so would be offensive; if the body had decayed too much to stomach, eaters would swallow parts and then cremate the rest at dawn the next day. When the

rest of the body had been cremated, the ashes would be buried and the area swept clean. As with the sky burial, nothing remains of the funeral rites or the body. Why consume the dead? The living Wari explain that they would rather be incorporated into the living bodies of their kin than rot in the cold, wet ground.

A most unusual and alarming tradition of the Ilongot concerns “grief rage.” After a death, men in the village felt compelled—irresistibly driven—to headhunt. The hunters endure hunger, thirst, and deprivation in the weeks it takes to set up an ambush; because they must wait for their prey to happen along, the process is lengthy and non-specific. When at last they have attacked, killed, and beheaded the hapless victim, the Ilongot do not keep the head as a trophy or bring it back home. They throw it away.

How could any of this help in the grieving process? How could death be mitigated by more death? When asked what drove them to the practice, they claimed that severing and throwing away a head was the same as throwing away the anger at death. The head becomes something to carry their anger away, a vessel for grief-born rage. This description didn’t really solve the problem, though; or not at first. What caused the rage to begin with? Was it life-for-life? The description given by the Ilongot seemed too simple, or even naïve. Trying different questions, prying further into their cultural traditions, came up with the same thing each time. Rage was born of grief, said the headhunters. Death literally gave birth to the practice.

Problematically for the Ilongot, however, the government outlawed head-hunting. The traditional ways had been blocked, few avenues remained. One describes the painful position of a man who lost his seventh child, a six-month-old baby. Shortly after the death, the father converted to evangelical Christianity, which was being introduced to the area by missionaries. What the man sought wasn’t denial of death (the typical Western response), but a means of coping with death’s reality. What he needed was a ritual, for his own had been taken away. He needed a new means of carrying his rage away before it destroyed him.

The Ilongot had a custom that recognized rage and gave it a place and a temporality—that is, a beginning and an end. This tradition was taken from them. The anger at abandonment is irreducible in that nothing at a deeper level explains it. Death births rage because at some fundamental, wordless level, rage is the gut-wrenching passion of the soul, gnashing its teeth in the dark.

Ideally all death rituals should serve equally to quell the rage and disperse the grief, making death more approachable by making it familiar once more.

Some Buddhist priests practiced an extreme form of asceticism that would lead to their deaths, and yet also establish them as “living Buddhas.”

In addition to practicing rigorous exercise to rid the body of fat, they consumed only nuts, berries, tree bark and pine needles while gradually reducing the amount they ate. The practitioner would starve to death within ten years when the practice was successful. The priest would also drink a poisonous tea made from the urushi tree, causing loss of bodily fluids (a kind of pre-drying). Finally, he would lock himself into a tomb connected to a bamboo breathing tube. The tombs would be opened after three years, and, if the mummification was successful, the remains would be dressed in robes and worshiped by their loyal followers.

The story of Kūkai (also known as Kōbō Daishi): When he was seventy-two, he sealed himself in a mountain cave and meditated until his death. According to tradition, his hair continued to grow, so his followers returned every few years to trim it and provide new robes. As ‘living Buddha,’ Kōbō Daishi had removed himself from the cycle of life and of need, achieving nirvana but also existing between life and death, between familiar and unfamiliar, in a stasis that required and permitted no change.

Look at the patient, stoic, pained expression of the mother as she hovers over a dead infant and consider: why would this be something you might wish to capture and display? Is this public display of grief appropriate or desirable? The answer, for the Victorians, was yes. All grief was public grief. When Queen Victoria’s husband Albert died, she wore black “weeds” for the rest of her life and was, in many respects, defined by her grief. It has been argued that the responsibility for making mourning “fashionable” lies with her—by the height of the Victorian period, widows were living memorials to their husband’s death, and while grieving lasted for shorter periods following the loss of wives or children, it was still always something you displayed to the world.

These relics were embellishments on a costume of grief, and the primary function of mourning wear was to identify the bereaved. In 1840, Basil Montagu records that “in the mourning dress, the outward sign of sorrow, we call for the solace of compassion, for the kind words and looks of friends and for the chastened mirth of strangers, who, unacquainted with the deceased, respect our grief.”

Mourning dress created a culture where grief for the dead was public; something that, in the US and UK at least, is no longer the case. Yet I imagine many today might find the idea appealing. If you have ever been through personal tragedy, you may well have felt hurt and offended by the world around you, which doesn’t slow down or take any notice of your suffering. Haven’t you ever longed for a space of even a few days where people—friends and strangers alike—paused respectfully to consider your loss? Today’s relentless pace demands that most of us schlep along as before,

with little time available to stop and really reflect on, or live with, our grief—ultimately the best way to help us pass through it. The cost and time of making or wearing mourning clothing and mourning jewelry forced a pause, and created space for grief (both private and public). When the mourner was ready to move from black to gray, they were actually performing a rite of passage.

The immortality provided by algorithms can't approximate a personality yet, but we make greater strides every year in that direction. Will we see a resurgence of ancestor worship? That is, will we continue to visit the shrines of the now-deceased on Facebook or other media, consulting them, asking their advice? Stranger still will we begin to see a new emotion arise—one of mourning for a loved one mixed with joy and affection toward a machine housing that loved one's digital resurrection? It might seem improbable, but psychologists take such things seriously. Many suggest that mourning periods will extend as a result, lasting perhaps for years. Once again, though, the Victorians did that long before us.

Owning Ideas

There is one group of people not shocked by the entertainment industry's policy of suing randomly chosen file sharers: historians of copyright. They already know what everyone else is slowly finding out: that copyright was never primarily about paying artists for their work, and that far from being designed to support creators, copyright was designed by and for distributors—that is, publishers, which today includes record companies, movie studios, streaming platforms, and more. But now that the Internet has given us a world without distribution costs or delays, it no longer makes any sense to restrict sharing in order to pay for centralized distribution. Abandoning copyright is now not only possible, but desirable. Both artists and audiences would benefit, financially and aesthetically. In place of corporate gatekeepers determining what can and can't be distributed, a much finer-grained filtering process would allow works to spread based on their merit alone. We would see a return to an older and richer cosmology of creativity, one in which copying and borrowing openly from others' works is simply a normal part of the creative process, a way of acknowledging one's sources and of improving on what has come before. And the old canard that artists need copyright to earn a living would be revealed as the pretense it has always been.

None of this will happen, however, if the industry has its way. For three centuries, the publishing industry has been working very hard to obscure copyright's true origins, and to promote the myth that it was invented by writers and artists. Even today, they continue to campaign for ever stronger laws against sharing, for international treaties that compel all nations to conform to the copyright policies of the strictest, and most of all to make sure the public never asks exactly who this system is meant to help. The reward for these efforts can be seen in the public's reaction to the file-sharing lawsuits. While many people agree that this time the industry went too far, the error is mainly treated as one of degree—as if the companies had a valid point, but had merely resorted to excessive force in making it.

To read the true history of copyright is to understand just how completely this reaction plays into the industry's hands. The companies don't really care whether they win or lose these lawsuits. In the long-run, they don't

even expect to eliminate file sharing. What they're fighting for is much bigger. They're fighting to maintain a state of mind, an attitude toward creative work that says someone ought to own products of the mind, and control who can copy them. And by positioning the issue as a contest between the Beleaguered Artist, who supposedly needs copyright to pay the rent, and Evil Pirates, who would rather copy a song or a story off the Internet than pay a fair price, the industry has been astonishingly successful. They have managed to substitute the loaded terms 'piracy' and 'theft' for the more accurate 'copying'—as if there were no difference between stealing your bicycle (now you have no bicycle) and copying your song (now we both have it). Most importantly, industry propaganda has made it a commonplace belief that copyright is how most creators earn a living—that without copyright, the engines of intellectual production would grind to a halt, and artists would have neither means nor motivation to produce new works.

Yet a close look at history shows that copyright has never been a major factor in allowing creativity to flourish. Copyright is an outgrowth of the privatization of government censorship in sixteenth-century England. There was no uprising of authors suddenly demanding the right to prevent other people from copying their works; far from viewing copying as theft, authors generally regarded it as flattery. The bulk of creative work has always depended, then and now, on a diversity of funding sources: commissions, teaching jobs, grants or stipends, patronage, et cetera. The introduction of copyright did not change this situation. What it did was allow a particular business model—mass pressings with centralized distribution—to make a few lucky works available to a wider audience, at considerable profit to the distributors.

The arrival of the Internet, with its instantaneous, cost-free sharing, has made that business model obsolete—not just obsolete, but an obstacle to the very benefits copyright was alleged to bring society in the first place. Prohibiting people from freely sharing information serves no one's interests but the publishers'. Although the industry would like us to believe that prohibiting sharing is somehow related to enabling artists to make a living, their claim does not stand up to even mild scrutiny. For the vast majority of artists, copyright brings no economic benefits. True, there are a few stars—some quite talented—whose works are backed by the industry; these receive the lion's share of distribution investment, and generate a correspondingly greater profit, which is shared with the artist on better than usual terms because the artist's negotiating position is stronger. Not coincidentally, these stars are who the industry always holds up as examples of the benefits of copyright. (Fun Fact: The NCAA recently did something similar with

allowing their athletes to accept endorsements, effectively buying off those with the biggest platforms that might otherwise be used to complain about the NCAA's continued exploitation.)

But to treat this small group as representative would be to confuse marketing with reality. Most artists' lives look nothing like theirs, and never will, under the current spoils system. That is why the stereotype of the impoverished artist remains alive and well after three-hundred years. The publishing industry's campaign to preserve copyright is waged out of pure self-interest, but it forces on us a clear choice. We can watch as most of our cultural heritage is stuffed into a vending machine and sold back to us dollar by dollar—or we can reexamine the copyright myth and find an alternative.

The first copyright law was a censorship law. It was not about protecting the rights of authors, or encouraging them to produce new works. Authors' rights were in little danger in sixteenth-century England, and the recent arrival of the printing press (the world's first copying machine) was if anything energizing to writers. So energizing, in fact, that the English government grew concerned about too many works being produced, not too few. The new technology was making seditious reading material widely available for the first time, and the government urgently needed to control the flood of printed matter, censorship being as legitimate an administrative function then as building roads.

The method the government chose was to establish a guild of private-sector censors, the London Company of Stationers, whose profits would depend on how well they performed their function. The Stationers were granted a royal monopoly over all printing in England, old works as well as new, in return for keeping a strict eye on what was printed. Their charter gave them not only exclusive right to print, but also the right to search out and confiscate unauthorized presses and books, and even to burn illegally printed books. No book could be printed until it was entered in the company's Register, and no work could be added to the Register until it had passed the crown's censor, or had been self-censored by the Stationers. The Company of Stationers became, in effect, the government's private, for-profit information police force. The system was quite openly designed to serve booksellers and the government, not authors. New books were entered in the Company's Register under a Company member's name, not the author's name. By convention, the member who registered the entry held the "copyright," the exclusive right to publish that book, over other members of the Company, and the Company's Court of Assistants resolved infringement disputes.

This was not simply the latest manifestation of some preexisting form of copyright. It's not as though authors had formerly had copyrights, which

were now to be taken away and given to the Stationers. The Stationers' right was a new right, though one based on a long tradition of granting monopolies to guilds as a means of control. Before this moment, copyright—that is, a privately held, generic right to prevent others from copying—did not exist. People routinely printed works they admired when they had the chance, an activity which is responsible for the survival of many of those works to the present day. One could, of course, be enjoined from distributing a specific document because of its potentially libelous effect, or because it was a private communication, or because the government considered it dangerous and seditious. But these reasons are about public safety or damage to reputation, not about property ownership. There had also been, in some cases, special privileges—then called “patents”—allowing exclusive printing of certain types of books. But until the Company of Stationers, there had not been a blanket injunction against printing in general, nor a conception of copyright as a legal property that could be owned by a private party.

For awhile this partnership worked well for the government and for the Stationers. The Stationers profited from their monopoly, and through the Stationers, the government exercised control over the spread of information. Around the end of the seventeenth century, however, owing to larger political changes, the government relaxed its censorship policies, and allowed the Stationers' monopoly to expire. This meant that printing would return to its former anarchical state, and was of course a direct economic threat to the members of the Company of Stationers, accustomed as they were to having exclusive license to manufacture books. Dissolution of the monopoly might have been good news for long-suppressed authors and independent printers, but it spelled disaster for the Stationers, and they quickly crafted a strategy to retain their position in the newly liberal political climate.

The Stationers based their strategy on a crucial realization, one that has stayed with publishing conglomerates ever since: authors do not have the means to distribute their own works. Writing a book requires only pen, paper, and time. But distributing a book requires printing presses, transportation networks, and an up-front investment in materials and typesetting. Thus, the Stationers reasoned, people who write would always need a publisher's cooperation to make their work generally available. Their strategy used this fact to maximum advantage. They went before Parliament and offered the then-novel argument that authors had a natural and inherent right of ownership in what they wrote, and that furthermore, such ownership could be transferred to other parties by contract, like any other form of property.

Their argument succeeded in persuading Parliament. The Stationers had managed to avoid the odium of censorship, as the new copyrights would originate with the author, but they knew that authors would have little

choice but to sign those rights back over to a publisher for distribution. There was some judicial and political wrangling over the details, but in the end both halves of the Stationers' argument survived essentially intact, and became part of English statutory law. The first recognizably modern copyright, the Statute of Anne, was passed in 1709 and took effect in 1710.

The Statute of Anne is often held up by champions of copyright as the moment when authors were finally given the protection they had long deserved. Even today, it continues to be referenced both in legal arguments and in press releases from the publishing industry. But to interpret it as an authors' victory flies in the face of both common sense and historical fact. Authors, having never had copyright, saw no reason now to suddenly demand the rather paradoxical power to prevent the spread of their own works, and did not do so. The only people threatened by the dissolution of the Stationers' monopoly were the Stationers themselves, and the Statute of Anne was the direct result of their lobbying and campaigning. In the memorable words of the contemporary Lord Camden, the Stationers "... came up to Parliament in the form of petitioners, with tears in their eyes, hopeless and forlorn; they brought with them their wives and children to excite compassion, and induce Parliament to grant them a statutory security." To make their argument more palatable, they had proposed that copyright would originate with the author, as a form of property that could be sold to anyone—anticipating, correctly, that it would most often be sold to a printer.

This proposal was a shrewd tactical move, because one of Parliament's concerns was to prevent the re-establishment of a centralized monopoly in the book trade, with its attendant potential for a renewal of censorship by the crown.

"The stationers made the case that they could not produce the fragile commodities called books, and thus encourage learned men to write them, without protection against piracy. There is an apparent tracing of rights to an ultimate source in the fact of authorship, but before attaching large importance to this we have to note that if printing as a trade was not to be put back into the hands of a few as subject of monopoly—if the statute was indeed to be a kind of 'universal patent'—a legal draftsman would naturally be led to express himself in terms of rights in books and hence to initial rights in authors. A draftsman would anyway be aware that rights would usually pass immediately to publishers by assignment, that is, by purchase of the manuscripts as in the past. I think it nearer the truth to say that publishers saw the tactical advantage of putting forward authors' interests

together with their own, and this tactic produced some effect on the tone of the statute.”

The Statute of Anne, taken in historical context, is the smoking gun of copyright law. In it we can see the entire apparatus of modern copyright, but in still-undisguised form. There is the notion of copyright as property, yet the property is really intended for publishers, not authors. There is the notion of benefiting society, by encouraging people to write books, but no evidence was offered to show that they would not write books without copyright. Rather, the Stationers’ argument was that publishers could not afford to print books without protection from competition, and furthermore that printers could not be depended to reproduce works faithfully if given unfettered freedom to print. The corollary, they implied, was that without the prospect of reliable distribution, authors would produce fewer new works.

Their argument was not unreasonable, given the technology of the time. Making a perfect copy of a printed work required access to the original press and compositor, anyway; if reliable reproduction were to be encouraged, then a single-holder copyright system had a certain logic to it. And the publishers would now be effectively forced to pay authors in return for exclusive printing rights (although in fact the Stationers had sometimes paid authors even before, simply to guarantee the completion and delivery of a work). The authors who succeeded in selling this new right to printers had no particular motivation to complain—and naturally, we don’t hear very much about the authors not so favored. The consolidation of author’s copyright probably contributed to the decline of patronage as a source of income for writers, and even allowed some authors, though always a small minority, to support themselves solely from the royalties their publishers shared with them. The fact that a given copyright could only be held by one party at a time also helped prevent the proliferation of divergent variations, a problem that had vexed authors perhaps even more than plagiarism, as there was no easy method by which they could endorse or disclaim particular variations.

But the overall historical record is clear: copyright was designed by distributors, to subsidize distributors not creators. This is the secret that today’s copyright lobby never dares say aloud, for once it is admitted, the true purpose of subsequent copyright legislation becomes embarrassingly clear. The Statute of Anne was just the beginning. Having granted the premise that copyrights should exist at all, the English government found themselves under pressure to extend copyright terms further and further. In the long legal saga that ensued, what’s important is not the particular sequence of laws and verdicts, but the identity of the plaintiffs: they were just

the sort of stable, settled business interests capable of sustaining litigation and lobbying over a period of decades—that is, they were publishers, not authors. They had proposed the author’s copyright out of economic interest, and only after the crutch of a censorship-based monopoly had been taken away from them. When it became clear that the tactic worked, they lobbied to strengthen copyright.

And this is still the pattern today. Whenever the US Congress extends copyright terms or powers, it is the result of pressure from the publishing industry. The lobbyists will sometimes trot out a superstar author or musician as an exhibit, a human face for what is essentially an industry effort, but it’s always quite clear what’s really going on. All you have to do is look at who’s paying the lawyer’s and lobbyists’ bills, and whose names appear in the court dockets: publishers’.

The industry’s centuries-long campaign for strong copyright law is not merely a reflexive land grab, however. It’s a natural economic response to technological circumstances. The effect of the printing press, and later of analog sound recording technology, was to make creative works inseparable from their means of distribution. Authors needed publishers the way electricity needs wires. The only economically viable method of reaching readers (or listeners) was the bulk print run: to manufacture thousands of identical copies at once, then physically ship them to various points of distribution. Before agreeing to such an investment, any publisher would naturally prefer to buy or lease the copyright from the author, and just as naturally would lobby the government for the strongest possible copyright powers, the better to protect their investment.

There is nothing inherently exploitative about this; it’s just straightforward economics. From a business point of view, a print run is a daunting and risky project. It involves the high up-front costs of a physical medium—be it dead tree pulp, magnetic tape, vinyl platters, or pitted optical discs—plus complicated, expensive machinery to imprint the content onto the medium. There’s also the unseen investment of vetting the master copy: because a flawed master can reduce the value of the entire run, publishers and authors go to considerable trouble to generate a polished, error-free version of the work before printing. There is little room for an incremental or evolutionary process here; the work must be brought to near-perfection before the public ever sees it. If any mistakes are overlooked, they will have to be tolerated in the finished product, at least until the process is started again for the next print run. The publisher must also negotiate prices and line up distribution paths, which is not only a matter of bookkeeping, but of physical expenses, of trucks and trains and shipping containers. Finally, as if all this weren’t enough, the publisher is compelled to spend even more money on marketing

and publicity, to have a better chance of at least recovering all these outlays.

When one realizes that all this must happen before the work has generated a penny of revenue, it is little wonder that publishers argue hard for copyright. The publisher's initial investment—that is, their risk—in any individual work is greater, in economic terms, than the author's. Authors by themselves might have no inherent desire to control copying, but publishers do. And in a world filled with publishers' royalty-supported marketing departments, authors, of course, need publishers all the more. The concentration of distribution revenues results, inevitably, in the familiar logic of an arms race.

The arrival of the Internet fundamentally changed this equation. It has become cliché to say that the Internet is as revolutionary a development as the printing press, and it is. But it is revolutionary in a different way. The printing press may have made it possible to turn one book into a thousand books, but those books still had to travel from the press into the hands of readers. Physical books were not only the medium in which the content was consumed, they were also the medium in which it was transported to the consumer. Thus, a publisher's total expense was proportional to the number of copies distributed. In such a situation, it is reasonable to ask that each user bear a portion of the costs of distribution. Each user is, after all, more or less responsible for her particular quantum of expense. If the book (or record) is in her hands, it must have gotten there somehow, which in turn means someone spent money to get it there. Divide those expenses by the number of copies, add in some amount for profit, and you arrive, roughly speaking, at the book's price.

But today, the medium over which content is distributed can be unrelated to the medium in which it is ultimately consumed. The data can be sent over a wire, at essentially no cost, and the user can print up a copy at her own expense, and at whatever quality she can afford, on the other end. Furthermore, it is no longer important to possess the master; in fact, the concept of the master copy itself is obsolete. To make a perfect copy of a printed work is actually quite hard, although making a corrupt or abridged copy is very easy. Meanwhile, to make a perfect copy of a digital work is trivially easy—it's making an imperfect copy that requires extra effort.

Thus the practice of charging the same fee for each copy, regardless of how many copies there are or who made them, is now unjustifiable. The cost of producing and distributing the work is now essentially fixed, no longer proportional to the number of copies. From society's point of view, every dollar spent beyond the amount needed (if any) to bring the work into existence in the first place is a waste, an impediment to the work's ability to spread on its own merits.

The Internet did something the Company of Stationers never anticipated: it made their argument a testable hypothesis. Would creators still create, without centralized publishers to distribute their works? Even minimal exposure to the Internet is enough to provide the answer: of course they will. They already are. Many short works of both fiction and non-fiction are already available online. Printing and binding entire books on demand is rarer, but only because the equipment to do it is still somewhat expensive and the desire for a physical book is dwindling.

Some might argue that authors are different, that they are more dependent on copyright than musicians. After all, a musician expects to perform, and can therefore gain indirectly by releasing recordings for free—greater exposure leads to more performances. But authors don't perform; they reach their audience only through their works, not in person. If they now had to come up with ways to fund themselves without imposing an artificial scarcity on their works, could they do it? Imagine the simplest scenario: you walk into the neighborhood print shop and tell the clerk the Web address of the book you want. A couple of minutes later, the clerk comes back with a freshly printed, hardbound book, straight off the Internet. He rings up the sale.

“That'll be eight dollars. Would you like to add the one dollar author's suggested donation?”

Do you say yes? Perhaps you do, perhaps not—but note that when museums charge a voluntary admission fee, people often pay it. The same sort of dynamic is at work in the copy shop. Most people are happy to pay a tiny extra bit on top of some larger amount, if they have their wallet out already and think it's for a good reason. When people fail to make small, voluntary donations to a cause they like, it's more often due to the inconvenience (writing a check, putting it in the mail, et cetera) than the money. But even if only half, or fewer, of all readers were to make such donations, authors would still earn more than they do under traditional royalty schemes, and furthermore would have the pleasure of finally being the readers' ally in distribution, instead of their enemy.

This is not the only possible system, and it can easily coexist with others. Those not convinced by voluntary donations should consider another method: the Fund and Release system (also called the Threshold Pledge system). Those who have used Kickstarter or similar sites will be familiar with the concept, if not the term. This system is designed to solve the classic problem of distributed funding, which is that each contributor wants reassurance that others are also contributing, before putting in her own

money. Under fund-and-release, the hopeful creator of a new work states up front how much money will be required to produce it—this is the “threshold.” An intermediary organization then collects pledges, in any amounts, from the general public. When the total amount pledged reaches the threshold (or exceeds it by some standard percentage, to account for bookkeeping and assumption of risk), the intermediary signs a contract with the creator, and the pledges are called in. Only at this stage, when there is enough money to achieve the desired result, is anyone asked to actually pay up. The intermediary holds the money in escrow, paying the creator according to whatever schedule they negotiated. The last of the money is paid when the work is completed and made publicly available, not just to the contributors, but to the entire world. If the creator doesn’t produce, the intermediary returns the money to the donors.

The fund-and-release system has some interesting properties not found in the monopolistic, copyright-based marketplace. The resultant work is available to everyone in the world, free of charge. Yet the author was also paid enough to produce the work; if she needed more, she could have asked for more and seen if the market would bear it. Those who did choose to pay paid only as much as they were comfortable with, no more. And finally, there was no risk for the contributors—if the threshold is never reached, then no one pays anything.

Not all methods will be so pleasantly high-minded, of course. The author Fay Weldon famously accepted money from Bulgari jewelry to write a novel that featured Bulgari products prominently. She did so, titling the book *The Bulgari Connection*. The book was originally intended as a limited edition to be given away at a corporate function, but having written it, Weldon took it to a publisher for general release. Does this mean that in the future we’ll have to scrutinize all creative works for signs of hidden corporate sponsorship? Perhaps, but this is nothing new—product placement was invented in the context of traditional copyright, and has flourished there, as it probably would anywhere. Copyright is neither the cause of corporate sponsorship nor its antidote. To look to the publishing industry as a force for decommercialization would be weirdly out of touch indeed.

These are just a few examples of ways to support creative work without copyright. There are many other methods; there were many even before the Internet made convenient, direct micro-payments possible. Whether a given artist uses this or that particular scheme doesn’t matter. The important thing is that with little or no friction to impede the payment of tiny amounts, authors will find ways to make such payments happen on the scale they need. Those economists who are enamoured of markets as a solution to everything should be in love with the possibilities here; but, predictably,

many are not, because they hate to see anything become ‘not property.’

To see a glimpse of the future, it may be most helpful to look not at net-savvy musicians, but at software. The flourishing Free Software movement is probably the best example we have today of a post-copyright world. Instead of prohibiting sharing, the software’s license explicitly permits and encourages it. Some predicted that this initial success would quickly level off as the software increased in size and complexity and required centralized, hierarchical organizations to maintain. But instead of foundering, the Free Software movement has grown so quickly that even its own participants are surprised, and it shows no signs of stopping. It now produces software whose functionality rivals that available in the proprietary market. Free software is widely used by banks, corporations, and governments, as well as individual computer users. More web sites run the free Apache web server than run all other web servers combined. Free operating systems are now the fastest-growing segment of the operating system market. Although some free software authors are paid for their work (after all, their services provide a benefit to those who use the software, and some of those users are willing to pay for it), others volunteer their time. Each software project has its own reasons for existing, and each programmer their own reasons for contributing. But the cumulative effect is a direct flaunting of copyright’s entire justification: a thriving community of intellectual production now exists without enforcing copyrights, yet achieves substantially the same results as its mainstream counterpart.

According to the traditional justification of copyright, this shouldn’t be happening. The software is essentially in the public domain; its copyright serves mainly to identify the original authors, and in some cases to prevent anyone else from imposing a stricter license. The authors have given up every exclusive right except the right to be identified as the authors. They have voluntarily returned to a world before copyright law: they enforce no royalties, and have no control over the distribution and modification of their works. The software’s license gives everyone automatic permission both to use and to redistribute it. You can simply start handing out copies, there’s no need to notify anyone or ask permission. If you want to modify it, you’re free to do that too. You can even sell it, though naturally it’s difficult to charge much, since you’d be competing with others handing out the same goods at no cost. A more common model is to encourage people to download the software for free, and instead sell services such as technical support, training, and customization. These models are not fantasies, they are the basis for profitable businesses that exist right now, paying real programmers competitive salaries to work on free software. But the point is not that people are paid to do it—some are, but many more are not, and yet write

it anyway. The real point is that a tremendous amount of free software is produced and maintained every year, at a rate that grows quickly even by the standards of the software industry.

If this phenomenon were isolated to software, it would be explainable as an aberration—software is different, programmers are overpaid, and so on. But it's not just software; if you look carefully, there are signs of it happening everywhere. Musicians release their tracks online for free downloading, and the quantity of freely available writing on the Internet—starting with reference and non-fiction works, but now including fiction and poetry—long ago passed the point of measurability. Software is not fundamentally different from these other forms of information. Like poems, songs, books, and movies, it can be transmitted digitally. It can be copied in whole or in part; it can be excerpted for use in other works; it can be modified and edited; it can even be satirized.

The abandonment of copyright is farthest along in software mainly because programmers were among the first groups to have Internet access, not because of anything special about the nature of software. Gradually, creators in other areas are realizing that they too can disseminate their works without publishers or centralized distribution chains, by simply allowing the freedom to copy. And increasingly, they are choosing to do so, because they have little to lose, and because it's the easiest way for their work to find its way to an appreciative audience. Far from being especially dependent on copyright law, creators gain the most by abandoning the copyright monopoly.

Even in their early stages, these trends raise an obvious question. If copyright is not really needed to stimulate original creation, then what purpose does it serve today? For it is quite clear that if copyright did not exist already, we wouldn't invent it now. We just finished building ourselves a gigantic copying machine (the Internet) that doubles as a communications device, and incidentally makes it convenient to transfer small amounts of money between people. Sharing is now the most natural thing in the world. The idea that artists are somehow harmed by it is demonstrated false every day, by the thousands of new works that appear online, credited and fully acknowledged by their authors, yet free for the taking. If someone were to argue that creativity would soon dry up unless we immediately institute a system of strict controls over who can copy what, we could reasonably look on them as insane. Yet, in slightly more diplomatic language, this is essentially the argument used by the copyright lobby to press for ever stronger laws.

Creativity is not what's at stake here, and in its more honest moments the publishing industry even tacitly admits this. Although for public relations purposes industry leaders make token declarations about the need for poor

artists to earn a living, their most detailed and compelling statements are usually about the business effects of copyright.

“You’re not buying music, you’re buying a key. That’s what digital rights management does: it enables business models.”

It’s hard to imagine a more succinct statement of the industry credo. He might as well have said ‘That’s what copyright does: it enables business models.’ Unfortunately, not all of the propaganda put out by the industry is as straightforward and honest.

In Ray Bradbury’s iconic dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*, a war rages in a future society over the existence of books. Those in power seek to destroy them, both because of the controversial ideas they disclose and because of their perceived limited utility in a society filled with video-enabled walls and mobile media devices. Those who rebel against these rules hide books to preserve them for historical, political, and philosophical reasons. Bradbury’s infamous firemen—shock troopers who kick down doors and incinerate homes where books are hidden—and their mechanical drone-like hounds that sniff out literary contraband are meant as provocations to incite our fears that the very book we hold in our hands might be taken away from us at a moment’s notice in the name of “public happiness.” By personifying this version of absolute control, Bradbury makes clear that notions of personal property or domestic privacy stand no chance in a society that values centralized authority over individual autonomy and cultural heritage.

As a commentary on the McCarthy Era, Bradbury’s work is a reaction to a specific threat to our engagement with ideas and the cultural artifacts containing them. And although the particular brand of control Bradbury had in mind has not manifested itself in contemporary US culture, there is a different sort of threat to our freedom to read, explore, and share ideas—one that is more subtle, but all the more dangerous for it. This threat doesn’t kick down your door in the dead of the night; it already lives in your home. It’s embedded into the media you buy and stored on the devices you carry in your pocket. It doesn’t rely on physical force or the power of the state to enforce its rules, just the often unseen operation of software code: Digital Rights Management (DRM).

“You don’t need to be a lawyer to be a musician, but you do need to know one legal term—copyright. To all creative artists—poets, painters, novelists, dancers, directors, actors, musicians, singers, and songwriters—the term matters dearly.

To all artists, copyright is more than a term of intellectual property law that prohibits the unauthorized duplication or

performance or distribution of a creative work. To them, ‘copyright’ means the chance to hone their craft, experiment, create, and thrive. It is a vital right, and over the centuries artists have fought to preserve that right; artists such as John Milton, William Hogarth, Mark Twain, and Charles Dickens. Twain traveled to England to protect his rights, and Dickens came to America to do the same.”

Recognize that? It’s a page straight out of the Stationers’ playbook—an undisguised retelling of the copyright myth, complete with references to individual authors, designed to arouse our support for struggling artists valiantly fighting for their artistic integrity. Apparently, all those artists throughout history who did just fine without copyright aren’t included in “all creative artists.”

“Copyright law all started with The Statute of Anne, the world’s first copyright law passed by the British Parliament in 1709. Yet the principle of protecting the rights of artists predates this. It may sound like dry history at first blush, but since there was precedent to establish and rights to protect, much time, effort, and money has been spent in legal battles over the centuries.”

This breathless summary is the copyright equivalent of ‘Christopher Columbus sailed to America to prove the Earth was round and make friends with the Indians.’ Yes, much money has indeed been spent in legal battles, but the industry is careful not to say who spent it, nor are any further details given about the “principle of protecting the rights of artists” that is alleged to predate these developments.

The rest of their page continues in a similar vein, with so many omissions, mischaracterizations, and outright lies that it’s hard to imagine how anyone doing even a modicum of research could have written it. It is, basically, low-grade supporting propaganda in their ongoing campaign to convince the public that copyright is as fundamental to civilization as the laws of thermodynamics.

The RIAA also indulges in one of the favorite tactics of the modern copyright lobby: equating illegal copying with the unrelated offense of plagiarism. For example, a former head of the RIAA, used to speak at schools and colleges, urging the students to adopt the industry’s views about information ownership. Here is her own description of how she presents the case:

“Analogies are what really work best. I ask them, ‘What have you done last week?’ They may say they wrote a paper on this or that. So I tell them, ‘Oh, you wrote a paper, and you got an A? Would it bother you if somebody could just take that paper and get an A too? Would that bug you?’ So this sense of personal investment does ring true with people.”

Since people who download music and movies do not usually replace the artist’s name with their own, let’s ask the question she should have asked: ‘Would it bother you if somebody could just show a copy of your paper around, so other people could benefit from what you wrote, and see that you got an A?’ Of course, the students would have answered ‘No, we aren’t bothered by that at all,’ which isn’t what the RIAA wanted to hear.

The RIAA is extreme only in the clumsiness of their propaganda. Their message is, in essence, the same one offered by the rest of the copyright industry, which maintains a constant drumbeat of warnings that online content swapping will deprive creators of their reputations and their ability to work, despite overwhelming evidence that copyright never provided them with much of a livelihood anyway, and that they would happily continue to create without it as long as they have a way to distribute their works. The campaign might sound harmless or silly when described as I have described it here, but because they are fighting for survival, with large budgets and skilled publicity departments, the publishers have succeeded in shaping public opinion to a surprising degree. Consider this poor woman in an article about the RIAA file-sharing lawsuits:

“One woman who has received a subpoena from the recording industry association said she had struggled to explain to her 13-year-old son why file-sharing was wrong.

‘I said, suppose you wrote a song and a famous rock group sang it and you didn’t get paid,’ said the mother, who declined to give her name because of her legal situation. ‘He said: I wouldn’t care. That would be awesome. They’re still just in that young age where money doesn’t matter.’

The mother said she had better results when she compared taking someone’s song to plagiarizing a school paper.”

One can only hope the sensible 13-year-old manages to keep his head, when so many around him are apparently losing theirs. The combination of a still-sympathetic public and deep pockets has unfortunately allowed the copyright industry to exercise dangerous influence at the legislative level. The result is a disturbing trend: mutually reinforcing physical and

legal barriers that, while ostensibly designed to combat illegal copying, have the inevitable effect of interfering with all copying. Digital copy-protection schemes are increasingly enforced by your computer's hardware itself, rather than by malleable and replaceable programs. With government cooperation, this combination becomes even more powerful. In the United States we have a law—the Digital Millennium Copyright Act—that makes it illegal to circumvent a digital protection scheme, or even to produce software that helps others circumvent a digital protection scheme. Unfortunately, since much hardware and software automatically imprints such schemes on any media it produces, the Act effectively stifles authorized copying and many other activities that would otherwise fall into the category of “fair use” under current copyright law.

It is vital to understand that these side effects are not accidents, not unexpected consequences of an otherwise well-intentioned effort to protect artists. Rather, they are an integral part of a strategy that, at bottom, has nothing to do with encouraging creativity. The purpose of this three-pronged industry effort—the publicity campaign, the legal campaign, and the hardware “protections”—is simply this: to prevent the Internet experiment from being carried out to completion. Any organization that is deeply invested in the concept of copy control cannot be pleased to see a system arise that makes copying as easy as clicking a mouse. To the extent possible, such organizations would like to see the same pay-per-copy model that we've been using for centuries continue, even though the fundamental physics of information have changed to make pay-per-copy obsolete.

Although the copyright lobby succeeds in getting new laws passed, and even in winning some court cases, these victories rest on a disintegrating foundation. How much longer will the public continue to believe in the copyright myth, the notion that copyright was invented to make creative work possible? The myth has been maintainable so far because it always had a tiny a grain of truth: although copyright was not inspired by authors, and was not enacted to protect them, it did enable the widespread distribution of many original works. Furthermore, there are still many publishers (generally the smaller or individually-owned ones) who behave with an admirable sense of cultural stewardship, subsidizing unprofitable but important works with money earned by stronger sellers, sometimes even losing money outright in order to print things they think worthwhile. But because they are all bound by the economics of large-scale printing, they are all ultimately dependent on copyright.

There won't be a dramatic battle between the publishing industry and the copying public, with a climax, a denouement, and a clear winner striding out of the dust. Instead, what we will see—are already seeing—is the

emergence of two parallel streams of creative work: the proprietary stream, and the free stream. Every day, more people join the free stream, of their own volition, for all sorts of reasons. Some enjoy the fact that there are no gatekeepers, no artificial barriers. A work can succeed by its merits and word of mouth alone: although there's nothing to stop traditional marketing techniques from being used in the free stream, there's less to subsidize them, so word of mouth and peer-review networks are taking on a greater importance there. Others enter the free stream as crossovers from the proprietary, releasing a portion of their work into the free domain as an advertisement or an experiment. Some simply realize that they have no chance of success in the proprietary world anyway, and figure they might as well release what they have to the public.

As the stream of freely available material gets bigger, its stigma will slowly vanish. It used to be that the difference between a published author and an unpublished one was that you could obtain the former's books, but not the latter's. Being published meant something. It had an aura of respectability; it implied that someone had judged your work and given it an institutional stamp of approval. But now the difference between published and unpublished is narrowing. Soon, being published will mean nothing more than that an editor somewhere found your work worthy of a large-scale print run, and possibly a marketing campaign. This may affect the popularity of the work, but it won't fundamentally affect its availability; and there will be so many "unpublished" but worthwhile works, that the lack of a publishing pedigree will no longer be considered an automatic strike against an author. Although the free stream does not use traditional copyright, it does observe, and unofficially enforce, a "credit right." Works are frequently copied and excerpted with attribution—but attempts to steal credit are usually detected speedily, and decried publicly. The same mechanisms that make copying easy make plagiarism very difficult. It's hard to secretly use someone else's work when a search can quickly locate the original.

The proprietary stream cannot survive forever, in the face of such competition. The abolition of copyright law is a must; but the real force here is creators freely choosing to release their works for unrestricted copying, because it's in their interests to do so. At some point, it will be obvious that all the interesting stuff is going on in the free stream, and people will simply cease dipping into the proprietary one.

Or, we can sit back and allow this process to be halted, by permitting manufacturers to build in hardware "protections" that interfere with our ability to copy legitimately; by allowing the copyright lobby to capture our legislatures, to the point where we are constantly looking over our shoulders for the copyright police; and by hesitating to use the free stream to its full

potential, because we've been taught a false story of what copyright is all about.

We can, if we choose, have a world where concepts like “out of print” or “rare book” are not only obsolete, but actually meaningless. We can live in a fertile and vibrant garden of constantly evolving works, created by people who wanted deeply to make them available, not mandated by a publisher's market research. Schools would never be forced to stay with out-of-date textbooks because of the per-copy prices set by publishers, and your computer would always let you share songs with your friends.

One way to get there is to question the copyright myth. Copying isn't theft, and it isn't piracy. It's what we did for millennia until the invention of copyright, and we can do it again, if we don't hobble ourselves with the antiquated remnants of a censorship system from the sixteenth century.

“Invention does not consist of creating out of void, but out of chaos.”

“All have derived benefits from their ancestors and therefore, all are bound, as by an oath, to transmit those benefits, even in an improved condition, to posterity. Only an isolated, solitary being, having no relations to a community around him, can subscribe to the arrogant doctrine of absolute ownership.”

Knowledge is too important to remain the eternal possession of any company or individual. We know that future achievements must build on past ones; that monopolies, over the long-run, drain the creativity from a society.

No concept is truly unique and all ideas are created in the context of the society and culture in which they are engendered. Therefore, there cannot be any true ownership, or indeed theft, of these artifacts as they are an integral part of the environment that learning is taking place within.

“Creative work is to be encouraged and rewarded, but private motivation must ultimately serve the cause of promoting broad public availability of literature, music, and the other arts.”

The rules governing private property are constantly being contested and adapted, sometimes in big ways (banning slavery) but often in small ways barely noticeable to anyone not directly involved. What looks like government regulation is sometimes better understood as the creation of a property right. For example, before 1978, airlines with overbooked flights simply bumped their excess passengers arbitrarily. After many complaints,

the Civil Aeronautics Board (which then regulated airlines) began requiring airlines to treat each seat as the property of the passenger who booked it. That way, airlines with overbooked flights would have to “buy” the excess seats back by offering whatever inducement was necessary to get the right number of passengers to give up their “property” voluntarily.

The underlying mechanisms that define property become even more complicated when property takes the form of strands of genetic material, or combinations of molecules, or gigabits of software code, or, more generally, information and ideas. This sort of property doesn’t exist in one unique place and time. It can’t be weighed or measured concretely. And most of the cost of producing it goes into discovering it or making the first copy. After that, the additional production cost is often zero. Once the discovery or invention has been made, the public will benefit most by having full access to it at no more than the cost of replicating it—which, again, is often near zero. Why should a company that creates a blockbuster drug that can be reproduced for pennies earn billions while many who would benefit from it cannot afford it?

Our thoughts and creations owe an unpayable debt to those who came before, what makes us think we have the right the demand payment?

While we happily borrow, copy, and benefit from the ideas of those who have gone before us, without a thought, many of us are reluctant to let others use “our” ideas unless they pay us for doing so. When Walt Disney produced films like *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, and *Alice in Wonderland*, he borrowed the stories freely from the public domain, but when the copyright on his films ran out, he lobbied to have it extended. And as the late Steve Jobs said, “We [Apple] have always been shameless about stealing great ideas.” Yet Apple is famously quick to litigate against any companies who borrow or appear to borrow Apple’s ideas. Most have no problem with copying as long as they’re the ones doing it.

When the nation was founded, copyrights covered only “maps, charts, and books” and gave the author the exclusive right to publish for fourteen years, which could be renewed once, for a maximum term of twenty-eight years. In 1831, the maximum was increased to forty-two years. In 1909, Congress again extended the maximum, this time to fifty-six years, where it remained for the next half century. Then, beginning in 1962, Congress extended the maximum eleven more times. In 1976, Congress extended it to the life of the author plus an additional fifty years. The creator did not even have to seek renewal. If the creation emerged from a corporation, the copyright lasted seventy-five years. This change operated retroactively, so any work still under corporate copyright in 1978, when the new law took effect, was eligible for an additional nineteen years of protection. In 1998,

Congress added twenty years on top of all this—to ninety-five years from the first publication, in the case of corporate owners.

The Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998 was also known around Washington as the Mickey Mouse Protection Act because it was basically about Mickey. Walt Disney had created Mickey in 1928, so under the prevailing seventy-five-year corporate limit Mickey would move into the public domain in 2003. Pluto, Goofy, and the rest would become public shortly thereafter. That would mean big revenue losses for the Disney Corporation. Accordingly, Disney lobbied Congress intensively to extend copyright protection for another twenty years, as did Time Warner, which held copyrights on many twentieth-century films and musical scores, along with the heirs of dead songwriters George and Ira Gershwin. They got what they wanted. Most of those old copyrights are now scheduled to expire in 2023. It seems a safe bet that before that year, copyrights will be extended yet again.

Moreover, copyrights now cover almost all creative works, including computer programs, and give owners (now, usually large corporations) rights over all derivative work that might be generated by the original. As a result, much of the creative output of the last century—not just Mickey Mouse and other Disney characters but many of the icons of the twentieth century, including Superman and Dick Tracy; a treasure trove of movies, among them *Gone with the Wind* and *Casablanca*; the last century's great outpouring of music, including George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" and Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind"; and masterpieces of literature, such as the works of Faulkner and Hemingway—have been locked away for an additional two decades. Here again, the result is higher corporate profits, higher costs to consumers, and less access for everyone. The reason more printed books are available on Amazon.com from the 1880s than from the 1980s, for example, is that anyone is free to republish books from the earlier era.

Ironically, many of Disney's original creations drew heavily on characters and stories that had become classics, such as Aladdin, the Little Mermaid, and Snow White, because they had long been in the public domain. But the public domain is now far smaller.

By allowing license terms to redefine transactions and strip consumers of ownership, courts are taking power away from the public lawmaking process and vesting it in the hands of private IP rights holders. Licenses function as a form of privately made law that allows rights holders to modify, supplement, and contravene IP law at the expense of the customers who pay for their products.

For most consumer goods, the contract is formed at the time of initial purchase. Let's say you walk into your local hardware store to buy a shovel.

You see one that looks suitable for your needs. It bears a \$20 price tag. Even though it's not as formal as a loan document, contract law calls that an offer. You take the shovel to the checkout counter and tender the asking price. That's acceptance. A contract has been formed. But let's say that once you get home, the hardware store calls you and says:

“You know that shovel you bought? Well, there are some additional strings attached. You can use it for ditch digging, but you can't use it for gardening. Gardening requires you to pay an extra \$30 upgrade fee.”

After depleting your reserve of expletives and hanging up the phone, chances are you would feel no obligation to avoid planting some shrubbery with your new shovel. And no court in its right mind would disagree with you. It would recognize that phone call as an ineffective attempt to modify an existing contract. Now imagine a slightly different scenario. While waiting in the checkout line, you notice a sticker on the handle of your shovel. It reads:

“This shovel is subject to a license agreement. You will be notified of the full terms by phone after your purchase.”

Does this change things? Most of us would probably say no. Vague references to unknown terms cannot form the basis of a contract.

“The door refused to open. It said, ‘Five cents, please.’ He searched his pockets. No more coins; nothing. ‘I'll pay you tomorrow,’ he told the door. Again he tried the knob. Again it remained locked tight. ‘What I pay you,’ he informed it, ‘is in the nature of a gratuity; I don't have to pay you.’

‘I think otherwise,’ the door said. ‘Look in the purchase contract you signed when you bought this apartment.’ In his desk drawer he found the contract; since signing it he had found it necessary to refer to the document many times. Sure enough; payment to his door for opening and shutting constituted a mandatory fee. Not a tip.

‘You discover I'm right,’ the door said. It sounded smug. From the drawer beside the sink Joe Chip got a stainless steel knife; with it he began systematically to unscrew the bolt assembly of his apt's money-gulping door. ‘I'll sue you,’ the door said as the first screw fell out. Joe Chip said, ‘I've never been sued by a door. But I guess I can live through it.’”

Motion Picture Patents Co. v. Universal Film Manufacturing Co., involved Edison's patented film projectors. Edison was happy to use Westinghouse dynamos over the patent holder's objections, but when it came to his own patents, Edison had a very different view. His projectors were extremely popular, but Edison quickly realized that the real money was in selling film reels, which he had also patented. So he attached a large steel plate to each of his projectors that asserted that they could only be used with Edison reels. After his patent on the reel expired, the defendants decided to make their own compatible film reels for use with Edison's projector. Edison sued them and their customers, claiming that use of the new reels with the patented projector violated the restriction stamped on the side of the device.

For Edison—much like Lexmark and Keurig—tethering a device that customers are likely to buy only once to a consumable accessory product like ink, coffee, or reels of film looked like a savvy business model. By locking out competitors, Edison could keep the more lucrative film reel market to himself. However, the Supreme Court's *Motion Picture Patents Co.* decision ultimately rejected Edison's attempt to trump patent exhaustion. It explained that “the primary purpose of our patent laws is not the creation of private fortunes for the owners of patents, but is ‘to promote the progress of science and the useful arts.’” As a result, “the right to vend is exhausted by a single, unconditional sale, the article sold being thereby carried outside the monopoly of the patent law and rendered free of every restriction which the vendor may attempt to put upon it.”

In 2013, the Supreme Court again revisited the doctrine of patent exhaustion, this time in relation to genetically modified soybean seeds. Monsanto owned patents on these seeds, and sued farmers who saved seeds from prior seasons and replanted them, claiming this infringed the exclusive right to “make” their patented products. One of these farmers argued that patent rights in the seeds were exhausted when farmers bought the original batch, and any subsequent seeds that came from the harvested plants were subject to exhaustion as well. Seeds, he argued, are naturally “self-replicating”; they grew themselves. The Court rejected such arguments, including the so-called “blame-the-bean” defense, but it noted that its holding was limited to the facts of the case; other technologies might, in fact, self-replicate “outside of the purchaser's control” or that self-replication might be “a necessary but incidental step in using the item for another purpose.” In noting this, the Court cited to section 117 of the Copyright Act, which allows for the creation of essential step copies and modifications of software programs.

So far, limitations on use have for the most part treated everyone the same: ‘you cannot lend this ebook,’ or ‘your rental period is twenty-four hours.’ But as technology reduces the costs of monitoring and valuing individual

behavior, we are likely to see increasingly fine-grained, individualized use-based restrictions. Imagine your reasonably-hip crossover vehicle alerting you after your third after-school stop, ‘I’m sorry; you’ve reached your limit of daily passenger drop-offs. Would you like to upgrade your vehicle plan to CarPoolPro?’ As if that weren’t indignity enough, your carmaker’s pricing algorithm—relying on information it has gathered about property values in your neighborhood, your driving patterns, and your in-car search history—predicts exactly how much you are willing to pay for the privilege of dropping off that last cranky first grader. This is exactly the goal of price and geographic discrimination tactics—to divide our lives into individual transactions and charge as much as we are willing to pay for each one. Shifting away from ownership is an essential step toward that future.

US copyright law does not protect fashion design, only fabric prints and jewelry, and the law has always been firm on this point. The copyright office has always said very consistently that clothing is just functional and therefore can’t be copyrighted. In Europe, as well as in India, Singapore, and with certain limitations in Canada, fashion design is largely covered by copyright rules, although they are often loosely enforced. France, perhaps not surprisingly, has had copyright protection on their fashions for a century.

The reason America lags behind other nations on fashion copyright law is perhaps because historically it was a manufacturing hub rather than a design center. Europe had the designers; the United States had the factories that mass-manufactured the European designs. Garment makers benefit from relaxed copyright laws because it means they can either skip hiring designers or simply hire sketch artists to copy the latest looks. They can just go out and choose what’s hot—it used to be what’s hot from Paris, now it’s what’s hot from anywhere—and make the copy.

However, now that you’re more likely to find a fashion designer than a garment worker in the United States this may have shifted the balance of power toward designers, many of whom are demanding that we reexamine our laws.

Does the artist who invents something deserve a different level of credit from those who employ that invention later, even if they do so in a more interesting way? Is originality more or less important than we pretend?

Copyright and patent laws which are structured to ensure fame and profit for those that can afford the fees and are the quickest to file forms have created a society and a history filled with people celebrated for creations they did not originate and filled also with creative people who died in poverty and anonymity because they did not have the gift of self promotion.

“Sure, copyright is silly—when you’re not the creator.”

False. Unless the individual raised themselves in a cave cut off from all other humans, creating the idea and product solely in that cave before emerging into a world they have no knowledge or experience with but luckily made a product that an alien culture finds useful, then they have not created the item without assistance. It is not purely their amazing business acumen or engineering skills or creative intellect that created the idea, it was done with assistance. Copyright is silly regardless of who you are, provided you value the common good over yourself. Now of course, in the current system, copyright is a way for some small segment of the population to be supported well. However this is done at the expense of everyone else in many extremely harmful ways.

The human mind is unable to form an original thought. An idea is either one that has been had before, or one that is the logical result of something else.

Once upon a time, people were active collaborators in the creation of culture. That was the essence of folk traditions. People took songs, tweaked them, and remade them as their own; they retold stories, adding their own embellishments. Higher forms of culture worked this way, too. What was Mark Twain but a skilled refashioner of the African American tales he overheard as a youth? If critics were honest, they would concede that every artist operated like this—borrowing, quoting, building supposedly original creations on the works of others. Jazz, at its core, entails the constant reinterpretation of the old songbook; hip-hop unapologetically swipes its beats and hooks. The great poets did this, too. T. S. Eliot, who stitched elusive and allusive quotations into his verse, issued the dictum:

“Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal.”

Knowledge is a river for all humans to drink from. In that sense, is intellectual property theft?

When Jonas Salk, a scientist at the University of Pittsburgh, developed the first polio vaccine in 1952, he did not patent the lifesaving treatment.

“There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?”

As Thomas Jefferson explained it:

“He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me.”

If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and

I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.

We all know about taxes, but the government can also turn to non-tax mechanisms for funding public purposes, which impose tax-like burdens in the future. Grants of patents and copyrights are an obvious example. These government-granted monopolies are mechanisms through which the government provides incentives to innovate and do creative work, and in this sense can be thought of as alternatives to direct government payments for these purposes. The government could pay people and corporations to research new drugs, software, or other items, and to do creative work. In fact, it already does, paying over \$30 billion a year to finance research at the National Institutes of Health and funding—modestly—creative work through the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This direct funding appears as an expenditure in the government's budget. However, if the government pays for this work with a patent or copyright monopoly, then the cost never appears on the government's books. In effect, the government is committing the public to paying a higher price for the protected item for the duration of the patent or copyright. This is a form of taxation that need never show up in the government's accounts. A push to limit government spending can lead to longer and stronger patent and copyright protections as alternatives to direct spending, even if these monopolies are less-efficient mechanisms for financing innovation and creative work.

Patents and copyrights give their holders monopolies on technology or creative work for their duration. If we are concerned that money is going from ordinary workers to people who hold patents and copyrights, then one policy we may want to consider is shortening and weakening these monopolies, if not removing them altogether. But policy has gone sharply in the opposite direction over the last four decades, as a wide variety of measures have been put into law that make these protections longer and stronger. Thus, the redistribution from people who work to people who own the technology should not be surprising—that was the purpose of the policy. If stronger rules on patents and copyrights produced economic dividends in the form of more innovation and more creative output, then this upward redistribution might be justified. But the evidence doesn't indicate there has been any noticeable growth dividend associated with this upward redistribution. In fact, stronger patent protection seems to be associated with slower growth.

A large number of R&D labs in the United States were surveyed to gain insights into the relative importance of patents as a mechanism to support research. The study found that patents were viewed as a relatively

unimportant mechanism in allowing firms to profit from their research. The respondents cited lead time advantages, secrecy, and the use of complementary manufacturing and marketing as more important than patents. The survey also found substantial differences in answers by firm size, with large firms most frequently citing patents as a major way to protect their investment in R&D.

The biggest technology companies are spending billions accumulating patent portfolios and then suing and countersuing one another. By purchasing Motorola Mobility for \$12.5 billion in 2012, for example, Google gained ownership of seventeen-thousand patents, many of which would serve as valuable ammunition in the smartphone patent wars that Google, Samsung, and Apple were waging against one another. Google and Apple have been spending more money acquiring and litigating over patents than on doing research and development.

Fuisz came upon the startup's website. The home page gave a cursory description of the microfluidic system Theranos was developing. Under the website's News tab, he also found a link to a radio interview Elizabeth Holmes had given to NPR's "BioTech Nation" segment a few months earlier, in May 2005. In the interview, she'd described her blood-testing system in more detail and explained the use she foresaw for it: at-home monitoring of adverse reactions to drugs. Fuisz listened to the NPR interview several times while gazing out the window at the koi pond in his yard and decided there was some merit to Elizabeth's vision. But as a trained physician, he also spotted a potential weakness he could exploit. If patients were going to test their blood at home with the Theranos device to monitor how they were tolerating the drugs they were taking, there needed to be a built-in mechanism that would alert their doctors when the results came back abnormal. He saw a chance to patent that missing element, figuring there was money to be made down the road, whether from Theranos or someone else. His thirty-five years of experience patenting medical inventions told him such a patent might eventually command up to \$4 million for an exclusive license.

At 19:30 on the evening of Friday, September 23, 2005, Fuisz sent an email to his longtime patent attorney, Alan Schiavelli of the law firm Antonelli, Terry, Stout & Kraus, with the subject line *Blood Analysis—deviation from norm (individualized)*:

“Al, Joe, and I would like to patent the following application. It is a known art to check various blood parameters like blood glucose, electrolytes, platelet activity, hematocrit et cetera. What we would like to cover as an improvement is the presence of

a memory chip or other such storage device which could be programmed by a computer or similar device and contain the 'normal parameters' for the individual patient. Thus if results would differ significantly from these norms—a notice would be given the user or health professional to repeat the sampling. If the significant difference persists on the retest, the device using existing technology well known in the art, to contact the physician, care center, pharma company or other or all. Please let me know next week if you could cover this.

Thx. Rcf"

Schiavelli was busy with other matters and didn't respond for several months. Fuisz finally got his attention on January 11, 2006, when he sent him another email saying he wanted to make a modification to his original idea: the alert mechanism would now be "a bar code or a radio tag label" on the package insert of the drug the patient was taking. A chip in the blood-testing device would scan the bar code and program the device to automatically send an alert to the patient's doctor if and when the patient's blood showed side effects from the drug. Fuisz and Schiavelli exchanged more emails refining the concept, culminating in a fourteen-page patent application they filed with the US Patent and Trademark Office on April 24, 2006. The proposed patent didn't purport to invent groundbreaking new technology. Rather, it combined existing ones—wireless data transmission, computer chips, and bar codes—into a physician alert mechanism that could be embedded in at-home blood-testing devices made by other companies. It made no secret of which particular company it was targeting: it mentioned Theranos by name in the fourth paragraph and quoted from its website.

These government-granted monopolies can impose substantial costs on the public. In the case of prescription drugs alone the cost is in the neighborhood of \$380 billion a year (equal to 2.0 percent of GDP). Washington is filled with politicians and organizations that hyperventilate about government debt and the burden it imposes on our children, but they ignore the burdens imposed by patent and copyright monopolies granted by the government.

"The Constitution's language nowhere suggests that [copyright] should include a right to divide markets or a concomitant right to charge different purchasers different prices for the same book, say to increase or to maximize gain. Neither, to our knowledge, did any Founder make any such suggestion. We have found

no precedent suggesting a legal preference for interpretations of copyright statutes that would provide for market divisions.”

Patents, like copyrights, do not entitle their holders to control all valuable uses of their products. Those rights have limits, and patent holders have to live with them. Yet just as John Wiley pointed to the positive impact price discrimination could have on students in developing countries who need cheap textbooks, patent holders have told their own, even more compelling story of the upside of market segmentation. Instead of cheap books, patent holders point to cheap pharmaceuticals. Citizens in developed countries like the United States can generally afford to pay much more for a product than those in poorer or less developed nations. By charging rich countries more, drug companies can charge poor countries less. And often that’s what happens. For example, one 2010 study examined the difference in international drug prices and found that in the top five countries, the prices were almost five times as high as they are in the bottom five countries. The result, patent holders claim, is a net increase in access to potentially life-saving medicine.

Putting aside the fact that the pharmaceutical industry doesn’t tell us much about the market for smartphones or ink cartridges, there are reasons to doubt the accuracy of this simple story. No doubt, some patients in developing economies benefit from price discrimination. But not all do. Drug companies are sometimes tempted to take advantage of the vast disparities of wealth within poor countries by selling their products at high prices to a lucrative minority. Many drugs are still unaffordable in developing countries despite strict bans on exporting them. And countries like the United States have their own problems with wealth inequality. When rich countries supply subsidies through high consumer prices, the poor in those countries don’t fare well. Ultimately, while pharmaceutical companies feel public pressure to keep drug prices low in the developing world, the goal of price discrimination is not to increase social welfare but to maximize profits. Just like textbook publishers, large drug companies enjoy extraordinary profits. In 2014, *Forbes* reported Pfizer’s profits at an astounding 42 percent. That’s not a company that sets prices on the basis of social welfare.

There is a basic principle that everyone should understand: drugs are cheap, but patents and other forms of protection make them expensive.

Generic drugs are almost always cheap—patent protection makes drugs expensive. The cancer and hepatitis drugs that sell for tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars a year would sell for a few hundred dollars in a free market.

Many lifesaving drugs continue to be made by only one company long after the original patent expires. In part, that's because the Patent Office often renews patents on the basis of small and insignificant changes to the original drugs that technically make them new and therefore patentable. The office is not required to weigh the financial burdens its decisions impose on customers. And pharmacies cannot substitute generic versions of a brand-name drug when it has changed in even the most minor of ways. For example, Forest Laboratories announced in February 2014 it would stop selling the existing tablet form of Namenda, its widely used drug to treat Alzheimer's, in favor of new, extended-release capsules called Namenda XR. The capsules were simply a reformulated version of the tablet, but even that minor change prevented pharmacists from substituting generic versions of the tablet, whose patent was about to run out. "Product hopping" like this keeps profits flowing to the pharmaceutical companies but costs consumers and health insurers a bundle.

In many other instances, new drugs are just changed old drugs with no expectation that they will be better. When creating drugs through organic synthesis, mirror-image molecules are created. If drug D is created, you wind up with a compound consisting of half D and half D' (the mirror image of D). The mirror image is usually inert and has no effect on the drug or the individual taking the drug, but it is left in because there is an expense to remove it. Years ago, the drug companies hit upon a brilliant idea. If they removed that non-working, mirror-image part of the pill, they could claim they devised a new drug!

Think this is rare? Ever heard of Nexium ("the purple pill")? Nexium is just Losec, with the mirror-image part removed. And Losec is an effective, and now generic, drug for heartburn. Losec is D + D'; Nexium is just D. There is no reason to believe that equivalent amounts of the two drugs are not the same—and research supports this. Four head-to-head studies compared 20 milligrams of Losec to 20 or 40 milligrams of Nexium. But you have to remember—half of Losec is D'(filler)! So these studies really compared 10 milligrams of D to 20 or 40 milligrams of P. Shouldn't more be better? One would think so, but it was barely so, and only in half the studies. And, of course, none of the advertising stated that you could get the same improvement just by taking more Losec. This isn't the only offender. In fact, since 1990, the proportion of these mirror-removed drugs among approved new drugs worldwide has become greater than half of those new approvals.

Many drugs that are available over the counter in other countries can be bought only by prescription in the United States, and the drug companies aggressively market these brands long after the patents have expired so that

patients ask doctors to prescribe them. America is one of the few advanced nations that allow direct advertising of prescription drugs to consumers.

It is illegal for Americans to shop at foreign pharmacies for cheaper versions of the same drugs sold in the United States, either branded or generic. In 2012, Congress authorized US Customs to destroy any such medications. The ostensible reason is to protect the public from dangerous counterfeit drugs. But for at least a decade before then, during which time tens of millions of prescriptions were filled over the Internet, no case was reported of Americans having been harmed by medications bought online from a foreign pharmacy. The real reason for the ban is to protect the profits of US pharmaceutical companies, which lobbied intensely for it. Yet the real threat to the public's health is drugs priced so high that an estimated fifty-million Americans—more than a quarter of them with chronic health conditions—did not fill their prescriptions in 2012, according to the National Consumers League.

Drug companies pay the makers of generic drugs to delay their cheaper versions. These so-called pay-for-delay agreements, perfectly legal, generate huge profits both for the original manufacturers and for the generics—profits that come from consumers, from health insurers, and from government agencies paying higher prices than would otherwise be the case. The tactic costs Americans an estimated \$3.5 billion a year. Europe doesn't allow these sorts of payoffs. The major American drugmakers and generics have fought off any attempts to stop them.

These companies are banking on an apocalyptic future of rampant disease, one in which governments are forced to buy, at top dollar, whatever lifesaving products the private sector has under patent.

The importance of patents in the pharmaceutical and medical equipment industry is reflected in the large gap between patent-protected prices and the cost of production. As noted earlier, patent-protected drugs can sell at prices a hundred times higher than their generic equivalents. Medical equipment follows a similar pattern. The cost of manufacturing even the most complex scanning devices or other cutting-edge equipment will rarely be more than a few thousand dollars, yet patent protection allows these products to sell for hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. This cost is recouped in high prices paid by patients (or their insurers) for procedures that may have a trivial marginal cost.

Another issue with patent monopolies is that they distort the research process by encouraging drug companies to pursue patent rents rather than find drugs that meet urgent health needs. If a pharmaceutical company produces a drug for a particular condition that earns large amounts of revenue, its competitors have a strong incentive to try to produce similar

drugs for the same condition, in order to capture a share of the rents.

Patent protection also is likely to slow and/or distort the research process by encouraging secrecy. Research advances most quickly when it is open. However, companies seeking profits through patent monopolies have incentive to disclose as little information as possible in order to avoid helping competitors. This pressure forces researchers to work around rather than build upon research findings. An analysis found that the patenting of DNA sequences in the Human Genome Project slowed future innovation and product development by between 20 and 30 percent.

Relying on patent incentives to support medical research encourages drug companies to direct research toward finding a patentable product. If, for example, evidence suggests that a condition can be most effectively treated through diet, exercise, environmental factors, or even old off-patent drugs, a pharmaceutical manufacturer would have no incentive to pursue this research. Ideally, the manufacturer would make this evidence publicly available so that researchers supported by the government, universities, or other nonprofit organizations could pursue it, but there is little incentive for them to go this route. In fact, if they are concerned that such research could lead to an alternative to a patentable product that they might develop or be in the process of developing, their incentive is to conceal the research.

A system of directly funded research, paid for by the government, would be considerably more efficient for the development of new drugs and medical equipment.

The basic logic of a system of publicly financed medical research would be that the government expand its current funding for biomedical research, which now goes primarily through the National Institutes of Health, by an amount roughly equal to the patent-supported research now conducted by the pharmaceutical industry. PhRMA, the industry trade group, puts this funding at roughly \$50 billion a year, or 0.3 percent of GDP, a figure that is also consistent with data from the National Science Foundation. That would be a reasonable target, with the idea that public funding would eventually replace patent-supported funding. Adding in research on medical equipment and tests would increase this figure by \$12–15 billion.

Suppose that we were spending another \$50 billion a year on medical research in order to replace patent-supported research, and all the findings were placed in the public domain so that all drugs were sold as generics. The annual budget would be \$50 billion higher due to the additional spending on research, but we would save \$380 billion a year on drugs due to generic pricing. In Washington policy circles, the high-drug-price scenario would be the path of fiscal prudence and caring about our children. It might pull far more money out of their pockets, but money going to drug companies

doesn't bother Washington-policy-types anywhere near as much as money going to the government.

Some would argue the necessity of having some system of international coordination so that the United States was not funding research for the whole world. This would presumably involve some payments scaled to GDP, with richer countries paying a larger share of their income. Or perhaps we could see such programs as reparations paid by the US to the world and worlds poor for climate change, regime change, and everything else they've fucked up with their toxic culture and foreign policy.

Artemisinin is a compound extracted from Chinese sweet wormwood plants. Artemisinin-based drugs are some of the best treatments we have against malaria, but as every Chinese sweet wormwood enthusiast knows, growing enough of the plant is expensive and time consuming. This is especially bad for malaria because most sufferers live in economically impoverished sub-Saharan Africa. The availability of Chinese sweet wormwood has varied dramatically over time, creating wild price fluctuations. For instance, the price was about \$135 per pound in 2003, \$495 in 2005, about \$90 in 2007, and about \$405 in 2011. When the prices drop, farmers stop growing the plants. This creates the shortage, which increases the price again. And you really don't ever want to have a shortage of antimalarial drugs.

We can't get off this cycle because we insist on doing public goods for a profit. This is a prime example of why markets are shit at supplying public goods. We could easily subsidize and encourage the production and make prices stable with no new technology required. Instead we insist on finding complex new ways that can be properly monetized and ignoring the potential for both foreseen and unforeseen consequences.

Some economists are just plain deluded ignorant fucks, drinking way too much of a the Kool-Aid and trying to force it on everyone else. There are others who do see some of the problems but then simply offer outdated views like some kind of copyright tax credit would be great to help finance creative works. They all ignore the fact that the world has changed.

There are already huge amounts of creative work available on the internet—for free—with no copyright tax credit in sight. Yet the dynamics and causes of this are largely ignored. Economists are locked into a worldview that makes life harder for every living thing. It is as if we were birds, gifted with the ability to fly, and yet we have these economists telling us—and successfully convincing most—that we are nothing but flightless penguins. It would be so easy if we could fly, but alas we cannot, so toil in the current system we must.

People will also create works if they're not worried they're going to die of starvation, or freeze to death because they have no home when winter comes,

or watch their child die from a preventable disease because they don't have the resources to provide healthcare. Most products can be created at cost or slightly more, if you're not concerned with the above.

Where the reintroduction of copyright—modern copyright—was justified by publishing being several orders of magnitude more expensive than authoring, the Internet has made publishing several orders of magnitude cheaper than authoring, completely reversing the original premise.

Of course, there will be no shortage of people who profit from an artificial limitation, once it is in place. You could easily argue today that X and Y must not change, because A and B profit from the status quo—and so, the copyright industry readily claims that so and so many thousand jobs are upheld (“created”) by this artificial and harmful limit. But really, what kind of an argument is that? Who has the right to prevent the passage of time because they benefit from a lack of change? This is effectively the copyright industry's single argument today.

The spread of digital cameras essentially destroyed the traditional film industry, causing the collapse of two major US corporations, Kodak and Polaroid, and leading to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. While the collapse of these companies and the job losses were unfortunate, no one would have considered it a reasonable strategy to block the spread of digital cameras. On the other hand, when the development of digital technologies and the Internet threatened the business model of the entertainment industry, the response was to pass laws to contain these technologies to preserve the sector's mode of doing business. This is a great example of how it is not technology itself that is determining the distribution of income, but rather how various interest groups are able to write the laws governing the use of technology.

From a purely economic perspective, artificial friction may well alleviate the concerns of the media industries and even save libraries money if the pricing is fair. Yet copyright law in the US was never designed solely to benefit private market actors. Instead, as a constitutional matter, US copyright law was intended to use private market incentives in ways that ultimately benefited the public at large, not exclusively or even primarily copyright holders. Thus, as enamored as some of the founders might have been with the romantic ideal of authors and inventors, it was ultimately public access to knowledge and the resulting “progress of science and the useful arts” that was the true metric of IP's success.

Innovations that create value are useful, but copying what works well is more practical.

The lack of free knowledge is crippling progress. Because no one can build on ideas that work and all must start from a different point, we lose a great

deal of innovation and research speed. In the case of diseases, environmental health, and other urgent crises, we cannot afford the loss in time or the added expense and inaccessibility brought by idea ownership.

Copyright is a government-enacted, granted, and termed restriction of people's rights to ideas. You own the VHS plastic and storage that information is held on, but the data held in the storage is as "owned" by anyone as one owns the sound waves coming from a mouth, or anyone can own the light coming from the sun.

If movies couldn't be made without copyright, fine. I guess movies wouldn't be business model. There is no inherent right for government or society to protect a business model. When it *is* done, it's entirely up for debate how and why it's done. The default state is no idea ownership.

We're owed the content because ideas and data cannot inherently be owned at all. We decided to restrict ownership for entirely practical reasons, not reasons of inherent moral imperative. If the practicality of the reasons goes away or is reduced, it's entirely feasible to adjust the limitations. If the limitations begin to infringe on topics we consider *actual* moral imperatives—like life, property, free speech—to a degree that is unacceptable then it can enter the realm of a *detriment* to morality, but never can copyright itself enter the realm of *being* a moral imperative by itself, because it isn't that in any way.

One of the subjective measures of feasibility is precisely how willing people are to abide by it. If most people say it's dumb and don't abide by it, then it *is* dumb because there is no other moral imperative behind its inception. It is also possible that people who say it's dumb don't think it through, or will change their minds if all TV, movies, and music goes away, but maybe it won't. Who knows.

Throughout human history, culture has been made by people telling one another stories, building on what has come before, and making it their own. Every generation, every storyteller puts their own spin on old tales to reflect their own values and changing times.

This creative remixing happens today and it happens in spite of the legal cloud cast by copyright law. Many of our modern cultural icons are owned by a small number of content companies. We rework popular stories to critique them or assign new meanings to them, telling our own stories about well-known characters and settings. When copyright holders try to shut us down, fair use helps us fight back.

The publishing industry's campaign to preserve copyright is waged out of pure self-interest, but it forces on us a clear choice. We can watch as most of our cultural heritage is stuffed into a vending machine and sold back to

us dollar by dollar—or we can reexamine the copyright myth and find an alternative.

In an extreme case, ASCAP, the recording rights organization, once requested that the Girl Scouts pay fees for singing copyrighted songs at their campfires.

“You are morally obligated to reimburse someone who thought it was worth charging for.”

Maybe you are, I feel morally obligated to prevent any money I can from going to the copyright lobby, who continue to push for ridiculous copyright terms. I might not be able to afford my own lobbyist, but I sure as hell can stop funding theirs.

“You are not entitled to free shit just because the rest of us have character.”

I’m just undoing the damage to society you are doing. You’re not entitled to ruin society just because you are too lazy to be informed about copyright.

In my opinion, if you create something that has any real value to the larger world, then everyone is entitled to see it for free. I think everyone has earned that little bit of joy for themselves. I’m not saying you shouldn’t get paid, you certainly should get paid. And people will pay you. But a lot of people can’t, and they shouldn’t be treated like they’re evil for wanting to see that exciting new shade of red everyone has been talking about.

The core problem with copyright is that enforcement of it requires monitoring of communications, and you cannot be guaranteed free speech if someone is monitoring everything you say. This is important, most people fail to see or address this point when debating the issue of copyright, so let me make it clear: ***You cannot guarantee freedom of speech and enforce copyright law.*** It is for this reason that a system designed to *protect* Freedom of Speech, must *prevent* enforcement of copyright.

What if one does not wish to cite sources for ideas, whether within the text or in some sort of index at the end? Is writing art? What if the act of implementing citations changes the fundamental nature of the work? What if the message is unavoidably altered, thereby essentially censoring the author’s message? In what way is restricting the manner—words, images, sounds—in which one can express an idea not a gross violation of the concept of free speech?

Tomorrow’s civil liberties should never have to take a back seats to preserving yesterday’s business models.

And therein lies the rub. Monsanto's scientists are not engineering seeds that generate extra seeds so farmers can expand planting during the next season or even eat during times of famine. That would certainly help African farmers who lack seeds, and assist Indian farmers struggling to afford Monsanto's seed monopoly.

Instead, the company developed a "Terminator gene" that rendered offspring seeds infertile. Monsanto says it will never commercialize this "genetic use restriction technology," which is good news. The bad news is that Monsanto can afford to keep that ace in the hole so long as its patents are enforced and farmers keep buying its pricey, patented seeds and the herbicide those seeds are built upon.

What's more, Monsanto's "white hats" in the white coats are not working on open-source drought-resistant crops for cash-starved farmers in poor nations. They are not working on open-source technologies to increase yields for a growing global population. No, they get paid to produce proprietary products for a profit-making company that ruthlessly enforces its monopoly.

They can argue that this is "science" and "progress." And they might point out that science is expensive. Patents help pay for the innovations that will "feed the world." Sadly, their science isn't really about true sustainability. It's about sustaining an otherwise unsustainable agrochemical model that denudes soil, poisons water, and stokes counter-evolutionary responses from Mother Nature.

It's not "pure science." It's a business model. Frankly, Monsanto's "innovations" wouldn't be needed if its scientists weren't perfecting poison and playing poker with evolution. And now they're doubling down with a sci-fi-sounding surfactant that could literally change life with one simple spray.

Like patents, copyright terms are protected by international agreements. However, it is possible to develop a comparable system or alternative funding to work around the copyright system. It is important that the system respect individuals' choices in supporting music, books, movies, and other types of creative work rather than having a government agency decide which work should be supported. For this purpose, an individual tax credit might be appropriate. The model for a tax credit to support creative work could be the tax deduction for charitable giving. It allows individuals to make tax-deductible contributions to religious, educational, social assistance, and cultural organizations with minimum interference from the government. In effect, the government is subsidizing the contribution at the taxpayer's marginal tax rate, which is 39.6 percent for the highest-income taxpayers. Because the deduction is not capped, it is limited only by the size of the taxpayer's tax liability (it is not refundable).

To qualify for tax-deductible contributions, an organization need only file with the IRS and indicate the sort of tax-deductible activity in which it is engaged. The IRS does not attempt to determine whether an organization is 'good' as a religious organization or as a provider of food to the poor; that determination is left to the taxpayer. The only concern for the IRS is that the organization is in fact engaged in the activity that provides the basis for its tax-deductible status and that it is not engaged in prohibited activities such as political campaigning or profit making ventures.

Eligibility to receive funds through a creative work tax credit would work much the same way. Individuals or organizations would register to be eligible to receive funds by indicating the type of creative work in which they engaged as individuals or supported as organizations. This means that individuals would indicate that they are writers, musicians, video producers or engaged in some other type of creative work. The only issue from the standpoint of the IRS (or any other enforcement agency) would be whether the person is in fact engaged in the activity and whether the organization used its funding to support the type of creative work it claimed to support. In other words, if an organization claimed to support the writing of mystery novels or jazz music, then the concern would be whether they had actually used their funds for this purpose. Because this system is intended to be an alternative to the copyright system, the condition for getting funding for both individuals and organizations is that they not would be eligible for copyright protection.

In order to ensure that the tax-credit system did not become a copyright farm system, in which people established their reputations in the tax-credit system and then cashed in with the copyright system, there should be a substantial gap (e.g. five years) between the last time creative workers received funding through the tax-credit system and when they could first receive copyright protection.

Individual taxpayers would have the option to give the tax credit to a single individual or organization or divide it up among as many individuals as they choose. One major difference with the tax deduction for charitable contributions is that the tax credit would be refundable, meaning that every person would have the option to support creative work of their choosing, even if they had no tax liability.

There would be some risk of fraud, just as there is with the charitable deduction. However, the risks are likely to be considerably smaller with the tax credit than with the charitable deduction because the sums involved per person would be much smaller. If a high-income person contributes \$1 million to a bogus charity, he or she receives an effective tax subsidy of \$396,000 that the charity and the individual could, in principle, split

between them. A \$100 tax credit would require 40,000 people to scam the government by the same amount.

A credit of \$100 opted for by 90 percent of the adult population (a high percentage, but this is free money) would generate more than \$22 billion a year to support books, movies, music, and other creative work. This amount would vastly exceed the amount currently going to creative workers through the copyright system, although it would total far less than the current subsidy for charitable contributions, which was likely in the neighborhood of at least \$54 billion in 2016. The ultimate check on the boundaries of the system is what people are prepared to support with their tax credits. If few people opted to support journalism or video games, then these industries would remain largely dependent on copyright protection.

Public funding could produce a large number of textbooks free from copyright restrictions. The arithmetic here is striking. An appropriation of \$500 million a year (0.01 percent of federal spending) to finance textbook writing and production would cover 500 books a year, assuming an annual cost of \$1 million per textbook. After 10 years, 5,000 textbooks would be available in the public domain to be downloaded at zero cost, or printed out in hard copy for the cost of the paper.

Discovery is a story of many participants, not of lone heroes or “eureka” moments.

When taken to extremes the collectivist view can seem trite. Every time I drink a great cup of coffee, I could thank the farmers in Colombia who grew the beans, those in Brazil who provided the lush green fields of swaying sugar cane used to sweeten it, or the herdsman in Devon who milked the cows so my pick-me-up could be decorated with a little froth. I could also thank the nuclear power workers who provided the electricity to heat it, the person who had the bright idea of drinking a beverage based on roasted seeds in the first place, or who patented the first espresso machine. I could list all those hundreds of people who worked in supply lines straddling the planet to bring the energy, information, and ingredients together. Many might prefer to thank the barista, since our amazing ability to cooperate is a defining characteristic of human society, and it’s a given that many others were involved in almost everything we do.

But this seems to be a view resulting from being enmeshed within a highly individualistic culture. The notion of thanking such a diverse range of people—or even those we might not deem people at all—is not necessarily going to be viewed negatively by all cultures. The simplest example to trot out would of course be a hunter thanking an animal for its sacrifice—a common cultural practice, even for some red-blooded modern Americans.

There is no way to steal an idea, the tech does not exist. Though I’m

sure some alphabet soup agency or government contractor has tried. The only way for me to possess your idea is if you have offered it up to the world. Should it remain within your own mind, it can certainly be claimed as 'yours'—though of course how much of our ideas are truly, originally, completely, ours is debatable—but if I am able to have it also within my own mind, then it is only because you have chosen to share it. Once shared, there are no limitations on its use, that privilege only extends to ideas within the confines of your own brain. To claim anything else is to seek control over another's most basic of freedoms—that of thought and expression. One cannot have a just world when this is allowed, tolerated, promoted, admired. Such things are relics of a more barbarous era, let us throw off the shackles our ancestors have placed upon us, let us help our brothers and sisters shed their own shackles, let us begin to make up for the harms of the past, let us cease our own harms, let us unite as one people, under a banner of justice for all, let us never again allow such greed to go unchallenged, let us start today.

Part II

Institutionalized Injustice

Oh, a rifle took its aim and a man fell to the ground
He tried to stand again but everybody held him down
A time of terror when the bullet pierced the air
I know that couldn't happen here
Oh, it must have been another country
Yes, it must have been another land
That couldn't happen in the USA
We'd never treat a man that way

And a migrant worker sweats underneath the blazin' sun
He's fallen to his knees but his work is never done
He begs someone to listen but nobody seems to care
I know that couldn't happen here
Oh, it must have been another country
Yes, it must have been another land
That couldn't happen in the USA
We'd never treat a man that way

And a man is working steady, it's good money he receives
But he's thrown out of work for the wrong things he believes
He didn't have the thoughts most everybody shares
I know that couldn't happen here
So it must have been another country
Yes, it must have been another land
That couldn't happen in the USA
We'd never treat a man that way

And a man is sent to prison to wait until he dies
He fights to save his life, for years and years he tries
Even though he changed himself he dies upon the chair
I know that couldn't happen here
Oh, it must have been another country
Yes, it must have been another land
That couldn't happen in the USA
We'd never treat a man that way
Oh, I know we'd never treat a man that way

Chapter Twenty-four

Needless Suffering

They had not yet started out across a continent of grief that a lifetime of walking could not cover.

“My mother told me, ‘You never turn anybody away. Don’t turn anybody away at night because anything can happen to them. Wait till the daytime so they can see their way.’”

“I was once asked by a troubled young boy whether there was any compelling reason for him not to pull the legs off a spider. I said that there was. ‘Well, spiders don’t feel any pain,’ the boy retorted. ‘It’s not the spider I’m worried about,’ I replied”

Once a man moved into a new village. He wanted to find out what his neighbors were like, so in the middle of the night he pretended to beat his wife very severely, to see if the neighbors would come and reprimand him. But he did not really beat her; instead he beat a goatskin, while his wife screamed and cried out that he was killing her. Nobody came, and the very next day the man and his wife packed up and left that village and went to find some other place to live.

When the suffering of another creature causes you to feel pain, do not submit to the initial desire to flee from the suffering one, but on the contrary, come closer, as close as you can to him who suffers, and try to help.

There is a neoliberal myth that the rich can only be incentivized with additional money while the poor can only be incentivized with increasingly debased material conditions and increasingly harsh punishments.

If we throw kids in holes at age ten, those who get out would be quite capable of getting themselves out of holes they’ve been thrown in. But is this a good skill to select for? Why can’t we just not throw them in holes?

So much of our modern day struggles are artificial constructs. It is not us against nature—if it ever was—but us against the constructs of whatever society we find ourselves in. One could argue that we are ill prepared for these struggles given the relatively recent onset of these conditions.

How much energy is spent on such artificial constructs. What additional harms are caused by these struggles and failures to achieve? Do they serve any legitimate purpose or are they simply no better than frat house hazing?

“Let me give an example. Recently I was thinking maybe I’d foster a kid. So I looked into the package. It’s quite generous. You get a council flat, and on top of that you get £250 a week to look after the child. But then I realized: wait a minute. They’re talking about £13,000 a year and an apartment, for one child. Which the child’s parents in probably most cases didn’t have. If we’d just given the same thing to the parents so they didn’t get into so many problems they’d never have had to foster the child to begin with. And, of course, that’s not even counting the cost of the salaries of the civil servants who arrange and monitor fosterage, the building and upkeep of the offices in which they work, the various bodies that monitor and control those civil servants, the building and upkeep of the offices in which they work, and so forth.”

How many homeless huddle in the cold, close to clean, heated, empty hotel rooms?

Something to ponder: compared to a more just world—with free health-care, free life-long education, clean air & water, 100% renewable energy, free inter- & intra-city rail & bus, universal basic income, living retirement stipend, public banking, guaranteed housing, et cetera—is your situation now, relative to that just world, nearly as shitty as a third-world world slum-dweller’s life compared to your current situation?

The burden of finding water in dryland communities almost always falls to women, many of whom must make laborious journeys through remote and dangerous regions and then return with their heavy loads—even when sick or pregnant. Water fetching is a leading cause of miscarriage and stillbirth in desert villages, and women often give birth during the arduous journeys. Such babies are called Mwanzia in Kenya, meaning ‘born on the way.’

People living without sanitation can ingest as much as ten grams of fecal matter a day.

Within three weeks, their pump was operational. The skin rashes, diarrhea, and stomach pains the community suffered from using filthy water disappeared within two weeks. Malaria incidence has plummeted because nobody uses the open pond to gather water and wash any more.

Supplying a \$30 clean-cook stove to the 500 million households who cook with open fires could be done for just \$15 billion. Distributing clean-cook

stoves would not only reduce the pollution burden, but also free girls and women from gathering and carrying firewood, a task that endangers their health, puts them at risk of rape, and prevents them from going to school. A big win all round.

In the 1980s, the IMF and World Bank imposed conditions on development aid, preventing African governments from subsidizing fertilizers. However, after decades in which the population was continuously on the edge of famine, and following a disastrous harvest in 2005 when more than a third of the population needed emergency food aid, Malawi's President Bingu wa Mutharika rebelled, and reintroduced fertilizer subsidies—the first sub-Saharan country to do so. Agricultural production trebled, and by 2007, Malawi was exporting its surplus corn to Zimbabwe and Kenya. A dozen countries are now following suit and introducing subsidies.

Some 40% of food produced in the developing world is wasted before it gets to market because of refrigeration and transportation issues. The same proportion of food is thrown away in the rich world. Cutting waste would be the fastest and cheapest way of meeting future global food requirements. Food wastage is the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases after the US and China, and uses a third of agricultural land even though 870 million people go hungry every day.

The adult cormorants had all gone. And their chicks—the offspring they devoted so much effort to feeding—had been left behind to die. The sight tore at his heart; even decades later, he couldn't forget walking among “the horde of downy babies” as they starved.

“They would flap their unfledged wings, while they gave their hunger call, at the feet of this strange, uncormorant-like creature. There was not a thing one could do for them. Day by day there were fewer begging, more staggering about and listlessly drooping. And then more—hundreds of thousands more—of the pitiful, collapsed, downy clumps that were the dead. Somehow, ever since, it has been possible to understand more fully the famines of China and India.”

Capitalism is a formidable social system. Despite the best efforts of hundreds of millions of socialists over the last century and a half, it remains the hegemonic system governing production and politics around the world. That dominance at least partially explains the sense of shock palpable in the writings of media figures who have slowly awoken to the growing socialist revival in the United States. There's a very real sense in reading these pieces that the authors just can't believe anyone is still questioning capitalism.

Writers often attempt to pile as many bodies at the foot of socialism as possible, through a familiar tour of the death tolls attributed to regimes in countries like the USSR, China, and Cambodia. These deaths, they argue, are ignored by contemporary advocates of socialism. In fact, some claim, the present resurgence of socialism in the United States is mostly grounded in an ignorance of twentieth-century history every bit as myopic as far-right Holocaust deniers. It's more than a little ironic that they attempt to paint socialists as historically ignorant, when their own writing and statements reveals a near total lack of understanding of anything about these societies. They're only really interested in body counts.

For example, they will often bring up the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, which ruled the country from 1975–1979 and presided over a genocidal level of violence against the country's population. For these people, Cambodia was ruled by the same economic system as Russia or China. Such an assertion betrays a near-total ignorance of the actual history of the Khmer Rouge, whose connection to socialism was roughly analogous to Donald Trump's connection to Christianity. From long before they took power in 1975, the Khmer Rouge were an ethno-supremacist movement dedicated to restoring the glory of the Cambodian nation and scapegoating ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese. Socialist phraseology served as mere window-dressing.

Upon taking power, the regime emptied the cities of their populations to boost rural agriculture, abolished money, and grandiosely blew up the country's central bank. Predictably, the economy collapsed, and the regime was short-lived. This fact in and of itself should serve as a clue that it was a rather different kind of society than either China or Russia after their revolutions. After all, whatever the many crimes of those regimes, and whatever their considerable economic problems, both countries achieved relatively high levels of economic growth that considerably raised their populations' standards of living over decades.

To top it all off, the Khmer Rouge would never have come to power in the first place without the savage American intervention in Cambodia, most centrally a bombing campaign that devastated the countryside. Only the brutality of the world's foremost capitalist power, acting in the name of combating communism, could create the conditions in which a regime like the Khmer Rouge could attain state power. Avoiding historical myopia apparently means ignoring this kind of historical context, so long as it allows one to pile more corpses at the feet of socialism.

But what of China? Here, it would seem they come closer to the mark. The Chinese famine of 1958–61 was one of the greatest peacetime catastrophes of the twentieth century, and there is no doubt that the

particular forms of state planning the Chinese state adopted contributed to it. But once again, with some more historical context, things begin to look rather different. For while China experienced three years of world historic catastrophe in the mid-twentieth century, around the world, countries which did not have the systems of food support that China built experienced decades of slow-motion starvation. Around the world, landlords' ability to exclude rural populations from their private property left the rural poor in utter destitution.

Compare India, where, for all talk of socialism, landlords still held sway, and China, where they did not:

“It is important to note that despite the gigantic size of excess mortality in the Chinese famine, the extra mortality in India from regular deprivation in normal times vastly overshadows the former. Comparing India's death rate of 12 per thousand with China's of 7 per thousand, and applying that difference to the Indian population of 781 million in 1986, we get an estimate of excess normal mortality in India of 3.9 million per year. This implies that every eight years or so more people die in India because of its higher regular death rate than died in China in the gigantic famine of 1958—61. India seems to manage to fill its cupboard with more skeletons every eight years than China put there in its years of shame.”

In other words, though India experienced no concentrated period of starvation which can be easily identified and hung around the neck of a particular ideology, its ordinary conditions for the latter half of the twentieth century, in which an extraordinarily unequal distribution of land obtained, created an excess mortality that, over the long-term, dwarfed that of the worst famine of the century. Most of the death and suffering resulting from capitalism remains stubbornly unspectacular.

When people with diabetes ration their insulin because of rising costs, and some of them die, that's a consequence of the distribution of property rights that exists in our society. When the poor suffer increased mortality from airborne pollution, that too, is a consequence of our current economic system. This exercise could be extended indefinitely. The people whose lives are devastated because our society prioritizes the property rights of the wealthy over the needs of the poor are victims of an injustice every bit as much as those who died in compressed catastrophes under states calling themselves socialist.

One could, of course, turn this logic around, and point to the human potential lost in quotidian inefficiencies of the state socialist regimes, and

the human dignity assaulted by their political corruption. But what would be the point? Few today would honestly say that, given the choice between life in an advanced capitalist democracy like the US and an authoritarian developmental state like China or the USSR, they would choose the latter. But this is not the choice on offer today in the United States. It's not the vision of socialism of many, which is grounded in the centrality of democracy to human liberation.

In fact, the socialist tradition is full of voices who have been stridently critical of those regimes on precisely these grounds. Some might contend that it's where socialists end up, even when they want to go somewhere else, but it's hardly credible to argue that an attempt to build socialism in the most advanced economy in history will necessarily end up in the same place as revolutions in developing countries against tottering agricultural elites.

What contemporary socialists, whose numbers are growing at an incredible rate, are arguing is that life for tens of millions of Americans can be decisively improved by a whole host of measures that would rein in the power of capital, from Medicare for All to subordinate the healthcare industry to human need to a renewed union movement that would curb the despotic power employers wield over their workers. Some socialists go further, arguing that we will only have a humane society when a small portion of humanity no longer wields exclusive control over our productive resources.

These arguments are gaining traction today not because Americans are unfamiliar with the legacy of state socialism, but because they are all too familiar with the state of American society today. Today's socialists have succeeded in linking the everyday tragedies they see around them to an economic system that has delivered ever more spectacular rewards to the wealthy, while most barely tread water. They have understood that though Americans may not be perishing en masse in a famine, they are needlessly suffering in innumerable ways because of the way our society distributes property.

The task today's socialists have ahead of them is a daunting one. Capitalism's resilience is not to be underestimated. But their often ineffectual and ignorant criticisms are a reminder that whatever the sources of that resilience, the quality of the system's apologists is certainly not among them.

The more needless suffering and struggle we alleviate here, now, on Earth, the weaker God gets. In that sense, our goal must be to kill God.

Chapter Twenty-five

You Didn't Earn It

“The masses are feminine. In the area of politics, the masses are feminine. OK? And the feminine masses look to what? They look to the masculine for protection. And who is the masculine? The government. So the feminine masses look to the masculine government for protection. OK? So when the feminine masses see a Klansman on TV, or a militiaman running around with a gun, or a patriot wearing camouflage, what is she going to feel? She’s going to feel that her safety is being what? She’s going to feel that her safety is being altered. And she doesn’t want her safety to be altered. So she’s going to turn to who? She’s going to turn to the masculine for protection.”

“I have a rescue fantasy—what social worker doesn’t? Somewhere inside, we love to believe that we could just hug our clients and make everything better. If we took them home and gave them a good meal and enough sympathy, we believe we could fix everything and earn their undying gratitude. But that is an inside thought. You do not tell your clients about that thought. The point is to help, not to feel helpful. If I needed groceries, would I really want to go someplace where I might get hugged by some misty-eyed young lady with a savior complex? No way.”

“The idea of human rights is that people have basic dignity and that it’s the role of the government—yes, the government—to ensure that no one falls below the decent level. Civilized society doesn’t say for people to go and make it on your own and if you can’t, bad luck.”

World poverty isn’t reducing. Earning \$2 per day doesn’t mean that you’re somehow suddenly free of extreme poverty. Not by a long shot. People have been calling for a more reasonable poverty line for many years. Most agree that people need a minimum of about \$7.40 per day to achieve

basic nutrition and normal human life expectancy. So what happens if we measure global poverty at the low end of this more realistic spectrum—\$7.40 per day, to be extra conservative? Well, we see that the number of people living under this line has increased dramatically since measurements began in 1981, reaching some 4.2 billion people today.

Most of “people are making more money” comes from ‘people were forced off their subsistence farms so that they had to use money to buy what they got from their own labor before.’ So, for example, when NAFTA went into place, millions of Mexican subsistence farmers were forced off their land. This led, directly, to the massive increases in immigration to the US that occurred in the 90s and early 2000s, by the way.

People miss the essential point: it’s not how much money you have. It’s whether or not you have enough food, shelter, clothes, and so on. It’s whether you have what you need and some of what you want. Only a moron—or someone as disconnected from the realities of life like Bill Gates—could think that being able to buy as much as \$1.90 a day, in the United States of 2011, would qualify as enough money. These people who say with certainty how poverty is massively decreasing make me sick. They are either ignorant, or very stupid and disconnected from reality, or they are very evil.

Essentially all of the poverty reduction of the past 30 years comes from one source, and one source only: China—which industrialized by classic protectionist policies which the IMF, World Bank and poverty ghouls do their best to make impossible. And as for China, what is also clear from their experience, and in the data, is that the Chinese who moved to the cities to get those great new jobs are less happy than the people who stayed in the villages. Further, great amounts of force have had to be used to move peasants off the land, because they know the new factory jobs suck even worse than being a peasant. As they did in Britain during the Industrial revolution.

What made some parts of the world better wasn’t capitalism, per se. It was steam power and oil power. Those parts of the world then used that power, along with gunpowder and whatnot, to conquer most of the world and take what they wanted. Today we do it different ways, but the bottom line is simple enough: measured by any semi-reasonable standard—would you want to try to live on \$7.40 a day, including paying your rent?—poverty is not getting better. It is getting worse.

If you say poverty is decreasing, what you are saying is ‘it is ok to keep doing what we’re doing.’ And you are wrong.

“I say that you ought to get rich, and it is your duty to get rich. The men who get rich may be the most honest men you

find in the community. Let me say here clearly: ninety-eight out of one-hundred of the rich men of America are honest. That is why they are rich. That is why they are trusted with money. I sympathize with the poor, but the number of poor who are to be sympathized with is very small. To sympathize with a man whom God has punished for his sins is to do wrong. let us remember there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings.”

“Society tells me I have to go to school, get a good job, and then I’ll get a salary, because I’m in America. And that’s what I did, and now I’m in debt. And now I’m suffocating.”

Such stories expose multiple malfunctions in the machinery of American progress. They implicate the country’s health care system and the problem of unaffordable drugs; its public transport system; its wage and labor laws; its food system and food deserts; its student debt crisis; its so-called great risk shift, through which corporate America has stabilized its own income statements over a generation by off-loading uncertainty onto workers; and the ways in which shareholders were running companies more and more for themselves, to the detriment of every other stakeholder.

By every international metric of health and living standards, the rural counties of southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky qualify as third-world. So do large areas of Detroit, Cleveland, Camden, Gary, and many other American cities. At the same time, wealth beyond computation, almost beyond imagining, piles up in the money center of New York and the technology hub of Palo Alto. It piles up long enough to purchase a \$95,000 truffle, a \$38 million vintage Ferrari GTO, or a \$179 million Picasso before the balance finds its way to an offshore hiding place.

What thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty, thoughtful poor people call with equal justice a problem of riches.

We need to understand a little of the real origins of the modern social welfare state, which we now largely think of—when we think of them at all—as having been created by benevolent democratic elites. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Europe, most of the key institutions of what later became the welfare state—everything from social insurance and pensions to public libraries and public health clinics—were not originally created by governments at all, but by trade unions, neighborhood associations, cooperatives, and working-class parties and organizations of one sort or another. Many of these were engaged in a self-conscious revolutionary project of “building a new society in the shell of the old,” of gradually creating

Socialist institutions from below. For some it was combined with the aim of eventually seizing control of the government through parliamentary means, for others, it was a project in itself.

One must remember that during the late nineteenth century, even the direct heirs of Marx's Communist Party had largely abandoned the idea of seizing control of the government by force, since this no longer seemed necessary; in a Europe at peace and witnessing rapid technological progress, they felt that it should be possible to create a social revolution through peaceful, electoral means. Germany was one of the places where such parties were most successful. Even though Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the great mastermind behind the creation of the German state, allowed his parliament only limited powers, he was confounded by the rapid rise of workers' parties, and continually worried by the prospect of a Socialist majority, or a possible Paris Commune-style uprising in his new united Germany.

His reaction to Socialist electoral success from 1878 was twofold: on the one hand, to ban the Socialist party, trade unions, and leftist newspapers; on the other, when this proved ineffective—Socialist candidates continued to run, and win, as independents—was to create a top-down alternative to the free schools, workers' associations, friendly societies, libraries, theaters, and the larger process of building socialism from below. This took the form of a program of social insurance (for unemployment, health and disability, et cetera), free education, pensions, and so forth—much of it watered-down versions of policies that had been part of the Socialist platform, but in every case, carefully purged of any democratic, participatory elements.

In private, at least, he was utterly candid about describing these efforts as a “bribe,” an effort to buy out working-class loyalties to his conservative nationalist project. When left-wing regimes did later take power, the template had already been established, and almost invariably, they took the same top-down approach, incorporating locally organized clinics, libraries, mutual banking initiatives, workers' education centers, and the like into the administrative structure of the state.

“My idea was to bribe the working classes, or shall I say, to win them over, to regard the state as a social institution existing for their sake and interested in their welfare.”

The quote is useful to bear in mind since I find that the general point—that the welfare state was largely created to pay off the working class for fear of their becoming revolutionaries—tends to be met with skepticism, and demands for proof that this was the self-conscious intention of the ruling

class. But here we have the very first such effort described by its founder quite explicitly as such.

The welfare system was originally planned in the interest of the nation rather than of needy individuals. When Otto von Bismarck pioneered state pensions and social security in late nineteenth-century Germany, his chief aim was to ensure the loyalty of the citizens rather than to increase their well-being. You fought for your country when you were eighteen, and paid your taxes when you were forty, because you counted on the state to take care of you when you were seventy.

The social safety net in the US and what is called the welfare state in Britain and Europe are a means of buying social peace. The safety nets—decent and humane and civilized—promote peace. Peace is good for countries. Peace is good for business—unless you're an armaments manufacturer I guess. Peace is good for capitalism.

The neoliberals in government should consider the safety nets a cost of doing business instead of a pot of money to be looted.

All of society's problems which could be solved by money were caused by money. Poverty is also regarded as a moral failure, as society needs to blame the victim to avoid blaming themselves for the situation the poor find themselves in. In this way, courage, duty, industry, thrift, kindness, loyalty—all of the traditional virtues may be replaced simply by wealth, the ultimate virtue respected in society today.

We still have 43 million people in poverty as well as 15 million in deep poverty. And the limits of those categories are likely far too narrow.

All across America, there are thousands of struggling cities and towns. Many of these places, and the rural regions where they are located, are hidden from view in pockets of the country that other Americans have largely forgotten. In these communities, too, the formal economy has all but disintegrated, and the social safety net—both public and private—is threadbare. To visit these impoverished regions is to experience what Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy did fifty years ago, when they were visibly shaken by the conditions there. With so many of their citizens cut off from any legitimate access to a cash income, these places may seem unrecognizable as part of "America." And yet they are America, as much as any other place in the country.

Two dollars is less than the cost of a gallon of gas, roughly equivalent to that of a half gallon of milk. Many Americans have spent more than that before they get to work or school in the morning. Yet in 2011, more than four percent of all households with children in the world's wealthiest nation were living in a poverty so deep that most Americans don't believe it even exists in this country.

What happens when a community starved for cash forges a shadow economy that threatens to overtake the formal one—and the two become commingled, almost indistinguishable from each other? Does it become that much harder for a community to right its collective course, to return to a formal system with rules by which people play?

The old poverty was linked to an economy based on exploitation of the worst sort. But there were still jobs to be had. Then, for a time, there was a cash floor that kept families with children above a certain threshold. Now there are neither jobs nor a cash safety net. And a place that has experienced entrenched poverty for decades has met a new poverty of the deepest sort.

A federal program in existence for sixty years, a system that had survived would-be reformers for decades—including a full frontal attack by Ronald Reagan—was terminated by Congress and the stroke of the president's pen in the summer of 1996 without much fuss at all. Welfare, as the country knew it, was dead, and very few people seemed to care.

In truth, what Bill Clinton accomplished were things that no Republican could have done. Thanks to our two-party system, Democratic politicians carry a brand identity that inhibits them in some ways but allows them remarkable latitude in others. They are forever seen as weaklings in the face of the country's enemies, for example; but on basic economic questions they are trusted to do the right thing for average people. That a Democrat might be the one to pick apart the safety net is a violation of this basic brand identity, but by the very structure of the system it is extremely difficult to hold the party accountable for such a deed. This, in turn, is why only a Democrat was able to do that job and get away with it. Only a Democrat was capable of getting bank deregulation passed; only a Democrat could have rammed NAFTA through Congress; and only a Democrat would be capable of privatizing Social Security, as George W. Bush found out in 2005.

In 1995, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously predicted that the proposed welfare reform would result in children "sleeping on grates." Most observers think history proved him wrong. But does the rise in the number of the \$2-a-day poor represent the great failure of welfare reform? Perhaps Moynihan was not so far off after all. Perhaps his only mistake was in assuming that this failure at the very bottom of the economic distribution would be visible and obvious, when in fact, throughout history, American poverty has generally been hidden far from most Americans' view.

In effect, the new work requirements have merely reduced the number of poor people who are jobless, while increasing the number of poor people who have jobs.

Plunging our society's weakest and most vulnerable into economic des-

peration triggered a domino effect of misery right down the line, with the slightly better-off now feeling the competition of the utterly hopeless. The effect was to make all of us a little more precarious. On its own, welfare reform was a mean-spirited thing to do—one of the most regressive social programs promulgated by a democratic government in the twentieth century. Considered as part of a grander economic architecture, however, it makes an awful kind of sense. Welfare reform confirmed and accelerated the gradual replacement of a semi-protective welfare state by a disciplinary state mating the stinging goad of workfare with the dull hammer of prisonfare, for which the close monitoring and the punitive containment of undesirables stand in for social policy toward the dispossessed. Toil hopelessly or go to prison: that is life at the bottom, thanks to Bill Clinton, with ample assistance from his wife Hillary. But yeah, it was obviously the Russians who made her lose, not the decades of public displays of utter contempt for the poor.

The very act of jailing an indigent person for a fine-only, low-level offense is unconstitutional, and many of these jailings occur in states that actually have laws explicitly banning debtors' prisons. In 1983 the Supreme Court heard the case of Danny Bearden, an illiterate ninth-grade dropout who was convicted of receiving stolen goods and placed on probation with a fine of \$500 and a \$250 order of restitution. His parents put up the first \$200. Danny Bearden was going to pay the rest himself but was laid off from his factory job. He tried very hard to find work, but finally had to tell the probation people he had lost his job and could not make the payment then due. His probation was revoked and he was sent to jail. The Supreme Court decided in *Bearden v. Georgia* that "punishing a person for his poverty" violates the equal protection clause and that an indigent defendant cannot be jailed for inability to pay a fine unless he has "willfully refused to pay the fine or restitution when he has the means to pay."

Yet, Bearden and state law are flouted every day. The people who hear the low-level cases are often municipal judges or justices of the peace who are not lawyers or are lawyers but serve part-time and practice in completely different areas of the law. Some judges do not know the law, but other judges know it well and apply it harshly nonetheless. The Supreme Court has not given clear guidance for what "willfully refused" means, and the literature abounds with instances where the judge said the defendant had expensive-looking shoes or the like and therefore must be able to pay. A judge in Illinois asked all defendants if they smoked, and when any said yes, the judge said they have the means to pay. A judge in Michigan found that because the defendant had cable television he was capable of paying.

And the Bearden ruling that a defendant's ability to pay must be taken into account does not apply when a person is arrested on a bench warrant for

defaulting on a payment plan, because now the debtor has committed a crime that does carry a jail sentence. Failure to pay constitutes criminal contempt, which allows incarceration as well as further fines and fees. Because the contempt is a crime that allows jailing, there is no protection for indigence and Bearden becomes irrelevant.

Even the right to an attorney comes with a price tag. The Supreme Court decided in *Fuller v. Oregon* that charging a fee for a public defender can be constitutional if people who would suffer a “manifest hardship” are relieved from paying it (a requirement ignored in some states). In fact, forty-three states charge for having a public defender. Florida does not waive its \$50 public defender application fee for the indigent, instead instructing its courts to include it as part of sentencing or as a condition of probation. In North Carolina, defendants have to pay not only the \$50 fee but also the full value of the defense services provided, and in Virginia a defendant must pay up to \$1,235 for a public defender on each count for certain felonies. South Dakota charges \$92 an hour; even a defendant found innocent nonetheless owes \$920 for ten hours of representation. If he cannot pay, it is a crime.

The legal issues were simple. The Benton County District Court was violating Bearden and Gideon as well as state law by systematically failing to ascertain the ability of defendants to pay fines, fees, and other levies and to provide effective counsel to the defendants. The case was settled in 2016 and the county stopped jailing people for their debts or ordering them to work crews for failure to pay, and also stopped issuing warrants over not making payments. This is all good but it's like whack-a-mole: you get one of the bad actors, but another one pops up.

Damian Stinnie is one of the nearly million people in Virginia who have had their driver's licenses suspended. Despite spending much of his childhood in foster care, Stinnie graduated from high school with a 3.9 grade point average—a great story so far. Entering the world of work, he found a job and lost it and then, seeking work, received four traffic violations and racked up \$1,000 in fines and costs. He was unable to pay the full amount within thirty days on his new \$300-a-week job, so his driver's license was automatically suspended, meaning that Stinnie was among the 75 percent of those suspended who were sanctioned for not paying, not for the infractions themselves. As is routine in Virginia, no one asked Stinnie if he could afford to pay. At that point he joined the millions who face the dilemma of choosing between getting to work and taking the risk of being penalized for driving without a license. With the expansions of the state's fines and fees in 1998, assessments ballooned from \$281.5 million to \$618.8 million in 2014, with collections going from \$192.2 million to \$258.6 million.

No one ever asked debtors if they were able to pay, and the so-called

probation officer placed a series of further financial hurdles before them if they wanted to ask the court for a ruling that they were truly indigent. The company charged \$25 if a defendant requested a hearing before the judge and often required another \$20 drug test as a prerequisite as well. The company routinely “lost” records of payments and thereby won any payment dispute with the debtor. And because PCC always paid itself first, debtors who paid enough to cover the original fine often still had a balance due; the money they paid had gone to the private company rather than the government. This in turn occasioned another year of probation and fees. And PCC often invented new rules or interpretations to add more debt and/or new grounds for accusing the debtor of having violated the terms of their probation.

Money bail is ruining the lives of literally millions of poor people and costing the country unnecessary billions of dollars in incarceration costs every year. Local jail populations grew by 19.8 percent just between 2000 and 2014, with pretrial detention accounting for 95 percent of that growth. Just as one example, but typical of big cities around the country, is Philadelphia, where the cost of running the jails is \$110 to \$120 per inmate per day. The single feature shared by almost every defendant in pretrial detention is that they are poor. Rich people make bail; poor people don’t. Regardless of actual guilt or innocence, poor people are criminalized for their inability to buy their way out of jail. The major shortage of judges, prosecutors, and public defenders, coupled with the number of people being held in jail awaiting trial, has led to a crisis in which it is not possible for every defendant who wants a day in court to get one. So the courts need a way to keep the trials from taking place.

“Veteran lawyers remember a time when only clients charged with serious felonies had to make bail unless they were held without bail, but now it’s pretrial incarceration en masse. Even clients charged with petty, non-jailable offenses can have bail set on them nowadays. The predictable result is that many of our clients take a plea in order to get out rather than fight the case while sitting in jail, even if they have a great defense or are totally innocent.”

By imprisoning poor people who cannot put up money for bail, the system uses the threat or reality of extended imprisonment to extract guilty pleas, even from people who are innocent or have other valid defenses. Not able to get a timely trial, they have one option—plead guilty. It is a Hobson’s choice, more so even than many of the defendants realize, because the guilty

pleas have serious collateral consequences they may not even be aware of and which stay with them for the rest of their lives. But pleading guilty is what they do by the thousands, every day, all over America. And, ironically, when they plead guilty, they receive a sentence of credit for time served and they go home. While they were presumed innocent, they were too dangerous or unreliable to be released, but once convicted they are sent home.

The long pretrial stays in Rikers and other big-city and big-county jails are obvious antipathies to the very idea of having speedy trials. How these statutes work—what counts toward mandated time limits within which a trial must take place, and what does not—is complicated, but the basic point is that delays related to backlogs in the courts are not counted against the clock. Even if the defendant had a lawyer and was prepared to go to trial, under the current system, the clock stops every time there is a delay due to unrelated backlogs at the court.

“I heard them lock the shower door, and they were mocking him. He was crying, please stop, please stop. And they just said, ‘Enjoy your shower,’ and left.”

He might not be dead now if, when we closed mental hospitals in the 1960s, we had made major investments in community-based mental health services. He might not be dead now if we hadn't started incarcerating people at astronomically high rates in the 1970s. He might not be dead now if we hadn't slashed addiction treatment funds in the 1980s. He might not be dead now if, in the 1990s, we hadn't hired private companies to run our jails and prisons or portions of them and paid them so little that they could recruit only correctional staff who were untrained, incompetent, and too often sadistic, and mental health professionals who were stretched too far, were too frequently underqualified, and often operate under horrifying conditions. But he is dead, because what we did do in the wake of the deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals over the past half century was the worst possible combination of choices we could have made.

Schizophrenic, African American, poor, fifty years old, and doing time for a drug conviction, Rainey was an inmate at the Dade Correctional Institution of the Florida Department of Corrections, and specifically at the Transitional Care Unit or mental health ward when he died on June 23, 2012. Correctional officers there had rigged a shower with water at the scalding temperature of 180 degrees to torture prisoners whom they deemed uncooperative. Darren Rainey had defecated on the floor of his cell and would not clean it up. As punishment, the officers put him in the

shower for almost two hours, taunting him as he screamed in panic and pain. Ultimately, Rainey was scalded to death.

Mental illness and addiction are pathways to poverty, and poverty is a pathway to mental illness and addiction. The toxic stress that is emblematic of people coping with poverty culminates all too regularly in mental illness and addiction.

The most a person can receive under SSI is \$735 a month, but a recipient can be docked or terminated if, for example, she pays less for room and board than what the government deems a fair amount; according to the rules, this “discount” counts as extra income. The government also calls it extra income if a friend or relative gives the person some money to help get by. And a stint in a hospital for more than thirty days that is paid for by Medicaid can be counted as an SSI overpayment and place the beneficiary in jeopardy of being penalized.

There is evidence that welfare reform coincided with a fundamental shift in the way low-income single mothers thought about parenting. In the years prior to welfare reform, in-depth conversations with hundreds of single mothers on welfare illuminated their belief that taking a full-time job would greatly detract from their ability to be a good parent, especially if they had young children. Then came the roaring 1990s, when an unprecedented number of these single mothers found themselves going to work, “pushed” by the changes in the welfare rules and “pulled” by the EITC expansions, minimum-wage increase, and unprecedented strength of the economy.

Years after welfare reform, when researchers engaged in a further series of in-depth conversations with former welfare recipients, the typical single mom talked about work in a very different way from those interviewed just a few years before. Now she was telling researchers that to be a good parent, she had to model the value of education by getting a job. For these single mothers, the idea of returning to welfare violated their views of what being a good parent required, adding a self-imposed stigma to the potent societal stigma that came with claiming benefits from the program.

The beggarly question of parentage—what is it, after all? What does it matter, when you come to think about it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care.

Researchers estimate that American workers lose billions of dollars each year to what is referred to as “wage theft”—clear violations of labor standards that include paying less than the minimum wage, forcing employees to work off the clock, and failing to pay mandated overtime rates. If one tallied all of the losses suffered by victims of robberies, burglaries, larcenies, and motor vehicle thefts combined, the figure wouldn’t even approach what is taken

from hardworking Americans' pockets by employers who violate the nation's labor laws. And the victims are generally the most vulnerable among us.

Fifty years ago, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. proposed that America launch a broad-based, gigantic Bill of Rights for the disadvantaged and a Marshall Plan for the poor and the hurting. He said if we were willing to rebuild Europe after World War II, then America should be willing to rebuild Appalachia where poor whites were; the inner cities of Detroit and Chicago; and the Deltas of Mississippi and Alabama.

“While Negroes form the vast majority of America's disadvantaged there are millions of poor whites who would also benefit from this kind of bill. The moral justification for the special measures for the negro is rooted in the robberies of the institution of slavery. Many poor whites, however, were the derivatives of the victims of slavery. As long as labor was cheapened by involuntary servitude of the black man, the freedom of white labor, especially in the South was little more than a myth.”

King understood that saving communities should be first over saving corporations, that we should not treat corporations like people and people like things. He understood that if you ignore the poor, eventually there will be an implosion. What we're really beginning to experience is a process of slow decay, punctuated by a recurring economic crisis, one in which reforms achieve sporadic gains. But the long-term trends of growing inequality, economic dislocation, failing democratic accountability, deepening poverty, ecological degradation, greater invasions of liberty and growing imprisonment especially of minorities, continues to slowly and quietly challenge the belief in the capacities and moral integrity of the overall system and its governing elite.

There is a blind spot in American economic theory. It's called consciousness. Our refusal to have an economic theory that looks and sees that we are all integrated and we all really need each other. The question we face, is how can the nation's wealth ultimately be shifted institutionally to benefit the vast majority of people? Because we cannot live in isolation. For years we were taught that what was good for Wall Street was good for your street and our street, but that no longer holds true. As King warned 50 years ago, when you ignore the poor, the whole system will collapse. The first thing we must recognize, is that economic justice is a moral issue. And economics can't be separated from moral questions. It was never intended that way.

As far back as the Torah, Deuteronomy says caring for the stranger and being just to the poor must be the hallmark of a nation. The Psalmist said

relieving the poor and the oppressed is a moral value we need in the public square. Every prophet of the Old Testament: Jeremiah, Malachi, Ezekiel always began their criticism of Israel, their criticism of the nation, with a critique of systems of poverty. Jeremiah says taking care of children and the vulnerable and the innocent must be the call of leaders and their society, and in fact, Jeremiah 22 says go to the palace and tell the king:

“Do not hurt the poor and the widows; otherwise, this palace will become rubble.”

Isaiah 10 says this:

“Woe unto those who legislate evil and rob the poor of their rights, and make women their prey.”

Isaiah 58 says “Secure the rights of the poor”; in fact, in Isaiah 58, we’re supposed to call for the “loosing of the bands of wickedness.” Do you know what “loose the bands of wickedness” means? In Hebrew, it means pay people what they deserve. Pay a living wage, because if you don’t, it’s not merely considered conservative ideology. In the Bible, if you do not pay people a living wage, it is called wickedness. Ezekiel says to refuse dishonest gain, and refuse to be—or to give status to—economic predators. In fact, in Ezekiel 22, Ezekiel says whenever the preachers and the politicians stand on the side of greed and hurt toward the least of these in the poor, whenever the morality preachers and the policy people come together to engage in bad policy that hurts the poor, Ezekiel describes them as acting like rabies-infested wolves.

And Jesus—you know, that brown-skinned, Palestinian Jew who never charged the leper or sick person a co-pay, always gave free healthcare, and who was eventually killed by the state? In his first sermon, he said:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me for he hath anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”

And the word ‘poor’ in Greek is *patokos*. There are three other words for poor: One has to do with somebody being lazy; the other one has to be with somebody suddenly becoming poor because they are suddenly sick. But the word *patokos* means people who have been made poor by economic systems of exploitation, by stratification that existed in the Roman Empire, where the one percent demanded that all the rules operate in their favor, while the 99 percent suffered. And it was those people that Jesus said were at the center of the attention of God, and better be the center of the attention

of your community and your nation if you plan that nation to survive the judgment of God.

The millennial embrace of socialism, then, does not mean that millennials are trying to implement some complicated new economic system that they do not understand. It means that they measure any economic system by the degree to which it is humane and democratic, and they are angered by the degree to which our current one fails people. It means that they reject selfishness and believe in solidarity. And it means that they are determined to help each other build something better, whatever that may be.

Would you allow yourself to be exploited so ruthlessly in a stable, local market? I wouldn't. This is how revolutions are born and the local industries are taken over by angry citizens.

Mass poverty can only be maintained by a corrupt elite running the society. To think this could be the natural state of affairs is the root of the neoliberal problem. I think the wealthy have deluded themselves with their own propaganda into thinking that this social condition is possible to maintain. It is not. It is more wasteful of resources and effort than anything else but—because of human timidity, nature's abundance, and cheap energy—can be ignored.

When it is finally realized how badly the citizenry has been treated, there will be much to account for. Poverty is another phenomena distorted by the elite. Poverty could be ended today if there was the will.

I find it revealing when people are forced to express their visions in simple, unmasked terms. Anyone who believes, or tolerates a society where its citizens are forced to live in abject poverty is a sociopath. This is what the capitalist world has wrought.

A world moving beyond the capitalist mindset is what I am counting on.

“Its not fair if everyone gets the same, if I worked harder I should get more.”

Why did you work harder?

“Because I wanted more.”

Is that fair, in a reality where resources are finite?

The misanthropic refrain of conservatives is that “it's wrong to give something to people who have done nothing to earn it.” But other answers are possible. One might point out that people born into the middle or upper class have done nothing to “earn” their privileged position. The wealthy haven't earned the inheritance they receive from their parents.

White Americans didn't earn their skin-color or the fact that they weren't born in, say, a Haitian slum. People who benefit from charisma or physical beauty or intelligence did nothing to earn that; they were born with it. They deserve no credit for it. Somebody who happens to meet the right person at the right time and is launched on a successful career is the beneficiary of luck—as, in short, every “successful” person is, in innumerable ways.

Nor does any of this begin to address all the ways that the wealthy or corporations or Silicon Valley entrepreneurs benefit from state policy designed to give them what they want and to strip the poor of the right to live. Through the agency of the state—its corporate welfare programs, defense budget, patent and copyright protections, and, to some extent, interest payments on bonds—the population subsidizes the power and wealth of people whose ideology is to shame those who benefit from state programs. According to their own ideology then, these “libertarians” in the business class ought to have their property confiscated, since, strictly speaking, they have “earned” none or little of it.

The more one gains economically from living in civilized society, the greater one's duty to maintain that society by paying taxes.

“Our hard earned tax payments shouldn't go toward supporting the lazy”

Because, of course, poverty can only be a result of laziness. This is a comforting thought, that somehow poverty and misfortune can be avoided if you simply work hard enough.

Of course since in many cases such an individual is referring to federal taxes, it is incorrect that their tax payments support the lazy. Federal taxes do not fund federal spending.

How many catastrophes would it take to undo the security in your life? That is a question I think every person should ask themselves, and consider in judgment of others. I think the truth is it's usually a lot less than you'd think.

The simultaneous rise of both the working poor and non-working rich offers further evidence that earnings do not correlate with effort.

Don't tell me that raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour solves the problem. No one can doubt the moral significance of the movement. But at this rate of pay, even at forty hours a week—an unlikely amount in fast-food franchises—you're still at that official poverty line. What, exactly, is the point of a earning a paycheck that isn't a living wage, except to prove that you have a work ethic?

When we place our faith in hard work, we're wishing for the creation of character; but we're also hoping, or expecting, that the labor market will allocate incomes fairly and rationally. And there's the rub: they do go together. Character can be created on the job only when we can see that there's an intelligible, justifiable relation between past effort, learned skills, and present reward. When I see that your income is completely out of proportion to your production of real value, of durable goods—and by 'durable' I don't mean just material things—the rest of us can use and appreciate, I begin to doubt that character is a consequence of hard work. When I see, for example, that you're making millions by laundering drug cartel money (HSBC), or pushing bad paper on mutual fund managers (AIG, Bear Stearns, Morgan Stanley, Citibank), or preying on low-income borrowers (Bank of America), or buying votes in Congress (all of the above)—just business as usual on Wall Street—while I'm barely making ends meet from the earnings of my full-time job, I realize that my participation in the labor market is irrational. I know that building my character through work is stupid because crime pays. I might as well become a gangster like you. And when you make good people into criminals, don't be surprised when one of them eventually shows up to slit your throat—for the people.

Why is it so much easier for some to believe 150,000,000 people are lazy/stupid as opposed to 400 people being greedy?

The 1% in the US keep on arguing how they only collect 20% of income but pay 40% of taxes. They don't seem to realize that if their income had stayed at 30x the lowest paid instead of 300x, the lower paid would actually be paying more taxes.

It also displays an ignorance of history, since the income tax, which began as a tax only on the 0.1 percent was never designed to target the poor.

The best thing about this program of reverse taxation, as far as the 9.9 percent are concerned, is that the bottom 90 percent haven't got a clue. The working classes get riled up when they see someone at the grocery store flipping out their food stamps to buy a T-bone. They have no idea that a nice family on the other side of town is walking away with \$100,000 for flipping their house.

Laying the blame on a lack of personal responsibility obscures the fact that there are powerful and ever-changing structural forces at play here. Service sector employers often engage in practices that middle-class professionals would never accept. They adopt policies that, purposely or not, ensure regular turnover among their low-wage workers, thus cutting the costs that come with a more stable workforce, including guaranteed hours, benefits, raises, promotions, and the like. Whatever can be said about the

characteristics of the people who work low-wage jobs, it is also true that the jobs themselves too often set workers up for failure.

Poverty is structural, it is a construct, it is a basic underpinning of capitalism. The suffering all around us is the result of capitalism run amok. And our current crony-capitalism on steroids is the result of our collective failure to regulate. Because capitalism, and the inherent greed that comes with it, is seductive.

How do we get the hoarders to realize it's a zero sum game? They've been hoarding for so long and can be so indignant and entitled about their silly stash, it's as if they'd rather die than change.

Part of the reason TANF isn't doing its job is that it is a block grant given to the states, which have broad flexibility as to how they spend the money. This means that they have plenty of reasons to keep families off the rolls, because if they do, they get to use the money for other, related purposes. Of the \$16.5 billion the federal government transfers to states for TANF, more than \$11 billion is siphoned off for other uses, sometimes to fund a state's child welfare system. Strained state budgets are thus eased. TANF has become welfare for the states rather than aid for families in need. Beyond eligibility rules and other formal restrictions on who qualifies, there's evidence that some prospective applicants may be diverted from applying for aid in unauthorized ways.

Barely three-million people receive TANF now, less than one percent of the population. Almost half of those are in California and New York, so the remaining 1.7 million are divided among forty-eight states and the District of Columbia. And the numbers are still going down, 600,000 fewer in 2013 and 2014 alone.

As former congresswoman Michele Bachmann once put it, if the minimum wage were repealed "we could potentially virtually wipe out unemployment completely because we would be able to offer jobs at whatever level." Theoretically, Bachmann is correct. But her point is irrelevant. It is no great feat for an economy to create a large number of very-low-wage jobs. Slavery, after all, was a full-employment system.

Whatever wage gains these workers receive are rarely passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. That is because big-box retailers and fast-food chains compete intensely for customers and have no choice but to keep their prices low. It is notable, for example, that in Denmark, where McDonald's workers over the age of eighteen earn the equivalent of twenty dollars an hour, Big Macs cost only thirty-five cents more than they do in the United States. Any wage gains low-paid workers receive will more than likely come out of profits—which, in turn, will slightly reduce returns to shareholders and the compensation packages of top executives.

The reason for the sharp divergence in labor market experiences between Germany and the US is that Germany encouraged its employers to reduce work time rather than lay off workers in response to a reduction in demand. While there were differences across firms, the basic story was that if a company cut back workers' hours by 20 percent, the government would make up 40 percent of the loss in pay (eight percent of total pay), the company would make up 40 percent (eight percent of total pay), and the worker would accept a four percent pay cut. The basic logic behind this system was that, if the government is willing make up lost pay of workers when they are completely unemployed, why not pay workers when they are partially unemployed as a result of a reduction in work hours?

Twenty-six states now have work-sharing programs as part of their unemployment insurance systems, including several large states like California and New York. However, the take-up rate on these programs has been low. Most employers are not even aware that support for work sharing exists as an alternative to layoffs. It doesn't help that the programs tend to be overly bureaucratic and in many cases have not been modernized since they were first put in place at the end of the 1970s or early 1980s.

In addition to having an unemployment insurance system that is both ungenerous and encourages layoffs, as a longer run matter we have an institutional structure in place that tends to encourage longer hours for workers. As a result, insofar as workers get benefits from productivity growth, they take them in the form of higher pay rather than more leisure. Specifically, because health care insurance is mostly an employment-based benefit, rather than universally provided through the government, employers typically see it as a fixed cost per worker. So rather than hiring additional workers and paying for their health insurance, employers would generally prefer their existing workforce to work more hours. The preference for longer hours is even greater in cases where employers provide defined benefit pensions in addition to health insurance.

Consider this basic arithmetic: if we produced the same number of cars but the average work year in the auto industry had 20 percent fewer hours, we would have 25 percent more people working in the auto industry. The reality will always be more complicated, but the basic point is straightforward: for the same levels of output, shorter hours mean more workers. In other wealthy countries, the average number of work hours in a year has fallen sharply over the last four decades. Most countries in Western Europe mandate five to six weeks a year of paid vacation. Between six months and one year of paid parental leave is standard, as is some amount of paid leave for other family reasons. In some countries, the standard work week is less than 40 hours.

By contrast, in the United States the number of hours in the average work year has changed little over the last four decades, due almost certainly in large part to the benefit structure that creates substantial per-worker overhead costs. As a result of our different histories, workers in the United States average considerably more hours each year than workers in Europe. According to data from the OECD, the average work year in the United States is 1,790 hours, compared to 1,419 hours in the Netherlands, 1,482 in France, and 1,371 in Germany. If the average work year in the United States were comparable to those in Western Europe, more workers would be employed at relatively well-paying jobs in sectors like manufacturing, construction, and communications instead of being forced to accept lower-paying jobs in sectors like retail and restaurants. By reducing the supply of workers in the lower-paying sectors, the reduction in average hours would lead to higher wages in low-paying sectors for the workers who were left behind. In short, it is reasonable to believe that the longer average work year in the United States has been a factor contributing to inequality.

What are called “public schools” in many of America’s wealthy communities aren’t really public at all. In effect, they’re private schools, whose tuition is hidden away in the purchase price of upscale homes there, and in the corresponding property taxes. Even where courts have required richer school districts to subsidize poorer ones, large inequalities remain. Rather than pay extra taxes that would go to poorer districts, many parents in upscale communities have quietly shifted their financial support to tax-deductible parents’ foundations designed to enhance their own schools. About 12 percent of the more than fourteen-thousand school districts across America are funded in part by such foundations. They’re paying for everything from a new school auditorium (Bowie, Maryland) to a high-tech weather station and language arts program (Newton, Massachusetts). Parents’ foundations are visible evidence of parents’ efforts to reconnect their money to their kids—and not to kids in another community, who are likely to be poorer.

How many people does it take to make an urban farm? Twenty-five film makers and journalists to do pieces on urban farming, sixty-three grad students to study the farm, a few people from the not-for-profit complex to hold meetings about farming, a few elected officials to have their pictures taken at the farm, and about five people to do the actual farming.

Although civil society groups are assumed to be motivated by altruism they are nonetheless embedded in a global capitalist economy and have quite specific material requirements that must be fulfilled in order to operate successfully. To be successful, an organization must survive and, in a market-based environment, this means finding ways to generate the funds necessary to sustain operations. Yet, it is more than this. Those at the helm share the

same ideologies and Western mindsets as the capitalists and corporations whose interests they serve.

“What’s infuriating about manipulations by Non-Profit Industrial Complex is that they harvest good will of the people, especially young people. They target those who were not given skills and knowledge to truly think for themselves by institutions which are designed to serve the ruling class. Capitalism operates systematically and structurally like a cage to raise domesticated animals. Those organizations and their projects which operate under false slogans of humanity in order to prop up the hierarchy of money and violence are fast becoming some of the most crucial elements of the invisible cage of corporatism, colonialism, and militarism.”

There is an old joke that conservatives told about left-wing agitators at the start of the twentieth century. The story goes that the speaker jumps up on the soap box and yells out: “If I had two-million dollars, I would give you one.” He then says, “And if I had two houses I would give you one.” He continues, “If I had two pigs,” the radical then pauses and says quietly, “wait, I have two pigs.” This perspective seems to describe many of those working against inequality at our leading nonprofit foundations. While many foundations now list combating inequality as major part of their agenda, their top executives often draw paychecks in the high hundreds of thousands of dollars. For example, the average pay package for the highest paid non-financial position at the country’s ten largest foundations in 2014 was \$820,000.

Revolutionaries must always go forth to answer the momentary desires and needs of the people, the poor and the oppressed people, while waging the revolutionary struggle. It’s very important because it strengthens the people’s revolutionary camp while it weakens the camp of the capitalist power structure.

During a time when a person’s worldview is under attack, friends and community remind him that everything is OK. This is true at the individual level and the societal level: citizens need to know that they are being taken care of and supported during times of crisis, meaning communities need respected and trusted police forces, governments, fire departments, and religious leaders. When that safety net is gone, crisis, trauma, stress, and violence all become a lot more difficult to deal with. This may be one reason that countries with long histories of upheaval have a hard time bouncing back.

“But poverty doesn’t bind the poor together as much as wealth and the need to protect it bind the rich. If it did, we would hear the rattle of tumbrels in the streets. One hears mutterings, but the chains have not yet been shed.”

There is no demographic that has a sharper instinct for empathy than the downtrodden.

Poor folks rely on people the way rich folks rely on money. Since money is never a solution, the only thing to rely on is social connections, preferably local ones. For example, poor mom’s car breaks down. Calling the tow truck is a no go. Paying for something like AAA is a rich people solution, so no go. Instead she calls Uncle Jim, who can at least come get her and the baby from the side of the road, if nothing else.

Likewise if she’s about to get evicted, and has no money in the bank, she calls Aunt Judy, or Mom, or somebody, hoping for a place to stay, at least for a little while, just to stay off the street.

Nobody likes to be called up only when you want something from them. So these social ties have to be constantly tended and strengthened, indefinitely, just in case of a someday problem. You never know when you need to beg \$100 off someone, so you need to be on good terms long before that ever happens. Most poor people will not be doing this in some scheming way, they only know that you need to stay tight with your friends and family. That’s just how life is lived.

These social networks are the number one survival method the poor rely on, since money is forever a problem. So they put a lot of time into maintaining them.

Wealthier folks can rely on their financial resources to get them out of binds, and can afford to be less attached to a local social circle. This is why the poor resent it so much when one of their own does well but then moves away. You’ve become somebody they can rely on, except then you took that from them, leaving them no better off. Whatever of their own resources went into helping you in childhood have been a waste. At the least your success reflected well on them, but then you made sure to keep your distance from “those people.” They don’t even gain a bit of social status from you. You used them and threw them away.

The often unspoken attitude is that the ‘poors be yappin,’ like it’s some ignorant, self-defeating behavior that wastes time, and accomplishes nothing. Great minds discuss ideas, the stupid poors discuss people. As if the poor were just trying to create some fruitless Kardashian-esque existence for themselves. They are not. They are building, maintaining, and tapping into the one reliable resource they have, essentially crowdsourcing their survival

prospects. They are resource pooling. This is also the fundamental utility of the church, and explains its true meaning in the lives of the poor.

So the divide between rich teens and poor teens. Constant chatting is how you maintain social bonds. A 16-year-old may not grasp this. But then again, she may grasp it quite well. If you've got no people, you've got nothing. She was the toddler in that car when mom called Uncle Jim, after all. It's not rocket science. The poor are using the internet for the main thing it appears to be good for, which is strengthening the social networks that allow them to get by. There's a lot more to it than games.

Rural poverty happens because people aren't being paid to take adequate care of their places. There's lots of work to do here. And you can't afford to pay anybody to do it! If you depress the price of the products of the place below a certain level, people can't afford to maintain it. And that's the rural dilemma.

Even for those who did make foolish mistakes, they were kids. At some point, continuing to fuck up their lives over a debt that they'll never reasonably be able to pay makes no sense at all. If we continue down this path, we're no longer allowed to wonder why younger people aren't buying cars, aren't buying houses, aren't investing, and generally aren't engaged with society. You can't have it both ways, and we're ruining an entire generation of Americans because they bought into a flawed system that was aggressively sold to them by figures of authority when they were kids. On a societal level, it's so stupid that we almost deserve the inevitable consequences that it's having on a consumer spending-driven economy.

The mythology aims to convince people that if they're the beneficiaries of Social Security, they should be responsible for saving up to pre-fund it. That's like saying that you're the beneficiary of public education, so you have to pay for the schooling. You're the beneficiary of healthcare, you have to save up to pay for that. You're the beneficiary of America's military spending that supposedly keeps us from being invaded next week by Russia (or maybe it's China now), you have to spend for all that—in advance, and lend the money to the government for when it's needed.

Where do you draw the line? Nobody anticipated in the nineteenth century that people would have to pay for their own retirement. That was viewed as an obligation of society. You had the first public pension (social security) program in Germany under Bismarck. The whole idea is that this is a public obligation. There are certain rights of citizens, and among these rights is that after your working life you deserve to live in retirement. That means that you have to be able to afford this retirement, and not have to beg in the street for money. The wool that's been pulled over people's eyes is to imagine that because they're the beneficiaries of Social Security, they

have to actually pay for it.

The US federal government is a monetary sovereign, it alone controls the value and quantity of its currency in existence. The US government cannot involuntarily run out of money, it is impossible. Your taxes do not fund any federal government spending. It does not need your taxes for any of its expenses, this includes Social Security. The government—federal only—creates money as needed when it pays its bills, whether that's for drones to attack wedding parties or grandma's Social Security check.

The myth of money as a finite resource is used to keep the gap between the rich and the poor as wide as possible.

Yes, a dollar is simply paper with pictures of dead dudes on it—though really this is outdated since most is just digital at this point—which the federal government has complete control over. It's not a real resource; ecosystems, metals, labor, time—those are the resources that matter and constrain our actions. Bombs, drones, fighter jets are bad uses of real resources, the dollar cost doesn't really matter.

How many dollars are created out of thin air, how many exist in total, only matters from an inequality standpoint, since dollars can become power, influence, control. The solution to this is simply the destruction of dollars via federal taxation. No one should be allowed to hoard wealth, power, influence.

As long as we collectively desire to feed, clothe, house, educate, care for every individual then we can. Of course there are ultimately limits: real resource, famine, et cetera, but a lack of dollars is not one of them. What value the paper we call dollars has is irrelevant especially in a country as large and resource-rich as the United States. The problem is, those that wish to deny these basic rights to people control the power structures necessary to ensure that these needs are met. This problem is not just one that exists in the US, it is one that plagues most of us.

The use of the market to provision fundamental public goods is unjust, immoral, insane. Energy production, transportation infrastructure, education, essential food production, healthcare, pharma, electricity generation & distribution must all be under collective control. No profits should be made from such public goods.

Anything less is theft, assault, makes the existing governments illegitimate, makes it one's moral obligation to overthrow such institutions and replace them with ones which will work for the collective good.

It's self-evident that goods on which everybody is dependent should belong to the public.

Two Treatises of Government is a strange medley of logic pieced together on selective authority from the Christian Bible, a very flawed understanding

of zoology, and a state of nature which has never existed for homo sapiens. Unfortunately for Locke's libertarian arguments, man has never been "a lion or a tyger" and may better look to bees and ants as models for behaviour. Locke's state of nature with unbridled free will has never existed except in isolated instances as humans are social and do not act independently. He confused autonomy for all with an excess of free will, creating a survival of the fittest structure which allows autonomy only for a very few of the most ruthless.

To say that what has always been is what always must be denies all of civilization. Locke's writings are the foundation for the system of dissociation we live in today. Societal pressure to respect and assist the needs of others was replaced by blame for the weak. Charitable obligation was replaced by entitlement. Patriarchy was replaced by corporate power. Governance passed from families to cities to states to its first fully dehumanized form in corporations. The libertarian ideals assisted the powerful who considered it their free will to violate the rights of others in their quest for ever more power, the ultimate virtue in Locke's ideal state of nature.

The opposite of poverty is not wealth. It is justice. And Deuteronomy gives us our charge:

"Justice, justice shall you pursue."

The Rule of Law

Measuring Civilization

“Most of what ails our criminal justice system lies in unwarranted certitude on the part of police officers and prosecutors and defense lawyers and judges and jurors that they are getting it right, that they simply are right. Just a tragic lack of humility by everyone who participates in our criminal justice system.”

Illicit behavior defines the difference between right and wrong for a culture, and acts as a safety valve to drain off excess energy generated by the pressures of institutional routines. It also helps instigate social change. Where crime exists, collective sentiments are sufficiently flexible to take on a new form, and crime sometimes helps to determine the form they will take. How many times, indeed, it is only an anticipation of future morality—a step toward what will be.

When the injustice of harm is overpowering, we react by denying its injustice and seeing harm as justified and deserved.

“Sometimes I think this whole world is one big prison yard. Some of us are prisoners, some of us are guards.”

“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky

The more a crime sounds like the plot from a movie, the less likely it is to happen in real life.

More than five-hundred citizens of Falaise had come to the execution. They assembled around the town scaffold, where the Vicomte de Falaise himself presided over the proceedings. Earlier, the accused had been tried and convicted of a vicious crime: savagely biting a child in the face and arms. And though the child had subsequently died, there was no expression

of remorse at trial, no apology to the family. Indeed, the guilty party had not spoken a word since being taken into custody, and she said nothing when a harsh sentence was handed down: she was to be given injuries that matched the child's—wounds in the head and arms—before being garroted and hanged.

The crowd watched with eager eyes as she was brought up the scaffold for all to see. She had been dressed in men's clothes, and a special executioner had been brought in from Paris. It was 1386, and the population of northern France expected a show. But still, the condemned refused to speak. As the last preparations were made, the assembled men and women waited for the final act. It was, the Vicomte must surely have thought, a righteous punishment for an atrocious act, and after the executioner had done his work and the body of the felon hung limp, he ordered a fresco of the scene painted in the Church of Holy Trinity in the town.

When, some three decades later, Henry V and his British compatriots destroyed much of the church, the people of Falaise came together to have the fresco repainted, where it remained for more than four-hundred years. Though the fresco has not survived—it was whitewashed by the church in 1820 during a renovation—today we know for certain why the condemned never spoke. She was a pig.

The events at Falaise were far from an anomaly. Trials and punishments of animals were common for centuries. Judicial proceedings were brought against rats and locusts that infested villages and destroyed crops. Mastiffs were guillotined for assaults. Murderous bulls were seized, tried, and convicted. Horses were burned by court order for their transgressions. The prosecution of animal crimes was not just a matter of backwoods folk practice; it was written into legal codes and religious sources. It was official and sanctified. There were processes and procedures to be followed. In some cases, lawyers were even appointed to represent the accused.

In 1918, Kentucky had passed a law abolishing murder trials for dogs accused of killing sheep. But the courts were slow to learn new tricks, and over the next decade a number of dogs were prosecuted.

When Bill, a collie, was “charged with being a dog of vicious character,” in the winter of 1926, the Associated Press was there to report the story:

“We, the jury, find the defendant guilty as charged,” was the instructed verdict returned by a jury here yesterday in the case of the State of Kentucky versus Bill. The death sentence was imposed by County Judge J.W. Pruitt, and Bill was legally executed. The dog was brought into court by the husband of his owner, Mrs. Sophia Stone. Witnesses testified as to Bill's charac-

ter prior to his attack on a neighbor's daughter, the cause of the trial. Within a few minutes after the passing of sentence, Bill was electrocuted. His head was sent to a Lexington laboratory for examination."

We would like to believe that we have finally achieved a modern, enlightened approach to justice—punishing only those with “guilty minds,” and not because we like it, but because we must protect society. But even today our basic instincts bubble to the surface. We, too, seem to feel vengeful toward animals from time to time. A surfer is dragged underwater off the coast of Australia, and we demand that the protected legal status of great white sharks be lifted so that they may be killed. A grizzly bear attacks a hiker in Yellowstone National Park, and we conduct a full investigation, reconstruct the crime scene, match the DNA, and execute the animal. Occasionally we even feel the urge to punish inanimate objects. Be honest: Have you ever wanted to get back at your computer for losing a file or freezing up at a key moment? Have you kicked the chair that stubbed your toe? And we sometimes take pleasure in the pain and suffering of those who have harmed us—bullies, pickpockets, terrorists—even when that misery does nothing to make us safer in the future.

The best available evidence suggests that although many of our decisions reflect deliberation and reasoning, our moral compass often directs our behavior beyond our conscious awareness. In one famous experiment, people read descriptions of behaviors that are generally viewed as immoral, like two siblings having sex, and then told researchers what they thought. The trick was that the researchers carefully tailored the details of the scenarios to eliminate obvious reasons to object to the conduct. In the incest scenario, for example, the brother and sister were adults, used contraception, freely consented to the act, and experienced no resulting negative feelings. In addition, the incest never occurred again and was never disclosed. Study participants were quick to conclude that the sex was wrong, but they struggled to explain why when the experimenter pointed out that their grounds for objection (for example, that a baby with a genetic defect might be conceived) were nullified by the provided description (effective birth control was used). Even when they ran out of explanations, the participants did not change their opinions: around 80 percent clung to the idea that a wrong had been committed.

There is often a disjunction between the punitive rationales that people give and their actual motives. Indeed, there is a growing scientific consensus that it is a desire for retribution—not deterrence or incapacitation—that has the strongest influence on why we punish.

Eliminating the possibility that our drive to punish comes down simply to a desire to incapacitate dangerous agents is straightforward: we need only ensure that the perpetrator will be fully incapacitated regardless of what we choose to do. Imagine two scenarios. In one, a shark attacks a young girl playing in the waves; in the other, a shark attacks a forty-eight-year-old pedophile. The shark has been hunted down and condemned to death by the authorities, and the only question is the method used to kill it. How much of a numbing agent should authorities give to the shark so that it does not feel any pain as the fatal poison does its work?

If your motivation is ensuring the future safety of the beach, the identity of the victim should not affect your answer, since the shark is going to be killed—that is, rendered unable to harm anyone in the future—no matter what. But your answer should change if you are motivated by retribution, because killing an innocent little girl is seen as a worse harm than killing an adult sex offender and thus would require a harsher response. Sure enough, that’s what researchers found: people provided more of the painkiller to the shark that killed the pedophile than to the shark that killed the girl. We can alter the types of animal perpetrators and we can change the circumstances, but the effect holds. People are driven by retribution to punish attacking sharks, oxen, and dogs in ways that are not significantly different from how they are driven to punish human offenders guilty of comparable misdeeds.

The implications of the research are troubling, suggesting that when a harm has been committed, our desire to find a culprit and reset the moral scales by inflicting punishment may sometimes override our commitment to fair treatment. In the back of our minds, we may already know this about ourselves—though we are loath to acknowledge it. The bloody unfairness stains our history books and our newspaper stories: a mob lynching of an innocent black man after police describe a rape suspect as black; the gangs that live by the motto “You take one of ours and we take one of yours”; the waterboarding of purported “enemy combatants” following the attack of September 11th. When you look closely, these retaliatory acts look far less like accidents, anomalies, and collateral damage. They look like reflections of our culture and its toxic tendencies.

People with an ardent belief in pure evil are active participants in determining sentences, reviewing punishments, and setting policy. It matters when a governor or president evaluating petitions for clemency from death-row inmates thinks—as George W. Bush did—that “good and evil are present in this world, and between the two there can be no compromise.” And it matters when a sitting Supreme Court justice wholeheartedly believes that the Devil is a real person, as former Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia did—though maybe he had some insider information. Such individuals are

at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to appreciating the various forces outside of an offender's control that may have led him to commit a terrible act. And this creates a tragic paradox in which those who are more likely to see evil in others are more likely to commit evil acts themselves—supporting or perpetrating cruel acts against people whose crimes ultimately reflect not their corrupted dispositions but their genetic and environmental bad luck.

Are our beliefs and motivations really that different from those of our medieval French counterparts who tried and executed a pig? The ever-optimistic Steven Pinker has offered an argument that, viewed against the backdrop of human history, the modern world is relatively peaceful. One of the driving forces behind the decrease in violence, he argues, is the transfer of punishment responsibilities to a disinterested third party. And it seems obvious that the modern judicial system, with its judges, jurors, police, lawyers, and correctional officers, has indeed preempted much of the bloody individual and group retaliation that characterized our past. But have we simply hidden the wounds?

We would very much like to believe that superstition has no place in our courthouses and that we are never driven by blood revenge. We would like to think that we take no pleasure in punishment. We want to believe that feelings of warmth toward our fellow man always outweigh feelings of disgust and hatred. It is true that, in the West, we no longer have public executions—for pigs or humans. It is true that we no longer break people on the rack or draw and quarter. But are we “better angels” on the inside, or have we merely constructed elaborate structures that camouflage the retributive drives within us?

The decline of the trial by ordeal was not brought about because people suddenly realized that dipping men and women into water to see if they float was a poor way to assess innocence. It disappeared because the Catholic Church hierarchy decided that commanding God to work miracles in the service of a human judicial system violated biblical principles. And what replaced the ordeal was not a system of evidence and reason but something arguably less accurate and humane than what had come before: judicial torture. For roughly the next half millennium, when a person was strongly suspected of a serious crime, but there were no witnesses, he would be broken on the rack or subjected to the thumbscrew to elicit a confession. Like those who had administered the ordeal, the officials in charge did not see themselves as cruel or unjust. Like us, they constructed an elaborate structure of seemingly objective rules and procedures that affirmed their righteousness and impartiality.

With no dominant governmental authority to manage the conflicts of the scattered small communities of Europe through much of the Middle Ages,

the legitimacy of human action in matters of law was always contestable. But godly action was not.

But how will someone nine-hundred years from now view our current system of justice? The truth is that our descendants will be no less surprised by the routine and systematic unfairness we tolerate today than we are by our ancestors' trials by ordeal. They will look back at our judges and juries and see biases that are just as obvious as the ones we now perceive in the bishops and abbots who presided centuries ago. They will look back at our criminal code and see laws as wrongheaded and illegitimate as the prohibition on heresy. They will examine our processes and procedures—how strictly we followed them, how heartily we trumpeted them as bastions of integrity and accuracy—and laugh at our naïveté just as we laugh today at the mumbo-jumbo justice of Sir Bedevere the Wise. If there is a Monty Python of the thirtieth century, its members will write skits that look an awful lot like episodes of *Law & Order*.

America accounts for less than five percent of the world's population, but almost a quarter of all prisoners. Some 2.3 million individuals are behind bars across the country, and in excess of 6 million are under "correctional supervision"—more, by far, than in any other nation. Even at their height, the Gulag labor camps never came close to the number of our citizens currently on probation, in jail or prison, or on parole.

Take one-hundred-thousand Americans, and 707 of them are languishing in a cell. By contrast, 284 out of every hundred-thousand Iranians are locked up, 118 out of every hundred-thousand Canadians, and only 78 out of every hundred-thousand Germans. A country that abolished slavery 150 years ago now has a greater number of black men in the correctional system than there were slaves in 1850 and a greater percentage of its black population in jail than was imprisoned in apartheid South Africa.

These places are also what sociologists call "total institutions," places that isolate people, usually without their consent. There are several types of total institutions: places that care for those who can't care for themselves or are a danger to themselves and others, like nursing homes and psychiatric hospitals; places that confine criminals, like jails and penitentiaries; and voluntary total institutions, like schools, abbeys, and monasteries. Though they are not inherently 'evil,' these places are the sites of many of history's most tragic and horrendous crimes against humanity. The monsters inside total institutions are not necessarily the ones behind bars.

Research shows any form of long-term association with an involuntary total institution can leave you feeling less than human, which is, for many, a fate worse than death. To paraphrase Michel Foucault: the executioner has power only over your death; an institution has power over everything

else. People realized such isolation was not a good idea, and a number of activists began to denounce it, among them Charles Dickens:

“In its intention I am well convinced that it is kind, humane, and meant for reformation; but I am persuaded that those who designed this system of Prison Discipline, and those benevolent gentlemen who carry it into execution, do not know what it is that they are doing. I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body; and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye, and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment in which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay.”

Eventually courts ruled that forced institutionalization of those with disabilities is unconstitutional. But total institutions for other marginalized groups continues today. Prisons are the new asylums, once again putting our “monsters” into cages.

In the United States, there are more than three times as many people suffering from significant mental illness locked in our prisons and jails as there are in our mental health facilities. And only about a third of those individuals have received treatment since their incarceration began.

The fact that it was not until 2014 that Pennsylvania agreed not to put inmates with serious disabilities or mental illness in solitary confinement is further testament to how far we still have to go in building institutions that respect human rights.

Convicts had no meaningful legal rights at one point and no effective redress. They were understood, quite literally, to be slaves of the state. The Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution had abolished slavery but allowed one major exception: slavery remained appropriate as punishment for a crime. In a landmark decision by the Virginia Supreme Court, *Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, issued at the height of Southern Redemption, the court put to rest any notion that convicts were legally distinguishable from slaves:

“For a time, during his service in the penitentiary, he is in a state of penal servitude to the State. He has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his personal rights except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. He is for the time being a slave of the State. He is *civilter mortuus*; and his estate, if he has any, is administered like that of a dead man.”

About 70 percent of offenders and ex-offenders are high school dropouts, and according to at least one study, about half are functionally illiterate. Many offenders are tracked for prison at early ages, labeled as criminals in their teen years, and then shuttled from their decrepit, underfunded inner city schools to brand-new, high-tech prisons.

Those sent to prison are institutionally branded as a particular class of individuals with major implications for their place and status in society. The negative credential associated with a criminal record represents a unique mechanism of state-sponsored stratification. It is the state that certifies particular individuals in ways that qualify them for discrimination or social exclusion. The official status of this negative credential differentiates it from other sources of social stigma, offering legitimacy to its use as a basis for discrimination. Four decades ago, employers were free to discriminate explicitly on the basis of race; today employers feel free to discriminate against those who bear the prison label—those labeled criminals by the state. The result is a system of stratification based on the official certification of individual character and competence—a form of branding by the government.

Felony is the new nigger. They don't have to call you a nigger anymore. They just say you're a felon. In every ghetto you see alarming numbers of young men with felony convictions. Once you have that felony stamp, your hope for employment, for any kind of integration into society, it begins to fade out. Today's lynching is a felony charge. Today's lynching is incarceration. Today's lynch mobs are professionals. They have a badge; they have a law degree. A felony is a modern way of saying, 'I'm going to hang you up and burn you.' Once you get that 'F,' you're on fire.

In "colorblind" America, criminals are the new whipping boys. They are entitled to no respect and little moral concern. Like the "coloreds" in the years following emancipation, criminals today are deemed a characterless and purposeless people, deserving of our collective scorn and contempt. When we say someone was "treated like a criminal," what we mean to say is that he or she was treated as less than human, like a shameful creature. Hundreds of years ago, our nation put those considered less than human in shackles; less than one-hundred years ago, we relegated them to the other side of town; today we put them in cages. Once released, they find that a heavy and cruel hand has been laid upon them. In this brave new world, punishment for the original offense is no longer enough; one's debt to society is never paid.

Collectively, these sanctions send the strong message that, now that you have been labeled, you are no longer wanted. You are no longer part of 'us,' the deserving. Unable to drive, get a job, find housing, or even qualify for public benefits, many ex-offenders lose their children, their dignity, and

eventually their freedom—landing back in jail after failing to play by rules that seem hopelessly stacked against them.

The consequences for real families can be devastating. Consider housing, without it people can lose their children. Take for example, the forty-two-year-old African American man who applied for public housing for himself and his three children who were living with him at the time. He was denied because of an earlier drug possession charge for which he had pleaded guilty and served thirty days in jail. Of course, the odds that he would have been convicted of drug possession would have been extremely low if he were white. But as an African American, he was not only targeted by the drug war but then denied access to housing because of his conviction. Since being denied housing, he has lost custody of his children and is homeless. Many nights he sleeps outside on the streets. Stiff punishment, indeed, for a minor drug offense—especially for his children, who are innocent of any crime.

Remarkably, under current law, an actual conviction or finding of a formal violation is not necessary to trigger exclusion. Public housing officials are free to reject applicants simply on the basis of arrests, regardless of whether they result in convictions or fines. Because African Americans and Latinos are targeted by police in the War on Drugs, it is far more likely that they will be arrested for minor, nonviolent crimes. Accordingly, HUD policies excluding people from housing assistance based on arrests as well as convictions guarantee highly discriminatory results.

Perhaps no aspect of the HUD regulatory regime has been as controversial, however, as the “no-fault” clause contained in every public housing lease. Public housing tenants are required to do far more than simply pay their rent on time, keep the noise down, and make sure their homes are kept in good condition. The “One Strike and You’re Out” policy requires every public housing lease to stipulate that if the tenant, or any member of the tenant’s household, or any guest of the tenant, engages in any drug-related or other criminal activity on or off the premises, the tenancy will be terminated. Prior to the adoption of this policy, it was generally understood that a tenant could not be evicted unless he or she had some knowledge of or participation in alleged criminal activity. Accordingly, in *Rucker v. Davis*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the “no-fault” clause, on the ground that the eviction of innocent tenants—who were not accused or even aware of the alleged criminal activity—was inconsistent with the legislative scheme.

The US Supreme Court reversed. The Court ruled in 2002 that, under federal law, public housing tenants can be evicted regardless of whether they had knowledge of or participated in alleged criminal activity. According to the Court, William Lee and Barbara Hill were rightfully evicted after their

grandsons were charged with smoking marijuana in a parking lot near their apartments. Herman Walker was properly evicted as well, after police found cocaine on his caregiver. And Perlie Rucker was rightly evicted following the arrest of her daughter for possession of cocaine a few blocks from home. The Court ruled these tenants could be held civilly liable for the nonviolent behavior of their children and caregivers. They could be tossed out of public housing due to no fault of their own.

Throughout the United States, newly released prisoners are required to make payments to a host of agencies, including probation departments, courts, and child-support enforcement offices. In some jurisdictions, ex-offenders are billed for drug testing and even for the drug treatment they are supposed to receive as a condition of parole. These fees, costs, and fines are generally quite new—created by law within the past twenty years—and are associated with a wide range of offenses. Every state has its own rules and regulations governing their imposition.

Examples of preconviction service fees imposed throughout the US today include jail book-in fees levied at the time of arrest, jail per diems assessed to cover the cost of pretrial detention, public defender application fees charged when someone applies for court-appointed counsel, and the bail investigation fee imposed when the court determines the likelihood of the accused appearing at trial. Post-conviction fees include pre-sentence report fees, public defender recoupment fees, and fees levied on convicted persons placed in a residential or work-release program. Upon release, even more fees may attach, including parole or probation service fees. Such fees are typically charged on a monthly basis during the period of supervision. In Ohio, for example, a court can order probationers to pay a \$50 monthly supervision fee as a condition of probation. Failure to pay may warrant additional community control sanctions or a modification in the offender's sentence.

Some offenders, like Ora Lee Hurley, find themselves trapped by fees and fines in prison and find it nearly impossible to get out. Hurley was a prisoner held at the Gateway Diversion Center in Atlanta in 2006. She was imprisoned because she owed a \$705 fine. As part of the diversion program, Hurley was permitted to work during the day and return to the center at night. Five days a week she worked full-time at a restaurant earning \$6.50 an hour and, after taxes, net about \$700 a month. Room and board at the diversion center was about \$600, and her monthly transportation cost \$52. Miscellaneous other expenses, including clothes, shoes, and personal items such as toothpaste, quickly exhausted what was left. Hurley's attorney decried the trap she was in:

“This is a situation where if this woman was able to write a check for the amount of the fine, she would be out of there. And because she can’t, she’s still in custody. It’s as simple as that.”

Although she worked a full-time job while in custody, most of her income went to repay the diversion program, not the underlying fine that put her in custody in the first place. This harsh reality harks back to the days after the Civil War, when former slaves and their descendants were arrested for minor violations, slapped with heavy fines, and then imprisoned until they could pay their debts. The only means to pay off their debts was through labor on plantations and farms—known as convict leasing—or in prisons that had been converted to work farms. Paid next to nothing, convicts were effectively enslaved in perpetuity, as they were unable to earn enough to pay off their debts.

Post-conviction penalties have a long history. The American colonies passed laws barring criminal offenders from a wide variety of jobs and benefits, automatically dissolving their marriages and denying them the right to enter contracts. These legislatures were following a long tradition, dating back to ancient Greece, of treating criminals as less than full citizens. Although many collateral sanctions were repealed by the late 1970s, arguably the drug war simply revived and expanded a tradition that has ancient roots, a tradition independent of the legacy of American slavery.

Remarkably, even in communities devastated by mass incarceration, many people struggling to cope with the stigma of imprisonment have no idea that their neighbors are struggling with the same grief, shame, and isolation. This type of phenomenon has been described in the psychological literature as pluralistic ignorance, in which people misjudge the norm. One example is found in studies of college freshman who overestimate the drinking among other freshman. When it comes to families of prisoners, however, their underestimation of the extent of incarceration in their communities exacerbates their sense of isolation by making the imprisonment of their family members seem more abnormal than it is.

The silence this stigma engenders among family members, neighbors, friends, relatives, co-workers, and strangers is perhaps the most painful—yet least acknowledged—aspect of the new system of control. We can have no significant understanding of any culture unless we also know the silences that were institutionally created and guaranteed along with it.

Ultimately, the fatal flaw of Broken Windows was its ignorance of history. Even if you put the best possible spin on it and stipulated that it was conceived by well-meaning people as a race-neutral tool for an ostensibly race-neutral problem, in its implementation it drifted inexorably in another

direction. To the black people who were its most frequent targets, the real-life, non-theoretical version of the program instantly evoked overtly racist policing programs from the past. For them, Broken Windows and Stop-and-Frisk never had a chance of being taken seriously as anything but the latest excuse to harass minorities. George Kelling had the foresight to understand that the optics of blasting homeless people with fire hoses in the Commando subway cleanup program would be bad. But somehow nobody worried that ticketing hundreds of thousands of people a year for obstructing pedestrian traffic or loitering might strike a particular chord with a population of people once targeted en masse for crimes like vagrancy and “impudence” for nearly a century after the Civil War.

According to a report released by the US Department of Justice’s Bureau of Statistics in 2006, the US spent a record \$185 billion for police protection, detention, judicial, and legal activities in 2003. Adjusting for inflation, these figures reflect a tripling of justice expenditures since 1982. The justice system employed almost 2.4 million people in 2003—58 percent of them at the local level and 31 percent at the state level. If four out of five people were released from prisons, far more than a million people could lose their jobs.

Unlike in the majority of democracies, in the United States, prisoners cannot vote; they are barred from political participation. The United States is unique among Western democracies in barring some prisoners from voting even after they have been released. As a consequence, there is no one recognized by the polity who can speak from the perspective of prisoners. Prisoners have become dehumanized as a consequence. They now serve as a strategic instrument in politics. A politician summons up crime to elicit fear, and then offers himself as the instrument to satisfy the desire for retribution (though the desire is for retribution of the fear caused by that very politician). The disappearance from public political life of the perspective of the prisoner has resulted in an ethical crisis for the United States. Recent decades have borne witness to ever more draconian prison torture practices, including the extensive use of solitary confinement and inhumane prison-sentencing practices.

What is less often remarked upon is that the disappearance of the prisoners’ perspective from public political discourse has resulted in another kind of crisis, a political crisis. The dehumanizing of prisoners has undermined our democracy. One example is the widespread practice in the United States of prison gerrymandering. In the many states that practice it, prisoners confined there also count as residents of the area where the prisons are. Many prisons are located in rural areas, and many of those areas have too few nonincarcerated residents to allow a representative to the state legis-

lature. In the state of Pennsylvania alone, there are eight state legislative districts that have too few nonincarcerated residents to be state legislative districts without counting the nonvoting (and mostly urban) prisoners in their prisons. Prisons thus give the rural voters in the areas in which prisons are located vastly enhanced political power and money from the state. This, in turn, gives such voters extra incentive to promote brutal prison-sentencing practices to keep the prisoners incarcerated and bring more to their districts.

Although there are many factors behind America's high incarceration rates, the ever-expanding list of criminal violations and the harshness of our sentencing are front and center. When Illinois's criminal code was updated in 1961, it was 72 pages, but by 2000 it had grown to 1,200 pages. Illinois is no anomaly: in every state, we imprison people for relatively minor, nonviolent crimes—like using drugs or passing a bad check—that would receive a slap on the wrist in other countries. While no more than 10 percent of those convicted of crimes in Germany and the Netherlands are sentenced to prison, in the United States it's 70 percent.

We also hand out much longer prison sentences than in other parts of the world. Burglarize a house in Vancouver, and on average you can expect five months in a Canadian facility. But drive an hour south to Bellingham, Washington, and commit the same offense, and you'll spend more than three times as long in prison. The same pattern is true for serious crimes. In Norway, for example, no one can be given a sentence of more than twenty-one years, while in the United States we regularly lock people up and throw away the key. Unlike many of our European counterparts, we also have all sorts of penalty enhancements and mandatory rules that can turn a seemingly small infraction into decades in prison.

The end of the law is to reconcile different interests and let them live together without undue fanaticism—and everyone should have a fanatic attachment to that end.

“If I take a broom handle and penetrate your stomach with it, that's not rape. If I take that same broom handle and penetrate your vagina or anus, that's rape. Now, I'm not trying to be offensive here, but if I'm choosing, it's the handle in the hole that already exists, not a new one made by it, that is going to be the less worse outcome. But simply, they're both assaults, not one sexual, one not, perhaps both violent assaults, but still simply assaults. Sexualizing a crime does nothing but bring cultural biases and emotions into the law.”

Of course, cultivating a flat affect does little or nothing to eliminate the biases that a person might bring to the issue. And approaching something like assault without emotion is neither objective nor fair and balanced. It only feels that way.

The carceral system has always used sensationalized cases and the specter of unthinkable harm to create new mechanisms of disposability. Those mechanisms are what feed bodies to hungry dungeon economies while we are distracted by our own fears of “bad people” and what they might do if they aren’t contained. Of course, a system that never addresses the ‘why’ behind a harm never actually contains the harm itself. Cages confine people, not the conditions that facilitated their harms or the mentalities that perpetuate violence. Yet, for some reason, even people who are well versed in the dynamics of the system often believe Law and Order moments are possible, when, just for a moment, an instrument of state violence can be made good.

Do you think we should rape people who rape? We don’t rape rapists, because we think about the person who would have to commit the rape. Should we assault people who have committed assault? We can’t imagine replicating a rape or an assault and holding on to our dignity, integrity, and civility. But because we think we have found a way to kill people that is civilized and decent, we are comfortable.

I hate it when people say, ‘Well, what if it was your kid that was kidnapped? Would you still care so much about human rights?’ Nope. I’d go full genocide to get my kid back, cheerfully murdering hundreds of millions of innocent people along the way. I’d make Hitler look lazy and uncommitted. This is why we mustn’t factor in the personal perspective of the victims. It torpedoed our ability to act justly, and just creates a cycle of ever-escalating vengeance.

Not contained in the judge’s sentence of death was that his last vision on earth would be looking up into the faces of those who hated him. They would hate him because they believed him to be a murderer—yes, like them. They would hate him because he is black. And those who hated him would be the ones to whom he would say good-bye.

Long in advance the condemned man knows that he is going to be killed and that the only thing that can save him is a reprieve. In any case, he cannot intervene, make a plea outside himself, or convince. Everything goes on outside him. He is no longer a man but a thing waiting to be handled by the executioners. This explains the odd submissiveness that is customary in the condemned at the moment of their execution.

Preacher was executed at Stateville Correctional Center at Joliet, Illinois. Some mammal, claiming to be a member of the human species, stuck a needle in Preacher’s arm, and another unidentified bipedal turned on the

poison, and Preacher Man died with love, along with those deadly chemicals, in his heart.

The innocent die a slower, more torturous death. To know that one is innocent, but day after day, year after year, decade after decade one is penned up like an animal in the zoo—such is the ultimate torture. There the innocent will live out their remaining years in a cramped, concrete closet as the hated, and in the company of the hated. There they will die at the hands of other inmates, or by the clubs of sadistic guards, or from inadequate medical care, or, at last, from the accursed needle itself.

Other familiar problems include mental illness, ineffective assistance of counsel, defendants who have insisted on representing themselves, and a lack of consideration for the trauma and abuse predating their crimes. Among the few people ever executed at the federal level since 1988 was Louis Jones, a black Gulf War veteran convicted for a rape and murder on a military base; Jones had no criminal history and had been diagnosed with PTSD. He died by lethal injection in 2003.

So many people snort and roll their eyes at mitigators such as extremely abusive childhoods, mental illness, or veterans with PTSD. The common refrain is:

“Lots of people with the same horrific experience don’t go around killing innocent people.”

This is trivially true, but fundamentally stupid and the reasoning immoral. Human beings’ behavior results from an established—but still poorly understood and complex—interaction of nature with nurture. Some individuals lack the genetic capacity to withstand extremely horrific conditions and retain their stability and judgment. In the birth and family lotteries—or a war experience imposed by the state—they are far more vulnerable to losing their shit.

Their victims, moreover, are not at all uniformly supportive of execution. But even if it were otherwise, the state kills people in the name of all of us, and the justice of this must be assessed in terms of whether all of us are moral when telling the government to kill in our names. It is very clear to me that to empower the state to kill a helpless human being in our name is immoral.

“I put my life on the line for this country. To me, not voting is not right; it lead to a lot of frustration, a lot of anger. My son’s in Iraq. In the army just like I was. My oldest son, he fought in the first Persian Gulf conflict. He was in the Marines. This is my baby son over there right now.

But I'm not able to vote. They say I owe \$900 in fines. To me, that's a poll tax. You've got to pay to vote. It's 'restitution,' they say. I came off parole on October 13, 1999, but I'm still not allowed to vote. Last time I voted was in '88. Bush versus Dukakis. Bush won. I voted for Dukakis. If it was up to me, I'd vote his son out this time too.

I know a lot of friends got the same cases like I got, not able to vote. A lot of guys doing the same things like I was doing. Just marijuana. They treat marijuana in Alabama like you committed treason or something.

I was on the 1965 voting rights march from Selma. I was fifteen years old. At eighteen, I was in Vietnam fighting for my country. And now? Unemployed and they won't allow me to vote."

His vote, along with the votes of millions of other people labeled felons, might have made a real difference in 2004 and beyond. There is no doubt their votes would have changed things in 2000. Following the election, it was widely reported that, had the 600,000 former felons who had completed their sentence in Florida been allowed to vote, Al Gore would have been elected president of the United States rather than George W. Bush.

Research indicates that a large number of close elections would have come out differently if felons had been allowed to vote, including at least seven senatorial races between 1980 and 2000. The impact on those major elections undoubtedly would be greater if all those deterred or prevented from voting were taken into account. But as ex-offenders will hasten to emphasize, it is not just the big elections that matter. One ex-offender put it this way:

"I have no right to vote on the school referendums that will affect my children. I have no right to vote on how my taxes is going to be spent or used, which I have to pay whether I'm a felon or not, you know? So basically I've lost all voice or control over my government. I get mad because I can't say anything because I don't have a voice."

First, the sentiment in favor of letting prisoners vote is quite simple: Universal suffrage means universal suffrage. You get to vote because you're a person, and you are still a person even if you commit a crime. A universal right is neither means-tested nor morals-tested, it's something you're entitled to no matter what. The criminal sphere is separate: You may do things that warrant punishment, you may be dangerous to others and have to be

confined, but nothing you could do warrants stripping you of your citizenship. There are also strong pragmatic arguments for letting prisoners vote, such as the fact that the criminal justice system has historically been used as a means of keeping disfavored populations from participating in democracy. Giving the state the ability to selectively revoke people's right to determine who runs the state creates strong perverse incentives to criminalize the existence of those people who would vote for the political opposition.

How, then, can we respond to the Dylann Roof Problem? If you murder nine people, you still get to participate in democracy? Why shouldn't we just adopt the Mehdi Hasan Compromise, and create categories of especially heinous crimes that make you ineligible to vote? Just exclude Roof and the really bad people.

This position is very tempting, but I think it fails to appreciate what is so powerful and important about truly universal rights. It may seem simple to distinguish the 'really bad' people from the 'merely bad' people, but once you've committed yourself to instituting a moral test for voting the line-drawing questions will become very difficult. For example, robbery is considered a violent crime. Should purse-snatchers be denied the right to vote, but embezzlers and fraudsters be granted it? In fact, in attempting to reinforce the badness of bad crimes, this approach actually ends up diminishing the badness of some crimes. Why? Because if we say that 'Your rights depend on whether you pass a moral test,' then anyone who passes the moral test will have, well, passed a moral test. But we might not want to signal any kind of approval of imprisoned people's conduct or create tiers of citizenship and have them fall into the Good Tier.

One reason that keeping universal programs absolutely universal is useful is because it means that granting people their rights isn't a judgment of their merit. To many people, if we start asking 'But what about Dylann Roof?' then any basic human entitlement will seem gross. Why should Dylann Roof get to stay in a soft bed? Why should he get state-funded medical care? Why should he even be allowed to live? If personal moral character is a factor in these questions, then to many, obviously someone like Roof deserves nothing at all, because he's so reprehensible. But if we look at basic rights questions that way, then we will end up doing terrible things: letting prisoners die because we refuse to give them adequate medical treatment, for instance. If you think the crimes of people like Dylann Roof are so horrible then if we start using the seriousness of the crime as the measurement of how much humane treatment Roof deserves, he won't be treated humanely. Some people are completely fine with that, and do think that when someone commits an atrocity it grants the rest of society license to brutalize and even murder that person. Others of us, however, think

nobody deserves that.

People often fail to appreciate why a kind of absolutism can be very valuable in protecting liberties. The same thing goes for the free speech principle: Instead of having to empower someone to determine who the acceptable speakers and the unacceptable speakers are, even if we agree that there are some unacceptable speakers, allowing all speakers divorces the question of how bad the content is from the question of whether the person can speak. This is useful, because once permission is conditional on content, you get into tricky questions like ‘Well, if a fascist can’t speak, why can George W. Bush, who is responsible for the deaths of 500,000 people?’ Of course, it’s usually impossible to fully decouple these questions, and nobody who has an easy answer to free speech issues has thought about them enough, but there is a reason why leaning toward ‘absolutes’ and ‘universals’ is valuable. If line-drawing is tricky and likely to lead to abuse, then it’s better to simply avoid having to draw any line at all.

Most people don’t think that all prisoners should vote. I see why they think that: Some people in prison have done truly horrible things, and it might seem like an insult to victims to let them help choose their country’s leaders. But there’s a different way to think about it: The question of whether they should vote says nothing whatsoever about what they did to victims. It’s like the question of whether they deserve to see a doctor when they’re sick. It is not a diminishment of their crimes, but a recognition that their crimes are not the issue when it comes to the basic rights of life, health, and democratic participation. Everyone gets to vote, not because they are morally good enough, but because they are people.

Once rights become privileges for any segment of a population they can be revoked for the rest of the population.

The truth is that we’re not going to make much more progress until we realize that we are just as ignorant of the effects of our punishments as we are of what actually drives us to punish. Our favored tools of mass incarceration and solitary confinement do not do what we think they do. And we remain wedded to the same mistaken theories espoused some two-hundred years ago by the Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons.

Now, as then, the prisoner and potential prisoner are viewed as rational beings who make decisions to offend based on a cost-benefit analysis. To decrease crime, the thinking goes, you just need to increase the magnitude of the punishment until violating the law no longer seems to pay. The more distasteful the punishment—that is, the more we deprive criminals of the things that they normally enjoy—the less likely a person will be to choose to offend in the future.

Harsh treatment is acceptable because it’s directed only at people who

deserve it in proportion to their wrongdoing. However, as moral individuals, we understand that we shouldn't cause a prisoner physical pain, which rules out various forms of abuse at the hands of the state. Tough prison sentences, then, are the optimal approach to punishment because they act as a strong deterrent without forcing us to "mistreat" the prisoner.

They also provide a ready means for incapacitating people who just don't respond to the threat of being locked up. Prisoners who are uncontrollable are never let out; the rest, we can feel confident, will now steer clear of crime, knowing how unpleasant it is behind bars. Put simply: our prisons are humane; our punishments are deserved; and our system makes us safer. That's what Eastern State's progenitors proclaimed, and that's what we believe. And we are dead wrong.

It can be no surprise that members of the public fail to raise an eyebrow when a new, harsh mandatory sentence is handed down, or when a study suggesting endemic prison rape or deplorable living conditions is released, or when legislation is enacted that prevents parolees from living within the confines of a city, deprives them of their ability to vote, or stamps them with a permanent badge of ignominy. But these are terrible things. And if we stopped to think about our common humanity and shared destiny, we'd realize that they are directly at odds with our values and we would not stand for them.

Hopelessness, the Department of Corrections is well aware, breeds desperation, so incentives are built into the system to encourage even men with nothing to lose to obey the rules. If you obey the rules, you get privileges. If you break the rules, you lose them. If you break enough rules, you wind up in solitary confinement with only an hour of exercise a day. Man is a social animal, and the threat of solitary is usually enough to keep all but the most troubled inmates in line.

What is solitary confinement actually like? To get a sense, walk into your bathroom, shut the door, lie down in your bathtub, and close your eyes. When you reopen them, imagine that this is where you will spend the next five years of your life. Take a look at your new kingdom. Wake up in the morning and the fluorescent lights are already on, just as they have been all night. Roll from your bed and you can touch the walls—off-white or white. It may be thirteen by eight, or eight by ten, or fourteen by seven, but take a step and you touch the walls. There are no windows, but maybe you get a slit. There is a toilet and a sink. This is where you sit for twenty-three hours each day for weeks and months and years on end. You get taken out only to shower and, on certain days, for a bit of movement in a slightly bigger cage—a narrow dog run.

In Maine, no radios or televisions were permitted. At California's Pelican

Bay, those in solitary get a personal phone call only in the case of emergency. It is a bit softer in the Departmental Disciplinary Unit of the Walpole prison in Massachusetts: a radio after thirty days, a thirteen-inch black-and-white television after sixty, and up to four calls a month, if merited by good behavior. Human contact is virtually nonexistent. The doors are often solid metal, preventing you from talking with other inmates. For many, the opening of the door slot for the guard to push through a food tray is it for the entire day. If you want to feel a human touch, your only real chance is to break the rules—block out the lights to sleep or cover the opening in the door, and you can expect an “extraction.” Officers with shields and helmets will rush into your cell, pin you to the ground, and shackle your arms and legs. Your clothes may be cut off your body as they kneel on your legs and back. You may then be strapped naked to a restraint chair.

Our attention may be drawn to the fight against capital punishment, but only a few dozen people are executed each year in the United States. Meanwhile, thousands of our citizens are locked in boxes for months and years, and thousands more imprisoned for decades without the possibility of parole. Few of us stop to consider whether burying people alive is really such an enlightened alternative to lethal injection.

And it is hard to maintain that narrative of “deserved” suffering when the inmates who are raped in prison are not the worst criminals. They are disproportionately nonviolent first-time offenders. They are disproportionately young and physically small. They are disproportionately mentally disabled. They tend to have histories of being sexually abused as children. And in a horrible twist, those who would seem most deserving of brutal treatment not only avoid the worst abuse in prison but are given *carte blanche* to act as perpetrators. There is something unquestionably perverse about a system of justice that tacitly sanctions as part of punishment the very abuses that it condemns as mandating punishment.

To succeed in the long-run, rules must have a moral or practical basis and the support of the people. If society says that you may do one thing and not another, there must be some rationale or the rule will be flouted. There is no legitimacy in officials writing rules as they choose simply because they have the power to do so. Such is tyranny.

So we’ve got “inclosed” trucks—potentially used for business or sleeping—as well as housetrailer, watercraft, secondary schools, elementary schools, and more. California law actually adds to this list. In California, burglary can be charged of anyone “who enters any house, room, apartment, tenement, shop, warehouse, store, mill, barn, outhouse or other building, tent, vessel, floating home, sealed cargo container, or mine or any underground portion thereof, with intent to commit grand or petit larceny or any felony.” Think

about this: if you step into an abandoned mine “or any underground portion thereof” with no plans to steal anything, but instead simply intending to shoot an unlicensed handgun (a felony), you are legally guilty of burglary. Why? Because it took place inside a legally recognized artificial structure (the mine).

Even a hole in the ground could be considered a building for the purposes of burglary law. In *People v. Buyle*, a 1937 court case in California, a company stores property in a cave dug out of a hillside, an employee tries to make off with some of the goods. A burglary has been committed. The court’s instructions for the case specifically stated that a small bubble of negative space dug into the landscape, even if lacking a complete front wall, “is nonetheless a house merely by virtue of the fact its walls and roof may be produced by an excavation in the hillside.” Nonetheless a house. Because of burglary law, architecture is suddenly everywhere. We are surrounded by invisible buildings.

Legally speaking, architecture is a form of magic, one that has no place in an otherwise rational system. Architecture is the magic of four walls with the power to fundamentally transform how certain crimes are judged and how their perpetrators can be sentenced. True, other crimes may still have been committed, but that is exactly the point. Why not simply indict on the strength of these other crimes alone and be done with accusations of burglary? Why is burglary so beloved by lawyers and police? It is often easier to convict someone of burglary than it is of other crimes, including rape. What’s more, a burglary charge also frequently increases—sometimes quite drastically—the possible sentencing. Think of burglary perhaps as something like an augmentation spell, always ready to be cast upon the crimes at hand: a little special something a prosecutor can tack on to any felony charge as long as it occurred inside a legally recognized architectural space. Conclusively determining a crime’s precise architectural circumstances—demonstrating unimpeachably that the accused was inside a built structure at the time of commission—thus takes on great forensic and punitive importance.

A recent indication of how flexible the spatial circumstances can be for determining whether someone has committed burglary came after an escapade in New York City. Early in the morning of July 22, 2014, two American flags mounted atop the city’s iconic Brooklyn Bridge were mysteriously replaced with white flags. After two German artists claimed responsibility for the act a few weeks later, NYPD deputy commissioner Stephen P. Davis remarked to the *New York Times*:

“At a minimum, it’s trespass, but there is a possibility you

could charge burglary. If you go into a fenced-in area for the purpose of committing a crime, that legally constitutes a burglary.”

In this case, the artists climbed into a fenced-in portion of the bridge at the base of each tower. Neither of these spaces has a roof, as they are little more than chain-link cages open to the wind—yet this is considered an architectural interior in the eyes of the law, transforming mere trespass into burglary with one enchanted close.

It does not take much imagination to suspect that, someday, an altogether-too-clever team of lawyers, police officers, and architects will combine forces to devise any number of speculative wall-like barriers peppered around the city so that other people can, rightly or not, be charged with burglary after stepping “inside” these imaginary spaces. Burglary, then, would fully and absurdly have become a pointless mathematical exercise in which unreal architectural forms are brought forth into the world in a form of legal sorcery.

Experiencing a trial sometimes feels like finding oneself dropped into a room filled with noisy, gibbering psychos—lawyers and even the judges—all of whom are trying to act as if they are sane. And what sane result, if any, finally emerges years later is anyone’s guess. Moreover, a delay of years is meaningless to the justice system since the system enjoys a perpetual life, while the accused, guilty or not, can die without having tasted the first morsel of justice.

One of the virtues of tribal law is that it presupposes that people are just the way we know they are: generally wise, kind, generous, and well-intentioned, but perfectly capable of being foolish, unruly, moody, cantankerous, selfish, greedy, violent, stupid, bad-tempered, sneaky, lustful, treacherous, careless, vindictive, neglectful, petty, and all sorts of other unpleasant things. Tribal law doesn’t punish people for their shortcomings, as our law does. Rather, it makes the management of their shortcomings an easy and ordinary part of life.

There is no crueller tyranny than that which is perpetuated under the shield of law and in the name of justice.

We may think we know how the criminal justice system works. Television is overloaded with fictional dramas about police, crime, and prosecutors—shows such as *Law & Order*. These fictional dramas, like the evening news, tend to focus on individual stories of crime, victimization, and punishment, and the stories are typically told from the point of view of law enforcement. A charismatic police officer, investigator, or prosecutor struggles with his own demons while heroically trying to solve a horrible crime. He ultimately achieves a personal and moral victory by finding the bad guy and throwing him in jail. That is the made-for-TV version of the criminal justice system.

It perpetuates the myth that the primary function of the system is to keep our streets safe and our homes secure by rooting out dangerous criminals and punishing them. These television shows, especially those that romanticize drug-law enforcement, are the modern-day equivalent of the old movies portraying happy slaves, the fictional gloss placed on a brutal system of racialized oppression and control.

Those who have been swept within the criminal justice system know that the way the system actually works bears little resemblance to what happens on television or in movies. Full-blown trials of guilt or innocence rarely occur; many people never even meet with an attorney; witnesses are routinely paid and coerced by the government; police regularly stop and search people for no reason whatsoever; penalties for many crimes are so severe that innocent people plead guilty, accepting plea bargains to avoid harsh mandatory sentences; and children, even as young as fourteen, are sent to adult prisons. Rules of law and procedure, such as ‘guilt beyond a reasonable doubt’ or ‘probable cause’ or ‘reasonable suspicion,’ can easily be found in court cases and law-school textbooks but are much harder to find in real life.

There is a difference between the letter of the law and justice, and that usually depends on the person wielding the power in a given situation.

The law is always up for grabs. The law is not an inflexible instrument like a cannon that can be lined up and fired. It’s a flexible human instrument that responds to political power. When you have the power of the presidency, you have the capacity to put people in place who will be sensitive to upholding these laws. When you lose that authority, you’re left with futile rear-guard actions.

The US has more people in jail than any other country in the world, yet executives who cause enormous economic devastation not only go unpunished, but are incentivized to do it again. Isn’t this a huge inequality?

When we talk about inequality in this country, often we’re talking about jobs and wealth and economic opportunity. But I would say that the greatest perquisite of the power class in America is the ability to commit crimes with impunity. I think this profoundly undermines the sense that we live in a just and fair society when we see top corporate executives getting the kinds of protections from our legal system that are not available to people of lower means.

In one case, corporate executives are found guilty, but their criminal charges are overturned because the prosecutors put up the wrong stock chart. They put up a stock chart that prejudiced the jury because the chart went down, when maybe it didn’t go down as much as they thought. For that, these guys get their charges thrown out. The courts have been very

interested in reversing white collar convictions.

In a 2012 speech, the head of Obama's Criminal Division, Lanny Breuer, announced that he was sometimes persuaded when banks and corporations asked him not to prosecute on the grounds that it might cause the company in question to fail and thus hurt the economy. "We must take into account the effect of an indictment on innocent employees and shareholders," Breuer said, describing a courtesy that American prosecutors extend to no other group and that, by its nature, makes a joke of the idea of equality before the law.

One thing soon becomes clear: The quantum of justice available to most Americans is in direct proportion to that individual's social and economic status, which is to announce the controlling rule of law in America: Little money, little status—little justice.

What the poor get is discipline; what the professionals get is endless indulgence.

The thread by which good governance hangs is this equality before the law, for the only fear of the man who turns the gears is that he may find himself upon them.

There can be no equal justice where the kind of trial a man gets depends on the amount of money he has. And the gap between the haves and have-nots is only going to widen. For those at the top, crime really does pay—and the more you make, the more access you have to those who can help you game the system. And the more you have that power, the less likely the government is to investigate you, prosecute you, or take a hard line in plea bargaining, because they know that they aren't going to win at trial.

For those at the bottom, by contrast, the lack of access initiates a devastating downward cycle. You can't stop losing, because every time you return from prison, you are in a worse position to gain the help you need. Each new sentence keeps you away longer from gainful employment, education, and personal connections. You never have the chance to build up the necessary capital to buy in to the secret world that hedge-fund fraudsters take for granted. And you pass on the curse to your children: when you're incarcerated, they, too, are less likely to go to college or rise out of poverty. Entire inner-city communities become locked into this self-reinforcing inequity, while gated ones across the river are able to secure wealth and success for generations to come.

One can suffer all nature of physical injury and survive; one can never bear the supreme injury of being deprived of justice. The pain is too deep and too real, too disabling and too lasting. As time passed, the need for

retribution will become an irresistible compulsion. Such is the resulting disease of injustice.

Deprive a human being of justice and the human will die for it. Ask the martyrs of history. The refusal of justice plants a cancer in the soul.

One of the strangest side effects of our ineffective and unfair incarceration system is that it may also make people less likely to follow the law in the first place. To many policymakers, severe mandatory sentences seem to offer a powerful incentive to follow the rules. But the extreme harshness of our punishments may actually increase the likelihood of malfeasance because they suggest that the law is not worthy of respect. If a couple of garage break-ins over the summer and a stolen car can land a nineteen-year-old in prison for life, then it is hard to trust the system, believe in its rules, and rely on its processes and officers.

Research has shown that citizens are more willing to defer to the decisions of legal authorities and more willing to follow the law when they see those authorities and legal rules as legitimate. In one study, a group of participants read about a proposed law that seemed unjust because it raised civil liberties concerns or hurt certain citizens, while another cohort read about a seemingly just law. Those who had read about an unjust provision were more likely to report that they planned to disregard other completely unrelated criminal laws in their day-to-day lives.

An 1867 editorial:

“If it had previously existed in the convicted person’s bosom a spark of self-respect this exposure to public shame utterly extinguishes it. Without the hope that springs eternal in the human breast, without some desire to reform and become a good citizen, and the feeling that such a thing is possible, no criminal can ever return to honorable courses. The boy of eighteen who is whipped at New Castle for larceny is in nine cases out of ten ruined. With his self-respect destroyed and the taunt and sneer of public disgrace branded upon his forehead, he feels himself lost and abandoned by his fellows.”

We are so obsessed with the idea that the experience inside prison must not be like the experience outside that we overlook how much harder that makes it for inmates to rejoin society once they are released. Depriving people of normal human contact does not eliminate criminal behavior; it eliminates the capacity to engage in normal human contact. Losing the stimulation of work, entertainment, or socialization does not prompt people to make better choices in the future; it leaves them unprepared to get a job or interact with the outside world when they are released.

Our current system does everything wrong in terms of optimal deterrence. Deterrence works when potential offenders think that they are almost certain to be caught and given a clear, immediate punishment. Our system, by contrast, offers a low probability of getting caught and a hazy potential punishment far in the distant future.

Despite our admission that “justice delayed is justice denied,” our judicial process is often dragged out over a series of months. In Brooklyn, the average wait time for a trial is 243 days; in the Bronx it is 408 days. Some cases take three, four, or five years. Even when punishment is certain, the greater the delay between the violation and the punishment, the less the penalty will act as a deterrent.

Harsher punishments or minimum sentencing do not equal automatic deterrence, nor help those already in the system. Put simply, harsh punishments deter people who will never enter the criminal justice system; harsh punishment and minimum sentencing ignore particularities to criminal activity, instead painting every offender under the same light of guilt, a practice which ignores societal variables relating to current socioeconomic standing, law enforcement bias, past detainment, and even upbringing. Such policy is in direct conflict with the theory of deterrence, a theory of which is the foundation to much modern penology following the sovereign era.

Deterrence theory states that criminal behavior can only be deterred with policy that is speedy, consistent, and relative. Meaning, a lack of the aforementioned variables such as in a system—very much like the current one in the US which has many accounts of pretrial detainment or light bail for some but not all (especially in relation to socioeconomic status)—results in little deterrence as those who will enter the system do not know what to expect to get out of it.

Further, harsh punishments ignore the social contributions to a fostering of eventual deviance; for example, a large contributor to deviance is the idea of the ‘American Dream.’ The American Dream represents a goal all in America are taught to want, yet only a select few can actually attain. Put simply, those who cannot attain such a goal resort to crime to attain the same goals as those not limited by social factors. Harsh punishments typically end up targeting certain groups over others due to natural bias within law enforcement—based on historical and cultural factors—and thus violate the consistency principle for the effect of general deterrence to the overall populace. Harsh punishments ultimately separate communities and illuminate some as deviant and some as not, simply reinforcing political bias to encourage a lack of support for certain social programs and areas.

The fact that our punishments are often vastly out of proportion with the crime, say for example mandatory minimums and the prevalence and

expectation of prison rape, is direct evidence of the unfairness of the system, which any adult will pick up on, and correctly take as evidence that the system is out to get them.

Our policy of punishing people—hurting them, making them feel helpless—for bad behavior seems to be built on the idea that we'll change their minds and subsequent behavior by force. However, successfully changing someone's mind without their consent or cooperation is the definition of brainwashing, which requires far more extreme tactics than imprisonment—tactics which we don't—and shouldn't—have the stomach for as a society. I suspect that, to the extent that spanking children—hurting them and making them feel helpless—works at all, it's only because children haven't yet built up the psychological defenses to physical coercion that adults have.

Most crimes, like robbery, assault, and rape, are committed by habitual offenders who have serious difficulty functioning peacefully in society. There are of course a number of reasons for this, many not within the control of the habitual offenders. If they are released, around 50 percent of them go right back to committing their crimes. Murderers are different. If you exclude professional hit men and the insane, most murderers are in prison for a onetime eruption of violence that they themselves are often shocked to have committed. Once released, they have a recidivism rate of two percent. In a strictly statistical sense, murderers are much better candidates for judicial mercy than men who have committed far lesser crimes.

For any severe crime, punishment for first time offenders is quite stupid. Society, the community, has already paid a price for such individuals to learn, to be wiser in the future in many cases. What good does it do to imprison them for decades or more when many will now be—especially with the aid of rehabilitation and other assistance programs—much less likely to cause future harm than the general population which has not made such mistakes.

Everyone is capable of committing any horrific act given the right circumstances. To act otherwise is to enshrine ignorance and increase the risk of harms.

The lack of correlation between crime and punishment is nothing new. Sociologists have frequently observed that governments use punishment primarily as a tool of social control, and thus the extent or severity of punishment is often unrelated to actual crime patterns. Governments decide how much punishment they want, and these decisions are in no simple way related to crime rates. This fact can be seen most clearly by putting crime and punishment in comparative perspective. Although crime rates in the United States have not been markedly higher than those of other Western countries, the rate of incarceration has soared in the United States while

it has remained stable or declined in other countries. Between 1960 and 1990, for example, official crime rates in Finland, Germany, and the United States were close to identical. Yet the US incarceration rate quadrupled, the Finnish rate fell by 60 percent, and the German rate was stable in that period. Despite similar crime rates, each government chose to impose different levels of punishment. Today, due to recent declines, US crime rates have dipped below the international norm. Nevertheless, the United States now boasts an incarceration rate that is six to ten times greater than that of other industrialized nations—a development directly traceable to the drug war.

I can tell you that there is a huge disconnect between perception of punishment and effectiveness of our systems.

The problem, is that punishing people too much actually makes them more likely to recommit a crime. People feel that leniency is a bad thing, but what if I told you that all research points to incarceration as often exacerbating risk and recidivism? Then what do you do?

The end goal of the correctional system is to stop recidivism, and crimes like manslaughter have some of the lowest rates of recidivism. Manslaughter is the taking of someone's life without intending to do so, which is not something that happens very often, since it's not intentional. Research also shows that murder, for the most part, is a one time deal; usually out of a shitty situation—caught your wife cheating on you, for instance.

So, that guy who got uber-wasted one night, and ended up killing two people behind the wheel of his car. He goes to prison, and after three years has done a bunch of programs, half his family disowns him, he lost all his friends, and he's bankrupt. There are two options:

1. Keep him incarcerated, at the cost of \$80K+ per year, where his risk to become a violent criminal increases exponentially for each year he is incarcerated, because he is removed from society, his support system is shattered and he becomes bitter. And unless you plan to keep him in for life, or he gets killed, he will be released with those emotions into society eventually.
2. You reintegrate him within society with a number of conditions, at two-thirds of his sentence, and research shows he has a very little chance of recommitting any offense, let alone another DUI. He gets to have a job and pay taxes, and give back to society.

What is the best course of action? How do you justify keeping him incarcerated?

Of course you can also find that rare example where one guy did it three, four, five times—but he should be dealt with accordingly as well. I'm talking about the majority of offenders. Most Canadians would be shocked at how many people were incarcerated and now live productive lives around them, but you don't hear about those in the media, only the sensationalist shitstorms that occur occasionally.

The problem is that the public only sees the 'HE KILLED 2 PEOPLE AND WAS ONLY IN JAIL FOR 3 YEARS!' reaction to the decisions, and their response is 'FUCK THAT, HE SHOULD GET LIFE!'

I understand that people feel a need for vengeance, but if there is anything that I've learned through the years, it's that the end goal of corrections is not vengeance, or punishment, nor should it be—the end goal is to reduce crime. That is how you get a safer community, and that is how you reduce the number of victims.

Sure, it may seem unfair for that family who lost the two people and feel that he should be in for life, but what about the other thousand families that aren't victimized in the future, because the offenders were reintegrated properly?

It's a hard concept to grasp, because it asks us to override our emotional response for vengeance, with rational thinking, something that isn't very easy—it's the hardest thing you can ask a victim to do. It's even harder in the hivemind of the world, especially those commentators who talk the loudest—looking at you Nancy Grace or "Judge" Jeannine Pirro.

Don't feel that lenient sentences in your nation are a downside, please, please don't—be grateful that your society is progressive with human rights and an evidence-based understanding of the greater good of society. The stark contrast is what we see in Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, where even the smallest crime can end in a death sentence. They are far from progressive, and care little for evidence.

Please don't take this as a preaching for the system, it's far from perfect, however we have come a very long way from the barbaric, and most importantly—ineffective—types of punishment that aim only to quench our thirst for vengeance; especially since this aim only made our society less safe.

“If a man is returned to society more embittered, vengeful, demoralized, and incapable of social and economic survival than when he first came to prison, then we certainly have failed to protect society.”

‘Punishing’ is too narrow and ill-defined. In theory, prison has three good purposes:

1. An incentive to not commit crimes.
2. A way to keep the most dangerous criminals off the street.
3. A place to rehabilitate criminals so that they do not continue committing crimes after leaving.

All three of these provide a benefit to society, though the exact amount of value is up for debate. Many people believe also there is a fourth purpose: Retribution or vengeance for victims of crimes. However, this does not benefit society. This type of punishment screws people up and makes recidivism even more likely while also making society more likely to turn a blind eye to prison health and safety issues. Both of these benefit the for-profit prison system which is itself partly responsible for one of the highest incarceration rates in the world.

If that’s not enough, we have an abnormally high incarceration rate for people who are actually innocent because the District Attorney is an elected position and Americans are, as mentioned before, a very angry and vengeful bunch. They’re elected on promises that they will successfully prosecute more people. So when the prison system reflects a desire for revenge against criminals, every innocent person gets caught in this web.

What if you were falsely accused of rape? Or molesting a child? Maybe a crooked police officer plants something on you or claims you assaulted him while his dash cam was “broken?” A prison system that reflects those first three goals would take away your freedom, but not abuse you. The one we often have—though it varies from place to place—would have you bruised, raped, or even killed by other inmates depending on the crime you were accused of, working for pennies an hour to put a tiny dent in the debt you are accumulating, or possibly putting your family into debt to pay outrageous prices for your basic needs.

Criminal punishment is so extreme that it should be used only when every other possible means of solving a social problem has been exhausted. The criminal punishment system is so blunt and harmful in its effects that it should be reserved only for the most serious offenses, and anything that can be resolved outside it should be. If you are a prison abolitionist, as I am, you think we should take prosecution off the table most of the time as a response to a given social problem. To see why, imagine that you and I are discussing how we can persuade our friend Dennis to stop showing up late to union meetings. You suggest that we offer to give Dennis a ride, so

that he won't be able to blame the bus system. I suggest that we sit down and ask Dennis to level with us about why he's late, and tell him why his presence matters. We can debate how to approach this. But imagine if a third person piped up and said:

“I suggest that we give him a warning, and if Dennis is late to one more meeting, we show up to his house, armed, drag him away in front of his children, and lock him in a cage for a week.”

Person 3 would appear to lack basic humanity, and their suggestion would (hopefully) be dismissed out of hand. That's true even if we believe this would objectively be an effective way of convincing Dennis to show up on time. Prosecution may work, then, but it's an extreme option. We might need it in the case of murder or physical abuse, but on the whole we need to think more creatively.

As recently as the mid-1970s, the most well-respected criminologists were predicting that the prison system would soon fade away. Prison did not deter crime significantly, many experts concluded. Those who had meaningful economic and social opportunities were unlikely to commit crimes regardless of the penalty, while those who went to prison were far more likely to commit crimes again in the future. The growing consensus among experts was perhaps best reflected by the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, which issued a recommendation in 1973:

“No new institutions for adults should be built and existing institutions for juveniles should be closed.”

This recommendation was based on their finding that:

“The prison, the reformatory, and the jail have achieved only a shocking record of failure. There is overwhelming evidence that these institutions create crime rather than prevent it.”

Every minute under the carceral, colonial project is inconceivable violence. We too often place abolition as something only possible in a far-off future, which means we're allowing the right-now to be stolen. The only logical time for abolition and decolonization is now.

While no one organization can do everything, a successful anti-prison movement will need to synthesize direct action, popular relevancy, and radical critique. To separate these approaches is to grant victory to the prison state.

Too much twenty-first century US-based anti-prison advocacy huddles within a safe limit. The goal has become to find people who are relatively

or absolutely innocent under the law, and agitate for their release. Make no mistake: getting people out is a good thing. But the persuasive means used to attract attention and gain sympathy often reinforces the deadly belief that, aside from some errors, confinement reduces more harm than it generates. This kind of thinking detours anti-prison work into a charitable enterprise—to help the so-called deserving—rather than what it should be: a cornerstone of large-scale fights for social, economic, and environmental justice.

The purpose of abolition is to expose and defeat all the relationships and policies that make the United States the world's top cop, warmonger, and jailer. Practicalities rather than metaphors determine the focus and drive the analysis, because the scope of prison touches every aspect of ordinary life. Thus, it is possible and necessary to identify all those points of contact and work from the ground up to change them. This ambition makes some people impatient, as well it should. Abolition is a movement to end systemic violence, including the interpersonal vulnerabilities and displacements that keep the system going. In other words, the goal is to change how we interact with each other and the planet by putting people before profits, welfare before warfare, and life over death.

By imagining most criminals as autonomous, rational actors deciding to pursue greedy, lustful, or hateful ends, we underestimate the significance of forces in the world around us and dynamics in our brains over which we have little control. Once again, we are paying attention to all the wrong things.

We are always seeking to address problems that are not the root cause. Address why the innately social animal is perpetrating violence against its kin and fix that. This will have a much more widespread positive effect than doing anything to specifically address guns. Mental illness, greed, ignorance, lack of empathy, irrational passion, manipulation, lack of options. How many issues can we solve if we recognized that these were our true problems? Focusing on individual issues like gun control, or gay or transgender rights simply divides your power as a people striving for justice.

“Though anthropologists have long focused on the distinctions between people, it is recognizing the sameness that allows us to most accurately predict violence. Of course, accepting someone's humanness does not mean excusing his behavior. This lesson is probably starkest when you spend time with the world's most violent and dangerous people, the ones you might call monsters, the ones who committed acts you might think you couldn't have imagined. Many of them are locked up at Atascadero State

Hospital in California. I founded and fund a program there called Patient Pets, which allows patients to care for small animals. Many of these men will be locked up for life without visitors, and a mouse or bird might be all they have.

I recall the way the patients reacted to the death of a particular guinea pig who had been one of the first pets in the program. When they noticed the old animal was sick, they wanted to find a way to keep her from dying, though most knew that wasn't possible. The program's coordinator sent me this report: One patient, Oliver, made it his job to be sure the ailing animal had everything she needed. Oliver asked to keep her in his room, 'so she won't be alone at night, just in case she decides to die then.' Eventually, the old guinea pig was unable to move and her breathing was labored. Oliver gathered several patients in my office, and the guinea pig died in his arms, surrounded by an unlikely group of mourners. There was not a dry eye in the ward as the patients said their good-byes and silently left the office. I have often shared with you the effects these events have on the patients, some of whom, moved by the death of one of the animals, cried for the first time about the harms they had committed on others.

As I sat in my office watching the patients, all felons, many guilty of brutal crimes, most lost in a variety of addictions (you choose), mental illness (pick one), and regarded as the bottom of the barrel, I saw a glimmer of compassion, a bit of emotion, and the glimpse of humanity that society believes these men lack (and in most situations, they do). It is true that the majority of these men are exactly where they belong; to unleash them on society would be unthinkable, but we cannot disregard their humanness, because if we do, I believe, we become less human in the process. So, even in a gathering of aberrant murderers there is something of you and me.

Scientists, after all, do not observe a bird that destroys its own eggs and say, 'Well, that never happens; this is just a monster.' Rather, they correctly conclude that if this bird did it, others might, and that there must be some purpose in nature, some cause, some predictability."

Universal among the violent criminals was the fact that they were keeping a secret, a central secret. And that secret was that they felt ashamed—deeply ashamed, chronically ashamed, acutely ashamed. It was shame, every

time. I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed or humiliated or disrespected or ridiculed. As children these men were shot, axed, scalded, beaten, strangled, tortured, drugged, starved, suffocated, set on fire, thrown out of the window, raped, or prostituted by mothers who were their pimps. For others, words alone shamed and rejected, insulted and humiliated, dishonoured and disgraced, tore down their self-esteem, and murdered their soul. For each of them the shaming occurred on a scale so extreme, so bizarre, and so frequent that one cannot fail to see that so many of the men who occupy the extreme end of the continuum of violent behaviour in adulthood occupied an equally extreme end of the continuum of violent child abuse earlier in life.

The rule in crisis management is: Don't make it your goal to control effects, make it your goal to control causes. If you control causes, then you don't have to control effects.

The biggest driver of violence is treating money as a finite resource.

A year in a New Jersey prison costs more than a year at Princeton University. State spending on prisons has outpaced spending on higher education in the last twenty years, increasing at six times the rate.

A single death-penalty case, from arrest to execution, costs a state government between \$1 million and \$3 million. The average cost of housing an inmate in a supermax prison is approximately \$75,000 a year. Justice is a finite resource: we have only so much time, and so much empathy. Should we spend such a large portion of what we have on trials and punishments?

Law & Order

Over the decades, the FBI has best served the cause of national security by bending and breaking the law. A secret police is anathema in a democracy. But the FBI's powers make it America's closest counterpart.

Hoover was not a monster. He was an American Machiavelli. He was astute, he was cunning, and he never stopped watching his enemies. He was a founding father of American intelligence and the architect of the modern surveillance state. Every fingerprint on file, every byte of biographic and biometric data in the computer banks of the government, owes its origins to him.

People usually focus on what burglars take, but it's how they move that's so consistently interesting. Burglars explore. They might not live in a city full of secret passages and trapdoors—but they make it look as if they do. As burglars have chipped and slithered away at their self-chosen jobs throughout the cities of the world, the FBI have become twenty-first-century break-in artists extraordinaire, controlling the scenography of intrusion to a degree that would stun even Hollywood concept artists.

The FBI's present-day program tasked with making sure that state-sanctioned break-ins go off without a hitch is code-named, appropriately enough, Stagehand. Picture G-men dressed as traffic cops, (mis)directing cars away from certain streets and intersections; parking buses in front of mob-operated shops to disguise the lock-picking operation going down on the other side; even carrying their own collections of dust around with them in envelopes and vials, in case they disturb any dust-covered objects (or floors or tables or any other flat surface) in a target's apartment. They sprinkle replacement dust as they walk backward out the door, and as if it were fairy tale, no one will ever know they were there.

Easily one of the more outlandish stories of surreptitious entry by America's Secret Police: While breaking into what is described only as a Soviet-bloc embassy, one of the participating agents promptly died of a heart attack. Right there, he collapsed onto the carpet, his heart giving out. Not only did the other agents on the case have to carry him out, but his body relaxed in its sudden death to the grotesque extent that "his bowels emptied on an oriental rug in the office." Not only did the team have to remove the entire rug from the embassy in the middle of the night, but they had to find a twenty-four-hour dry cleaner to fix the stain. Then, because the carpet would still be partially wet the next morning, they decided to paint the ceiling above it to make it look as if a water pipe had ruptured in one of the rooms above. Then and only then—improvised narratives piling on top of

outright lies, newly cleaned rugs drying below freshly painted ceilings—could the FBI effectively rid the target building of their traces.

We should not seek to stop acts of terror—or any other crime—through surveillance, that is not a free society. In a free society, the way you prevent crimes from occurring is that you remove the conditions, the catalysts for those crimes. You preempt terrorism not by catching them before they can act but by removing the reasons, the justifications for engaging in such acts. To do anything else is to surrender freedom, justice, for the illusion of security.

Afghan detainee Gul Rahman was tortured to death. He was dragged outside of his cell, stripped naked, beaten, and repeatedly immersed in cold water. After being put in an isolation cell overnight, he died of hypothermia. An internal CIA investigation admits that Rahman froze to death, but blames it on Rahman for rejecting his last meal, saying:

“He denied his body a source of fuel to keep him warm.”

“Policing is broken. It has evolved as a paramilitary, bureaucratic, organizational arrangement that distances police officers from the communities they’ve been sworn to protect and serve. When we have shooting after shooting after shooting that most people would define as at least questionable, it’s time to look, not just at a few bad apples, but the barrel. And I’m convinced that it is the barrel that is rotted.”

“The NSA, CIA, and FBI aren’t intended to be criminal organizations. They were built to help the people of the US. The hope of the public at large is that this draws honorable people to those organizations, and that at worst, only a few bad apples will exist.”

I really wish people would stop using this expression.

Have you ever left a bad apple in a bunch of apples? If you had, you’d know exactly what happens: the whole bunch turns bad very quickly. That’s where the expression came from, and that’s why it’s invalid to say “only a few bad apples”—there is no such thing as a few bad apples! When you have a ‘bad apple’—whether it’s an apple or a cop in a police department—unless it’s removed quickly, pretty soon they’re all bad. Which is why the expression is apt for police, except that everyone keeps forgetting about what really happens with bad apples. Does no one keep bunches of apples any more?

Repeat after me: if the bad apples remain after being found, it is not just a few bad apples, everyone is complicit.

You do realize the saying is not: ‘Feel free to leave the bad apples there, so long as only a few of them are moldy and oozing juices all over the others it doesn’t matter because the rest remain good.’ You’re only allowed to call them “a few bad apples” without looking like a moron, if they are treated like bad apples are treated.

One murder might be the fault of a single bad cop. But many murders are almost always the fault of supervisors and politicians, through the systems they construct to make those murders disappear.

We must not pretend that the countless people who are routinely targeted by police are ‘isolated.’ They are the canaries in the coal mine whose deaths, civil and literal, warn us that no one can breathe in this atmosphere.

“You only have a few seconds to decide how to react. You want only to survive this call and ensure your fellow officers also survive.”

Then the solution is easy. Don’t show up! If that’s really the only or main, or even top-three goal of the police officers, then they can stay back at the station. Maybe hide under a desk. Honestly if that’s all they want then, as soon as they get the call about the situation, they should all hop in their cars, turn on the sirens, and drive out of town until the whole thing blows over.

“Officers’ safety comes first, and not infringing on people’s rights comes second.”

—Fran Healy, Philadelphia Police Department Spokesperson

American police are particularly violent. In 2015, an article in the Guardian stunned many with its side-by-side comparisons of police violence in America relative to other countries. Iceland had one fatal police shooting in seventy-one years; Stockton, California had three in six months. Australia had ninety-four fatal police shootings between 1992 and 2011; the US had ninety-seven in March 2015.

And the numbers have not improved since then. When adjusted for population, American police killed over two-hundred times more people than UK police did in 2018. In Germany, where police are far more violent than in the UK, police killed twenty-seven times fewer people than their American counterparts.

In this lethal landscape, a number of programs have emerged in the US to teach young people about how to live in the world police create.

“I’m hoping the law enforcement officer will walk up, see this child doing exactly what the curriculum told them to do and think, ‘I can relax. This child knows exactly what he or she is supposed to be doing.’ And perhaps, it will not escalate.”

“Our number one goal is to teach children what they need to know to be able to live through the police stop and make it home safely. There is no silver bullet. There is no way you’ll be able to determine whether or not the police will actually harm you, but if you can be respectful and humble you stand a better chance showing the officer you’re not a threat.”

Five states—Texas, North Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, and Illinois—now mandate some form of instruction on how to interact with police, either as part of the civics curriculum or drivers education. Other states are considering similar measures. Many school districts also now use informal instructional programs organized and run by police, public defenders, church groups, the ACLU, or other community organizations. These programs are often pitched as a stopgap—a concrete way to equip young people with life-saving tools in a country where racism is intractable and structural reforms are elusive.

Yet there is a deep cynicism at work when police violence is treated as a fact of contemporary life that can only be mitigated through a series of subservient rituals. In fact, rather than fostering a less violent present and future, the programs end up shifting the onus for avoiding deadly interactions from police onto the very civilians they brutalize.

The realities of modern policing are nowhere to be found in the various policing curricula used by states and localities. In an instructional video that high school students in Texas are now mandated to watch, police officers are portrayed as a strikingly diverse group of men and women—a stark contrast to the state’s overwhelmingly white and male police force.

An online course that Virginia now requires all Drivers Ed students to take notes that teens might have a bad attitude “because they think police are singling them out based on their age or other visible characteristics for unfair treatment.” The elephant in the room, racial discrimination in traffic stops, goes unmentioned. Later, the lesson provides four strategies “that will ensure a safe and appropriate interaction with law enforcement officers,” including “staying calm and being respectful.” Again it is silent on an obvious question: “What do I do when the police choose to attack me?”

“What we tell teens very strongly is that you want to be able to go home. If you act crazy, you don’t get that chance. Let the

officer give you a ticket and you can go fight it in court. That's a lot better than being carted off to jail or worse."

"You should tell police that you would like to remain silent. You should not just remain silent—that can be seen as a form of aggression."

The constant threat of violence, though unmentioned, hangs in the air. Police are understood as forces of nature, figures whose behavior can be slightly modified at best. Among the "Don'ts" listed by Strategies for Youth in their presentation "Be SMART with Police" are items like:

- "Don't keep your hands in your pocket—take them out slowly."
- "Don't make quick movements."
- "Don't question or mock an officer's authority."

A presentation used in the Midwest called "Get Home Safely: 10 Rules of Survival" instructs:

"Avoid physical contact with the police. No sudden movements, and keep hands out of pockets."

"Don't, under any circumstance, get into an argument with police."

Do not run, even if you are afraid and do not resist, even if you are innocent. Finally, they counsel:

"Stay calm and remain in control. Watch your words, body language, and emotions."

There's a startling transference of responsibility here from the adult who is ostensibly trained for the encounter—the police officer—to the teenager. The burden of restraint is not on the officer, the one with lethal force—that is the business of the child. It is the very definition of blaming the victim.

Many of these programs imply that their *raison d'être* is as much about officer safety as about the well-being of the kids receiving the lesson. Texas's recently approved curriculum guide asks:

"Why should you place your hands on the steering wheel while the officer is approaching?"

A: For the officer's safety; it signals that you are not armed."

Under the “Driver Dos” it warns that “certain movements, such as reaching for required documents, could be interpreted as a threat to the officer’s safety.”

This inverts the actual danger present in any encounter with police. In 2017, police killed 987 people; police deaths caused by another person stood at forty-six. Police are twenty-one times more likely to kill civilians than the other way around.

Civilians like Sandra Bland. In 2015, Bland was beaten by a Texas police officer during a traffic stop and later died in police custody. What do these programs have to say about her death?

“While the officer went up to 10, if Bland had given him her license and insurance, she might be here with us today.”

Some students know a self-serving lesson when they see one. At a 2017 presentation for teens in Baltimore put on by the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) and sponsored by the Urban League, a sixteen-year-old asked the police officer:

“Since this kind of stems from police misconduct, are police officers being told how to interact with us?”

The officer volleyed that police are trained how to interact with the community in the police academy, adding that if students “show respect,” it will go “a long way in setting the tone for how the encounter will go.” But throughout the morning session the students sought to relate their real-life experiences and stories of Baltimore police corruption or misconduct to challenge the lessons of obedience to police being put forward.

NOBLE runs a similar program in Chicago, where the history of police violence creates a particularly fraught environment for pro-police lecturing. Students here do not need to point to the ACLU reports documenting racism in police stops, or the fact that the vast majority of police stops in the city do not lead to arrest, or that in half the stops the ACLU reviewed police either gave an unlawful justification or no reason at all. They can simply draw on their own experience.

“We were walking and they just pulled us over. They asked what we were doing. They put our name in the system. I don’t need to have my name in the system with jailed people. It just wasn’t fair.”

Presenters for NOBLE acknowledged that their department has “bad apples” and gave students the canned response for what to do when faced with an abusive police officer:

“Cooperate at the time and file a misconduct report later.”

They declined to mention that somewhere between 89 percent and 96 percent of police misconduct reports in Chicago are dismissed.

At Oakland schools, where the Alameda County public defender’s office puts on its own presentation instructing teens how to interact with police, students are told to always remember the magic words: “I have the right to remain silent” and “I want a lawyer.” They also warn students that oversharing with police “can quickly and needlessly escalate a situation.”

This is sound legal advice, but in places like Chicago—where NOBLE advises students, “Most of the time, you should answer the questions. Because if you don’t, you’re making something that could have been two questions worse”—the hard realities of American policing inevitably intrude. This, after all, is the city where police commander John Burge ran a torture program on Chicago’s predominately black South Side from 1972 to 1991. His program did not simply mete out beatings, but also designed torture instruments—most notably a device that sent out electroshocks when applied to the testicles—for the police to extract (often false) confessions. In 2015, the Guardian revealed that Chicago police operated a black site where seven-thousand people were disappeared for off-the-books interrogations.

And herein lies the core problem with these classes. None of them deal with the inherent power imbalance between a teenager and an agent of the state, who holds a monopoly on legitimized violence. Some who run these programs have a genuine desire to curb police violence. But because they assume that radical changes to policing are impossible, we are left with a series of hacks and tips that they hope might, just might, prevent the police from killing more people. Suffused with the illusion, the comfort, of “doing something,” they forget the fundamental problem: as a student in Chicago summed it up at a recent event:

“We don’t know what a police officer is going to do. They always have the upper hand.”

You know what you’ll get if you walk into a Walmart or McDonald’s anywhere in the country and act like a schmuck? Sweetness and light. It may be forced. It may be covering some real hostility. But there’s not a three-ring binder in the world that says:

“If the customer is an asshole, be an asshole right back at them.”

So when a cop or another individual tells you ‘be nice to a cop and they’ll be nice in return,’ they think they’re describing paragons of virtue. What they are actually saying is ‘police are less capable of keeping their egos and tempers in check, less capable of displaying professionalism in public, and more prone to violent, childish petulance than the lowest paid, least trained workers around.’

Somehow it escapes them that their advice for dealing with cops overlaps significantly with advice for dealing with, say, wild animals.

This notion that police officers have to control every situation, to control all the variables—that’s an awesome responsibility, and if you take it on, you’re caving to delusion. You no longer exercise discrimination or discretion. You have to control, and the way you control is with authority, power, and force. With a dog, the easiest way to take control is to simply kill it. I mean, especially if there are no consequences for doing so.

When the law guns down 12-year-old children, or beats down old women on traffic islands, or chokes people to death over cigarettes; when the law shoots people over compact discs, traffic stops, drivers’ licenses, loud conversation, or car trouble; when the law auctions off its monopoly on lethal violence to bemused civilians, when these civilians then kill, and when their victims are mocked in their death throes; when people stand up to defend police as officers of the state, and when these defenders are killed by these very same officers; when much of this is recorded, uploaded, live-streamed, tweeted, and broadcast; and when government seems powerless, or unwilling, to stop any of it, then it ceases, in the eyes of citizens, to be any sort of respectable law at all. It simply becomes force.

In the black community, it’s the force they deploy, and not any higher American ideal, that gives police their power. This is obviously dangerous for those who are policed. Less appreciated is the danger illegitimacy ultimately poses to those who must do the policing. For if the law represents nothing but the greatest force, then it really is indistinguishable from any other street gang. And if the law is nothing but a gang, then it is certain that someone will eventually resort to the kind of justice typically meted out to all other powers in the street.

In one experiment, a group of elementary school students at a Halloween party played games—first wearing their normal clothes, then their costumes, then their normal clothes again. In the “anonymous” second set of games, students were significantly more aggressive, but that aggression disappeared when they removed their masks for the final games. It seemed to be the

costumes and not the children's inherent character that mattered—a finding that some have connected to anthropological research showing that societies in which warriors mask or change their appearance during battle are far more likely to also kill and torture their victims.

An almost unquestioned but utterly pernicious fact is that when they empowered cops to lie to people in order to trick them they knocked a critical block out from under the citizen-government edifice. No government official should ever be allowed to lie to a citizen. This is pure ends justify the means immorality. And the only way I can trust the police is by willfully ignoring the basic fact that everything they say could be a lie. This leads to the kind of mental gymnastics that excuses the worst kinds of behavior in the name of efficiency and safety. The government is not, first and foremost, in existence to be efficient or make me safe. It is there to protect my rights and be a conduit for collective democratic action. That's why governments were instituted among men.

The truth-seeking objective is most likely to be overridden in high-profile cases, where the pressures to solve the crimes are the strongest. In some instances, the adversarial pull results in deliberate police malfeasance, and even entails lying outright in court, a practice known as testilying.

One study found that testilying began soon after cases were dismissed under the 1961 Supreme Court holding in *Mapp v. Ohio*, which created the exclusionary rule. To police, there is a deep-seated disregard for what they consider to be silly little laws made by a silly little Supreme Court in a backroom far removed from the dangerous streets they are trying to bring order to.

The logic of this rule is that it is sometimes necessary to let the guilty go free in order to protect the innocent from overzealous law enforcement.

“Only occasional and more flagrant abuses come to the attention of the courts, and then only those where the search and seizure yields incriminating evidence and the defendant is at least sufficiently compromised to be indicted.”

If police raid an innocent man's or woman's home and uncover no evidence, then there will be no arrest, and no subsequent criminal trial permitting a judge to determine if the raid was unconstitutional. More importantly, there will often be no way to sanction the police officers who authorized this raid, and, thus, nothing deterring them from conducting more illegal raids in the future. *Mapp* held that the only way to “compel respect” for the Constitution's ban on unlawful searches and seizures is “by removing the incentive to disregard it.” Police conduct illegal searches

because they hope to find evidence of criminal activity, so the way to deter such activity is to render the fruit of these searches useless to the prosecution.

In many cases, it may be the impulse to do right—to act altruistically—that causes us to cut corners. In a startling finding, scientists have shown that people may actually cheat more when their cheating benefits others but not themselves. If we are acting solely for others, it is hard to see ourselves in a negative light and much easier to rationalize unethical acts. People who work for nonprofit foundations, schools, or other public benefit organizations may be relatively more inclined to bend the rules because the charge of enhancing social welfare seems to justify the dishonest behavior. If this theory is correct, both prosecutors and police might well be particularly vulnerable to rationalizations of this kind.

Ironically, then, it is caring deeply about other people, not a callous lack of empathy, that can set in motion some acts of dishonesty—or violence.

Police officers are no more or no less honest than the vast majority of witnesses that testify in court, but there's this unofficial presumption that they are more honest and that their testimony should be believed more. Part of it is because they are the police, the good guys, and part of it is that they are trained on how to testify.

In early America, citizens were considered equals with law enforcement officials. Authorities were rarely permitted to enter one's home without permission or in a deceitful manner. And it was not uncommon for police officers to be held personally liable for trespass when they wrongfully invaded a citizen's home. Unlike today, early Americans could resist arrest when a police officer tried to restrain them without proper justification or a warrant—which, of course, the police had to allow citizens to read before arresting them. Some would argue that daring to dispute a warrant with a police official today who is armed with high-tech military weapons and tasers would be nothing short of suicidal.

The reason for this boils down to propaganda and indoctrination from a very young age. Our entire school system spends an inordinate amount of time to reinforce the idea of American exceptionalism, prepping kids to be receptive to propaganda channels and to follow orders from authority figures—especially those in the military and police. Children are exposed to what is essentially police advertising/propaganda from a very young age through field trips, rallies, and school visits where police show off their cool tech and gear while reinforcing the cops and robbers binary way of thought. It's not something that's widely talked about here—and many Americans would essentially consider it blasphemy—but, the propaganda machine in this country is as large or larger than China or North Korea—it's just much more gentle, subtle, and I'd argue much more effective as a result. Americans

are primed from the beginning to believe there are either good guys or bad guys, democrats or republicans, cops or robbers, soldiers or enemies, for many the idea of corrupt cops goes against their whole worldview so they marginalize, rationalize, and excuse it because the alternative is realizing the world is complex and full of color, not simply black and white.

Laws do not tie the hands of the state nearly so much as public opposition can; given the choice between legal rights and popular support, we are much better off with the latter.

We shouldn't harbor any illusions that a return to the 'rule of law' will save us. The thing about the rule of the bourgeoisie is that it is just that—the way the bourgeoisie rule. As an instrument of capital and empire, the law could be read or stretched to allow all sorts of thuggery and mischief. And as the crises of US hegemony grow and magnify, it perpetuates the urge toward more expansive power and brutality. The rule of law was and is nurturing the seeds of its own abuse.

“Without knowing it, they had intuitively grasped the reason for William Blackstone's famous observation that it is better that some who are guilty go free than even one person who is innocent be wrongly imprisoned—so that people have reason to obey the law because it is just.”

Does of a “country of laws” simply condition its citizens to not resist government overreach or violence and instead utilize methods that are ineffective or will come too late? Why is one obligated to “not resist” what one knows to be an indefensible or immoral act?

The people who hid Anne Frank were breaking the law, while the people who killed her were following it.

Can a law be accepted as just in one era and be considered fundamentally unjust at a later time? Are there, in other words, laws that are simply unjust at their core? Or is it possible for a law to be just at the time and later experienced as unjust because of changes in historical circumstances? There is no easy answer to this question, but I would suggest a general rule: laws that privilege one group's survival and flourishing, while depriving another group, can never be deemed to be just. A law that is deemed to be just at the time it is enacted, but then later found to be unjust, often means that it was unjust at the start. At the dawn of the US, laws privileging white men of property, despite being considered just at the time, were fundamentally unjust because they impeded women, unpropertied white men, people of color, and slaves from flourishing. It took time for

enough people to experience and lament the injustices before these laws were changed or eradicated.

The worse kind of unjust laws are those that are hidden from view, ensconced in language of Nature, God, or simply the way it is and always has been. The meta-message in these language games is that the law is just and unquestionable. There is no alternative. We have no choice but to accept and submit to the law and accept our lot in life. At the same time, unjust laws may have been enforced for so long that they have become part of the ethos and common practice of the people; this feels as if it is natural despite obvious injustices. An unjust law operates such that those who suffer the effects of the law do not or are unable to question it or accurately attribute the real source of their suffering. In fact, they may find some other source to blame for their suffering.

An unjust law is no law at all. One is not bound to enforce or obey an unjust law, for to do so would mean participating in an injustice. Naturally, unjust laws are accompanied by institutions charged with enforcing them, making disobedience precarious. If we shift here to those who make the laws, three observations can be made. First, it is usually the case that legislators do not believe that the laws they make are unjust. They typically offer “good” reasons for a law and these reasons may go unquestioned by most of the populace, especially those who may benefit from the law. Second, it is rare that persons who possess the power to make and enforce laws do so at the expense of themselves, which leads to a question regarding the making of any law, *cui bono*, who benefits. Third, an unjust law either enacts or simply codifies existing unjust practices. Laws enacted regarding slavery, for instance, reinforced the already existing injustices associated with trafficking and exploiting human beings.

Unjust laws exist, shall we be content to obey them or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Many generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy is worse than the evil. It makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage its citizens to be on the alert to point out its faults, and do better. Why does it always crucify Christ and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels?

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth—certainly the

machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.

There are two ways to change an unjust law. You can ask lawmakers to amend it, or you can break it together in a way that makes it unenforceable. Which approach is more empowering? The former concentrates power in the hands of a few; the latter disperses it to everyone. The former frames leaders as the only agents of change; the latter enables all of us to determine the shape of our lives and our communities.

We can apply this logic of direct action to all the problems we face.

“I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.”

One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that ‘an unjust law is no law at all.’”

When the thick mesh of interactions between people and the state has been reduced to nothing but authority and obedience, the only remaining force that binds us is state power. The totalitarianism Hayek feared is more likely to emerge when governments, having lost the moral authority that arises from the delivery of public services, are reduced to cajoling, threatening, and ultimately coercing people to obey them.

Since when have we Americans been expected to bow submissively to authority and speak with awe and reverence to those who represent us? The constitutional theory is that we the people are the sovereigns, the state and federal officials only our agents. We who have the final word can speak softly or angrily. We can seek to challenge and annoy, as we need not stay docile and quiet.

Lying to authorities, misleading them, frustrating their effort through verbal actions, is a fundamental right to free speech.

But what if, despite the skewed playing field, someone manages to say something that threatens to destabilize the power structure? If history

is any indication, it swiftly turns out that freedom of expression is not such a sacrosanct right after all. In practice, we are permitted free speech only insofar as expressing our views changes nothing. The premise that speech alone cannot be harmful implies that speech is precisely that which is ineffectual: therefore anything effectual is not included among one's rights.

During World War I, the Espionage Act criminalized any attempt to "cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, [or] refusal of duty" or to obstruct recruiting for the armed forces. President Woodrow Wilson urged the bill's passage because he believed antiwar activity could undermine the US war effort. Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman were arrested under this law for printing anarchist literature that opposed the war. Likewise, the Anarchist Exclusion Act and the subsequent Immigration Act were used to deport or deny entry to any immigrant "who disbelieves in or who is opposed to all organized government." Berkman, Goldman, and hundreds of other anarchists were deported under these acts. There are countless other examples showing that when speech can threaten the foundation of state power, even the most democratic government doesn't hesitate to suppress it.

Thus, when the state presents itself as the defender of free speech, we can be sure that this is because our rulers believe that allowing criticism will strengthen their position more than suppressing it could. Freedom of speech can act as a kind of 'safety valve' to let off steam when people might otherwise be bent on revolution. Therein lies the true purpose of the right to free speech in the US.

Anyone who thinks the forces of law and order are going to defend their right to free speech is either on the same side as those forces or has not been paying attention. There is no free speech in the United States if one's politics oppose the essential racism and economics of this nation.

Civil disobedience is not something we should shy away from. Civil obedience should horrify us—there is an epidemic. The problem we have to solve is not too much civil disobedience, but too much civil obedience.

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. If any think that their influence would be lost there, and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, that they would not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person. Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and exploitation, the State will not hesitate which to choose. When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his

office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose, blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now.

If you're neutral in situations of injustice, you've chosen the side of the oppressor. Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

The state protects one's rights—or should—it does not grant one anything, it cannot, because those rights are not its to give.

Focusing on the right to free speech, we see only two protagonists, the individual and the state. Rather than letting ourselves be drawn into the debate about what the state should allow, we should focus on a third protagonist—the general public. We win or lose our struggle according to how much sovereignty the populace at large is willing to take back from the state, how much intrusion it is willing to put up with. If we must speak of rights at all, rather than argue that we have the right to free speech let us simply assert that the state has no right to suppress us. Better yet, let's develop another language entirely.

One dictionary defines civil liberty as “the state of being subject only to laws established for the good of the community.” This sounds ideal to those who believe that laws enforced by hierarchical power can serve the “good of the community”—but who defines ‘the community’ and what is good for it, if not those in power? In practice, the discourse of civil liberties enables the state to marginalize its foes: if there is a legitimate channel for every kind of expression, then those who refuse to play by the rules are clearly illegitimate. Thus we may read this definition the other way around: under ‘civil liberty,’ all laws are for the good of the community, and any who challenge them must be against it.

The first prong is making exceptions to universal liberty when certain keywords are present. There's no shortage of “terrorist laws” in the world. Basically none of them make terrorism a worse crime—preparing to cause widespread devastation is already a serious crime in most or all countries—instead they remove rights to due process for people suspected of such crimes, and frankly, for people in general.

Many crimes involve hate, assigning special significance to some is dangerous and unjust.

We have always held that you should own the thoughts in your head. This is why people can plead the fifth in the US. The only problem is now the barrier between your head and your computer is pretty thin. For people who spend the better part of their day interacting with the machine and store their whole lives on it, the difference between thoughts in your head

and thoughts on your laptop is not much, especially now that we sort of use it as a way of outsourcing our memory.

There's a reason you separate military and the police. One fights the enemies of the state, the other serves and protects the people. When the military becomes both—even something as simple as encouraging former members of the military to become police qualifies—then the enemies of the state tend to become the people.

Excessively complex laws applied on a large scale end up eroding the effective rule of law, one way or another. Laws and government are hugely important, but having a massive, complex body of law undermines the purpose of that body of law.

The more fundamental and widespread the laws, the more strict they must be. Likewise, as you get more and more local in the jurisdiction and impact of the law, you can afford to be looser with text versus intent because the impact is far less dire, and people physically amongst themselves can operate like that efficiently. A few rulers may work, but hundreds or thousands cannot.

This extends to make the case that, because textualism would require sufficiently prescriptive laws, and sufficiently proscribing the possibilities involved over hundreds of millions of people is impossible, the federal government should limit itself to the simplest, universally fair and applicable laws, and leave smaller groups of people to manage themselves and write the more specific, tailored laws on their own.

No law is going to be perfectly drafted for every contingency, and simply from a pragmatic standpoint, you need to enforce the obvious intent of the law, even if sometimes it isn't spelled out. Seems reasonable to most people. So what's the problem with the statement? If you take it too far, you're letting the courts literally rewrite binding laws based on their whim. If you don't have rules, you have rulers. Whenever you leave things up to interpretation and judicial precedent, you run the risk of people with the designated power of interpretation manipulating things for their own ends. Even if not maliciously, they're still exercising their version of what's right over the properly voted and passed laws the people consented to.

It's not exactly a question of textualism, but the same concept applies in the example of the Federal ban on marijuana. Currently it is on the books, and largely not being enforced. Is this good, or bad? The same people that argue for textualism would say that this is bad (even if they're pro-weed) because if no prohibition on weed is truly what the populace wants, then a new President can get elected and come right back and enforce it, turning a number of distributors and consumers into criminals overnight. Meanwhile, if the general populace does want the ban, they are having their will directly

contradicted because someone is exercising discretion with interpreting the law.

What a textualist would say, more or less, is that laws should be enforced exactly as they are written. If the law is good, then all the better that it is properly upheld. If the law has bad parts to it, it's better to enforce those parts too, make it painful, and drive people to properly amend the law. If you just use discretion to soften the bad parts of a law, then people and representatives will never be motivated to fix it properly. Then you get this weird, unwritten law that society goes by, sitting on top of what you can actually point to on the books. Basically when you don't adhere enough to the text of the law, you start to undermine the rule of law itself. Again, in place of rules, you end up with rulers. Which is quite a step back on the path of political evolution.

“Judges are like umpires. Umpires don't make the rules; they apply them.”

Chief Justice John Roberts certainly wasn't the first person to use the metaphor, but in the fall of 2005, it seemed a particularly compelling notion to many denizens of Capitol Hill and their constituents back home. Good judges call balls and strikes. They don't pitch or bat. They put their backgrounds, experiences, and allegiances to the side and apply the clear law to the clear facts. Bad judges, by contrast, let their personal opinions about policy infect their rulings. They are unelected activists, advancing their own ends by interpreting things where there is no room for interpretation and by legislating from the bench.

This was Roberts's master stroke. During his confirmation hearings, he wasn't just playing defense to survive the confirmation battle; he was also establishing an offensive position to reshape the nature of adjudication in the long-term. There was a war over what judges could and should do. Establishing the umpire as an ideal would constrain judges who thought that their backgrounds ought to play a role in their decisions, as well as presidents who sought to appoint more women, blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Muslims, and gays to the judiciary. There was no need for diversity on a court of referees. And it would limit others who thought that the law was not neutral, clear, and set in stone, but rather frequently ambiguous and subject to changing meaning with changing times. The umpire judge was necessarily a textualist—a strict constructionist—with no right to look outside his little black book of rules to decide a case.

They may say—and often do—that it is not they who make the decisions, lay down the rules, give orders to every other governing official in the

land; they may say they do nothing but interpret the laws, including the Constitution; they may talk at times as though they neither had nor need human minds, as though they might almost as well be a nine-headed calculating machine, intricately adjusted to the words of the Constitution and of lesser laws, and ready to give automatic answers to any attorneys who drop their briefs in the proper slot and push the button. But even non-lawyers have come to find a trifle naïve and unconvincing the old fantasy that our government, especially its judicial branch, is mechanically controlled by laws, not by men.

Our system is rooted in the principle of *stare decisis*—the notion that courts should generally adhere to the law as established by earlier cases—and many criminal statutes also reflect what judges decided many decades ago. What qualifies as rape? What are the elements of a valid self-defense claim? Should victims have to face their accusers in court? The psychological evidence suggests that we should expect very different responses depending on the gender, religion, sexual orientation, and political orientation—among many other things—of the judge or legislator making the call. Yet the answers we have are largely the creation of a very narrow band of Ivy League-educated Christian men of northern and western European ancestry.

The Supreme Court was pumping out precedent for almost 180 years before the first African American had a chance to share his perspective, more than 190 before the first woman left her mark, and 220 before the first Hispanic authored an opinion. So, even if you happen to come before a Latina judge whose background and perspective actually benefit you, she will be operating under an elaborate legal structure built over centuries by individuals whose experiences may be quite foreign to your own.

This very significant branch of government has in effect the final word over some of the most consequential issues—the ones that are closest to our feelings and identities—and it is not only produced by a two-layer undemocratic process but is also staffed by people who graduated almost exclusively from two or three graduate schools. The Supreme Court is like a House of Lords for our meritocrats from Harvard, Yale, and sometimes Stanford law schools.

Certainly, precedent and statutory laws can act as powerful constraints on judges—and may even help eliminate or reduce certain biases—but professors engage in a damaging charade when they pantomime a legal world in which clear instructions are implemented by dutiful technicians. That world does not exist, but it's what all judges have been trained to expect.

The truth is that a text is rarely confined to just one interpretation, and figuring out the proper historical meaning of a legal source is inherently subjective and conjectural. The Fourth Amendment begins:

“The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated. . . .”

So what is a ‘search’? Is using a thermal-imaging device from across the street to see if someone is using high-intensity lamps producing a lot of heat to grow marijuana in his home a search? Is placing a GPS tracking device on a car a search? Textual originalism does not dictate a clear answer; it just provides a cover of legitimacy to an inherently biased task.

When judges do research, they already have an idea of what they are looking for and—surprise!—they tend to find it. The underlying drive is to bolster an argument, not discover the truth. We tend to assume that the more data a person has at her fingertips, the more accurate she’ll be. But, in fact, having more information may make it easier to find the necessary support for an erroneous proposition.

Amicus curiae briefs—“friend-of-the-court” filings, widely believed to aid the justices by helping to fill informational gaps—are a dead end as well. Although they often purport to offer impartial counsel, they are advocacy documents with facts chosen to persuade. And members of the Court draw from them—more than a hundred times between 2008 and 2013—with a startling lack of scrutiny, citing amicus facts backed up by e-mails, research funded by the amicus itself, unpublished studies “on file with the authors,” and, sometimes, nothing at all. With dozens of amici in certain cases and more each year, it seems as if justices are being given a deep reservoir of knowledge, but all that the system really does is supply an easier way to support preexisting conclusions.

Much of the bias that infects a judge’s decision-making is subtle and automatic. And in many cases it is small enough or disguised enough to go unnoticed by others. It is like having a single step that’s ever so slightly higher than the others. Until recently, at the 36th Street subway stop in Brooklyn, there was just such a step. Every day it caused numerous people to trip as they ascended to street level. But no one did anything, even those who were most severely affected. The guy who nearly dropped his baby? The woman who fell to her knees? They caught their balance or brushed themselves off and walked on, thinking that it was just bad luck or that they had been clumsy or distracted. Few, if any, blamed the step, and so there it remained, a fraction of an inch off, until someone decided to film the entrance. Suddenly, with a pool of data, the problem was so clear it was comical. In under an hour, the videographer captured seventeen people stumbling on the step. And within a day of the evidence being posted online, New York’s MTA had begun replacing the staircase.

Take the matter of introspection. There's a wealth of research suggesting that many biases can't be detected through soulsearching. And while it's one thing for us all to walk around believing that it's possible to self-reflect and identify all of our hidden proclivities, it's quite another thing to have the legal establishment confirm that intuition. Unfortunately, that is exactly what many of our rules and procedures do.

The same thing happens when our legal system bolsters the myth that being impartial is simply a choice. Over and over, during the trial process, jurors are instructed to switch off their irrelevant thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. "Do not allow sympathy, prejudice, fear, or public opinion to influence you," Third Circuit jurors are told. "You should also not be influenced by any person's race, color, religion, national ancestry, or gender." Likewise, whenever the judge sustains an objection, "you must disregard the question or the exhibit entirely. Do not think about or guess what the witness might have said in answer to the question; do not think about or guess what the exhibit might have shown." And if the judge orders evidence to be stricken or removed from the record, "you must not consider it or be influenced by it in any way."

Knowing how little control we have over the many automatic processes in our brains, such directives seem almost laughable. But this is no farce: these are the instructions that guide those participating in our legal system every single day. Out of thin air, the Third Circuit has conjured up a magical remote control for the brain, allowing jurors to erase, pause, and mute on command.

Doubt is the friend of fairness. Without it, you cannot convince anyone that they really do have it wrong or that change is urgently needed.

That's equally true for police officers, lawyers, jurors, and witnesses: we need to get all of our key legal actors in the business of second-guessing themselves. Doubt isn't the enemy of justice—blind certainty is. And, in most cases, healthy skepticism isn't going to develop on its own because there are so many forces pulling the other way.

The only way forward is to be fearless about looking back. The legal system should become very sensitive to the question of have we done justice? Have we made a mistake?

Sophistry over time—it goes something like this: first, a court decision (Abood) says that while forcing workers to subsidize political speech is coercive, they can indeed be forced to pay for nonpolitical speech. Then another decision (Janus) says that this distinction doesn't make sense, that the supposedly nonpolitical speech is still pretty political, that Abood's justifications for requiring it fail, and that coercion is coercion. If we get caught up in 'law logic,' we can end up having a fight over whether the

government's interests in drawing the political/nonpolitical distinction are 'compelling.' And we can forget how many premises we've already tacitly accepted, namely that having a buck deducted from your paycheck is the same as being forced to say words on penalty of imprisonment. Law often evolves through a series of syllogisms that occur gradually, and look insane when they're put together, but because they come in separate cases, can seem reasonable one by one. Consider this logic:

1. There should be no difference between the way laws are applied to individuals versus organizations of multiple individuals.
2. The government cannot prevent individuals from exercising their right to free speech.
3. Preventing people from spending money to speak is preventing them from exercising their right to free speech. If the government prohibited someone from buying flyers to speak, it would be the same as if it prohibited them from speaking.
4. Corporations are organizations of multiple individuals.
5. Any restriction on how corporations spend money to influence the political process is a freedom-destroying tyrannical violation of the First Amendment.

From voting rights to prosecutorial accountability to class actions, there are numerous examples of how premises that sound plausible in isolation can lead to disastrous and absurd results when taken as a whole.

A judge will let you off of your shoplifting charge if the police stepped into your home and seized evidence without a warrant, but a court will rarely intervene in the obviously unjust situation of a man being sent to prison for the rest of his life for stealing a few DVDs. And a court will almost never overturn a sentence on the grounds that it is inherently wrong for someone to face the threat of gang rape while under the sole control of the state.

How did we get to this point? What are judges actually for? Historically, judges were basically people who were good at dispute resolution at a time when state enforcement wasn't really a thing. They needed to be able to come up with judgments that parties would actually follow, instead of just, say, murdering each other. This judicial role makes some kind of abstract sense. In less regulated times, judges were probably pretty useful practical agents of community order, and even sometimes of justice. In the Bible, for example, there's a lot of language about the ideal judge being someone

who defends the interests of the weak and downtrodden against the tyranny of the powerful. The number of verses invoking fire and brimstone against “unjust judges” who “even rob the widows and fatherless children,” though, tells us that this ideal probably wasn’t always borne out in real life.

But then we come roaring into the present. Here in the US, we no longer live in a time where it’s typical for vigilantism and blood-feuds to break out on a large scale if the judge doesn’t make a decision the parties will willingly accept. Although in the case of, say, *Bush v. Gore*, that would have perhaps been a preferable outcome. So what function do judges perform now? Rather than just making pronouncements on what would be equitable in a particular dispute, judges are—theoretically—supposed to faithfully apply codified law. We’ve made a policy shift over the years that strongly favors ‘predictability,’ in place of ‘justice,’ as the chief virtue of the legal system.

It’s a well-accepted principle of the judicial craft that the important thing is to have a rule, rather than to necessarily have the right rule. Having the right rule is merely a subsidiary concern, if it’s a concern at all. We’d much rather have all similar cases or issues get decided the same way, instead of different ways, even if this leads to worse practical, real-world results overall for more individual people. Under this system, say, it’s much better if all US agents who kill people from inside US territory are deemed categorically ineligible to be sued, because this is predictable, and predictability is fair. To have a situation where some border guards are sueable and others aren’t, by contrast, is unfair. People would never know what to expect in a world like that! Except that there might, you know, occasionally be some consequences for people who slaughter other humans from a distance, but again, what do we know, we’re not judges after all.

The problem is that more than a few judges think that when they are anointed and ascend to that seat on high, some unidentified power causes their humanness to disappear and replaces it with a brand of lofty judicial insight that one can experience only if one’s posterior is affixed to the judge’s chair. Once in an empty courtroom I slipped up to the judge’s chair and sat down, firmly, and waited and waited. I never felt a bit smarter. Perhaps it was because I hadn’t donned the black robe.

Now, it’s possible you might think that I’m being unfair to judges here by expecting them to care about the same things—children being shot to death, poor people having their lives irreparably ruined by filing errors—that laypeople care about. The law is complicated, after all, and judges are legal experts. Isn’t it natural that judges would care about abstruse legal arguments that the rest of us can’t see the relevance of, because they understand the larger ramifications of each individual case for our great

legal system? Without this far-seeing vision, wouldn't our entire civilization go down in flames?

To this, we can only say that this is a terrible way to run a society, and this is not what actually motivates judges in 99 percent of cases. Judges are just ordinary people like you and me. They do not behave in the strange way they do because they are wise beyond the ken of mere mortals. They behave this way because our legal system has created a climate calculated to warp judges' minds. I once spoke to an immigration judge presiding over a court that was attached to a detention center. Her docket consisted largely of asylum-seekers who had been detained after crossing the border, and would appear before her—in jumpsuits and shackles—to try to argue their own cases without lawyers. The denial rate at this detention center was high. Most of these asylum-seekers would be sent back to countries where they claimed to fear for their lives, and the judge would never know their fates. I asked the judge:

“What's the hardest part of your job?”

She seemed to think for a moment.

“Our computer system crashes a lot. It's really annoying.”

The fact is that no judge or justice ever approaches a case with a genuinely open mind. They read briefs and hear arguments with brains shaped by Sunday school, military service, summers on Cape Cod, and years as a prosecutor or a parent. Researchers recently found that judges who had a daughter rather than a son were 16 percent more likely to decide gender-related civil rights cases in favor of women's rights. The effect appears to be driven primarily by male judges appointed by Republicans. One theory is that having a daughter helps these judges better understand the challenges that women face on issues like equal pay and reproductive health, giving them a perspective that they wouldn't otherwise have. All of this makes the lack of diversity on our present courts a major concern.

If the law consists of the decisions of the judges and if those decisions are based on the judge's hunches, then the way in which the judge gets his hunches is the key to the judicial process. Whatever produces the judge's hunches makes the law.

Thirty-two states hold elections for judges of state supreme courts, appellate courts, and trial courts. Nationwide, 87 percent of all state court judges face elections. This is in sharp contrast to other nations, where judges are typically appointed with the advice and consent of legislative bodies. No other nation in the world does this, because they realize you're not going to get fair and impartial judges that way.

“I think about the credos that I admire: Kant’s call to action for the betterment of man; Aquinas’s belief that every man’s job is to help every other man achieve his ends. When I grew up everything in my parents’ house had to be black and white. No interracial marriage, no booze, no sex, no voting for Democrats. I went to law school, and I thought: How does this narrow-minded horseshit aid in the callings of Kant and Aquinas? It can’t, because it’s too marginalizing.

But now look where I am, I’ve come full circle, because I see the people that I prosecute as case files, black ink on a white page. There’s so fucking many meth-heads, I can’t differentiate. I don’t get a chance to see them in their homes. I don’t really have time to see them even as people, because that’s not how I’m trained. So how have I evolved?

I haven’t. I devolved.”

State attorneys general, in charge of enforcing the rules by bringing lawsuits, are also subject to election and re-election, and they too are receiving increasing amounts of corporate money for their campaigns. An investigation by the New York Times in late 2014 found that major law firms were funneling corporate campaign contributions to attorneys general in order to gain their cooperation in dropping investigations of their corporate clients, negotiating settlements favorable to their clients, and pressuring federal regulators not to sue.

The attorney general of Utah, for example, dismissed a case pending against Bank of America, over the objections of his staff, after secretly meeting with a Bank of America lobbyist who also happened to be a former attorney general. Pfizer, the pharmaceutical giant, donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to state attorneys general between 2009 and 2014, to encourage favorable settlements of a case brought against the company by at least twenty states for allegedly marketing its drugs for unapproved uses. AT&T was a major contributor to state attorneys general who opted to go easy on the corporation after a multi-state investigation into the firm’s billing practices.

Trials are meant to be adversarial affairs, where one side argues for a person’s guilt regarding specific charges and the other side argues for a person’s lack of guilt (as opposed to ‘innocence’) regarding those specific charges. The entire judicial system is predicated on the belief that through such an adversarial proceeding, the truth will emerge. In reality, this is not always the case. The prosecution gets the first opening argument and the last rebuttal, so the prosecution has an advantage in any trial. In a

long trial, the prosecution can build their case for days or weeks before the defense has much to say about it. Although jurors are admonished not to form an opinion until both sides have been heard, it's human nature to do so. The defense can challenge the prosecution and cross-examine the witnesses to attempt to keep the defense's case alive, but if the defense attorneys are too aggressive in their questioning, this can turn off the jury before the defense has even been able to call its first witness.

Cross-examination, when an attorney has the chance to ask questions of a hostile witness, has been described as the "greatest legal engine ever invented for the discovery of the truth." An attorney conducting a cross-examination has four basic options: He can challenge the credibility of the witness; he can show that the witness made an honest mistake; he can spin damaging testimony in his client's favor; or he can ignore the testimony entirely. One of the strengths of cross-examination is that it is inherently adversarial,

The US legal system is organized as an adversarial contest: in civil cases, between two citizens; in criminal cases, between a citizen and the state. Physical violence and intimidation are not allowed in court, whereas aggressive argument, selective presentation of the facts, and psychological attack are permitted, with the presumption that this ritualized, hostile encounter offers the best method of arriving at the truth. Constitutional limits on this kind of conflict are designed to protect criminal defendants from the superior power of the state, but not to protect individual citizens from one another. All citizens are presumed to enter the legal arena on an equal footing, regardless of the real advantages that one of the parties may enjoy. The Constitution, therefore, offers strong guarantees for the rights of the accused, but no corresponding protection for the rights of crime victims. As a result, victims who choose to seek justice may face serious obstacles and risks to their health, safety, and mental health.

The oil industry pioneered, if not established, America's fondness for litigation.

For decades, the rules of civil litigation required that evidence collected during discovery be logged with the court, open to public scrutiny. Secrecy was the exception. In the 1980s and 1990s, rule changes moved discovery out of the courthouse and thus out of public view. Instead, the material was to be swapped privately between the lawyers involved. Companies eager to keep their records confidential had pushed for the change, but it also served the interests of judges and court clerks inundated with increasingly complex product-liability cases and huge caches of documents accompanying them.

The factors that play a role in our encoding of a memory are much more influential than we'd imagine. Simply by altering the conditions in which

a witness viewed a person, researchers were able to boost identification accuracy to 86 percent or drop it to 14 percent.

Stress affects memory as well, and violence is extremely stressful. Muskets have been found on Civil War battlefields with dozens of cartridges in their barrels, rammed home by soldiers who were too terrified to remember to fire each time they reloaded. Witnesses to violent crimes can be similarly unaware of their actions.

In particular conditions, such as the individual being anxious and the question coming from someone with authority—say, the lawyer in a court room—specific wording can create a memory. For example, if the lawyer asks:

“Was the defendant in the vicinity of the cheese store at the time of the great cheddar robbery?”

then the witness can answer yes or no, according to what he or she remembers. But if the lawyer asks:

“Where in the cheese store was the defendant at the time of the great cheddar robbery?”

this question asserts that the defendant was definitely there. The witness may not remember seeing the defendant, but the question, stated as a fact from a higher-status person, causes the brain to doubt its own records, and actually adjust them to conform to the new “facts” presented by this “reliable” source. The witness can end up saying something like, ‘I think he was standing next to the gorgonzola,’ and mean it, even though he or she witnessed no such thing at the time. That something so fundamental to our society should have such a glaring vulnerability is disconcerting.

Counterfeit memories are difficult to distinguish from memories of real events. This is a well-known bane of eyewitness identification and forensic interviewing, especially with suggestible children. Psychologists at the University of Arizona induced false memories in subjects to determine whether they would appear the same as true ones under a P300 paradigm. Using a well-established psychological test, they read to subjects a series of related words—‘prick,’ ‘thimble,’ ‘haystack,’ ‘thorn,’ ‘hurt,’ ‘injection,’ and ‘syringe.’ The word ‘needle’—a natural fit with the others—was not included. Yet when the investigators asked subjects whether it had been one of the words they had heard moments earlier, many participants answered yes. In P300 testing, those who reported feeling confident that “needle” had been among the original words showed the same pattern of brain electrical activity as they did when they were recalling the words they had heard.

Jurors believe confident witnesses, and investigators and prosecutors know this. The US Supreme Court stated that the “level of certainty of the witness” was an important factor in a 1972 case where a victim expressed “no doubt” in court that she recognized her own rapist. By contrast, most psychologists who testify as experts on eyewitness memory say that “an eyewitness’s confidence is not a good predictor of his or her identification accuracy.” In fact, mistaken eyewitness identifications, and their confident presentation to the jury, are the main cause of over 75 percent of wrongful convictions that are later overturned by DNA evidence.

Thinking in words about a person’s appearance can actually impair your ability to recognize that person later. Although this possibility was known in the 1950s, interest in it was revived by a series of experiments conducted in 1990, when it was given the new name “verbal overshadowing.” In one experiment, subjects watched a thirty-second video of a bank robbery that included a view of the robber’s face. One group of subjects then spent five minutes writing a description of the face “in as much detail as possible.” A control group spent five minutes doing something unrelated. Afterward, the subjects tried to pick the robber out of a set of photographs of eight similar-looking individuals, and then indicated how confident they were in their choices. The protocol used in this procedure mimics what happens in criminal cases. The police routinely ask witnesses to give detailed descriptions of suspects, and those same witnesses later try to identify a suspect in a photographic lineup. In the experiment, those subjects who did an unrelated task successfully identified the suspect 64 percent of the time. But what about those who wrote detailed notes about the suspect? They picked the right suspect only 38 percent of the time! The verbal information in the written notes overshadowed the nonverbal information captured by the initial visual perception of the face, and the verbal information turned out to be less accurate.

Ironically, our intuition tells us that analyzing a face will help us remember it better, but in this case at least, it is better for analysis to step back and let more automatic, pattern recognition processes take over. This experiment did not involve an emotional evaluation, only an objective test of memory, but reflective deliberation did not help.

A warning against the blind confidence in the observations of the average man: In a thousand courts in a thousand places all over the world, witnesses every day affirm by oath mixtures of truth and untruth, combinations of memory and of illusion, of knowledge and of suggestion, of experience and wrong conclusions.

We mistakenly think that memories are like carvings in stone; once done, they do not change. Nothing could be further from the truth. Memory

is not only selective; it is malleable. In the 1990s, there was much public concern and excitement about recovered memories. Authoritative figures published books and appeared in the media claiming that it was possible to completely repress memories of painful and traumatic events. Working with therapists, a number of patients discovered memories of such ghastly things as sexual abuse by their parents, cannibalism, satanic cults, and murder. Many families were destroyed and lives, both of the accusers and of the accused, ruined. Now that the panic has died down, we are ruefully admitting that there is no evidence at all that human beings repress painful memories. If anything, the memories remain particularly vivid.

Researchers have recently conducted a research project into the repressed-memory syndrome. Their interest was piqued by its sudden appearance in the late twentieth century. If the syndrome were hardwired into the human brain, then surely there would be evidence of its occurrence down through history. They found examples in nineteenth-century literature, but, although they offered rewards, they turned up no examples either in fiction or in nonfiction before 1800. They concluded that “the phenomenon is not a natural neurological function, but rather a ‘culture-bound’ syndrome rooted in the nineteenth century.” The preoccupation of the Romantics with the supernatural and the imagination, as well as later work, most notably that of Sigmund Freud, into the subconscious, predisposed us to believe that the mind can play extraordinary tricks on us.

We also polish our memories in the recounting. Primo Levi, who did so much to keep the memory of the Nazi concentration camps alive, warned:

“A memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in stereotype, crystallized, perfected, adorned, installing itself in the place of the raw memory and growing at its expense.”

As we learn more about the past, that knowledge can become part of our memory, too. The director of the Yad Vashem memorial to the Holocaust in Israel once said sadly that most of the oral histories that had been collected were unreliable. Holocaust survivors thought, for example, that they remembered witnessing well-known atrocities when in fact they were nowhere near the place where the events happened.

Our memories are not like digital photo albums that we can open and view perfectly preserved. Each time we retrieve a memory it is re-created anew. It’s more like going into a kitchen pantry and making your favorite meal: the essential ingredients are basically the same, but it tastes a little different each time you make it. When we remember things, we’re picking

out words and images, ideas and feelings, that seem to go together to re-create an experience in our brain. Each retrieval is re-created based on the last one, making memory an active and ongoing process.

We experience something and encode the facts and associated sensations, which remain stored until they are retrieved, reconsolidated as a memory, and then encoded again. Next time you tell the story, you're recalling the memory from the last version you told, not the original "hard copy." Remembering is an active process, which means we can introduce manipulations and interventions. It may be a little unsettling to think that your early memories have probably changed many times over the years.

Suggestion can create false autobiographical memories. A number of studies have shown how easy it is to plant false memories—everything from receiving a painful enema to meeting Bugs Bunny at Disneyland. One group of researchers found that they could get 50 percent of participants to remember all or part of a childhood hot-air balloon trip that never happened after showing the person a doctored photo of the event along with other real photos from the person's youth.

The less we know, the easier it is for us to produce a coherent story, and it is the consistency of the narrative that predicts how much confidence we will have in our assessment. The unfortunate result is that we may become overconfident precisely when we have limited or weak evidence. Consider the following two sentences:

1. When an elderly woman gets on the train, Carl immediately gives up his seat.
2. When an elderly woman gets on the train, Alex remains in his seat, reading his book.

Which man is likely to come to the aid of a passenger having a heart attack?

Easy, right? It is obviously Carl. But now look back at the sentences. They tell us almost nothing that would help us accurately forecast each man's future actions. Carl might not have seen the woman at all; he might have given up his seat after suddenly realizing it was his stop, or to move away from a crying child. And Alex might have remained seated because there were many open seats on the train, or because someone else offered the woman a seat and she refused, or because his back was turned. We took a few bits of information and then quickly filled in what was missing, so that we had a coherent story that allowed us to divine the men's characters and predict how they would behave. We do this hundreds of times a day.

Ignorance is not always bad however. The National Association of Medical Examiners encourages doctors to maintain their independence—for example, by avoiding interactions with investigating law enforcement officials before conducting exams. Such interaction can bias a doctor's conclusions. In fact, studies have shown that the more details crime lab analysts know about a case before conducting their analysis, the more likely they are to come up with false positives.

In one study, researchers asked two sets of experienced forensic clinicians to determine whether a particular mental patient with a violent history, Mr. Jones, ought to be released. Both groups were provided with a “state-of-the-art assessment” by a respected psychologist. The only difference was whether the psychologist chose to express the risk Mr. Jones posed to the public as a probability (“Patients similar to Mr. Jones are estimated to have a 20 percent probability of committing an act of violence”) or as a relative frequency (“Of every 100 patients similar to Mr. Jones, 20 are estimated to commit an act of violence”).

One might assume—quite logically—that the choice is of no consequence: the information is exactly the same and easy to understand in both cases. Yet it had a huge effect on the experts. Those who considered the risk in terms of 20 dangerous perpetrators out of every 100 were twice as likely to keep Mr. Jones confined in the mental hospital as those who pondered the 20 percent chance that he would engage in violence upon release. When the researchers probed more deeply, they found that people had a pretty benign picture of Mr. Jones with his future dangerousness conveyed as a probability, but if it was expressed as a frequency, they immediately thought of “some guy going crazy and killing someone”—and that potent image made them see Mr. Jones as more of a risk.

The actual likelihood of the threat is often not what matters most. If we have strongly negative feelings about something—like an assault by a pedophile—we will treat it as a significant risk regardless of how likely it is to occur. A one-in-five-million chance and a one-in-five-thousand chance look exactly the same to us.

In one recent study, researchers gave experts a DNA sample, telling them that it was part of a gang-rape case in which one of the perpetrators had accepted a plea deal and was testifying against the others. They needed to confirm that one of the suspects who denied any involvement had, in fact, taken part in the rape. As expected, the experts found that his DNA matched the sample, corroborating the witness's account and the prosecution's case. However, the researchers then took the same biological evidence and gave it to seventeen other DNA analysts without providing any backstory. What happened? Only one of the seventeen experts agreed

with the original group that the DNA was a match. Sequences of amino acids do not rearrange themselves to fit the prosecutor's frame, but that doesn't mean there is no room for bias. Someone has to interpret the results. And the first set of analysts couldn't help but be swayed by the information they had already been given.

Our justice system has an "expert paradox." We ought to defer to experts when they are more qualified to assess matters than we are, but we often get things backwards: we rely on our own skills of analysis where they are deeply flawed, and we embrace expert evidence when it is misleading and unhelpful.

"My sense is that judges, especially elected judges, find it very difficult to rule on these issues when it's going to seriously affect the prosecution in a high-profile case. They don't want to inject themselves into the case. It's just much easier to let two experts butt heads, and leave it to the jury to decide which one they believe."

Federal and state judiciaries should commit to the rigorous training of judges in assessing expert testimony. If a forklift operator has to reach a basic level of competency with the standard equipment for his job, why shouldn't a judge? A lack of proficiency can bring devastating consequences in both cases.

"I am afraid the education of many police and judges with regard to pathologists comes from paper-bound detective books and procedural TV shows wherein the pathologists make amazing and at times absurd deductions from minimal evidence and lacking any historical background of the case being studied. These examples, even though complimentary, are gross exaggerations of the actual practice of pathology."

Roughly one out of every three pretrial defendants believes incorrectly that if he remains silent after being arrested, his silence can be used against him at trial.

Police departments, for instance, teach investigators how to deliver a Miranda warning so that it is most likely to be misunderstood and ignored. Officers are encouraged to bring up the warning as a casual aside—and not at the moment of arrest, when a person is most likely to be considering his rights. When the Miranda doctrine was first introduced, cops were worried that it would severely limit their ability to gain confessions, but in fact it

has turned out to have a minimal effect on police work, precisely because it is so easy to work around.

The generally accepted gold standard, the Reid Technique of Interviewing and Interrogation, which has been used to train more than half of the police officers in the United States, not only fails to guard against false confessions but actually appears to encourage them. Using the Reid approach, when someone is brought in for questioning, detectives determine whether he is telling the truth through a nonconfrontational interview, and then, if he appears to be lying and his guilt is “reasonably certain,” they proceed to an aggressive interrogation designed to extract a confession. Unfortunately, police officers are no better than the rest of us at detecting deceit. And far from correcting officers’ erroneous intuitions about lying, the Reid technique relies heavily on unreliable gut instincts and dubious cues to deception.

When we view events as if standing in the shoes of the person experiencing them, we are much more likely to attribute the actor’s behavior to forces and constraints in the surrounding environment than when we adopt the perspective of an outside observer, in which case we tend to make attributions that focus on the individual’s disposition and character.

Imagine that you are impaneled on a jury and have to decide whether the defendant’s confession was voluntary or coerced by the police. As luck would have it, the entire interrogation was recorded, and you are provided with a videotape from one of three cameras in the room: a camera directed at the interrogator, a camera directed at the defendant, or a camera positioned to the side, showing both parties. It would seem reasonable to assume that regardless of the footage you were shown, you would come to the same conclusion, since all three cameras capture the exact same scene. When scientists conducted a number of studies using such a setup, however, they found that perspective made a big difference. By simply shifting the point of view from the person being questioned to the interrogator, researchers were able to significantly reduce the number of people who thought the resulting confession was coerced. Watching the interrogator through the eyes of the suspect, it was a lot easier to see—and feel—the menace and pressure. Those who watched the videotape that showed both sides made assessments that fell in between the two conditions.

Ironically, it may be harder to eliminate false confessions when there is an ineffective set of procedural rules aimed at preventing them than it would be if there were no protections at all. With elaborate structures in place, it appears that we’ve addressed the issue, and anything that is not barred at the gates is given little or no scrutiny—it’s assumed to be legitimate. The horrible truth is that in prohibiting the torture of suspects and requiring that arrestees be Mirandized, courts made lying to suspects

seem more justified—a necessary tool for the police whose work of keeping us safe became more difficult.

When the general population assumes that a popular police practice is prohibited because it's unfair, it should raise a red flag.

It stands as a warning to all of us. We have been lulled into thinking that discarding the rack and the back-room brute was enough. But all we have done is change the form of our coercion. The wounds and scars are now hidden, which leaves us in a far more precarious position. How do we spot a coerced confession when there are no bruises or welts? How do we know to sound the alarm bell when no one wears the torturer's cowl or beats out a confession, innocence be damned?

But we must also ask ourselves the broader question of whether seeking an admission of guilt is a proper approach for a just legal system. In the United States today, the vast majority of people charged with a crime are presented with a choice: say you did it and receive leniency, or maintain your innocence and suffer the consequences if a jury doesn't agree. Ninety to ninety-five percent admit guilt, which means no one ever has to come forward with any proof that the defendant is actually responsible, no jurors ever consider the evidence, and the trial process is completely short-circuited.

Let that sink in: nine out of ten prisoners are being punished based solely on their own admission of guilt. We've put away the breaking wheel, yes, but how far have we really come?

There's a real disconnect in this country between what people perceive is the state of indigent defense and what it is. I attribute that to shows like *Law & Order*, where the defendant says, 'I want a lawyer,' and all of a sudden Legal Aid appears in the cell. That's what people think.

In 2004, the American Bar Association released a report on the status of indigent defense, concluding that:

“All too often, defendants plead guilty, even if they are innocent, without really understanding their legal rights or what is occurring. Sometimes the proceedings reflect little or no recognition that the accused is mentally ill or does not adequately understand English. The fundamental right to a lawyer that Americans assume applies to everyone accused of criminal conduct effectively does not exist in practice for countless people across the United States.”

Tens of thousands of poor people go to jail every year without ever talking to a lawyer, and those who do meet with a lawyer for a drug offense often spend only a few minutes discussing their case and options before

making a decision that will profoundly affect the rest of their lives. As one public defender explained:

“They are herded like cattle into the courtroom lockup, up at 3 or 4 in the morning. Then they have to make decisions that affect the rest of their lives. You can imagine how stressful it is.”

Children routinely “waive” their right to counsel in juvenile proceedings. In some states, such as Ohio, as many as 90 percent of children charged with criminal wrongdoing are not represented by a lawyer.

“The kids come in with their parents, who want to get this dealt with as quickly as possible, and they say, ‘You did it, admit it.’ If people were informed about what could be done, they might actually ask for help.”

Prosecutorial overcharging is of two sorts: vertical overcharging, in which the prosecutor charges offenses for which he or she has insufficient proof to convict, and horizontal overcharging, in which the prosecutor charges a series of overlapping offenses arising from the same criminal act. In the latter type, prosecutors charge every offense for which a defendant might theoretically satisfy the offense definition, no matter how overlapping the offenses may be. Thus, a prosecutor might take a standard rape case—using force to compel intercourse—and add on assault, kidnapping, gross sexual imposition, et cetera. This is made possible because most American criminal codes, in which the state’s criminal laws are collected, grow over time to have a vast collection of overlapping offenses. Legislatures have been constantly adding new offenses, sometimes making the code seven or eight times longer than its original form based on the Model Penal Code, but without substantially expanding the code’s coverage.

So, for example, most states now have an offense of “carjacking,” after a series of newspaper headlines about such conduct. Does anyone doubt that such conduct was already punished severely as armed robbery (as well as auto theft, kidnapping, assault, et cetera)? Adding one more offense to charge was an act of potential showmanship, not criminal code improvement. The forests of overlapping offenses exist in large part because prosecutors have politically promoted them. Prosecutors have put political muscle into supporting a constant stream of new offenses that typically are just added on top of the old ones.

To protect this ability to bring multiple charges, they have repeatedly opposed criminal code reforms that would streamline codes and eliminate unnecessary overlaps. For example, in a new criminal law codification

undertaken in Illinois in 2003, which had as one of its primary aims the consolidation of overlapping offenses, the recodification was ultimately blocked by the political opposition of prosecutors. The prosecutors instead sponsored a new reform commission that kept the redundancies in the current code.

Strategic overcharging might seem to the uninitiated to be too unethical to be done openly. But the increasing game-like features of the system have dulled participants' sensibilities. Indeed, one need only look at similar manipulative conduct by federal judges before the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 stopped the practice. Federal law at the time required that all offenders be eligible for early release by the United States Parole Commission no later than after serving one-third of their sentence. Judges who were uncomfortable with this early release could, and did, short-circuit the system by simply determining the sentence they really wanted, then tripling it. Thus, offenders would become eligible for release only after serving the full term the judges thought appropriate. Prosecutors may be making similar sorts of strategic manipulations when they overcharge. It was in part this judicial manipulative practice that contributed to the enactment of the "truth in sentencing" provisions of the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. People had become increasingly skeptical of the sentences that were publicly imposed because they always ended in early release. The new act requires that an offender serve at least 85 percent of the sentence imposed—an attempt to earn back some credibility for the system.

Innocent parties can be compelled to plead guilty if they perceive the risk of going to trial as too high. When that happens, not only do we send an innocent person to prison, but we also close the case, which means that the police stop looking for the guilty party. The plea bargain, then, is best likened not to a shortcut but to a short circuit of our constitutional guarantees of due process. This presents a profound irony: while the adversarial system was introduced to protect defendants, the overwhelming resource requirements of that system have helped to drive a shift to plea bargaining, which has far fewer safeguards than a non-adversarial trial.

The practice of encouraging defendants to plead guilty to crimes, rather than affording them the benefit of a full trial, has always carried its risks and downsides. Never before in our history, though, have such an extraordinary number of people felt compelled to plead guilty, even if they are innocent, simply because the punishment for the minor, nonviolent offense with which they have been charged is so unbelievably severe. When prosecutors offer three years in prison when the penalties defendants could receive if they took their case to trial would be five, ten, or twenty years—or life imprisonment—only extremely courageous—or foolish—defendants turn the offer down.

The pressure to plead guilty to crimes has increased exponentially since

the advent of the War on Drugs. In 1986, Congress passed The Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which established extremely long mandatory minimum prison terms for low-level drug dealing and possession of crack cocaine. The typical mandatory sentence for a first-time drug offense in federal court is five or ten years. By contrast, in other developed countries around the world, a first-time drug offense would merit no more than six months in jail, if jail time is imposed at all. State legislatures were eager to jump on the “get tough” bandwagon, passing harsh drug laws, as well as “three strikes” laws mandating a life sentence for those convicted of any third offense. These mandatory minimum statutory schemes have transferred an enormous amount of power from judges to prosecutors. Now, simply by charging someone with an offense carrying a mandatory sentence of ten to fifteen years or life, prosecutors are able to force people to plead guilty rather than risk a decade or more in prison. Prosecutors admit that they routinely charge people with crimes for which they technically have probable cause but which they seriously doubt they could ever win in court. They “load up” defendants with charges that carry extremely harsh sentences in order to force them to plead guilty to lesser offenses and—here’s the kicker—to obtain testimony for a related case. Harsh sentencing laws encourage people to snitch.

While such conduct is deplorable, it is not difficult to understand. Who among us would not be tempted to lie if it was the only way to avoid a forty-year sentence for a minor drug crime? The pressure to plea-bargain and thereby ‘convict yourself’ in exchange for some kind of leniency is not an accidental by-product of the mandatory-sentencing regime. The US Sentencing Commission itself has noted:

“The value of a mandatory minimum sentence lies not in its imposition, but in its value as a bargaining chip to be given away in return for the resource-saving plea from the defendant to a more leniently sanctioned charge.”

Harsh mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenders have been consistently upheld by the US Supreme Court. In 1982, the Supreme Court upheld forty years of imprisonment for possession and an attempt to sell nine ounces of marijuana. Several years later, in *Harmelin v. Michigan*, the Court upheld a sentence of life imprisonment for a defendant with no prior convictions who attempted to sell 672 grams (approximately 23 ounces) of crack cocaine. The Court found the sentences imposed in those cases “reasonably proportionate” to the offenses committed—and not “cruel and unusual” in violation of the Eighth Amendment. This ruling was remarkable

given that, prior to the Drug Reform Act of 1986, the longest sentence Congress had ever imposed for possession of any drug in any amount was one year. A life sentence for a first-time drug offense is unheard of in the rest of the developed world. Even for high-end drug crimes, most countries impose sentences that are measured in months, rather than years. For example, a conviction for selling a kilogram of heroin yields a mandatory ten-year sentence in US federal court, compared with six months in prison in England. Remarkably, in the United States, a life sentence is deemed perfectly appropriate for a first-time drug offender.

The most famous Supreme Court decision upholding mandatory minimum sentences is *Lockyer v. Andrade*. In that case, the Court rejected constitutional challenges to sentences of twenty-five years without parole for a man who stole three golf clubs from a pro shop, and fifty years without parole for another man for stealing children's videotapes from a Kmart store. These sentences were imposed pursuant to California's controversial three strikes law, which mandates a sentence of twenty-five years to life for recidivists convicted of a third felony, no matter how minor. Writing for the Court's majority, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor acknowledged that the sentences were severe but concluded that they are not grossly disproportionate to the offense, and therefore do not violate the Eighth Amendment's ban on "cruel and unusual" punishments. In dissent, Justice David H. Souter retorted:

"If Andrade's sentence [for stealing videotapes] is not grossly disproportionate, the principle has no meaning."

Similarly, counsel for one of the defendants noted that the Court's reasoning makes it extremely difficult if not impossible to challenge any recidivist sentencing law:

"If these sentences aren't cruel and unusual punishment, what would be?"

First and second strikes are counted by individual charges, rather than individual cases, so a single case can result in first, second, and even third strikes. For example, a person arrested for possession of a substantial amount of marijuana, as well as a tiny amount of cocaine, could be charged with at least two separate felonies: possession with intent to sell marijuana, as well as possession of cocaine. Pleading guilty to each of these crimes would result in "two strikes." Fifteen years later, if the individual is arrested for passing a bad check, he or she could be facing a third strike and a life sentence. To make matters worse, sentences for each charge can run consecutively, so a

defendant can easily face a sentence of fifty, seventy-five, or one-hundred years to life arising from a single case. In fact, fifty years to life was the actual sentence given to Leandro Andrade, whose sentence for stealing videotapes was upheld by the Supreme Court.

Most people imagine that the explosion in the US prison population during the past twenty-five years reflects changes in crime rates. Few would guess that our prison population leapt from approximately 350,000 to 2.3 million in such a short period of time due to changes in laws and policies, not changes in crime rates. Yet it has been changes in our laws—particularly the dramatic increases in the length of prison sentences—that have been responsible for the growth of our prison system, not increases in crime. One study suggests that the entire increase in the prison population from 1980 to 2001 can be explained by sentencing policy changes.

About as many people were returned to prison for parole violations in 2000 as were admitted to prison in 1980 for all reasons. Of all parole violators returned to prison in 2000, only one-third were returned for a new conviction; two-thirds were returned for a technical violation such as missing appointments with a parole officer, failing to maintain employment, or failing a drug test. In this system of control, failing to cope well with one's exile status is treated like a crime. If you fail, after being released from prison with a criminal record—your personal badge of inferiority—to remain drug free, or if you fail to get a job against all the odds, or if you get depressed and miss an appointment with your parole officer (or if you cannot afford the bus fare to take you there), you can be sent right back to prison—where society apparently thinks millions of Americans belong.

Unless the number of people who are labeled felons is dramatically reduced, and unless the laws and policies that keep ex-offenders marginalized from the mainstream society and economy are eliminated, the system will continue to create and maintain an enormous system of injustice.

A little over one-hundred years ago, the English writer G. K. Chesterton was called for jury duty. After taking his oath, Chesterton sat back and observed the various characters in the unfolding drama: a woman accused of neglecting her children, a bicycle thief, a judge, assembled lawyers. From that intimate vantage point, he realized something that he had previously failed to grasp:

“The horrible thing about all legal officials, even the best, about all judges, magistrates, detectives, and policemen, is not that they are wicked (some of them are good), not that they are stupid (some of them are quite intelligent), it is simply that they have got used to it.”

As he explained, the problem with the system was that those in it were so acclimated to their surroundings, so set in their ways and assumptions, that “they do not see the prisoner in the dock; all they see is the usual man in the usual place. They do not see the awful court of judgment; they only see their own workshop.” For Chesterton, the solution was laymen jurors—outsiders, like him, who could:

“See the court and the crowd, and coarse faces of the policemen and the professional criminals, the wasted faces of the wastrels, the unreal faces of the gesticulating counsel—and see it all as one sees a new picture or a ballet hitherto unvisited.”

“Now, somebody has to say no to this. I can’t do it. The only thing I can do is ask you to do it. You have more power than the judge, and I don’t know many people who’ve got more power than the judge in this situation. You’ve got a lot more power than the prosecutors. You’ve got a lot more power than the police. You’ve got more power than the marshals. You’ve got more power than anybody because you can say no.

And not only that, but every one of you has that power, each of you individually, because the verdict has to be unanimous. So any one of you can say no and that is the end of the government’s case. People like George Washington sought to set up a federal government so you wouldn’t have to be afraid of it, that’s why our founders gave you that power, and that’s why you are so special.”

When a jury departs from the evidence and delivers a verdict that reflects some broader sense of justice, it is called “jury nullification.” Juries have used nullification to spare white men who were obviously guilty of lynching blacks, as well as to spare battered women who were obviously guilty of killing their husbands. Jury nullification, although treated warily by the courts, has traditionally been one way in which the “conscience of the community” can counteract the effect of an unpopular law.

The Seventh Amendment guarantees citizens the right to a jury trial. However, when the populace has no idea what’s in the Constitution—civic education has virtually disappeared from most school curriculums—that inevitably translates to an ignorant jury incapable of distinguishing justice and the law from their own preconceived notions and fears.

The best way to predict a jury’s ultimate verdict is to look at what the majority of jurors favor before deliberating, because that aligns with the outcome 90 percent of the time.

We are told to presume the defendant's innocence, and although it is an ideal we Americans embrace with pride, it cannot displace the knowledge we've gained from our own experience in life. That knowledge forms our attitudes in every case, and rarely does it presume innocence.

Visualization can be incredibly persuasive. The more a prosecutor can get a jury to visualize the defendant committing the crime, the easier it becomes to convince them that he's the culprit. One way to help them visualize the defendant committing the crime is to provide lots of detail. Particularly striking, powerful, or emotional details are especially effective. Like a big black man raping a little white girl with a broom handle.

"I tell my class: As a heterosexual male, it's not as if I won't be disgusted if you show me pictures of certain sexual acts between two males. The task for me is to say: What the hell does this have to do with my ethical beliefs? I tell them, the thought of two very ugly people having sex also revolts me, but that does not lead me to consider legislating against ugly people having sex.

The homeless are another group that people frequently speak ill of, probably because they, too, can trigger disgust alarms, making it easier for society to dehumanize them and find them guilty of crimes they didn't commit. My ethical duty is to make sure that this emotion doesn't influence me in a way it might actually tread on someone's humanity."

The highly disgusting also tend to be hard on crime; against casual sex, abortion, and gay rights; and authoritarian in orientation. For example, they're more inclined to think children should obey their elders without question and they place greater emphasis on social cohesion and following convention. Though the evidence is not as strong, there are even hints that those prone to disgust are more likely to be fiscally conservative (against taxation and government spending programs). There's a physiological angle to this story as well. When shown pictures of people eating worms and other revolting imagery, conservatives sweat more profusely than liberals (as measured by galvanic skin response). Their heightened reactivity, however, is not limited to disease-related dangers. Compared to liberals, they also react to loud noises with a more pronounced startle response. These twin observations may have direct bearing on a well-documented finding in political science: conservatives typically view the world to be a more threatening place than liberals. That, in turn, could influence their position on issues relevant to foreign policy. In addition to being more distrustful of foreigners,

they may be more willing to use force. Next to liberals, conservatives certainly are more outspoken in their support of patriotism, a strong military, and the virtue of serving in the armed forces.

A fear of germs does more than slant people's religious and political views. It literally leads them to think of morality in black-and-white terms—a finding with disturbing ramifications for the criminal justice system. You've likely noted that fairy godmothers always wear white and wicked witches black and, what's more, that the gun-toting heroes and villains in Westerns typically follow the same dress code. This seemingly trite observation raises an intriguing question: As a byproduct of being honed to spot contaminants, does the human mind actually encode black as sinful and white as virtuous?

Since the behavioral immune system operates at high speed to protect us from germs—indeed, some scientists liken it to a reflex—researchers grew increasingly confident that the subjects were relying on moral intuition rather than the slower process of conscious reasoning. If so, they theorized, people who were the fastest to link white to morality and black to immorality would be more concerned about germs and cleanliness. To explore this hunch, all the participants were asked to evaluate the desirability of cleaning products and other consumer goods at the end of the trial. Just as they anticipated, those whose test results suggested they might be germaphobic gave the most favorable ratings to cleaning products—especially items that were hygiene-related, like soap and toothpaste.

Since the tendency to see black as bad is heightened when moral issues are foremost on our minds, a courtroom is exactly the place where one would expect the cognitive bias to be most pronounced—unsettling news for people of color hoping for a fair trial. The darkness-contamination-evil link probably doesn't contribute as strongly to prejudice as the linking of ethnicity, poverty, and crime but it's concerning because all these negative biases might have an additive effect, raising the odds that a person of color will be found guilty or receive a harsher sentence.

Defense attorneys say there has long been a sentiment among some police and prosecutors that when it comes to babies who die unnatural deaths, “there are no accidents.” Someone killed the child, either willfully or through criminally negligent parenting. Babies don't die without someone being at fault. Therefore, somebody must be punished.

The greater value we place on young people's lives means we are also more motivated to seek justice on their behalf when they are killed. When an older man is murdered, research suggests that police officers will be less driven to track down his killer—even in situations where the murderer did not choose his particular victim and put everyone at risk, as with a remotely detonated bomb.

Passing a homeless drunk, we do not see a human being with a mind, feelings, needs, and ideas; we see him as if he were a mound of rags and trash, and that influences how we treat him. A pile of garbage can be left in the hallway for hours; it doesn't merit a police investigation; it doesn't need to be handled gently as it is lifted from the sidewalk.

The system failed them because of the psychological limitations of the people who operate it—limitations we all share. We see, in the words of the Bible, the speck in the eye of our brother but fail to notice the beam in our own eye. We blindly trust in the objectivity of our technologies and practices because they seem to deliver reality, when, in truth, they may distort our perspectives.

The reason it is important is this: Here is a group of people who have gathered to judge—and possibly execute—a fellow citizen. It's the highest calling there is and it has to be done well. A trial, however, is just a microcosm of the entire political system. When a democratic government decides to raise taxes or wage war or write child safety laws, it is essentially saying to an enormous jury, 'This is our theory of how the world works, and this is our proposal for dealing with it. If our theory makes sense to you, vote for us in the next election. If it doesn't, throw us out.' The ability of citizens to scrutinize the theories insisted on by their government is their only protection against abuse of power and, ultimately, against tyranny. If ordinary citizens can't coolly and rationally evaluate a prosecutor's summation in a criminal trial, they won't have a chance at calling to task a deceitful government. And all governments are deceitful—they're deceitful because it's easier than being honest. Most of the time, it's no more sinister than that.

The Sixth Amendment provides the defendant in a criminal trial with the right to "an impartial jury." It's a promise that we do not keep and may never be able to deliver.

People in almost every culture believe that one can spot liars through various cues—the way they avert their eyes, stutter, fidget, or touch their faces. Yet research does not support the validity of these signs. Numerous studies have shown, for example, that people who are lying are actually less likely to move their arms and legs (not more likely, as observers tend to assume), and averting one's gaze is not related to deceit. Even worse, when people are under a lot of pressure to appear trustworthy, that often exacerbates the behaviors that observers wrongly associate with lying. A truthful person who will calmly look you in the eye when discussing matters in her own home will stare down at her restless legs when called upon to defend herself in court.

There are surprisingly few useful clues for detecting when people are

lying. And even these cues are primarily verbal rather than nonverbal; for example, inaccurate statements are somewhat more likely to contain fewer details and more qualifiers ('I'm not positive, but I think that the bank-robber's shirt may have been blue') than accurate ones. Even trained security professionals, such as judges and police officers, rarely do better than chance at detecting lies.

And mechanical "lie detectors," are provably misnamed. Innocent people can fail to pass a polygraph test. And pathological liars, those with special training, and a small percent of the general population can beat the machine, i.e., tell a lie without indicating abnormal stress on the machine. Lastly, the integrity of the operator is key to a successful session. A faulty or dishonest operator can cause the person being tested such stress that a truth-teller can be made to look like a liar. Similarly, a dishonest operator can lessen the sensitivity of a machine such that a liar can look like a truth-teller. There are other concerns as well. Poor wording of questions and too many questions can adversely affect the usefulness of the test. For all these reasons and more, most states do not allow use of polygraph evidence in court. The primary use of such a machine is simply to scare criminals into a confession.

A memory of the perpetrator's face is just as susceptible to adulteration and misuse as a hair sample or partial fingerprint taken from a crime scene, but we don't treat it that way. We don't worry that it will get corrupted or lost or misreported. We don't subject it to careful monitoring or objective assessment. It makes little sense that a court should make the fullest use of all the modern scientific methods when, for instance, a drop of dried blood is to be examined in a murder case, while the same court is completely satisfied with the most unscientific and haphazard methods of common prejudice and ignorance when a mental product, especially the memory report of a witness, is to be examined.

We can expect to identify only a tiny percentage of the mistakes, biases, and acts of dishonesty marring the work of police officers, judges, jurors, and others. Most who have been wronged will never know it. Even if they do find out, the opportunity to remedy the problem is severely restricted: people often aren't aware of their rights, there aren't enough competent attorneys to file complaints and appeals, and there's frequently no hard evidence to convince a judge to address the issue. In only 5 to 10 percent of all cases, for example, is there a biological sample for DNA testing. And if a judge, two decades down the line, by some miracle, does acknowledge a suggestive eyewitness identification or a coercive interrogation and overturns a sentence, we still can't call it justice, for we placed an innocent man in a closet-sized cell for twenty years of his life.

We need to start thinking about witness mistakes in the way that we

think about other types of errors that individuals, groups, and institutions make. Studies of actual police lineups show that eyewitnesses select innocent people more than 30 percent of the time. Would we as a society tolerate the sale of a car whose brake lights malfunctioned on every third trip, or a hospital that handed out the wrong medicine to every third patient? Obviously not; we would demand immediate change. So why do we accept the claim that the legal system works just fine as it is?

It's true that, much of the time, when a witness picks out an innocent filler from a lineup, that person does not go on to be convicted of the crime. But given the tens of thousands of witness identifications annually, even a low percentage of truly consequential errors can produce an egregious level of harm. And consider that someone could offer the same rosy account of the hospital that gave every third person the wrong prescription: in most cases the patient would either notice before taking the medication or swallow it without experiencing any significant ill effects. But would we say to those who did suffer serious adverse reactions—or to the families of those who lost their lives: It's a shame about the error, but since our system works pretty well in general, we're not going to change it?

After receiving Kennedy Brewer's letter, the attorneys at the Innocence Project in New York agreed to represent him. Shortly after Brewer had been cleared by DNA testing, but well before he had been exonerated, his attorneys from both Mississippi and New York paid a visit to Forrest Allgood in Macon. The prosecutor had already announced that he planned to try Brewer again. The legal team wanted to make a personal plea to Allgood to drop the charges. What happened next, as recounted by André de Gruy and Peter Neufeld, was remarkable. The attorneys, along with Brewer himself, were to meet with Allgood in the jury room of a Noxubee County courthouse. Only after Brewer left the room did Allgood agree to talk. He then brought them back to an office in the courthouse and took a seat behind a desk. He leaned back, propped up his cowboy boots, and crossed his feet.

Neufeld carefully explained the science behind DNA testing, why the science in this case proved Brewer's innocence, and why the US Constitution compelled Allgood to drop the charges. When Neufeld had finished, Allgood slowly looked up from the floor, paused, and said, "You really believe in this science stuff, don't you?" Stunned, Neufeld replied that, indeed, he really did believe in DNA and in science. Allgood shrugged, took his boots off the table, and said, "Well I guess everybody's gotta believe in something."

"We had multiple experts saying this guy was innocent. We had two labs confirm the DNA tests. We were thinking: we just need to round up as many scientists as we can. More

confirmation, more tests, eventually we'd convince Allgood that our client is innocent. That conversation was such a revelation. The fact is, none of it mattered. We were dealing with a guy who thought science was just another set of beliefs, just another religion that wasn't his. You can see how a guy like that... how once he's convinced someone is guilty, he just isn't going to stop."

When asked about the conversation, Allgood denied making the first comment. "I have never disbelieved in DNA," he wrote, adding that he does sometimes object to how DNA test results are interpreted. He does recall making the second comment.

Because Brewer so rarely got emotional, de Gruy remembers vividly one of the few times he did. It was in 2007. Brewer had been released on bail but had yet to be formally exonerated. There was still talk of trying him again. New York Times reporter Shaila Dewan had come to Macon to write about Brewer's case.

"We were talking to Kenny at his mom's house, Shaila started asking Kenny about Christine Jackson, the little girl who was killed. And Kenny began to cry. I guess I just wasn't prepared for that. After all that time, it came out of nowhere. But there it was. He told Shaila that she wasn't his daughter, but he still cared for her. He started talking about how because he had been taken to jail so quickly, he never got to go to her funeral. All these years had gone by, and he still hadn't had a chance to visit her grave."

De Gruy says that's when he realized something important that he and Brewer's other attorneys had been overlooking.

"We were so busy trying to get Kenny out of prison, we had never really talked to him about Christine. It hit me that Kenny wasn't just a victim of a wrongful conviction; he was a victim of Justin Johnson, too. He was a victim of this crime just as much as anyone else in that little girl's life. And after all that had happened to him, he never really got the chance to heal."

It wasn't just the timing of the emotion that stuck with de Gruy, but the impetus for it.

"Here's a guy who had never gotten angry over being wrongly convicted for killing this little girl. Never got angry about being

put on death row. The one time he really broke down, it was because he never got to grieve for that little girl.”

Forrest Allgood has said on numerous occasions that although the system failed in the Brooks and Brewer cases, it also worked. What he means, of course, is that all things considered, the net result was what the process aspired to in the first place: the identification and apprehension of the real perpetrator. In a 2008 letter to the editor defending his prosecutions, Allgood argued that the fact that Brooks and Brewer combined spent nearly three decades in prison for crimes that they didn't commit was nothing more than truth being the “daughter of time.” Allgood isn't alone in his thinking. The late Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia believed the same thing. In a 2006 opinion discussing the intersection of an inmate's claim of factual innocence and the death penalty, Scalia wrote that “the possibility that someone will be punished mistakenly is a truism, not a revelation.” For Scalia, Allgood, and many others, the moral hazards inherent in that position are worth the risk. But the risk is not an abstract one.

As we wait five or ten or fifty years for a finding to become incontrovertible, people's lives are being upended by legal rules, principles, and norms that often have no scientific basis at all.

It took the jury less than two days to deliberate, convict him based on bad scientific evidence, hear evidence on appropriate punishment, deliberate again, and sentence him to death. It took thirteen years for the courts to admit that a small portion of the bad evidence might have been scientifically unsound. It took another fourteen months for the trial court judge to agree to hold a hearing on the matter. It will be another fourteen months from that decision until the hearing itself. It's often said that the wheels of justice grind slowly. That isn't always true. When it comes to convicting people, they can move pretty swiftly. It's when the system needs to correct an injustice—admit its mistakes—that the gears tend to sputter to a halt. For now, he remains on death row.

In one case, a panel from the Fifth Circuit unanimously denied a new trial for a Louisiana man named James Koon, who had been convicted in 1996 of killing an infant. Steven Hayne was the state's expert witness. In his petition, Koon claimed that the recent revelations about Steven Hayne's credibility were newly discovered evidence. The panel unanimously rejected that claim. The panel also ruled that Koon should have discovered allegations made by Hayne's critics years earlier. But this particular opinion included two important words that proved Koon and appellants like him never really stood a chance:

“The evidence shows the witness for Louisiana, Dr. Steven Hayne, a now-discredited Mississippi coroner, lied about his qualifications as an expert and thus gave unreliable testimony about the cause of death.”

Now-discredited. This was the first time a majority opinion from an appeals court of any kind had acknowledged that Hayne had been “discredited.” Not only that, the opinion acknowledged that Hayne had lied about his credentials. Unfortunately, because of what that panel did next, the acknowledgment provided no relief for the people trying to get a new trial by challenging Hayne’s credibility. That’s because despite the fact that this was the first time an appeals court had described Hayne as discredited, it was already too late to do anything about it.

The federal district court judge who first ruled on Koon’s petition determined that despite the evidence that Hayne had been discredited:

“Dr. Hayne’s expertise was questioned by the Mississippi Supreme Court in an opinion published in May 2007; Justice Diaz’s Special Concurrence relied upon a magazine article published in 2006. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it is safe to conclude that a habeas petitioner exercising due diligence should have discovered this information well before the fall of 2011. In other words, this petition is clearly time-barred.”

The Fifth Circuit panel agreed. The panel noted that several media outlets had first begun to criticize Hayne between 2006 and 2008, that the Innocence Project had filed its complaint against Hayne in 2009, and that Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Oliver Diaz had criticized him in his concurring opinion in the Edmonds case in 2007.

“Koon’s assertion that he could not have learned of Edmonds from information in the Louisiana State Penitentiary law library is both implausible and immaterial in the light of the public information about Dr. Hayne that was available for several years prior to July 2011.”

Because Koon could have discovered these criticisms of Hayne much earlier, he had missed his deadline. He was out of luck. With a single short opinion, the Fifth Circuit admitted that the medical examiner Mississippi had been using for two decades was no longer a credible witness, but then slammed the door on anyone he had helped convict. Under a precise reading of federal law and the relevant case law, this was arguably correct. It was

also incredibly unfair and a stark illustration of just how ill-equipped the federal courts and federal law are to catch and correct quackery disguised as expertise.

Since the onset of DNA testing in the 1990s, the legal system has slowly been coming to terms with the fact that forensic analysts aren't nearly as accurate and reliable as they've often claimed to be. The problem has been documented in countless studies, reports, and law review articles, but the most damning evidence is the most straightforward: according to a 2007 study of the first two-hundred post-conviction exonerations, over half involved flawed forensic evidence. In the majority of those cases, the state's forensic witnesses gave inaccurate and unreliable testimony. And even as the criminal justice system can't seem to keep bad science out of its courtrooms, once someone is convicted, the same system then shifts to protect the "finality" of the verdict. Federal lawmakers have only made it worse with laws like AEDPA, altering federal code to make it ever more difficult to challenge state verdicts in federal court. The courts still let these witnesses testify at trial—as experts. But years later, when science proves them wrong, or the defendant finally finds funds to hire an expert to say as much, the system is all about protecting the verdict. At that point, it no longer wants to hear from experts.

Most of these more subjective forensics fields have largely avoided exposing themselves to scientific scrutiny. It's easy to see why. There's no incentive for them to do so. The purpose of forensics is to solve crimes. The end game is to testify in court and persuade a judge or jury. Once the courts begin accepting analysts from a new area of forensics as experts, there's no upside to those analysts then subjecting their methods and analysis to scientific scrutiny. They already have the only approval they need: that of the courts. If the science affirms their methods, they're no better off than they were before. At best, they get the benefit of telling the jury that their field is backed by scientific research. Of course, anyone can claim as much, regardless of whether it's true. But if their field doesn't withstand scientific scrutiny, it's free material for opposing attorneys. It could put their entire livelihood at risk—or at least it ought to.

Imagine that defendant "Johnny" is convicted based on handwriting analysis evidence. This particular variety of expert testimony has been criticized for many years but has only been acknowledged as invalid by government agencies in the last few years. Johnny now wants to file a post-conviction petition for a new trial based on the scientific consensus that the evidence used to convict him isn't scientifically reliable. At what point does the year-long window in which Johnny had to file his petition begin to take effect? Should it be after the first critical study? The second?

Is it once the scientific community has reached a consensus? What defines a consensus? How does one define the field of scientists among which such a consensus must arise? It isn't as if scientists take an annual vote on these things. These are critical questions, and they're essentially impossible to answer. The courts and Congress have set a trap for these defendants, and absent DNA evidence, there's really no escaping it. File your claim too soon—say, after the first few studies—and the courts could rule that you haven't presented enough evidence that the expertise used to convict you has been discredited. You now risk being barred from ever raising the issue again. But if you wait for a stronger scientific consensus before filing, the courts could rule that your deadline passed a year after those first few studies were published. Your window has closed. Here, too, you're now barred from raising that claim again.

And that's all just for the suspect fields of forensics. With individual experts, it gets even trickier. Michael West is a good example. Mississippi's courts, prosecutors, and attorneys continued to uphold and defend West's credibility well into the mid-2000s, despite the fact he had been repeatedly criticized and exposed going back to the mid-1990s. Mississippi attorney general Jim Hood finally conceded in 2008 that West wasn't a credible witness, telling the Jackson Free Press that West "is someone we have investigated, and I don't support him in any manner." But while Hood's office had by then stopped explicitly defending the substance of West's analyses in court, his office still continues to defend convictions won primarily on West's testimony. Instead of arguing that West is a credible witness, the office now argues that defendants are procedurally barred from raising West as an issue again, because most of them already challenged West's credibility and lost. It doesn't matter that even Hood acknowledges now that the courts back then were wrong.

But in cases like that of Hayne, the situation is more nuanced. The information trickles out over time. The gradual discrediting of Hayne took place over more than a decade. In November 2014, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Steven Hayne had earned the label of 'discredited.' But exactly when did the court reach that conclusion? And how was James Koon supposed to have known? There was no announcement. There was no press release. There was no notice given to those who may have been convicted by Hayne's testimony that said, "Hey, you now have one year to file your claims."

The added indignity for someone like Koon is that Louisiana offers post-conviction indigent legal help only to those who have been sentenced to death. Koon was sentenced to life in prison, so once he lost his appeal, he lost his lawyer. He filed his post-conviction petition himself. The Fifth Circuit

ruling in his case essentially states that from his prison cell, an indigent defendant like Koon should not only have been following each revelation about Hayne's credibility as it happened but should have been able to discern the precise moment when those revelations tipped the scales to make Hayne 'discredited' in the eyes of the court—even though the court itself couldn't or wouldn't say precisely when that occurred. And Koon should have then filed his petition within a year of that magical moment. But it's even worse than that. Not only do the courts expect these defendants to abide by these dizzying rules to the letter, the courts refuse to hold themselves to the same standard. The Flaggs ruling that affirmed Hayne's credibility as an expert witness came in March 2013. That would be nineteen months after July 2011, which the same court declared was the very latest by which Koon should have already discovered the evidence that Hayne was not credible. There's just no way Koon could have gotten it right.

Finally, it's worth noting that the "discredited" acknowledgment in the ruling did not prevent Hayne from testifying in future cases in the Fifth Circuit—or anywhere else. It did not prevent Louisiana prosecutors from using him if they so desired, or even Mississippi prosecutors should the state change its laws. Ironically (or perhaps not), the only real consequence of the Fifth Circuit's acknowledgment that a longtime expert witness for the state was now discredited was to prevent criminal defendants from challenging that expert in federal court.

The system values process far more than justice.

Plant Wars

Witches and sorcerers cultivated plants with the power to “cast spells”—in our vocabulary, psychoactive plants. Their potion recipes called for such things as datura, opium poppies, belladonna, hashish, fly-agaric mushrooms (*Amanita muscaria*), and the skins of toads (which can contain DMT, a powerful hallucinogen). These ingredients would be combined in a hempseed-oil-based “flying ointment” that the witches would then administer vaginally using a special dildo. This was the “broomstick” by which these women were said to travel.

The challenge these plants posed to monotheism was profound, for they threatened to divert people’s gaze from the sky, where the new God resided, down to the natural world all around them. The magic plants were, and remain, a gravitational force pulling us back to Earth, to matter, away from the there and then of Christian salvation and back to the here and now. Indeed, what these plants do to time is perhaps the most dangerous thing about them—dangerous, that is, from the perspective of a civilization organized on the lines of Christianity and, more recently, capitalism. Christianity and capitalism are both probably right to detest a plant like cannabis. Both faiths bid us to set our sights on the future; both reject the pleasures of the moment and the senses in favor of the expectation of a fulfillment yet to come—whether by earning salvation or by getting and spending. More than most plant drugs, cannabis, by immersing us in the present and offering something like fulfillment here and now, short-circuits the metaphysics of desire on which Christianity and capitalism—and so much else in our civilization—depend.

But do not worry, though Christianity may be failing to do anything, capitalism has begun to embrace cannabis—with industrial growing, a mass diversity of products, and an increase in heavily-processed and -concentrated forms thereby rendering the drug more like alcohol, where one’s desire is to simply get ‘fucked up.’

There is a myth about natural cannabis: the user has an illusion of great insight, but it does not survive scrutiny in the morning. I am convinced that this is an error, and that the devastating insights achieved while high are

real insights; the main problem is putting these insights in a form acceptable to the quite different self that we are when we're down the next day. If I find in the morning a message from myself the night before informing me that there is a world around us which we barely sense, or that we can become one with the universe, or even that certain politicians are desperately frightened men, I may tend to disbelieve; but when I'm high I know about this disbelief. And so I have a tape in which I exhort myself to take such remarks seriously. I say, 'Listen closely, you sonofabitch of the morning! This stuff is real!'

Memory is the enemy of wonder, which abides nowhere else but in the present. This is why, unless you are a child, wonder depends on forgetting—on a process, that is, of subtraction. Ordinarily we think of drug experiences as additive—it's often said that drugs "distort" normal perceptions and augment the data of the senses—adding hallucinations, say—but it may be that the very opposite is true—that they work by subtracting some of the filters that consciousness normally interposes between us and the world.

In one way or another, all our experiences are chemically conditioned, and if we imagine that some of them are purely 'spiritual,' purely 'intellectual,' purely 'aesthetic,' it is merely because we have never troubled to investigate the internal chemical environment at the moment of their occurrence. Mystics have always worked systematically to modify their brain chemistry, whether through fasting, self-flagellation, sleeplessness, hypnotic movement, or chanting. The reason there aren't nearly as many mystics and visionaries walking around today, as compared to the Middle Ages, is the improvement in nutrition. Vitamin deficiencies wreak havoc on brain function and probably explain a large portion of visionary experiences in the past.

The brain can be made to drug itself, as seems to happen with certain placebos. We don't merely imagine that the placebo antidepressant is working to lift our sadness or worry—the brain is actually producing extra serotonin in response to the mental prompt of swallowing a pill containing nothing but sugar and belief. What all this suggests is that the workings of consciousness are both more and less materialistic than we usually think: chemical reactions can induce thoughts, but thoughts can also induce chemical reactions.

It does not seem to be an exaggeration to say that psychedelics, used responsibly and with proper caution, would be for psychiatry what the microscope is for biology and medicine or the telescope is for astronomy.

The reason research came to a halt was the drug war, not lack of potential in psychedelic compounds. The question is not do psychedelics cause harm in certain individual cases. So do automobiles, prescription drugs, mountain climbing, and love affairs—all more or less legal at this point. The question

is do you think it's justified to bring down the full institutional fury of the police state on citizens who want to explore these substances?

We already have a psychoactive drug sold on every street corner in America, one that's highly toxic and addictive, that's a major factor in violent crime, and that regularly destroys people's lives. Every year it kills more than ten times the people who died in the 9/11 attacks, and yet it's completely legal.

Of course I'm talking about alcohol. It should be the benchmark for any rational discussion of drug policy—this is the level of harm we as a society are willing to accept from a merely recreational drug. If some other drug creates far less harm and offers far greater potential benefits—as is the case with LSD or psilocybin—then at least let's not fool ourselves that loosing the police state on its users is motivated by altruistic concern for their well-being.

Throughout the 1980s, drunk driving was a regular topic in the media, and the term 'designated driver' became part of the American lexicon. At the close of the decade, drunk drivers were responsible for approximately 22,000 deaths annually, while overall alcohol-related deaths were close to 100,000 a year. By contrast, during the same time period, there were no prevalence statistics at all on crack, much less crack-related deaths. In fact, the number of deaths related to all illegal drugs combined was tiny compared to the number of deaths caused by drunk drivers. The total of all drug-related deaths due to AIDS, drug overdose, or the violence associated with the illegal drug trade, was estimated at 21,000 annually—less than the number of deaths directly caused by drunk drivers, and a small fraction of the number of alcohol-related deaths that occur every year.

In response to growing concern—fueled by advocacy groups such as MADD and by the media coverage of drunk-driving fatalities—most states adopted tougher laws to punish drunk driving. Numerous states now have some type of mandatory sentencing for this offense—typically two days in jail for a first offense and two to ten days for a second offense. Possession of a tiny amount of crack cocaine, on the other hand, carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in federal prison. Although drunk driving carries a far greater risk of violent death than the use or sale of illegal drugs, the societal response to drunk drivers has generally emphasized keeping the person functional and in society, while attempting to respond to the dangerous behavior through treatment and counseling.

Sure, its a problem that unethical chemists shotgun potentially dangerous, completely untested drugs out to a largely ignorant consumer base. But the lion's share of the blame belongs to the ongoing state of drug prohibition. If safer, more heavily studied drugs like MDMA weren't so illegal, there

wouldn't be a market for all of the weird little research chemicals meant for legitimate scientific study.

Black markets are inherently risky and dangerous since illegal contracts can only be enforced through violence or the threat of violence. This is an argument for regulating sales of things that attract eager buyers but pose minimal harm to the public, rather than trying to prevent them altogether.

For some types of meth, 'lab' is largely a misnomer. All that is truly necessary to make Nazi dope, in addition to the anhydrous ammonia and the cold pills, is a lithium strip from inside a battery (accessible by unrolling the layers of zinc and aluminum that lie beneath the protective sheath), some Coleman lantern fluid, and a ninth-grade knowledge of chemistry. Using a soda bottle instead of a pair of buckets rigged with surgical tubing is called the single-batch system, and it became popular once the police had begun raiding so many homes in search of meth labs. Single-batching was devised as a way to cook while riding mountain bikes. If they strapped a soda bottle onto a rack over the rear wheel, single-batchers believed that the constant movement—unlike in a home lab—would diffuse the smell of the process. They further believed that the police wouldn't suspect people on bikes of cooking meth.

But it didn't take long to catch on. In one story, a county sheriff's deputy pulls up to a kid sitting by the side of the road amid a wilderness of midsummer corn. His bike in pieces all around him, he has a soda bottle at his side, inside of which there is a small inferno of activity: he has decided, while he waits for his meth to cook, to take his bike completely apart and put it back together again. The boy asks the deputy why he stopped. "I got a call," says the deputy, in the bone-dry wit endemic to the Midwest, "that you needed to borrow a screwdriver."

Meth makes you do crazy shit. One story is of an ex-Marine sharpshooter who was also a prolific meth cook and lived alone with his teenage daughter. In 2003, increasingly paranoid that he would get caught making meth, the ex-Marine knocked out all the windows from his home and replaced them with black plastic garbage bags taped to the frames, thereby keeping people from looking in. They also provided a good way to defend the house, for he'd cut holes in the center of the bags from which he planned to shoot whoever came to shut down his lab. Near the windows, he had placed nineteen firearms of various kinds, along with seven-thousand rounds of ammunition. What one might find funniest about the story is not that the ex-Marine aroused his neighbors' suspicions by going outside in his underwear to dance in the street in the middle of the day; or that his daughter was home at the time, studying; or that the man, when the police came, tried to hide by lying still in the concrete gutter of the street, thinking he was camouflaged.

What may give some a good a laugh is that the man had the most firepower stacked around the house's highest windows, those in his daughter's room, which provided the best vantage points for shooting. There he had two AR-15 fully automatic assault rifles, a Remington 12-gauge shotgun, and seven-hundred rounds of ammunition. Commented one cop:

“Had he not decided to lay down and hide in the gutter there's no question he would have killed every single one of us.”

A meth user's feelings are reflected in what are called his executive actions—his ability to choose between what we all know to be good and bad. What feels good is tied directly to survival. The ability to make decisions, therefore, is in some ways controlled not by what people want, but by what they need. Meth hijacks the relationship between what is necessary and what is desired. The result is that when you take away meth, nothing natural—sex, a glass of water, a good meal, anything for which we are supposed to be rewarded—feels good. The only thing that does feel good is more meth. Moreover, there's a basic and lasting change in the brain's chemistry, which is a direct result of the drug's introduction. The ultimate effects are psychopathology such as intolerable depression, profound sleep and memory loss, debilitating anxiety, severe hallucinations, and acute, schizophrenic bouts of paranoia: the very things that meth, just eighty years ago, was supposed to cure.

Even if we get a hold of meth next month, we've already got three human stages of history to clean up. But seeing that we won't have it under control next month, we're going to have four, five, maybe six generations to deal with: the medical problems, the psychological ramifications—we don't even know what else. We've only settled into a long-term siege.

Consider Major, a former meth user. For Major, waiting to see what price his son would pay for his transgressions was a daily reminder of why he had to stay straight. But there was always the fear that one day, out of the blue, Buck would develop some kind of problem that was a direct result of Major's heavy meth use. The idea of this—and that it might, no matter how many strides Major made in his life, become a sudden and crushing reality—grew inside Major like a benign tumor that could, at any moment, metastasize into an inoperable cancer. The very notion that innocent, tiny Buck might be victimized by his father's past was still enough to make Major want to go and finish himself off with one last, superlatively freeing crank overdose.

The bad news, said Major, was that he lacked anything in which to believe. He was working hard—at staying clean, at raising Buck, at making

money. But without meth, Major found it impossible to feel, as he put it, “happy.” Even when Major did the right thing, he couldn’t quite believe in its rightness, for that thing didn’t satisfy him—meth did. To get back to normal—that is, to begin once again to derive meaning from the humdrum facts of life—might take years. Intellect cannot substitute for instinct—knowing is not feeling. Major’s self-admonishment that he ought to be grateful is no substitute for the neurotransmitters—and the feeling of well-being they create—that he can no longer produce. In the meantime, the gravitational pull of meth, with its pyrotechnic promise of biochemical ecstasy, could be overwhelming.

Contrary to what many people might think, the rural United States has for decades had higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse than the nation’s urban areas. If addiction has a face it is the face of depression.

Crack flooded the streets for as little as \$2.50 a rock. An addict broke into the home of eighty-one-year-old Rosa Parks and, even after recognizing her, stole fifty-three dollars and punched her in the face.

Not long after, Chino found his corner, and started selling his crack. And three years after that, when he was sixteen, he would smoke it for the first time.

“I wanted to know what my mom chose over me.”

And on the little table beside Hannah, there was her alcohol, and her heroin, and a needle. And Liz—who has never wanted to use drugs—looked at them and looked at Hannah and thought: ‘Which of these things on your bedside table can I give you to take your pain away?’

“And that was the moment I understood what addiction did for people.”

“When your kid’s dying from a brain tumor or leukemia, the whole community shows up. They bring casseroles. They pray for you. They send you cards. When your kid’s on heroin, you don’t hear from anybody, until they die. Then everybody comes and they don’t know what to say.”

In a country where doctors once feared opiates, a culture of aggressive opiate use was emerging by the mid-1990s.

“My fellowship director even told me, ‘If you have pain, you can’t get addicted to opiates because the pain soaks up the euphoria.’ Now you look back and it sounds so preposterous.

That's actually what people thought. You can think what you want in the face of ten-thousand years of reality."

Pain perception has a strong psychological component. The same incoming pain signal can be interpreted as painful or not, depending on what the patient is thinking. Pain requires conscious attention.

Drugs help attain the soothing hiss of oblivion. But when the drugs wear off, the vulnerabilities throb like a fresh surgical incision.

"Everything, bad or good, boiled back to the decade on the needle, and the years before that imbibing everything from cocaine to Romilar, pot to percs, LSD to liquid meth and a pharmacy in between: a lifetime spent altering the single niggling fact that to be alive means being conscious."

Behind every vice is an impulse. We can sate those impulses in ways that are healthy, that improve our ability to deal with the world, and that help us grow as people. Or we can sate those impulses in ways that numb us to the world and drive us deeper and deeper away from it.

In 1970, high-grade heroin and opium flooded Southeast Asia. Military physicians in Vietnam estimated that nearly half of all US Army enlisted men serving there had tried opium or heroin, and between 10 and 25 percent of them were addicted. Deaths from overdoses soared. In May 1971, the crisis reached the front page of the *New York Times*: "G.I. Heroin Addiction Epidemic in Vietnam." Fearful that the newly discharged veterans would join the ranks of junkies already bedeviling inner cities, President Richard Nixon commanded the military to begin drug testing. No one could board a plane home until he had passed a urine test. Those who failed could attend an army-sponsored detoxification program.

Operation Golden Flow, as the military called it, succeeded. As word of the new directive spread, most GIs stopped using narcotics. Almost all the soldiers who were detained passed the test on their second try. Once they were home, heroin lost its appeal. Opiates may have helped them endure a war's alternating bouts of boredom and terror, but stateside, civilian life took precedence. The sordid drug culture, the high price of heroin, and fears of arrest discouraged use, veterans told a sociologist who evaluated the testing program from 1972 to 1974. The findings were startling. Only five percent of the men who became addicted in Vietnam relapsed within ten months after return, and just 12 percent relapsed briefly within three years.

"This surprising rate of recovery even when re-exposed to narcotic drugs ran counter to the conventional wisdom that

heroin is a drug which causes addicts to suffer intolerable craving that rapidly leads to re-addiction if re-exposed to the drug.”

Scholars hailed the results as “revolutionary” and “path-breaking.” The fact that addicts could quit heroin and remain drug free overturned the belief that “once an addict, always an addict.”

It turns out that quitting is the rule, not the exception—a fact worth acknowledging, given that the official NIDA formulation is that “addiction is a chronic and relapsing brain disease.” The Epidemiologic Catchment Area Study, done in the early 1980s, surveyed 19,000 people. Among those who had become dependent on drugs by age twenty-four, more than half later reported not a single drug-related symptom. By age thirty-seven, roughly 75 percent reported no drug symptom.

The National Comorbidity Survey, conducted between 1990 and 1992 and again between 2001 and 2003, and the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, conducted between 2001 and 2002 with more than 43,000 subjects, found that 77 and 86 percent of people who said they had once been addicted to drugs or alcohol reported no substance problems during the year before the survey. By comparison, people who were addicted within the year before the survey were more likely to have concurrent psychiatric disorders. Additionally, NIDA estimates that relapse rates of treated drug-addicted patients run from 40 to 60 percent. In other words, they are not representative of the universe of addicts. They are the hard cases—the chronic and relapsing patients. Yet these patients often make the biggest impressions on clinicians and shape their views of addiction, if only because clinicians are especially likely to encounter them.

Researchers and medical professionals err in generalizing from the sickest subset of people to the overall population of patients. This caveat applies across the medical spectrum. Just as the clinician wrongly assumes that all addicts must be like the recalcitrant ones who keep stumbling through the clinic doors, psychiatrists sometimes view people with schizophrenia as doomed to a life of dysfunction on the basis of their frequent encounters with those whose delusions and hallucinations don’t improve with treatment. The error of extrapolating liberally from these subsets of difficult patients is so common that statisticians gave it a name: the “clinician’s illusion.”

Unfortunately the brain-disease model has become dogma—and like all articles of faith, it is typically believed without question.

Before the Soviet invasion, Kandahar’s farmers produced an abundance of figs, melons, peaches, grapes, and pomegranates that were deservedly renowned for being the most delectable on earth. As part of the scorched-earth policy they implemented against the mujahedeen, however, the Soviets

not only obliterated these orchards and vineyards; they also destroyed the elaborate, centuries-old irrigation systems that had enabled the desert to bloom. To survive, the farmers started cultivating poppies instead, which needed to be watered only once every five days or so. And as the opium fields proliferated, militias vied to control the lucrative traffic in “flower oil”—a local euphemism for the gummy brown sap scraped from the plant’s seed capsules to produce heroin.

Once elected, Reagan’s promise to enhance the federal government’s role in fighting crime was complicated by the fact that fighting street crime had traditionally been the responsibility of state and local law enforcement. After a period of initial confusion and controversy regarding whether the FBI and the federal government should be involved in street crime, the Justice Department announced its intention to cut in half the number of specialists assigned to identify and prosecute white-collar criminals and to shift its attention to street crime, especially drug-law enforcement.

One senator insisted that crack had become a scapegoat distracting the public’s attention from the true causes of our social ills, arguing:

“If we blame crime on crack, our politicians are off the hook. Forgotten are the failed schools, the malign welfare programs, the desolate neighborhoods, the wasted years. Only crack is to blame. One is tempted to think that if crack did not exist, someone somewhere would have received a Federal grant to develop it.”

Until 1988, one year of imprisonment had been the maximum for possession of any amount of any drug.

In the 1980s, the US government helped fuel Central America’s dirty wars through its covert and overt support for brutal, drug-dealing Contras and repressive regimes in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. These wars killed and injured hundreds of thousands, frayed and destroyed social relations, and increased poverty, insecurity, and drug trafficking in the region. The wars also led to widespread forced migration, including widespread flight to the United States. These refugees typically ended up in the poor neighborhoods of cities like Los Angeles. Once there, many impoverished boys and young men (and, to a lesser extent, girls and young women) found themselves joining US-born-and-bred gangs. In addition to terrorizing US neighborhoods, these refugee gang members were often arrested and deported back to their home countries, where they soon established new branches of their US-based gangs. In turn, these gangs became centrally involved in the growth in drug trafficking in Central America—which the Contras helped kick-start—as drug traffickers took advantage of the region’s

poverty and instability to create a new transshipment hub between South American producers and North American points of sale.

The main result of the US drug war has been merely to shift transportation routes while increasing violence and doing little to affect consumption. Squeezing trafficking in one place has created a “balloon effect,” pushing the trade from the Caribbean to Honduras and other parts of Central America. Today, an estimated 90 percent of the cocaine shipped from Colombia and Venezuela to the United States goes through Central America, with more than one third of that total going through Honduras.

After the Cold War, the combatant command responsible for Latin America found itself marginalized and with little to do. Southcom discovered its salvation in disaster and drugs.

Many people believe that in times of war, democratic norms may be set aside. For this reason, the vocabulary used in the United States of a “war on drugs” is a clear signal that liberal democratic norms will be violated to deal with an emergency situation. In general, politicians are apt to appeal to the vocabulary of emergency in those situations in which they want to bypass democratic deliberation.

In a liberal democratic society, politicians will always make claims of exception for policies about which they care deeply. They will wrap these claims in the language of exception: “emergency manager,” as if the majority Black cities in the state of Michigan underwent tornadoes and floods; the “war on drugs,” as if drug use was an enemy outside. It is the job of the media in a democratic society to police politicians’ appeal to exceptions in the language of emergency.

Until recently, the financial incentives offered to local law enforcement to pump up their drug arrests have not been well publicized, leading the average person to conclude reasonably—but mistakenly—that when their local police departments report that drug arrests have doubled or tripled in a short period of time, the arrests reflect a surge in illegal drug activity, rather than an infusion of money and an intensified enforcement effort.

Although paramilitary units were often justified to city councils and skeptical citizens as essential to fight terrorism or deal with hostage situations, they were rarely deployed for those reasons but instead were sent to serve routine search warrants for drugs and make drug arrests. In fact police departments have an extraordinary incentive to use their new equipment for drug enforcement: the extra federal funding the local police departments received was tied to anti-drug policing. The size of the disbursements was linked to the number of city or county drug arrests. Each arrest, in theory, would net a given city or county about \$153 in state and federal funding. Non-drug-related policing brought no federal dollars, even for violent crime.

As a result, when Jackson County, Wisconsin, quadrupled its drug arrests between 1999 and 2000, the county's federal subsidy quadrupled too.

It was not until 1984, when Congress amended the federal law to allow federal law enforcement agencies to retain and use any and all proceeds from asset forfeitures, and to allow state and local police agencies to retain up to 80 percent of the assets' value, that a true revolution occurred. Suddenly, police departments were capable of increasing the size of their budgets, quite substantially, simply by taking the cash, cars, and homes of people suspected of drug use or sales.

One highly publicized case involved a reclusive millionaire, Donald Scott, who was shot and killed when a multi-agency task force raided his two-hundred-acre Malibu ranch purportedly in search of marijuana plants. They never found a single marijuana plant in the course of the search. A subsequent investigation revealed that the primary motivation for the raid was the possibility of forfeiting Scott's property. If the forfeiture had been successful, it would have netted the law enforcement agencies about \$5 million in assets.

Relatively little organized opposition to the drug war currently exists, and any dramatic effort to scale back the war may be publicly condemned as "soft" on crime. The war has become institutionalized. It is no longer a special program or politicized project; it is simply the way things are done.

A Black Lives Matter activist, confronting Hillary Clinton about her husband's crime policies in August of 2015, used the unfortunate words "unintended consequences" to describe mass incarceration. In fact, it was widely known at the time that the consequence of the crack/cocaine sentencing disparity was the mass incarceration of black drug users. This was one of the reasons the US Sentencing Commission tried to abolish the disparity in 1995, an action that Clinton and the Republican Congress overruled. It was also why the Congressional Black Caucus begged Bill Clinton not to overrule it—and why prison riots erupted when it became clear he was going to sign the bill overruling the recommendations of the Sentencing Commission.

"Let's be clear about what these policies have done. They have filled the nation's prisons with hundreds of thousands of young black and Latino men whose greatest crime is drug addiction. It is no wonder that one-third of black men in their 20s are under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system. If we treated alcoholics and abusers of powdered cocaine this way, the nation's prisons would be bulging with white inmates."

Supreme Injustice

The Constitution, in Section 2 of Article 3, which establishes the judiciary branch, gives Congress the power to define and limit what the Supreme Court can and can't do. Here's part of the exact language:

“[T]he Supreme Court shall have appellate jurisdiction both as to law and fact, with such exceptions, and under such regulations as the Congress shall make.”

The Congress can control the terms and conditions under which the Supreme Court can rule? Yes, according to the Constitution. The framers of the Constitution wanted the greatest power to be closest to “We the People”—and that's why the entire House of Representatives and a third of the Senate is up for election every two years. Congress is the body in our representative democratic republic that is closest to the people, so that's where they wanted most of the power. That's also why Congress is defined in Article 1 of the Constitution, establishing it as the first among equals.

As Thomas Jefferson wrote in an 1820 letter to William Charles Jarvis, who thought Supreme Court justices should have the power to strike down laws:

“You seem to consider the judges the ultimate arbiters of all constitutional questions; a very dangerous doctrine indeed, and one which would place us under the despotism of an oligarchy. The Constitution has erected no such single tribunal. I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society, but the people themselves.”

Nowhere in the Constitution does it say that the Supreme Court can strike down laws passed by Congress and signed by the president. Nowhere.

In 1788, Alexander Hamilton wrote a newspaper article, now known as “Federalist No. 78,” stating:

“[T]he judiciary, from the nature of its functions, will always be the least dangerous to the political rights of the Constitution;

because it will be least in a capacity to annoy or injure them. The Executive not only dispenses the honors, but holds the sword of the community. The legislature not only commands the purse, but prescribes the rules by which the duties and rights of every citizen are to be regulated. The judiciary, on the contrary, has no influence over either the sword or the purse; no direction either of the strength or of the wealth of the society; and can take no active resolution whatever. It proves incontestably, that the judiciary is beyond comparison the weakest of the three departments of power; that it can never attack with success either of the other two.”

In 1803, a hard-right-wing Federalist chief justice named John Marshall—who’d been only eleven years old when the Declaration of Independence was written and signed—ruled, in the case of *Marbury v. Madison*, that the Supreme Court could strike down laws as “unconstitutional.” Although the power of “judicial supremacy” over the other two branches had been discussed extensively in the early days of the republic and debated in the constitutional convention, it had been rejected and does not appear in the Constitution. But Marshall took it onto himself and his court, instantly transforming the Supreme Court from “the weakest of the three” to the absolute overlord tribunal. John Marshall had, in effect, turned himself into a king, along with his colleagues on the Supreme Court. No matter what Congress and the president—the other two branches of government—did, the Supreme Court could overturn them. A tiny group of unelected lawyers who, like kings of old, had jobs for life, now controlled the fate and destiny of the United States.

President Thomas Jefferson went apoplectic. He wrote that if that decision wasn’t challenged by Congress:

“[T]hen indeed is our Constitution a complete *felo-de-se* [a suicide pact]. The Constitution, on this hypothesis, is a mere thing of wax in the hands of the judiciary, which they may twist and shape into any form they may please.”

Marshall and the court backed down, at least in appearance. For as long as Jefferson was alive, Marshall never again ruled a law unconstitutional. He never again said that a few unelected judges were the kings of America, with nobody else having the power to undo their decisions.

However most politicians weren’t seeing the long view—they never, in their wildest dreams, imagined that the court would become the final hurdle over which every single law passed by Congress and signed by the

president must leap. As mentioned, the Supreme Court was very wary about using judicial review in its first century. Mostly it just did what the Constitution says it should do—be the final court of appeals in legal disputes and criminal prosecutions, and in issues between the states. The buck has to stop somewhere, and that’s the Supreme Court. But striking down laws? That’s a power only kings have, and in the modern era even most kings in constitutional monarchies don’t have that power. In the United Kingdom, for example, not only does the king (or queen) not have the power to strike down laws, neither does the United Kingdom’s own supreme court. Ditto for the royal family and the supreme court of The Netherlands.

If the Supreme Court can’t decide what is and what isn’t constitutional, then what is its purpose? What’s it really supposed to be doing? The answer to that is laid out in the Constitution in plain black-and-white. It’s the first court where the nation goes for cases involving disputes about treaties, ambassadors, controversies between two or more states, between a state and citizen of another state, between citizens of different states, and between our country and foreign states. Read Article 3, Section 2 of the Constitution—it’s all there. Not a word in there about ‘judicial supremacy’ or ‘judicial review’—the supposed powers of the court to strike down (or write) laws by deciding what is and what isn’t constitutional.

President Thomas Jefferson was pretty clear about that—as were most of the Founders—and the court didn’t start seriously deciding “constitutionality” until after all of them were dead. But back in the day, here’s what Jefferson had to say:

“The Constitution has erected no such single tribunal, knowing that to whatever hands confided, with the corruptions of time and party, its members would become despots. It has more wisely made all the departments co-equal and co-sovereign within themselves. When the legislative or executive functionaries act unconstitutionally, they are responsible to the people in their elective capacity.”

Their elective capacity? That’s a fancy way of saying that the people can toss out on their ass any member of Congress or any president who behaves in a way that’s unconstitutional. The ultimate remedy is with the people—it’s the ballot box. If we don’t like the laws being passed, then we elect new legislators and a new president. It’s pretty simple.

But without the Supreme Court, some say, we never would have had *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which ended apartheid in America, or *Roe v. Wade*, which ended restrictions on abortion in 1973. Maybe. Brown

v. Board of Education was mostly the Supreme Court reversing itself from its own 1886 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, which is what established legal apartheid in America. And if the Supreme Court hadn't decided *Roe v. Wade*—remember, the birth control pill had just been invented and brought to market thirteen years earlier and the women's movement in 1973 was in full bloom—then it would have been just a matter of a few years before Congress took care of it. The fact of the matter is that the Supreme Court has never found eternal truths in the Constitution—they just reflect current popular view, and they usually do that with about a twenty-year lag time.

Knowing that if the Supreme Court had not ruled the way they had in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, the drums of war probably wouldn't be beating, Lincoln let his inner lawyer loose and said right out loud:

“[T]he candid citizen must confess that if the policy of the Government upon vital questions affecting the whole people is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court, the instant they are made in ordinary litigation between parties in personal actions the people will have ceased to be their own rulers, having to that extent practically resigned their Government into the hands of that eminent tribunal.”

Although he'd sugar-coated the statement, there it was. Lincoln knew that the entire concept that the Supreme Court could strike down laws passed by Congress and signed by the president was not one of the powers given to it by the Constitution.

Grant's successor, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, took office under the most dubious of circumstances. Hayes had once been an advocate for enslaved black men seeking freedom. As an attorney in private practice, Hayes had argued dozens of cases on behalf of runaway slaves, often taking on clients offered to him by Levi Coffin, the president of the Underground Railroad. But Hayes sacrificed this principle in order to shore up his path to the White House. After Hayes lost the popular vote to Democrat Samuel Tilden and faced a highly disputed electoral vote, his supporters brokered a deal with Democrats: inaugurate Hayes, and the new president would end Reconstruction. As a result of this deal, federal troops stood down, Louisiana inaugurated a Confederate brigadier general as governor, and former slaves were left only with the Court's admonition to “look to the States” for protection. By the time the sun set on the Hayes administration, Southerners no longer lived under the Constitution of the United States. They lived under the white supremacist Constitution of John Archibald Campbell. And it wouldn't be long before the whole nation would live under the Constitution of Stephen Johnson Field.

On a porch in Colfax, Louisiana, eight wounded men lay shielded from the rain. Close to a decade earlier they'd been enslaved, toiling far away from the site where General Robert E. Lee would soon surrender his army. Five months earlier they'd cast ballots in a rigged election, then watched an ex-Confederate officer declare himself governor of their state. Two weeks back they'd been triumphant, emboldened by a federal judge's order to oust that false governor's loyalists and regain control of their local government from white supremacists. By morning, they would be gunned down by a racist mob.

Eight decades later, in the autumn of Jim Crow, this mob's descendants would erect a historical marker commemorating this massacre: "three white men and 150 negroes were slain" in what the marker deems the "Colfax Riot," bringing the "end of carpetbag misrule in the South."

The events this marker touts—the death of Reconstruction, the birth of Southern apartheid, and the near century of white supremacy that followed—did not simply emerge from a single day's slaughter. They were shepherded into being by one of the most powerful and most malign institutions in American history: the Supreme Court of the United States. Though a federal prosecutor achieved a nearly impossible task—he convinced a jury dominated by Southern white men to convict three members of the Colfax mob of violating the civil rights of African Americans—the Supreme Court tossed out these convictions in *United States v. Cruikshank* (1876). Less than eleven years after Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, the justices gave their blessing to the campaign of white-on-black terrorism that would define the South for generations.

Prior to the Civil War, most of the rights embraced by the Bill of Rights were not 'rights' in the way we understand that term today. Instead, the Constitution mostly prevented the federal government from taking certain actions against individuals. States, however, remained free to seize people's property without compensation, or to invade people's homes, or to establish an official state religion, just so long as the authorities did so in compliance with their own state's constitution. The Fourteenth Amendment declared, for the first time in the nation's history, that Americans enjoy a broad array of rights simply because they are Americans, and that they keep these rights even as they travel across state lines. In the amendment's words, "no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States." To ensure that states did not deny these new citizenship rights to freedmen, the Fourteenth Amendment also declared that all persons born in the United States and subject to its laws "are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside," regardless of the station of their parents. And it proclaimed that there are

some rights that citizens and foreigners both enjoy simply because they are human. No state may “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Though modern-day scholars disagree about what, exactly, the “privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States” are, the primary author of the Fourteenth Amendment had a fairly clear idea. In the words of that author, Ohio Republican Congressman John Bingham:

“The privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States, as contradistinguished from citizens of a State, are chiefly defined in the first eight amendments to the Constitution of the United States. These eight articles I have shown never were limitations upon the power of the States, until made so by the fourteenth amendment.”

Thus, Bingham believed that his amendment would, for the first time, forbid the states from violating the Bill of Rights. Yet Bingham’s amendment was also fundamentally flawed. Whatever the Ohio lawmaker might have wished it to accomplish, the amendment’s naked text offers no hint as to what the “privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States” could be. Similarly, it speaks in broad, undefined terms like “liberty” and “due process,” then leaves the reader to guess what exactly these words mean as well. By writing such open-ended language into the Constitution, Bingham and his fellow lawmakers delegated sweeping authority to the Supreme Court of the United States, as the power to interpret these and other ambiguous phrases within the Constitution ultimately rests with the justices who sit on that Court.

The few men and even fewer women entrusted with this power have not often wielded it wisely:

- The Court spent the first three decades after the Civil War paving the way for Jim Crow, and it spent the next four decades shielding employers from laws protecting their workers from exploitation.
- The justices held that Americans could be forced into concentration camps based on nothing more than their race, and that women could be sterilized at the state’s command.
- They held that children could be made to work in a cotton mill for as little as ten cents a day.

- They relegated countless adults to dank sweatshops and deadly factories, with neither a union nor a minimum wage to protect them.
- They gave billionaires a far-reaching right to corrupt American democracy, and neutered much of America's most important voting rights law.

And, throughout all of this history, the justices frequently ignored rights that are explicitly protected by the text of the Constitution. During World War I, for example, Congress enacted a sweeping censorship law that banned many forms of “disloyal” speech and even prohibited Americans from displaying the German flag. Yet the Supreme Court showed little sympathy for the view that the First Amendment’s “freedom of speech” protects individuals who speak out against their government during wartime. The Court held in a unanimous opinion:

“When a nation is at war, many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured so long as men fight, and that no Court could regard them as protected by any constitutional right.”

The justices, in other words, have routinely committed two complementary sins against the Constitution. They’ve embraced extra-constitutional limits on the government’s ability to protect the most vulnerable Americans, while simultaneously refusing to enforce rights that are explicitly enshrined in the Constitution’s text. And they paved a trail of misery as a result. Few institutions have inflicted greater suffering on more Americans than the Supreme Court of the United States.

“A just court will, at times, order an infamous man or woman to be freed from prison. It will shield hated minorities from their community’s rage. And it will bring many of the nation’s wealthiest and most powerful interests to heel before the law.”

In 1899, Field joined the Supreme Court’s nearly unanimous decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the segregated railcar decision that held that:

“The enforced separation of the races neither abridges the privileges or immunities of the colored man, deprives him of his property without due process of law, nor denies him the equal protection of the laws.”

An 1888 act prohibiting Chinese laborers who departed the United States from returning, even if they'd previously been issued a certificate by the federal government granting them permission to do so was upheld by the Supreme Court in a unanimous decision written by Justice Field.

We typically think of the Thirteenth as only abolishing slavery. Section 1 of the Thirteenth Amendment does so, and Section 2 empowers Congress to enforce Section 1. In 1866, Congress enforced the abolition of slavery by passing a Civil Rights Act, prohibiting actions that it deemed perpetuated the characteristics of slavery. Actions that made African Americans second-class citizens, such as racial discrimination in housing, were included in the ban. In 1883, though, the Supreme Court rejected this congressional interpretation of its powers to enforce the Thirteenth Amendment. The Court agreed that Section 2 authorized Congress to "to pass all laws necessary and proper for abolishing all badges and incidents of slavery in the United States," but it did not agree that exclusions from housing markets could be a "badge or incident" of slavery. In consequence, these Civil Rights Act protections were ignored for the next century.

There were many specific government actions that prevented African Americans and whites from living among one another, and I categorize them as 'unconstitutional.' In doing so, I reject the widespread view that an action is not unconstitutional until the Supreme Court says so—they don't have that right only the people do. Few Americans think that racial segregation in schools was constitutional before 1954, when the Supreme Court prohibited it. Rather, segregation was always unconstitutional.

Yet even if we came to a nationally shared recognition that government policy has created an unconstitutional, *de jure*, system of residential segregation, it does not follow that litigation can remedy this situation. Although most African Americans have suffered under this *de jure* system, they cannot identify, with the specificity a court case requires, the particular point at which they were victimized. For example, many African American World War II veterans did not apply for government-guaranteed mortgages for suburban purchases because they knew that the Veterans Administration would reject them on account of their race, so applications were pointless. Those veterans then did not gain wealth from home equity appreciation as did white veterans, and their descendants could then not inherit that wealth as did white veterans' descendants. With less inherited wealth, African Americans today are generally less able than their white peers to afford to attend good colleges.

If one of those African American descendants now learned that the reason his or her grandparents were forced to rent apartments in overcrowded urban areas was that the federal government unconstitutionally and unlawfully

prohibited banks from lending to African Americans, the grandchild would not have the standing to file a lawsuit; nor would he or she be able to name a particular party from whom damages could be recovered. There is generally no judicial remedy for a policy that the Supreme Court wrongheadedly approved.

But this does not mean that there is no constitutionally required remedy for such violations. It is up to the people, through our elected representatives, to enforce our Constitution by implementing the remedy. By failing to recognize that we now live with the severe, enduring effects of *de jure* segregation, we avoid confronting our constitutional obligation to reverse it. If I am right that we continue to have *de jure* segregation, then desegregation is not just a desirable policy; it is a constitutional as well as a moral obligation that we are required to fulfill. ‘Let bygones be bygones’ is not a legitimate approach if we wish to call ourselves a constitutional democracy.

More than five-hundred injunctions were issued against workers or labor unions just in the final two decades of the nineteenth century. By the 1920s, after watching an entire generation of judges’ efforts to thwart the labor movement, American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers warned:

“Those who seek to retain the injunction evil and to expand it are doing the greatest disservice to our system of jurisprudence, and in fact to our system of democratic government.”

To judges who shared Justice Brewer’s mindset, unions were no less odious than the governments that sought to control market forces—in fact they were in many ways viewed as more dangerous. Unions were not, in these judges’ minds, coalitions of labor market participants joining together to improve their position at the bargaining table; they were competitors to the judiciary itself. The judicial decisions of this era routinely used words such as ‘tyranny’ and ‘dictatorship’ to describe unions engaged in strikes or boycotts. Unions would declare employers to have sinned against the rights of workers, then impose sanctions upon those employers in much the same way that courts imposed consequences on lawbreakers. In this sense, Brewer and many of his fellow jurists perceived unions as creating their own alternative system of law—a law of labor, by labor, and for labor—that threatened to tear down the primacy of the law applicable in their courts. This is why Justice Brewer’s opinion in the *Debs* case proclaims that the American Railway Union exercised “powers belonging only to government” when it tried to separate the Pullman Company from the channels of interstate commerce. The courts must have the authority to reclaim their own dominance.

Yet, in endorsing the steps taken to put down the strike, the Court asserted a simply breathtaking vision of its own power. The lower court that issued the injunction against the union relied largely on the Sherman Antitrust Act to justify its decision. Justice Brewer's opinion, by contrast, relied on the law of "nuisance," a judge-made doctrine typically associated with property rights. Essentially, Brewer's opinion established that federal courts could issue sweeping injunctions with nationwide implications upon their own authority, regardless of whether elected officials had actually given them that power.

No fair judge could have laid the full blame for the strike's disruptiveness at the union's feet. Pullman's workers chose to strike, but the Pullman Company made the decision to slash wages and increase dividends. The union chose to boycott, but it was the Managers who decided to intentionally disrupt their own train lines in order to turn the public against the union. The first stone was cast, not by a striking worker, but by a nameless thug—and that stone was met by bayonets ordered onto the scene by the President of the United States himself. The workers and their union resorted to disruptive tactics only because they had nothing else to fall back on. And with each escalation, management met them with overwhelming, even deadly, force. When the Pullman Strike came to an end, Eugene Debs went to jail. The local union leaders were blacklisted. And Pullman's remaining workers returned at the same meager wages that triggered the strike. Meanwhile, the railroad barons went back to their mansions, where they remained among the wealthiest and most powerful men in the nation. And the Supreme Court said this was right. Justice Brewer's opinion in Debs was unanimous.

In the wake of the Pullman Strike, Congress enacted a law prohibiting railroads from firing workers solely because they belonged to a labor union. Because this law applied solely to railroads, which are, by their very nature, engaged in transportation and not manufacturing, it should have been well within Congress's authority even under the line drawn in the Sugar Trust Case. Yet the Court struck down this law in 1908, declaring that "labor organizations have nothing to do with interstate commerce" even if every single member of the union is engaged in interstate commercial activity.

Similarly, after Congress enacted a law protecting collective bargaining and similar rights for coal miners, the justices struck down this law, in 1936, on the grounds that mining coal has nothing to do with selling coal. Eleven years earlier, however, when a mining executive's attempt to de-unionize one of his mines broke out into an armed conflict between labor and management, the Supreme Court decided that it was perfectly acceptable for the federal government to regulate mining workers—at least when the regulation benefited management.

In the early years of the twentieth century, wedge-shaped buildings dotted the “hard coal counties” of Pennsylvania, where heavy lumps of anthracite coal were crushed into marketable pieces. There, at the top of each wedge, iron rollers broke the coal and elaborate screens sorted it by size. Meanwhile, underneath this operation, machines of a different kind culled rock and slate from an endless stream of crushed coal pouring down the inside of the wedge. There, engulfed by clouds of black dust, dozens of children filled each of these coal “breakers,” where they earned as little as forty cents a day for ten hours of labor. Chutes flowing with black anthracite formed the bowels of these breakers, while boys as young as eight years old sat on planks watching the stream of minerals flow by their feet. Their job was to spot stray pieces of slate and other detritus that could impurify coal shipments and decrease their value. Men with sticks patrolled the boys, smacking the heads or shoulders of any boy who appeared to be slacking.

Anthracite is difficult to distinguish from slate when it is constantly flowing by your feet in a rapidly moving stream—and when you are working in a room blackened with coal dust—so the boys bent low over the chutes to tell valuable coal from worthless slate. After just a few years of such labor, their backs began to hunch, their shoulders grew round, and their chests grew narrow. As one visitor to the breakers observed, “most of them become more or less deformed and bent-backed like old men.” When it was cold, the breakers were barely heated, so the boys donned scarves and hats and, if they could afford them, overcoats. Gloves, however, were forbidden, because the boys’ jobs depended so much upon their sense of touch. At the end of the workday, even if they were bathed and costumed in the garb of a mine owner’s son, a breaker boy could be immediately identified by his bleeding fingers and fingernails worn down to the quick by repeatedly plunging into the streams of hard coal. Many of these boys lost fingers. Some of them had entire limbs torn off by the machinery that drives the coal forward. Others slipped and fell down the refuse chutes—where, if they survived the fall, they were smothered to death by the piles of slate tossed in behind them.

Unlike the breakers, which operated only during the day, the silk mills ran day and night, with the girls divided into two twelve-hour shifts. The mills were kept moist and hot, and the girls emerged from this environment into the chilly Pennsylvania air at the end of their winter shifts. Tuberculosis and bronchial diseases ran rampant through the young workforce, as did anemia. And the work itself was no less physically demanding than the conditions imposed upon the breaker boys. As one girl described life in the mills:

“When I first went to work at night, the long standing hurt

me very much. My feet burned so that I cried. My knees hurt me worse than my feet, and my back pained all the time. Mother cried when I told her how I suffered, and that made me feel so badly that I did not tell her any more. It does not hurt so much now, but I feel tired all the time. I do not feel near as tired, though, as I did when I worked all night. My eyes hurt me, too, from watching the threads at night. The doctor said they would be ruined if I did not stop the night work. After watching the threads for a long time, I could see threads everywhere. When I looked at other things, there were threads running across them. Sometimes I felt as though the threads were cutting my eyes.”

In the unregulated stamping works of George Pullman’s Chicago, boys were handed a short iron poker and tasked with keeping an endless series of cans in line as they traveled through a vat of molten metal solder. Though the boys wrapped their hands in cloth to protect them from the melted metal, this shielded them from little more than the most minor burns. The briefest splash would often cost a young boy his hand.

Nicotine poisoning ran rampant through the children employed by Chicago’s nearby cigar factories, and the gilding that many child workers applied to picture frames stiffened their fingers and left them susceptible to throat disease. In the carpet factories of New York and Pennsylvania, child laborers soaked themselves in toxic dyes. One boy opened his shirt to a reporter to reveal a chest and stomach dyed a deep crimson. Others walked home night after night in clothes dripping with the red, blue, or green dye they’d worked with during their shift, leaving a brightly colored trail behind them in the snow. Children employed as varnishers in furniture factories inhaled poison fumes that led to a variety of intestinal maladies. Children in wallpaper factories slowly poisoned themselves with toxic paints. Naphtha fumes produced in the manufacture of rubber goods led to paralysis and decay. Children in leather works handled nauseating chemicals. Boys and girls working in match factories became sick with phosphorous necrosis—known as “phossy jaw”—a kind of gangrene of the lower jaw. Lead poisoning abounded in boys employed by foundries and stereotype printing operations.

And even in workplaces where the air was clean and the dangers were readily apparent, children were endangered by the sheer exhaustion their long shifts worked upon their growing bodies. In a 1909 court case, a thirteen-year-old boy employed by an Indiana steel mill literally passed out with his leg crossing the rail of a track used to transport iron to his employer’s furnaces. The boy had worked more than a week’s worth of

fourteen-hour night shifts in a row, and he remained unconscious with his leg across the track until it was crushed by a passing iron cart.

Child labor was as much a Northern problem as it was a Southern problem, but in the South, cotton mill managers spoke openly of their hope that someday nearly all men would be unemployed—replaced by relatively cheap women workers and even cheaper children. A young boy would enter the mill at age six, earning as little as ten cents a day for his labor, grow to become a father himself, and eventually be laid off and replaced by his own six-year-old son.

Though conditions inside the Southern mills were by no means harsher than those facing many child laborers in the North—indeed, they were often relatively safe compared to the poisonous, fire-filled environments of many Northern factories—conditions outside the mills gave the mill owners far greater ability to line their pockets at children's expense. Unlike the North, where decades of industrialization and railroad construction gave parents at least some ability to seek work in communities where they would not toil alongside their young children, much of the Southern economy was little more than poor farmers barely earning enough to feed and clothe their families. A handbill circulated by a North Carolina cotton mill relied on the misery of nearby farmers' lives to recruit entire families:

“While you are on the farm toiling in rain and snow, feeding away what you have made during the summer and making wood to keep fires to keep your family from freezing, you could at the same time be in a cotton mill and in a good comfortable room, making more than you can make in the summer time on the farm. At the mills, children over 12 years old, after they learn their job, can make more than men can make on farms.”

Northern capital had almost as much of a stake in the South's mills as did Southern investors. One investigation of twenty-four Alabama mills found that eleven of them were owned by Northerners—and the Northern-owned mills employed twice as many children under twelve as those owned by Southern capital. Massachusetts, which barred child labor outright before the age of fourteen, had some of the strictest child labor laws in the nation. But wealthy Bostonians could evade these laws simply by shipping their capital down South.

Senator Augustus Bacon, a Confederate army veteran representing the state of Georgia, warned that if Congress had the “arbitrary power” to address child labor, its ability to control American lives would be “practically unlimited.” This claim—that if Congress has the power to enact a particular

piece of legislation, then there would be no practical limit on its authority to enact other laws—would prove to be a common refrain repeated over and over again by opponents of progressive reform in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Judges, and the lawyers who someday become judges, are creatures of precedents and common law rules that developed through a slow, deliberative process, often over the course of hundreds of years. This breeds a kind of conservatism that is less rooted in anti-government ideology than it is in traditionalism.

“Lawyers are secretly opposed to the instincts of democracy; their superstitious respect for what is old, to its love of novelty; their narrow views, to its grandiose plans; their taste for formality, to its scorn for rules; their habit of proceeding slowly, to its impetuosity. If you ask me where American aristocracy is found, my reply would be that it would not be among the wealthy who have no common link uniting them. American aristocracy is found at the bar and on the bench.”

Admittedly, the legal profession’s aristocratic character began to fade after state lawmakers started relaxing the requirements necessary to be admitted to the bar during the early 1800s. By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, these relaxed requirements led to a kind of class struggle between old-line aristocratic lawyers and the less-refined crop of men, many of them immigrants, who began earning a living as attorneys.

The American Bar Association (ABA) was founded in 1878 largely as an effort by the “best men” of the bar to reassert control over their profession, in part by raising the standards of legal education and other requirements necessary to become an attorney. Indeed, the ABA was largely the brainchild of one of the most pedigreed members of the legal profession—Simeon Baldwin, a Yale Law School professor and son of a former United States senator. Baldwin would go on to serve as chief justice and then governor of Connecticut. Laissez-faire attitudes were hardly uncommon among the men who heeded Baldwin’s call to organize America’s elite attorneys under a single bar association. Tiedeman and Brewer were both early members of the ABA, as were several very conservative lawyers who would later serve on the Supreme Court. But the prevailing attitude among these legal elites was less one of generalized skepticism about government and more a fear of rapid change. The first president of the ABA, compared the development of the law to the slow, Darwinian process of natural selection.

To legal elites who believed that the proper development of the law takes centuries, legislatures—with their power to cast aside longstanding principles

of the common law and replace it with an entirely novel legal regime—were downright terrifying. One early ABA president proclaimed that the United States could “endure all its other dangers with less apprehension than the action of its federal and state legislation inspires.” Another ABA president fretted that “when a state legislature meets, every great corporation within its reach prepares for self-defense, knowing by bitter experience how hospitably attacks upon its property are received in committees and on the floor.” ABA speakers labeled elected lawmakers as reckless politicians who truckled for the unthinking vote; social agitators who sought office for self advantage, not for the public weal; and professional demagogues who filled the land with ill-considered and impractical theories and engaged in gross, persistent, flagrant, and sometimes corrupt dereliction. The judiciary offered these legal elites the gradual, evolutionary process they found so comforting, whereas democracy represented the greatest single threat to this gradualism. In their minds, longstanding principles of the common law had served Americans and their English forefathers well for generations, so why should upstart lawmakers be allowed to simply cast these principles aside?

If there was any doubt left that the most well-to-do Americans had a friend in the Fuller Court, that doubt was eliminated by Fuller’s decision in *Pollock v. Farmers’ Loan & Trust*, which was handed down in the few short months between Debs and the Sugar Trust decision.

The income tax that Cleveland begrudgingly accepted as the price of tariff reform was quite modest. The tax exempted the first \$4,000 in income, more than \$100,000 in modern dollars, and only required taxpayers to contribute two percent of their income beyond that point. In total, only the wealthiest one-tenth of one percent of all Americans would pay this tax, contributing less than four percent of the nation’s revenues. Yet Fuller’s Court viewed even this modest tax as unconstitutional, and they relied on one of the Constitution’s most confusing distinctions in order to strike it down.

As originally drafted, the Constitution forbade any “direct” tax from being laid by Congress “unless in proportion to the census.” So if the state of New York housed seven percent of the nation’s population, its citizens must pay exactly seven percent of any direct taxes enacted by federal law. Thus, if an income tax qualified as a “direct” tax, such a tax would be practically impossible to administer in the United States, as it would require the federal government to calculate and recalculate how much money it could raise from each state and enact a different tax system in each state to achieve that goal.

Moreover, as Fuller’s opinion in *Pollock* makes perfectly clear, even the nation’s founders were unsure what constituted a “direct” tax as opposed

to some other form of taxation. Fuller devotes nearly fourteen pages of his opinion to conflicting quotes from prominent early Americans struggling to define the term ‘direct tax.’ Future Chief Justice Marshall defined a direct tax as a tax on “lands, slaves, stock of all kinds, and a few other articles of domestic property,” while Alexander Hamilton defined it more broadly to include “capitation or poll taxes, taxes on lands and buildings, general assessments, whether on the whole property of individuals, or on their whole real or personal estate.” Justice Samuel Chase, by contrast, doubted that taxes on “personal property” qualified as direct taxes. And Justice James Iredell seemed to agree that only a “land or poll tax” can be considered direct taxation. Theodore Sedgwick, a delegate to the Philadelphia Convention and future Speaker of the House, offered the unique view that taxes on “objects of luxury” could never be direct taxes—a view that was soundly mocked by James Madison.

In other words, the only thing that was clear from Fuller’s lengthy catalog of quotes from the framers and their contemporaries was that the Founding Fathers themselves had no clear idea what distinguishes a ‘direct’ tax from an ‘indirect’ one. And yet Fuller concludes his list of quotations with one of the least self-aware passages ever to appear in a Supreme Court opinion:

“From the foregoing it is apparent:

1. That the distinction between direct and indirect taxation was well understood by the framers of the Constitution and those who adopted it.
2. That under the state systems of taxation all taxes on real estate or personal property or the rents or income thereof were regarded as direct taxes.”

The upshot of this opinion was that income from capital—be it land, stock, or commodities—was immune to taxation, but income from wages was not. John D. Rockefeller could sit in his office watching money pour in from his investments, the whole time comfortable in the knowledge that this income could never be taxed. His lowest-paid worker enjoyed no such security. Indeed, in a concurring opinion, an elderly Justice Field was quite direct about the fact that he would declare this income tax unconstitutional specifically to protect the wealthy.

“The present assault upon capital is but the beginning. It will be but the stepping-stone to others, larger and more sweeping, till our political contests will become a war of the poor against the rich; a war constantly growing in intensity and bitterness.”

Pollock was a massive departure from precedent.

Six years after New York placed a limit on bakers' hours, the state fined a bakery owner named Joseph Lochner fifty dollars for overworking an employee. Four years later, Lochner's case reached the Supreme Court. Yet, despite the fact that it took a decade for the maximum-hours law to reach the justices, the fact that the law was doomed became obvious the moment Chief Justice Fuller announced that Justice Rufus Peckham would deliver the Court's opinion in *Lochner v. New York*.

Fuller and Peckham were, in many ways, ideological twins. Just as Fuller opposed the Emancipation Proclamation and tried to prohibit federal incursions upon slavery as an Illinois state lawmaker, the young Rufus Peckham was a Democrat who opposed secession but who also had no love for black slaves. "I am proud I believe in no negro equality," Peckham wrote his brother the same month Abraham Lincoln was elected president. Two years later he railed against "the radical abolitionists" who were "making it a war for the freedom of the slaves, in spite of the Constitution and if necessary in spite of the Union."

Peckham remained similarly dismissive of African Americans after becoming a judge. As a justice, Peckham voted to uphold segregation in *Plessy*. He sided with Alabama's suspicious decision to prevent over five-thousand black citizens from registering to vote. And he backed a Georgia county's plan to tax black families to pay for white schools without providing similar school facilities to black children—although, in keeping with the frequent disregard of turn-of-the-century justices for civil rights, the Court's decision in *Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education* was unanimous.

His most revealing race case, however, may be a silent dissent Peckham offered on behalf of a skating rink owner claiming that a law prohibiting race discrimination in "places of amusement" violated the owner's supposed right to do what he wanted with his property. Though Peckham did not explain why he believed the rink owner should have the right to deny admission to black patrons, his dissenting vote matched a long record of skepticism regarding the power of elected officials to rein in business. Peckham's laissez-faire outlook animated even the most routine cases he heard as a state court judge. When a fourteen-year-old girl employed by a laundry crushed her hand between the two heavy rollers of a machine used to press collars, Peckham scoffed at the idea that her employer had any obligation to prevent such accidents or to compensate the victims of such injuries. By merely "accepting this work and entering upon the employment about this machine," the young girl assumed the risk that she might be injured by it. According to Peckham, workers like this permanently disabled girl "cannot call upon the defendant to make alterations to secure greater safety."

Justice Peckham, like Chief Justice Fuller, owed his high position to his friendship with the conservative President Grover Cleveland. Early in Cleveland's first term in the White House, the new president exerted his considerable influence in his home state of New York to help place Peckham on the state's highest court. Nearly a decade later, Cleveland favored his friend with an appointment to the nation's highest Court.

Yet, for all that the two justices shared in common, Peckham was, if anything, even more conservative than the chief justice. Seven years before *Lochner* reached the Supreme Court, a mine owner brought a similar lawsuit challenging a Utah maximum-hours law governing miners. Even Fuller agreed that this law was constitutional, joining six of his colleagues in deferring to the state legislature's determination that the hazards of mine work required a shorter work day. Peckham and the archconservative Justice Brewer found themselves in a lonely dissent.

And Peckham combined his staunch conservatism with an overarching distrust of democracy. When the city of Buffalo passed an ordinance replacing several gas street lamps with electric lighting, Peckham responded with a dissenting opinion, calling this act a "plain, bald, useless waste of the property or funds of the public" and insisting that his court should keep the gas lighting in place. To Peckham, even a question as routine as whether a particular avenue should be lit by gas flames or lightbulbs cannot be trusted to elected officials, and it was the sacred duty of judges to veto those officials' decisions if the judges deemed them unwise. No other judge joined Peckham's dissent in the electric lights case.

In other words, Peckham was the perfect justice to take up the crusade against "the absolutism of a democratic majority" and to write Justice Field's conservative vision into the Constitution. Six years after Field's death and just eight years after his retirement from the bench, *Lochner v. New York* would be more than just a victory for Joseph *Lochner*, it would be the culmination of Field's life's work.

Peckham's *Lochner* opinion in many ways maps the state court opinions invalidating attempts to better the lot of workers. Just as the Wisconsin justices read a right to be bound by some of the most oppressive labor contracts into their state constitution's invocation of the word 'liberty,' Peckham found a similar freedom from laws improving workplace conditions within the Fourteenth Amendment's vague language. "The general right to make a contract in relation to his business is part of the liberty of the individual protected by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Federal Constitution," Peckham wrote—despite the fact that this so-called right is never mentioned in this amendment—so judges must treat any effort to protect workers from exploitation with great skepticism.

Although the *Lochner* opinion did place some limits on this extra-constitutional right to contract, Peckham showed nothing but scorn for the idea that protecting workers is, in and of itself, a legitimate task for lawmakers. In Peckham's mind, "the question whether this act is valid as a labor law, pure and simple, may be dismissed in a few words. There is no reasonable ground for interfering with the liberty of person or the right of free contract" by preventing bakeries from overworking their bakers. Peckham also had no sympathy for the fact that a poor tenement dweller with no means to buy his own bread is hardly in a position to negotiate for decent wages or reasonable hours. "There is no contention," the *Lochner* opinion asserts, that bakers are unable to "care for themselves without the protecting arm of the State."

In reality, of course, New York's bakers worked fourteen-hour shifts in roach-infested basements, slept on their work tables, and then woke up the next day to do it again before the "protecting arm of the State" intervened.

Though *Lochner* deemed mere sympathy for workers to be an illegitimate impulse on the part of lawmakers, Peckham did leave the door open to some forms of labor regulation. Laws protecting the "safety, health, morals, and general welfare of the public" were still permitted under *Lochner*. So a state could still, in theory, protect workers from injury or disease.

Yet even this limited universe of health and safety laws could be vetoed by the courts. As Justice John Marshall Harlan explained in a dissenting opinion, many turn-of-the-century health researchers believed that bakeries were unusually unhealthy work environments, and that bakers' health risks were exacerbated by long hours.

"The constant inhaling of flour dust causes inflammation of the lungs and of the bronchial tubes. The eyes also suffer through this dust, which is responsible for the many cases of running eyes among the bakers. The long hours of toil to which all bakers are subjected produce rheumatism, cramps, and swollen legs. The intense heat in the workshops induces the workers to resort to cooling drinks, which together with their habit of exposing the greater part of their bodies to the change in the atmosphere, is another source of a number of diseases of various organs. Nearly all bakers are pale-faced and of more delicate health than the workers of other crafts, which is chiefly due to their hard work and their irregular and unnatural mode of living, whereby the power of resistance against disease is greatly diminished. The average age of a baker is below that of other workmen; they seldom live over their fiftieth year, most of them dying between

the ages of forty and fifty. During periods of epidemic diseases the bakers are generally the first to succumb to the disease, and the number swept away during such periods far exceeds the number of other crafts in comparison to the men employed in the respective industries. When, in 1720, the plague visited the city of Marseille, France, every baker in the city succumbed to the epidemic, which caused considerable excitement in the neighboring cities and resulted in measures for the sanitary protection of the bakers.”

Peckham, however, dismissed these risks.

“It might be safely affirmed that almost all occupations more or less affect the health, but there must be more than the mere fact of the possible existence of some small amount of unhealthiness to warrant legislative interference with liberty.”

Having dismissed the evidence that too many hours working in a bakery was unhealthy, Peckham then wrote the fear of democracy into the Constitution itself:

“It is unfortunately true that labor, even in any department, may possibly carry with it the seeds of unhealthiness. But are we all, on that account, at the mercy of legislative majorities?”

The upshot of this debate was that workplace health and safety laws were allowed, but only at the sufferance of unelected judges. Rufus Wheeler Peckham had no popular mandate to legitimize his exercise of power. He also had neither training as a physician nor any background in the sciences. Yet he took it upon himself to decide which workplaces were healthful and which ones dangerous enough to justify state intervention. And his opinion in *Lochner* was an invitation for every other judge in the country to do the same.

It is worth noting that not every judge, or even every justice who joined the majority opinion in *Lochner*, was as skeptical of government action as Justice Peckham. Though judges like Peckham weren't exactly rare during the decades surrounding the *Lochner* decision, a more subtle philosophy drove many of Peckham's contemporaries as well.

In the end, it took an alliance of two very different kinds of conservatives to produce opinions like *Lochner*: those who viewed democracy as a threat to liberty and those who believed, that society must show “infinite caution” before tearing down longstanding institutions. The lawyers and judges of

this era did not need to be disciples of Christopher Tiedeman—although many of them were—in order to stand athwart democracy and yell, “stop!” They just had to be protective of a legal regime that was designed for an era when it took four months to travel from New York to California.

The fact that not every justice who agreed with *Lochner*’s result shared an unforgiving ideology sometimes meant that plaintiffs invoking the so-called “liberty of contract” doctrine did not prevail. Indeed, *Lochner*’s most strident modern-day apologist defends the opinion on the grounds that the Supreme Court upheld most of the laws challenged under this doctrine. Yet, while this claim may be true, it is too dismissive of the sweeping impact of many decisions that did strike down laws protecting workers—or the completely arbitrary reasoning that the justices would often apply when deciding whether a law violates *Lochner*’s freedom to contract.

Carrie Buck was an imbecile, and the mother and the daughter of an imbecile to boot. In the words of the superintendent of the state mental institution where Buck was sent to live as a young woman, her family belonged “to the shiftless, ignorant, and worthless class of antisocial whites of the South.” And, perhaps worst of all, Buck was promiscuous—a trait that was alone sufficient reason to have her institutionalized. Indeed, the evidence of Buck’s promiscuity was hard to deny as it literally grew inside her. At the age of seventeen, Carrie Buck was pregnant, and she needed to be sent away. This is the picture of the young woman that would reach the justices sitting 150 miles away from her new institutional home near Lynchburg, Virginia. It also bore no resemblance to reality. Indeed, Buck’s case would come to symbolize the dangers of judicial inaction no less than *Lochner* stood for judicial overreach.

Taken together, the two cases reveal just how drastically judges empowered to decide the scope of constitutional rights can miss their mark. The justices invented a right to work long hours for little pay virtually out of thin air, yet they could not move themselves to stop one of the most intrusive invasions of a woman’s liberty in all of American history. Far from falling behind her peers intellectually, Buck performed quite well in school. Rather than claiming Buck could be intellectually disabled, a teacher wrote a note indicating Buck was a strong student—“very good-deportment and lessons”—her final year in school. Though Buck was forced to drop out during the sixth grade, this had little to do with her so-called “feeble-mindedness” and far more to do with her living conditions.

Carrie Buck’s father died shortly after her birth in 1906, and she was removed from her mother Emma’s care and placed in a foster home at the age of three. Her foster family, however, viewed her as little more than an indentured servant. The younger Buck’s foster parents, a couple named J.T.

and Alice Dobbs, pulled her out of school so she would have more time to focus on the household chores they assigned to her—and so that Buck could be loaned out to the neighbors. And Buck was not promiscuous. She was raped. By her foster mother’s nephew. Carrie Buck spent her entire young life being used for others’ purposes. She was used by the Dobbsses as an unpaid servant. She was used by Alice Dobbs’s nephew for sex. And she would soon be used to legitimize a nationwide effort to create an American master race.

Heredity, according to a Virginia law enacted just two months after Buck was institutionalized, “plays an important part in the transmission of insanity, idiocy, imbecility, epilepsy, and crime.” Therefore, the solution to imbeciles or criminals was to remove them from the gene pool entirely. Less than a year after arriving at the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded in 1924, Carrie Buck would be given a show trial intended to prove that she was genetically unsuited for breeding. Her attorney would be one of the state’s leading supporters of eugenics—selected for his willingness to collude with the Colony’s officials and to work against his client. One of the star witnesses at this trial was a nurse who would diagnose Carrie’s eight-month-old daughter as a “not quite normal baby” based upon little more than “a look about” baby Vivian Buck. Another key witness was a mental hospital director who moonlighted as a poet composing rhyming couplets about eugenics:

Oh why do we allow these people
To breed back to the monkey’s nest
To increase our country’s burdens
When we should only breed the best?

His testimony would liken Carrie Buck to a lame mare or a stunted pig—the farmer “breeding his hogs, horses, cows, or sheep selects a thoroughbred.” So why is it that “any sort of seed seems good enough” when human beings breed? In just five hours of testimony, lawyers, doctors, social workers, and eugenicists erased any trace of a perfectly intelligent young woman born into unfortunate circumstances, and recast her as the second of three generations of feeble-minded offspring. Yet, although the result of Carrie Buck’s trial was all but predetermined, her fate was sealed by a much higher Court. In its nearly unanimous decision in *Buck v. Bell*, the Supreme Court proclaimed that “three generations of imbeciles are enough.” Five months later, a surgeon cut Carrie open and removed her fallopian tubes.

In the end, Sutherland’s decisions, and the decisions of the other justices willing to declare forced sterilization sacred and the minimum wage profane,

reveals the tragic flaw at the core of the Fourteenth Amendment. By describing the scope of American's individual rights in such imprecise terms—What are the “privileges or immunities of citizens”? What is the “liberty” that cannot be denied “without due process of law”?—the drafters of this amendment delegated the power to define these rights to the nine justices on the Supreme Court. And those nine men were so inapt to the task that they placed the right to be exploited by a rapacious employer on a higher plane than a woman's right to do what she wants with her own body. The same justices who embraced *Lochner's* fabricated freedom to contract also placed this imaginary right on a higher plane than many rights that were explicitly laid out in the Constitution itself. The *Lochner* Era was not simply an age when the justices seized the power to censor economic regulation, for example; it was also one of the high points of an entirely different form of censorship. Though the Constitution's First Amendment explicitly protects every American's right to speak freely, the justices who were so active in striking down progressive labor laws could not actually be bothered to enforce the right to speak out against the government.

Congress voted by a wide margin to give Wilson his declaration of war, and then they gave him far more. By the time the Allied Powers met at Versailles to sketch out the terms of Germany's surrender, Congress had made it a crime to “willfully utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” about America's Constitution, its military, its flag, or its form of government. Or to argue against the draft. Or to publicly claim that Germany was on the right side of the First World War. Indeed, the mere act of displaying a German flag could be punished by up to twenty years in prison. “May God have mercy” on dissenters, Attorney General Thomas Gregory proclaimed, “for they need expect none from an outraged people and an avenging government.” At Gregory's urging, armies of volunteers arose not just to fight the enemy abroad, but to spy on potential dissidents at home. The American Protective League employed literally hundreds of thousands of members to report rumors of disloyal neighbors directly to the Justice Department. Other, smaller groups bore names such as the “Knights of Liberty,” the “Sedition Slammers,” and the “Boy Spies of America.” Gregory bragged that these domestic spies enabled the government to “to keep scores of thousands of persons under observation.”

The nation's judges were no more merciful than Gregory and his prosecutors. The editor of a Jewish socialist newspaper received ten years in prison for uttering these twelve words:

“I am for the people and the government is for the profiteers.”

Thirty German Americans were convicted for asking South Dakota's governor to reform Selective Service procedures and threatening to vote for his opponent if he refused to do so. A filmmaker, who produced a movie about the Revolutionary War that depicted British soldiers committing atrocities, received a ten-year sentence. "History is history, and fact is fact," the trial judge wrote about the film, but "this is no time" for films that may sow seeds of "animosity or want of confidence between us and our allies."

"To be consistent with its revolutionary character and true to its international principles the party is morally bound to stand squarely against every war save and alone the war against war, the war of the world's enslaved and exploited workers against the world's enslaving and exploiting masters.

I realize that, in speaking with you this afternoon, there are certain limitations placed upon the right of free speech. I must be exceedingly careful, prudent, as to what I say, and even more careful and prudent as to how I say it."

Nevertheless, Debs also acknowledged that he had freely chosen to go to jail before he would silently comply with the Wilson administration's censors:

"I would rather a thousand times be a free soul in jail than to be a sycophant and coward in the streets."

This was the law that the Supreme Court had made by the onset of the Great Depression. Dissent was dangerous. Sweatshops enjoyed the blessing of the courts. Children labored from dusk until dawn in the deadliest factories. And women could be mutilated according to the whims of the state.

As a 1930 report by a New York commission explained, "a very marked lessening of earning power begins around age 50," in large part because workers' worn-out muscles could no longer handle the kind of heavy labor that once supplied their livelihood. In some industries, men started to fall apart even younger.

"In the building trades, one-half of the workers have suffered partial or total impairment of earning power at age 54. Among glass blowers, this is true at age 51; among steel workers age 46, and among railway workers at age 39. The heavy industrial work that offered many fathers their only way to make a living simply burns men up."

Some of the elderly shut out by their own children wound up homeless, but a common fate was life in the poorhouse. Though the poorhouse faded from American memories many decades ago, every state but New Mexico had such homes at the dawn of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration providing housing of last resort to individuals on the furthest margins of society. Most of the inmates in these houses—and poorhouse residents were typically labeled as “inmates”—were elderly. A 1910 report in Massachusetts, for example, found that 92 percent of poorhouse inmates took up residence after age 60. Though conditions varied, poorhouses were often wretched, dirty environments with little capacity for long-term care and few, if any, staff trained to provide for the infirm.

“With a few notable exceptions, our present public almshouse care of the aged is inadequate and altogether unsuited to meet the varying needs of the poor.”

Faced with such a future, some workers celebrated their retirement with suicide rather than spend the rest of their lives in a poorhouse. A sixty-year-old man in Cleveland threw himself from a bridge onto the street 125 feet below because he feared his own old age.

FDR did not come to Washington with a comprehensive plan. What he did promise the voters who placed him in office, however, was an entirely new approach to policymaking:

“The country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something. The millions who are in want will not stand by silently forever while the things to satisfy their needs are within easy reach.”

Roosevelt’s plan to turn the government into a laboratory was wildly at odds with his predecessor Herbert Hoover’s vision, who warned in one of his final campaign speeches that his opponent would “destroy the very foundations of our American system” by extending “government into our economic and social life.” But, more important, Roosevelt’s ideas were a direct assault on the vision that dominated the Supreme Court. When the justices created a constitutional right to fire unionized workers, or when they declared the minimum wage to be off limits, or when they held the United States of America powerless to purge the nation of child labor, they did far more than simply set the nation’s labor policy. They declared that many of the most important and controversial questions left to lawmakers were instead answered by the Constitution itself, and that the kind of

experimentation Roosevelt proposed was strictly off limits. The battle that emerged between Roosevelt and the Supreme Court was about far more than whether the New Deal would stand or fall. It was about whether the solutions to America's most vexing problems were preordained—and whether the American people had the right to prefer Roosevelt's bold experimentation to Hoover's stoic confidence in the old ways.

Despite the very real likelihood that it would be struck down, President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act. If the justices were going to doom another generation of the least fortunate seniors to the poorhouse, then they would have to do their own dirty work.

Mass inflation would result from excessive New Deal spending, many insisted, and the new benefits for unemployed and retired workers would be devoured by this inflation. Social Security, some warned, "is no more secure than the value of the dollar in which its benefits are payable." Such arguments are still in use and effective today, largely because people have no knowledge of history, and institutions like schools or the media do not actually educate and inform.

In his inaugural address, he offered a stern rebuttal to the justices who might try to strip him of the mandate a landslide election had given him—especially after the Liberty League had cast that election as a referendum on Roosevelt's understanding of the Constitution:

"This year marks the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the Constitutional Convention which made us a nation. At that Convention our forefathers found the way out of the chaos which followed the Revolutionary War; they created a strong government with powers of united action sufficient then and now to solve problems utterly beyond individual or local solution. A century and a half ago they established the Federal Government in order to promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to the American people.

Nearly all of us recognize that as intricacies of human relationships increase, so power to govern them also must increase—power to stop evil; power to do good. The essential democracy of our nation and the safety of our people depend not upon the absence of power, but upon lodging it with those whom the people can change or continue at stated intervals through an honest and free system of elections. The Constitution of 1787 did not make our democracy impotent."

Roosevelt's words echoed General George Washington's much older

warning that “unless Congress have powers competent to all general purposes” then the blood spilt in the Revolution will “avail us nothing,”

The opposition to the Child Labor Amendment revealed two challenges facing anyone seeking to amend the Constitution. Constitutional amendments can have unpredictable results—just look at how the Supreme Court treated the Fourteenth Amendment—and this unpredictability can lead to opposition from unexpected sources. Conservative groups recruited parents to oppose the amendment by claiming that it would lead to a federal ban on household chores. One of the leading opponents of the amendment was the Catholic Church, which feared that it would allow Congress to regulate parochial schools on the theory that schoolwork was a form of labor. The Boston archdiocese even claimed that the Child Labor Amendment was “more in keeping with Soviet Russia than with the fundamental principles of the American Government.”

This tendency to stir opposition points to a related problem facing proponents of a constitutional amendment. No other constitutional democracy—nor, for that matter, any of the fifty states—has a constitution as difficult to amend as the United States Constitution. With rare exception, such as when Congress refused to seat senators or representatives from rebel states that refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment or the unusual case of Prohibition, the American Constitution is impossible to amend unless there is a widespread national consensus supporting the amendment across nearly every region and every sector of the nation. Determined opposition from an interest group that is powerful in just a small minority of states can be enough to derail an amendment.

Sham trials defined Southern justice for much of the twentieth century. From the era of the Pullman Strike until the early days of the Hoover administration, the number of lynchings in the South plunged more than 90 percent. A major factor in this drop, however, were state laws intended to placate white mobs by rushing black defendants from arrest to execution. Arkansas’s law, for example, provided that a trial must begin within ten days after a sheriff notified the local judge that the “crime of rape, attempt to commit rape, murder, or any other crime calculated to arouse the passions of the people” had occurred—the defendant’s right to secure counsel and prepare a defense be damned.

Once the trial began, defense attorneys rarely sought continuances for fear that their client would be murdered. Prosecutors told juries to convict in order to reward mobs for the restraint they showed by allowing the trial to move forward. Some governors even refused clemency requests on the grounds that a death sentence was necessary to ward off a lynching. This, in other words, was the world that had emerged from the Supreme Court’s

Reconstruction decision in Cruikshank. The lesson of the Colfax Massacre was that violent mobs could enforce white supremacy with near-impunity. And because Cruikshank effectively freed the states to ignore the Bill of Rights, nothing prevented states like Alabama from transforming their courts into agents of the mob.

When the newly constituted Warren Court met once again to discuss the fate of *Brown*, the new chief justice immediately cast his lot against Jim Crow. “We can’t set one group apart from the rest of us and say they are not entitled to the same treatment as all others,” Warren told his new colleagues. The Reconstruction Amendments “were intended to make equal those who once were slaves.” The significance of Warren’s pronouncement was obvious to each of the other eight justices. A year ago, under Vinson’s leadership, there were only four certain votes to end school segregation. Now the only question was whether the justices would stand together when they stuck the knife in Southern apartheid. The value of unanimity was not lost on the members of the Court. Justice Clark announced that he would support a decision striking school segregation—provided that the Court did not require the South to change too quickly—almost immediately after Warren’s vote made the outcome in *Brown* inevitable. Justice Frankfurter told a former law clerk that he feared a divided decision could trigger such resistance from the South that the Court’s order would become unenforceable. When Justice Reed was the lone holdout preparing a dissent upholding segregation, Warren dissuaded him with a warning—“Stan, you’re all by yourself in this now.” Not wanting to bear the blame for the South’s backlash against *Brown*, Reed signed onto Warren’s opinion.

What such actions clearly illustrate is that these individuals are nothing but unelected, job-for-life politicians in robes.

Although the Court was willing to declare school segregation unconstitutional, it wasn’t yet willing to do much about it. One year after *Brown*, the justices handed down another unanimous decision holding that desegregation need only move forward “with all deliberate speed.” Local judges, many of whom owed their jobs to their relationships with segregationist senators, would supervise school integration. And local officials would have the “primary responsibility” for determining how to implement *Brown* in light of the unique conditions within their school districts.

White Southerners received this decision as if Earl Warren had personally ridden on horseback to Appomattox Courthouse in order to surrender the Union’s armies. Florida lawmakers broke into cheers when they learned of the decision, and a Louisiana legislator labeled it “the mildest decree the Supreme Court possibly could have handed down.” A Virginia politician mused that “the court has not the courage of its previously avowed convictions,” and

a segregationist from Florida decided that the Court “realized it made a mistake in May and is getting out of it the best way it can.”

Though Southern resistance to *Brown* was inevitable, the Court’s timid implementation order undoubtedly emboldened the resisters. Eighty-one Southern members of Congress signed a “Southern Manifesto” pledging to “use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision which is contrary to the Constitution.” Several schools in Virginia refused to open entirely rather than permit black students to be educated alongside white ones. After Governor Orval Faubus deployed the Arkansas National Guard to prevent nine black students from attending Little Rock Central High School, President Eisenhower had to deploy twelve-hundred paratroopers to Little Rock to protect the students. And the South’s campaign of resistance was wildly successful for many years. In 1959, just forty of North Carolina’s three-hundred-thousand African American students attended integrated schools. Forty-two of Nashville’s twelve-thousand black students attended desegregated schools in 1960.

Despite the Court’s initial reluctance to ensure that *Brown* would be meaningfully enforced, it is easy to imagine a much darker opinion emerging from the Court’s deliberations over public school segregation. If Jimmy Byrnes had remained on the Court, the vote Justice Minton cast for integration would have instead belonged to the man from South Carolina. Similarly, if President Herbert Hoover had succeeded in appointing Judge John J. Parker to the Court, that may have added another vote in favor of segregation. If Hugo Black had behaved more like a former Klansman might have been expected to behave, and if Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson had not died when he did, then *Brown v. Board of Education* might now be remembered as one of the greatest civil rights defeats of the twentieth century. Indeed, history would have been quite different if only President Eisenhower had been more diligent in screening his Supreme Court nominees. Although Eisenhower respected the rule of law enough to order troops to Little Rock in order to enforce the Supreme Court’s order, he was privately unamused by Chief Justice Warren’s most famous opinion. Southern whites, Eisenhower told Warren at a White House dinner, “are not bad people. All they are concerned about is to see that their sweet little girls are not required to sit in school alongside some big overgrown Negroes.” Eisenhower later described the Warren appointment as the “biggest damned-fool mistake I ever made.”

In spite of the slow progress achieved by *Brown*, the nearly sixteen years that Earl Warren served as chief justice were nonetheless one of the most transformative periods in American constitutional history. For the first time since Reconstruction, the justices gave real meaning to the Constitution’s

ban on racial apartheid. The Warren Court invigorated the Bill of Rights. It gave dissenting voices the freedom to speak openly without fear of arrest. It barred police from indiscriminately listening in on people's phone calls. And it restored democracy to states that had abandoned the basic rule that every person gets one, and exactly one, vote. Constitutional rights that had lain dormant for nearly a century roared back to life thanks to the Warren Court, and the Fourteenth Amendment finally represented something more than a shield over the rich and the powerful.

The Warren Court was one of the great anomalies of American history—a brief period when the Supreme Court read the Constitution and saw some of the many ways it was intended to make American lives better. And we owe this period to a series of historical accidents. If Byrnes had remained on the Court; if Black hadn't rejected his racist past; if Vinson hadn't died; or if Eisenhower hadn't made two damned-fool mistakes—he later listed his appointment of Justice William Brennan, a reliable vote in favor of the Warren Court's landmark decisions, as a second mistake akin to the Warren appointment—then the constitutional revival of the Warren era could have never happened. Like all anomalies, this revival could not last forever. Future presidents typically put a great deal more thought into their Supreme Court nominations than President Eisenhower did.

In the end, the most important thing the Warren Court did to advance racial justice was not the *Brown* decision. It was its willingness to get out of the way once Congress decided to confront Jim Crow. For protection against abuses by legislatures the people must resort to the polls and the streets, not to the courts.

For eighty-two long years, from 1875 until 1957, Congress did not pass a single civil rights bill. Indeed, this was true even when such legislation enjoyed majority support. Five civil rights bills passed the House between the end of World War II and 1957, but none of them survived contact with the Senate.

The reason for this inability to legislate was the filibuster, which allowed Southern white supremacists to block any bill they chose, so long as they could convince just a handful of conservatives outside the South to join their obstruction of the legislative process. Moreover, because Southern voting officials ensured that few black voters would actually get to cast meaningful ballots, white supremacist lawmakers faced no consequences for their opposition to civil rights.

The Jim Crow South was largely a collection of one-party states—between 1916 and 1944, for example, the Republican presidential candidate won more than five percent of the vote in South Carolina just one time. Thus, the winner of a Democratic primary in the South was virtually guaranteed

election, and general elections were largely formalities. For this reason, segregationists could exclude African Americans from the franchise entirely by preventing them from voting in Democratic Party primaries.

In 1923, one state tried to do just that by enacting a law providing that “in no event shall a negro be eligible to participate in a Democratic party primary election held in the State of Texas”—though this first attempt to suppress the black vote did not end well for Texas. The Supreme Court struck down the law in a unanimous opinion proclaiming that “it seems to us hard to imagine a more direct and obvious infringement of the Fourteenth [Amendment].” Even Justice James Clark McReynolds joined this opinion.

This decision, according to the Texas legislature, created “an emergency with a need for immediate action” and the lawmakers quickly replaced the unconstitutional law with a new one providing that “every political party in this State through its State Executive Committee shall have the power to prescribe the qualifications of its own members and shall in its own way determine who shall be qualified to vote or otherwise participate in such political party.” Not long thereafter, the state Democratic Party’s executive committee enacted a resolution providing that only “white democrats” may participate in their primary. Though the Court also struck this law down, in 1932, it did so over a dissent from McReynolds and the other members of the Four Horsemen. The Texas law itself, McReynolds claimed, “withholds nothing from any negro.” Instead, it merely recognized the Democratic Party’s power to “prescribe qualifications for membership.” According to McReynolds it was the Party, not the state, that denied voting rights to African Americans. And the Constitution has nothing to say about discrimination by a private organization such as a political party.

The obvious problem here is you have members of the club creating the laws the club must work within—highly problematic.

Three weeks after the Court’s second decision striking down Texas’s white-primary scheme, the state’s Democrats took matters into their own hands. Acting pursuant to no state law whatsoever, the Party enacted a resolution at its convention providing that only “white citizens” may vote in a Democratic primary. This time, the justices unanimously sided with the segregationists. Recall that the Fourteenth Amendment provides that “no state” shall “deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws,” and the Fifteenth Amendment provides that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” In both cases, the amendments indicate that only government actors—a “state” or the “United States”—are bound by their prohibitions against race discrimination. Although the two previous white-

primary cases struck down a state law that mandated segregation—or at least entangled the state with the process that Texas Democrats used to exclude black voters—this case involved a political party acting on its own. “The qualifications of citizens to participate in party counsels and to vote at party primaries have been declared by the representatives of the party in convention assembled,” Justice Owen J. Roberts explained in *Grovey v. Townsend*, “and this action upon its face is not state action.”

The Texas Democratic Party was not an arm of the government, according to *Grovey*, and therefore it was immune to the Constitution’s prohibition on racial voter suppression. *Grovey* did not last long. Less than a decade later, the Supreme Court overruled it in the landmark *Smith v. Allwright* decision. But *Grovey* lasted just long enough to validate a strategy that animated the South’s resistance to black voting rights—if the court strikes down one voter suppression practice, just keep coming up with new ones until the courts back off.

The single most important thing the Supreme Court ever did for civil rights was not *Brown*. It was the Court’s decision to do absolutely nothing when first confronted with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Not long after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law, a motel in Atlanta and a barbecue restaurant in Birmingham filed a pair of lawsuits objecting to the law on similar grounds to the arguments raised by men like Rehnquist, Bork, and Goldwater. Nevertheless, the justices unanimously upheld the law. Less than two years later, they rejected a similar challenge to the Voting Rights Act. These three cases were the most important civil rights decisions of their era. By simply getting out of the way and allowing the federal government to do its job, the Warren Court did more to tear down Jim Crow than it could ever have accomplished on its own.

At the height of the Warren Court, many liberals gazed upon the Supreme Court with the same hunger to see their dreams made real by judicial decree that motivated union busters and Southern cotton mill owners during the *Lochner* Era.

The fact that contemporary judicial conservatives have not handed down a latter-day *Lochner v. New York* does not mean that they’ve failed to make an ideological mark on the law. In many cases, it simply means they are more subtle than their forebears. While justices like Field, Fuller, Brewer, and Sutherland read doubtful restrictions on government into the vaguest phrases of the Constitution, modern-day conservatives often prefer a different tactic. By reading civil rights laws narrowly, or by placing procedural barriers between workers and the courthouse door, or by shunting consumers into tribunals that are stacked in favor of the companies they are suing, the

Court can undermine progressive legislation just as surely as if they had declared it unconstitutional.

Moreover, as Congress grows more and more dysfunctional, the distinction between a Supreme Court decision reinterpreting the Constitution and another decision that achieves the same result by rethinking an ordinary statute matters less and less. Traditionally, the Court's constitutional precedents were understood to be particularly difficult to displace, because the difficulty of amending the Constitution makes the Court the only effective resort for changing obsolete constitutional doctrine. Court decisions interpreting acts of Congress, by contrast, could always be overruled by a new act of Congress. In an age when Congress and the president can barely agree upon whether or not to shut down the government, however, the idea that Congress will get its act together long enough to overrule a Supreme Court decision is largely a pipe dream. The justices are no longer simply the final word on the Constitution, they are typically the final word on everything that comes before them.

Once upon a time, it was generally understood that the police could not stop and search someone without a warrant unless there was probable cause to believe that the individual was engaged in criminal activity. That was a basic Fourth Amendment principle. In *Terry v. Ohio*, decided in 1968, the Supreme Court modified that understanding, but only modestly, by ruling that if and when a police officer observes unusual conduct by someone the officer reasonably believes to be dangerous and engaged in criminal activity, the officer "is entitled for the protection of himself and others in the area" to conduct a limited search "to discover weapons that might be used against the officer." Known as the stop-and-frisk rule, the *Terry* decision stands for the proposition that, so long as a police officer has "*reasonable articulable suspicion*" that someone is engaged in criminal activity and dangerous, it is constitutionally permissible to stop, question, and frisk him or her—even in the absence of probable cause. Justice Douglas dissented in *Terry* on the grounds that "granting police greater power than a magistrate judge is to take a long step down the totalitarian path." He objected to the notion that police should be free to conduct warrantless searches whenever they suspect someone is a criminal, believing that dispensing with the Fourth Amendment's warrant requirement risked opening the door to the same abuses that gave rise to the American Revolution. His voice was a lonely one.

A lower court broadly condemned "bus sweeps" in the drug war, comparing them to methods employed by totalitarian regimes:

"The evidence in this case has evoked images of other days,

under other flags, when no man traveled his nation's roads or railways without fear of unwarranted interruption, by individuals who had temporary power in Government. . . . This is not Hitler's Berlin, nor Stalin's Moscow, nor is it white supremacist South Africa. Yet in Broward County, Florida, these police officers approach every person on board buses and trains ("that time permits") and check identification, tickets, ask to search luggage—all in the name of "voluntary cooperation" with law enforcement.

The US Supreme Court reversed. The Court ruled that Bostick's encounter with the police was purely voluntary, and therefore he was not "seized" within the meaning of the Fourth Amendment. Even if Bostick did not feel free to leave when confronted by police at the back of the bus, the proper question, according to the Court, was whether "a reasonable person" in Bostick's shoes would have felt free to terminate the encounter. A reasonable person, the Court concluded, would have felt free to sit there and refuse to answer the police officer's questions, and would have felt free to tell the officer "No, you can't search my bag." Accordingly, Bostick was not really "seized" within the meaning of the Fourth Amendment, and the subsequent search was purely consensual. The Court made clear that its decision was to govern all future drug sweeps, no matter what the circumstances of the targeted individual. Given the blanket nature of the ruling, courts have found police encounters to be consensual in truly preposterous situations. For example, a few years after Bostick, the District of Columbia Court of Appeals applied the ruling to a case involving a fourteen-year-old girl interrogated by the police, concluding that she must be held to the same reasonable-person standard.

This is no secret to the Supreme Court. The Court long ago acknowledged that effective use of consent searches by the police depends on the ignorance (and powerlessness) of those who are targeted. In *Schneckloth v. Bustamonte*, decided in 1973, the Court admitted that if waiver of one's right to refuse consent were truly "knowing, intelligent, and voluntary," it would "in practice create serious doubt whether consent searches would continue to be conducted." In other words, consent searches are valuable tools for the police only because hardly anyone dares to say no.

So long as orders are phrased as a question, compliance is interpreted as consent. 'May I speak to you?' thunders an officer. 'Will you put your arms up and stand against the wall for a search?' Because almost no one refuses, drug sweeps on the sidewalk (and on buses and trains) are easy. People are easily intimidated when the police confront them, hands on their guns or

tasers, and most have no idea the question can be answered, ‘No.’

The upshot of the Court’s forced-arbitration cases is that the decision to employ them or not to employ them rests almost entirely with individual companies. And these companies can deny services or employment altogether to those who refuse to relinquish their ability to assert their rights in court. Forced arbitration, in other words, could potentially do just as much to undermine the rights of ordinary Americans as any decision handed down in the *Lochner* Era. What use is a minimum-wage law or a right to be free from discrimination if all of the judges who would enforce those rights are replaced by “arbitration mills” that exist solely to rule against workers and consumers?

The fact that one can imagine a slippery slope, however, does not mean that they will inevitably wind up at the bottom of it. Indeed, if the fact that a judge can envision a slippery slope were sufficient reason to declare a law unconstitutional, then it’s likely that all laws would have to be struck down. If Congress has the power to ban products like heroin and machine guns, it could also use that power to ban apple pie and ice cream! If Congress has the power to enact a ten-dollar minimum wage, it could use that power to enact a million-dollar minimum wage! If Congress can levy a 25 percent income tax, it could use that power to levy a 99.99 percent income tax! If Congress can ban child labor, it could ban all labor!

Moreover, there is something fundamentally aristocratic about the idea that judges must shrink federal authority in order to ward off the most horrible theoretical law those judges can possibly imagine. As Chief Justice Marshall explained in his opinion laying out the broad reach of Congress’s authority to regulate commerce, “the wisdom and the discretion of Congress, their identity with the people, and the influence which their constituents possess at elections are the restraints on which the people must often rely solely, in all representative governments.” The premise of any democracy is that the people must be trusted to make decisions for themselves, even if a small group of men with lifetime tenure believe that those people will come to regret their decision. If the Affordable Care Act—or any other law, for that matter—turns out to be a bad idea, the Constitution provides a very simple remedy. It’s called an election.

Two visions of the Constitution have struggled for dominance in the United States ever since Hamilton clashed with Jefferson over the constitutionality of the First Bank of the United States. In one, the United States should be governed by the men and women who are elected to govern, and, while the Constitution does place explicit limits on government that must be policed by the Supreme Court, it is not the job of the Court to micromanage decisions that belong to the people’s elected representatives. In the other

vision, the primary purpose of the Constitution is to restrain government action, even if lawmakers could easily act to prevent human suffering. As a Senator said in a 2010 lecture in which he argued that federal child labor laws are unconstitutional, the Constitution “was designed to be a little bit harsh.”

For the four Republican justices who voted to remove Obamacare from the books in its entirety, however, that truce is dead. They did not simply embrace a tenuous legal argument, they embraced a tenuous legal argument that ran headlong into one of Justice Scalia’s own opinions. And they voted to enact their political party’s number-one policy priority in the process. If the justices cannot be relied upon to set their partisan views aside in an easy case such as this one, how can they be trusted to interpret a Constitution that is absolutely riddled with vague and open-ended phrases? What are the “privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States”? What makes a search or seizure “unreasonable”? Which punishments are “cruel and unusual”? If the government wants to deny someone “liberty,” how much “process” is “due”? What is a “public use” of private property? How should the United States guarantee a “republican form of government”? What is the “general welfare of the United States”? Which laws are “necessary and proper” for carrying into effect Congress’s enumerated powers?

Many of these questions perplexed the very men who wrote these phrases into the Constitution. And yet we trust a Court with nine unelected judges and a terrible track record to issue binding pronouncements about what that Constitution means. This is the same Court that decided *Dred Scott* and *Cruikshank*. The same Court that invalidated the minimum wage and child labor laws. The same Court that held that a woman could be sterilized against her will. The same Court that upheld Japanese internment and that opened the doors to segregation. The same Court that gave us *Citizens United* and *Bush v. Gore*. And the same Court that nearly stripped health care from millions of Americans. We placed our Constitution in the hands of John Archibald Campbell, and we placed it in the hands of Stephen Johnson Field—and we gave them the ability to read whatever they chose into our founding document. Their successors enjoy that very same power to this day.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Imaginary Lines

Spartan teenagers were handed a dagger and sent off into the countryside to secretly stalk and murder the boldest local peasants in such a way that no man was able to say, either then or afterwards, how they came to their deaths. By ruthless Spartan logic, this was the perfect multipurpose path to citizenship: it kept insurrection at bay and turned young Spartans into masters of stealth and survival.

Even when two cultural norms are equally valid in theory, in the practical context of immigration it might still be justified to judge the host culture as better. Norms and values that are appropriate in one country just don't work well under different circumstances. Let's look closely at a concrete example. In order not to fall prey to well-established prejudices, let's imagine two fictional countries: Coldia and Warmland. The two countries have many cultural differences, among which is their attitude to human relations and interpersonal conflict.

Coldians are educated from infancy that if you get into conflict with somebody at school, at work, or even in your family, the best thing is to repress it. You should avoid shouting, expressing rage, or confronting the other person—angry outbursts just make things worse. It's better to work with your own feelings, while allowing things to cool down. In the meantime, limit your contact with the person in question, and if contact is unavoidable, be terse but polite, and avoid sensitive issues. Warmlanders, by contrast, are educated from infancy to externalize conflicts. If you find yourself in conflict, don't let it simmer and don't repress anything. Use the first opportunity to vent your emotions openly. It is OK to get angry, to shout, and to tell the other person exactly how you feel. This is the only way to work things through together, in an honest and direct way. One day of shouting can resolve a conflict that may otherwise fester for years, and though head-on confrontation is never pleasant, you will all feel much better afterwards.

Both these methods have their pros and cons, and it is hard to say that one is always better than the other. What might happen, though, when a Warmlander emigrates to Coldia, and gets a job in a Coldian firm? Whenever a conflict arises with a co-worker, the Warmlander bangs on

the table and yells at the top of his voice, expecting that this will focus attention on the problem and help to resolve it quickly. Several years later a senior position falls vacant. Though the Warmlander has all the necessary qualifications, the boss prefers to give the promotion to a Coldian employee. When asked about it, she explains: “Yes, the Warmlander has many talents, but he also has a serious problem with human relations. He is hot-tempered, creates unnecessary tensions around him, and disturbs our corporate culture.” The same fate befalls other Warmlander immigrants to Coldia. Most of them remain in junior positions, or fail to find any job at all, because managers presuppose that if they are Warmlanders, they would probably be hot-tempered and problematic employees. Since the Warmlanders never reach senior positions, it is difficult for them to change the Coldian corporate culture.

Much the same thing happens to Coldians who emigrate to Warmland. A Coldian starting to work in a Warmland firm quickly acquires the reputation of a snob or a cold fish, and makes few if any friends. People think that he is insincere, or that he lacks basic human-relation skills. He never advances to senior positions, and he therefore never gets the opportunity to change the corporate culture. Warmland managers conclude that most Coldians are unfriendly or shy, and prefer not to hire them to positions that require contact with customers or close cooperation with other employees.

Both these cases may seem to smack of racism. But in fact, they are not racist. They are ‘culturist’. People continue to conduct a heroic struggle against traditional racism without noticing that the battlefield has shifted. Traditional racism is waning, but the world is now full of culturists.

“Do you want to know the difference between Illegal Aliens and Politicians?

Well for starters they talk funny, and they can be pretty greasy. They are sneaky and ambitious about trying to get to where they want to go. They will lie, even fake being somebody else just to get a job. And when they do, they make a heck of a lot more money than those *illegals*.”

Most people from the US are taught that America is a melting pot—despite the fact that the name ‘America’ covers North and South and Central America, or that the metaphor glosses over bloody battles and the oppression of numerous people and groups.

Of course, there are only two types of people in the United States. People who are here because we allowed their families to come here, and people who are here because we somehow overlooked murdering their families. That’s it.

Families of immigrants and some descendants of the indigenous people we accidentally managed not to completely exterminate.

All people whose lives are impacted by the policies of a particular state, should have a say in how that state manages its affairs and particularly how it manages its entry requirements. In the absence of such an arrangement, what prevails at the level of international relations is a type of tyranny. In a global frame, what can democracy mean when the citizens of impoverished nations have no influence on the governmental policies that affect them most, in particular the immigration policies of wealthy nations?

Immigration has become a privilege of the elite and those useful to the elite instead of a right of the desperate. The world's people are being divided not into naturally forming communities but into corporate controlled economic markets. Governance by nation states is now as arbitrary and illogical as city states were earlier found to be.

Does US immigration policy simply allow our government to cushion itself from the effects of not adequately educating and supporting its own people?

The same sort of situation holds in all of the jobs that native born workers supposedly do not want: Native-born workers will wash dishes, clean toilets, and pick tomatoes for \$20 an hour. When the nanny state conservatives say that they can't find native-born workers for these jobs, they mean that they can't find native-born workers at the wages that they want to pay, just as most of us can't find native-born doctors or lawyers who are willing to work for \$15 an hour. The difference is that the nanny state conservatives get to bring in immigrants at low wages to meet their needs, whereas the doctors and lawyers can count on the nanny state to protect them from competition with immigrant workers.

The importation of low-paid labor is a tool of oppression that divides workers and benefits those in power. The proper response, therefore, is not abstract moralism about welcoming all migrants as an imagined act of charity, but rather addressing the root causes of migration in the relationship between large and powerful economies and the smaller or developing economies from which people migrate.

The comforting delusion that immigrants come here because they love America is incredibly naïve—as naïve as suggesting that the nineteenth-century Irish immigrants to England loved England. Most migrants emigrate out of economic necessity, and the vast majority would prefer to have better opportunities at home, among their own family and friends. But such opportunities are impossible within the current shape of globalization.

If open borders is “a Koch brothers proposal,” then what would an authentic Left position on immigration look like? In this case, instead of

channeling Milton Friedman, the Left should take its bearings from its own long traditions. Progressives should focus on addressing the systemic exploitation at the root of mass migration rather than retreating to a shallow moralism that legitimates these exploitative forces. This does not mean that leftists should ignore injustices against immigrants. They should vigorously defend migrants against inhumane treatment. At the same time, any sincere Left must take a hard line against the corporate, financial, and other actors who create the desperate circumstances underlying mass migration which, in turn, produces the populist reaction against it. Only a strong national Left in the small and developing nations—acting in concert with a Left committed to ending financialization and global labor exploitation in the larger economies—could have any hope of addressing these problems.

To begin with, the Left must stop ignoring the effects of immigration on domestic labor, especially the working poor who are likely to suffer disproportionately from expanding the labor pool. Immigration policies should be designed to ensure that the bargaining power of workers is not significantly imperiled. This is especially true in times of wage stagnation, weak unions, and massive inequality.

Employers, not immigrants, should be the primary focus of enforcement efforts. These employers take advantage of immigrants who lack ordinary legal protections in order to perpetuate a race to the bottom in wages while also evading payroll taxes and the provision of other benefits. Such incentives must be eliminated if any workers are to be treated fairly. They've also got websites, headquarters, warehouses, and factories and other physical infrastructure—they've got shit that's easy to find and take control of in response to injustice.

Trump infamously complained about people coming from third-world “shithole countries” and suggested Norwegians as an example of ideal immigrants. But Norwegians did once come to America in large numbers—when they were desperate and poor. Now that they have a prosperous and relatively egalitarian social democracy, built on public ownership of natural resources—though many of these harm developing nations by contributing to climate change, so in part the good life of Norwegians is subsidized by the poor elsewhere, as in all Western nations to varying degrees—they no longer want to. Ultimately, the motivation for mass migration will persist as long as the structural problems underlying it remain in place.

Reducing the tensions of mass migration thus requires improving the prospects of the world's poor. Mass migration itself will not accomplish this: it creates a race to the bottom for workers in wealthy countries and a brain drain in poor ones. The only real solution is to correct the imbalances in the global economy, and radically restructure a system of globalization

that was designed to benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor. This involves, to start with, structural changes to trade policies that prevent necessary, state-led development in emerging economies. Anti-labor trade deals like NAFTA and its replacement must also be opposed and repealed. It is equally necessary to take on a financial system that funnels capital away from the developing world and into inequality-heightening asset bubbles in rich countries. Finally, although the reckless foreign policies of the George W. Bush administration have been discredited, the temptation to engage in military crusades seems to live on. This should be opposed. US-led foreign invasions have killed millions in the Middle East, created millions of refugees and migrants, and devastated fundamental infrastructure.

Indeed, smuggling people is as lucrative as smuggling drugs, and safer. There is not the worldwide concern for the transportation of illegal immigrants as there is for shipping narcotics, and in the unlikely event the organizers are caught, the penalties are much lighter.

Instead of simply sealing themselves off, affluent countries should be giving much more support to less affluent countries that are supporting large numbers of refugees: Lebanon, Jordan, Ethiopia, and Pakistan are obvious examples. Refugees living securely in countries that border their own are less likely to attempt hazardous journeys to remote regions and more likely to return home once a conflict is resolved.

But maybe you'd rather just continue your virtue signaling. And use things like drowned toddlers as simply another cog in your feel-good outrage machine.

Chapter Thirty

Starving for Justice

“Don’t tell us these racist lies, how we don’t care when someone black or brown dies in our community, that we only care when they’re the victim of a white police officer. My friend recently died. He left a hole in my heart. All right, a hole that can never be filled. And I’m speaking from my soul here. We cared when he died. We care when everyone dies.

But you know what the difference is, bigots of the world? That when those people die, if someone catches the ‘gangbanger’ or the individual who’s responsible for their murder on camera, he’s going to jail ninety-nine-point-nine-nine-nine percent of the time!

And when we catch an officer of the law, who’s supposed to know the law, and in my opinion should be held to that law to the highest standards, ninety-nine-point-nine-nine-nine percent of the time we hear excuses instead of hearing accountability.

And that’s all we’re saying. We want you to make it what you said it was on paper. Otherwise, it’s a lie. They think they can just close the door and have some kind of let-them-eat-cake Louis XVI party in there, while we starving out here. And when I say starving—I mean we got donuts—we starving for justice.”

We have not addressed the moral panics that sedimented over the past forty-five years into draconian laws. We have not curbed the zeal to punish. We have not restored what ought to be at the center of law: the idea that punishment has limits, and that the institutions have a responsibility to restore offenders to society in a better condition than when they were judged guilty of crimes. What is still urgently needed is a comprehensive approach to legal reforms, including laws that pertain to the most hated classes of offenders.

What follows is not a plan, but several questions and claims offered for serious consideration by those committed to justice and interested in dismantling mass incarceration. They are offered as conversation starters—

food for thought, debate, and—I hope—collective action. Each is a challenge to conventional wisdom or traditional strategies. Far more should be said about each point made, but, as indicated, this is meant to be the beginning of a conversation, not an end.

Ten-thousand years ago, there was no court or trial to ensure that a man accused of murder received due process—justice was the end of a spear. One-thousand years ago, proof of guilt was revealed when a woman’s hand festered after being burned with a hot iron. One-hundred years ago, black citizens could be barred from the jury box, bar, and bench on account of the color of their skin. And a decade ago, it was legal in the United States to execute someone who had committed his crime before he was eighteen.

Progress, certainly—but this has been no unbroken advance. It has been a journey, uphill and against the wind. It has entailed detours and backtracking—and our current vantage point has much to do with chance. History makes clear that our next destination may, or may not, lie up the mountain. The arc of history does not bend toward justice unless we bend it.

The best way to avoid known human biases or predictable errors in our criminal justice system may be to make changes outside of it. When confronted with a question like how to reduce the murder rate, we tend to recite the standard set of commonsense solutions: increase the number of officers in high-crime neighborhoods, crack down on drug gangs, and develop better tests to predict future violent behavior. But there may be other, less obvious responses that are more cost-effective and easily implemented. For example, a city could invest in trauma kits containing materials developed by the military for treating battlefield wounds and train all officers in how to address the major causes of preventable death in combat (a collapsed lung, airway obstruction, and hemorrhage from a limb), which also happen to be extremely common when someone has been shot in a drive-by or wounded in a robbery, or shot by police. Or we could have all hospitals and ambulances carry the inexpensive generic drug tranexamic acid, which is used to slow the bleeding of wounded soldiers—it’s estimated that every year this simple change could save the lives of up to four-thousand Americans who are the victims of violence. Before we go down the road of sanctioning invasive and problematic police actions to try to reduce gun violence (like “stop and frisk”) or invest immense time and energy in developing neuro-recidivism predictors that may never be accurate, we should see if there’s a simpler way to achieve our ultimate end: saving lives.

It is true that a virtual courtroom would remove a lot of the drama and excitement from the trial. But that is exactly the point: the elements that make for good television—bombastic attorneys, witnesses with shaky

hands, and defendants seemingly unmoved by the tearful testimony of the victim—make for poor justice.

The Supreme Court admonished in *Berger v. US* that the duty of a prosecutor “is not that it shall win a case, but that justice shall be done.”

We could adopt a similar approach in realigning the relationship between detectives and suspects. As we’ve seen, the commonly used Reid technique casts the two as adversaries. The resulting interrogations tend to be highly confrontational, focused on battering a suspect into submission and lying to him if necessary until he fesses up, which we know greatly increases the likelihood of a false confession. So, what if we recast the investigator’s objective, from obtaining an admission of guilt to simply gathering reliable information? Rosy claims to the contrary, the emphasis in our current approach is not on reaching an accurate account of what happened. That’s why detectives are permitted to offer the suspect potential motives and descriptions of how the crime went down—even if they’re entirely made up—to make it more psychologically palatable for him to accept responsibility. It’s an effective way to get to ‘I did it,’ but it’s a terrible way to get to the truth.

Our corrections hiring should target people well suited to rehabilitative work rather than disciplinarians ready for a fight.

We should also reduce the impenetrable divide between the public and the prison population. Although certain types of offenders are quite appropriately kept separate from the general public, many would benefit from closer ties with outside society. And the rest of us would benefit, too. If those convicted of crimes will walk among us again, we must begin preparing them today. We ought to help prisoners maintain family connections, allowing frequent interaction with loved ones so that they have support when they return. There is no justification for callous and shortsighted policies like limiting an inmate to a single phone call to his kids once every two weeks. Destroying families doesn’t prevent crime; it engenders it.

We can’t tie anchors around people’s waists, toss them in the deep end, and expect them to swim. If our goal really is for those who have committed crimes to become productive citizens, we’ve got to give them more help than other people, not less.

We can start by acknowledging that removing blame from our criminal justice system doesn’t mean that harmful conduct would suddenly become acceptable or that people who commit crimes would suddenly be free from sanction. The idea that if we stopped vilifying the criminal we’d have to treat rape victims and rapists exactly the same way is entirely false. Even without a legal framework grounded in personal volition and culpability, a serial rapist has still committed terrible acts that we would rightfully

denounce. But we'd no longer subject individuals to poor treatment and contempt on the grounds that they're bad people who deserve it. We'd get out of the payback business. Instead, we'd focus on remedying the harm, rehabilitating the criminal, discouraging others from taking similar actions, and treating the conditions that precipitated the crime in the first place.

The difficulty of justifying a democratic state is that its citizens must live in a society and be governed by laws to which they must adhere while simultaneously preserving their liberty. In order to preserve the liberty of action of its citizens, the laws of a democratic country must be laws to which those citizens in some sense agree, via a process of joint deliberation. A central question, or perhaps the central question, of democratic political theory is what makes a joint deliberative process fair. The question is complicated by the fact that citizens of a democratic state are typically born into a state with already existing laws. Because of this, the deliberative process must take into account the fact that the laws will apply to people who did not have the opportunity to participate in their formation. When crafting laws we must therefore take into account the views of those not yet born, as well as of children who, while not at that point capable of deliberation, one day will be among the people whose viewpoints need to be taken into account. What ideals should govern a deliberative process that results in laws of this sort, laws that can legitimately be taken as binding on individuals not yet born or too young to participate in their formation?

Democratic political theory has long favored another ideal, according to which a democratic community is one that fosters certain kinds of attitudes toward one's fellow citizens. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois brings our attention to this normative ideal of public reason by describing the consequences of its complete failure in his description of the political state in the American South after the Civil War:

“Can we establish a mass of black laborers and artisans and landholders in the South who, by law and public opinion, have absolutely no voice in shaping the laws under which they live and work? Can the modern organization of industry, assuming as it does free democratic government and the power and ability of the laboring classes to compel respect for their welfare—can this system be carried out in the South when half its laboring force is voiceless in the public councils and powerless in its own defense? It is pitiable that frantic efforts must be made at critical times to get law-makers in some States even to listen to the respectful presentation of the black man's side of a current controversy. The laws are made by men who have little interest in the Negro;

they are executed by men who have absolutely no motive for treating the black people with courtesy or consideration; and, finally, the accused law-breaker is tried, not by his peers, but too often by men who would rather punish ten innocent Negroes than let one guilty one escape.”

As Martin Luther King Jr. writes in “Letter from a Birmingham Jail:”

“A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law.”

But Du Bois is not merely making King’s point. He is rather bringing our attention to what he seems to regard as a more central reason the laws are not democratically legitimate. It is because those who created the laws did not have empathy for some of those subject to them, namely, their Black fellow citizens. The lack of empathy meant that the laws were crafted in such a way that did not reflect respect for the viewpoints of Black citizens; lawmakers will not listen to the “respectful presentation of the black man’s side of a current controversy.” Du Bois is arguing that the laws in the South are illegitimate, and they are illegitimate because:

1. Black citizens do not participate in their formation
2. Lawmakers will not take into account the reasonable perspectives of Black citizens
3. There is no empathy on the side of the lawmakers for the situation of Blacks subject to those laws

Du Bois is suggesting that underlying the kind of equal respect involved in taking into account reasonable perspectives of Black citizens is empathy.

A failure common in public discourse is the failure to see the point from the other man’s position. In making assertions that apply to everyone, utilize the safeguard of changing ‘you’ into ‘I.’ That way, one can more easily see whether the policy one is prescribing to others is a reasonable one.

What is most in need of reform is the legal system’s understanding of how the mind works. The police, the witnesses, the lawyers, the judges, and the jurors are all too susceptible to the illusions we have discussed. Because they are human, they believe that we pay attention to much more than we do, that our memories are more complete and faithful than they are, and that confidence is a reliable gauge of accuracy. The common law of criminal

procedure was established over centuries in England and the United States, and its assumptions are based precisely on mistaken intuitions like these.

It is relatively easy to convict an innocent person. Millions of defendants are processed through our courts each year, so it becomes nearly impossible to determine how many are actually innocent once they've been convicted. No one has the time or resources to examine the facts and backgrounds of those claiming to be wrongfully convicted. Actual wrongful conviction estimates range from two percent to ten percent, but no one really knows. These numbers may sound low, but when applied to a prison population of 2.3 million, they become staggering. Can there really be between 46,000 and 230,000 innocent people locked away? Those of us who are involved in innocence work firmly believe so. And, practically speaking, once an innocent person is convicted, it is virtually impossible to get them out of prison.

The US Constitution guarantees due process to anyone charged with a crime, and that means that everyone who is arrested is presumed to be innocent until found otherwise by a jury. Referring to the country's collective sacrifice during the American Revolution, a Massachusetts judge wrote that it was:

“Inconceivable that the people who depleted their resources in a long and bloody war to maintain their rights as freemen should have intended to deprive their citizens of an impartial trial before an unprejudicial jury.”

The prosecution, therefore, should labor under the implacably humane ideal that, as later expressed in a Supreme Court decision, “it is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer.” This is called the ten-to-one rule and can be traced through English common law all the way back to the Romans. The scales of justice—in theory, at least—are so heavily tilted in favor of the accused because it is thought that vastly more social harm results from jailing the innocent than from freeing the guilty. The reason that laws exist in the first place is to prevent social harm; so by definition those laws cannot cause more harm than the crimes they are meant to prevent.

If we become serious about dismantling the system of mass incarceration, we must end the War on Drugs. There is no way around it. The drug war is largely responsible for the prison boom and the creation of the new undercaste, and there is no path to liberation for communities of color that includes this ongoing war. So long as people of color in ghetto communities are being rounded up by the thousands for drug offenses, carted off to

prisons, and then released into a permanent undercaste, mass incarceration as a system of control will continue to function well.

Ending the drug war is no simple task, however. It cannot be accomplished through a landmark court decision, an executive order, or single stroke of the presidential pen. Since 1982, the war has raged like a forest fire set with a few matches and a gallon of gasoline. What began as an audacious federal program, has spread to every state in the nation and nearly every city. It has infected law enforcement activities on roads, sidewalks, highways, train stations, airports, and the nation's border. The war has effectively shredded portions of the US Constitution—eliminating Fourth Amendment protections once deemed inviolate—and it has militarized policing practices in inner cities across America. Racially targeted drug-law enforcement practices taken together with laws that specifically discriminate against drug offenders in employment, housing, and public benefits have relegated the majority of black men in urban areas across the United States to a permanent second-class status.

If we hope to end this system of control, we cannot be satisfied with a handful of reforms. All of the financial incentives granted to law enforcement to arrest poor black and brown people for drug offenses must be revoked. Federal grant money for drug enforcement must end; drug forfeiture laws must be stripped from the books; racial profiling must be eradicated; the concentration of drug busts in poor communities of color must cease; and the transfer of military equipment and aid to local law enforcement agencies waging the drug war must come to a screeching halt.

Public defender offices should be funded at the same level as prosecutor's offices to eliminate the unfair advantage afforded the incarceration machine.

In a nutshell, the following are your basic rights when it comes to interactions with the police as outlined in the Bill of Rights:

- You have the right under the First Amendment to ask questions and express yourself.
- You have the right under the Fourth Amendment to not have your person or your property searched by police or any government agent unless they have a search warrant authorizing them to do so.
- You have the right under the Fifth Amendment to remain silent, to not incriminate yourself and to request an attorney.
- Depending on which state you live in and whether your encounter with police is consensual as opposed to your being temporarily detained or arrested, you may have the right to refuse to identify yourself.

9 Principles for Policing by Consent

1. To prevent crime and disorder, as an alternative to their repression by military force and severity of legal punishment.
2. To recognize always that the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behaviour, and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect.
3. To recognize always that to secure and maintain the respect and approval of the public means also the securing of the willing cooperation of the public in the task of securing observance of laws.
4. To recognize always that the extent to which the cooperation of the public can be secured diminishes proportionately the necessity of the use of physical force and compulsion for achieving police objectives.
5. To seek and preserve public favour, not by pandering to public opinion, but by constantly demonstrating absolutely impartial service to law, in complete independence of policy, and without regard to the justice or injustice of the substance of individual laws, by ready offering of individual service and friendship to all members of the public without regard to their wealth or social standing, by ready exercise of courtesy and friendly good humour, and by ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life.
6. To use physical force only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient to obtain public cooperation to an extent necessary to secure observance of law or to restore order, and to use only the minimum degree of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a police objective.
7. To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.
8. To recognize always the need for strict adherence to police-executive functions, and to refrain from even seeming to usurp the powers of the judiciary, of avenging individuals or the State, and of authoritatively judging guilt and punishing the guilty.

9. To recognize always that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them.

We need an effective system of crime prevention and control in our communities, but that is not what the current system is. This system is better designed to create crime and a perpetual class of people labeled criminals, rather than to eliminate crime or reduce the number of criminals.

“These weren’t the kind of men you sent to jail. You don’t make the punishment fit the crime: you make the punishment fit the criminal.”

Colorblindness, though widely touted as the solution, is actually the problem. Civil rights leaders are quick to assure the public that when we reach a colorblind nirvana, race consciousness will no longer be necessary or appropriate. Far from being a worthy goal, however, colorblindness has proved catastrophic for African Americans. It is not an overstatement to say the systematic mass incarceration of people of color in the United States would not have been possible in the post-civil rights era if the nation had not fallen under the spell of a callous colorblindness. The seemingly innocent phrase, ‘I don’t care if he’s black. . .’ perfectly captures the perversion of Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream that we may, one day, be able to see beyond race to connect spiritually across racial lines. Saying that one does not care about race is offered as an exculpatory virtue, when in fact it can be a form of cruelty. It is precisely because we, as a nation, have not cared much about African Americans that we have allowed our criminal justice system to create a new racial undercaste.

The deeply flawed nature of colorblindness, as a governing principle, is evidenced by the fact that the public consensus supporting mass incarceration is officially colorblind. It purports to see black and brown men not as black and brown, but simply as men—raceless men—who have failed miserably to play by the rules the rest of us follow quite naturally. The fact that so many black and brown men are rounded up for drug crimes that go largely ignored when committed by whites is unseen. Our collective colorblindness prevents us from seeing this basic fact. Our blindness also prevents us from seeing the racial and structural divisions that persist in society: the segregated, unequal schools, the segregated, jobless ghettos, and the segregated public discourse—a public conversation that excludes the current pariah caste. Our commitment to colorblindness extends beyond individuals to institutions and social arrangements. We have become blind, not so much to race, but to the existence of racial caste in America.

More than forty-five years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. warned of this danger. He insisted that blindness and indifference to racial groups is actually more important than racial hostility to the creation and maintenance of racialized systems of control. Those who supported slavery and Jim Crow, he argued, typically were not bad or evil people; they were just blind. Even the Justices who decided the infamous Dred Scott case, which ruled “that the Negro has no rights which the white man is bound to respect,” were not wicked men, he said. On the contrary, they were decent and dedicated men. But, he hastened to add:

“They were victims of a spiritual and intellectual blindness. They knew not what they did. The whole system of slavery was largely perpetuated through spiritually ignorant persons.

This tragic blindness is also found in racial segregation, the not-too-distant cousin of slavery. Some of the most vigorous defenders of segregation are sincere in their beliefs and earnest in their motives. Although some men are segregationists merely for reasons of political expediency and political gain, not all of the resistance to integration is the rearguard of professional bigots. Some people feel that their attempt to preserve segregation is best for themselves, their children, and their nation. Many are good church people, anchored in the religious faith of their mothers and fathers. What a tragedy! Millions of Negroes have been crucified by conscientious blindness. Jesus was right about those men who crucified him. They knew not what they did. They were inflicted by a terrible blindness.”

King recognized that it was this indifference to the plight of other races that supported the institutions of slavery and Jim Crow. In his words:

“One of the great tragedies of man’s long trek along the highway of history has been the limiting of neighborly concern to tribe, race, class or nation.”

The consequence of this narrow, insular attitude “is that one does not really mind what happens to the people outside his group.”

If colorblindness is such a bad idea, though, why have people across the political spectrum become so attached to it? For conservatives, the ideal of colorblindness is linked to a commitment to individualism. In their view, society should be concerned with individuals, not groups. Gross racial disparities in health, wealth, education, and opportunity should be of no interest to our government, and racial identity should be a private matter,

something best kept to ourselves. For liberals, the ideal of colorblindness is linked to the dream of racial equality. The hope is that one day we will no longer see race because race will lose all of its significance. In this fantasy, eventually race will no longer be a factor in mortality rates, the spread of disease, educational or economic opportunity, or the distribution of wealth. Race will correlate with nothing; it will mean nothing; we won't even notice it anymore. Those who are less idealistic embrace colorblindness simply because they find it difficult to imagine a society in which we see race and racial differences yet consistently act in a positive, constructive way. It is easier to imagine a world in which we tolerate racial differences by being blind to them.

The uncomfortable truth, however, is that racial differences will always exist among us until we truly shatter the myth of race. We should hope not for a colorblind society but instead for a world in which we can see each other fully, learn from each other, and do what we can to respond to each other with love. That was King's dream—a society that is capable of seeing each of us, as we are, with love. That is a goal worth fighting for.

The notion that all of these reforms can be accomplished piecemeal—one at a time, through disconnected advocacy strategies—seems deeply misguided. All of the needed reforms have less to do with failed policies than a deeply flawed public consensus, one that is indifferent, at best, to the experience of poor people, especially those of color. As Martin Luther King explained back in 1965, when describing why it was far more important to engage in mass mobilizations than file lawsuits:

“We're trying to win the right to vote and we have to focus the attention of the world on that. We can't do that making legal cases. We have to make the case in the court of public opinion.”

King certainly appreciated the contributions of civil rights lawyers (he relied on them to get him out of jail), but he opposed the tendency of civil rights lawyers to identify a handful of individuals who could make great plaintiffs in a court of law, then file isolated cases. He believed what was necessary was to mobilize thousands to make their case in the court of public opinion. In his view, it was a flawed public consensus—not merely flawed policy—that was at the root of racial oppression.

Some might attribute the cyclical nature of racial progress to the “unstable equilibrium” that characterizes the United States' racial order. Under normal conditions, they argue, state institutions are able to normalize the organization and enforcement of the prevailing racial order, and the system

functions relatively automatically. Challenges to the racial order during these periods are easily marginalized or suppressed, and the prevailing system of racial meanings, identity, and ideology seems “natural.” These conditions clearly prevailed during slavery and Jim Crow. When the equilibrium is disrupted, however, as in Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement, the state initially resists, then attempts to absorb the challenge through a series of reforms that are, if not entirely symbolic, at least not critical to the operation of the racial order. In the absence of a truly egalitarian racial consensus, these predictable cycles inevitably give rise to new, extraordinarily comprehensive systems of racialized social control.

One example of the way in which a well established racial order easily absorbs legal challenges is the infamous aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. After the Supreme Court declared separate schools inherently unequal in 1954, segregation persisted unabated. The statistics from the Southern states are truly amazing. For ten years, 1954–1964, virtually nothing happened. Not a single black child attended an integrated public grade school in South Carolina, Alabama, or Mississippi as of the 1962–1963 school year. Across the South as a whole, a mere one percent of black school children were attending school with whites in 1964—a full decade after *Brown* was decided.

Brown did not end Jim Crow; a mass movement had to emerge first—one that aimed to create a new public consensus opposed to the evils of Jim Crow. This does not mean *Brown v. Board of Education* was meaningless, as some commentators have claimed. *Brown* gave critical legitimacy to the demands of civil rights activists who risked their lives to end Jim Crow, and it helped to inspire the movement (as well as a fierce backlash). But standing alone, *Brown* accomplished for African Americans little more than Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. A civil war had to be waged to end slavery; a mass movement was necessary to bring a formal end to Jim Crow. Those who imagine that far less is required to dismantle mass incarceration and build a new, egalitarian consensus reflecting a compassionate rather than punitive impulse toward poor people fail to appreciate the distance between Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream and the ongoing racial nightmare for those locked up and locked out of American society.

Differences of opinion are inevitable about which reforms are most important and in what order of priority they should be pursued. These debates are worthwhile, but it is critical to keep in mind that the question of how we do reform work is even more important than the specific reforms we seek. If the way we pursue reforms does not contribute to the building of a movement to dismantle the system of mass incarceration, and if our advocacy does not upset the prevailing public consensus that supports the

new caste system, none of the reforms, even if won, will successfully disrupt the nation's class equilibrium. Challenges to the system will be easily absorbed or deflected, and the accommodations made will serve primarily to legitimate the system, not undermine it. We run the risk of winning isolated battles but losing the larger war.

All behavior is produced by chains of physical events that ultimately reach back to forces beyond the agent's control. There is an old French proverb—*Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*—'To know all is to forgive all.' The ultimate hope is that society will discard blame-based punishment as a nasty relic and insert in its place penalties whose purpose is to shape future behavior.

Part III

Supremacist Ideology

How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes'n how many times must the cannon balls fly
Before they're forever banned?
The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Yes'n how many years can a mountain exist
Before it is washed to the sea?
Yes'n how many years can some people exist
Before they're allowed to be free?
Yes'n how many times can a man turn his head
And pretend he just doesn't see?
The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Yes'n how many times must a man look up
Before he can see the sky?
Yes'n how many ears must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?
Yes'n how many deaths will it take till he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Non-Human Relations

An Existential Loan

“A tree is a tree,” Ronald Reagan famously said in the midst of a pitched battle over logging rights. “How many more do you need to look at?”

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
But lets the greater felon loose
Who steals the common from the goose

The Aliens Use Elites to Geoengineer/Methanate the Earth for Their Eventual Colonization Theory That Explains Everything:

- The Canadian Defense Minister stated some Aliens live now beneath the earth.
- Trees communicate through mycelium and trees’ constant banter might possibly drive the aliens mad with their noise. Also trees both oxygenate and remove CO₂ from the atmosphere and must die to make room for methane and eliminate any chance for our survival. See: rapid deforestation.
- Fracking, mining, hyperloops, et cetera are all methods for clearing more subterranean living space.
- Sinkholes are a means of exit to the surface once the methanation is sufficient.
- The uptick in objects blazing across the sky is a possible indication that more alien eggs are arriving or alternately, these “meteors” are atmospheric testing devices.

- The recent formation of companies that will provide space exploration for the wealthy 1% suggests the wealthiest are clearly in on the geo-engineering arrangement and have been promised a space refuge or mountain bunker.

This is the only rational explanation for not stopping climate change when the evidence was in 40+ years ago. Yes, you may say greed, but greed could never be this big or the 1% this greedy because the 1% have children too. It is all by design. There is a long-term plan.

Anthrohopelessness: The weariness that genuinely humane beings feel as they witness the collapse of much biology and beauty.

But what should we do with this fear that comes from living on a planet that is dying, made less alive every day? First, accept that it won't go away. That it is a fully rational response to the unbearable reality that we are living in a dying world, a world that a great many of us are helping to kill, by doing things like making tea and driving to the grocery store and yes, having kids.

“Whilst you rage against all of those who are to blame there is a case to examine our own culpability. We find it convenient to see ourselves as Victims, and as such we have had no control over our own individual decisions to comply.”

Excuse me, governments are to blame. They had information back in the early twentieth century from scientists. They had meetings about it in the 1960s. Thatcher was well aware of the issue, yet chose instead heavily to promote petrol-driven motor cars.

I can understand, being extremely generous, governments not acting on what scientists were telling them back then. But in recent decades, with climate science so much more developed, more instrumentation, more data being processed through computers, satellites recording methane billowing from the oceans and the face of the earth, data on coral reefs, acidification in the deep oceans being measured—there was no question about the gravest culpability on the part of governments, which continues today, for god's sake. Which continues today!

Had we lived through a period of genuine democracy, then yes, we people have a say in what happens. But for ever and a day we have to vote either left or right in a noxious dance between only two main parties. And even then, so what? We vote in one and they do nothing. We vote in the other—they do nothing.

How does it even matter which of the two main parties is in power? Neither does anything in any case, nor have they in any other country in a way which seriously reduces emissions. Capitalism holds sway across this earth and the Earth has been used as currency, it has been depleted, ripped out, torn down, damaged, and plundered, always with political approval in some endless quest for “economic growth,” whatever the fuck that means.

When it means the planet is now tipping into such tumultuous change that we have changed the entire atmosphere surrounding earth, the planet will heat up to the point of no return and much of life will become extinct in what we’re casually calling an ‘extinction event’—as if it’s simply a program on telly instead of the end of trillions of lives, a cessation of possibilities on a grand scale, the throwing of millions of years evolution into the dustbin—then economic growth is the greatest con trick ever known to mankind. It is no such thing, is it?! It has brought only vast wealth in its wake for the tiniest elite and destruction on a *vast* scale for everything and everybody else.

What is *my* culpability? I don’t drive, I don’t go on aeroplanes, I wear only secondhand clothes from charity shops, I am vegan, I wrap up in jumpers and coats rather than burn electricity, I have only one light on where I currently am with all others switched off and my only piece of technology is this PC which I turn off at night and one smartphone, where I take all the ‘apps’ off so the damned battery lasts longer.

And I have read and watched and learned about climate change for two decades and the frustration is off the scale, *off the scale*, with the total lack of action by politicians, who have our blood on their hands. When will it be their blood?

The Paris meeting was yet another fudge, another delay, another shrug-and-we’ll-deal-with-this-later, with delegates pretending they’d come to some kind of vital agreement when they had done nothing of the sort. They included in their global cuts of emissions technological solutions which have not even been *invented* yet.

But oh the horror when Big Bad Orange Man pulls the US out of this completely useless and inadequate process. It’s a game to them, when will you get it? They’re playing you. And oh how that righteous anger will flow should the people ever find themselves able to focus it on their real enemies, rather than simply tearing each other apart.

I don’t know how I will be able to contain my anger over the coming decade. I don’t. But I can tell you one thing. I *will* remain angry, because I’m damned if I’m going to subside into depression. I’m going to snatch every last damned minute of life in this exquisitely beautiful world, fully active and alert and functioning. And I will see to it that this shit is stopped—enough

is enough—even if it’s the last thing I do.

The fuckin’ plants are dying off and you’re pumped because ‘HUMANS NO. 1!’ And we’re not thriving really, not on our carbon-fuel, high-growth model of society. We’re taking out an existential loan against the odds of our own survival, trading away our atmosphere and ecosystems for a few decades of hyper-consumption.

We have to get over the old Cartesian paradigm of looking at the world as a machine which we get to control, which exists separately from us and can be manipulated without any unwanted repercussions. It’s a system we belong to, and like all functioning systems it has to self-regulate to stay alive.

The Agricultural Revolution seems to have been accompanied by a religious revolution. Hunter-gatherers picked and pursued wild plants and animals which could be seen as equal in status to *Homo sapiens*. The fact that man hunted sheep did not make sheep inferior to man, just as the fact that tigers hunted man did not make man inferior to tigers. Beings communicated with one another directly and negotiated the rules governing their shared habitat. In contrast, farmers owned and manipulated plants and animals, and could hardly degrade themselves by negotiating with their possessions. Hence the first religious effect of the Agricultural Revolution was to turn plants and animals from equal members of a spiritual round table into property.

To justify the carnage inflicted upon wildlife, Roman attitudes towards the natural world shifted markedly. During the early days of the Republic, Romans regarded the Mediterranean landscape as the sacred space of nature deities such as Apollo, god of the sun, Ceres, goddess of agriculture, and Neptune, god of freshwater and the sea. As Rome expanded, however, these religious beliefs became largely hollow rituals, disconnected from natural processes. During the high days of the empire, Stoic and Epicurean philosophies that legitimated the status-driven debauchery of the Roman upper classes prevailed. Orgies of conspicuous consumption, in which the wealthy would eat until they vomited, only to begin eating again, became common—this one is perhaps apocryphal, but illustrative nonetheless.

By the time Christianity became the official state religion of Rome in the late fourth century, there was little to differentiate Roman philosophy from the dominant attitude of the Judeo-Christian scriptures, in whose creation myth God grants human beings absolute dominion over the world he has made. Humanity, the Bible and Christian tradition held, was placed apart from nature by God, gifted with an immortal soul and a capacity for rational thought that legitimated the transformation of the natural world in the pursuit of human self-interest.

It was Western culture that first dreamed up the notion that ‘humans’ and ‘nature’ are somehow separate. This dichotomy holds that human beings are inherently superior to all other animals, alleging that we are the only ones capable of cognition or experiencing emotions. We’re told that efforts to communicate with other animals or to develop relationships that aren’t based on total domination are simply futile. Despite this very thorough conditioning, many people still desire a deeper connection with other animals and the more-than-human world, a connection that was implicit in all human lives before the dawn of ‘modern civilization,’ and the colonization and decimation of other cultures.

A closer look at the “crazed mob” on the beach that day seems to reveal this desire for connection: Notice that the people were not intentionally abusing the dolphin. There were cries among the crowd to place her back in the water. When she died, reportedly from dehydration, people came forward to tenderly stroke her, seemingly overcome with a dawning sense of sadness and regret. These are not the actions of monstrous people who should be condemned. These are the actions of people who are being taught to fundamentally misunderstand other animals, to treat them like objects rather than the aware, sensitive beings they truly are.

The incident illustrates one of the ways that Western culture mediates our relationships with other animals in order to reinforce the illusory barrier between ‘humans’ and ‘nature’—the performer metaphor, where humans are the spectators and nature is the entertainer. In North America at least, the language used to describe encounters with wild animals is largely linked to entertainment: ‘That whale really put on a show’ or ‘That bird is showing off.’ The examples are endless.

Companies like SeaWorld are simultaneously a symptom and a cause of this performer metaphor. Their facilities are sites where the collective misunderstanding of animals is acted out and disseminated into popular culture. Thousands of largely young and impressionable people who visit SeaWorld each year are exposed to the performative metaphor in its purest form: they, as the audience, applaud as the cetaceans are forced to go through their trained routines. They leave with the impression that what they have witnessed is part of the natural order of things: that this is how humans ought to relate to cetaceans and other animals. SeaWorld should have acknowledged the part their industry played in the death of the small Franciscana dolphin. Instead, they released a snarkily worded blog that admonished people for taking selfies with the dolphin. According to SeaWorld, one should not “pass around the animal like a prop to get a good selfie. And yes, taking a stranded young dolphin out of the water to take selfies with it falls under harassment.”

This may be true. But coming from SeaWorld, this advice is ironic since their entire business model is predicated on removing cetaceans from the oceans, forcing them to perform shows, and—wait for it—charging people money to take selfies with them. SeaWorld’s explicit acting-out of the performer metaphor is what helps transform dolphins, captive or stranded, into props for photos.

Of course, not everyone in Westernized culture views the more-than-human world through a performative lens. However, this perspective remains quite pervasive and it actively inhibits alternative ways of understanding and relating. The performer metaphor is so predominant in Western settings that at times we have a difficult time speaking, and perhaps even perceiving, differently. So, when we say things like, ‘those manatees enjoy performing for us,’ we may actually believe it. As cities grow larger and fewer people have the opportunity to develop their own perspectives, the performer metaphor’s influence may continue to grow.

Unfortunately, McKibben’s “war on climate change” only indirectly addresses the structural inequities. Although it might alleviate unemployment, “help ease income inequality,” and clean up the environment to some degree, simply replacing the toxic fossil fuel industry with a clean, green energy sector would do little to correct deeper, systemic problems—such as poverty, slums, our prison system, militarism—and other injustices emanating from our exploitative political economy; one that could be maintained by green cops, and by green armies, just as easily as by their fossil fuel counterparts.

All of this leads to a serious consideration. Instead of regarding the inability to act on climate change as a result of inertia or incompetence, perhaps we should begin to regard it as willful. After all, who now sincerely doubts that pollution and greenhouse gases create the conditions that produce the ecological calamities that largely harm the poor? And how can we overlook the related fact that the owners of the world have a substantial incentive in ridding the planet of the billions of people whose existence alone threatens their property and privileges? Indeed, allowing climate change to kill the poor would not only be more convenient than policing, fighting, locking out and locking up billions; by claiming that it’s inevitable, the owners of the world can watch the ecological holocaust unfold with a relatively good conscience.

When one considers this, along with the fact that the affluent classes dictate social policy as well as the regulation of the pollutants responsible for the climate calamities bombarding the poor, we may begin to see that the failure to halt the proliferation of notoriously toxic gases is comparable to a type of passive chemical warfare. Isn’t that what it amounts to? And, relevantly, there is a World War II precedent for just this type of inaction as

well. While the Red Army was losing millions in their march toward Berlin, the US intentionally delayed invading Europe in order to allow the Nazis to further weaken the USSR, which the US, Britain, and others regarded as a threat to their property—and the rule of money—ever since the October Revolution.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that climate inaction amounts to a willful omission designed to cull the world's poor, it is nevertheless difficult to deny that action is being both stymied and ignored. Obama, for instance, who promised in 2008 to vigorously tackle climate change, did nothing. And though some may argue that, whatever his shortcomings, McKibben should at least be commended for arguing for action, this argument is undermined by McKibben's approach which, at best, amounts to a plea for reform; and, at worst, comes off as a pitch for a business opportunity.

Rather than McKibben's "war on climate change," adequately mitigating the harms associated with climate change—which are inseparable from poverty and exploitation—requires an entirely new, emancipatory political economy, one that produces necessities for human flourishing for their own sake, rather than for exchange. Instead of producing new machines, what's more crucial is that we turn many of the existing ones—such as the war machine—off. And though McKibben is correct in pointing out that climate change involves war, he grievously misidentifies the enemy. Climate change is not the enemy; it's merely one of the many harmful effects of our political economic system. This is what needs to be eliminated. But such a transformation requires something greater than war. It requires peace.

Conveniently, you don't even have to read the piece, the headline tells you all you need and then some: "How To Make A Profit From Defeating Climate Change" really nails it. The entire mindset on display in just a few words. If that's what they went for, kudos are due.

That these problems originated in the same relentless quest for profit that they now claim will help us get rid of them, is likely a step too far for them; must have been a class they missed. 'We destroyed it for profit' apparently does not in their eyes contradict 'we'll fix it for profit too.' Not one bit. It does, though. It's indeed the very core of what is going wrong.

Profit, or money in general, is all these people live for, it's their altar. That's why they are successful in this world. It's also why the world is doomed. Is there any chance I could persuade you to dwell on that for a few seconds? That, say, Bloomberg and Carney, and all they represent, are the problem dressed up as the solution? That our definition of success is what dooms us?

Philosophers, religious people, or you and me, may struggle with the question, 'what's the purpose of life,' these guys do not. The purpose of life

is to make a profit. The earth and all the life it harbors exist to kill, drill, excavate, and burn down, if that means you can make a profit. And after that you repair it all for a profit. In their view, the earth doesn't turn of its own accord after all, it's money that makes it go round.

The lifestyles of the last ten generations of us, especially Westerners, are characterized more than anything else by the huge increase in the use of energy, of calories and joules. As we went from wood to peat to coal to oil and gas, the energy return on energy investment kept going higher. But that stopped with oil and gas. And from now on in it will keep going down.

'Free carbon excess' was a one-off gift from nature. It will not continue and it will not return. Different forms of carbon have offered us a one-time source of free energy that we will not have again. The idea that we can replace it with "clean energy" is ludicrous. The energy return on energy investment doesn't even come close. And you can't run a society with our present levels of complexity on a much lower net energy. We must dress down. No profit in that, sorry.

Ever wonder why everybody drives a car that is ten times heavier than her/himself and has a 10% efficiency rate in its energy use? Why there's an infrastructure everywhere that necessitates for every individual to use 1,000 times more energy than it would take herself to get from A to B on foot? Sounds a lot like deliberately wasteful behavior, doesn't it?

The essence here is that while we were building this entire wasteful world of ours, we engaged in the denying and lying behavior that typifies us as a species more than anything: we disregarded externalities. And there is no reason to believe we would not continue to do just that when we make the illusionary switch to "clean" energy.

The idea that "extinction does not carry moral significance, even when we have caused it"—that statement is a stranger to thousands of years of philosophy on moral agency and reveals an ignorance of human moral thinking. Moral agency issues from an ability to consider consequences. Humans are the species most capable of such consideration. Thus many philosophers consider humans the only creatures capable of acting as moral agents. An asteroid strike, despite its consequences, has no moral significance. Protecting bears by declaring Katmai National Monument, or un-protecting Bears Ears National Monument, are acts of moral agency. Ending genetic lineages millions of years old, either actively or by the willful neglect that many advocate, certainly qualifies as morally significant.

We have not done the things that are necessary to lower emissions because those things fundamentally conflict with deregulated capitalism, the reigning ideology for the entire time we have been struggling to find a way out of this crisis. We are stuck because the actions that would give us the best

chance of averting catastrophe—and would benefit the vast majority—are extremely threatening to an elite minority that has a stranglehold over our economy, our political process, and our major media outlets. That problem might not have been insurmountable had it presented itself at another point in our history. But it is our great collective misfortune that the scientific community made its decisive diagnosis of the climate threat at the precise moment when those elites were enjoying more unfettered political, cultural, and intellectual power than at any point since the 1920s.

The metaphor that we are part of the earth ecosystem is not a belief; it is a reality. We are tiny specks in a fabulous system, parts of something grand. We are part of what life has “learned” from its inception on earth and has genetically encoded in DNA that will be passed on until the sun goes out—hopefully.

Our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity’s use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it’s not the laws of nature.

We can’t will it to be otherwise. We can’t say, ‘Well, yes, our civilization is built on an evolutionarily unstable strategy but we can make it work anyhow, because we’re humans.’ The world will not make an exception for us. And of course what the Church teaches is that God *will* make an exception for us. God will let us behave in a way that would be fatal for any other species, will somehow “fix it” so we can live in a way that is in a very real sense self-eliminating. This is like expecting God to make our airplanes fly even if they’re aerodynamically incapable of flight.

“Yes, a new economic model is needed if catastrophic climate change is to be avoided. I do not know anything about the finer details of economics but can remember being highly skeptical when carbon pricing was suggested as a way to reduce emissions. It is quite obvious that it cannot work.”

Modern societies have always been hierarchical. With humans, wealth had come to be seen to be the symbol of high status and success. This would have been fine if it had been kept within the limits that the environment could sustain. Unfortunately, the Industrial Revolution opened the floodgates to environmental exploitation on a massive scale with its consequent emissions of CO₂ and other pollutants.

Every successive layer of society has more control over those beneath them and demands more rewards. The majority of humans are trapped by this system and many work to “better” themselves by moving up the social order by acquiring more wealth. Industry is geared to producing ever more products to enable people to get rich. The cost to the environment is totally ignored.

It is obvious that this economic model has led us onto the path to extinction. It is indisputable that the climate is set towards rapid change. That has always led to mass extinction events in the past. If anyone is not aware of the meaning of ‘mass extinction,’ it means that the vast majority of species on Earth will die, including humans.

A new economic model is needed. Ideally, the culture of acquiring wealth should be totally abandoned. I am very aware that that is very unlikely to happen but it could be the only way to save ourselves. Societies with a high disparity between the poorest and wealthy have, in the past, bred discontent and been overturned by revolutions. Unfortunately, the new rulers have always fallen into the same trap—that of acquiring wealth for themselves at the expense of others and the environment.

Human society has evolved to be this way over millennia. Unfortunately, there are not millennia available to create a fairer society less exploitative of others and resources. It would undoubtedly have been better if action to reduce fossil fuel use had been taken thirty or forty years ago instead of increasing their use in spite of warnings. The only real way to make a difference now is to cut fossil fuel burning to the barest minimum immediately which would mean creating a new economic model. Too much to ask?

Many people cannot see beyond the need to have work, any work, whatever the environmental cost. I am very far from being the cleverest person here but even I can see that there is a way, but it does mean that the wealthy would have to accept a lower standard of living. Surely, other people, very many of whom are a lot cleverer than me, can also see that? There are very many people who are perfectly happy with a considerably lower standard of living than even those who do not consider themselves to be wealthy, I am one of them. Wealth is not money or material possessions, it is having sufficient food to eat, a place to live, and social interactions with family and friends.

As climate change progresses, the first of those to go will be sufficient food to eat. That will cause huge disruption of the social order and economic collapse. Change is inevitable, surely it would be better to take decisive action now to reduce the impacts and to ensure an orderly transition rather than to let everything descend into chaos.

Of course, it is not helpful that there are still so many people who

dispute that climate change is a problem. That is akin to having the carbon monoxide alarm go off in their house and for them to say, ‘I can’t see anything, or smell anything so no worries, I’ll just wait to see if I die.’ The alarm is being sounded by scientists, who have been studying the climate full time for many years. They have been sounding the alarm for at least thirty years but emissions have been rising in that time. Not by a small amount, by around one third more. No meaningful action has been taken to halt these emissions. Time is running out very fast.

In pushing other species to extinction, humanity is busy sawing off the limb on which it perches.

The end of growth exposes the stupidity and ignorance of all but a precious few “leaders.” There is no other way this could have run, because an era of growth simply selects for different people to float to the top of the pond than a period of contraction does. Can we agree on that?

Growth leaders only have to seduce voters into believing that they can keep growth going, and create more of it. Anyone can do that. So anyone who’s sufficiently hooked on power games will apply. Contraction leaders have a much harder time; they must convince voters that they can minimize the suffering of the herd. Which is invariably a herd that no one wants to belong to. A tough sell.

At some point the whole ‘but it will create jobs’ thing doesn’t hold water. Jobs are only valuable if they contribute to the future. If the jobs, quite foreseeably, make the future worse then they have no value—perhaps even negative value once their externalities are factored in.

“Certain wolves I’ve known—they were better at being a wolf than I’ve been at being a person. Killing a wolf is like killing a brother.

I have lived to see state after state extirpate its wolves. I have watched the face of many a newly wolfless mountain, and seen every edible bush and seedling browsed to death, every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddlehorn. Too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long-run. Perhaps this is the hidden meaning in the howl of the wolf, long known among mountains, but seldom perceived among men.”

Wolves became werewolves, dangerous dogs became chupacabras, human-eating snakes became dragons, narwhal horns became unicorns, mastodon became cyclops, squids and octopi became sea monsters, and even Thomas Jefferson in the 1790s introduced the megalonyx, which he believed to be a

great cat-like creature based on the discovery of a large claw—it turned out to belong to a sloth. All to be defeated at the hand of humans.

People continue to tame and subjugate nature, but when we visit the few remaining scraps of wilderness where bears roam free, we can still feel an instinctive fear. How precious that feeling is.

We are each newly arrived and temporary tourists on this planet, yet we find ourselves custodians of the world for all people yet unborn. A little humility, and forbearance, might comport.

This we know: the Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the Earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

Traditionally, when a great crime such as a murder occurs, people make a great effort to apprehend the guilty party. A murder is a great grievance, but it is a minor one compared to the loss of a species, especially one that is part of a cultural and ecological web that encompasses millions of people, performs ecological services on a near global scale, and enriches the enjoyment of life not just for the living but for all generations to come.

Neither ignorance nor personal justification can be a defense when it comes to heinous crimes leading to genocide, ecocide, or the extinction of species. Effects really matter, and any chemical that is synthesized—meaning that it has never before existed as a component of an ecosystem—should be assumed harmful on an ecosystem level until proven otherwise. This is not wild extrapolation; it is commonsense biology. And by common sense it is also obvious that ‘the market’ as such will not solve the problem but will create and maintain it, if left to run free like a high-tech car without a steering wheel or brakes.

It’s not that anyone thinks humans have not greatly changed the world, or will stop changing it. Rather, as the great wildlife ecologist Aldo Leopold wrote in his 1949 classic, *A Sand County Almanac*:

“To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.”

Diversity is a survival factor for the community itself. A community of a hundred-million species can survive almost anything short of total global catastrophe. Within that hundred-million will be thousands that could survive a global temperature drop of twenty degrees—which would be a lot more devastating than it sounds. Within that hundred-million will be thousands that could survive a global temperature rise of twenty degrees. But a community of a hundred species or a thousand species has almost no survival value at all.

It is holy work. The more competitors you destroy, the more humans you can bring into the world, and that makes it just about the holiest work there is. Once you exempt yourself from the law of limited competition, everything in the world except your food and the food of your food becomes an enemy to be exterminated.

As you see, one species exempting itself from this law has the same ultimate effect as all species exempting themselves. You end up with a community in which diversity is progressively destroyed in order to support the expansion of a single species.

We—especially economists—need to realize that the global economy is a subsystem of our global ecology. There can be no economy without exploitation of the natural world and the global economy can never be larger than the size of the natural resources that Earth once held because ecology indicates the boundaries of where our economy can reach. There are ecological limits. Human capital and natural capital are not interchangeable in any tangible sense. The eco-capitalist mindset unfortunately fails to understand this very basic, and self-evident, observation.

The metaphors we use to describe the natural world strongly influence the way we approach it, the style and extent of our attempts at control. It makes all the difference in and to the world if one conceives of a farm as a factory or a forest as a farm.

The potential for us to make progress with environmental issues is limited by the basic assumptions that we make about nature, the unspoken, often unrecognized perspective from which we view our environment. If there is any hope of dealing with our global environmental crisis we must first break free of old assumptions and old myths about nature and ourselves.

Forest = Forest
Cattle Ranch = \$

Yes. Sadly. Natural resources are ruthlessly exploited by predatory capitalism and turned into money. But money is without life and without value outside a very limited cultural setting. Our hoarding economy has turned everything it touches into money. Money is stored as figures in a bank. It is just some bytes in a computer. Utterly useless unless reinvested in something that sustains life. But all the hoarders do is invest their money to make—wait for it—more money. Just rewrite the accounts and give everyone billions each. Flood the earth with digital wealth if that is so special. It is only of symbolic value. It is not real for fucks sake! And this is to say nothing of the incredible loss of biodiversity that goes along with the destruction of forest. Given how consistently researchers discover powerful

new pharmaceutical compounds in exotic rainforest plants, we may have already sacrificed a cure for cancer for the sake of our Big Macs.

Forest is very much real, very much of unique value. not just forest but a rich environment full of ever evolving life forms. With inherent value, the inalienable value of life. Who knows what wonders come from such forest? Once upon a time in a forest an ape climbed down from a tree and stood upright on the earth and walked forward into a future which created you and me. Why might such forests not generate more new life at least as wonderful as human beings? Let's keep as much biodiversity as possible. For our present benefit and for the future.

To exchange life for money is insane, simply insane.

If there is danger in the human trajectory, it is not so much in the survival of our own species as in the fulfillment of the ultimate irony of organic evolution: that in the instant of achieving self-understanding through the mind of man, life has doomed its most beautiful creations.

I thought of the long ages of the past during which the successive generations of these things of beauty had run their course with no intelligent eye to gaze upon their loveliness, to all appearances such a wanton waste of beauty. This consideration must surely tell us that all living things were not made for man. Their happiness and enjoyments, their loves and hates, their struggles for existence, their vigorous life and early death, would seem to be immediately related to their own well-being and perpetuation alone.

Anthropocentrism, the idea that humankind is the most important element of existence, is another unique facet of the human/nature divide that has colonized much of the world today. Simply put, anthropocentrism is narcissism on a cultural scale.

This is manifested when, for example, entire landscapes are transformed to be suited to the needs of modern civilization, done at the expense of both human and nonhuman. The opinions, desires, and needs of indigenous communities, of cetacean communities, of the multitude of other-than-human communities, are unequivocally and thoroughly dismissed.

Some say that the selfie is the epitome of individual narcissism. The rise in selfie popularity seems to align with the trajectory of Western anthropocentrism, as both climb to a fevered pitch. Gone are the days when people were content to take photos where the landscape or other animals were the central features.

Now, humans are often centered in these shots, as though the scenes would be meaningless without a human face. The world increasingly exists as a mere backdrop for the comings and goings of Westernized humanity.

Selfies can be inflammatory, and for good reason. Many animals have died for selfies, but billions more have died from rampant human self-

centeredness. Selfies bring into visceral focus our ailing relations with the more-than-human world, and this focus is uncomfortable to reckon with.

But reckon with it we should. We can do this by first recognizing where the problems lay: within the Western framing of the world we experience. Only when we have done this can we begin imagining alternative ways of being together, where we can co-create a more compassionate and understanding world for all species.

Only when we put down the selfie stick and really look at the ‘more than human’ world will we begin to reclaim the connections that Western culture has hidden from us. There is a whole Universe that awaits us beyond the illusion.

Of course, the same arbiters of moral importance will heatedly defend a favorite delicacy, a piece of finery, a bloody recreation, or whatever else, as if all the world depended on it. How do we convey to them the truly finer things, such as a sense of fraternity with fellow creatures, bound for dust as we are, and the self-restraint and mercy in which we show the real glory of humanity?

It cannot be the right of masses of people who can afford it to take vacations in whatever part of the planet they choose regardless of many factors including environmental ones. Just because corporations increasingly have the human right to exploit resources wherever and whenever they choose, does not mean we should be extending that right to all individuals at the level of total vacation destiny rights. We should be challenging the destructive rights of the corporations.

We all need to start understanding the true value of things rather than the price of things. Sometimes something simply should not have a price tag.

“It’s basically dealing with itself as we deal with basic human needs. As countries develop, fertility rates are dropping worldwide, and many developed countries are already below replacement rates.”

The problem with “developed” countries is that they use a perfectly insane amount of resources and depend on suffering to maintain their standard of living. As more countries become “developed” this puts more pressure on the rest of the world’s natural resources.

“If you want global population to drop, the best thing we can do is help keep the developing countries on that track.”

It's not a lack of development, it's a lack of a cultural value that comprehends and respects the future and decent behavior toward non-human beings and ecosystems. It's egotistical insanity and a fundamental lack of morality.

The question is, do we want to continue eating meat, or do we want to make room for a couple billion more people? The all-encompassing question is, do we want to give up X, so that we can fit Y number of people on the planet?

A lot of people like to talk about how there's plenty of room for so many more people. But it seems as if they don't really think about quality of life questions, because they'll also tell you that taking daily showers is bad, having a lawn is bad, driving a car is bad, owning a single family home is bad, not living in an urban area in general is bad. But none of these things are objectively 'bad,' it's just that they are starting to butt up against questions like 'Is there enough for everyone?' and, 'Can we keep doing this to the planet?'

And those are great questions to be asking. Because in many ways, there isn't enough for everyone, and we can't keep doing this to the planet. And while I certainly don't advocate lavish, wasteful, destructive lifestyles, I do see the almost every form of personal cut-backs as nothing more than a stopgap solution, a warning. I mean, if me changing from 15 minute showers to 10 minute showers is what's necessary today, what's necessary tomorrow? Even the big offenders, like dairies or California almonds, don't provide unlimited water for an unlimited population.

The usual next argument is that the global population will reach some kind of equilibrium, both by a general decrease in birth rates for first world countries, and by the simple fact that we will eventually run out of resources to feed, clothe, shelter everyone. And I believe that, but what I don't want is a world continuously on the brink. I don't want just enough water for people to drink. I don't want just enough tigers to maintain a viable population. I don't want just enough National Park space to accommodate every visitor, as long as the park is at 100% capacity every day. It's not about any one of these things, but it's about all of them, and many more.

Would I literally kill someone for a steak or the freedom to take a nice 30 minute shower after a long day? No. And eugenics scares the shit out of me. I'm just confident that the key to human prosperity and happiness and safety lies in a reasonable population. And that's what I think more people should be talking about.

Our planet is not fragile at its own time scale, and we, pitiful latecomers in the last microsecond of the planetary year are stewards of nothing in the long-run. Yet no political movement is more vital and timely than

modern environmentalism because we must save ourselves—and our neighbor species—from our own immediate folly.

Many people argue in a dramatically flawed way, yet many will not realize it. We find ourselves arguing over non-issues, not the real issues. One may be arguing that conservation hunting is fantastic, it helps support the animals when no other funding is provided. The other may be arguing over the immorality of killing the animal for money. They're not having the same argument in most cases. Does the supporter believe this is the best or correct way to be doing it? We don't know. Is the opponent against it always? Simply arguing that while it is the only option available now, because the system is flawed? Neither is necessarily examining the real issue, while wasting time and energy on unimportant distractions.

Other Nations

The root of all of our myths containing various humanoid, human-like, primate-esque monsters is our genetic cousins which our ancestors made extinct.

When we wound the planet grievously by excavating its treasures, destroy its ability to breathe by converting forests into urban wastelands, poison its waters with toxic wastes, and exterminate other living organisms, we are in fact doing all this to our own bodies. All other species are to be enslaved or driven to extinction if need be in the interests of human “progress.” We are part of the same web of life—where every difference we construct artificially between ‘them’ and ‘us’ adds only one more brick to the mausoleum of humankind itself.

“They are in all ways like me, but the thing that has failed them is luck, and they are as unlikely to escape theirs as I am to forfeit mine. The poachers are just uneducated young men. They’re as smart as we are; they’re being used by evil people because they have nothing to lose except their lives.”

When a poacher kills an elephant, he doesn’t just kill the elephant who dies. The family may lose the crucial memory of their elder matriarch, who knew where to travel during the very toughest years of drought to reach the food and water that would allow them to continue living. Thus one bullet may, years later, bring more deaths. Watching dolphins while thinking of elephants, what I realized is: when others recognize and depend on certain individuals, when a death makes the difference for individuals who survive, when relationships define us, we have traveled across a certain blurry boundary in the history of life on Earth—‘it’ has become ‘who.’

Grief doesn’t require understanding death. Humans certainly grieve, but they disagree on what death is. People learn widely varying traditional beliefs—in heaven, hell, karmic reincarnation, and other devices for keeping the deceased undead. The main thing humans seem to believe about death is: you never really die. A minority believe that we simply end, ceasing to exist. But most people find that notion inconceivable. ‘I believe in life everlasting’ are words many are taught to repeat in church. So when a chimpanzee or dolphin carries its dead baby, does it understand any less about death than does the pope? When an elephant fondles the bones of its dearly departed, does it understand more?

Is it because I speak to you, that you judge that I have feeling, memory, ideas? Well, I do not speak to you; you see me going home looking

disconsolate, seeking a paper anxiously, opening the desk where I remember having shut it, finding it, reading it joyfully. You judge that I have experienced the feeling of distress and that of pleasure, that I have memory and understanding.

Bring the same judgment to bear on this dog which has lost its master, which has sought him on every road with sorrowful cries, which enters the house agitated, uneasy, which goes down the stairs, up the stairs, from room to room, which at last finds in his study the master it loves, and which shows him its joy by its cries of delight, by its leaps, by its caresses.

Barbarians seize this dog, which in friendship surpasses man so prodigiously; they nail it on a table, and they dissect it alive in order to show the mesenteric veins. You discover in it all the same organs of feeling that are in yourself. Answer me, machinist, has nature arranged all the means of feeling in this animal, so that it may not feel? Has it nerves in order to be impassible? Do not suppose this impertinent contradiction in nature.

We say ‘humans and animals’ as though life falls into just two categories: ‘us’ and ‘all of them.’ Yet we’ve trained elephants to haul logs from forests; in laboratories we’ve run rats through mazes to study learning, let pigeons tap targets to teach us Psychology 101; we study flies to learn how our DNA works, give monkeys infectious diseases to develop cures for humans; in our homes and cities, dogs have become the guiding protectors for humans who see only by the light of their four-legged companions’ eyes. Throughout all this intimacy, we maintain a certain insecure insistence that ‘animals’ are not like us—though we are animals. Could any relationship be more fundamentally miscomprehended?

“Realizing we are not so different to the rest of the animal kingdom could have profound implications on how we treat our closest living relatives. Is it acceptable to continue to carry out invasive medical trials? Or lock up our primate cousins in zoos for our entertainment?”

Sentences like this are so depressing to read. First, because yes, obviously. Anyone with a heart would agree that medical experiments and locking up animals for our entertainment is grotesque, selfish callousness on the part of humans. But also—yes, we *know* that there is a very faint dividing line between human and animal behaviour. Anyone who’s ever owned a pet knows that.

I have only known cats. But the psychological connection, the understanding between them and me, their emotional need for me to show them love, their need to love me back, and a whole range of other behaviours

means they are not simply objects, or even ‘animal-objects,’ but living thinking sensing emotional beings—like me, except with fur and different shaped bodies.

I’ve had cats who are clearly intelligent, others who are a little dim. I’ve had cats play tricks on me, or come up with strategies, such as systematically knocking books off a shelf and peering around to notice my reaction, when they want to jostle me into getting up from the computer and giving them breakfast. I usually feed my cats at 8:00. If I’m sitting at my computer at 7:45 and one of my two cats decides he’s impatient for breakfast, that’s what he does. Or reaches out and slightly nudges a coffee cup.

I could cite hundreds of examples of what my cats do. And they’re “just” cats. Monkeys, apes—are vastly more similar to us human beings, obviously. To trap an animal used to roaming in the wild in a cage is grotesque stupidity on the part of humans—very cruel, a horrific punishment for an animal who has done nothing but be himself. I will never forget Guy the Gorilla at London Zoo, sitting hunched in front of the bars of his cage, grumpy and depressed, getting angry with people gesticulating in front of his face and masturbating wildly when angry.

Climate change threatens the existence of all of us on this planet. I often think how very much I would like a moratorium for animals across the world, even just one fucking week, before we wipe out life on earth, where they can just be left alone. Not boiled alive in Asia, not have their horns ripped off in Africa, not cut up and drugged and trapped in machines in the West, not shoved in their thousands into pens so tiny they can’t even turn around and as a result compulsively peck out their feathers.

The way humans treat the natural world goes beyond obscenity. It is sick, sick, sick behaviour. Our comeuppance is this: because we can treat the natural world as we do, because we can treat living creatures the way we do, means that our mental faculties are far too limited to understand the way that human beings naturally slot into the world. Which means we are too ignorant to understand how to protect our natural living world. Which is why we have done nothing about climate change and why we have already locked into the system, with our out of control emissions, temperature rises of at least four degrees or more.

Our sociopathy is too advanced for the survival of the natural world on this planet. And too advanced for the survival of our own selves. It’s very depressing.

Whenever people say, ‘We mustn’t be sentimental,’ you can take it that they are about to do something cruel. And if they add, ‘We must be realistic,’ they mean they are about to make money out of it. These slogans have a long history. After being used to justify slave traders, ruthless industrialists,

and contractors who had found that the most economically realistic method of cleaning a chimney was to force a small child to climb it, they have now been passed on, like an heirloom, to the factory farmers.

This isn't the first time science has seen such a pervasive collapse of rigor. A century ago, scientists believed that northern Europeans were the most intelligent of our species, thanks to a big fat dose of bias. Such bias is now seen as antiquated, but comparative psychology is applying the same bias to cross-species comparisons between humans and apes.

In one set of studies, researchers compared children raised in Western households, steeped in the cultural conventions of nonverbal signaling, with apes raised without the same cultural exposure. But then they were all tested on Western conventions of non-verbal communication. Of course the human children are going to do better. I would like to see them put the human kids in the wild and see them forage for food and communicate with other apes; who'd outperform there?

Of the approaches so far in measuring apes' abilities, the only firm conclusion that can be made is that apes not raised in Western, postindustrial households do not act very much like human children who were raised in those specific ecological circumstances, a result that should surprise no one.

We need another and a wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals. Remote from universal nature and living by complicated artifice, man in civilization surveys the creature through the glass of his knowledge and sees thereby a feather magnified and the whole image in distortion. We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate for having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein do we err. For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours, they move finished and complete, gifted with the extension of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings: they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.

We have to remember that what we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our methods of questioning. It is a simple truth of field biology that it is easy to miss and hard to figure out what, exactly, an animal is doing. And what animals do may be more complex than the descriptions we apply or the measurements we devise.

We are sometimes at a loss in trying to describe such events because we unthinkingly imagine the animals as instinctual. We are suspicious of motive and invention among them. The lesson of evolution with the muskox, an animal that has changed little in two-million years, is that whether it is witty or dull in its deliberation, a significant number have consistently

chosen correctly.

Whenever we seek to take swift and efficient possession of places completely new to us, places we neither own nor understand, our first and often only assessment is a scientific one. And so our evaluations remain unfinished.

Ecosystems are not only more complex than we think. They're more complex than we can think.

Assessing the mind of a creature this alien demands that we be extraordinary flexible in our own thinking. Imagine the way someone like an octopus might attempt to measure our brainpower: How many color patterns an octopus might wonder, can your severed arm produce in one second? On the basis of that answer, an octopus could reasonably conclude we humans were stupid indeed—so dumb that they could steal a bucket of fish from us in full view.

“What if the catalyst or the key to understanding creation lay somewhere in the immense mind of the whale? Suppose if God came back from wherever it is he's been and asked us smilingly if we'd figured it out yet. Suppose he wanted to know if it had finally occurred to us to ask the whale. And then he sort of looked around and he said, 'By the way, where are the whales?'”

A lot of flowers have patterns on their petals that reflect UV light, the reason being that bees can see UV, and use that information to better figure out which flowers are good to harvest. We can't see UV light, so we see flowers differently than bees do. It doesn't matter to you whether that flower would rather be pollinated by a bee or a hummingbird or a butterfly, because you're much more interested in looking at my face and figuring out whether my smile is genuine or if I'm scamming you. So bees see flowers in a special way but my face is just another vaguely-round blob, while your senses can instantly process an incomprehensible amount of information about my facial expression but can't distinguish flowers as well as a bee can.

What is a flower really like? What is a face really like? What the bee sees? What we see? To understand what a flower is, you have to understand it objectively, completely abandoning the idea of sight, or what a flower looks like, what it smells like, what it feels like. We are incapable of doing that.

The duration of the beat of a hummingbird's wing is as concealed to our sensory organs as is the drifting of the continents.

The labeling of objects is very much part of language, and we should not forget that once upon a time linguists defined language simply as symbolic

communication. Only when apes proved capable of such communication did they feel the need to raise the bar and add refinements such as that language requires syntax and recursivity. Syntax is what tells us that a Venetian blind is not a blind Venetian. Many communication experts consider syntax to be the defining characteristic of true language.

Critical pieces such as power alliances (politics) and the spreading of habits (culture), as well as empathy and fairness (morality), are detectable outside our species. The same holds for capacities underlying language. Honeybees, for example, accurately signal distant nectar locations to the hive, and monkeys may utter calls in predictable sequences that resemble rudimentary syntax.

The most intriguing parallel is perhaps referential signaling. Vervet monkeys on the plains of Kenya have distinct alarm calls for a leopard, eagle, or snake. These predator-specific calls constitute a life-saving communication system, because different dangers demand different responses. For example, the right response to a snake alarm is to stand upright in the tall grass and look around, which would be suicidal in case a leopard lurks in the grass.

Science increasingly views human speech and birdsong as products of convergent evolution, given that songbirds and humans share at least fifty genes specifically related to vocal learning. No one serious about language evolution will ever be able to get around animal comparisons.

Even with respect to my fellow humans, I am dubious that language tells us what is going on in their heads. I am surrounded by people who study members of our species by presenting them with questionnaires. They trust the answers they receive and have ways, they assure me, of checking their veracity. But who says that what people tell us about themselves reveals actual emotions and motivations? This may be true for simple attitudes free from moralizations ('What is your favorite music?'), but it seems almost pointless to ask people about their love life, eating habits, or treatment of others ('Are you pleasant to work with?').

It is far too easy to invent post hoc reasons for one's behavior, to be silent about one's sexual habits, to downplay excessive eating or drinking, or to present oneself as more admirable than one really is. No one is going to admit to murderous thoughts, stinginess, or being a jerk. People lie all the time, so why would they stop in front of a psychologist who writes down everything they say? In one study, female college students reported more sex partners when they were hooked up to a fake lie-detector machine than without it, thus demonstrating that they had been lying before.

“My distrust of language goes even deeper, because I am also unconvinced of its role in the thinking process. I am not sure that

I think in words, and I never seem to hear any inner voices. This caused a bit of an embarrassment once at a meeting about the evolution of conscience, when fellow scholars kept referring to an inner voice that tells us what is right and wrong. I am sorry, I said, but I never hear such voices. Am I a man without a conscience, or do I think in pictures? Moreover, which language are we talking about? Speaking two languages at home and a third one at work, my thinking must be awfully muddled. Yet I have never noticed any effect, despite the widespread assumption that language is at the root of human thought. In his 1973 presidential address to the American Philosophical Association, tellingly entitled ‘Thoughtless Brutes,’ the American philosopher Norman Malcolm stated that ‘the relationship between language and thought must be so close that it is really senseless to conjecture that people may not have thoughts, and also senseless to conjecture that animals may have thoughts.’”

How much different is you rehearsing your presentation in your mind, anticipating and answering potential questions, than the wolf imagining eating just before beginning to chase the elk? Does one require more intelligence? Does one demonstrate more intelligence?

Since we routinely express ideas and feelings in language, we may be forgiven for assigning a role to it, but isn’t it remarkable how often we struggle to find our words? It’s not that we don’t know what we thought or felt, but we just can’t put our verbal finger on it. This would of course be wholly unnecessary if thoughts and feelings were linguistic products to begin with. In that case, we’d expect a waterfall of words! It is now widely accepted that, even though language assists human thinking by providing categories and concepts, it is not the stuff of thought.

We don’t actually need language in order to think. The Swiss pioneer of cognitive development, Jean Piaget, most certainly was not ready to deny thought to preverbal children, which is why he declared cognition to be independent of language. With animals, the situation is similar. The obvious—and I should have thought sufficient—refutation of the claim that natural languages are the medium of thought is that there are non-verbal organisms that think.

“I very rarely think in words at all. A thought comes, and I may try to express it in words afterwards.”

If it’s true that children lack inner speech, the implications are far-reaching. No one should conclude from this that children don’t think, but

they do seem to lack a mode of thinking that dominates the consciousness of many adults. That's just one of several reasons for concluding that a small child's mind is a strange place to be. Language, then, does not give the child thought; rather, it transforms whatever intellectual capacities are present before language comes along.

“Famous cases include Koko, the sign-language gorilla spontaneously combining the signs for ‘white’ and ‘tiger’ upon seeing a zebra, and Washoe, the chimpanzee pioneer of this entire field, labeling a swan a ‘water bird.’ I am prepared to interpret this as a hint of deeper knowledge, but only after I see more evidence than we have today. It is good to keep in mind that these animals produce hundreds of signs every day and have been studied for decades. We’d need to know more about the ratio between hits and misses among the thousands of utterances recorded. How are these fortuitous combinations different from, say, Paul the octopus (nicknamed Pulpo Paul) who rose to fame after a string of correct predictions during the 2010 World Cup? In the same way that no one assumes that Paul knew much about soccer—he was just a lucky mollusk—we need to compare striking animal utterances with the probability of them coming about by chance. It is hard to evaluate linguistic skills if we never get to see the raw data, such as unedited videotapes, and hear only cherry-picked interpretations by loving caretakers. It also doesn’t help that whenever apes produce wrong answers, their interpreters assume that they have a sense of humor, exclaiming ‘Oh, stop kidding around!’ or ‘You funny gorilla!’

I consider us the only linguistic species. We honestly have no evidence for symbolic communication, equally rich and multi-functional as ours, outside our species. It seems to be our own magic well, something we are exceptionally good at. Other species are very capable of communicating inner processes, such as emotions and intentions, or coordinating actions and plans by means of nonverbal signals, but their communication is neither symbolized nor endlessly flexible like language.

For one thing, it is almost entirely restricted to the here and now. A chimpanzee may detect another’s emotions in reaction to a particular ongoing situation, but cannot communicate even the simplest information about events displaced in space and time. If I have a black eye, I can explain to you how yesterday I walked into a bar with drunken people and so on. A chimpanzee

has no way, after the fact, to explain how an injury came about. Possibly, if his assailant happens to walk by and he barks and screams at him, others will be able to deduce the connection between his behavior and the injury—apes are smart enough to put cause and effect together—but this would work only in the other’s presence. If his assailant never walks by, there will be no such information transfer.”

We put so much added value on being able to explain how to do something than actually doing it. But which is actually more valuable? It depends. Just because an animal cannot explain why or how they do something does not imply any lack of complexity or ability or intelligence.

We judge heroism not by what is thought but what is done. What are firefighters thinking when they rush into a burning room to rescue a stranger’s child and there is no time to think? If a hero is someone who risks their life for the life of another, then as for Triangle, the sickly little-brother wolf who saved his big sister—you tell me.

We tend to give our words and abstract thoughts a little too much credit for our more visceral feelings. We tend to overestimate how different the core of our subjective experience is from other animals, particularly other mammals. There are definite, large differences between humans and even their closest kin, but they don’t completely overpower the similarities. A lot of what drives you on a fundamental level developed well before our lineage split from others.

Dogs especially were domesticated from a very social species, and bred to become even more socially focused. They may not have some of the more intellectual reactions we do, they don’t contemplate ‘loving all mankind,’ but that gut-level emotion that makes you care so much about another person that you really do value their well-being as highly as your own? That’s something they’ve been driven to over-develop across millennia.

“Dogs never let you down. You can lock your wife in your trunk, you can lock your dog in your trunk, and you open the trunk—your wife’ll be mad, the dog will be glad to see you.”

You can look at a dog and say they don’t have ‘real sadness,’ or ‘real joy’ or any of that, but after a certain point it’s just like looking at other humans and saying that. You can’t know another’s mind for sure, but their behaviour can give you some pretty strong hints as to how much you have in common.

Dolphins and humans have not shared a common ancestor for tens of millions of years. Yet for all the seeming estrangement of lives lived in

liquid, when they see us they often come to play, and we greet them and can recognize in those eyes that someone very special is home. There is someone in there. It's not a human, but it is a someone.

Just about every animal—not just mammals and birds—can learn, recognize individuals, and respond to empathy.

Octopuses realize that humans are individuals too. They like some people; they dislike others. And they behave differently toward those they know and trust. The idea of octopuses with thoughts, feelings, and personalities disturbs some scientists and philosophers. Only recently have many researchers accorded even chimpanzees, so closely related to humans we can share blood transfusions, the dignity of a mind.

The belief set forth by French philosopher René Descartes in 1637, that only people think—and therefore, only people exist in the moral universe (*Je pense, donc je suis*)—is still so pervasive in modern science that even Jane Goodall, one of the most widely recognized scientists in the world, was too intimidated to publish some of her most intriguing observations of wild chimpanzees for twenty years. From her extensive studies at Gombe Stream Reserve in Tanzania, she had many times observed wild chimpanzees purposely deceiving one another, for example stifling a food cry to keep others from discovering some fruit. Her long delay in writing of it stemmed from a fear that other scientists would accuse her of anthropomorphizing—projecting “human” feelings onto—her study subjects, a cardinal sin in animal science. There's always an effort to minimize emotion and intelligence in other species.

Hormones and neurotransmitters, the chemicals associated with human desire, fear, love, joy, and sadness are highly conserved across taxa. This means that whether you're a person or a monkey, a bird or a turtle, an octopus or a clam, the physiological changes that accompany our deepest-felt emotions appear to be the same. Even a brainless scallop's little heart beats faster when the mollusk is approached by a predator, just like yours or mine would do were we to be accosted by a mugger.

You have to deeply deny the evidence to conclude that humans alone are conscious, feeling beings who can enjoy living and desire to continue doing so. In other words, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. People who play with a dog—or a squirrel or a rat—and then believe that the animal lacks consciousness, themselves lack a certain consciousness. Such people certainly lack, in a peculiarly human way, the wider empathy that our dogs and others so generously, so naturally grant to us.

By veiling their vocal repertoire with our one-size-fits-all words—‘bark,’ ‘rumble,’ ‘howl,’ et cetera—that don't actually fit all, we hobble our understanding of their understanding of what they mean.

“Nonhuman animals may arrive at beliefs based on evidence, but it is a further step to be the sort of animal that can ask oneself whether the evidence really justifies the belief, and can adjust one’s conclusions accordingly.”

Yet it is many humans who are demonstrably incapable of asking whether evidence justifies their beliefs, then adjusting their conclusions. Other animals are great and consummate realists. Only humans cling unshakably to dogmas and ideologies that enjoy complete freedom from evidence, despite all evidence to the contrary. The great divide between rationality and faith depends on some people choosing faith over rationality, and vice versa. Other animals’ actions and beliefs are evidence-based; they don’t believe anything unless the evidence justifies it. Other animals attribute awareness only to things that are actually aware. While a dog might bark to rouse someone sleeping on the living room couch, they never seek assistance from the sofa itself. Or from volcanoes. Or from bearded dudes floating in the clouds. They easily discriminate living things from inanimate objects and even from impostors.

Do humans really have a better-developed theory of mind than other animals? People watching a cartoon of nothing more than a circle and a triangle moving around and interacting almost always infer a story, involving motives and personalities and genders. Children talk to dolls for years, half-believing—or firmly believing—that the doll hears and feels and is a worthwhile confidant. Many adults pray to statues, fervently believing that they’re listening.

All of this indicates a common human inability to distinguish conscious minds from inanimate objects, and evidence from nonsense. Children often talk to a fully imaginary friend who they believe listens and has thoughts. Monotheism might be the adult version. We populate our world with imaginary conscious forces and beings—good and evil. Most present-day people believe they’re helped or hindered by deceased relatives, angels, saints, spirit guides, demons, and gods. In the world’s most technologically advanced, most informed societies, a majority of people take it for granted that disembodied spirits are watching, judging, and acting on them. Most leaders of modern nations trust that a sky god can be asked to protect their nation during disasters and conflicts with other nations.

All of this is “theory of mind” gone wild, like an unguided fire hose, spraying the whole universe with presumed consciousness. Humans’ “superior” theory of mind is in part pathology. The oft-repeated line, “humans are rational beings,” is probably our most half-true assertion about ourselves. There is in nature an overriding sanity and often, in humankind, an

undermining insanity. We, among all animals, are most frequently irrational, distortional, delusional, worried.

Belonging to the World

Plants and animals have been mechanized. Around the time that *Homo sapiens* was elevated to divine status by humanist religions, farm animals stopped being viewed as living creatures that could feel pain and distress, and instead came to be treated as machines.

The process of taming almost always involves the castration of males. This restrains male aggression and enables humans to control the herd's procreation.

Today, the motto of the more efficient, inseminating, vertically integrated mega-farmer could be: More handjobs on the farm, fewer farmhands on the job. Farmers with know-how and pride got eliminated. This kind of farming doesn't take any talent. The company gives you a plan, a consultant, the feed, and the pigs. All you have to do is follow the plan. This system also required farmers to subtly shift the way they looked at their animals. The good farmer had to know his animals. The successful Smithfield producer has to know his inputs, death rates, and his feed conversion ratios.

Our children's books, our iconography, and our TV screens are still full of giraffes, wolves, and chimpanzees, but the real world has very few of them left. There are about 80,000 giraffes in the world, compared to 1.5 billion cattle; only 200,000 wolves, compared to 400 million domesticated dogs; only 250,000 chimpanzees—in contrast to billions of humans. Humankind really has taken over the world.

Today, the majority of large animals on planet earth are domesticated farm animals that live and die as cogs in the wheels of industrial agriculture. The disappearance of wildlife is a calamity of unprecedented magnitude, but the plight of the planet's majority population—the farm animals—is cause for equal concern. In recent years, there is growing awareness of the conditions under which these animals live and die, and their fate may well turn out to be the greatest crime in human history. If you measure crimes by the sheer amount of pain and misery they inflict on sentient beings, this seemingly radical claim is not implausible.

Much of the vaunted material wealth that shields us from disease and famine was accumulated at the expense of laboratory monkeys, dairy cows, and conveyor-belt chickens. Over the last two centuries, tens of billions of them have been subjected to a regime of industrial exploitation whose cruelty has no precedent in the annals of planet Earth. If we accept a mere tenth of what animal-rights activists are claiming, then modern industrial agriculture might well be the greatest crime in history.

You could call factory-farm animals evolution's greatest success story, if

all that mattered were reproduction and population, but what is that worth when individually it means a life subjected to extreme cruelty? The animal kingdom has known many types of pain and misery for millions of years, yet the Agricultural Revolution created completely new kinds of suffering, ones that only worsened with the passing of the generations.

From the viewpoint of the herd, rather than that of the shepherd, it's hard to avoid the impression that for the vast majority of domesticated animals, the Agricultural Revolution was a terrible catastrophe. Their evolutionary success is meaningless. A rare wild rhinoceros on the brink of extinction is probably more satisfied than a calf who, after being ripped from his mother, spends its short life inside a tiny box, fattened to produce juicy steaks. The contented rhinoceros is no less content for being among the last of its kind. The numerical success of the calf's species is little consolation for the suffering the individual endures.

This discrepancy between evolutionary success and individual suffering is perhaps the most important lesson we can draw from the Agricultural Revolution. When we study the narrative of plants such as wheat and maize, maybe the purely evolutionary perspective makes sense. Yet in the case of animals such as cattle, sheep, and *Sapiens*, each with a complex world of sensations and emotions, we have to consider how evolutionary success translates into individual experience.

Hyper-bred in industrial facilities, separated at once from their mothers, denied the outdoors and anything resembling a natural life, confined without relief between bars, mutilated, experiencing no touch of human kindness before it all ends in the mayhem of slaughter, these creatures still have the social natures of their own distant wild ancestors. Each one still has the emotions, the desires, the need for play, companionship, and maternal care that allowed their kind to flourish over millions of years before humans took charge of their existence. Each one can be happy, sad, lonely, and afraid.

A detail has always stayed with me, from a visit years ago to the world's largest abattoir for hogs, that somehow stirs fellow-feeling as much as any other: The vast plant floors—scene of 2,000 kills every hour, if you can picture that pace—must be constantly washed clean of waste, because in terror so many of the pigs lose control of their bowels.

“You're not wrong. But you've failed to convince me as to why you are not taking it a bit too far. The line between species might be gray, but you can't deny that with distance the distinction is there, or you'd stop eating plants too.”

I agree. There are also differences between members of a given species,

human or other. But in the ways that matter to the question ‘Should I kill this person?’ humans are mostly pretty similar, and I don’t see how the differences between us and the animals that we use for food are important to the question either.

It’s pretty well established that most of the species Americans regularly eat are conscious, feel pain, and even have emotions. These qualities are, to me, the important common things that make killing wrong. Basically, I think we should try to avoid killing things that want to live, and we should try to avoid making things suffer. It is also pretty well established that plants—at least the ones we know of—aren’t conscious and can’t suffer, so the same concerns don’t apply there. They can react to their environment, but they don’t have minds and don’t experience pain or sadness, so they not only don’t care what we do with them, they can’t care.

“To use chickens as an example, so long as they’re healthy and not in pain, I fail to see the problem of responsible chicken farming.”

A slaughtered chicken might not be in pain, but it’s definitely not healthy. If you’re talking about just farming for eggs and not killing the chickens, there are a few practical problems. Hens’ productivity naturally goes down as they age, so if you don’t kill them, eventually you’re taking care of these animals and getting nothing in return. Additionally, if you’re breeding the chickens in order to keep your farm running for more than five years, you’ll find that half of the chicks are male and can’t lay eggs. A popular solution is to kill all the male chicks immediately so they don’t drain your resources, but that’s not an option on a no-kill farm.

So being cold, starving, terrified, in constant pain, deprived of dignity, prodded and beaten as you’re moved into and between cages; all for a prolonged and sustained period; and finally killed slowly and painfully to satisfy a belief system. This is a holocaust when it happens to homo sapiens, but a valid farming method when applied to animals? If so these are classic sociopathic tendencies. I’m of course not in any way trivializing the holocaust. Human dignity could be argued to more conscious of such dire situations, and thus suffer more. But no one knows what the animals in these conditions experience, and only a fool considers it to be a categorical difference.

All humans are Nazis when it comes to animals for their suffering is an eternal Treblinka. I sit in witness to the greatest machines of death and suffering known to man. I sit in relatively sparse company. I must construct a reality or narrative which will allow me to function within such a world.

We presently keep hundreds of millions of other sentient beings in unimaginably frightful conditions. We do so for no better reason than to satisfy our culinary tastes. It has aptly been remarked that if animals had a conception of the Devil, he would surely have human form. Alas this is no mere rhetorical conceit. Contemporary humans deliberately incarcerate and butcher our fellow creatures in a vast, state-sanctioned apparatus of concentration and extermination camps. They are run with mechanized horror for profit.

In retrospect, our descendants may view them as a defining feature of our age in a way akin to our own conception of the Third Reich. Analogously, their sheer viciousness and even existence is usually camouflaged behind a morass of bland euphemism. Fortunately for our peace of mind, at least, we find it hard properly to conceive of what we're being spared. Conditions inside the camps and factories are frequently so gruesome that the public have to be barred from watching the atrocities that go on inside them.

What we are doing in the death-factories is so vile that a few lines of text can scarcely even hint at its ghastliness. Nevertheless, we are so inured to the notion of exploiting and killing other sentient beings to titillate our palates that many otherwise "sophisticated" people will find the starkness of expression of these paragraphs somehow sensationalist; or perhaps "emotive," as if the reality of such suffering could properly be otherwise.

We avoid grieving for animals in order to function and even the most committed animal advocates must regularly engage in disavowal. There is an impulse to recoil from all of the grief and loss of being 'animal' in a human world, the incomprehensible, interminable record of irreparable harms. It is worth doing almost anything to suppress this terror.

What would it mean to comprehend the reality when walking down the grocery aisles? Suddenly, the scene in front of you shifts. No longer are you seeing normal products of everyday existence. In front of you is the violent reality of animal flesh on display: the bones, fat, muscles, and tissue of beings who were once alive but who have been slaughtered for the parts of their body. This scene overtakes you, and suddenly you tear up. Grief, sadness, and shock overwhelm you, perhaps only for a second. And for a moment you mourn, you mourn for all the nameless beings in front of you.

Since the ultimate result of the factory farm victim is death and dismemberment, is the practice not *more* horrific and indefensible than slavery and the slave trade?

- **Families broken up:** Both
- **Seen as subhuman:** Both
- **Abuse:** Both
- **Murder:** Factory Farm
- **Selective breeding:** Factory Farm

The thing is, once a town accepts CAFOs, it's impossible to confine their ugliness. Flies can't be caged. Neither can odors. Cruelty also tends to spread. Once farmers become hardened to animal pain, it's a smaller step to also seeing their workers as unfeeling machines. Researchers have found that in 85 percent of households where animals are subjected to violence, there are also incidents of domestic abuse. Violence radiates out through society. As does poverty. These days middle class family farmers must make ever riskier bets to stay afloat, and their farms demand menial laborers—often undocumented and always poor—who claw at the slippery foot of the American dream, sometimes driven to drugs and crime by the hopelessness of the endeavor.

It is a system that, in pursuing one kind of efficiency, has embraced other inefficiencies: Pollution, and all forms of waste, is by definition inefficient. Suffering is inefficient. Is it possible to fashion an economy that saw the efficiency in keeping families together, the efficiency of healthy people, and perhaps even—dare I ask it—the efficiency of beauty and pleasure?

Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own. In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish. The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism:

“Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things.”

And that's coming from the folks that ran (run?) the world's largest 'kiddie diddler' cover-up operation.

“I have no obligation to eat substitutes just to satisfy bleeding hearts. When I can go moose hunting, kill a great source of very lean and healthy meat—enough meat to feed a few families and have a vacation at the same time—I have no moral dilemma about it. I thoroughly enjoyed our pork roast wrapped in bacon tonight, the steaks on the weekend. I am going to have a great time with the annual fish fry this Saturday of all the fish caught this winter. We plan on doing a whole lamb over a pit at the first corn roast and so on.

Can I do all this? Yes. Should I? Hell ya cause it all tastes so damn good. I have no problem killing for food. And to answer something you asked earlier, if it meant the difference between my kids eating or starving to death I would have no problem killing to get someone's food supply. So you enjoy your protein shake and I will enjoy my steak."

A cow's desire to continue living is greater than my desire for a slightly tastier meal.

Quale nie ein Tier zum Scherz denn es fühlt wie du den Schmerz—Never do something to torture an animal because it feels the pain like you. He drilled the ethics of hunting into me, and the only time when I ever saw him show anger toward me was when as a preteen in the 1950s I tried to kill a skunk with my slingshot to impress my peers. That was not all right. It was disgusting. He felt justified to kill birds for a museum where they would be preserved forever, as some feel justified to eat fish, chicken, or other meat that is digested in hours. Which is more justified? And even if necessary, how do you justify? Those who are familiar with ancient folklore, or are up above the rest of us a moral notch or two, kill "respectfully" by offering prayers or apologies, in the hope that animals will "offer themselves" up to be voluntarily killed. However, it is a sad fact that no animal cares if those who might eat them invent reasons to justify their acts to make themselves feel good.

I am going to assume you live in the first world. As a first world individual, you eat meat, not to survive, but because you like it. Unless you get lost on your moose hunt and are hunting food until you're rescued, meat is a luxury, not a necessity.

It seems you use survival as a way to legitimize what might otherwise be a troubling act. But be honest and recognize it is a conscious choice, to choose the luxury food item which cost a feeling, emotive creature its life so you could feel a momentary surge of happy chemicals in your brain from the oh so tasty meat—and yes, it *is* very tasty, we agree here. You can certainly make that choice, put happiness over others, but you can't hide behind survival of you and your family to do it. There are certainly some who—for various environmental or societal reasons—essentially have to eat meat or they'll die, I'm just betting you're not in that camp.

And while your last line was likely just meant in a lighthearted fashion, it does highlight something interesting. You enjoy your consensual intercourse, I'll just keep using the force. You go ahead and not beat bags of puppies to death, I'll be getting my happiness from doing so and then maybe I'll BBQ them after. You go ahead with paying your workers, I'm gonna keep mine

as property, it's easier that way. You go ahead with killing your livestock before butchering, I like to watch mine squirm and it makes the meat taste better. These don't seem like acceptable compromises in our society, what makes yours different?

“Are you really going to compare eating meat to slavery? Eating meat to BBQ live puppies? That my friend is called a straw man argument. Try again.

Self righteous vegetarians like you make everyone else look like a lunatic by association.”

Well remember, I beat those bags of puppies to death first, before BBQing—I'm not a monster. Also: You haven't articulated a difference. You've simply acted as if the difference is obvious. If it is so obvious, would you care to point it out? At one time the inferiority of the African race was seen as the obvious order of things, you probably disagree and have reasons for doing so.

I'm simply seeking an explanation, in no way am I self righteous, though if you would care to point out instances of that I would be happy to reevaluate. I have not forced you to hear my views, standing outside your place of work or play, shouting. You chose to read them, simply ideas, questions, and criticisms. Perhaps the lack of concrete answers is simply because you lack them, and your negative opinion of me is because these shortcomings have been highlighted in your own mind? We are all ignorant of much, we would be wise to remember this.

“I am not obligated to educate you. The obvious difference is, if I eat meat in the park it's called a picnic. If I BBQ a puppy in the park I would be arrested, reviled, or possibly lynched. This is called reality.

The reason you are a self righteous lunatic is exactly because you compare normal behavior to psychotic behavior as though there is no difference.

If you're a seeker of truth as you claim, you'd do well to avoid insulting everyone around you by drawing such ridiculous analogies. But that's the thing with self righteous people who think they know better. You are patently incapable of understanding that reality is integral to philosophy.”

Who creates this reality? You act as if I want my human arms to allow me to achieve flight unaided, and I am simply a fool because I refuse to

acknowledge gravity. But much of what you are likely calling reality is simply something a hairless member of the great ape family decided, at some point in the past.

Who defines psychotic behavior? The majority? That would seem to retroactively legitimize quite a few horrors in history.

If one were to have stolen you from the hospital shortly after birth, one could theoretically mold you into the leader of some extremist vegan terror organization. Your mind craves stories, especially at a young age, and your society just feeds them to you in order to perpetuate itself. Just like how most US citizens are perfectly fine with their government engaging in genocide from its inception—because of course they would not call it genocide, it was Manifest Destiny.

Your society is powered by exploitation and abuse, without it, your “civilization” comes crashing down.

“The boy to be initiated is dressed in leaves and given drugs to keep him awake. Drums beat through the night until, before dawn, the boy is led into a special area of forest, where he’s obliged to confront two chimpanzees. Some of what follows seems to be symbolic enactment, some of it blood-real. A gong is sounded, a voice calls out from the forest, and two chimpanzees respond. The male chimpanzee comes out first and touches the boy’s head. The female chimpanzee emerges minutes after and the boy is expected to kill it. At dawn the boy bathes, then stays awake until late afternoon, pacing and expectant, at which point the circumciser comes at him with a homemade knife. ‘I nursed my wound for 45 days after,’ one initiate said. But now he was a man, no longer a boy. Until recently, the Bakweles have been using chimps for this ritual. They claim two chimps could be used for circumcision of as many as 36 people. They amputate the arms of the chimps. This part of the animal is eaten by elders of the village. Of late, however, due to the scarcity of chimps, Bakweles go for gorillas.”

We would do well to remember that the lens through which we view the world is only one type of lens, there are many different ones that exist, some completely unlike the lens we are familiar with. If I give you a lens that doesn’t allow you to see yellow, if most everyone has those lenses, you will never know yellow exists. You may even find someone to be crazy if they told you about it, for you had never seen it or know anyone serious who claims to believe in yellow.

What biases are you not even aware of? What concepts have you not been given or thought of yourself? What concepts *have* you been given or thought of that then influence others? Is there some information, some experience, you lack?

We are limited by the constructs we possess at the time. This applies to everyone so you must question the fundamentals of your ideology periodically. As a social animal, we are also limited by the way the majority of the culture thinks, especially if the majority culture is overtly hostile towards the ideas—animals being in any way equal to humans being a prominent example.

Not participating in an act which results in the needless misery and suffering is not making a sacrifice. You are assuming that you already have an inherent right to do as you please to less powerful beings. By giving up meat, you are not making a sacrifice as you are not giving up any right of yours.

And if you're being entirely honest about it, the best 'animals dead versus calories available' ratio is probably covered by whaling. You get an absolutely huge amount of calories from one whale, and it only nets you one animal death—you can't even get that ratio from wheat.

Sure, if you believe that the lives of whales and slugs have equal value then this is still problematic. Unfortunately, that isn't how the vast majority of people look at it. We find it unethical to kill organisms that we perceive to be conscious, and don't really mind killing simple organisms that don't have properties we associate with consciousness.

Instead, imagine an XY coordinate plane with all sorts of organisms plotted: level of consciousness (or awareness, or whatever you'd like to call it) on the X-axis, and the number of human-digestible calories available on the Y-axis. Organisms on the left side (e.g. corn, wheat) are going to have a drastically different calories to consciousness ratio than organisms on the right side (e.g. humans, whales). If you take Y / X you'd see an incredibly simple trend: the ratio of calories to consciousness is high on the left, and exponentially decreases as you move to the right.

The meta-trend of vegetarianism and veganism isn't to end all suffering, it's to trend leftward on the continuum as far as is practical.

The vegan paradigm is first and foremost centered on a steadfast recognition that animal lives have intrinsic value. That is, their value doesn't derive from the economic worth humans assign to them. Sentient beings have an interest in living, and thus, they have the right not to be treated as human property. If this basic point is lost in any animal advocacy, then the advocate must retool or else risk contributing to continuing animal exploitation.

I've been finding it increasingly bizarre that, in 2020, relatively wealthy and comfortable humans are still having to argue about whether non-human animals should have any moral considerations. It makes me think that, from an outside perspective, perhaps we're not worthy of such consideration ourselves? As little as 0.3% of the population of the UK is actively trying to avoid animal abuse, commodification, and exploitation, at least to a degree that mildly inconveniences them. At times, it feels as though at least 75% of the population enjoys taking the piss out of them.

'Can animals suffer' is no longer a question. 'Should we be deliberately causing billions of animals to suffer each year for our own short-term benefit' shouldn't still be a question either. If we extrapolate from the past, I think we can say with certainty that our decedents and descendants will look back at the piggeries, hatcheries, fur farms, cosmetic labs, and the rest, with shame and embarrassment.

We are much more like a pig, than a pig is like a toad—their hearts can function in us. Watch just five minutes of undercover footage from a large piggery. It's heartbreaking. It should make you want to cry. People writing, 'Fuck vegans! Bacon is amazing lol,' on videos of animal agriculture are standing on the wrong side of history, arguing in favor of abuse and oppression. I'm sorry, but they're gonna look like right dickheads.

It shouldn't just be vegans and animal rights activists who are calling for the abolition of these factory farms. It's the McRibs, and the pepperoni on a Domino's that are keeping them open. We should all take a look at how these intelligent and social creatures are being ruthlessly exploited for profit and cheap, unhealthy meat, and collectively say: 'No. Fuck This. This is horrible,' and begin the process of shutting them down—now, in our lifetime—before our great-grandchildren have to do it for us and whilst doing so lose all respect for us.

We weren't meant to be demons to these creatures. And we don't have to be any longer.

“What is it made of if it doesn't come from animals? You cant synthesize animal protein, and plants severely lack the nutrients only found in animal protein that we need. I am *never ever* taking supplements for the needs that plants cannot meet because it is either made from the natural source, defeating the supposed 'cruelty free' purpose, or it is made of something that just shouldn't be in our bodies, much like how typical margarine (a supposedly healthy dairy alternative) is one molecule away from either plastic or diesel fuel, depending on whether you

remove or add a molecule. I hate margarine for that reason, although I sometimes have to eat it because it is cheaper.

Furthermore, there are very few unbiased studies that find evidence for veganism, and many that find evidence against it. It is undeniable, and we are on the high end of the food chain. Even monkeys and apes eat meat and meat-like foods occasionally, from insects to other mammals. The people who make the vegetarian or fruititarian claims can go bother someone who is gullible enough to believe it. I have eaten deer, freshly killed. Yet I love fawns. I eat beef, but I think calves are cute. I eat pigs, but the sight of piglets make me squeal with delight (no pun intended). I eat chickens, but chicks make me awww really loudly.

See, we are all hypocrites regarding food. Vegans can claim their lifestyle is cruelty free, but animals still die for it, even if unintentionally. Field mice, insects, rabbits, raccoon, coyotes, et cetera are killed by farmers every day to protect crops and the farm animals, as well as unintentionally during harvesting (in the case of field mice). You can pretend not everyone kills something, but you're living a lie. I'm an advocate for natural food sources, and sustainably raised livestock. I'm not now, nor will I ever be, an advocate for going against nature in any way, and that includes trading healthy options for synthetic crap."

Meat and other non-human animal products are not a magic substance. Your human body needs certain components of these, this is correct, you are correct. It's not protein though—all protein is plant protein remember. However, we are aware of what those substances are. They are not some mystical energy force that dwells within non-human animals. So if you synthesize those components, using either artificial or simply using the natural processes of non-complex lifeforms, you then get to not die and not kill complex life in order to do so. Now of course even a vegan diet kills—insects on crops, bacteria, et cetera—so they are not bloodless either.

"You say that meat protein is not required for survival yet you go on about ways to substitute for them."

Substitute for the small number of nutrients found only in animal products? Yes, required. But if you can make the substitution, then the meat is no longer required. Just like if you have electricity, you don't need to light your house with whale oil lanterns.

Just because a particular trait served one well in previous historical eras, does not necessarily mean it is useful now. The same holds true for our cultural memes, much of which are ancient technology at this point.

We often wonder how people of the past, including the most revered and refined, could have universally engaged in conduct now considered unconscionable. While retrospective judgment tends to make us feel superior to our ancestors, it should really evoke humility. Surely some contemporary practices will be deemed equally abominable by succeeding generations. The only question is: Which ones?

I've long thought it will be our treatment of animals. I'm convinced that our great-grandchildren will find it difficult to believe that we actually raised, herded, and slaughtered them on an industrial scale—for pleasure.

“The hypothetical nation of tree-hugging, vegan, pacifists unfortunately did not survive history. This was not an accident. If they ever existed, they were eaten by the reality that is this world.”

There certainly may have been a culture like you describe, certainly ones that would have had at least some aspects. Their destruction was no accident. A culture which easily otherizes and believes it is moral to inflict violence on others intentionally did so, whether directly or indirectly.

Waking up angry every single day, decrying what our culture likes to think are the great civilizers of the world (ourselves)—what many think Western Civilization is. The great lie is that it is civilization. It's not civilized. It has been literally the most bloodthirsty brutalizing system ever imposed upon this planet. That is not civilization. That's the great lie: that it represents civilization.

Sometimes society as a whole can be viewed as a quasi-conglomerate form of legitimized morality but even that can go awry when that particular society holds beliefs that are later deemed horrific by the greater societies of the future—like a society that accepts and perpetuates slavery or the murder of a particular people-group. If you and I could agree on a certain moralistic framework then I could answer your question based off of those parameters but unless God exists and there really is a natural framework then to what avail is doing that?

“For one, you should note that I do not consider vegetarians nearly as silly. it's the extra step of no animal products no matter how acquired that tips the scale for me. The notion of refusing to eat unfertilized chicken eggs, honey, or milk even

when you know they were humanely acquired is a nigh fanatical or religious approach to the philosophy that strikes me as ridiculously unnecessary (hence: silly).”

What does humane mean to you? With eggs we run into what happens to the male chicks in egg-laying bird hatcheries, what happens to the individuals once they no longer produce eggs, the morality of keeping another imprisoned to be used as a resource.

“The claim that we, as omnivores who are naturally evolved to eat meat, are wrong when we do so also strikes a funny bone when we are still animals and have every right to eat another animal as the cheetahs or lions do.”

Wild animals kill to survive. They must kill to eat, otherwise they would die. Whether they kill on instinct or are aware of their predicament is irrelevant, we are not in their situation. If you live in modern society and have access to crops, vegetables, fruit, grains, et cetera, then you have no obligation or need for animal products. Also, lions exhibit all kinds of behavior that you would seek to avoid, for instance, violent territorial disputes, and in some cases a male lion will kill the cubs of a female he wishes to mate with because she won't mate while she has cubs around. Lions are not good ethical role models.

“There are also other considerations to think about. Like the fact that some people might see even a poor existence as superior to non-existence. As such, these industries have given the experience of life (good or bad) to countless more critters than could possibly have lived life without being a commodity and that might be seen as a net positive for the animal than nonexistence or nothingness.”

The animal can't conceptualize this and you can't harm someone who doesn't exist.

“There are also populations—like deer or kangaroos—that have to be controlled or they will destroy the environment and starve other animals in the area in the process and so might as well be consumed as a beneficial byproduct of their culling.

How would you feel about a cow that was free roaming but tripped and fell in such a way that it died? Would it be ethical to eat it? Of course by most moral constructs it wouldn't be any

problem and is just taking advantage of a bad situation. But a Vegan places a hard line at it just not being animal based at all which side-steps morality/ethics and finds itself in non-sense ideological fanaticism territory.”

That would be fine. If you think veganism is against that, then you misunderstand veganism. As for the culling: what predator did you exterminate that allowed the populations to rise unchecked?

Moral agency is the ability to know whether an action is right or wrong. For example, if a bear kills a person, there is no moral issue because that’s just how bears operate—not that this fact always stops the death squad goons of Wildlife Services—but, if a person kills a person, they need to hire a lawyer because people typically have more options than bears do, which means they can be held responsible for their actions. Murder is not just killing—murder is having a choice not to kill and killing anyway. Without moral agency, there is no murder. In fact, the whole idea of ‘justice’ assumes that moral agency exists, which is why most legal systems do not prosecute kids or folks with certain mental illnesses—if someone lacks the ability to do the right thing, it is pointless to punish them for not doing it.

You seem to fall into the typical trap of the technology-dominated culture. That just because you can do something means you should.

Lions very well may, if given the opportunity, domesticate gazelles and farm. Perhaps they might settle down, build more permanent shelters, and maybe even start to eat a few specific kinds of plants, just a few of them at first of course. Then maybe those plants make those lion offspring stronger, more likely to reproduce. Maybe then some genetic copying glitch results in some more complex cognition, leading to better hunting tactics. Soon more of those individuals are part of the lion pride. Maybe thousands of generations later, in the shade of a tree, members of a species descended from those lions are sitting in a complex nest, discussing whether or not a dolphin would farm a tuna if it could and whether it was morally right to eat gazelles.

If it is human nature to eat meat, then it must also be human nature to question the morality of doing so, it must also be human nature to not eat meat. Because humans do all these things. So human nature is not a rational argument, it is simply invoking a different kind of faith or embracing one’s ignorance as a virtue.

Do you not realize that you are the only omnivorous species with a choice? I really don’t understand the logic behind comparing your actions with that of a much less capable (in this regard) species. I guess it’s easier that way. But the truth is that you are part of the only species with a choice,

and you used your power to cause more suffering. No other carnivores or omnivores are in any position to make a choice, they don't even have a place in this debate.

It's the human way—'kill what you don't like,' whereas it should be 'live with what belongs here.' Animals don't behave like men. If they have to fight, they fight; and if they have to kill they kill. But they don't sit down and set their wits to work to devise ways of spoiling other creatures' lives and hurting them. They have dignity.

Predators cull the weak, man culls the healthy.

"You completely miss the point. Nature is all about survival of the fittest. Pure and simple. Humans as a species in order to survive have used our mental fitness to domesticate and dominate.

You need to understand, those that can not accept that, don't belong. If truly humans fell into survival of the fittest, the population of humans would be a small fraction of what it is."

You are utilizing a common misconception of exactly what 'survival of the fittest' means. In terms of evolution, it doesn't mean the strongest biggest brutes that can dominate all the others survive and thrive. A lot of evolutionary biologists actually shy away from the term, and Darwin himself was said to regret coining the phrase as it became so misused by the public.

What 'survival of the fittest' refers to is the fact that the genetic variances that are most well adapted to a given environment are the most likely to be passed along to future generations. A genetic mutation doesn't need to provide an advantage to get passed on. Most such mutations are actually neutral, they don't help or hinder us. Some genes are disadvantageous—for instance, the BRCA-2 mutation that greatly increases the chance of breast cancer—but are still able to be passed on because they do not prevent the organism that has it from being able to survive childhood and reproduce, or because they are recessive genes that are only expressed if both parents carry them, thus a parent can be a carrier for a condition like Tay Sachs that kills children at young ages.

However, some genes provide a clear advantage to a given species in a given location. A classic example is moths in a white birch forest. If you have a group of brown moths, and a gene enters the population that causes a moth to be white, that gives it a huge advantage because that moth is much less visible to predators. That moth is much more likely than his brown moth brethren to survive longer and make more moth babies. Thus the 'white moth' gene is far fitter than the 'brown moth' gene, and more

likely to be passed on. Survival of the fittest refers to how advantageous the white moth gene is to a moth in a forest full of white trees. It in no way indicates that white moths are the biggest, baddest, strongest moths out there and that is why they survived.

I'm quite aware of your point. It is simply what I view as a barbaric and misguided one. Survival of the fittest is part of the story humans tell themselves about their world. It is part of how the dominant human culture comes to understand things. Natural law, as most prominent Western philosophers see it, is based on primitive understandings of our world.

There is no biological law which states that one must value one's life or that of one's fellow species members over members of another species. The dominant culture shaped your view of the world much more than your biology has in all likelihood. You can use a basic understanding of human biology and psychology to mold a mind to believe almost anything given the proper conditions.

As a male of a sexually reproducing species, the law of nature seems to state that I can force myself on a member of the opposite sex. Yet I doubt you would be advocating for this. Accept that part of your nature is that you have the cognitive capability to explore concepts that allow you to expand beyond your biology-influenced tendencies.

“So by whose morals are we supposed to live our lives? Yours? Ain't gonna happen! What you seem to forget is that we have the ability and right to set our own moral compass. You may not like it but mine is just fine as is.”

I would like us all to honestly develop and continuously refine our moral compass as new information becomes available to us. We can do this both together and apart. But we must be honest and not accept answers which simply make us feel good and allow us to get through the day.

The same urges and ideologies which otherize the non-human to another category of being are the ones which have the potential to hurt you and your family.

“All your arguments are based on your morals. Sucks to be you. My morals are different and you do not have the power to tell me what is moral and what is not.”

I walk up and put a .22 into the head of a lamb. You see a morally corrupt act. I see charcoal roasted leg of lamb. I don't have to justify or rationalize this for any reason. I find it morally acceptable.

There are species that eat and ones that get eaten. Welcome to life.”

I was more interested in finding out the underpinnings of your morals than forcing mine on you. After all, text would be a very poor medium to do so—in fact I’m not even quite sure how I might go about it.

It is likely that you—directly or by proxy—force your moral views on others quite often. If one were to hurt your family, I imagine you would either take matters into your hands or expect the “authorities” to do so for you. But what if the perpetrator does not see it as a wrong act? Is it because you live in a country that allows you to vote and influence your laws, the ‘public morals?’ What if we voted that it was OK to hurt you, is that still a valid forcing of morals when they involve harm to another?

It makes me quite sad to see someone so willing to settle for such non-answers. And to use them to justify such harm. History will judge us all harshly. I think we owe it to your kids and everyone else’s to do better.

Remember, much of the foundations of what we believe, what we accept, how we view the world and our place in it, were laid by individuals who were often far more ignorant than even the average individual today. It would be good, both for your fellow humans, as well as the non-human animals, to question the validity of those foundations.

Using your logic, I can eat you, if you fail to defend yourself adequately. Now you may protest and state that eating humans is wrong. Why is that though? Why pork but not people? There must be some characteristic, some ability, some trait, you had to have chosen something as a defining difference, what is it? Or is it simply going with the flow and if people were an acceptable menu item in society you’d order some Pedro Parmesan with a Little Timmy meat sauce?

The issue with animal experimentation is the lack of consent. We should condemn the practices, if done without informed consent, regardless of the species. Given that it is likely impossible to bridge the communications gap to the extent of conveying such abstract concepts, it will always be impossible and therefore immoral to engage in any animal experimentation, regardless of how many lives stand to be saved.

As for animal testing and its role in civilization (though I’d argue its completely uncivilized but for this point we’ll use the generally accepted use of civilization): If you do not defecate on your food supply and in your water supply. If you have basic antibiotics. And you have a rough understanding of what viruses and bacteria are. Your society will be better off than most others in recorded history. This technology and information all exists already. We have sacrificed millions upon millions of animal lives

to acquire it. You can continue to have all of this without another animal death. Do you get to cure all cancers? Probably not. Still gonna have loved ones die of some diseases? Probably. But just as the absence of slaves may have had a negative effect on some individuals' lives did not mean that it was moral to continue the practice, it does not mean you get to inflict fear, pain, imprisonment on another creature for your "benefit."

Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. Sexists violate the principle of equality by favouring the interests of their own sex. Similarly, speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species. The pattern is identical in each case.

"I have it figured out. You struggle with morals all the time. You actually lack moral conviction and strength. I see people like you all the time. Weak people like you cannot understand how people like me can be so strong and certain. You believe because you struggle that everyone struggles. Not the case, as I have yet to find myself with a moral dilemma. Strength of character, you should try it.

A lot of it is confidence and not giving a rat's ass what you or anyone thinks of me.

As for my kids, they all love animals and they all love to hunt, fish, and eat what was killed. Wouldn't have it any other way.

You also use the word 'violence' like it is a bad thing. Why?"

Even the choice of the words you use to describe me are so infected with the ideology of the dominant culture. I'm weak because I'm uncertain about potentially taking a life—a permanent act—or causing another unnecessary harm? It seems you have quite a narrow and primitive definition of strength sir.

Confidence can come from knowledge, but it can also—and more often does—come from ignorance. Many ignorant individuals are too ignorant to know what they do not, and too confident about what they do—or think they do—know. One could argue it takes a certain level of confidence in oneself to admit one's shortcomings.

Violence is an act which results in great harm being done, by definition. Why would one want great harm to be done, unnecessarily? You, however, seem to choose to engage in, and glorify, the unnecessary use of violence. Why do you see it as so good—excluding the easy and inapplicable out of

‘survival’? Your children will grow up in a world where someone can label them as the spawn of animals, not worthy of protection, of life. Some could build a following around that, an ideology which puts your children at the bottom. And then your children and others pay the price of your “strength” and moral certainty.

Be aware: the fact that you do not have moral struggles is unlikely to be a sign of your great character, though your society is heavily invested in you seeing it as such.

But, it is likely you already have the moral belief system that it is wrong to cause unnecessary harm to animals. Most people refrain from causing unnecessary harm to humans because they recognize that humans are capable of suffering in the same way that they are. Most animals show all of the same signs that humans do that they are experiencing suffering—they avoid painful stimuli, they might yelp or grimace when hurt, pain is evolutionarily advantageous for them since they can move away from the stimuli, et cetera.

If you wouldn’t punch a stranger in the face, you ought not punch a puppy in the face. Similarly, if you wouldn’t eat a human because you know it would be wrong to cause it unnecessary harm, since you can just eat something else, you ought not eat a cow because you know it would cause it unnecessary harm. And yes, eating animals is almost always unnecessary because of the cost to your health, the cost to the environment, and the cost to your fellow humans that are exposed to environmental health hazards such as pollution, antibiotic resistant bacteria, food-borne illness. Your interest in satisfying your taste buds—and that is the only benefit to eating animals, as I’ve elaborated—by eating an animal does not trump the animal’s interest in being alive and avoiding suffering.

“Society developed this way for a reason. Humans are naturally hunters and predators. Over time they built up a system of laws and rules that keep them from slaughtering each other over a piece of bread. These laws rightly consider actions that are damaging to society as a whole to be vile. Things like rape, murder, and slavery. Other actions are not considered as vile or even at all vile, like eating meat, driving on a Sunday, and line dancing.

The process of figuring out what is and is not permissible is constantly evolving and is by no means perfect. You have no idea what would happen if you try to impose the moral supremacy of one imbecile on an entire population. The moral ramifications of doing that, by the way, far outclass the rights of a chicken not

to be eaten. So, if you think you know better than 6,000 years of evolution I will leave you to that delusion.”

You and I are both products of a single human culture. Your views of the world 6,000 years ago—while unfortunately not uncommon—are simply one way to look at it, interpret it. The story of Western civilization is what you know, what you speak of in all likelihood. At times it can be a very unflattering story, but it is undeniably one which holds progress up as its main theme. It explains your place in the world, how awful things were before the great gift of civilization as you know it, and on and on your culture sings to you.

You speak of one imbecile imposing views, painting it negatively, and surely it is. But that is largely what has happened—millennia ago—just on a slightly grander scale. That one imbecile is simply one small culture, that conquered and stole and manipulated its way to be the dominant one that essentially influences everything today.

Evolutionarily speaking, you are born with much the same hardware as your distant ancestors, its just that your stories have gotten more complex. While the exact implementations of an ideology may change—sometimes in large ways—the fundamental features are still present. Superiority over others, might makes right, technological progress over social progress. Why should I have any faith that someone with access to far less information about the world would have gotten *any* of the foundations of their society correct? And since we have the same exact hardware as them, but much more information, why would we not assume we might have a higher—though still not perfect—likelihood of getting things more right?

If you care about animals and are bothered by the abuse they endure, the only consistent response is to go vegan, because all animals—including humans—have an equal desire to live free from domination, other-inflicted exploitation, death, and other harms, by virtue of us all being sentient.

“You do understand that if we go vegan those animals we cultivate, exploit, eat are not going to be ‘free from domination, other-inflicted exploitation, death, and other harms,’ they would just never be born in the first place.”

Just as we understand that we don’t have a right to create humans for purposes of killing them to harvest their organs at age 18—no matter how “happy” their lives until then—we also don’t have the right to decide for other animals for what purpose they live, and when they die.

The consequence of that of course is that there will be fewer non-human animals around—at first—but the only reason they are brought into existence

in the first place is because the economic cost of feeding them is thought to be outweighed by the benefit of being able to use and kill them, to sell them as commodities. Ignoring externalities, that is—as AGW is not counted as a ‘cost’ of animal agriculture; nor is societal ill-health, to the extent that this is caused by the consumption of animal products. If we would decide to stop participating in the latter, do you really think we’d still be producing all that food and shelter and pasture for them to live on?

“Maybe if you ask the animals that are born to be eaten by us whether they would rather never be born, well they might just prefer to have been born and to know what life is, don’t you think? In addition if we kill them in humane ways, what’s not to like?”

I can only ask human animals whether they would appreciate being killed because someone would like to use their body for some purpose or other; thus far, nobody signed up for it. I would point out, furthermore, that you’d also need to ask the mothers whether they want to be impregnated to mother offspring who are to be killed.

We assume that we may decide for them that they would prefer living at all, but morally, that’s just vacuous, because thinking you are in the right, then acting on that, without checking our, by definition unverifiable, belief doesn’t fly, and is just another case of using words to obfuscate the fact that we are deciding for other animals how they are used, when they die, when they are destroyed, just as we do for anything we consider our property. Sentience has evolved to increase our chance of continued existence, and it allows us to choose our actions. So why choose to use and harm other animals—who want to continue to live just as much as we do—when we don’t have to? It makes no sense to me anymore, since I found out that animal use for food is nutritionally unnecessary.

As for “humane killing,” it is an oxymoron, which moreover evades or ignores the central issue—why do we believe we have the right to decide when another animal dies—without it being a case of self-defense in which there are no non-lethal alternative courses of action available—in the first place?

“Three points:

1. Animals are not humans so asking a human how they would feel if treated as an animal makes no sense. There is no moral equivalence. Pretending otherwise is mere moral one-upsmanship not morality.

2. Virtually all animals, including humans, depend on other animals for food. Even cute little birdies eat bugs. It's just nature. Why do humans not realize that they are part of nature?
 3. I realize I am part of nature and I love burgers. I am no more likely to allow a vegan to deprive me of that pleasure than I am to allow a Saudi cleric to deprive me of the pleasure of pork in hot garlic sauce. One pleasure hating moralist is equivalent to another.”
1. Humans are animals, it's just that we use 'animals' as short-hand for nonhuman animals. We are all equal in that we all desire to live our lives, and to not be harmed. Sure, we all experience that differently, but that's a separate, and morally irrelevant issue.
 2. This is not the way I would phrase it. Alternative: We are human; we are part of nature; we are able to reflect on our behavior and choose our actions. Hence being able to choose is not “unnatural.” The question then becomes who to count as part of the moral sphere. When it comes to sentient beings who we classify as humans, possession of 'sentience' is a sufficient reason to include them in the moral sphere. Sentience in large part refers to having a desire to continue to live, to evaluate one's surroundings, and to avoid dangers. Other animals also possess sentience, and also subjectively experience these desires, even though they experience them quite differently from us. So what reason do we have for excluding them from the moral sphere, other than that we feel we have the right to exclude them, which is a wholly circular justification for doing so?
 3. Why are you talking about others not “allowing” you to do things? The only person who decides what you allow yourself to do is you—no law can stop you—hence all the problems we have with violence even though we have laws.

As for your remark about “pleasure-hating moralists”—I am sad that you choose to characterize any/all vegans that way, not least because as I have tried to explain, the question whether we derive pleasure from eating animals is besides the point.

To offer an analogy: would you also characterize someone who argues for an end to sexual violence a ‘pleasure-hating moralist’? Note that I am not equating these—merely trying to explain via analogy why I think

that unnecessary; and animal use for food indeed is wholly unnecessary, distribution issues, which are political choices, aside. Violence towards other animals is morally indefensible.

“No one, absolutely no one, living in a current first world country has any right to claim superior morality. I find any action in claiming superior morality for life choices like veganism or vegetarianism hilarious. Do you really think you can remove yourself from affecting the environment, negatively, by a mere choice of food? You would have to live in a hut, built by your hands; eat food grown by yourself; weave textiles into clothing, et cetera. It simply doesn’t exist except in areas like Africa—yet the African tribes eat meat! So are you claiming environmental superiority versus Africans simply because they eat meat? Animal testing is what let the likes of you live above the age of 35. How do you think we develop drugs? Do you think mining is less invasive than nurturing animals on a farm? What about pesticides and fertilizers used on vegetables? You think growing corn and soy monocultures is less detrimental than cows? Maybe so, maybe not, but believe me when I say that no one has the right to claim any sort of superiority when they are part of the system.

Drive through the Midwest and look at those endless fields of corn, wheat, and soybeans and ask yourself how many animals live in those fields now, compared to how many animals lived in those fields in the past. Modern mass farming is the most ecologically damaging form of food production and requires the literal extermination of all other life forms to make room for it. There is nothing ethical about modern vegetable food production.”

Where am I talking about, let alone (personally) claiming moral superiority?

All I did is say that we have the ability to not use animals for food, and ask why we would then choose to continue to use animals, given that they are also sentient, also desire to live, and, most importantly, given that we—and especially those who live in the West—unlike other animals, have the ability to choose what we eat. And to preempt another common objection: no, a diet that consists of starches, legumes, and greens plus some fruits is not elitist. Animal agriculture is many times more resource and water intensive.

And, while I don't necessarily disagree that mass farming is an ecological disaster, please keep in mind that a very large part of US and worldwide production of soy, corn, wheat, alfalfa, and other grains is for use as fodder. In the case of soy, 98% of US soy meal goes to feed pigs, chickens, and cows. The figures for corn and wheat are somewhat lower—it's about 70% of corn, 25–33% of wheat—but still, an enormous amount of acreage is dedicated to the production of nutritionally unnecessary “food,” in the form of animals and animal products such as dairy, eggs.

“It's almost like you don't understand equations. If everything moved from meat to soy, then that ‘96% soy production is for feed’ would then read ‘96% of soy is for meat substitutes.’ You cannot get away from man being a heavy consumer of food products.”

I don't get it, all this worldliness and hostility, presumably because you have it in your head that I want to harm other humans to “save animals,” or whatever—yet at the same time you don't know that any animal will need to eat many times their slaughter weight in feed to attain that weight, just like we humans need many times our adult weight in food to grow and continue living. And the efficiency case is even worse when it comes to dairy and eggs.

If you have worries, I would appreciate it if you could express them clearly, rather than asking me to distill the worries from a response in which you impute all kinds of thoughts to me that are inaccurate or besides the point.

“I hear you, but still I can't help finding you so cruel for wishing all those piglets, chicken, what have you, not to be born, not to experience life, the tenderness of their mothers bosom, the running and squeaking and pickings with siblings, the staring at the moon and the night sky, the feeling of a full stomach, just because they were born to be eaten by us. You want to erase billions of sentient brains from the face of the Earth, just because someone will eat them once they are ripe for the serving.”

I am confused. Are you truly arguing that raising an animal for the express purpose of using them until it serves us better to kill them, all so long as, and to the extent that, one can make money out of it—or otherwise gain status—is morally neutral or good, but pointing out to people that this is morally odious is “cruel” because they might decide to stop participating

in the former? Forgive me, but that really makes no sense to me whatsoever, and I hope you can understand why.

“I didn’t say anything about money. I said it is cruel to wish for so many animals not to be born, not to experience life, just because they are born to be eaten.

Consider that before they are killed and eaten, they experience many small and rewarding pleasures of life for months or even years, such as having a meal, interacting with others, sleeping together, and perhaps pondering about the nature of life, yes including in those industrial factory farms, ignorant of what’s coming to them, in blissful ignorance shall we say.

You want to deny them everything, you want they were not born because you, having experienced life, judge their lives not worth living. Think about it beyond your preconceptions.”

I do hope you realize that you’re now basically using the same argument anti-abortion activists make to argue for denying women the right to have abortions—who are convinced that the right to life of unborn, not-yet-sentient offspring outweighs the right of the mother to decide what to do with her body? You’re arguing that one shouldn’t argue against animal use because the consequence might be that as-yet-unborn beings—who by definition cannot bear rights—would remain unborn, which is a harm?

“I’ve seen quite a few factory farms and also small scale traditional farms. In my childhood we used to kill pigs and sheep for festivities with family, in the case of sheep we called it the Crucifixion because we roasted them with arms and legs spread in a cross, standing upwards.

We didn’t enjoy killing them, some of them sheep and pigs and chicken had been with us over several summer seasons and they were part of our troop, but still we knew we were going to eat them. My grandpa gave me wine to drink, he said I was too brainy, needed to tone it down a bit, and I asked him about all the animals that lived with us but that we eventually killed and ate. He was a wise man, and he said do you wish that they were not born? Do you think their lives are not worth living? How arrogant of you. Or something like that. I thought he was right. Even living in a crowded factory floor with no room to spread wings or to run around is better than not to be born at all, a meal or two per day, time to grow, seeing things, breathing, who

am I to judge those things not worth the time they take before heading to the conveyor belt?

Besides, in the near future, factory farms will not raise individual animals, they will raise steaks, chicken breasts, ribs, et cetera, directly, by cell cultivation. The factory farm floor will be a thing of the past. Then this chicken Auschwitz cry will cease I guess.

Why do we have to go full vegan? My chickens live the life of Ryan, and we do joke about the soup we are going to make when they stop laying (and we are near the end now) but we know they are just going to die of old age or misadventure and get a half-decent burial.

Sheep wool, chickens eggs, cows milk—not seeing the inhumanity in that. Meanwhile we bomb the shit out of actual people that we don't even intend to honor by eating.”

As I tried to indicate above, the main reason is that anything less is inconsistent, because any type of institutionalized use is guaranteed to involve harm, because it all happens in the context of satisfying human needs at the cost of others—whether human or nonhuman—and because people are just blind to the ‘harm’ issue since we’re so used to seeing it. Even in mostly benign cases, such as that of backyard chickens, male chicks are generally killed because they can’t be sold—because people want eggs, and quiet. And while some people don’t, only very few people don’t out of a desire to respect their needs—mostly it’s only because they don’t feel comfortable with it. Which is fine as far as it goes, but it makes for a terrible moral principle.

In the case of dairy, this means forcibly impregnating cows to stimulate milk production, removing the calves after birth—either to be killed or to be raised on formula as the next-gen dairy cow—so that we can use their milk, and repeat every year, because only then does the milk production stay at a level at which economic exploitation “makes sense.” Generally cows can stomach about 4–7 “cycles” of this before their milk production drops below about 8000 liters/year, at which point the cost attached to keeping the cow alive and in production becomes too high, so the cow is sold to a butcher, and replaced by the next generation.

The figures for “happy” exploitation, and “organic” cows are marginally less worse, but the economic logic is the same—it’s all only and wholly about what suits us even when we decide for sentimental reasons to keep an animal around. Please understand I don’t mean this as an accusation, I’m just trying to make it clear how little our thinking has to do with actually

taking seriously the interests of nonhuman animals who we consider our property.

Similar things apply to our use of chickens for eggs, of sheep for wool—we keep them alive until it makes more economic sense to replace them than to let them live.

Five Freedoms was a set of guiding welfare principles articulated in the UK during the 1960s in response to increasing public concern about animal suffering caused by industrial-farming methods, such as battery cages for chickens and gestation crates for pigs. The Five Freedoms included freedom from fear, hunger, distress, and pain, and the freedom to engage in at least some species-specific behavior—for example, birds must be able to stretch their wings. These freedoms were suggested as ideals toward which to strive, with the built-in assumption that the things to which we expose animals under our “care” make achieving the freedoms difficult, if not impossible. The most striking thing about the Five Freedoms formulation is the cruel irony that what animals used in human industry most lack is freedom. Their lives are not their own.

No member of the animal kingdom nurses past maturity
 No member of the animal kingdom ever did a thing to me
 It's why I don't eat red meat or white fish
 Don't give me no blue cheese
 We're all members of the animal kingdom
 Leave your brothers and sisters in the sea

Isn't man an amazing animal? He kills wildlife—birds, kangaroos, deer, all kinds of cats, coyotes, beavers, groundhogs, mice, foxes, and dingoes—by the million in order to protect his domestic animals and their feed. Then he kills domestic animals by the billion and eats them. This in turn kills man by the million, because eating all those animals leads to degenerative—and fatal—health conditions like heart disease, kidney disease, and cancer. So then man tortures and kills millions more animals to look for cures for these diseases. Elsewhere, millions of other human beings are being killed by hunger and malnutrition because food they could eat is being used to fatten domestic animals. Meanwhile, some people are dying of sad laughter at the absurdity of man, who kills so easily and so violently, and once a year, sends out cards praying for “Peace on Earth.”

“This ability to predict the long-term future is reliant on memory. In fact, that's really the main evolutionary use for memory, as a storehouse of the information needed to predict

the future. With memory and cognition, our brains became time machines—we could travel back and forth in time. This mental time travel is a human capacity, distinguishing us from other animal. Scrub jays, oddly, seem to demonstrate similar abilities, but proof of mental time travel in animals is hard to come by as yet.”

Why is it assumed that they do not have it until proven that they do? Why is the assumption based on the idea that humans are special, advanced, unique?

We shouldn't assume that animals—or, for that matter, lovers, spouses, kids, or parents—must be thinking and feeling just as we would if we were them. They're not us.

Certainly, projecting feelings onto other animals can lead to us misunderstanding their motivations. But denying that they have any motivation guarantees that we'll misunderstand it.

A critique of empathy for animals' kinship bonds is that it reflects sentimentality and anthropomorphism. But in fact, it is natural to interpret what looks and sounds like sociability as sociability, just as it is intuitive to understand the expression of grief and loss as grief and loss. The radical projection in operation is the contrary: that animals do not suffer, despite what they show us. In a context wherein animals' yearnings are anxiously disavowed, the mother orca balancing her dead calf on her nose, refusing to let her go, summons us to reassess our assumptions.

What if the danger is not applying “human” qualities, abilities, dispositions to non-humans, but the elevation of such things to be the unique realm of humans? If one anthropomorphizes a tree, are they actually being irrational or was it those who placed the tree in the category of other, lesser, below, that are irrational? For some of the most basic functions of life is the prudent course not to assume that other creatures, other life, has the same abilities though perhaps differently expressed, emphasized?

The use of ‘anthropomorphism’ as an objection is quite problematic. Though it was standard in science until recently, it's actually a gross violation of Occam's Razor. It rests on an unsupported assumption that humans are utterly unique in the animal kingdom.

Realistically, we're evolved animals; it makes much more sense to assume that *all* human traits have precedents among other animals. That's especially true of our nearest relatives, of course, but in truth much of what we do is a variation on basic animal, or at least basic vertebrate. Humility turns out to be a scientific principle.

The stipulation ‘over-sentimental’ indicates, I assume, impatience with anthropomorphism. I’m impatient with that impatience. Anthropomorphism is our best first guess. We share almost all our anatomical and physiological hardware and software with non-human mammals and birds, and we know that animals have emotions too—ask Darwin, who wrote a very good book on the subject. If you want to know what an animal is feeling, start by asking how you’d feel.

Which requires a greater leap of faith?

- Humans are unique, with biological processes and abilities that are completely foreign to non-human animals.
- Humans are simply another variation of mammal, evolved with abilities and biological processes that make it more capable than other non-human animals in some situations and less capable in others but whose foundations can be found in many other creatures.

And what is the key distinction which makes the human more valuable than the non-human animal?

Is it that they can make technology? What level is required? Does every member of the species have to be able to create this tech?

Is it that they must have games with clearly defined rules?

Is it because they can communicate using symbols on pieces of paper? Can communication via symbols be sufficient if it’s in the dirt or on a tree and not paper? In what way would territorial markings be fundamentally different?

Is it that humans look like me?

I mean one could go on and on—entire books written, libraries filled—regarding what the potential difference between human and non-human animals is. So you should have lots of reference material should you not have the answers to my questions yourself.

Much of what makes my own life worthwhile—joy, play, meaningful work, loving relationships—is shared widely across species. The hard line between human and nonhuman that many seek to draw is blurrier than it appears.

A fundamental obstacle of how we view the world, and thereby, construct our stories, ideologies, scientific understanding, et cetera about it, is the differentiation between that which is done by us, and that which is done by them (animals). We speak to each other, they vocalize, call, howl. We make decisions, they are governed in many ways by instincts. We are one class of being, they are others, all lesser.

Are we different than other animals? Certainly, no one can dispute that basic, general claim. However we are not fundamentally different from all

animals, though of course there are some we are less alike than others. All of our skills, talents, abilities exist simply on a continuum, no one animal possesses a truly unique biological ability. Our intelligence, while high, is not some unique trait only possessed by humans. Others have intelligence as well, all seeming to be at a level less than ours but of course that is plagued by potential species-biases, human supremacy, et cetera. Others make and use tools but they don't make something like a laptop. Others form complex social groups, others care for their young, others experience fear.

Fear. To some extent a universal experience. Downplayed by even so-called unbiased science, it is something that at least every healthy organism will experience. Perhaps not experienced in the way that a textbook might define it, but experienced in a way that a child would likely describe as fear. And in some cases, the perceived—and to some extent actual—ignorance of a child guides us towards what may be true. We are certainly able to use our large, powerful brain hardware to render up some negative future scenarios that will create fear in the here and now, something current science seems to believe others do not do. Of course cognitive ability can often be difficult to determine given the largely foreign world of the others to many modern-day humans. At first it was simple ignorance that created the gap between Us and Them, now it is “scientifically proven” to most that our mental experience simply cannot compare to theirs.

We have equated the ability to make trinkets with intelligence. While these trinkets may certainly be complex, much of which is outside the ability of most of them, the trinkets are largely not unique. Others build houses, others build devices that allow them to take flight, others wear clothes and protective gear. What could be described as unique is simply our wide array of trinkets. But this is largely due to the fact that we have writing, another unique ability we are told. Certainly writing itself is a unique specific skill, but it is simply a form of inter-generational information transmission, something huge numbers of animals possess. As with many human skills, writing is simply one end of the continuum as it currently stands (according to human knowledge and construction).

These distinctions are all part of a process—likely begun by ignorance and continued by both ignorance and malice—to draw hard lines between us and them, to wall off our species—and by extension, civilization—from them. A dirty past, a dangerous past, a savage past, that is what we have left behind we are told. A savage knife-edge we no longer live on. However the savagery was never quite as bad as claimed, just as our absence of savagery now isn't quite as great as claimed. It's savage to kill another man, not an other. It's savage to take someone's land with guns, not with a court order. It's savage to blow up others along with yourself, not with precision bombs

from high in the air. Attempt to make connections between overt, covert, subtle savagery is met with derision, accusations of demeaning, belittling “true” savagery.

One of the biggest mistakes may be the argument that “articulating and defending a conception of their own interests” is specific to humans. Animals consistently voice preferences and ask for freedom. We deliberately have to choose not to hear when the lobster bangs on the walls from inside a pot of boiling water or when the hen who is past her egg-laying prime struggles against the human hands that enclose her legs and neck. We have to choose not to recognize the preference expressed when the fish spasms and gasps for oxygen in her last few minutes alive. Considering animals voiceless betrays an ableist assumption of what counts as having a voice.

The differences between humans and nonhumans, in moral capacities as in all else, exist on a continuum. This observation goes back to Charles Darwin, and some contemporary animal behaviorists, such as Frans de Waal, argue forcefully against ranking humankind at the top of some evolutionary ladder of intelligence.

Instead, there are a variety of intelligences, not all of which humans excel at. De Waal goes so far as to call for a moratorium on declaring any defining difference between human and animal, as so many past attempts—such as defining humans by tool use—have been handily disproven.

Charley doesn’t have our problems. He doesn’t belong to a species clever enough to split the atom but not clever enough to live in peace with itself. If chimps or other apes are to gain personhood, it likely won’t be due to anything extra that they can do that we haven’t already seen. Personhood for chimps will finally be realized not through more cognitive tests or changes in evolutionary timelines, but through a reimagining of what it really means to be a person.

Living diversity is astonishing, but as you peel layers of difference, you encounter similarities more stunning. The extreme shrinkage of hind limbs that granted whales their swimming bodies was largely accomplished by the loss of one gene. In your body, this same gene gave you normal limbs. Normal for a human, that is. If you look at side-by-side drawings of human, elephant, and dolphin brains, the similarities overwhelm the differences. We are essentially the same, merely molded by long experience into different outer shapes for coping with different outer surroundings, and wired inside for special talents and abilities. But beneath the skin, kin. There is no other animal like us. But don’t forget: there are no other animals like each of them, either.

Zoos aren’t prisons? You can *maybe* make that argument in the insect house, but remember, your ‘consciousness,’ ‘mind,’ ‘brain,’ whatever label

you want, is simply a different version of ones other non-human animals have. So if I locked you up in a nice house, with free medical care, food, toys, don't let you leave, and let a bunch of people observe your life, you'll likely use your quite-capable human version to see your situation as horrible, but so will most of the non-human animals in the zoo, just likely to a lesser extent.

Dropped into a completely alien—not green men, just radically different to your own—culture, not knowing the language, customs, et cetera, you would find that you may react in similar ways to Harambe, even with all that intelligence to sort out “right” and “wrong” actions. Would you be so supportive of putting down the dangerous creature then? Or would you perhaps want more leeway provided, more potential danger to others exist, to hopefully get you through alive?

“In his deepest being, Sultan is not interested in the banana problem. Only the experimenter's single-minded regimentation forces him to concentrate on it. The question that truly occupies him, as it occupies the rat and the cat and every other animal trapped in the hell of the laboratory or the zoo, is: Where is home, and how do I get there?”

Likewise, the melancholic bellowing of oxen separated from their kin and driven to the cattle trains heading for slaughter:

“And the worst of all is the stampede of homesick cattle. A yearning bull when it gets out of hand turns into a wild animal. I find that homesickness in an animal is even worse than in people.”

In such places, where animals are simply penned up, they are almost always more thoughtful than their cousins in the wild. This is because even the dimmest of them cannot help but sense that something is very wrong with this style of living. When I say that they are more thoughtful, I don't mean to imply that they acquire new powers of reasoning. But the tiger you see madly pacing its cage is nevertheless preoccupied with something that a human would certainly recognize as a thought. And this thought is a question: Why? ‘Why, why, why, why, why, why?’ the tiger asks itself hour after hour, day after day, year after year, as it treads its endless path behind the bars of its cage. It cannot analyze the question or elaborate on it. If you were somehow able to ask the creature, ‘Why what?’ it would be unable to answer you. Nevertheless this question burns like an unquenchable flame in its mind, inflicting a searing pain that does not diminish until

the creature lapses into a final lethargy that zookeepers recognize as an irreversible rejection of life. And of course this questioning is something that no tiger does in its normal habitat.

We know now from over a century of observing animals in captivity that when they are deprived of their natural habitat, they will often develop symptoms that look like extreme forms of despair. Parrots will rip their own feathers out. Horses will start unstopably swaying. Elephants will start to grind their tusks—their source of strength and pride in the wild—against the walls of their cells until they are gnarled stumps. Some elephants in captivity are so traumatized they sleep upright for years, moving their bodies neurotically the whole time. None of these species ever behave this way in the wild. Many animals in captivity lose the desire to have sex—that’s why it’s so hard to get animals to mate in zoos.

I acknowledge the benefits they provide. I simply don’t believe those benefits outweigh the negatives. Sure, there are great zoos out there that are absolutely dedicated to conservation and humane treatment of animals, but for every one of those, there are so many that provide little towards conservation efforts and mistreat the animals.

Studies have repeatedly shown how difficult and usually unsuccessful attempts are to reintroduce captive animals into the wild, so their claim of restoring wild populations of endangered species is lacking results. Not to mention that many zoos don’t have a diverse enough population of any given species to support their forced breeding programs of these endangered species, nor access or resources to coordinate with others, so they turn to inbreeding which only causes more issues for the animals.

The education argument is incredibly weak, because once again studies have shown that zoo patrons spend little to no time reading the available information on any animal. The average time spent at any individual enclosure was not nearly long enough to read and retain any information if an individual even bothered to read the signs.

The behavioral problems animals show in captivity alone is enough to make me detest zoos. Animals in zoos display behavior not typical of their wild counterparts, including self harm.

One of my biggest issues with zoos, however, is that they distract from the real issue. We are the ones causing so many species to go extinct. We are destroying their habitats and poaching them for their hides, horns, et cetera. The mass amount of funding zoos receive could do so much more good fighting those issues rather than holding these animals captive largely for our enjoyment.

In captivity, these animals will only ever get to experience a small fraction of what their lives could have been. In the wild, they would have

had miles and miles of ice to roam across and enjoy the thrill of hunting and interacting in family and social groups. Their lives would have had a very distinct meaning and purpose entirely of their own volition. Instead, they are confined to a glorified prison cell that is artificially cooled and packed with ice to keep them “comfortable.” The extreme boredom and frustration with this tiny ice box will likely lead them to exhibit stereotypical behaviors such as pacing or head bobbing. These pointless, repetitive actions are thought to be physical manifestations of extreme mental distress. According to Polar Bears International:

“Some 85 percent of North American polar bears [in zoos] do it, devoting nearly a quarter of their “active day” (i.e. the time they spend alert and moving) to this behavior.”

It occurred to me that the frogs and their progeny, if they had any, and their progeny’s progeny, if they had any, would never again touch the floor of the rainforest but would live out their days in disinfected glass tanks.

A century from now, pandas and tigers and rhinos may well persist only in zoos or in wildlife areas so small and heavily guarded they qualify as quasi-zoos.

We should see ourselves in our brothers and sisters, but we do not. Taken from her natural context, adequately cared for at best, slavery and imprisonment always, she labors alone. Or perhaps with a few companions. A hall closet compared to her true home. But hey, we feed and provide safety for her, she wouldn’t move as much if she didn’t have to. You wouldn’t mind submitting to this completely unwarranted lifetime house arrest then would you? Don’t worry, we’ll make sure you’re fed and watered and maybe give you a beach ball or something to play with. A home filled with family. Oh and yeah, sorry, didn’t say your house did I? Nope, so yeah, meet Billy and Sam, and you’ll be living with them in Texas. Maybe we’ll give Billy a handy and you can make a cute kid we can put on billboards. Have fun.

Resigned to a remaining life in captivity. Alone, at best coping and socializing with other damaged distant kin. One day she snaps. She goes on a rampage against her oppressors. No more concern for her body, no one but her had cared for a long time anyway. Damage. Rage. Frustration. Destroy. It’s close to over now, flesh pierced along with the air. No clean shots, but she doesn’t have much strength now. Down she goes, one eye pressed into the dirt, no energy to lift it even once more in what has become her long, troubled life. The other eye focuses on the small figures. Breathing hard now, breathing is hard now. No more small figures now.

Just as our big-eared brothers and sisters fall, so too do our small-eared brothers and sisters. They struggle each day against their own captors.

Their cages different but no less existent. Some die in captivity of “natural causes,” some few—unlucky ones if viewed honestly—of truly natural causes, some in fits of rage against their oppressors. Revolutionaries are not limited to one species, though popular propaganda would like you to believe so. Fighting. Dying. Risk. She lost it all. But she had lost it already, a life in captivity is not a life. You do not need to be a hairless ape to recognize these facts. An animal in a trap will seek to get out of the trap, to the point of removing its limb in order to survive at least a bit longer. Would you do anything close? Perhaps a lack of forethought promotes this, perhaps a wisdom that is clouded from view by your “superior intelligence.”

She is hopeless. They are hopeless. Brothers and sisters everywhere are hopeless, they despair. But they could be going through so much worse you say. How does this make it better? You are aware it could be worse yet do nothing to make it better? Great, they should feel lucky they didn’t live then? What purpose does this serve in discussing legitimate grievances? None, it is simply a tool used by the oppressors and their supporters, whether ignorant or informed. It applies to irrational fears, the type of fears promoted by the oppressors, and nothing more.

The largest extinction of our brothers and sisters is occurring as this is written, transmitted, read, stored. We poison them, murder them, experiment on them. We have the ability to communicate over long distances what we do to them. We can create arguments justifying all manner of violence against them. We can study the most ideal ways to exterminate them. We will do it publicly, privately, no matter.

It will be done.

It must be done.

You will not stop it.

Perish.

How does he feel about capturing animals in the wild and sending them to a life in captivity? He has no regrets:

“They’re ambassadors from the wild. Unless people know about and see these animals, there will be no stewardship for octopuses in the wild. So knowing they are going to accredited institutions, where they are going to be loved, where people will see the animal in its glory—that’s good, and it makes me happy. She’ll live a long, good life—longer than in the wild.”

A bear biologist writes:

“Every time I chase an animal to put a dart in it, I am in conflict. How can I justify getting the information like this?”

One of them had once come upon a female nursing her cubs. Unaware of his presence, she had settled back against a bank of snow with them and was staring calmly out across the empty sea ice.

“I saw that, and I said to myself, why in God’s name am I bothering these animals?”

Most humans believe we are superior, perfected, destined to rule. In truth other living things are as much of the world and have as much claim to the Earth as do we. And they cause far less trouble. Humans are by far the most compassionate and creative and violent and destructive species in the history of our planet. And because we have put the whole living world into accelerating decline—forests, waters, air, oceans, species—with zero consideration for other species and for people who will come after us, our moral landscape—if there is one—needs a total makeover.

Organisms don’t have to show their human equivalence—as conscious agents, intentional communicators, or ethical subjects—to count.

One measure of human moral progress—amid and despite the savageries we visit upon each other—is how we treat the innocent in our care. And none are more innocent than these.

When people would ask me why I’m concerned about animals in the face of widespread human suffering, I respond: ‘Compassion is an action word with no boundaries.’

If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it. By “without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance” I mean without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent.

This principle of altruism requires us only to prevent what is bad and it requires this of us only when we can do it without sacrificing anything that is, from the moral point of view, comparably important. Thus, all things being equal, there is no moral excuse for not doing what we can to alleviate the suffering of people who are dying from lack of food, shelter, and medical care, regardless of geographical proximity or distance. Just because they might be thousands of kilometers away, for example, doesn’t mean that we are not obliged to take the money that we would have spent on a luxury item and instead donate it to an international relief agency.

The extension of the principle of altruism to non-humans—not species, but individual animals—seems to be trivial. After all, once again, there is

no morally relevant difference in terms of the capacity to suffer. In other words, we are obliged to help a starving polar bear.

What happened to this animal? Did the witnesses of its suffering intervene? Did the videographer and his crew take any steps to save it? Usually such efforts on behalf of this or that particular animal meet resistance, even discouragement, on the grounds that we should not intervene as nature ‘takes its course.’

Now put aside the fact that nature is taking such a course only because it has been altered, perhaps irrevocably, by irresponsible human activity, to the detriment of the members of other species (not to mention our own). Even so, how much weight should we give to this ‘leave nature alone’ argument? Here is an animal that is suffering. Should we—or the people who take such videos—do anything to help it?

From an ethical perspective, the answer seems to me to be clear: yes, absolutely. Anyone who accepts the arguments that we are morally obliged both (a) not to treat animals in a certain way, because of their capacity to suffer, and (b) to relieve the suffering of human beings as long as it does not involve a comparable loss on our part must also grant (c) that we are morally obliged also to relieve the suffering of non-human animals when it is possible to do so and without comparable loss on our part.

Of course, we do often acknowledge such a duty to help animals that suffer, especially when it is clear that such suffering is directly related to human activity. We typically come to the aid of waterfowl harmed by oil spills, sea mammals incapacitated by plastic floating in the oceans, and animals injured by vehicles. But here is the sticking point: why should it be any different with animals whose suffering is less obviously or directly related—and perhaps not related at all—to human activity, suffering for which we less clearly bear responsibility, or for which we bear no responsibility at all?

A failure to help that polar bear—or any individual animal in a comparable condition, regardless of our responsibility, direct or indirect, for that suffering—is callous and morally wrong. Nor can lack of action be defended by some alleged concern for the course of nature (‘We must not interfere!’) or the gene pool of the species (‘Let the weak die!’). Consider someone who would use those same arguments to justify not intervening to help relieve the suffering of particular human beings during a famine or after a tsunami, or someone who would use such arguments to say that we should not give antibiotics to a child with pneumonia. Such an attitude, reminiscent of various Charles Dickens characters, would be rejected out of hand as immoral. If the only morally relevant factor is, ‘can they suffer,’ there is no relevant moral difference when animals suffer pain that we can

alleviate.

Hell, even the climate-change-denying Australian government airdropped some carrots and sweet potatoes to animals affected by bushfires. You want to be worse than those assholes?

If we don't get our act together and come in commonality and understanding with the organisms that sustain us today, not only will we destroy those organisms but we will destroy ourselves. We need to have a paradigm shift in our consciousness. What will it take to achieve that?

If I die trying but I'm inadequate to the task to make a course change in the evolution of this planet...okay I tried. The fact is, I tried. How many people are not trying. If you knew that every breath you took could save hundreds of lives in the future had you walked down this path of knowledge, would you run down this path of knowledge as fast as you could? Or would you hide, in fear of what else might be lurking along it, waiting for you?

I believe nature is a force of good. Good is not only a concept it is a spirit. So hopefully the spirit of goodness will survive.

Human beings will only be as kind or respectful to each other as they are kind and respectful to animals and nature.

The Sapiens regime on earth has so far produced little that we can be proud of. We have mastered our surroundings, increased food production, built cities, established empires and created far-flung trade networks. But did we decrease the amount of suffering in the world? Time and again, massive increases in human power did not necessarily improve the well-being of individual Sapiens, and usually caused immense misery to other animals.

Humans seem to be more irresponsible than ever. Self-made gods with only the laws of physics to keep us company, we are accountable to no one. We are consequently wreaking havoc on our fellow animals and on the surrounding ecosystem, seeking little more than our own comfort and amusement, yet never finding satisfaction. Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don't know what they want?

According to Taker mythology, every civilization anywhere in the universe must be a Taker civilization, a civilization in which people have taken the life of the world into their own hands. That's so obvious it doesn't need to be pointed out. Hell, every alien civilization in the history of science fiction has been a Taker civilization. Every civilization ever encountered by the USS Enterprise has been a Taker civilization. This is because it goes without saying that any intelligent creature anywhere will insist on taking his life out of the hands of the gods, will know that the world belongs to him and not the other way around.

It's not man who is the scourge of the world, it's a single culture. One culture out of hundreds of thousands of cultures. *Our* culture. And here is

the best of the news I have to bring: We don't have to change humankind in order to survive. We only have to change a single culture.

We now stand where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road—the one less traveled by—offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth.

Fundamentally, the task is to articulate not just an alternative set of policy proposals but an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis—embedded in interdependence rather than hyper-individualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy. This is required not only to create a political context to dramatically lower emissions, but also to help us cope with the disasters we can no longer avoid. Because in the hot and stormy future we have already made inevitable through our past emissions, an unshakable belief in the equal rights of all people and a capacity for deep compassion will be the only things standing between civilization and barbarism.

Writing in 1808, British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson described the battle over the slave trade as:

“A contest between those who felt deeply for the happiness and the honour of their fellow-creatures, and those who, through vicious custom and the impulse of avarice, had trampled underfoot the sacred rights of their nature, and had even attempted to efface all title to the divine image from their minds.”

Right from the beginning, everything that ever lived belonged to the world—and that's how things came to be this way. Those single-celled creatures that swam in the ancient oceans belonged to the world, and because they did, everything that followed came into being. Those club-finned fish offshore of the continents belonged to world, and because they did, the amphibians eventually came into being. And because the amphibians belonged to the world, the reptiles eventually came into being. And because the reptiles belonged to the world, the mammals eventually came into being. And because the mammals belonged to the world, the primates eventually came into being. And because the primates belonged to the world, *Australopithecus* eventually came into being. And because *Australopithecus* belonged to the world, man eventually came into being. And for three-million years man belonged to the world—and because he belonged to the world, he grew and developed and became brighter and more dexterous

until one day he was so bright and dexterous that we had to call him *Homo sapiens sapiens*, which means that he was us. And that's the way the we lived for three-million years—as if we belonged to the world. That's how we came into being. We know what happens if you take the Taker premise, that the world belongs to man. That's a disaster. If you take the Leaver premise, that man belongs to the world, then creation goes on forever.

Changing the World

The Human Super-Organism

“I am pessimistic about the human race because it is too ingenious for its own good. Our approach to nature is to beat it into submission. We would stand a better chance of survival if we accommodated ourselves to this planet and viewed it appreciatively instead of skeptically and dictatorially.”

ORDER IS DISTURBED BY LOSS OF PLACE.
ORDER IS DISRUPTED BY LOSS OF BALANCE.
ORDER IS DESTROYED BY LOSS OF DIVERSITY.

I have come to the conclusion that capitalism is successful primarily because it can impose the majority of the costs associated with its economic activities on outside parties and on the environment. In other words, capitalists make profits because their costs are externalized and borne by others. In the US, society and the environment have to pick up the tab produced by capitalist activity.

In the past when critics raised the question about external costs, that is, costs that are external to the company although produced by the company's activities, economists answered that it was not really a problem, because those harmed by the activity could be compensated for the damages that they suffered. This statement was intended to reinforce the claim that capitalism served the general welfare. However, the extremely primitive nature of American property rights meant that rarely would those suffering harm be compensated. The apologists for capitalism saved the system in the abstract, but not in reality.

For example, very little, if any, of the real estate development underway would be profitable if the external costs imposed on existing property holders had to be compensated. Consider just a few specific instances. When a taller house is constructed in front of one of less height, the view of the latter is preempted. The damage to the property value of the house whose view has

been blocked is immense. Would the developer build such a tall structure if the disadvantaged existing property had to be compensated for the decline in its value? When a house is built that can sleep 20 or 30 people next to a family's vacation home or residence, the noise and congestion destroys the family's ability to enjoy their own property. If they had to be compensated for their loss, would the hotel, disguised as a 'single family dwelling' have been built?

Walton County, Florida, is so unconcerned about these vital issues that it has permitted construction of structures that can accommodate 30 people, but provide only three parking spaces. Where do the rental guests park? How many residents will find themselves blocked in their own driveways or with cars parked on their lawns? As real estate developers build up congestion, travel times are extended. What formerly was a five minute drive from Inlet Beach to Seaside along 30-A can now take 45 minutes during summer and holidays, possibly longer. Residents and visitors pay the price of the developers' profits in lost time. The road is a two-lane road that cannot be widened. Yet Walton County's planning department took no account of the gridlock that would emerge.

As the state and federal highways serving the area were two lanes, over-development made hurricane evacuation impossible. Florida had to pay for turning two lane highways into four lane highways in order to provide some semblance of hurricane evacuation. After a decade, the widening of highway 79, which runs North-South is still not completed to its connection to Interstate 10. Luckily, there have been no hurricanes. If developers had to pay these costs instead of passing them on to taxpayers, would their projects still be profitable?

Now consider the external costs of offshoring the production of goods and services that US corporations, such as Apple and Nike, market to Americans. When production facilities in the US are closed and the jobs are moved to China, for example, the American workers lose their jobs, medical coverage, careers, pension provision, and often their self-respect when they are unable to find comparable employment or any employment. Some fall behind in their mortgage and car payments and lose their homes and cars. The local and state governments lose the tax base as personal income and sales taxes decline and as depressed housing and commercial real estate prices in the abandoned communities depress property taxes. State and local infrastructure declines. Possibly crime rises. Safety net needs rise, but expenditures are cut as tax revenues decline. Municipal and state workers find their pensions at risk. Education suffers. All of these costs greatly exceed Apple's and Nike's profits from substituting cheaper foreign labor for American labor. Contradicting the neoliberal claims, Apple's and Nike's

prices do not drop despite the collapse in labor costs that the corporations experience.

A country that was intelligently governed would not permit this. As the US is so poorly governed, the executives and shareholders of global corporations are greatly enriched because they can impose the costs associated with their profits on external third parties. The unambiguous fact is that US capitalism is a mechanism for looting the many for the benefit of the few. Neoliberal economics was constructed in order to support this looting. In other words, neoliberal economists are agents of injustice just like the Western print and TV media. Because of these influential propagandists you will hear those who are being looted praise the merits of “free market capitalism.”

So far we have barely scratched the surface of the external costs that capitalism imposes. Now consider the pollution of the air, soil, waterways, and oceans that result from profit-making activities. Consider the radioactive wastes pouring out of Fukushima since March 2011 into the Pacific Ocean. Consider the dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico from agricultural chemical fertilizer run-off. Consider the destruction of the Apalachicola, Florida oyster beds from the restricted river water that feeds the bay due to over-development upstream. Examples such as these are endless. The corporations responsible for this destruction bear none of the costs. If it turns out that global warming and ocean acidification are consequences of capitalism’s carbon-based energy system, the entire world could end up dead from the external costs of capitalism.

Free market advocates love to ridicule economic planning; Alan Greenspan and Larry Summers actually said that “markets are self-regulating.” There is no sign anywhere of this self-regulation. Instead, there are external costs piled upon external costs. The absence of planning is why over-development has made 30-A dysfunctional, and it is why over-development has made metropolitan areas, such as Atlanta, Georgia, dysfunctional. Planning does not mean the replacement of markets. It means the provision of rules that produce rational results instead of shifting costs of development onto third parties. If capitalism had to cover the cost of its activities, how many of the activities would be worth it? As capitalists do not have to cover their external costs, what limits the costs? Once the external costs exceed the biosphere’s ability to process the waste products associated with external costs, life ends.

We cannot survive an unregulated capitalism with a system of primitive property rights. Ecological economists understand this, but neoliberal economists are apologists for capitalist looting. In days gone by when mankind’s footprint on the planet was light, what some arrogantly call an

“empty world,” productive activities did not produce more wastes than the planet could cleanse. But the heavy foot of our time requires extensive regulation. The Trump administration’s program of rolling back environmental protection, for example, will multiply external costs. To claim that this will increase economic growth is idiotic. The measure known as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is so flawed that we do not know whether the increased output costs more to produce than it is worth. GDP is really a measure of what has been looted without reference to the cost of the looting. Environmental deregulation means that capitalists can treat the environment as a garbage dump. The planet can become so toxic that it cannot recover.

In the United States and generally across the Western world, property rights exist only in a narrow, truncated form. A developer can steal your view forever and your solitude for the period his construction requires. If the Japanese can have property rights in views, in quiet which requires noise abatement, and in sun fall on their property, why can’t Americans? After all, we are alleged to be the “exceptional people.” But in actual fact, Americans are the least exceptional people in human history. Americans have no rights at all. We hapless insignificant beings have to accept whatever capitalists and their puppet government impose on us. And we are so stupid we call it Freedom and Democracy.

“Basically the entire global economy rests on how quickly we can get carbon out of the ground and put it in the atmosphere. That’s basically the global enterprise. And there’s a lot of people doing it. Geologically, it’s a really impressive effort.”

Global warming has improbably compressed into two generations the entire story of human civilization. First, the project of remaking the planet so that it is undeniably ours, a project whose exhaust, the poison of emissions, now casually works its way through millennia of ice so quickly you can see the melt with a naked eye, destroying the environmental conditions that have held stable and steadily governed for nearly all of human history. That has been the work of a single generation. The second generation faces a very different task: the project of preserving our collective future, forestalling that devastation and engineering an alternate path. There is simply no analogy to draw on, outside of mythology and theology—and perhaps the Cold War prospect of mutually assured destruction.

Annihilation is only the very thin tail of warming’s very long bell curve, and there is nothing stopping us from steering clear of it. But what lies between us and extinction is horrifying enough, and we have not yet begun

to contemplate what it means to live under those conditions—what it will do to our politics and our culture and our emotional equilibria, our sense of history and our relationship to it, our sense of nature and our relationship to it, that we are living in a world degraded by our own hands, with the horizon of human possibility dramatically dimmed. We may yet see a climate *deus ex machina*—or, rather, we may yet build one, in the form of carbon capture technology or geoengineering, or in the form of a revolution in the way we generate power, electric or political. But that solution, if it comes at all, will emerge against a bleak horizon, darkened by our emissions as if by glaucoma. Those who have imbibed several centuries of Western triumphalism tend to see the story of human civilization as an inevitable conquest of the earth, rather than the saga of an insecure culture, growing, like mold, haphazardly and unsurely upon it.

Humans, like all mammals, are heat engines; surviving means having to continually cool off, as panting dogs do. For that, the temperature needs to be low enough for the air to act as a kind of refrigerant, drawing heat off the skin so the engine can keep pumping. At seven degrees of warming, that would become impossible for portions of the planet's equatorial band, and especially the tropics, where humidity adds to the problem. And the effect would be fast: after a few hours, a human body would be cooked to death from both inside and out. At eleven or twelve degrees Celsius of warming, more than half the world's population, as distributed today, would die of direct heat. Things almost certainly won't get that hot anytime soon, though some models of unabated emissions do bring us that far eventually, over centuries.

But at just five degrees, according to some calculations, whole parts of the globe would be literally unsurvivable for humans. At six, summer labor of any kind would become impossible in the lower Mississippi Valley, and everybody in the United States east of the Rockies would suffer more from heat than anyone, anywhere, in the world today. New York City would be hotter than present-day Bahrain, one of the planet's hottest spots, and the temperature in Bahrain would induce hyperthermia in even sleeping humans. Five or six degrees is unlikely by 2100. The IPCC furnishes us with a median prediction of over four degrees, should we continue down the current emissions path. That would deliver what today seems like unthinkable impacts—wildfires burning sixteen times as much land in the American West, hundreds of drowned cities. Cities now home to millions, across India and the Middle East, would become so hot that stepping outside in summer would be a lethal risk—in fact, they will become that way much sooner, with as little as two degrees of warming. You do not need to consider worst-case scenarios to become alarmed.

A sentiment exists—particularly among non-scientists—that the idea of humans seriously disrupting the planet on a geological scale is mere anthropocentric hubris. But this sentiment misunderstands the history of life. In the geological past, seemingly small innovations have reorganized the planet's chemistry, hurling it into drastic phase changes. Surely humans might be as significant as the filter-feeding animals of the Cambrian Explosion. Here's an example where, 500 million years ago, something very similar happened. There's plenty of talk today about comparing rates of extinction in the mass extinctions of the past with the rate at which we're driving species extinct today, and it's all through the evolution of new behaviors and ecosystem engineering. Like the Cambrian burrowers that reshaped the microbial mat world to their own ends, humans have converted half the planet's land surface to farmland. We're even beginning to change the chemistry of the ocean, acidifying it with carbon dioxide and turning whole swaths of the continental shelves anoxic with the deluge of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers pouring out of our agricultural heartlands. And the dizzying arsenal of our modern technology is a leap in innovation perhaps matched in the entire history of life only by the eruption of biological invention at the Cambrian Explosion. At the very least, it's not a stretch to think we might be as important as penis worms.

This is an example from the past when an ecological crisis happened because of ecosystem engineering. And we shouldn't be too surprised or too staggered or too blown away by the fact that maybe it's happening again. Biological organisms are an incredibly powerful geological force.

Sam Hill—the man, not the old-timey euphemism for hell—spent his career building roads across the Pacific Northwest. He didn't actually build them; huge teams of laborers did that. But Sam owned the company they worked for, and he got rich enough off the profits that he was able to commission his own damn Stonehenge as a monument. That's a bellwether of human progress: What was once the labor of generations can now be built at the whimsy of a rich man. In fairness to Sam, his motivations for building a fake Stonehenge were rather nobler than 'upstage those shiftless cavemen.' He wanted to create a monument to the millions of young men who died fighting in World War I. At that point, the prevailing belief was that Stonehenge had been built as a sacrificial altar. In Hill's mind, World War I was an altar upon which millions had been sacrificed, pointlessly. A full-scale replica of history's most famous pagan murder shrine seemed a fitting tribute.

How far back can we date the large-scale impact of *Homo sapiens* on the planet? According to some, the pivotal moment was the human development of language, and with it a capacity for conscious intentionality. Beginning

roughly 60,000 years ago, they argue, the origin of language and intentionality sparked a prodigious capacity for innovation that facilitated adaptive changes in human social organization. This watershed is marked in the archaeological record by a vast expansion of artifacts such as flints and arrowheads. With this “great leap forward,” *Homo sapiens* essentially shifted from biological evolution through natural selection to cultural evolution. Yet, tragically, our emancipation as a species from what might be seen as the thrall of nature also made us a force for planetary environmental destruction.

In tandem with this great leap forward in social organization and killing capacity, humanity expanded across the planet. From our ancestral home in Africa, we radiated outward, colonizing all the world’s major ecosystems within the span of 30,000 years. We spread first to Eurasia, then, around 50- to 60,000 years ago, to Australia and New Guinea, then to Siberia and North and South America around 13,000 years ago (though perhaps this one has changed yet again—what year is it?), and then, most recently, to the Pacific Ocean Islands only 4,000 years ago. At the same time, humans underwent a massive demographic boom, expanding from a few million people 50,000 years ago to around 150 million in 2000 BC.

The late Pleistocene wave of extinctions cannot be understood in separation from this spatial and demographic expansion of *Homo sapiens*. In most places around the planet, the megafauna extinctions occurred shortly after the arrival of prehistoric humans. On finding fresh hunting grounds, our ancestors encountered animals with no evolutionary experience of human predators. We quickly obliterated species that didn’t know how to stay out of our way. The susceptibility of creatures who were unfamiliar with humans is evident from what biologists call the filtration principle: the farther back in time the human wave of extinction hit, the lower the extinction rate today. This filtration effect means that in our ancestral home, Sub-Saharan Africa, only 5% of species went extinct, while Europe lost 29%, North America 73%, and Australia an astonishing 94%.

Ecologists have a label for such an event. They call it an outbreak. This use of the word is more general than what’s meant by an outbreak of disease. You could think of disease outbreaks as a subset. Outbreak in the broader sense applies to any vast, sudden population increase by a single species. Such outbreaks occur among certain animals but not among others. Lemmings undergo outbreaks; river otters don’t. Some kinds of grasshopper do, some kinds of mouse, some kinds of starfish, whereas other kinds of grasshopper, mouse, and starfish do not. An outbreak of woodpeckers is unlikely. An outbreak of wolverines, unlikely. The insect order Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies) contains some notable outbreakers—not just tent caterpillars of several kinds but also gypsy moths, tussock moths, larch

budmoths, and others. Those are exceptions, though, to the general rule even for lepidopterans. Among all the forest-dwelling species of butterfly and moth, about 98 percent maintain relatively stable populations at low density through time; no more than two percent ever experience outbreaks. What makes a species of insect—or of mammal, or of microbe—capable of the outbreak phenomenon? That’s a complicated question that the experts are still trying to answer.

From the ecological point of view an outbreak can be defined as an explosive increase in the abundance of a particular species that occurs over a relatively short period of time. From this perspective, the most serious outbreak on the planet earth is that of the species *Homo sapiens*. In 1987, the world’s human population stood at 5 billion. We had multiplied by a factor of about 333 since the invention of agriculture. We had increased by a factor of 14 since just after the Black Death, by a factor of 5 since the birth of Charles Darwin. That growth curve, on a coordinate graph, looks like the southwest face of El Capitan.

Another way to comprehend it is this: From the time of our beginning as a species (about 200,000 years ago) until the year 1804, human population rose to a billion; between 1804 and 1927, it rose by another billion; we reached 3 billion in 1960; and each net addition of a billion people, since then, has taken only about thirteen years. In October 2011, we came to the 7-billion mark and flashed past like it was a ‘Welcome to Kansas’ sign on the highway. That amounts to a lot of people, and certainly qualifies as an explosive increase within a relatively short period of time. The rate of growth has declined within recent decades, true, but it’s still above one percent, meaning that we’re adding about 70 million people yearly.

So we’re unique in the history of mammals. We’re unique in the history of vertebrates. The fossil record shows that no other species of large-bodied beast—above the size of an ant, say, or of an Antarctic krill—has ever achieved anything like such abundance as the abundance of humans on Earth right now. Our total weight amounts to about 750 billion pounds. Ants of all species add up to a greater total mass, krill do too, but not many other groups of organisms. And we are just one species of mammal, not a group. We’re big: big in body size, big in numbers, and big in collective weight.

We’re so big, in fact, that biologist Edward O. Wilson felt compelled to do some knowledgeable noodling on the matter. Wilson came up with this:

“When *Homo sapiens* passed the six-billion mark we had already exceeded by perhaps as much as 100 times the biomass of any large animal species that ever existed on the land.”

Wilson meant wild animals. He omitted consideration of livestock, such as the domestic cow (*Bos taurus*), of which the present global population is about 1.3 billion. We are therefore only five times as numerous as our cattle—and probably less massive in total, since they’re each considerably bigger than a human. But of course they wouldn’t exist in such excess without us. A trillion pounds of cows, fattening in feedlots and grazing on landscapes that formerly supported wild herbivores, are just another form of human impact. They’re a proxy measure of our appetites, and we are hungry.

We are prodigious, we are unprecedented. We are phenomenal. No other primate has ever weighed upon the planet to anything like this degree. In ecological terms, we are almost paradoxical: large-bodied and long-lived but grotesquely abundant. We are an outbreak.

When all the big game was gone, our ancestors were forced to find alternatives to their millennia-old hunter-gatherer survival traditions. Combined with climatic and demographic changes, the megafauna extinctions catalyzed one of humanity’s first food crises. Pushed by crisis conditions, humanity underwent what may be seen as its second great transition: the Neolithic Revolution. Given conducive environmental conditions—including plant species that could be domesticated, abundant water, and fertile soil—human beings shifted from nomadic to sedentary modes of food production. This shift happened remarkably rapidly, from about 10,000–8,000 BC.

The Neolithic Revolution also generated a fateful metamorphosis in humanity’s social organization. Intensive agriculture produced a food surplus, which in turn permitted social differentiation and hierarchy, as elite orders of priests, warriors, and rulers emerged as arbiters of the distribution of that surplus. Much of subsequent human history may be seen as a struggle over the acquisition and distribution of such surplus.

Farming was invented around 10,000 years ago (about 300 generations ago; world population: 1 million), transforming some regional landscapes as human-bred plant varieties replaced wild flora. Around 5,500 years ago (world population: 5 million), cities were built and the first great civilizations emerged. The Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America, which replaced the labour of humans and beasts with machines, started having a measurably global impact about 150 years ago (world population: 1 billion), as large volumes of carbon dioxide from fossil fuels were released into the atmosphere.

It took 50,000 years for humans to reach a population of 1 billion, but just the last ten years to add the latest billion.

As the Epic of Gilgamesh documents, the Mesopotamian city-states found themselves grappling with a scarcity of timber resources. The sweep-

ing deforestation of the region also contributed to the secondary effects of soil erosion and siltation that plagued irrigation canals, as well as having a significant impact on the biodiversity of the region. As the Sumerian city-states grew, they were forced to engage in more intensive agricultural production to support the booming population and the increasing consumption of the civilization, with its mass armies and state bureaucracy. The Sumerians sought to cope with this ecological crisis by bringing new land into cultivation and building new cities. Inevitably, however, they hit the limits of agricultural expansion. Accumulating salts drove crop yields down more than 40% by the middle of the second millennium BC. Food supplies for the growing population grew inexorably scarcer. Within a few short centuries, these contradictions destroyed ancient Sumerian civilization. The deserts that stretch across much of contemporary Iraq are a monument to this ecological folly.

Not all ancient societies went the way of Sumer. For about 7,000 years after the emergence of settled societies in the Nile Valley (around 5500 BC), the Egyptians were able to exploit the annual flood of the Nile to support a succession of states, from the dynasties of the Pharaonic Era, through the Ptolemaic kings of the Hellenistic Period, to the Mamluk Sultanate, and the Ottoman Era. The stability of Egypt's agricultural system originated in the fact that the Nile Valley received natural fertilization and irrigation through annual floods, a process that the Egyptians exploited with only minimal human interference.

Within decades of the introduction of dam-fed irrigation by the British in the nineteenth century, in order to grow crops like cotton for European markets, widespread salinization and waterlogging of land in the Nile Valley developed. The Aswan dam, begun by the British in the late nineteenth century, regulated the Nile's flood levels and thus protected cotton crops but undermined the real secret of Egypt's remarkable continuous civilization by retaining nutrient-rich silt behind the dam walls. As a result, the natural fertility of the Nile Valley was destroyed, replaced by extensive use of artificial, petroleum-derived fertilizers that placed Egypt even more deeply in thrall to the global capitalist economy.

It is only with the invention of hierarchical societies such as the Sumerian Empire that practices of defaunation and habitat destruction became so sweeping as to degrade large ecosystems to the point of collapse. The history of Egypt suggests that under the right material and cultural circumstances, human beings can achieve relatively sustainable relations with the natural world. It is the combination of militarism, debauched and feckless elites, and imperial expansionism, through which the Sumerians laid waste to much of the Fertile Crescent in pre-modern times, that renders ecocide so toxic as

to destroy the very civilizations that carry it out. The collapse of ecocidal imperial cultures should serve as a potent warning to the globe-straddling world powers of today.

In the first of his accounts of his voyages to the New World, Christopher Columbus describes the island he named Española as an Edenic land whose “mountains and plains, and meadows, and fields, are so beautiful and rich for planting and sowing, and rearing cattle of all kinds, and for building towns and villages.” Greed and lust for power drip from Columbus’s pen as he describes a marvelous land of abundant harbors and many rivers, “most of them bearing gold,” and populated by naïvely generous inhabitants “so liberal of all they have that no one would believe it who had not seen it.” For Columbus, the biodiversity of this new world is equally notable, for, as he notes the islands are “covered with trees of a thousand kinds of such great height that they seemed to reach the skies,” trees in which “the nightingale was singing as well as other birds of a thousand different kinds.” Columbus’ breathless description of the material riches to be found in the “New World” set the tone for the European imperial expansion in the subsequent five centuries.

If human beings have engaged in notable forms of ecocide throughout our history, it is only with the expansion of Europe and the development of modern capitalism that ecocide has taken on a truly global extent and planet-consuming destructiveness. As Europeans subjugated and colonized “virgin” lands, they dramatically augmented processes of environmental degradation and extinction. The expansion of capitalist social relations through European colonialism and imperialism pushed what had previously been regional environmental catastrophes to a planetary scale. In addition, by transforming nature into a commodity that could be bought and sold, capitalist society shifted humanity’s relations with nature into a mode of intense ecological exploitation unimaginable in previous epochs.

Capitalism is not necessarily more immoral than previous social systems with regard to cruelty to humans and the gratuitous destruction of nature. As a mode of production and a social system, however, capitalism requires people to be destructive of the environment. Three destructive aspects of the capitalist system stand out when we view this system in relation to the extinction crisis:

1. Capitalism tends to degrade the conditions of its own production
2. It must expand ceaselessly in order to survive
3. It generates a chaotic world system, which in turn intensifies the extinction crisis

By wrenching specific elements out of the complex ecosystems in which they are intertwined and turning them into commodities, capital remorselessly breaks down the complex natural world into impoverished but exchangeable forms, simultaneously discarding all those elements that don't appear to have immediate exchange value.

As Europeans colonized other parts of the world, they took cultural beliefs with them that legitimated their conquests. These ideologies of domination, intended to justify European expropriation of indigenous people and their land, also established an exploitative attitude towards flora and fauna in the colonies. The English philosopher John Locke, for example, argued that God intended the land to belong to those who were "industrious and rational." These attributes were manifested in Europeans' "improvement" of the land through their labor, development work that, he argued, removed the land from its original communal state and made it the property of the Europeans. As Locke remarked:

"He that in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled, and sowed any part of [the land], thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to."

In other words, since indigenous people weren't using the land properly, it didn't really belong to them and they could be dispossessed with no problem. Not coincidentally, Locke owned plantations in English colonies in Ireland and Virginia.

The scientific method generated a model of patriarchal mastery over a passive feminized nature that set the terms for subsequent notions of progress through domination of the natural world. Doctrines of the objectivity and disinterestedness of the scientific method helped to obscure the potentially ecocidal, patriarchal, and racist character of techno-science, until the social movements of the late twentieth century arose to challenge science's role in legitimating colonialism, in depriving women of control of their bodies, and in creating deadly chemicals such as DDT.

Capitalism is dependent on the conditions of production that it relentlessly degrades. By fecklessly consuming the environment, capital is figuratively sawing off the tree branch it is sitting on. But it does so because it must: it is a system based on ceaseless accumulation. Capitalists must constantly reinvest their accumulated profits if they are to survive against competitors, or at the very least, lose their wealth to inflation, driving capital to expand at a compound rate.

"Their skin would turn yellow and at that moment they knew it was time to die, which they did without much protest."

We called them the ‘yellow canaries.’ In other jobs I had with chemical companies, I learned to breathe—almost instinctively—with only the upper part of my lungs.

Trying to make a workplace safe isn’t easy, for it takes a lot of dollars. Money, not human health and welfare, is the heart and soul of that corporate business. People are cheap these days. The chemical industry can kill as many workers as they have at any one time, yet there are still more workers waiting outside to take their place. And the government always looks the other way while the worker gasps for breath.”

The spread of industrialization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a cancer. Industrialization in its present form, is a process of uncontrolled, unsustainable growth that eventually destroys its host—the biosphere.

When something precious is at stake, why not slow down and consider the options, not just for yourself but for a future that you will never see? In a time when we’ve never had more knowledge to inform our actions, we’ve never been more heedless. You are living for the moment while everything else around you is living in geological time.

The earth’s resources are not just scarce. They are finite. Classical economics encourages both producers and consumers to use up resources as fast as possible in pursuit of greater profits and growth. Mainstream economics as practiced today celebrates values—selfishness, gluttony, competitiveness shortsightedness—that were once viewed as cardinal sins, and in the process provides intellectual justification for capitalism’s disastrous pillage of the planet.

Can capitalist society reform itself sufficiently to cope with the extinction crisis? This is not simply unlikely. It is impossible in the long-run. While it is true that the environmental movement did manage to push corporations and the state into cleaning up local crises from the late 1960s onwards, climate change and extinction suggest that the capitalist system is destroying its ecological foundations when viewed on a longer temporal scale. Recall that capital’s solution to periodic systemic crises is to initiate a new round of accumulation. Capital essentially tries to grow itself out of its problems. But, as we have seen, the extinction crisis is precisely a product of unchecked, blinkered growth. In such a context, conservation efforts can never be more than a paltry bandage over a gaping wound.

As laudable as they are, conservation efforts largely fail to address the deep inequalities that capitalism generates, which push the poor to engage in deforestation and other forms of over-exploitation. Many of today’s major

conservation organizations were established in the last half of the twentieth century: the Nature Conservancy (1951), World Wildlife Fund (1961), Natural Resources Defense Council (1970), and Conservation International (1987). Yet during this same period, a new round of accumulation based on neoliberal principles of unrestrained hyper-capitalism has engulfed the planet. The neoliberal era has seen much of the global South become increasingly indebted, leading international agencies such as the World Bank to force debtor nations to harvest more trees, mine more minerals, drill for more oil, and generally deplete their natural resources at exponentially greater rates. The result has been a steeply intensifying deterioration in global ecosystems, including a massive increase in the rate of extinction.

Despite this dramatic collapse of global ecosystems, the climate change crisis has unleashed a fresh round of accumulation, obscured by upbeat language about the investment opportunities opened up by the green economy. Neoliberal solutions to the climate crisis such as voluntary carbon offsets are not only failing to diminish carbon emissions, but are also dramatically augmenting the enclosure and destruction of the global environmental commons. Such programs allow polluting industries in wealthy nations to continue emitting carbon, while turning the forests and agricultural land of indigenous people and peasants in the global South into carbon dioxide “sinks” or biodiversity “banks.” Under the green economy, vast numbers of people, plants, and animals are being sacrificed as collateral damage in the ecocidal exploitation of the planet. Capitalism, it is clear, cannot solve the environmental crises it is causing.

The massive wave of defaunation that has swept the globe over the last half century challenges the very idea of an unspoiled nature. There is no safe refuge from anthropogenic extinction. Indeed, the wilderness that remains has been so significantly degraded that we suffer from change blindness: as the planet’s remaining wilderness is degraded, each generation grows up with an increasingly impoverished view of natural biodiversity, so that human experience itself is undergoing a form of extinction.

In 2009 the European Commission and World Bank published a study that showed a mere 10 percent of the earth’s land today qualifies as “remote,” meaning it takes more than forty-eight hours to travel to it from a city.

Our planet is increasingly being made artificial through human-driven climate change. At least 80 percent of the earth’s land surface is directly influenced by humans. Why does that number matter? Because it indicates that humans are controlling the climate and environment on a scale unprecedented in earth’s history. If we have taken over as creators, those directing the evolution or extinction of life on the planet, how are we to be humble? What stands over us? Humility is important for thinking about

environmental values because it is what shows us our place in relationship to life. Without humility, it is too easy to underestimate or overestimate our value in relationship to the universe. This is far from a new idea—humility has long been an element of the preservationists' argument for caution in altering nature—but at a time when our technological powers have reached heady heights, perhaps this word is at its weakest.

Deserts are spreading across savannahs, forests are drying and being logged. Wildlife is being hunted and dying because of habitat loss and climate change, pushing the planet towards the sixth mass extinction in its history. Meanwhile, we are causing the proliferation of our domesticated species and indiscriminately scattering others around the globe. We are disemboweling the Earth through mining, drilling, and other extractions, littering the planet with novel compounds and materials, devices and objects, that could never have occurred naturally.

For almost all of the planet's 4.5 billion-year history, the atmosphere has been lit solely by extraterrestrial flares, like suns or meteors, or by electrical storms. Now, the skies are infused with artificial lights of different wavelengths as our devices communicate with each other and with us. And that's just in the invisible spectrum. In the visible spectrum we have lit up our world so brightly that towns and cities made of glass, steel, concrete can be seen from space at night and, for city dwellers, the stars fade into oblivion.

We now support a massive global population, but we have not simply multiplied the number of small hunter-gatherer communities. More than half of the world's people now live in cities—artificial constructs of densely packed, purpose-built living spaces, which act as giant factories consuming the planet's plants, animals, water, rocks, and mineral resources. Humanity operates on an industrial scale, and has needs—currently, eighteen terawatts of the energy at any time, 9 trillion cubic meters of fresh water per year and 40% of the global land area for food. It has become a super-organism, a creature of the Anthropocene, a product of industrialization, population expansion, globalization, and the revolution in communications technology. The intelligence, creativity, and sociability of this human super-organism is compiled from the linked-up accumulation of all the human brains, including those from the past who have left a cultural and intellectual legacy, and also the artificial minds of our technological inventions, such as computer programs and information libraries like Wikipedia.

In the Anthropocene, our Earth-moving capabilities have become truly planetary in scale: we now move more rocky materials through mining and other extractions than do glaciers and rivers combined.

Humanity currently uses 30% more natural resources a year than the

planet can replenish.

The idea that scarcity of natural resources poses limits to growth seems logical—indeed, the end of unsustainable capitalism has been predicted for centuries now—except that every time humanity is said to be on the brink of collapse, we find a way around the problem. The Green Revolution that tripled agricultural yields in the 1970s saw off one predicted crash. There was a huge fear in the nineteenth century that New York City and London would drown in their transport pollution (horse manure), or that they would run out of transport fuel (horse feed). The invention of the motor car laid those concerns to rest within a decade, but gave rise to other worries, like rubber and oil shortages. The new explosion in fracking, whereby engineers tap previously inaccessible horizontal drill sites deep underground, has increased global supplies of natural gas from decades to centuries. Such game-changing discoveries are hard if not impossible to predict. So should we rely on them to get us out of other resource shortages?

Like every other life form on this planet, humans are limited to whatever is contained on Earth and its atmosphere, with only solar energy being limitless. Humans are masters of conversion and adaptation. We will always find a solution to mineral shortages, but the problem is that the price for extracting scarce materials is usually paid for in environmental terms, whether it is the huge energy and water costs—and pollution—involved, or the destruction of precious landscapes. Humanity now uses roughly half of global natural production. Every other species that achieves this level of “success,” from bacteria to rats, reaches a tipping point at which its population size outstrips its ability to feed itself. Humanity is reliant on food, but also on external energy and other materials. The crash could be far more severe for us.

The self-awareness that comes with recognizing our power as a planetary force also demands we question our new role. Are we just another part of nature, doing what nature does: reproducing to the limits of environmental capacity, after which we will suffer a population crash? Or are we the first species capable of self-determination, able to modulate our natural urges, our impacts and our environment, such that we can maintain habitability on this planet into the future? And what of our relationship to the rest of the biosphere? Should we treat it as an exploitable resource to be plundered mercilessly for our pleasures and needs, or does our new global power imbue us with a sense of responsibility over the rest of the natural world? Our future will be defined by how we reconcile these two opposing, interwoven forces.

The entire concept of ‘us’ versus ‘nature’ is flawed since we too are part of nature. But why then is a bird’s nest or a beaver’s lodge and dam

considered natural, whereas human houses are not? If we are part of the natural world, why is what we produce—the artificial or cultural—deemed any more or less worthy of admiration, awe, and respect than what we deem naturally produced by planetary forces or evolution? When people make that distinction between humans and the natural world, surely what they mean is that we are capable of dramatically and deliberately choosing and altering the environment in a way that other species cannot. We can change and enhance nature—even the biology we are born with—and exceed natural physical limitations in a way no other species can.

Are we still “natural,” then, in the Anthropocene? Throughout civilization, humans have worried about our progress away from nature, while scorning or fetishizing societies who live most basically with nature. In the Anthropocene, as the last of these natural cultures now face extinction, it perhaps confirms that humans are not just changing the natural environment, but that we now operate on the planet as a very different animal.

There comes a time in a child’s life when they first realize that the food they enjoy—the meat they eat—comes from an animal. That the lovely fluffy mammal they pet is also food. Some children become vegetarian and refuse to eat meat again. Most do not. At this moment in our history, we are like children, realizing that the things we enjoy in life, that we depend upon, from energy to water to consumables, all come with environmental and social consequences that affect us. How we struggle to resolve this issue will determine the trajectory of the Anthropocene for years to come.

No single person or community came up with the idea to put the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The oil-based market-driven economy is a characteristic of civilization that arose out of the human love of energy and its promise of power and wealth. One gallon of oil contains an amount of energy that would take a man eight days of labour to produce. What is wealth if not the key to freedom, a way of throwing off the shackles of labour and the circumscribed life—the liberty to have, be, and do as you choose; the dream of no man having dominion over you? It’s intoxicating stuff.

One of the most unjust aspects of climate disruption (and there are many) is that our actions as adults today will have their most severe impact on the lives of generations yet to come, as well as kids alive today who are too young to impact policy. These children have done nothing to create the crisis, but they are the ones who will deal with the most extreme weather—the storms and droughts and fires and rising seas—and all the social and economic stresses that will flow as a result. They are the ones growing up amidst a mass extinction, robbed of so much beauty and so much of the companionship that comes from being surrounded by other life forms. It is

a form of theft, of violence—slow violence. A clean, vibrant planet is the birthright of all living beings.

Humans aren't the first species to alter the atmosphere; that distinction belongs to early bacteria, which, some two-billion years ago, invented photosynthesis. But we are the first species to be in a position to understand what we are doing.

The Great Oxidation Event occurred after cyanobacteria evolved photosynthesis. Photosynthetic creatures spread through the oceans, excreting oxygen all the while. The flood of oxygen permanently changed the surface of the earth, the composition of the oceans, and the functioning of the atmosphere. Most scientists believe it made the vast majority of the world's land and sea uninhabitable for the vast majority of the planet's living creatures. The resultant slaughter was an oxygen holocaust. Over time, minerals absorbed much of the gas, stabilizing it at about 21 percent of the atmosphere—a good thing, because if the level had risen much more our air would have had so much oxygen that a single spark could have set the planet afire.

The Great Oxidation Event has lessons for today. The first is that people who think that living creatures can't affect the climate have no idea of the power of life. The second is that the onset of climate change means that *Homo sapiens* is getting into the biological big leagues—we are tiptoeing into the terrain of bacteria, algae, and other truly important creatures. The third is that species, like sullen teenagers, don't pick up after themselves. Cyanobacteria sprayed their oxygen garbage all over Earth without concern for the consequences—littering on an epic scale. People are doing the same with carbon dioxide.

The Ad Hoc Study Group on Carbon Dioxide and Climate, or the Charney panel, as it became known, met for five days at the National Academy of Sciences' summer study center, in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Its conclusions were unequivocal. Panel members had looked for flaws in the modelers' work but had been unable to find any. "If carbon dioxide continues to increase, the study group finds no reason to doubt that climate changes will result and no reason to believe that these changes will be negligible," the scientists wrote. For a doubling of CO₂ from preindustrial levels, they put the likely global temperature rise at between two-and-a-half and eight degrees Fahrenheit.

The panel members weren't sure how long it would take for changes already set in motion to become manifest, mainly because the climate system has a built-in time delay. The effect of adding CO₂ to the atmosphere is to throw the earth out of "energy balance." In order for balance to be restored—as, according to the laws of physics, it eventually must be—the

entire planet has to heat up, including the oceans, a process, the Charney panel noted, that could take “several decades.” Thus, what might seem like the most conservative approach—waiting for evidence of warming to make sure the models were accurate—actually amounted to the riskiest possible strategy: “We may not be given a warning until the CO₂ loading is such that an appreciable climate change is inevitable.” It is now more than twenty-five years since the Charney panel issued its report.

A tipping point takes a small nudge to the climate system and amplifies it into a big change. Compare the climate system to a rowboat: You can tip and then you’ll just go back. You can tip it and just go back. And then you tip it and you get to the other stable state, which is upside down.

We’ve never conducted this experiment, and we only get to conduct it once; we don’t have a duplicate planet.

Extinction is truly forever; once a group dies out, the hundred-thousand unpredictable stages that led to its origin will never be repeated in precisely the same way.

The story of the great auk is a dark comedy. A flightless bird that once likely numbered in the millions, they were hunted by Native Americans and eaten by tenth-century Icelandic settlers in a manner not unlike how an exhausted parent goes out and grabs a rotisserie chicken from the grocery store today. They were quick in the water, but vulnerable when they tottered onto land to breed. By the early sixteenth century, European sailors, craving fresh meat after the long voyage to Newfoundland, would herd hundreds of them onto their boats before digging in.

Then the auk began to be used for more than food. Their feathers were perfect for pillows and mattresses. One sailor distastefully noted that a common tactic was to pluck the best feathers off before leaving the bird to “perish at his leisure.” Their meat could be used as fishing bait, and if you found yourself without wood, you could just light up an auk or two and let their body oils produce a flame for you. That is not a joke.

Only a handful of islands suited the auks’ mating needs, and by the late 1700s, those islands were being decimated. Going to the ill-named Funk Island and plucking birds all summer to fuel the ceaseless demands of the feather industry was the eighteenth-century equivalent of working at the local water park. In 1718, Funk Island was described as so overrun by auks that you couldn’t put your foot between them. By 1810, the place was barren.

There were efforts to save the auk. A petition led to a 1775 law that made taking an auk’s eggs or killing it for its feathers punishable by being beaten in public (certainly puts ideas like a carbon tax in perspective). But it was still legal to kill them for their meat, and in a dark irony, their growing

rarity made rich collectors willing to pay as much for a specimen as a skilled worker would make in a year. Who wouldn't risk a public flogging if you could cover 12 months of bills in a few days' work?

But there are two incidents that truly stand out in the annals of stupidity. In 1840, sailors snagged an auk from an island off Scotland, only to superstitiously stone it to death four days later amid a terrible storm, no doubt prompting a sailor to drunkenly slur, 'More like the not so great auk!' before offering up high-fives. It was the last auk seen in Great Britain, and by 1844, the auks were down to one lonely colony off the coast of Iceland.

One day, three men rowed out there, captured and strangled a pair of auks, left their cracked egg behind, and sold the bodies to a dealer. And that was the last time anyone ever saw a living great auk.

The earth has experienced five mass extinctions before the one we are living through now, each so complete a wiping of the fossil record that it functioned as an evolutionary reset, the planet's phylogenetic tree first expanding, then collapsing, at intervals, like a lung:

- 450 million years ago, 86 percent of all species dead
- 70 million years later, 75 percent
- 125 million years later, 96 percent
- 50 million years later, 80 percent
- 135 million years after that, 75 percent again.

Unless you are a teenager, you probably read in your high school textbooks that these extinctions were the result of asteroids. In fact, all but the one that killed the dinosaurs involved climate change produced by greenhouse gas. The most notorious was 250 million years ago; it began when carbon dioxide warmed the planet by five degrees Celsius, accelerated when that warming triggered the release of methane, another greenhouse gas, and ended with all but a sliver of life on Earth dead. We are currently adding carbon to the atmosphere at a considerably faster rate; by most estimates, at least ten times faster. The rate is one-hundred times faster than at any point in human history before the beginning of industrialization. And there is already, right now, fully a third more carbon in the atmosphere than at any point in the last 800,000 years—perhaps in as long as 15 million years. There were no humans then. The oceans were more than a hundred feet higher.

Many perceive global warming as a sort of moral and economic debt, accumulated since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and now come

due after several centuries. In fact, more than half of the carbon exhaled into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels has been emitted in just the past three decades. Which means we have done as much damage to the fate of the planet and its ability to sustain human life and civilization since Al Gore published his first book on climate than in all the centuries—all the millennia—that came before. The United Nations established its climate change framework in 1992, advertising scientific consensus unmistakably to the world; this means we have now engineered as much ruin knowingly as we ever managed in ignorance.

Global warming may seem like a distended morality tale playing out over several centuries and inflicting a kind of Old Testament retribution on the great-great-grandchildren of those responsible, since it was carbon burning in eighteenth-century England that lit the fuse of everything that has followed. But that is a fable about historical villainy that acquits those of us alive today—and unfairly. The majority of the burning has come since the premiere of *Seinfeld*. Since the end of World War II, the figure is about 85 percent. The story of the industrial world's kamikaze mission is the story of a single lifetime—the planet brought from seeming stability to the brink of catastrophe in the years between a baptism or bar mitzvah and a funeral.

Though the coral reefs of the Triassic flourished under a much higher atmospheric CO₂ regime than present, scientists are quick to dismantle what could be used as a strawman argument by skeptics:

“Although modern corals arose in the mid-Triassic and lived under much higher atmospheric CO₂ there is no evidence that they lived in waters with low-carbonate mineral saturation. It is the rapid unbuffered increase in atmospheric CO₂ and not its absolute values that causes important associated changes such as reduced carbonate ions, pH, and carbonate saturation of seawater.”

Though it might take only a few decades for us to wipe out coral reefs, if the End-Triassic mass extinction is any guide, these ecosystems will take not decades, centuries, or even millennia, but millions of years to restore. The decisions made in the next few years by the energy industry and the governments that regulate them will leave a record in the rocks that will last for hundreds of millions of years. Considering how much we've already done to dismantle coral reefs, and projecting these trends forward into anything resembling geological time, it becomes clear why it's not unreasonable to compare what is going on today with the worst disasters in earth's history.

Although this wave of mass extinction is global, the vast majority of species destruction is concentrated in a small number of geographical

hotspots. This is because biodiversity is unevenly distributed. On land, tropical rainforests are the primary nursery of biodiversity. Although they cover only six percent of the Earth's surface, their terrestrial and aquatic habitats harbor more than half the known species on the planet. The tropics are the leading abattoir of extinction, their great verdant expanses chopped up into quickly dwindling fragments, their plant and animal species struggling to adapt to habitat destruction, overharvesting, and, increasingly, anthropogenic climate change.

In the planet's tropical latitudes, there is a catastrophic convergence, a supremely destructive alignment of three factors:

1. Militarization and ethnic fragmentation related to the legacy of the Cold War in postcolonial nations
2. State failure and civil discord linked to the structural adjustment policies imposed on the global South by institutions like the World Bank in the name of debt repayment since the 1980s
3. Climate change-fueled environmental stresses such as desertification

But the picture of the stresses affecting the global South is incomplete without a consideration of the relations between humanity and the natural world in its fullest sense. We cannot understand the catastrophic convergence, that is, without discussing the decimation of biodiversity currently unfolding in the global South. Nor, conversely, can we understand extinction without an analysis of the exploitation and violence to which postcolonial nations have been subjected.

Extinction is the product of a global attack on the commons: the great trove of air, water, plants, and collectively created cultural forms such as language that have been traditionally regarded as the inheritance of humanity as a whole. Nature, the wonderfully abundant and diverse wild life of the world, is essentially a free pool of goods and labor that capital can draw on. Aggressive policies of trade liberalization in recent decades have been predicated on privatizing the commons—transforming ideas, information, species of plants and animals, and even DNA into private property.

There are at present no effective institutions to deal with the cancerous degradation of the global environment that is brought about by capital's need for continuous exponential growth.

Extinction is both a material reality and a cultural discourse that shapes popular perceptions of the world, one that often legitimates an inegalitarian social order. In order to respond adequately to this planetary crisis, we need

to transgress the boundaries that tend to keep science, environmentalism, religion, philosophy, and radical politics separate.

As millions of species are snuffed out, the biodiversity that supports the planetary ecosystem as we and our ancestors have known it is imperiled. This catastrophe cannot be stemmed—let alone reversed—within the present capitalist culture. We face a clear choice: radical political transformation or deepening mass extinction.

The notion that extinction is the death of a species is a far from adequate understanding of what is happening today. Extinction is the slow unraveling of delicately interwoven ways of life, generations of learning interrupted and lost from the world.

“Let us beware of needlessly destroying even one of the lives—so sublimely crowning the ages upon ages of evolving. The beauty and genius of a work of art may be reconceived, though its first material expression be destroyed; a vanished harmony may yet again inspire the composer; but when the last individual of a race of living beings breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can be again.”

They didn't leave a heritage. They didn't leave a building you could look at or dig a big hole or put in a dam. I guess the first rain that came along after the last one was caught washed out his tracks, and that was about the only sign they were there. We'll never have them again.

Climate change has become an unplanned experiment with the biodiversity of the planet. It is a major selective force and there's a lot of debate out there about how much different species can adapt. It's not easy to predict. What might be important for one organism is not the same as another. Seasonality, moisture, it might be for some that climate effects create a competitive balance or mutualism. It's extremely complicated. Consider, as an example, the ecological relationship between a bird and its prey, in this case a moth. If the peak season of moth hatching and abundance shifts as a result of climate changes, they may no longer be able to support birds that require them as food for their own reproductive cycles. When the speed of evolutionary change is mismatched between any two interdependent species, it could decrease abundance or lead to extinction.

The Volterran principle predicts, for instance, that if the populations of predators and their prey are more or less in balance with one another, and something happens to disturb their joint environment, then there will be a disproportionate decline in the number of predators. Surprisingly, this is precisely what happens. If herbivorous insect pests in a crop field are being

eaten by other predatory insects and the farmer sprays the entire area with a broad spectrum pesticide, a similar proportion of each population will die. But the crop-eating prey, whose death rate has been reduced by a shortage of predators, recovers more quickly than the predators, who initially can no longer find sufficient prey. So the farmer's even handed assault on the system seems only to make his pest problem worse. This is not what he intended or what we might expect, but it happens all too often, both with pesticides and to our ideas of how we think things ought to work.

For almost two centuries the Hudson Bay Company in Canada has been keeping records of the furs sold to them by hunters and trappers who work on islands in the bay. These purchases consist largely of lynx and their favorite food, the snowshoe hare. The records show that populations of the two species fluctuate, with a peak of abundance and therefore of fur sales, about every ten years. The population curves more or less coincide, with lynx numbers rising to their high point slightly after the hares. All very nice and tidy, just what one would expect if well-fed lynx tend to raise more litters, who eat more hares, leading to an eventual parallel decline in both populations. But the problem is that on some islands where there are no lynx, hare populations fluctuate anyway and in precisely the same way.

Recent studies have produced a more surprising Volterran suggestion. The snowshoe hare, it seems, is another species that reacts badly to overcrowding. It goes into a form of shock that the researchers diagnose as "hormone-mediated idiopathic hypoglycemia." What that means is that hares suffer from stress which damages their livers in ways from which they cannot recover, even if they are removed from the situation. They have an endocrinal response which controls their own population size. And, as it happens, those snowshoe hares which are most resistant to such stress, and therefore form a larger proportion of the surviving hare pool, also carry a virus that may produce a debilitating lynx disease. This predator-prey relationship is nothing like we imagined. It is actually the hares that assault the lynx.

In any biological community there are shifting configurations, many of which are going to be as complex and as unexpected as this. It is seldom as simple as 'who eats whom,' or of removing just those species that we find dangerous or inconvenient. Doing so can cause the community as a whole to change, like pulling the keystone out of a soaring arch brings the whole structure tumbling down. There are such species and their identification has become vital to ecology, which needs to be very concerned about extinctions now that we may be losing as much as a species every second from the biosphere.

There's a great political cartoon where a guy at a climate summit is

saying to his compatriot:

“What if it’s a big hoax and we create a better world for nothing?”

It all sounds so obvious, and too familiar. And that’s the problem: the things that should have us on fire demanding change somehow fail to rouse we, the people, to the passion that could free us from our dependence on our pushers.

Even though it’s a matter of physics that carbon dioxide makes the planet warmer, and even though, because of burning oil and coal, our atmosphere now contains a third more carbon dioxide (and climbing) than it did at the start of the Industrial Revolution, many people just won’t believe we have a big problem. People have a lot of kooky notions, but many who are disconnected from reality on this issue are running or aspiring to run the government of the United States of America.

“Our ancestors had seen the hunger for oil when the Yankee whalers came in the nineteenth century. They came for the whale oil and wiped out the whales. Whole villages that had relied on whales for food disappeared, Then six years ago we saw the hunger for oil coming back. We started to think, ‘This time we will go extinct.’”

As the whalers were stuck in their remorseless havoc, so we have stuck ourselves, with oil.

Though the world has relied on petroleum as a major industrial fuel for only a little over a century, people have been using petroleum for over six-thousand years. The Sumerians, among others, mined shallow asphalt for caulking boats and for export to Egypt, where it was used to set mosaics to adorn the coffins of great kings and queens. In about 330 BC, Alexander the Great was impressed by the sight of a continuous flame issuing from the earth near Kirkuk, in what is now Iraq; it was probably a natural gas seep set ablaze. The Chinese, around 200 AD, used pulleys and muscle labor to pump oil from the ground, send it through bamboo pipes, and collect it for fuel. Not until the 1800s did the West catch up to this level of oil drilling.

People being what we are, the potential for petroleum-based weapons was recognized early on. Arabs used petroleum to create flaming arrows used during the siege of Athens in 480 BC. The Byzantines in the seventh and eighth centuries hurled pots filled with oil ignited by gunpowder and fuses against Muslims. Similar bombs used at close range nearly destroyed the fleet of Arab ships attacking Constantinople in 673. Bukhara fell in 1220

when Genghis Khan hurled pots of naphtha at the city gates, where they burst into flame.

During the Renaissance, oil and asphalt from shallow pools discovered in the Far East found their way to Europe, and traders soon established routes to the West. By the 1600s, petroleum was lighting streets in Italy and Prague. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, asphalt was being used extensively to build roads. In the New World, natives in what is now Venezuela used petroleum to caulk boats and baskets, and for lighting and medicines. In 1539, a barrel of Venezuelan oil was sent by ship to Spain to soothe the gout of Emperor Charles V. In North America, certain natives used oil in rituals and for making paints.

The modern commercial petroleum era began in 1820, when a lead pipe was used to bring gas from a natural seep near Fredonia, New York, to nearby consumers and a local hotel. In 1852, Polish farmers in Pennsylvania asked a local pharmacist to distill oil from a local seep. They were hoping to make vodka, but the result was undrinkable. It burned, though, and so they invented kerosene. The invention of the kerosene lamp two years later created a mass market for commercial kerosene, and soon towns everywhere were glowing with the light of petroleum. In 1858, Colonel Edwin Drake pounded a well sixty-nine feet into the ground near Titusville, Pennsylvania. It produced a continuous flow of oil, and within a short time kerosene replaced whale oil for lighting lamps.

In the early 1900s, wooden oil derricks popped up so fast in Los Angeles that streets looked like a surreal forest painted by Picasso. Some two-hundred oil companies drilled more than two-thousand wells into scores of different oil fields. The frenzy turned the city into a “vibrant oil-soaked little canyon.” Early homeowners gamely hosted wooden derricks in their backyards and disposed of oil-field waste in their basements. Oil wells planted in cemetery plots allowed the dead to provide income for the living, in the form of royalty checks. The thirty-year-long boom manufactured big fortunes for Union Oil, Getty Oil, and Atlantic Richfield. The flowing oil dollars in turn fueled the state’s Wild West car culture and enriched evangelical churches. Petrodollars supported the upstart film industry and a raft of corrupt real estate deals. Oil turned California into an early American Kuwait.

In the 1880s, the first oil tanker began carrying oil across the ocean. By the 1970s, the seas began bearing thousand-foot-long supertankers capable of containing 800,000 tons of oil. Today oil accounts for over half the tonnage of all sea cargoes. Petroleum didn’t really get big until the internal combustion engines of the twentieth century and the autos, tractors, trucks, and, eventually, aircraft they powered. Middle East oil ramped up rapidly in the late 1940s. Oil was discovered in Iran in 1908, in Iraq in 1927, and in

Saudi Arabia in 1938. By the 1970s, the oil fields of the Middle East were producing about half the world's oil. Between 1950 and 1970, annual world oil production surged from 500 million to 3 billion tons. Today there are more miles of petroleum pipelines than of railroads.

In 2007, the US government collected \$9 billion in royalty payments from Big Oil on just the drilling done in the Gulf of Mexico. In reality, we should have earned a lot more, but the United States ranks ninety-third in the world in how much revenue it extracts from oil and gas extraction compared with the profits these industries enjoy. That has something to do with Ronald Reagan. Between 1954 and 1983, the average lease for federal land was \$2,224 per acre. But after Reagan, between 1983 and 2008, the average lease was just \$263 an acre.

In addition, in 1995, Congress decided to reduce the government's royalties on oil and gas extracted from deep water. The goal and result: more drilling encouraged. But other nations charge more. Oil taxes and royalties in the United States are considered much lower than elsewhere in the world. Our country should benefit financially, as the oil companies do. And what else isn't fine is that this encouraged more and riskier drilling but not more safety. Industry assurances that deepwater drilling was safe rocked a willing Congress to sleep on the issue. The fact that accidents are rare and unpredictable has substituted for the obvious truth and certainty that accidents do happen.

In 2005, despite high oil prices and even President George W. Bush saying oil companies needed no further drilling incentives, the Republican-dominated Congress again lowered the royalties oil companies are required to pay our national Treasury. That's nonsensical but part of the ideology appears to be a desire to starve the government so there is scant money for wasteful social programs like education, health, and environmental protection. And while, yes, there are excessive regulations, there is also excessive greed. Regulations don't threaten business; they threaten greed, the greed that threatens both us and our nation's economy. In 2006, Louisiana's congressional delegation supported giving a share of oil royalties to states that allowed drilling. This means using national oil revenue directly to achieve state policies that benefit Big Oil. Nice giveback. Clever.

“There must have been—I speculate—tremendous damage to sheer numbers of those eggs and larvae. We should also bear in mind, however, that the numbers of eggs and larvae are always far in excess of what the system can support. The competition and struggle for existence is so intense that under normal, healthy circumstances, only one fish egg in millions wins

the lottery ticket for becoming an adult. That is where a lot of the resiliency comes from. There may be enough survivors to let the Gulf recover quickly.”

Of course such positive thinking ignores the fact that these millions of losers do not simply poof out of existence like they’re in some Hollywood CGI-fest. They’re eaten, they provide nourishment, homes, nurseries, fertilizers. If they’re just poisoned before they can grow and do any of this that is a problem.

But the worst environmental disaster in history isn’t the oil that got away. The real catastrophe is the oil we don’t spill. It’s the oil we run through our engines as intended. It’s the oil we burn, the coal we burn, the gas we burn. The worst spill—the real catastrophe—is the carbon dioxide we spill out of our tailpipes and smokestacks every second of every day, year upon decade. That spill is changing the atmosphere, changing the world’s climate, altering the heat balance of the whole planet, destroying the world’s polar systems, killing the wildlife of icy seas, killing the tropics’ coral reefs, raising the level of the sea, turning the oceans acidic, and dissolving shellfish. And as the reefs dissolve and the productivity of oceans and agriculture destabilizes, so will go the food security of hundreds of millions of people.

Boiling Frogs

“Behind the lectern, a broad banner was adorned with the young company’s logo—the letters GCOS forming the spokes inside a sharp-toothed bucket wheel, the massive machine that chewed bitumen from the earth out in the mine like a hungry dog gnawing at a gristled bone. Above the logo, a semicircular arch of text read ‘Man Develops His World.’ It was an incontrovertible statement of fact in this otherworldly prefab temple to the genius of engineering. This was the purpose of civilization, modernity’s very apex. Man Develops His World!”

The idea of nature as a storehouse to feed human needs and a treasure trove to feed human ambitions is a pillar of Western civilization.

The average 797 dump truck will make four trips to the shovel and back per hour, roughly thirty to fifty total trips per shift by each driver. On average, each 400-ton load will produce 172 barrels of oil. In the giddy days of \$120-per-barrel oil in 2008, a driver might have hauled a million dollars’ worth of oil in a single twelve-hour shift. In 2015, with oil stuck in the doldrums of \$50 or less, the total was between \$250,000 and \$450,000.

Here are immaculately landscaped lawns and parks, brand-new schools and recreation facilities. Here are the YMCA and the Suncor Energy Centre for the Performing Arts and the Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo. Here are lavishly equipped big-box gyms, where men doing solo twenty-and-tens, their families back in Quebec or Prince Edward Island, spend their very little downtime working out, counting reps in lieu of counting the days till they head home again. Here are strip malls with long-established bars featuring karaoke nights and down-home fiddle bands tucked between Lebanese-run donair places and dental offices. Here’s a sign advertising ‘Tar Sand Betties Roller Derby’ in front of a hockey arena.

Here, on the very western edge of Timberlea, is the Syncrude Athletic Park, as new and lavish a collection of sports fields as you’ll find in any small city in the country. Beer-league softball teams fill a half-dozen baseball fields with friendly chatter, alongside four soccer pitches where cheers ring out in at least that many languages, alongside Fort McMurray’s first-ever cricket pitch, put in after the rest of the park had been built at the behest of the city’s first-ever cricket club.

Here, on MacDonald Island, which lies across the river just north of downtown and just south of the highway exit leading to Thickwood, is maybe the most elaborate multipurpose recreational centre a company town has ever built, finished in 2009 at a cost of \$127 million. Here, surrounding a

wide parking lot, is upper-middle-class suburban leisure at its High Modern apex and in many of its most popular forms. Here is the Miskanaw Golf Club, its clubhouse staring across the parking lot at Shell Place, a brand-new outdoor stadium and concert venue. In between the stadium and golf course is the enormous Suncor Community Leisure Centre. Its marquee facility is the Syncrude Aquatic Centre, an expansive, tropical-themed retreat from the merciless boreal winter, climate-controlled and artificially humid and equipped with several pools and multiple waterslides. There is also the CNOOC Nexen Field House (for basketball and other court sports), the CNRL Arena (for hockey and figure skating), the Total Fitness Centre (named for the French oil company, not the comprehensiveness of its workout gear), and the Oilsands Curling Club. The city's public library, with its Total Aboriginal Cultural Corner and Syncrude Corner, is on the second floor. MacDonald Island is a sober middle-class pleasure dome.

The hub of Calgary's business district is, rather fittingly, an artificially lit, climate-controlled homage to suburban retail commerce. There is an obvious practicality to the Plus 15 network. Winters are long and sometimes harsh here where the prairie meets the Rockies, the streets and sidewalks filling with snow that turns to slush and back again when a warming winter chinook wind blows through. But the Plus 15 represents as well a rejection of place, a suburbanite's thermostat-controlled denial of the realities of the local climate. Fifteen feet above the sidewalk, weather has been rendered irrelevant. The landscape is a picture framed by an office tower's window. The heart of the city, the main street where you bump into an old friend or pick up your dry cleaning, is an indoor concourse lined with retail outlets, set to a soundtrack of office-tower HVAC white noise. All of it gets locked up at night, and much of it is a desolate ghost town on the weekends. From suburban garage to heated underground parking lot, from meeting to lunch to a quick haircut, the white-collar oil sands employee's working day can transpire entirely, effortlessly indoors.

Is this progress? The grand High Modern project begun under a makeshift bubble tent as the Great Canadian Oil Sands in 1967 is a roaring success by the only definition known to everyone who was there that day. But it has come at a significant price to land, water, animals, and people, a cost tallied by varying measures over the years and understood to be far too high by those who now articulate a competing definition of progress. Those who subscribe to this competing view tabulate environmental costs not only uncounted but totally unconsidered at the project's launch. They delineate social costs that expand in lockstep with the scale of the Patch itself. And they ultimately assess hydrocarbons as a fuel source of the past and emissions reduction as the sine qua non of any sustainable definition of

progress in the twenty-first century.

In a large color ad taken out in *Life* magazine in 1962 by ExxonMobil's precursor, Humble Oil, a small, smartly dressed cartoon character saluted a photograph of a majestic glacier. "Each Day Humble Supplies Enough Energy to Melt Seven-Million Tons of Glacier!" the ad's headline declared.

A good way to understand the full impact of this burning of fossil fuels and forests is to compare it to volcanoes. Volcanoes have an immediate and literally chilling impact on climate, followed by a slower warming effect. However, these human sources of global warming gases are much, much larger—between 100 and 150 times bigger—than anything belched out by volcanoes, ultimately overpowering any cooling effect of volcanic dust and ash. Put another way, to match the CO₂ and other greenhouse gases that people are pouring into the atmosphere, Mount St. Helens would have to erupt every two-and-a-half hours, every day, forever.

"I may be talking to you here today, and in a month you may hear the news that I have disappeared. I ask myself: Am I scared? I am. I am a human being, I get scared. But it doesn't make me shut my mouth! As long as I am able to walk, I will be denouncing those who hurt the forest. The trees in the Amazon are my sisters. I am a son of the forest. I live off them, I depend on them, I am part of them. When I see one of these trees on top of a truck going to the sawmill, it gives me such pain. It's as if I were watching a funeral procession, taking the dearest person I've got. Why? It's life. It's life to me. It's life to all of you who live in cities! Because the forest is purifying the air, it is giving us a return. And the crimes of a group of people, who can think only of profit, of themselves, and not of future generations or anything else—they are doing whatever they want in our town. It's a shame because nobody takes any brave steps to solve this problem. This is the obstacle."

Although the age of permafrost is difficult to determine, most of it in Alaska probably dates back to the beginning of the last glacial cycle. This means that if it thaws, it will be doing so for the first time in more than one-hundred-twenty-thousand years.

It's very difficult to look at trends in air temperature, because it's so variable. So one year you have around Fairbanks a mean annual temperature of zero Celsius and you say, 'Oh yeah, it's warming,' and other years you have mean annual temperature of minus six Celsius and everybody says, 'Where?

Where is your global warming?’ In the air temperature, the signal is very small compared to noise. What permafrost does is it works as low-pass filter. That’s why we can see trends much easier in permafrost temperatures than we can see them in atmosphere. In most parts of Alaska, the permafrost has warmed by three degrees since the early 1980s. In some parts of the state, it has warmed by nearly six degrees.

Like all climate models, GISS’s divides the world into a series of boxes. Three-thousand-three-hundred-twelve boxes cover the earth’s surface, and this pattern is repeated twenty times moving up through the atmosphere, so that the whole arrangement might be thought of as a set of enormous checkerboards stacked on top of one another. Each box represents an area of four degrees latitude by five degrees longitude. The height of the box varies depending on altitude. In the real world, of course, such a large area would have an incalculable number of features; in the world of the model, features such as lakes and forests and, indeed, whole mountain ranges are reduced to a limited set of properties, which are then expressed as numerical approximations. Time in this grid-world moves ahead for the most part in discrete, half-hour intervals, meaning that a new set of calculations is performed for each box for every thirty minutes that is supposed to have elapsed in actuality. Depending on what part of the globe a box represents, these calculations may involve dozens of different algorithms, so that a model run that is supposed to simulate climate conditions over the next hundred years involves more than a quadrillion separate operations. A single run of the GISS model, done on a supercomputer, usually takes about a month.

Very broadly speaking, there are two types of equations that go into a climate model. The first group expresses fundamental physical principles, like the conservation of energy and the law of gravity. The second group describes—the term of art is ‘parameterize’—patterns and interactions that have been observed in nature but may be only partly understood, or processes that occur on a small scale and have to be averaged out over huge spaces.

Imagine that we were looking down at the earth from a spaceship hovering above the North Pole. It’s springtime, and the ice is covered with snow, and it’s really bright and white. It reflects over 80 percent of the incident sunlight. The albedo is around 0.8, 0.9. Now, let’s suppose that we melt that ice away and we’re left with the ocean. The albedo of the ocean is less than 0.1; it’s like 0.07. Not only is the albedo of the snow-covered ice high; it’s the highest of anything we find on earth. And not only is the albedo of water low; it’s pretty much as low as anything you can find on earth. So what you’re doing is you’re replacing the best reflector with the worst reflector.

The most significant indirect effect is known as “water-vapor feedback.”

Since warmer air holds more moisture, higher temperatures are expected to produce an atmosphere containing more water vapor, which is itself a greenhouse gas.

Q: “What is it like to know that the country in which you were born will no longer exist?”

A: “It is painful. We are talking about the loss of a culture that goes back perhaps 5,000 years, the loss of a unique language, of fairy stories and songs. I would hope that our population can all move together somewhere else, but it is likely that we will be split into small groups here and there wherever we can be accommodated. Older people tell me they would rather die under the waves than leave their homes, the place of their ancestors and the graves of their loved ones. It is likely many will die of grief rather than move on.

This is the biggest global emergency of our time—bigger than terrorism. People that continue to emit greenhouse gases, they are climate terrorists. We are the first to go. But others will come after us.”

The trick you’ve got to remember is that climate is multivariate. The plant species are having to respond both to temperature changes and to moisture changes and to changes in seasonality. It makes a big difference if you have a drier winter versus a drier summer, because some species are more attuned to spring and others to fall. Any current community has a certain mixture. If you start changing the climate, you’re changing the temperature, but you’re also changing moisture or the timing of the moisture or the amount of snow and, bingo, species are not going to move together. They can’t.

But even for those with more mobility, such long-distance migrations are likely not practical in a fragmented landscape like today’s. Many organisms now live in the functional equivalent of oceanic islands or remote mountain tops. Certainly, our knowledge of their past response may be of little value in predicting any future reactions to climate change, since we have imposed totally new restrictions on their mobility.

Bones of fish and whales are made of calcium carbonate, and researchers have found that ocean acidification is altering bone formation, particularly in the delicate ear bones, which fish use to navigate and sense speed and direction. Fish are not just disorientated by acidification: biologists have discovered that their neurotransmitters are also disrupted, changing their behaviour. Acidification also changes the way sound waves travel through

the water. A 0.3 decrease in pH allows sound to travel 70% further in the water—the ocean is becoming louder in the Anthropocene, perhaps confusing animals that communicate through sound, like cetaceans.

Noise polluters are like bullies in a school yard. They are basically saying, ‘I don’t care about you and the effect my noise has on you.’ It’s a power issue.

Fishermen often take the largest specimens of salmon or trout from streams and rivers. Fish usually need to reach a certain size before becoming sexually mature and capable of reproduction, after which growth slows down. Like other animals, fish show a trade-off between large size and time of reproduction: if you wait to be large before producing offspring, you probably will be able to produce more of them, and having greater numbers of offspring is favored by evolution, but you also risk dying before you are able to reproduce at all. But where overfishing has removed a substantial portion of a population, the average size of fish is now substantially smaller, because the fishermen have inadvertently selected for earlier reproduction, and evolution has favored fish that get to the business of sex sooner. It’s not just that the larger fish have all been taken; it’s that the fish are not reaching such sizes to begin with. The genes responsible for regulating growth and size at sexual maturity are now different because evolution has occurred. To bring back the jaw-dropping trophy fish of decades past, scientists say, people will have to change their ways.

The first-ever systematic estimate of the size of the annual global capture of wild fish calculates the total in the order of one trillion, although it could be as high as 2.7 trillion. To put this in perspective, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 60 billion vertebrate land animals are killed each year for human consumption—the equivalent of about nine animals for each human being on the planet.

Global annual fish consumption is now approaching 20 kg per person per year—four times as much as in the 1950s—even though global fish stocks have continued to decline. Humans are now the biggest ocean predator, making oceans less biodiverse and disrupting food chains. It is likely the only fish that people will eat, further into the Anthropocene, will be farmed. Entire species will never be seen, let alone tasted. Vast areas of the seabed of the Mediterranean and North Sea already resemble a desert, expunged of fish by Europeans using increasingly efficient methods such as bottom trawling.

The open ocean, that vast and lawless no-man’s-land of international waters where factory-fishing fleets the size of small cities trawl with giant nets and drag longlines studded with millions upon millions of hooks. These operations are ruthlessly efficient strip miners; a decade-long study found

that 90 percent of the global sea's large, predatory fish has been wiped out in the last fifty years.

And at what point would the hunting stop? When all the sharks were gone? There certainly wasn't an endless supply. Nature doesn't dole out apex predators at the same rate that it provides us with, say, pigeons. White sharks, like tigers and lions, reproduce slowly, giving birth to live young. Their gestation period has not been precisely determined, but it's thought to be close to eighteen months and result in only a handful of pups.

Strip away the top of the food chain and the bottom is likely to sprawl, with opportunistic animals (fish-devouring sea lions, for example) dominating and breeding unchecked, worms, viruses, parasites, and their ilk having a high old time.

Whales are social mammals with big brains, capable of enjoying life and of feeling pain—and not only physical pain, but very likely also distress at the loss of one of their group. Whales cannot be humanely killed—they are too large, and even with an explosive harpoon, it is difficult to hit the whale in the right spot. Moreover, whalers do not want to use a large amount of explosive, because that will blow the whale to pieces, and the whole point of whaling is to recover valuable oil or flesh from the whale. Hence harpooned whales typically die slowly and painfully.

Causing suffering to innocent beings without an extremely weighty reason for doing so is wrong, and hence whaling is unethical. But the Japanese whaling fleet will still kill about 1,000 whales, mostly minke whales. It justifies its whaling as “research” because a provision in the rules of the International Whaling Commission allows member nations to kill whales for research purposes. But the research seems to be largely directed to building a scientific case for a resumption of commercial whaling, so if whaling is unethical, then the research is itself both unnecessary and unethical.

The Japanese do have one argument that is not so easily dismissed. They claim that Western countries object to Japanese whaling because for them whales are a special kind of animals, as cows are for Hindus. Western nations should not, the Japanese say, try to impose their cultural beliefs on them. The best response to this argument is that the wrongness of causing needless suffering to sentient beings is not a culturally specific value. It is, for example, one of the first precepts of one of Japan's major ethical traditions, Buddhism. But Western nations are in a weak position to make this response, because they themselves inflict so much unnecessary suffering on animals. The Australian government, which has come out so strongly against whaling, permits the killing of millions of kangaroos each year, a slaughter that involves a great deal of animal suffering. The same can be said of various forms of hunting in other countries, not to mention the vast

quantities of animal suffering caused by factory farms.

Polyester garments release around 1,900 plastic fibers each time they are washed, which are being eaten by marine animals and getting into the food chain in measurable amounts.

Human changes to the marine environment may lead to a tipping point in which jellyfish rather than fish dominate the oceans of the Anthropocene, much as they did hundreds of millions of years ago in pre-Cambrian times. Jellyfish are simply better prepared than other marine life for Anthropocene conditions—warmer temperatures, salinity changes, ocean acidification, and pollution work to their advantage. Jellyfish can cope far better with anoxia (low oxygen) than muscular fish. Even our infrastructure—pontoons, piers, and drilling platforms—is a boon for jellyfish, providing an anchor for polyps.

As places get richer they begin outsourcing the dirty, polluting parts of making stuff to poorer countries. Most of China's pollution—filthy emissions, discoloured rivers, poisoned soils and ravaged wildlands—is associated with the recent fabrication of goods for export to the West.

The television in my living room, appears nowhere on Canada's emissions ledger, but rather is attributed entirely to China's ledger, because that is where the set was made. And the international emissions from the container ship that carried my TV across the ocean—and then sailed back again—aren't entered into anyone's account book. This deeply flawed system has created a vastly distorted picture of the drivers of global emissions. It has allowed rapidly de-industrializing wealthy states to claim that their emissions have stabilized or even gone down when, in fact, the emissions embedded in their consumption have soared during the free trade era.

China has followed Europe's example and outsourced its dirty industry from the wealthy cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, inland to rural and less developed central and western areas, as well as to poorer countries, such as Indonesia. In doing so, China's air quality will improve, just as Europe's has, while the atmosphere of developing countries will worsen.

Pushed into a smaller and smaller range by the encroaching shrimp farms, he was hungry. Late at night he would prowl into the nearby village, and any domestic animal not locked away might be taken. Yet for all his power, this big cat was at a loss, unable to fight back against the rolling changes that threatened not just him but his whole species. Our human species is wandering along a different path, seemingly oblivious to the warnings echoing around us. The crisis of global warming is much bigger than that tiger, the Sundarban forest, Bangladesh, global slavery, or any single one of us. It's a runaway train and we're all standing right in its path—unaware that we have in our hands a way to reduce global warming immediately and effectively. End slavery. One of the key causes of global warming is the

destruction of the world's forests, a process enabled by slave labor.

Slavery flourishes where old rules, old ways of life break down. The frontier can be swept by several waves of exploitation, the first which sweeps away the old forest, another which is the leading edge of the alien planting, a third rolls through when the alien forests are cut. Inside the wave of destruction laws disappear. Once trapped within one of these waves a person is beyond social norms and protection. The only road in is an isolated dirt track. This track stops at the line where old forest ends and new destruction begins. It is the first tentacle of change, moving ahead with the wave. The people caught up and forced to carry out the destruction of the forests live without electricity, running water, or communication with the outside world. They are completely under the control of their masters. As the wave passes, it carries slavery with it. The land ahead is still exploitable, the land behind is stripped, and when all the land is stripped the slaves will be dumped.

We tend to think of environmental destruction as huge bulldozers gouging their way through pristine forests, crushing life under their steel tracks, scraping away nature in order to cover the land with concrete. In fact the process is more insidious. The people who live in the forest and rely on it are usually forced to destroy it. Tree by tree, the hands of slaves wrench the life out of their own land and prepare it for a new kind of exploitation. The slavery of Brazil is a temporary slavery because environmental destruction is temporary: you only get to ruin a forest once and it doesn't take that long.

Logging operations bring roads and workers and firearms into the depths of the forest; dead wildlife consequently travels out.

Road creation is the primary driver of deforestation. Whether it is to provide access for mines and dams or to link towns and villages, a road enables loggers, animal poachers and traffickers, and small-time miners to enter virgin territory. Following in their wake are the farmers, who deforest for cropland, and drug growers and processors. Scientists have shown that 95% of all deforestation takes place within twenty-five kilometers of a road and, on average, every road carved into the Amazon—and there have been 50,000 kilometers built in the past three years—is followed by a fifty-meter-wide halo of deforestation.

It is because of this that they recommend establishing a railway or using the river networks to support large planned hydrodams and mines in the forest. The Camisea gas project at Las Malvinas in Peru, for example, in a sensitive area of the Amazon, has no road connections and operates like an industrial island where everything leaves or arrives by boat, air, or underground pipeline, which hugely limits its impact on the forest. Other ways of mitigating the disturbance include narrower roads that retain tree canopy

above, or rope bridges which reduce roadkill deaths by allowing animals to cross safely. Ground-dwelling creatures can benefit from underpasses—an elephant underpass built in 2011 under a busy road in Kenya has been used by hundreds of elephants and helped reunite separated herds, preventing conflict with farmers and road users.

For the individuals who carve away at the great tropical forests, their piecemeal destruction of a few acres for timber, crops, or ranching are livelihood improvements that make negligible impact on the enormity and permanence of a forest that extends further than they will usually have traveled in their lives. But the accumulation of millions of such forest-eaters, in addition to the large-scale commercial enterprises, are steadily eroding vast areas that have been forested for millennia. The accumulation of small-scale logging operations have a footprint that is twenty times larger than the more obvious wholesale deforestation. Even so-called sustainable logging practices—such as selective logging, in which one or two lucrative hardwoods are chopped down, leaving the rest intact—are enormously detrimental to the forest. On average, for every selectively logged tree, another thirty are severely damaged, increasing fire risk, worsening soils and impacting biodiversity.

Gilberto was a slave. His job was destroying the forest:

“My family, like most families, had no land. Sometimes we would try to ‘earn the land.’ That meant finding a piece of public land, or unused land, and planting a crop on it. Once we got some land cleared and the crop started, and then a big farmer came and said the land was his. We had no way of knowing if this was true. He said we could stay and he would pay us for harvesting ‘his’ crop.

Then someone came from the Ministry of Labor and stopped us farming there altogether. They said the conditions were too bad, and it was true we had no water, no toilets, and not really any shelter. We mostly just slept in the field, some people had pieces of plastic sheet to sleep under. We were hungry all the time, and the ants were biting us. We tried planting some vegetables, but got pushed off before we could harvest them. When the corn we had planted was ready, we went back to harvest it. We worked through the field pulling the ears of corn and then stripping away the outer leaves. The big farmer paid us about 5 reais [\$2] for every 130 pounds of shucked corn. This was all of us working, even the small children worked.

After this I went off with my cousin looking for work further north, up near the forest. This is where the gato caught me. The gato is like an actor, he comes along and is very nice, he understands how much you need a job, and he says he can help. He'll recruit several young men at a time in town, but when you get to the countryside, up on the edge of the forest, the gato becomes a villain.

When he recruited me, he said I would be paid 12 reais [about \$7] for every 'line' of trees I cut. A 'line' was about 50 square meters, and was about all you could cut if you worked hard from four in the morning until sundown. This is the raw forest, and the vegetation is very thick, some of the trees are enormous, but there are others of every size, along with thornbushes, vines, snakes, and lots and lots of insects. To do the work we had to buy equipment from the gato, boots, knives, hooks, machetes, and axes, and they were really expensive.

When we started to work there, we realized this was a bad situation. For breakfast the gato only gave us a little coffee and some manioc flour, at lunchtime there would be a small amount of rice, maybe some beans if we were lucky. Working this hard we were really hungry, and after a couple of days we just said, 'Forget it! We want to leave.' But the gato said, 'No! You owe me money, a big debt for the tools and the food and the cost of bringing you out here.' And then he showed us his gun. So we thought, 'Okay, we'll work out this debt and go,' but the debt just kept getting bigger and bigger. And the situation just got worse, our only shelter was a little bit of plastic over sticks, rats were running over us in our sleep, our only water was from a dirty pond, and our only toilet was the forest.

One of the worst things was what the gato was doing to two young guys who were thirteen or fourteen. At night he would come to the shelter and take one of them away at gunpoint. Off in the middle of the forest, he'd put his gun to the boy's head, and rape him, forcing him to do things. Sometimes he'd hit him with his pistol as well. It was terrible, we wanted to help them, but we were afraid that he'd shoot us. These boys were in bad shape.

After five months I had just had enough, and I told my cousin I was going to run for it. He was frightened and told me that I would be killed. By this time the gato had two other men watching over us with guns. But I was determined and willing

to take the risk. So, on a Sunday afternoon I walked about five miles through the jungle and found a road. It is hard to believe, but I actually met a guy I knew on the road. When he heard what had happened he gave me 30 reais and I was able to get a bus into Açailândia. There were men hanging around the bus station, so I asked some of them where I should go to report what had happened. 'Don't bother going to the police,' they said, 'they won't do anything. You've got to go to the Center for Defense of Life and Human Rights.'

At the center I met Brígida, a specialist who seemed to know all about what had happened to me, she said it was happening to a lot of young men. She took down all the details and where the men were being held and started a report to the Special Mobile Inspection Group so they could raid the site and rescue them. She told me it would be several days, possibly even weeks, before there could be a raid.

When she told me this I started to worry about my cousin. He was pretty sick when I left and I didn't want him to die there. So, I went back to help him. The gato was angry, but also very surprised to see me come back. I told him I had gone off to see a girl, and he just sent me back to work. I think it was the water, but now everyone was getting really sick, and my cousin was getting worse. He was so sick the gato didn't care when I asked to take him out to the road, so I got him off and he made it home. I stayed around waiting for the mobile squad to show up. I wanted to see what would happen, and be there to tell the truth. Finally, one day, the mobile squad arrived at about noon. The gato ran out with his gun, but realized the soldiers were a lot stronger, so he had to surrender. The workers started shouting, they were very happy, and were rushing to meet the mobile squad. The farmer who owned the land had to pay us 'back wages' immediately, and most of the workers left for their homes.

We told the police that the gato had raped those two teenagers, but he wasn't arrested, I don't know why. Somebody said that they couldn't physically prove he'd raped them, but I feel like those boys were victims and their word should have counted. The rest of us had seen the gato take the boys away, and then we had been with the boys when he brought them back. I don't understand why the gato wasn't punished for that.

Most of the men returned to the south, but when I got to Açailândia, I looked for work. I also met my wife; she was working in a restaurant. We hit it off right away, and got married not long after the raid. She still works in that restaurant and I'm working in a big kitchen. Everything is different now, I've got a whole new life."

I would dwell on darkness. A kind of darkness, for example, that afflicts the Kaminuriak caribou: excess killing at the hands of Eskimos, in modern times. Everyone is afraid to say something about it, for fear of being called a racist. It is easier to let the animals go than to confront that dark region in ourselves. The darkness of politics, in the long hours, runs into the darkness of the land. Into anger.

I would think of the Eskimo. The darker side of the human spirit is not refined away by civilization. It is not something we are done with. Eskimo people, in my experience, have, still, a sober knowledge of their capacity for violence, but are reluctant to speak of it to whites because they have been taught that these are the emotions, the impulses, of primitives. We confuse the primitive with the inability to understand how a light bulb works. We confuse the primitive with being deranged. What is truly primitive in us and them, savage hungers, ethical dereliction, we try to pass over; or we leave them, alone, to be changed. They can humiliate you with a look that says they know better.

How are we going to survive? Is deforestation viable? No! The forest is viable when it is standing! You don't have to water or fertilize the forest. All you have to do is go there and gather what it produces. The forest is twice as sustainable when it is standing because when you cut it down, you have only one chance, whereas when you leave it there, you will always have it. You will have it today, tomorrow, when you're gone, other people stay there and they will enjoy the forest the same way you did and they will live well.

For example, an untouched forest yielding Brazil nuts and other products can easily generate as much or more income as what can be made from cattle. If the naturally occurring forest products are complemented with a few cocoa and açai berry trees, the yield can be double or triple what a family might earn from cattle. But the cultural imperative is very strong, and the uneducated rural poor will tell you: "Cattle make a man rich." So, the forest dies and all but the cattle barons are impoverished.

Let's assume that only 40 percent of deforestation is accomplished with slavery—this is a conservative figure. What does that mean in terms of CO₂ emissions? To answer that question we have to determine how much

deforestation adds to the total CO₂ emissions each year, but on that point there isn't clear agreement. The amount of CO₂ scientists say comes from deforestation runs from 17 percent to 20 percent to 25 percent to "almost 30 percent." I'm going to go with the 20 percent estimate because that number is supported by more of the scientific research institutes around the world. So, if 40 percent of deforestation is slave-based, then slavery is responsible for 2.54 billion tons of CO₂ per year, not counting the scrubbing capacity that is lost when the trees are cut. For 2010 that amount of greenhouse gas is also greater than the emissions of all the countries in the world except China and the United States, the world's largest emitters. That's worth saying another way. If slavery were a country, it would have the third largest CO₂ emissions on the planet.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if bringing slavery to an end also helped curb the global warming that threatens the lives of our children and their children? After all, we know that slavery can be brought to an end. The 35 million slaves in the world today make up the smallest fraction of the global population to ever be in slavery, and the \$150 billion in slave production each year is the tiniest proportion of the global economy ever represented by slavery. Slavery is illegal in every country and rejected by all religions and political groups. It has been pushed to the very edges of our global society, where it hides and hurts the poor and vulnerable. We know how much it would cost to bring slavery to an end—about \$11 billion over a period of twenty to thirty years. And it is worth remembering that in the scale of the world economy \$11 billion is chicken feed. In fact, it is less than the amount that Great Britain alone will spend on chicken feed over the same period. Eleven-billion dollars is also the amount that the World Bank says is lost to the global market every year because of illegal logging. Like smallpox, with commitment and resources, slavery can be eradicated—reduced from millions in bondage to just a few isolated cases.

From the beginning of human history, slaves have been used to make bricks. Stories in the Bible attest to Hebrew slaves making bricks for their Egyptian masters. Egyptian tomb paintings from 2000 BC show slaves at work in brick kilns. When hundreds of thousands of African-Americans were re-enslaved after the Civil War in the peonage system, many were consumed by brick kilns.

"Gangs of prisoners sold from the pestilential city stockade on Bryan Street dug wet clay with shovels and picks in nearby riverbank pits for transport to the plant. There, a squad of men pushed clay that had been cured in the open air into tens of thousands of rectangular molds. Once dried, the bricks were

carried at a double-time pace by two dozen laborers running back and forth—under almost continual lashing by English’s overseer, Capt. James T. Casey—to move bricks to one of nearly a dozen huge coal-fired kilns, also called ‘clamps.’ At each kiln, one worker stood atop a barrel, in the withering heat radiating from the fires, furiously tossing the bricks into the top of the ten-foot-high oven.”

The scale of the operation was mind-boggling: in the twelve months ending in May 1907, these slaves produced nearly 33 million bricks, and Mayor James W. English pocketed the equivalent of \$1.9 million in today’s money.

And jumping forward to the present day we see that nothing much has changed:

“Between these two crews, more slaves, often children, are feeding the fire, clambering over the top and around the kiln in the intense heat. The air temperature here is well over 130 degrees, and the workers, including the children, wear sandals with thick wooden soles against the heat of the kiln. For all their heavy footgear, the workers tread lightly, and the smaller children have an advantage, for as the fires rage in the kiln below them sometimes the top level of bricks gives way. When this happens a person can fall through. If they fall completely into the kiln there is no hope for them: the temperature inside is more than 1,500 degrees and they are instantly incinerated. If only a leg or a foot pushes through, there may be hope depending on how quickly they are pulled up and out. But their burns will be serious and life-changing.

The roiling black smoke from burning tires carries polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons: dioxin, benzene, styrene, phenols; as well as heavy metals, and butadiene into the air. If you’re not familiar with these chemicals, the key thing you need to know is that they make you sick, give you cancer, and once in the water or soil are almost impossible to get rid of. In addition to the smoke, when you burn a tire, about two gallons of oil melts and drains away, carrying the same mixture of toxic compounds into the soil and groundwater. In the United States a tire fire is officially classified as an environmental crisis, and tire fire sites end up so poisoned they qualify for Superfund cleanup status.”

But it's fair to ask if all these slaves were set free wouldn't the kilns keep running and polluting with free workers? In a word, no. You can make a profit making bricks using thousand-year-old, Bible-era technology if you use slaves, but not if you have to pay the workers. Small, efficient, mechanical brick molders and kilns are readily available, and are ultimately more profitable than slave-based brick-making. Slaveholders, however, don't see the need to invest in new machines when they have slaves. So once again—stop the slavery and the pollution and CO₂ will drop dramatically.

When a “dig and wash” open-pit mine begins, clear-cutting the trees is just the overture of a four-act environmental tragedy. Act One is the removal of all life, plant and animal, to expose the sandy clay or stone below. Act Two is digging out great pits and trenches, and land near streams and rivers is especially sought after. Some riverbanks are excavated to a depth of one-hundred feet with the pits extending into the surrounding forest for another two-hundred feet. This converts a living river into a stagnant, dead pond writhing along the bottom of a barren ditch.

Act Three is the poisoning, the leeching and seeping of mercury, and the spread of death to the animals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and insects in the surrounding forest. Act Four of this tragedy is the abandonment. When the gold peters out, the slaveholders take their slaves and walk away. Piles of rubbish and mineral tailings are left where they sit. Soil, pushed to one side when the pits are opened, is never spread back over the scarred land. Streams and rivers, wrenched from their natural banks, are left trapped in pools or diverted in ways that further erode the forest. If the land can recover, which is often not possible, it will take decades, if not centuries.

“Climbing down into one of these pits, I gag on the acrid stench, a mix between that of a latrine and an oil refinery. At the bottom of one hole, as wide and deep as a house, is a small pool of water, fed from the trickling stream used to wash the gold on the long sloping tables. It is the color of this pool of water that stops me in my tracks. Beneath a patchy layer of scum it is magenta, fading to a dull metallic blue at the edges. Putting my face down to the pool's surface I see that even the ubiquitous mosquitoes aren't breeding here, and after a single sniff I jerk back from a coppery reek of sour metal.

On one edge of the abandoned site and surrounded by forest is another pit. The floor of this pit is wide and flat; time and weather have left the surface windswept, a soft and smooth layer of mud and fine sand. I carefully climb down because this is a perfect place to record animal, bird, and insect life. Testing the

surface with my fingertips, it is clear that anything that might crawl, walk, or land here would leave a trace as clear as ink on paper. But searching the pit, I find nothing—no bird’s footprint or animal track, not the weaving line of a snake, or even the tiny skittering trail of a beetle. After covering a large area, I found a single track, the hoofprints of three small deer crossing one far edge of the pit, not running, but stepping carefully across six feet of sand from one arm of the forest to another. In the midst of lush and fertile highland jungle, this is a dead zone.”

We look back to the destruction of the Great Plains ecosystem and shake our heads, blaming the ignorance of our ancestors and their rapacious disregard for nature and indigenous peoples. We can say that they didn’t understand what they were doing, believing that “development,” civilization, and their own betterment went hand in hand. That they didn’t understand that mature and highly evolved grassland was a treasure. They didn’t grasp that forcing its development meant ruin, and in the case of the Great Plains actually released more CO₂ into the air than cars or coal-fired power plants. But today we do understand.

We know that trying to turn a grasslands ecosystem into plowed fields is just as stupid and destructive as turning a forest into grassland for grazing cattle. We might as well make umbrellas out of toilet paper, or shoes out of concrete. We understand that it takes hundreds of thousands of years of evolution to assemble an ecosystem that works, one where plants and animals and insects and climate and weather and soil and water are fitted together into something that flourishes and produces, that is stable and maximizes the conversion of sunlight (our main energy source) into everything that makes life possible.

There is a human contradiction to these facts, but it is venal and ugly. It is the argument used by some individuals that their immediate desire for riches is more important than anything else, and one of the favorite rationalizations for this greed is the worn-out lie of development. If this sounds a little cosmic, if it sounds like a mystical call for tree hugging, it’s not. This is not the call of the Ghost Dance, an anguished last song when all was already lost. This is the living testimony of people like Cláudio and Maria, whose words and actions demonstrated the possibilities of a sustainable partnership with the forest. It is, however, a dangerous message, and it is no coincidence that Cláudio and Maria, like the Ghost-Dancing Sioux, were murdered when they stood in the path of greed.

Oregon, 1942: A Japanese floatplane launched from a submarine unsuccessfully attempts to start a forest fire in the mountains of southern Oregon.

This small incident begins an intensification of US Forest Service governance in which the campaign against forest fires is pursued with military-like discipline and zeal. In 1944, as fears of Japanese fire bombs over Oregon forests circulate, Smokey Bear becomes a symbol of fire protection as homeland security.

One eastern Cascade forester recalled, in the vision of that period:

“Forests of the future would be dominated by a mosaic of 25 to 40 acre even-aged stands of healthy and intensively managed young-growth.”

What went wrong with the post-war vision? Ponderosa was increasingly logged out, and it did not grow back, at least not readily. It was missing fire. The great ponderosas in their open parks had emerged together with Native American fire regimes, in which frequent burning of the underbrush encouraged browse for deer and berries for fall picking. Fire burned out competing conifer species while allowing the ponderosas to thrive. But whites drove out Native Americans in a series of wars and relocations. The Forest Service stopped not only their fires but all fires. Without fire, flammable species such as white fir and lodgepole grew up under the ponderosas. When the ponderosas were removed through logging, these other species took over. The open character of the landscape disappeared as small trees grew in. Pure stands of ponderosa became rare. The landscape looked less and less like the open ponderosa forests of the early twentieth century—and less and less like a landscape of interest to the timber industry.

In dispossessing Native peoples from the lands they had made so inviting, white loggers, soldiers, and foresters destroyed the park-like forests they had wanted so badly.

By using fire to create habitat for the animals they hunted, the Indians controlled—or at least acted upon—their environment. There was also, contrary to the conventional wisdom, widespread agriculture throughout the Americas. When a wave of microbes, advancing ahead of white settlers, demolished these civilizations the animal populations they had managed boomed. Suddenly deregulated, ecosystems shook and sloshed like a cup of tea in an earthquake. The passenger pigeons that blocked out the sun, the bison that shook the earth for hours on end, the profusion of shellfish in Cape Cod—all of which Europeans took as evidence of nature’s virgin bounty, might instead have been symptoms of a radically destabilized environment.

Myth: Fuel build up is responsible for large blazes.

A conventional narrative is that wildfires in the western US are unprecedented and more extensive than in the past. This increase in fire acreage is attributed to “fuel build-up,” presumed to be the result of successful fire suppression. However, such assertions lack context. Compared to the past, we still have a fire deficit.

For example, between 1900 and 1940, as many as 50 million acres burned annually. One of the largest wildfires in historic times, the 1910 Big Burn, raced across 3.5 million acres of northern Idaho and western Montana occurred in this period, long before anyone can argue there was fire suppression contributing to fuel build-up.

During the period between the 1940s and late 1988, when Yellowstone burned, there were few large fires due to Pacific Decadal Oscillation—an ocean current that brought cooler, wetter weather to the West. The lack of large blazes during these decades is attributed to successful fire suppression; however, it was also a period of cooler and moister climate. Nature was successful at putting out blazes. Then beginning in the late 1980s, the climate warmed considerably with historic drought conditions across many parts of the West, and large wildfires once again became common—in spite of even better firefighting ability and equipment. With climate change we can expect larger blazes to become more common.

A further nuance is that fuel build-up to the degree it has occurred due to fire suppression likely only applies to some ponderosa pine communities; not all ponderosa pine are characterized by high frequency and low severity fire—80% of the higher elevation ponderosa pine stands in the Colorado Front Range are characterized by high severity blazes. Most plant communities in the West burn at long intervals and often at high severity. This includes chaparral, juniper, sagebrush, all hemlock, most fir, aspen, and many higher elevation pines, including lodgepole pine and western white pine. All have fire rotations often running from many decades to hundreds of years.

Lodgepole pine in Yellowstone typically experiences large blazes every 200–400 or more years. Therefore, it is entirely natural for “fuels” to build up over this time, and given a window of hundreds of years, even if fire suppression were successful, it would not have any influence on fuels since dead materials in these forests naturally accumulate over many decades.

Myth: Active forest management will protect communities.

It is often assumed that logging projects, including thinning, around the West will stop large blazes during extreme fire weather conditions and/or reduce smoke and therefore protect communities. However, large blazes are controlled by top-down influences like climate/weather, not fuels.

All large fires burn during extreme weather conditions of low humidity, high temperatures, drought, and, most importantly, high winds. Under less than extreme conditions, most fires are easily contained; the majority of these blazes are small, burning less than 100 acres. For instance, a total of 56,320 fires burned over 9 million acres in the Rocky Mountains between 1980–2003. 98% of these fires (55,220) burned less than 500 acres and accounted for 4% of the area burned. By contrast, only 2% of all fires accounted for 96% of the acreage burned. And 0.1% (50) of blazes were responsible for half of the acres charred.

The overwhelming observation is that under extreme fire weather, no amount of logging/thinning significantly influences fire behavior. Under wind-driven conditions, embers are tossed miles ahead of a fire front. For instance, the Eagle Creek Fire in the Columbia Gorge jumped the mile and half wide Columbia River to ignite fires on the opposite shore. The landscape burned by the Camp Fire that destroyed Paradise, California had two previous fires in the past ten years (fuel reduction), had been extensively logged on private lands (fuel reduction), while the Forest Service had done hazardous fuel reductions on public lands.

In much of the West, the largest blazes are not even in forests. The 282,000-acre Thomas Fire that charred the hills around Santa Barbara, as well as the recent 98,000-acre Woolsey Fire that burned near Los Angeles, was in chaparral. The 558,198-acre Long Draw Fire that was the largest in Oregon history occurred in sagebrush.

In a 2017 letter to Congress, more than 250 scientists opined that logging and thinning were ineffective. To quote from their message:

“Thinning is most often proposed to reduce fire risk and lower fire intensity. However, as the climate changes, most of our fires will occur during extreme fire-weather (high winds and temperatures, low humidity, low vegetation moisture). These fires, like the ones burning in the West this summer, will affect large landscapes, regardless of thinning, and, in some cases, burn hundreds or thousands of acres in just a few days.”

The idea that fuel reduction from logging/thinning or even prescribed burning is effective is questioned by many researchers.

“Extreme environmental conditions overwhelmed most fuel treatment effects. This included almost all treatment methods, including prescribed burning and thinning. Suppression efforts had little benefit from fuel modifications.”

This view was echoed by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), which stated in a report to Congress:

“From a quantitative perspective, the CRS study indicates a very weak relationship between acres logged and the extent and severity of forest fires. The data indicate that fewer acres burned in areas where logging activity was limited.”

One of the problems is that our western landscapes are so vast, and predicting exactly where a fire might ignite is impossible. Research has shown that the probability of a fire encountering a ‘fuel reduction’ during any period when it might be useful is less than 1%. Plus, thinning/logging opens up the forest to greater heating and wind penetration, often exacerbating the conditions that encourage blazes. One study of 1500 fires found that actively managed forests—logged/thinned—tend to burn at higher severity than protected landscapes where presumably fuels are greater.

Myth: Dead trees contribute to larger blazes.

Another assumption is that dead trees resulting from insects, disease, or previous fires will contribute to more massive fires. Yet research from throughout the West shows that forests experiencing insect outbreaks or other sources of mortality are less susceptible to fire. This is because what burns in a blaze are fine fuels like needles, cones, small branches, shrubs, grass, and other easily burnable materials. This is why we get snags after insect outbreaks or fires. The larger trunks that remain lack the fine fuel to carry crown fires.

Ecologically speaking, dead trees are critical to healthy forest ecosystems. More wildlife species depend on dead trees for their survival than green trees. The second-highest biodiversity found in forests after old-growth stands occurs in the snag forests that result from high severity blazes.

Myth: Logging forests before they can burn helps fight climate change.

Burning forests release relatively small amounts of carbon. Most carbon remains on site in snags, roots, and burnt wood. Charcoal that results from high severity fires is one of the best carbon storage mechanisms available. By contrast logging and wood processing releases far more carbon. For instance, an Oregon Global Warming Commission 2018 report found that even in very active wildfire seasons, wildfires average around 10% (some years as low as 3%) of the states’ total greenhouse gas emissions. By comparison, logging contributed to more than three times more emissions.

Several Oregon State researchers concluded that:

“Logging harms our carbon balance for decades. By accounting for more of the benefits and costs involved in reducing the risk of crown fires, modifying storage in long- and short-term products, and in substituting wood products for fossil fuel (biomass), we find that thinning existing forests to reduce crown-fire risk increases net carbon emissions to the atmosphere for many decades.”

For every dollar it received in timber sales in 2010 the US Forest Service spent \$8.60 on fire suppression. Although environmental goals have changed Forest Service rhetoric, district offices are still evaluated by the board feet of timber they generate.

Nearly all timber sales on public lands lose money. The Forest Service (FS) tries to hide this fact with dubious accounting methods which the General Accounting Office (GAO) labeled as “unreliable overall” and had “significant reporting errors in its financial statements” and “lacked financial systems that could accurately track revenues and costs.”

Worse than the economic subsidies is the failure of the FS to truly acknowledge and account for the ecological impacts of its timber program. Ultimately the ecological impacts of logging are more costly to society than the welfare we give to the timber industry.

Unlike the God whose name begins with a capital letter, our gods are not all-powerful. Any one of them can be vanquished by a flamethrower or a bulldozer or a bomb—silenced, driven away, enfeebled. Sit in the middle of a shopping mall at midnight, surrounded by half a mile of concrete in all directions, and there the god that was once as strong as a buffalo or a rhinoceros is as feeble as a moth sprayed with pyrethrin. Feeble—but not dead, not wholly extinguished. Tear down the mall and rip up the concrete, and within days that place will be pulsing with life again. Nothing needs to be done, beyond carting away the poisons. The god knows how to take care of that place. It will never be what it was before—but nothing is ever what it was before. It doesn’t need to be what it was before. You’ll hear people talk about turning the plains of North America back into what they were before the Europeans arrived. This is nonsense. What the plains were five-hundred years ago was not their final form, was not the final, sacrosanct form ordained for them from the beginning of time. There is no such form and never will be any such form. Everything here is on the way. Everything here is in motion.

The only essential difference between rock, water, air, life, galaxies, economies, civilizations, plastics is the rate of flow.

Over millennia we fed, petted, and sheltered the dogs that knew what we were thinking, and we killed, beat, and exiled the dogs that were oblivious to our desires. This gives modern-day dogs an amazing ability to read human thoughts, although not in the mysterious telepathic sense. Instead they read our nonverbal cues, such as gaze and pointing.

But why did dogs start looking less like wolves and more like dogs? That happened on its own, too. Animals with genes for friendliness look different. The same genes that deliver desire for friendly contact with humans bundle a raft of stowaway physical traits. In discussing selective breeding in domestic animals, Darwin in the first chapter of *On the Origin of Species* noted:

“If a man goes on selecting he will almost certainly modify unintentionally other parts of the structure, owing to the mysterious laws of correlation.”

Weirdly, in various mammals (not just dogs), genes that create the hormones that reduce fear and aggression and increase friendliness also create floppy ears, curly tails, blotchy markings, shorter faces, and rounder heads.

Making worlds is not limited to humans. We know that beavers reshape streams as they make dams, canals, and lodges; in fact, all organisms make ecological living places, altering earth, air, and water. Without the ability to make workable living arrangements, species would die out. In the process, each organism changes everyone’s world. Bacteria made our oxygen atmosphere, and plants help maintain it. Plants live on land because fungi made soil by digesting rocks. As these examples suggest, world-making projects can overlap, allowing room for more than one species.

Humans, too, have always been involved in multi-species world making. Fire was a tool for early humans not just to cook but also to burn the landscape, encouraging edible bulbs and grasses that attracted animals for hunting. Humans shape multi-species worlds when our living arrangements make room for other species. This is not just a matter of crops, livestock, and pets. Pines, with their associated fungal partners, often flourish in landscapes burned by humans; pines and fungi work together to take advantage of bright open spaces and exposed mineral soils. Humans, pines, and fungi make living arrangements simultaneously for themselves and for others: multi-species worlds.

Twentieth-century scholarship, advancing the modern human conceit, conspired against our ability to notice the divergent, layered, and conjoined projects that make up worlds. Entranced by the expansion of certain ways of life over others, scholars ignored questions of what else was going on.

Although a PVC duck in the bathtub may well be harmless to your child, no one really knows how the post-consumer plastics that escape the landfill are altering the chemistry of the environment. The accidental experiment, which began a century or so ago, is ongoing.

Since the 1980s, Almería in southern Spain has developed the greatest concentration of greenhouses in the world, covering 26,000 hectares. Dubbed the sea of plastic, this Anthropocene landscape is remarkable not only because Europe's driest desert now produces millions of tonnes of fruit and vegetables, but also because the greenhouses reflect so much sunlight back into the atmosphere that they are actually cooling the province. While temperatures in the rest of Spain have climbed faster than the world average, meteorological observatories located in the plastic expanse have shown a decline of 0.3C per decade. It turns out that the plastic acts like a mirror, reflecting sunlight back into the atmosphere before it can reach and heat up the ground. At a local level, the plastic greenhouses offset the global greenhouse effect.

“This new, Anthropocene field of geoengineering is a fascinating area of research and the scientists working in it are some of the most remarkable and thoughtful people I've encountered. It is eerily reminiscent of the atomic research carried out in the 1940s—today's geoengineers are working at the cutting edge in an exciting, entirely new science, spending their lives making discoveries and designing amazingly powerful technologies that they fervently hope will never be deployed.

However, the predicament that humans currently find themselves in—facing catastrophic climate change and yet increasingly reliant on the fuels that exacerbate the problem—means that planetary cooling techniques are likely to be seriously considered. It is, after all, what humans have always done when presented with a challenge—engineer a way through it.”

The concept of artificially cooling the atmosphere is highly controversial, given the atmosphere is a global commons. Perhaps it is because the intent is so explicit; although humans are artificially warming the atmosphere with greenhouse gas emissions, the intent behind burning fossil fuels has always been to produce energy, not to warm the planet. Some argue that even research in this area should be banned because it implies intent to carry out the practice; others say that it draws effort away from climate-change mitigation—from decarbonizing our energy production.

But others argue surely freedom of inquiry should be preserved—carrying out scientific research into whether something would work and what its consequences might be does not make a scientist an advocate for deployment, and there are scientific questions that need to be answered, such as the impact on rainfall, and whether or not it would even be technologically possible, before society can start to decide whether or not to deploy such techniques. These people of course ignore the history of unintended consequences of seemingly innocent science done by childishly naïve fools. That’s the problem with specializing in one domain—you are left with little time and inclination to do anything but accept the mainstream viewpoint on everything else.

We may well see enormous forests of artificial trees cleaning our air. But, what of the huge Amazonian trees that sing with insects and birdlife? That forest is so much more than an array of carbon-sucking trees—it is life itself. How fickle will our care for forests be, once we discover artificial replacements for these services?

“The Chinese have a reputation for eating everything near their work sites. They eat the precious goats, causing conflict with the tribal owners, they eat dogs, so that people either sell their dogs to the Chinese, or steal another’s dog to sell to the Chinese. And they eat the wildlife too, everything from deer and antelope to big cats, which are killed by the tribes and sold to the Chinese. Most upsetting is the healthy and lucrative trade in ivory, for which local people shoot elephants. Then there is the concern about prostitution, which clings to construction sites in a region where at least one in ten people has HIV.”

The Chinese lust for endangered species is driving the extinction of everything from tigers to pangolins to manta rays. It has echoes in the past: ancient Egypt’s vast mummification industry contributed to the extinction of species such as the sacred ibis and Egyptian baboon, for example. Countless other species have been driven to extinction by humans fetishizing their fur, skin, or other parts. The difference in the Anthropocene with the Chinese extinction drive is that it is happening on a global scale and affecting so many different species.

Animals and their parts have become the latest conflict resource in Africa. It is no longer a case of a few small-scale hunters trying to sell animal parts at local markets. Now it is a big organized activity with grenades and machine guns.

Globally, the trade in wildlife is now the biggest illegal economy after arms and drugs.

Logging companies promised them schools, roads, and money in return for mahogany and forest clearance. However, over time, it became apparent that the companies' promises were not being met—the loggers were stripping and burning the forest, shooting the wildlife, and their roads allowed incursion by others who also exploited the place.

A clearing in the forest reveals a busy illegal timber port with logs of mahogany, cedar, and other hardwoods stacked high and ready for barging out. Authorities periodically confiscate a few logs, but the bribes are too lucrative for officials to do anything effective to stop the trade. Further along, another clearing contains a camp of gold miners, churning up the deforested earth and flushing mercury and other toxins into the river. A boat laden with bags and bags of dead monkeys passes, traveling in the opposite direction towards the markets.

Little of this wildlife is actually eaten by the community. Instead, the adults are skinned (their skins fetch a good price), their flesh sold as bushmeat, and surviving babies are sold as pets. A spider monkey goes for as little as \$100 in the market in the El Alto district of La Paz, although the villager who captures it will only get a fraction of that. Often, the tips of a monkey's fingers will have been shot off while it was clinging to its mother; many of the animals have bullets still lodged in their bodies or are missing anatomy.

Tigers, like jaguars, are a top predator, providing similar ecosystem benefits. Compared to bees, though, or cows or rice, they're useless. And that's largely been humanity's conservation decider to date: if it's useful, we'll keep it; if not, well, I don't fancy its chances. It applies to everything from individual animals and plants to ecosystems and natural landscapes.

More than 95% of the weight of all the land vertebrates is now made up of humans and the animals we've domesticated. At the beginning of the Holocene 10,000 years ago, that figure was just 0.1%.

At a time when so many species are threatened with extinction across the world from the plains to the rivers and oceans—it's worth remembering that Earth's many and varied lifeforms are not simply our neighbours on this planet, but our relatives.

Damming a river turns it into a lake and completely alters its function. If the area to be flooded is not adequately cleared of vegetation, methane—a greenhouse gas with twenty-five times the warming potential (over a century) of carbon dioxide—will be released from rotting material. Nearly a quarter of humanity's methane emissions come from big dams. Stalling a river in a reservoir allows some vegetation to build up and rot anyway, which can poison the water for fish.

A kilowatt-hour of electricity delivered from a coal-fired plant will produce

slightly more than half a pound of carbon, while if the power is originating from a plant that runs on natural gas, it will produce roughly half that amount.

Nearly a decade after the CBM boom, the BLM revealed that “several environmental situations of concern” had sprung up in “the progressive center of coalbed methane development from the Fruitland Formation.” Gas and hydrogen sulfide seeps had appeared where none previously existed. Healthy springs had dried up. Older, natural seeps gushed poisonous gases in greater volumes than ever before. Underground coal fires broke out as industry dewatered some seams and introduced oxygen. Old gas wells served as pathways for methane migration into groundwater. Soils became so saturated with fire damp in the Animas River Valley, south of Durango, Colorado, that plant and grass roots suffocated. The zones of methane-killed vegetation extended for miles.

“Where are the protections for those of us bearing the brunt of the impacts for the development of this energy? The extraction of coalbed methane development is mostly experimental and the Powder River Basin has actually been referred to by industry representatives as a laboratory. Why should we, who call this place our home, be guinea pigs? We are watching our homes and ranches transformed into an industrial gas field. There are about 14,000 CBM wells permitted in Wyoming’s Powder River Basin and upwards of 75,000 to 100,000 wells projected.

The development of CBM is primarily being carried out on the backs of landowners that have essentially no say in how the development can proceed and are being required to sacrifice our ranches, our water resources, our soil, our privacy, the wildlife—which also provides an income to many landowners—and our livelihoods. And yes, it is clean energy for urban areas—unfortunately, the production end in rural areas is not clean. We should not let the glitter of ten to twenty years of affluence blind us to the impacts and damages being felt very directly by others that are not reaping the benefits.

Landowners across North America can expect the worst from government and industry. They can expect to be deceived. They can expect to find non-disclosure about the risks. They can expect denials of responsibility. And they can expect the government to not protect them.”

A lawyer petitioned the US Environmental Protection Agency to force Alabama to protect drinking water by regulating fracking as a new form of well injection. The EPA denied the petition, declaring in 1995 that it “does not regulate and does not believe it is legally required to regulate the hydraulic fracturing of methane gas production wells.” It added that there was no proof of groundwater contamination in Alabama, even though the EPA had never tested any of the chemicals used for fracturing. The EPA’s position ignored its own inconvenient research.

In 1987, a lengthy EPA report on the “Management of Wastes from the Exploration, Development, and Production of Crude Oil, Natural Gas, and Geothermal Energy” had detailed a case of contaminated water caused by fracking in 1982 in West Virginia. After fracking a gas well 1,000 feet from the home of James Parson, fluids injected at about 4,000 feet deep by Kaiser Exploration and Mining Company were found in the man’s 416-foot-deep water well. A state lab report found “dark and light gelatinous material” as well as methane in the water and declared it undrinkable. Even the American Petroleum Institute, which claims fracking is totally safe and proven, confessed that in this instance there had been a “malfunction of the fracking process.”

The little-known EPA report confirmed a basic scientific truth:

“During the fracturing process fractures can be produced, allowing migration of native brine, fracturing fluid, and hydrocarbons from the oil or gas well to a nearby water well. When this happens, the water well can be permanently damaged and a new well must be drilled or an alternative source of drinking water found.”

The report noted that in scores of other cases, legal settlements sealed by nondisclosure agreements had hidden the scale of the problem:

“In some cases the records of well-publicized damage incidents are almost entirely unavailable for review.”

Gag orders erase history and allow regulators to claim there had been no proof of contamination in the first place. The courts are participating in criminal activity by allowing the gag orders. No one has the right to cover up contamination of lakes and rivers, because we share our water.

“Okay, we damaged your water well. We’ll just set you up with potable water through a tank system forever, because, you know, we just spent a million dollars drilling this well that we

made a hundred-million on. And it's costing us an extra three-hundred-thousand. We're okay. You know, we don't need to litigate with you, we don't even need to know that it was our fault. We're just happy to pay you. And by the way, by doing that you shut up, the regulators stay off our back, we get to do it again down the street."

What are we teaching our kids by signing away their right to freedom of speech? Contaminated water is a public health issue. Water moves, even contaminated water. Gag orders should be illegal.

Wherever the industry goes, increased air pollution follows. Industry wants only the oil so it flares off all associated gases into the atmosphere. In the Bakken in North Dakota, industry burned off \$100 million of natural gas into the air every month.

Industry flares burned so inefficiently (at only around 62 percent), studies showed, that they spewed 150 hazardous unburned hydrocarbons into the air. The contaminants—including benzene, styrene, ethynylbenzene, ethynyl-methyl benzenes, toluene, xylenes, acenaphthylene, biphenyl, and fluorine—floated downwind into the lungs and homes of landowners. Methylene chloride, a toxic solvent, was found in the air near natural gas operations too.

There is a cycle of abuse that plays out in communities fracked by the oil and gas industry. It happens like clockwork. The cycle begins with rising tensions and fears at public meetings and around kitchen tables as the industry invades with impossible promises. Once a frack job inevitably contaminates a well, or a pipeline leaks into a river, or a truck hits and kills some cows, rage and blame follows, as do threats and intimidation from industry and its supporters. During the third part of the cycle, regulators reluctantly get involved. Apologies, denials, and excuses blanket the community. Reconciliation is usually accompanied by the donation of money. A corporate check invariably goes to a hospital, school, library, sports center, or fire department. In many cases, gag orders are signed in return for cash settlements. Then the community forgets the event until the cycle repeats itself, snaring more rural victims. The cycle leaves in its wake a conquered people vulnerable to depression, addiction, and suicide.

"From time to time, even though I know without a doubt in my heart that I am meant for this fight, and that I have no choice, I must do it, my mind and fears try to sway me away. My ego fights with my heart, exclaiming: Why should I have to give up everything for others? Cause by the time this fight is done, my

life will be, too, or near to done. And then I remember money is nothing. My belongings are nothing. Water is everything. Truth is much more important. I need little from life now and want for even less.”

Her psychiatrist told her there would come a day when she realized that the horrors of her childhood had given her a strength few people have, and that she would find something of value in the abuse. For years the statement infuriated and rankled her. But now she recognizes its truth.

“The main reason I can do this is that there is nothing anyone can do to me that hasn’t already been done. They raped our aquifer. The enablers said you can’t talk about it, but Encana broke all the laws and rules. I couldn’t stop the bus driver or Rex, but I can do something now.”

She has grown accustomed to government and industry officials libeling and slandering her. In the middle of the night, anonymous phone callers have warned her, “Drop your lawsuit or bad things will happen.” Her beloved dog, Bandit, was thrown under a train. But the worse things got, the calmer she became.

“It is an incredible achievement in life to find and keep contentment, while watching what one created, achieved, saved, all vanish.”

Thousands have lived without love, not one without water.

“Our five-year-old wakes up at 3:00 screaming about the water. Are the calves getting sick? Are her cats going to die?”

Humans are distributing water around the world through a virtual water trade—the trade in goods and services that are produced using water. Most of this—92% of fresh-water consumption—is embodied in agriculture.

The water footprint of an average US citizen—which at 2,840 cubic meters per year is more than double that of the Japanese—is 80% home-grown, with the bulk of the remaining 20% coming from China’s Yangtze River basin.

It takes forty-eight gallons of water to make a gallon of beer, four gallons of water to make one of soda. Even a cow has a water footprint, drinking four gallons of water to produce one gallon of milk.

“The backlash is the green movement and it’s anti-globalization. They say water shouldn’t be a commodity, but why should water be free? Why is it different from food, which we also need to live, or shelter?”

Governments are buying up foreign land that is rich in water, or angling for a controlling stake in how that water is used. All of these acquisitions are occurring in developing nations and most in places where there is poor governance, corruption, little regulation and where local people have few rights to their own land and resources. Saudi Arabia, South Korea, China, and India have all bought up huge tracts of land across Africa, usually in the poorest countries’ most fertile zones and river basins, to grow crops for export back home. The Nile River, for example, is now under pressure not just to feed its resident human population, but also those in other continents who have purchased parts of Sudan.

Across the United States, surface water—the ocean, ponds, and rivers—are held in common as part of the public trust. But groundwater falls under different rules, depending on the state. Maine operates with a rule called absolute dominion, which it adopted in the late 1800s, a time of hand pumps and little understanding of the connection between groundwater and surface waters. The law grants landowners complete autonomy to take as much groundwater as they please. In Texas, the only other state in the nation that still follows the absolute dominion rule, they call it the law of the biggest pump. Other states use either the rule of prior appropriation (first in time, first in right); the rule of “reasonable use,” which considers other usages and the wants of the community; or the rule of “correlative rights,” which requires that all landowners above an aquifer share the resource. Absolute dominion is the weakest of the four groundwater protection rules,

Months passed, and a citizens group announced the results of a twenty-four-hour truck count: nearly a hundred tankers, each capable of holding 8,440 gallons, were pulling out of Fryeburg every day. Was that a lot of water? Compared to what the town used—about 200,000 gallons per day in the summer, half that in winter—yes. Did the town have any say about it? No. As a regular customer of the Fryeburg Water Company, Pure Mountain Springs can buy all the water it wants—no cap or permit needed. The moment residents realized how much water was leaving town, and who was profiting, was the moment their faith in the Fryeburg Water Company—and in one of the town’s most prominent families—began to waver.

I think about the way New York City bullied landowners in the Catskill and Delaware watersheds into selling their property, how Los Angeles outwitted desperate valley farmers to appropriate the Owens River, how Chicago

strongmen reversed the flow of the Chicago River to shunt their city's sewage all the way to St. Louis. Sneaking water around might seem difficult, but it isn't always: wells are dispersed, no one can see how much of it moves through pipes and into tankers, and no one knows for sure how much remains underground.

“It would be easy to understand if you could see it. But this is all purposefully hidden. It's easy to move around if people don't know what's cooking. It's the same all around the world.”

The more water pumped from aquifers and streams that feed the Saco, the less clean water ends up in the river, and the more impurities are concentrated. The same scenario plays out across the country: nearly 40 percent of the nation's rivers and streams are too polluted for fishing and swimming, to say nothing of drinking.

Most freshwater is actually used by agriculture—almost 70 percent, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization. Just 12 percent goes to direct human consumption: drinking, cooking, washing, and so on. Industry takes the rest. For most of human history, agriculture's overwhelming thirst didn't matter; water was plentiful enough for all. But now populations have risen enough that the requirements of families and the requirements of agriculture are colliding.

Seen from the air, the seventy-acre campus is mostly water: in circular tanks, concrete sluiceways and flumes, and sufficient rectangular pools to cover the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. Through massive pipes, the plant gulps the Missouri, which looks opaque and smells of muck and fish, and holds it for four hours in basins two stories deep. Operators add ferric sulfate and a cationic polymer, which have a positive charge, to neutralize the sediments' electrical charge. The particles clump together and sink. The water's cloudiness—or turbidity—starts to drop from as high as 10,000 NTUs (nephelometric turbidity units) to 50.

“If we didn't constantly rake out the sediment, the tank would fill up in a day.”

The water leaves the primary tanks in a flume, where potassium permanganate is added to counteract bad tastes and smells from, well, everything upstream. Then a disinfecting cocktail of chlorine and ammonia—called chloramine—is added, then lime, to soften the water and raise its pH, which helps particles coagulate and settle out. Now whitish gray, the water spends some time in softening basins, where organics and chemicals combine to

form a froth of floaties, which look like clumps of sheep's wool. The floaties contain viruses and bacteria. They get bigger and bigger until they sink.

“What we're trying to create is an aggressive aggregate moment.”

After the moment passes, the water flows placidly through wooden walls into a field of secondary tanks, where it's suddenly, startlingly, blue. The NTU isn't yet 0.1—well below the federal standard—but it's getting there. After spending four hours in the secondary tanks, the water will be dosed with carbon dioxide in an adjacent basin, to lower its pH (water with a high pH tastes dry), and, depending on the season, blended with powder-activated carbon, which turns all that blue temporarily black. The carbon absorbs atrazine. The levels sometimes as high as 35 ppb, must be lowered to less than 3. It costs thirty-six-thousand dollars to fill an empty silo with carbon (which also removes oil and pesticides from water), and the plant goes through as many as five silo loads a year. What do they do with the atrazine once they filter it out?

“We put it back in the river.”

It will be the city of Boonville's problem next.

Every year, American farmers spread about seventy-six-million pounds of atrazine, a herbicide, on fields. When it rains, much of that runs into ditches and streams, contaminating drinking-water sources in nearly every major Midwestern city, and well water and groundwater in states where the compound isn't even used. Scientists with the US Geological Survey (USGS) have found atrazine at levels up to 224 parts per billion in some Midwestern streams. When the Mountain Valley Spring Company looked around Missouri for a spring to feed a bottling plant—water companies are always looking to expand—they came up dry: all the groundwater they tested contained atrazine.

Atrazine kills weeds, and more. Even at levels well below the federal standard—three parts per billion—it causes birth defects, reproductive disorders, and cancer in lab animals. In the European Union, the maximum contaminant level for atrazine is thirty times lower, at 0.1 ppb. Human kidneys filter atrazine, and most people don't spend a lot of time swimming in herbicide-laced water, as frogs do. But human fetuses do live in water.

How do cities get away with serving atrazine-laced water? It's simple: water utilities are required to announce to the feds only their quarterly averages. EPA regulations focus on limiting risks from long-term exposure: levels of atrazine may peak in the May-to-August runoff period, but with

averaging out over quarters, it's possible to come in under the wire. Cities can also test before and after predicted spikes. The New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board, which takes raw water from the Mississippi River, tells customers its "running annual averages observed have always been found to be below the Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) set by the EPA." Kansas City, by contrast, has never topped three parts per billion in a day, let alone averaged over a year.

And then there's this: the government sets standards for most contaminants based on a healthy 150-pound person who drinks two liters of water a day. If you drink a lot more, you get a higher exposure. Or if you're small or vulnerable to a contaminant, you're also at higher risk. When the EPA sets standards for drinking water, it balances health effects—how many people would get sick from a contaminant—with the cost of cleaning up water to reduce that risk. Pesticide regulations for fruits and vegetables, by contrast, are only health-based. Federal law requires the EPA to prove that the cost of removing a contaminant doesn't exceed its benefits (deaths averted, that is, with a human life valued at \$6.1 million). If it does, the legal limits are raised—that is, weakened.

In December of 2005, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) released a report, following a two-and-a-half-year investigation, that found tap water in forty-two states was contaminated with 141 chemicals for which the government had failed to set safety standards. That's 141 contaminants in addition to the 114 already under scrutiny. Others suggest the sky's the limit when it comes to unregulated contaminants—industry pumps out new ones every year. The unregulated contaminants are linked to cancer, reproductive toxicity, developmental toxicity, and immune system damage. They come from industry (plasticizers, solvents, and propellants), from agriculture (fertilizer and pesticide ingredients), from development (runoff polluted by auto emissions and lawn chemicals, and effluent from sewage treatment plants), and from water treatment itself. Yes, cleaning up the water to decrease microbial illness—with chlorine, chloramines, ozone, and other chemicals—can cause problems of its own, in some cases increasing the risk of cancer and developmental and reproductive disorders.

Almost always, the FDA sets levels for chemical, microbial, and radiological contaminants no less stringent than those of the EPA. It sounds good, but if you think you are buying pure, natural water from a pristine fount—and why wouldn't you, based on the labels' pretty pictures and on the amount of money you spent—you might be disappointed to learn the FDA allows in bottled water the same complement of disinfection by-products, pesticides, heavy metals, and radioactive materials the EPA allows in tap. The only difference is that public water utilities are required in their annual

reports to let you know, while the bottled-water industry has spent millions to make sure you don't, lobbying hard to keep such information off its labels.

If citizens no longer control their most basic resource, their water, do they really control anything at all? With all, or even most, drinking water privately bottled—an industry wet dream—would purveyors end up recreating the system prevalent in the nineteenth century, when the well-to-do bought spring water from private purveyors while the poor died of waterborne diseases? Finding it logistically and economically impossible to deliver individual water containers to tens of millions of customers (and later collect the empties), bottlers might hit upon a simpler solution: delivery through common pipelines. And when pollution from industry, development, or agriculture threatened to taint their “pristine” sources, of which they'd need an ever-increasing supply, the water companies would be forced to either halt the polluters, buy them out, find other water sources, or do what cities and towns have done for decades: build treatment plants to filter and scrub the water, then go after upstream polluters.

Even though our towns and cities are no longer restricted to the geography of meandering rivers in the Anthropocene, it is worth noting that the pipes, reservoirs, and canals that carry out a natural river's function come at considerable cost. The abundance of water in rich countries costs an estimated \$750 billion a year in infrastructure and treatment, which is too expensive for poor countries to replicate.

Although India has managed to send a rocket to the moon, it cannot pipe water to the middle-class residents of even its most modern city, Delhi—or not for more than a few hours a day, and even then the water is often contaminated. Of course, the US landed men *on* the moon, *decades* ago and it can't provide clean, uncontaminated water to all its citizens either. So maybe we're being too hard on India.

“Never pull the casing on your well and look at it because you have been drinking water that has been coming over a filthy-looking mess with all kinds of oscillating slime fibers and so on. The best bet so far is to keep your biofilm healthy, don't have it coming off, keep it well fed, don't antagonize it, don't hit it with any chlorine. But it is a ticklish situation when you think about it. There is something living down there and you have to keep it happy or it will do bad things to you.”

Every gallon of gasoline that is consumed produces about five pounds of carbon, meaning that in the course of a forty-mile commute, a vehicle like a Ford Explorer or a GM Yukon throws about a dozen pounds of

carbon into the air. On average, every single person in America generates twelve-thousand pounds of carbon per year.

Deaths from climate change will not be caused by the weather per se (apart from a tiny percentage of cases), but rather by the fatal synergy between climate change and a catalogue of other misfortunes: natural disasters such as locust plagues; fake seeds; low productivity due to poor health; poor governance and corruption (that sees, for example, much of the agricultural budget vanish); social and gender inequalities; poor infrastructure; and trade laws and protectionist agreements that favour rich countries.

From a certain perspective, the logic behind the Byrd-Hagel Resolution is unimpeachable. Emissions controls cost money, and this cost has to be borne by somebody. If the United States were to agree to limit its greenhouse gases while economic competitors like China and India did not, then American companies would be put at a disadvantage. “A treaty that requires binding commitments for reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases for the industrial countries but not developing countries will create a very damaging situation for the American economy” is how Richard Trumka, the secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, put it when he traveled to Kyoto to lobby against the protocol. It is also true that an agreement that limits carbon emissions in some countries and not in others could result in a migration, rather than an actual reduction, of CO₂ emissions. Such a possibility is known in climate parlance as “leakage.”

From another perspective, however, the logic of Byrd-Hagel is deeply, even obscenely, self-serving. Suppose for a moment that the total anthropogenic CO₂ that can be emitted into the atmosphere were a big ice-cream cake. If the aim is to keep global concentrations below five-hundred parts-per-million, then roughly half that cake has already been consumed, and, of that half, the lion's share has been polished off by the industrialized world. To insist now that all countries cut their emissions simultaneously amounts to advocating that industrialized nations be allocated most of the remaining slices, on the ground that they've already gobbled up so much. In a year, the average American produces the same greenhouse-gas emissions as four-and-a-half Mexicans, or eighteen Indians, or ninety-nine Bangladeshis. If both the United States and India were to reduce their emissions proportionately, then the average Bostonian could continue indefinitely producing eighteen times as much greenhouse gases as the average Bangalorean (Fun fact: In the Bollywood knockoff of *Back to the Future*, ‘Bangalorean’ is the name of the time-traveling rickshaw). But why should anyone have the right to emit more than anyone else? At a climate meeting in New Delhi a few years ago, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then the Indian prime minister, told world leaders:

“Our per capita greenhouse gas emissions are only a fraction of the world average and an order of magnitude below that of many developed countries. We do not believe that the ethos of democracy can support any norm other than equal per capita rights to global environmental resources.”

Africans are expected to be the worst hit by climate change, suffering worsening droughts that will directly reduce food availability. Whether you believe it is relevant or not—and most people I speak to think it is—Africans have contributed the least to climate change, belonging to the only continent bar Antarctica that has not yet significantly industrialized (indeed, many parts have been de-industrializing since the 1980s).

If the eighteenth century was about Westerners stealing the people of Africa through the slave trade, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were about Westerners stealing the resources of Africa through colonization and unfair trade, then surely the twenty-first century is about Westerners stealing the water from Africa by climate-change-reduced rainfall and increased evaporation, and through direct land grabs of the most fertile, wet zones.

In many cases, investors require that their newly acquired land be cleared of people, or they buy “unoccupied,” state-owned or common lands. But there is almost nowhere on the planet—certainly no fertile land—that really is unoccupied. These lands are vital farming, grazing, or hunting-and-gathering resources for the world’s poorest people, who have no formal title to it, so governments feel free to dispose of it at will.

He had changed his mind about federal curbs on carbon dioxide. Explaining this reversal, Bush asserted that he no longer thought CO₂ limits were justified, owing to the “state of scientific knowledge of the causes of, and solutions to, global climate change,” which he labeled “incomplete.” For nearly a year, the Bush administration operated essentially without any position on climate change. Then, the president announced that the United States would be pursuing a whole new approach. Instead of focusing on greenhouse gas emissions, the country would focus on something called “greenhouse gas intensity.” Bush declared this new approach preferable because it recognized “that a nation that grows its economy is a nation that can afford investments and new technology.”

Greenhouse gas intensity is not a quantity that can be measured directly. Rather, it is a ratio that relates emissions to economic output. Say, for example, that one year a business produces a hundred pounds of carbon and a hundred dollars worth of goods. Its greenhouse gas intensity in that case would be one pound per dollar. If the next year that company produces the

same amount of carbon but an extra dollar's worth of goods, its intensity will have fallen by one percent. Even if it doubles its total emissions of carbon, a company—or a country—can still claim a reduced intensity provided that it more than doubles its output of goods. Typically, a country's greenhouse gas intensity is measured in terms of tons of carbon per million dollars' worth of gross domestic product.

To focus on greenhouse gas intensity is to give a peculiarly sunny account of the US situation. Between 1990 and 2000, US greenhouse gas intensity fell by some 17 percent, owing to several factors, including the shift toward a more service-based economy. Meanwhile, total emissions rose by some 12 percent. In terms of greenhouse gas intensity, the United States actually performs better than many third world nations, because even though we consume a lot more energy, we also have a much larger GDP.

Reagan's interior secretary, Donald Hodel, suggested that if CFCs were indeed destroying the ozone layer, then people should simply wear sunglasses and buy hats.

“People who don't stand out in the sun—it doesn't affect them.”

If chlorine had turned out to behave just slightly differently in the upper atmosphere, or if its chemical cousin bromine had been used in its stead, then by the time anyone had thought to look into the state of the ozone layer, the “ozone hole” would have stretched from one pole to the other. More by luck than by wisdom this catastrophic situation did not develop.

As the effects of global warming become more and more difficult to ignore, will we react by finally fashioning a global response? Or will we retreat into ever narrower and more destructive forms of self-interest? It may seem impossible to imagine that a technologically advanced society could choose, in essence, to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in the process of doing.

Hacking away at the environment that sustains us, that is the only source of our sustenance, is both wrong and stupid. There's no credible defense for either, just a tangled mess of rationalizations and justifications that mask hurtful greed. Slavery and environmental destruction are irrational, but then so is, all too often, culture. When a whole culture is convinced they are right in their wrongheadedness, we've all got a problem. Our cultures have a lot to answer for when it comes to slavery and how we treat the natural world. When a culture decides that women are inferior to men and acts on that decision, life for women can get ugly. When a culture decides that people who look a certain way, or pray a certain way, are evil or subhuman

or a threat, then it becomes a lot easier to use them or enslave them or just dispose of them. When a culture decides that its immediate well-being is more important than the livelihood of others, more important than a healthy and vibrant environment, then we're on a path to disaster.

We may say that we're more technologically able than earlier societies. But one thing about climate change is that it is potentially geopolitically destabilizing. And we're not only more technologically able; we're more technologically able destructively as well. I think it's impossible to predict what will happen.

One generation would tell the next, 'Look, there are these things that happen that you've got to be prepared for.' And they were good at that. They could manage that. They were there for hundreds of years. The thing they couldn't prepare for was the same thing that we won't prepare for, because in their case they didn't know about it and because in our case the political system can't listen to it. And that is that the climate system has much greater things in store for us than we think.

The monochromatic sort of history that most of us grew up with did not allow for events like the drought that destroyed Tell Leilan. Civilizations fell, we were taught, because of wars or barbarian invasions or political unrest. But nothing allows you to go beyond the third or fourth year of a drought, and by the fifth or sixth year you're probably gone. You've given up hope for the rain, which is exactly what they wrote in "The Curse of Akkad."

Despair is rarely helpful. I understand and to a certain extent agree with the position of those who, for practical purposes, urge hopefulness. In the end, however, how we feel about climate change is irrelevant. Global warming will have a profound effect on us, on our children, and on life on this planet for generations to come. We may be capable of dealing with this problem, or we may not. In either case, we are still responsible.

One problem with clean fuels is the perception that "they don't offer new services; they just cost more," as one analyst has said. Wrong on both counts, but the statement reveals our inability to understand the effects and costs of energy. The new services are the elimination of toxic pollution, risk, and the climate change and ocean chemistry change that fossil fuels cause. The costs of those things are enormous. The fact that the costs are not in the fuels' at-pump price is a failure of our economics, not a drawback of clean fuels. We are already paying, and we will pay enormous future costs for the effects of climate change on agriculture, coastal cities, coral reefs and fisheries, security, and the abundance and diversity of wildlife worldwide. Those costs are serious. A moral and practical answer is to engineer the transition.

If we could build the infrastructure to capture and transport energy

from renewable sources, the energy itself—sunlight, wind, tides, geothermal heat—would come for free. That’s what “clean, eternal” means. But we hear that energy that comes for free is too expensive. Who tells us clean, eternal energy is too expensive and that it would wreck the economy? Why, it’s none other than the big brothers: Big Oil and Big Coal! We’ve crossed that bridge before. There was another time when people vehemently insisted that changing America’s main source of energy would wreck the economy. The cheapest energy that has ever powered America was slavery. Energy is always a moral issue.

The wrong question is always being asked: ‘What is the practicality of X?’ That’s the wrong question. These things can all be done. What kind of issue is like this that we faced in the past? I think it’s the kind of issue where something looked extremely difficult, and not worth it, and then people changed their minds. Take child labor. We decided we would not have child labor and goods would become more expensive. It’s a changed preference system. Slavery also had some of those characteristics a hundred and fifty years ago. Some people thought it was wrong, and they made their arguments, and they didn’t carry the day. And then something happened and all of a sudden it was wrong and we didn’t do it anymore. And there were social costs to that. I suppose cotton was more expensive. We said, ‘That’s the trade-off; we don’t want to do this anymore.’ So we may look at this and say, ‘We are tampering with the earth.’ The earth is a twitchy system. It’s clear from the record that it does things that we don’t fully understand. And we’re not going to understand them in the time period we have to make these decisions. We just know they’re there. We may say, ‘We just don’t want to do this to ourselves.’ If it’s a problem like that, then asking whether it’s practical or not is really not going to help very much. Whether it’s practical depends on how much we give a damn.

We simply won’t be able to maintain civilization by digging fossil energy out of the ground and burning it. There’s not enough. By the middle of this century, well within the life span of many people already born, we are scheduled to add to the world another two-billion people—nearly another China plus another India’s worth of people. Of the truly great human-caused environmental catastrophes, foremost is the human population explosion. The forests, the fishes, and fresh water are collapsing under the weight of the number of people on Earth right now. All the other global environmental, justice, human development, energy, and security problems either start with or are made worse by the sheer crush of our numbers. The projected growth will squash human potential as billions of poor get poorer, while flaring tensions and igniting violence. Being concerned about overpopulation isn’t anti-people; not being worried about it is anti-people.

It's true that we've had higher CO₂ levels before. But, then, of course, we also had dinosaurs.

What does 'development' really mean? Does it have to be a lifestyle where you consume more, create more trash, destroy the natural areas that give you a sense of well-being and make living worthwhile? We don't need so much more electricity to develop as a nation. There is another way.

Everyone assumes that it's good to accentuate positive emotions, but that isn't correct. Look at sports victories that end in violence and property damage. A lot of antisocial and self-defeating behavior results from people who amplify positive emotions.

Humans might be able to learn something about mourning from crows. The notion that a species could teach humans a behavior that is considered fundamental to our humanness—the ability to grieve—will strike some as radical. But crows have been observed mourning, calling to, and revisiting their dead, and even avoiding places where other birds have died. If the death of a single crow signals 'here lies danger'—a danger significant enough to avoid a place for years, to alter flight ways and daily foraging routes—then what must the death of a whole species of crow, alongside a host of others at this time, communicate to any sentient and attentive observer? How could these extinctions not announce our need to find new flight ways, new modes of living in a fragile and changing world?

Loss of genetic diversity is a manifestation of the deeper problem of decreasing biological diversity. As natural habitats are altered, converted, and simplified, many species suffer a decline in their number of independent populations. Attempting to protect genetic diversity through the protection of a few remnant populations ignores the most basic problem and will result only in a continual scramble to save individual species. A true solution would halt the tendency of more and more species to become so severely depleted that they require individual attention. If the deeper problems causing this tendency are not addressed, it can be expected that the effort to protect endangered species in remnant populations will become overwhelming.

After two generations of access to cheap energy, we've been taught an immature way of living, and since we are so far removed from the effects of our consumption, we don't see our impact—and don't want to see it. I'm a good person, goes the reasoning, so don't tell me the way I'm living is causing village culture and ecological systems to collapse. Economics is driving this whole culture of immature unethical action that is laying waste to the world. Pulling a small thread—asking where your tomatoes or your drinking water come from—causes the whole system to unravel, leading some to conclude that what's needed is cultural revolution.

And this is where the intersection between extreme ideology and climate

denial gets truly dangerous. It's not simply that these people deny climate science because it threatens to upend their dominance-based worldview. It is that their dominance-based worldview provides them with the intellectual tools to write off huge swaths of humanity, and indeed, to rationalize profiting from the meltdown.

You can't slow-boil a frog without it noticing. In real life, frogs jump out before the water gets too hot. In the nineteenth-century experiment that apparently generated the idea, however, a frog was boiled to death—but its brain had been removed beforehand. Which was humane and, in the present context, makes the metaphor more apt.

Chapter Thirty-three

A Miracle of Purpose

Problem	Solution
Competition to win the affection of females can be intense.	If you're a certain kind of male toad, you grow a mustache with which to shank your rivals.
Maggots are helpless. Which can be an issue if you're a maggot.	The ant-decapitating fly surgically inserts its kid into a living ant, where the maggot moves into the brain and mind-controls the host into the leaf litter, before releasing a chemical that pops the ant's head off. Safely inside, the maggot develops like a babe in a crib.
The seafloor is a war zone.	The tiny wonder known as the pistol shrimp forms huge societies ruled by a king and queen and takes up residence in sea sponges, where soldier shrimp stand guard, weapons in hand.
Fish don't have many places to hide from their enemies on the barren seafloor.	The pearlfish swims up a sea cucumber's anus, makes itself comfortable, and eats its host's gonads.
A fungus in a windless rain forest is going to have trouble getting its spores around.	Ophiocordyceps invades ants' brains and mind-controls them up into trees to very specific spots, ordering the zombies to bite down on leaves before killing them. The fungus then erupts out of their heads and rains spores on their comrades below.
Sharks are basically just giant teeth.	The eel-like hagfish chokes its attackers to death by filling their gills with copious amounts of snot that it ejects out of glands in a fraction of a second.

Problem	Solution
Life on land is full of all kinds of nasty predators, as well as competition for food.	A certain spider leaves it all behind and goes aquatic, using its butt to collect a bubble of oxygen and start living in the water permanently. This is the only spider that lives its entire life underwater.
Sometimes a shell just isn't good enough for protection.	Cuttlefish have evolved the animal kingdom's most incredible active camouflage to imitate any kind of background in a flash.
Ever heard of something called a lion?	A mammal known as the pangolin has developed gnarly-looking keratinized armor that's impervious to lions, not to mention the ants it eats.
Not all African mammals have the luxury of armor.	The crested rat deploys special hairs that it slathers with chewed-up poisonous bark. That'll leave a bad taste in an assaulter's mouth, and could very well kill it.
The only reason any life is on this planet is to make babies. That turns out to be a lot of pressure.	The males of a marsupial called antechinus mate with every lady they can find for three straight weeks until their hair falls out and they bleed internally and go blind and die, plus other bad things.
Being a mom is a huge responsibility.	Hermaphroditic flatworms penis-fence, of course. Individual flatworms have both sperm and eggs, so whichever worm stabs its partner with its needle-like genitals wins the honor of not giving birth, while the fertilized loser mopes away.
The deepest seafloors are desolate, and food is in short supply.	A certain worm has hit upon the idea of boring into the skeletons of creatures that have sunk to the bottom, dissolving and digesting bone with the help of friendly bacteria.
A snail has to eat not only for energy, but to build its shell.	The giant African land snail lays waste to vast swaths of vegetation. And when the snail invades Florida and can't get enough calcium to build that shell, it lays waste to the stucco in vast swaths of homes.

Problem	Solution
Seafloor critters often have robust armor, requiring the right utensils to eat them.	The mantis shrimp deploys hammer-hands that strike its prey so fast they momentarily heat the surrounding water to the temperature of the sun's surface, splitting clams and crabs to pieces.
Your prey are quick footed.	The tiger beetle one-ups them by running so fast it blinds itself and has to stop every once in a while to get its bearings. Not that it matters. This is a supreme sprinter with a stomach to fill.
Moths can escape typical spiderwebs.	The bolas spider mimics a female moth's sex pheromones, luring in the males. Then it swings a specialized web, just a drop of goo on a line, to snare its prey.
Worms aren't known for their speed.	But the velvet worm is celebrated for its weaponry. It fires jets of glue out of two modified legs—yes, legs—to entrap its prey. Then it takes its time gnawing through their exoskeletons.
Snails also aren't celebrated for their speed.	To capture fish, the cone snail drugs them first by releasing chemicals into the water, before strolling up and enveloping the prey with its balloon-like mouth.
Fish don't take too kindly to traumatic parasitization.	The lamprey has evolved to look like the desert pit monster that ate Boba Fett in Star Wars: It suctions on to its thrashing victim with a disk-like mouth packed with dozens of hooked teeth and will often drill right down to the bone.
Some insects just can't be bothered to get gnawed on alive.	The assassin bug impales its prey with super-elongated, needle-like mouthparts, sucks out their juices while they're attached to its face, and then sticks their corpses to its back as camouflage.
The life of the burrower is plagued with tight squeezes.	The naked mole rat has evolved extremely stretchy, loose skin that allows it to move better in its tunnels. Oh, also: The starch that makes this possible, hyaluronan, bestows the animal with a near immunity to cancer.

Between losing its ability to regulate its body temperature and largely losing its eyes, the naked mole rat is a reminder that there's no such thing as progress in evolution. Darwin resisted using the word 'evolution,' from the Latin meaning "unfolding" or "unrolling," because it might imply some sort of march toward perfection. He preferred "descent with modification." Sure, over the 3.8-billion-year history of life on Earth organisms have gotten more and more complex since that initial primordial soup of microorganisms, but intricate evolutionary innovations like the eye can fade away when they're not needed. Darwin's idea here, that species don't necessarily become perfect, only well adapted to their environment like the seemingly backward naked mole rat, wasn't well received. It meant that humans were just another animal that happened to evolve an impressive mind, not a creature favored by a higher power. He was right, though. We're not special, however much we think we are. We're naked like the mole rat—only we invented clothes.

We like to see ourselves as something more than animals. As animals plus. The plus factor being some kind of special human essence that has been added to the baseline of animality. This additive has been defined in a variety of ways, ranging from culture to consciousness, from religion to morality, but the truth is that the mystery ingredient, if it exists at all, remains just that, a mystery. The problem with this approach is that it looks at life from the top down. It excludes humans, and human nature, from the rest of nature. And it relegates the rest, plants and animals alike, to some kind of mindless substrate.

In the late 1970s, a professor at Sheffield University in England noticed that one of his honor students had a remarkably large head. He recommended the student get a CAT scan. The scan didn't just reveal a problem with the student's brain, it showed he barely had one at all—95% of it was cerebro-spinal fluid, with only a thin crust of gray matter pinned against his skull. This condition isn't totally remarkable—it's called hydrocephalus, and it's basically like having a leaky pipe in your brain. The leaking fluid gradually pushes your brain outward against your skull. If it happens when you're young and your bones are still malleable, the pressure pushes out your skull as well—hence the large hat size. What was remarkable about this student was that he had an IQ of 126 (a score of 100 is average), which might tell you something about the IQ test, but it also means that when it comes to brains, size doesn't matter all that much. We have three pounds of brain stuffed into our heads while he was working with a quarter-pounder and doing just fine.

Some argue our bigger brains led to a revolutionary new skill, one that would become the foundation of all human achievement: we learned to aim not only where food was, but where food wasn't. Kudus and rabbits dart

off in mad zigzags, meaning a hunter has to mentally process the timing and distance of three different bodies moving through space—his own, his prey’s, and his weapon’s—to calculate the exact point where spear meets quarry.

“That kind of sequential thought requires intellect of a higher order.”

Specifically, he’s talking about imagination: the ability to project into the future, visualize possibilities, think in the abstract. That’s why some believe language, literature, medicine, and even love are all connected to our ancient ability to hit a hare at twenty paces.

“Throwing is about finding order in chaos. The more you’re able to think in sequence, the more ideas you’re able to string together. You can add more words to your vocabulary, you can combine unrelated concepts, you can plan for the future, and you can keep track of social relationships.”

Of course, there would seem to be a massive human supremacist bias in these statements, beliefs, theories. Does every predator not rely in some way on predicting movement to catch prey—whether guessing where it will be seconds before it is or knowing where it will be weeks before and lying in wait? Birds, wolves, fish, lions, reptiles, insects—and remember the worm with legs?—all practice some form of such predictions. But they can’t tell us or show us—not in any way that science would deem credible at least.

Fish are able to infer their own relative social status by observing dominance interactions among other fish. Fish also have been observed to display unique personalities. We know too that birds plan future meals and that their ability to make and use tools often surpasses that of chimpanzees. Rodents can use a rake-like tool to retrieve food that is out of reach. Dogs classify and categorize photographs the same way humans do; chimpanzees know what other chimpanzees can see, and show better memory in computer games than do humans; animals from magpies to otters to elephants grieve for their young; and mice feel empathy. For anyone who follows scientific literature or popular media on animal behavior it’s obvious that we’re learning a phenomenal amount.

The study of animal behavior is among the oldest of human endeavors. As hunter-gatherers, our ancestors needed intimate knowledge of flora and fauna, including the habits of their prey. Hunters exercise minimal control: they anticipate the moves of animals and are impressed by their cunning if they escape. They also need to watch their back for species that prey on

them. The human-animal relationship was rather egalitarian during this time.

A more practical knowledge became necessary when our ancestors took up agriculture and began to domesticate animals for food and muscle power. Animals became dependent on us and subservient to our will. Instead of anticipating their moves, we began to dictate them, while our holy books spoke of our dominion over nature. Both of these radically different attitudes—the hunter’s and the farmer’s—are recognizable in the study of animal cognition today. Sometimes we watch what animals do of their own accord, while at other times we put them in situations where they can do little else besides what we want them to do.

“But what then does it mean to be human?”

The but opening is telling as it sweeps all the similarities aside in order to get to the all-important question of what sets us apart. I usually answer with the iceberg metaphor, according to which there is a vast mass of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral similarities between us and our primate kin. But there is also a tip containing a few dozen differences. The natural sciences try to come to grips with the whole iceberg, whereas the rest of academia is happy to stare at the tip. In the West, fascination with this tip is old and unending. Our unique traits are invariably judged to be positive, noble even, although it wouldn’t be hard to come up with a few unflattering ones as well.

We are always looking for the one big difference, whether it is opposable thumbs, cooperation, humor, pure altruism, sexual orgasm, language, or the anatomy of the larynx. It started perhaps with the debate between Plato and Diogenes about the most succinct definition of the human species. Plato proposed that humans were the only creatures at once naked and walking on two legs. This definition proved flawed, however, when Diogenes brought a plucked fowl to the lecture room, setting it loose with the words “Here is Plato’s man.” From then on the definition added “having broad nails.”

In 1784 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe triumphantly announced that he had discovered the biological roots of humanity: a tiny piece of bone in the human upper jaw known as the *os intermaxillare*. Though present in other mammals, including apes, the bone had never before been detected in our species and had therefore been labeled “primitive” by anatomists. Its absence in humans had been taken as something we should be proud of. Apart from being a poet, Goethe was a natural scientist, which is why he was delighted to link our species to the rest of nature by showing that we

shared this ancient bone. That he did so a century before Darwin reveals how long the idea of evolution had been around.

Uniqueness claims typically cycle through four stages: they are repeated over and over, they are challenged by new findings, they hobble toward retirement, and then they are dumped into an ignominious grave. I am always struck by their arbitrary nature. Coming out of nowhere, uniqueness claims draw lots of attention while everyone seems to forget that there was no issue before. For example, in the English language—and quite a few others—behavioral copying is denoted by a verb that refers to our closest relatives, hinting at a time when imitation was no big deal and was considered something we shared with the apes. But when imitation was redefined as cognitively complex, dubbed “true imitation,” all of a sudden we became the only ones capable of it. It made for the peculiar consensus that we are the only aping apes. Merely duplicating behavior, such as one songbird learning another’s song, was not enough anymore: it had to be done with insight and comprehension. While imitation is common in lots of animals according to the old definition, true imitation is rare. We learned this fact from experiments in which apes and children were prompted to imitate an experimenter. They’d watch a human model open a puzzle box or rake in food with a tool. While the children copied the demonstrated action, the apes failed, hence the conclusion that other species lack imitative capacities and cannot possibly have culture. The comfort this finding brought to some circles greatly puzzled me, because it did not answer any fundamental questions either about animal culture or about human culture. All it did was draw a flimsy line in the sand.

Imagine that aliens from a distant galaxy landed on earth wondering if there was one species unlike the rest. I am not convinced they would settle on us, but let’s assume they did. Do you think they’d do so based on the fact that we know what others know? Of all the skills that we possess and all the technology that we have invented, would they zoom in on the way we perceive one another? What an odd and capricious choice this would be! But it is precisely the trait that the scientific community has considered most worthy of attention for the last two decades. Known as theory of mind, abbreviated ‘ToM,’ it is the capacity to grasp the mental states of others. And the profound irony is that our fascination with ToM did not even start with our species. Emil Menzel was the first to ponder what one individual knows about what others know, but he did so for juvenile chimpanzees. At some point, however, it was redefined in such a manner that it seemed, at least for a while, absent in apes.

All these definitions and redefinitions take me back to a character played by Jon Lovitz on Saturday Night Live, who conjured unlikely justifications

of his own behavior. He kept digging and searching until he believed his own fabricated reasons, exclaiming with a self-satisfied smirk, “Yeah! That’s the ticket!”

With regard to technical skills, the same thing happened despite the fact that ancient gravures and paintings commonly depicted apes with a walking cane or some other instrument, most memorably in Carl Linnaeus’s *Systema Natura* in 1735. Ape tool use was well known and not the least bit controversial at the time. The artists probably put tools in the apes’ hands to make them look more human-like, hence for exactly the opposite reason anthropologists in the twentieth century elevated tools to a sign of brainpower. From then on, the technology of apes was subjected to scrutiny and doubt—ridicule even—while ours was held up as proof of mental preeminence.

It is against this backdrop that the discovery (or rediscovery) of ape tool use in the wild was so shocking. In their attempts to downplay its importance, I have heard anthropologists suggest that perhaps chimpanzees learned how to use tools from humans, as if this would be any more likely than having them develop tools on their own. This proposal obviously goes back to a time when imitation had not yet been declared uniquely human. It is hard to keep all those claims consistent. When Leakey suggested that we must either call chimpanzees human, redefine what it is to be human, or redefine tools, scientists predictably embraced the second option. Redefining man will never go out of fashion, and every new characterization will be greeted with ‘Yeah! That’s the ticket!’

Another human uniqueness proponent noted that “there is no obvious evidence that animals have ever agreed on a five-year plan.” True, but how many humans have? I associate five-year plans with central government and prefer examples drawn from the way both humans and animals go about their daily business. For example, I may plan to buy groceries on my way home, or decide to book a vacation this weekend. This is the nature of our planning. It is not unlike the story of Franje, the chimpanzee who gathered all the straw from her night cage to build a warm nest outdoors. That she took this precaution while still indoors, before actually feeling the cold outside, is significant because it fits the so-called Spoon Test.

In an Estonian children’s story, a girl dreams of a friend’s chocolate pudding party where she can only watch other children eat, because everyone has brought their own spoon, and she has not. To prevent this from happening again, she goes to bed that night clutching a spoon. Two criteria are proposed to recognize future planning. First, the behavior should not follow directly from present needs and desires. Second, it should prepare the individual for a future situation in a different context than the current one.

The girl needed a spoon not in bed, but at the chocolate pudding party she expected in her dream.

“At the Yerkes Primate Center, we have a male chimp, Steward, who never enters our testing room without first looking around outdoors for a stick or branch that he uses to point at the various items in our experiments. Even though we have tried to discourage this behavior, by removing the stick from his hands so that he’ll point with a finger like everyone else, Steward is stubborn. He prefers to point with a stick and will go out of his way to bring one with him, thus anticipating our test and his self-invented need for a tool.”

Lisala, a bonobo, carries a heavy rock on a long trek toward a place where she knows there are nuts. After collecting the nuts, she continues her trek to the only large slab of rock in the area, where she employs her rock as a hammer to crack the nuts. Picking up a tool so long in advance suggests planning.

Neuroscience may one day resolve how planning takes place. The first hints are coming from the hippocampus, which has long been known to be vital both for memory and for future orientation. The devastating effects of Alzheimer’s typically begin with degeneration of this part of the brain. As with all major brain areas, however, the human hippocampus is far from unique. Rats have a similar structure, which has been intensely studied. After a maze task, these rodents keep replaying their experiences in this brain region, either during sleep or sitting still while awake. Using brain waves to detect what kind of maze paths the rats are rehearsing in their heads, scientists found that more is going on than a consolidation of past experiences.

The hippocampus seems also engaged in the exploration of maze paths that the rats have not (yet) taken. Since humans, too, show hippocampal activity while imagining the future, it has been suggested that rats and humans relate to the past, present, and future in similar ways. This realization, as well as the accumulated primate and bird evidence for future orientation, has swayed the opinion of several skeptics, who used to think that only humans show mental time travel. We are moving ever closer to Darwin’s continuity stance, according to which the human-animal difference is one of degree, not kind.

Various experiments indicate that at least some animals—including birds such as parrots and scrub jays—do remember individual incidents and consciously plan for future eventualities. However, it is impossible to prove

this beyond doubt, because no matter how sophisticated a behaviour an animal exhibits, skeptics can always claim that it results from unconscious algorithms in its brain rather than from conscious images in its mind.

The claim that only humans can mentally hop onto the time train, leaving all other species stranded on the platform, is tied to the fact that we consciously access past and future. Anything related to consciousness has been hard to accept in other species. But this reluctance is problematic: not because we know so much more about consciousness, but because we have growing evidence in other species for episodic memory, future planning, and delayed gratification. Either we abandon the idea that these capacities require consciousness, or we accept the possibility that animals may have it, too.

Proponents of human uniqueness face the possibility that they have either grossly overestimated the complexity of what humans do or underestimated the capacities of other species. Neither possibility is a pleasant thought, because their deeper problem is evolutionary continuity. They can't stand the notion of humans as modified apes. Like Alfred Russel Wallace, they feel that evolution must have skipped the human head. Although this view is currently on its way out in psychology it is still prevalent in the humanities and most of the social sciences. Typical is a reaction by the American anthropologist Jonathan Marks to the overwhelming evidence that animals pick up habits from one another, hence show cultural variability:

“Labeling ape behavior as ‘culture’ simply means you have to find another word for what humans do.”

Given that the discontinuity stance is essentially pre-evolutionary, let me call a spade a spade, and dub it Neo-Creationism. Neo-Creationism is not to be confused with Intelligent Design, which is merely old creationism in a new bottle. Neo-Creationism is subtler in that it accepts evolution but only half of it. Its central tenet is that we descend from the apes in body but not in mind. Without saying so explicitly, it assumes that evolution stopped at the human head. This idea remains prevalent in much of the social sciences, philosophy, and the humanities. It views our mind as so original that there is no point comparing it to other minds except to confirm its exceptional status.

Why care about what other species can do if there is literally no comparison with what we do? This view rests on the conviction that something major must have happened after we split off from the apes: an abrupt change in the last few million years or perhaps even more recently. While this miraculous event remains shrouded in mystery, it is honored with an

exclusive term, 'hominization,' mentioned in one breath with words such as 'spark,' 'gap,' and 'chasm.' Obviously, no modern scholar would dare mention a divine spark, let alone special creation, but the religious background of this position is hard to deny.

Darwin believed that all traits were utilitarian, being only as good as strictly necessary for survival, but Wallace felt there must be one exception to this rule: the human mind. Why would people who live simple lives need a brain capable of composing symphonies or doing math?

“Natural selection could only have endowed the savage with a brain a little superior to that of an ape, whereas he actually possesses one but very little inferior to that of the average member of our learned societies.”

During his travels in Southeast Asia, Wallace had gained great respect for non-literate people, so for him to call them only “very little inferior” was a big step up over the prevailing racist views of his time, according to which their intellect was halfway between that of an ape and Western man. Although he was nonreligious, Wallace attributed humanity’s surplus brain power to the “unseen universe of Spirit.” Nothing less could account for the human soul. Unsurprisingly, Darwin was deeply disturbed to see his respected colleague invoke the hand of God, in however camouflaged a way. There was absolutely no need for supernatural explanations, he felt. Nevertheless, Wallace’s Problem still looms large in academic circles eager to keep the human mind out of the clutches of biology.

The suspicion that humans might not be evolving may stem from the misconception that evolution is progressing toward a goal. A related fallacy is that all of life has been aimed at the production of humans, the pinnacle of evolution. If humans are seen as an end point, then presumably there is no need for further modification, making continued human evolution a sort of gilding of the anthropological lily. Such a notion is scientifically indefensible, of course; nature has not singled out humans for special treatment, and human beings are not the most recently evolved species on the planet in any event. That last honor, if it can be viewed as such, would likely belong to a virus, a bacterium, or another microorganism, since their short generation times allow them to evolve, almost literally, in the blink of an eye. Humans are no more of an end point to evolution than they are its most recent product.

Half a century ago, DNA studies revealed that humans barely differ enough from bonobos and chimpanzees to deserve their own genus. It is only for historical reasons that taxonomists have let us keep the *Homo* genus all

to ourselves. The DNA comparison caused hand-wringing in anthropology departments, where until then skulls and bones had ruled supremely as the gauge of relatedness. To determine what is important in a skeleton takes judgment, which allows the subjective coloring of traits that we deem crucial. We make a big deal of our bipedal locomotion, for example, while ignoring the many animals, from chickens to hopping kangaroos, that move the same way. At some savanna sites, bonobos walk entire distances upright through tall grass, making confident strides like humans. Bipedalism is really not as special as it has been made out to be. The good thing about DNA is that it is immune to prejudice, making it a more objective measure.

In 2010 scientists conducted an unusually touching rat experiment. They locked a rat in a tiny cage, placed the cage within a much larger cell and allowed another rat to roam freely through that cell. The caged rat gave out distress signals, which caused the free rat also to exhibit signs of anxiety and stress. In most cases, the free rat proceeded to help her trapped companion, and after several attempts usually succeeded in opening the cage and liberating the prisoner. The researchers then repeated the experiment, this time placing chocolate in the cell. The free rat now had to choose between either liberating the prisoner, or enjoying the chocolate all by herself. Many rats preferred to first free their companion and share the chocolate—though quite a few behaved more selfishly, proving perhaps that some rats are meaner than others. Skeptics dismissed these results, arguing that the free rat liberated the prisoner not out of empathy, but simply in order to stop the annoying distress signals. The rats were motivated by the unpleasant sensations they felt, and they sought nothing grander than ending these sensations. Maybe. But we could say exactly the same thing about us humans. When I donate money to a beggar, am I not reacting to the unpleasant sensations that the sight of the beggar causes me to feel? Do I really care about the beggar, or do I simply want to feel better myself?

In essence, we humans are not that different from rats, dogs, dolphins, or chimpanzees. Like them, we too have no soul. Like us, they too have consciousness and a complex world of sensations and emotions. Of course, every animal has its unique traits and talents. Humans too have their special gifts. We shouldn't humanize animals needlessly, imagining that they are just a furrer version of ourselves. This is not only bad science, but it also prevents us from understanding and valuing other animals on their terms.

There's growing evidence that the octopus is far more intelligent than most people ever imagined, partially because most people always assumed they were gross, delicious morons. Yet this new evaluation is still conducted through a myopically human lens. We classify the octopus as intelligent because of its ability to do human things, based on the accepted position that

we are the most intelligent species on Earth. What's harder to comprehend is the intelligence of an octopus in a world where they are more intelligent than we are.

Because our most recent common ancestor was so simple and lies so far back, cephalopods are an independent experiment in the evolution of large brains and complex behavior. If we can make contact with cephalopods as sentient beings, it is not because of a shared history, not because of kinship, but because evolution built minds twice over. This is probably the closest we will come to meeting an intelligent alien.

When we try to compare one animal's brainpower with another's, we run into the fact that there is no single scale on which intelligence can be sensibly measured. Different animals are good at different things, as makes sense given the different lives they live. An analogy can be drawn with tool kits: brains are like tool kits for the control of behavior. As with human tool kits, there are some elements in common across many trades, but much diversity also. All the tool kits found in animals include some kind of perception, though different animals have very different ways of taking in information. All (or almost all) bilaterian animals have some form of memory and a means for learning, enabling past experiences to be brought to bear on the present. The tool kit sometimes includes capacities for problem solving and planning. Some tool kits are more elaborate and expensive than others, but they can be sophisticated in different ways. One animal might have better senses, while another may have more sophisticated learning. Different tool kits go with different ways of making a living.

There is every reason to suppose that when a fox and I step on a piece of barbed wire we experience something similar. For the moment I mean simply that pain receptors in the fox's foot and mine fire in a more or less identical way and send electronic impulses along more or less identical tracts in the peripheral and central nervous systems to be processed by the brain, which in each case sends a message to our muscles saying 'Take that foot off the wire'—if indeed a reflex hasn't already achieved that. The brain processing will certainly, in both the fox and me, ingrain the lesson 'Don't step on barbed wire: it's not nice'; this will become a part of the experience which we have genuinely shared. It happened to both of us in a neurologically identical way: we both know what stepping on barbed wire is like, in a way that people and animals who have not stepped on barbed wire do not know. I take it that there are many neurological sequences which it is possible meaningfully to say I share with an animal. If a wind blows down the valley in which we are both lying, we both feel it similarly. It may (it will) import different things for us. For the fox its main significance might be that the rabbits are likely to be grazing in the wood by the horse chestnuts; for me

its main significance might be that I'm cold and need to pull on another layer. But that doesn't mean that we haven't both felt it. We have. And the differing significance can be deduced by observation.

Even to form a conception of what it is like to be a bat, one must take up the bat's point of view. If one can take it up roughly, or partially, then one's conception will also be rough or partial. It's not difficult to imagine humans having echolocation sonar and how that would help us walk through a pitch-black room. That experience can be visualized. But what we can't understand is how that experience informs the consciousness of a bat. We can't even assess what level of consciousness a bat possesses, since the only available barometer for consciousness is our own. The interior life of a bat—or an octopus, or any nonhuman creature—is beyond our capacity. And as a society, we are comfortable with not knowing these things—although less comfortable than we were in, say, the nineteenth century. So imagine that this evolution continues. What would happen if we eventually concluded—for whatever collection of reasons—that our human definition of logic is an inferior variety of intelligence? Humans would still be the Earth's dominant life form, but for reasons that would validate our worst fears about humanity.

In a hundred years, qualitative intelligence might be unilaterally prioritized over quantitative aptitude. So if humankind decides that emotional intelligence is really what matters while simultaneously concluding that nonhuman species are superior to humans in this specific regard, society would adopt a highly uncomfortable imbalance. I mean, the relationship between man and beast wouldn't really change. Humans would remain the dominant species. But that dominance would suddenly appear to derive exclusively from brute force. It would essentially derive from the combination of opposable thumbs and a self-defined "inferior" brand of intellect that places us in a better position to kill and control our rivals.

This actuality would swap the polarity of existence. The current belief among many in the animal rights community is that humans are responsible for the welfare of animals and that we must protect them. Our apex slot in the intellectual hierarchy forces us to think on behalf of animals, since they cannot think for themselves. Their innocence is childlike. But if animals are actually more intelligent than humans—and if we were all to agree that they are, based on our own criteria for what constitutes an intelligent being—it would mean that our sovereignty was founded on mental weakness and empathetic failure. It would mean the undeniable success of humankind is just a manifestation of our own self-defined stupidity. Would this change the world? It would not. This is not a relationship that can be switched. The world would continue as it is. We would not elect a cat as president, or

even as comptroller. But this would be a helluva thing to be wrong about, and many would argue maybe a good thing to pretend we're wrong about, just in case.

The chemistry of life is an aquatic chemistry. We can get by on land only by carrying a huge amount of salt water around with us. Researchers have identified traces of what they believe is the earliest known prehistoric ancestor of humans—a microscopic, bag-like sea creature, which lived about 540 million years ago.

You are standing beside your mother, holding her hand. She is holding her mother's hand, who is holding her mother's hand. Eventually the line stretches three-hundred miles long and goes back five-million years, and the clasping hand of the ancestor looks like that of a chimpanzee.

One of an octopus's arms is stretching out to meet one of her mother's arms, and one of her mother's mother's arms, and her mother's mother's mother's. . . Suckered, elastic arms, reaching back through time: an octopus chorus line stretching not just hundreds, but many thousands of miles long. Back past the Cenozoic, the time when our ancestors descended from the trees; back past the Mesozoic, when dinosaurs ruled the land; back past the Permian and the rise of the ancestors of the mammals; back, past the Carboniferous's coal-forming swamp forests; back past the Devonian, when amphibians emerged from the water; back past the Silurian, when plants first took root on land—all the way to the Ordovician, to a time before the advent of wings or knees or lungs, before the fishes had bony jaws, before blood pumped from a multi-chambered heart. More than 500 million years ago, the tides would have been stronger, the days shorter, the year longer, and the air too high in carbon dioxide for mammals or birds to breathe. All the earth's continents huddled in the Southern Hemisphere. And yet still, the arm of her ancestor, sensitive, suckered, and supple, would have been recognizable as one of an octopus.

The giant Pacific octopus is one of the world's most efficient carnivores in converting food to body mass. Hatching from an egg the size of a grain of rice weighing three-tenths of a gram, a baby giant Pacific octopus doubles its weight every eighty days until it reaches about 44 pounds, then doubles its weight every four months until maturity.

An octopus's muscles have both radial and longitudinal fibers, thereby resembling our tongues more than our biceps, but they're strong enough to turn their arms to rigid rods—or shorten them in length by 50 to 70 percent. An octopus's arm muscles, by one calculation, are capable of resisting a pull one-hundred times the octopus's own weight.

An octopus can control each sucker individually.

While arms can be employed for specialized tasks—for example, as your

left hand holds the nail while your right hand wields the hammer—each arm may have its own personality, almost like a separate creature. Researchers have repeatedly observed that when an octopus is in an unfamiliar tank with food in the middle, some of its arms may walk toward the food—while some of its other arms seem to cower in a corner, seeking safety.

Most of an octopus's neurons are in the arms, not the brain.

A giant Pacific octopus can regenerate up to one third of a lost arm in as little as six weeks. Unlike a lizard's regenerated tail, which is invariably of poorer quality than the original, the regrown arm of an octopus is as good as new, complete with nerves, muscles, chromatophores, and perfect, virgin suckers. Even the specialized arm of the male, the ligula, can be regrown.

Not only can they grow new arms when needed; there is evidence that, on occasion, an octopus chooses to detach its own arm, even in the absence of a predator. Tarantulas do this too—if a leg is injured, they will break it off and eat it.

The ability of the octopuses and their kin to camouflage themselves is unmatched in both speed and diversity. Octopuses and their relatives put chameleons to shame. Most animals gifted with the ability to camouflage can assume only a tiny handful of fixed patterns. The cephalopods have a command of thirty to fifty different patterns per individual animal. They can change color, pattern, and texture in seven-tenths of a second. On a Pacific coral reef, a researcher once counted an octopus changing 177 times in a single hour. At Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, cephalopods put on laboratory checkerboards virtually disappear. They don't make checks, of course; but they can create a pattern of light and dark that makes them invisible on virtually any background, to virtually any eye.

An octopus can also voluntarily control its skin texture—raising and lowering fleshy projections called papillae—as well as change its overall shape and posture. The sand-dwelling mimic octopus, an Atlantic species, is particularly adept at this. One online video shows the animal altering its body position, color, and skin texture to morph into a flatfish, then several sea snakes, and finally a poisonous lionfish—all in a matter of seconds.

The octopus eye, unlike our own, can detect polarized light. It has no blind spot. Our eyes are binocular, directed forward for seeing what's ahead of us, our usual direction of travel. The octopus's wide-angle eyes are adapted to panoramic vision. And each eye can swivel independently, like a chameleon's. Our visual acuity can extend beyond the horizon; an octopus can see only about eight feet away.

Human eyes have three visual pigments, allowing us to see color. Octopuses have only one—which would make these masters of camouflage, commanding a glittering rainbow of colors, technically color-blind. How,

then, does the octopus decide what colors to turn? New evidence suggests cephalopods might be able to see with their skin. Woods Hole and University of Washington researchers found the skin of the octopus's close relative, the cuttlefish *Sepia officinalis*, contains gene sequences usually expressed only in the retina of the eye.

Researchers reported that the strikingly beautiful, newly rediscovered Pacific striped octopus lives in communities of up to forty animals. Males and females cohabit in dens, mate beak-to-beak, and produce not just one but many broods of eggs over their lifetimes.

Though cooks who throw lobsters into boiling water insist invertebrates' attempts to escape are mere reflexes, they're wrong. Prawns whose antennae are brushed with acetic acid carefully groom the injured sensors with complex, prolonged movements—which diminish when anesthetic is applied. Crabs who have been shocked rub the hurt spot for long periods after the initial injury. Octopuses also do this, and are more likely to swim away or squirt ink when touched near a wound than when touched elsewhere on the body.

Male cuttlefish courting a female may trick rival males into thinking there is nothing to worry about. The courting male adopts the coloring of a female on the side of his body that faces his rival, so that the latter believes he is looking at a female. But the same male keeps his original coloring on the female's side of his body in order to keep her interested. He thus courts her surreptitiously. This two-faced tactic, called dual-gender signaling, suggests tactical skills of an order that we might expect in primates but not mollusks.

The undersea world is a seriously slimy place. Slime helps sea animals reduce drag while moving through the water, capture and eat food, keep their skin healthy, escape predators, protect their eggs. Tube worms secrete slime to build a leathery tube, like a flower stalk, to protect their bodies and keep them attached to a rock or coral. For some fishes—Amazon discus and cichlids among them—slime is the piscine equivalent of mother's milk. The babies actually feed off the parents' nutritious slime coat, an activity called "glancing." The brightly colored mandarin fish exudes bad-tasting slime to deflect its enemies; the deep-sea vampire squid, an octopus relative, produces glowing slime to startle predators. Bermuda fire worms signal with luminous slime to attract mates like fireflies flashing on a summer night. The female fire worms glow to attract the males; the males then flash, after which the two release eggs and sperm in tandem.

A creature of the ocean bottom, a hagfish grows to about 17 inches long, and yet, in mere minutes, it can fill seven buckets with slime—so much slime it can slip from almost any predator's grip. The hagfish would be in danger of suffocating on its own mucous, except it has learned, like a person with

a cold, to blow it out its nose. But sometimes it produces too much slime for even a hagfish to tolerate, and for this occasion, it has devised a nifty trick: the animal wraps its tail around its body like a knot and slides the knot forward, clearing the slime.

The elegant efficiency of the jellyfish's structure may be one reason for the group's diversity. Jellyfish bodies are at least 95% water; the remaining 5% or so contains the barest essentials needed to capture, consume, and use energy. Their method of locomotion, an elastic ring that contracts to rapidly expel water and propel the jelly forward, allows them to move more efficiently than any other organism. Their trailing tentacles brush against prey, immobilizing them and conveying them to the jellyfish's mouth—after which the jelly digests its prey in its body cavity and subsequently expels the remaining parts of the prey through the same single opening.

The lack of complex physical features makes jellies extremely adaptable and the things that restrict other marine animals—such as temperature, acidity, salinity, light, or darkness—don't faze them. They combine plant-like simplicity, animal-like mobility, and an almost bacterial ability to reproduce rapidly under favorable conditions. There's even a species of jellyfish that achieves near-immortality by turning back into a polyp—a less mature version of itself—when injured. The polyp can then produce identical copies of the injured jelly and the jelly can revert back to the polyp again and again, indefinitely.

Creatures are dependent on sunlight in surprisingly complex ways. The organisms with the first dibs on sunshine are the plants, which use it in photosynthesis. The sun's energy is then passed up the food chain, to the bugs that eat these plants, to the birds that eat the bugs, to the mammals that eat the birds. The same goes in the oceans. Plantlike phytoplankton float around absorbing the sun's energy. Zooplankton eat the phytoplankton, and fish eat the zooplankton, on up the line. Every critter in that food chain, though, meets its end and sinks down into the abyss, a biomass that's known quite tranquilly as marine snow—even though it's made of dead things. Opportunists in the water column pick at this marine snow as it falls, and accordingly very few nutrients even reach the seafloor. So few nutrients, in fact, that a whale that dies and sinks more or less intact to the bottom (there may be opportunists, but not enough to strip a whale clean before it hits the floor) will provide as much food to the critters of the seafloor as would thousands of years of marine snow. The so-called whale fall is what the scavengers of the seafloor are desperate for. They'll pick the giant's bones clean and won't stop at that, for there are creatures that devour the bones themselves.

Most whales eat microscopic organisms like plankton, and so their throats

are only four or five inches wide. If you happen to find yourself inside the mouth of a blue whale you would be too big for it to swallow and your journey would likely end with a crushing blow from its 6,000-pound tongue.

Humpback whales have sex in threesomes, with the third whale acting as a sort of assistant like some soy-boy beta cuck.

The dolphins' evolutionary path is a preposterous feat: their predecessors were land mammals that resembled small, hooved wolves. After an interlude in swamps and coastal lowlands, these fledgling aquanauts moved permanently into the water. Over the course of twenty-million years, their limbs turned to fins, their shape became streamlined for swimming, their fur turned to blubber, their nostrils migrated to the top of their heads—in other words, they developed all the equipment needed to master undersea life. They aced it, too: dolphins have perfectly hydrodynamic bodies. They swim faster than physics would seem to allow, given the density of water and the amount of muscle they have. Their bodies are so ideally adapted for speed, navigation, plunging into the depths, and keeping warm that it's hard to imagine improvements.

“One morning I watched five spinners give birth simultaneously, the babies corkscrewing out of their mothers tail-first, then wobbling to the surface to take their first breaths. Witnessing this made me wonder if the dolphins could decide, within reason, when they wanted to deliver—because statistically, five babies appearing at once was almost certainly not random. That possibility, in turn, led me to muse: Could dolphins also choose the moment of their own deaths?”

Dolphin erections happen at will; they can pop it out like a kickstand or retract it neatly whenever they want to. What other body functions do dolphins have under their own control? It is an intriguing question.

“It's like dolphins and whales are living in these massive, multicultural, undersea societies. Really the closest analogy we have for it would be ourselves.”

“A certain willingness to face censure, to be a maverick, to question one's beliefs, to revise them, are obviously necessary. But what is not obvious is how to prepare one's own mind to receive the transmissions from the far side of the protective transparent wall separating each of us from the dark gulf of the unknown. Maybe we must realize that we are still babies in the

universe, taking steps never before taken. Sometimes we reach out from our aloneness for someone else who may or may not exist. But at least we reach out, and it is gratifying to see our dolphins reach also, however primitively. They reach toward those of us who are willing to reach toward them.”

A biologist recalls tailing a pod of bottlenoses on one grim, foggy morning along the coast of Los Angeles. The animals were hunting, ignoring her research boat as they searched for fish. Finally, they found a huge school of sardines and began herding them. If there’s anything that commands a dolphin’s attention it is a mother lode of fish, so she was surprised when one of the dolphins suddenly broke away from feeding and headed out to sea, swimming at top speed. The rest of the pod followed; so did the biologist and her crew. The dolphins arrowed about three miles offshore and then they stopped, arranging themselves in a circle. In the center, the scientists were shocked to see a girl’s body floating. She was a teenager and barely alive, her suicide attempt only moments away from succeeding. Around her neck, the girl had strung a plastic bag containing her identification and a farewell letter. Thanks to the aquatic snitches, she was “rescued.”

“I still think and dream about that cold day and that tiny, pale girl lost in the ocean and found again for some inexplicable reason, by us, by the dolphins.”

Tales like this are remarkably common: famously, when rescuers pulled five-year-old Cuban Elián González out of the water three miles off Florida’s coast, adrift and alone for forty-eight hours after his boat capsized and everyone else aboard had drowned, some of his first words were about how dolphins had surrounded him and kept him from slipping off his life ring in thirteen-foot seas. After a 9.1 earthquake shook the waters off Phuket, Thailand, on December 26, 2004, seven boats full of scuba divers were startled when a pod of dolphins began to leap theatrically, right in front of them, attention-getting behavior that none of the veteran captains or divemasters had witnessed before. The ocean was roiled from the earthquake and the captains had decided to return to port, but the dolphins seemed to be frantically beckoning them offshore. Out of curiosity, the dive boats followed them. At that point no one aboard the vessels could have known that massive tsunami waves were rolling beneath them, thundering toward the shoreline where they would cause epic death and destruction. The divers soon learned that by steering them out to sea, away from the breaking waves, the dolphins had saved their lives.

Surfers, in particular, seem to benefit from dolphin intervention; accounts of dolphins aiding their fellow wave riders are the most plentiful of all. When a surfer was bitten three times by a great white shark near Monterrey, California, dolphins drove off the marauder, formed a ring around the surfer, and escorted him to the beach. Even before the attack the dolphins had been circling with unusual focus. When the shark approached for its first pass they made a visible ruckus: thrashing their fins at the surface, slapping their tails on the water, and in general acting so aggressively that another surfer, floating fifteen feet away, wondered, “What did he do to piss off the dolphins?” When he got the full measure of what was happening, he paddled over to help. While the stricken surfer flailed in a pool of blood, the shark returned—twice. One ninja dolphin vaulted out of the water and lashed at the attacker with its tail, Bruce Lee style.

What to make of these stories? One point worth noting is that dolphins often behave toward us in the same ways they do toward one another. It’s standard dolphin operating procedure, for instance, to fend off sharks, or hold an injured mate at the surface so he can breathe, or steer the pod away from danger. In the dolphins’ nomadic undersea world, solitude equals vulnerability, so a lone human in the water must seem to them direly in need of assistance. Their consideration of us isn’t limited to emergency situations, either: at the Tangalooma Island Resort in Australia, where wild bottlenoses are regularly fed fish by people standing in the shallows, biologists have documented—on twenty-three occasions—the dolphins reciprocating, swimming up to offer freshly caught tuna, eels, and octopi as gifts. In other words, dolphins do not always differentiate between us and them. At times they do not seem to care that we are not members of their species—they simply appoint us honorary dolphins. Maybe that was why Fungie made his home among the residents of Dingle. To him, perhaps, they were just a slightly-peculiar-looking pod.

Throughout most of their lives, orcas stick close to their mommas—unless SeaWorld or some other aquatic gulag operator gets involved. An orca’s pod is his immediate family, a group that might contain four generations. Each pod, in turn, is part of a bigger clan, also comprised of close relations, and at the top of the orca organizational chart are the broader communities, made up of clans. In our terrestrial world, we call them nations. A killer whale’s cultural education unfurls at a pace that is similar to ours. They develop socially, like we do, and nothing happens instantly: maturity comes over time. At twenty, orcas are still learning and growing. Matriarchs have been known to approach the century mark, often outliving their offspring; they can spend more than thirty years in menopause. As with all of nature’s successful adaptations there is a reason for this, and we’ve learned some

eye-opening things about the matriarchs' role. They babysit, for one thing. They share food. And they teach: killer whale mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers pass on so much essential knowledge that calves removed from their influence are as ill-equipped for wild orca life as children raised by wolves would be in our society, if dropped into Midtown Manhattan.

This blue orb we live on? It's had oceans for 3.8 billion years. In a realm where history isn't written, it is the matriarch who carries the past, everything her pod needs to survive into the future. She is the keeper of the dialect; she teaches her descendants their very identity. She shows everyone how to hunt, no minor task when you consider the tricky and specialized techniques orcas deploy. In Argentina, one group uses the high-stakes tactic of intentionally stranding themselves—rocketing onto the beach, grabbing a seal, and then hopefully propelling themselves back into the water. Scientists have watched young orcas being tutored for six years before they even attempt this.

Stromatopods have underwater rocket clubs. At work here is a surprisingly simple mechanism. Up at the top of the arm is a kind of membranous divot, curved like a saddle, that acts as a spring. The stomatopod contracts a big muscle in that arm, pulling back the club and compressing the spring until an internal latch snaps into place. That latch is holding back a tremendous amount of energy in the muscle, and when it flies open, the spring rockets the club forward at up to fifty miles per hour, which is especially impressive considering this is happening in water. The resulting force is devastating. Subjected to such treatment, clams shatter, while more fragile creatures like crabs explode into a shower of limbs. Indeed, a clubber stomatopod will target a crab's claws first, blowing them off to counter the prey's futile attempts to defend itself.

The solution a geography cone snail has to holding on to their prey isn't brawn, but a brutal, sophisticated mix of both chemical and ballistic warfare. Something weird happens when a geography cone snail approaches a school of fish. Well, a couple of weird things happen. First, the fish don't seem to give a hoot. They're aloof, lolling there wide-eyed. They don't even seem to give a hoot when the snail expands its huge mouth like a fleshy hot air balloon. Slowly the mouth envelops several clueless fish, until the snail at last fires a harpoon into each victim, paralyzing it almost instantly. The mouth balloon shrinks, and the fish go quietly into death. Which would seem like a silly thing to be so relaxed about.

But it turns out that the fish are under a kind of spell: The geography cone snail has evolved to deploy insulin as a chemical weapon. By releasing massive amounts of the hormone into the water, the snail makes its prey's blood sugar levels plummet. Hypoglycemic shock sets in. The fish grow

sluggish and confused as their nervous systems glitch. In effect, they're hypnotized, conscious yet locked up, like you or me suffering a fit of sleep paralysis. But what's even weirder is that insulin in an invertebrate like a geography cone snail and insulin in a vertebrate like a fish are chemically distinct. Yet in addition to producing invertebrate insulin for its own body, the snail has evolved fish-like insulin that it has weaponized to overload its prey.

The mightiest land crustacean of all is the coconut crab. It's a kind of hermit crab, only it forgoes the shell and grows to three feet across and ten pounds. The crab's claws are so powerful it can tear through coconuts, as its name suggests. On the islands in the Pacific the coconut crab calls home, it's been known to attack kittens. I'm sorry you had to read that, but who knows, maybe those cats were evil or something. It's good to think positive, after all.

Compared with the human penis, that of the hamadryas appears to lack a foreskin and the animal was therefore thought to be born circumcised. It has been suggested that the Egyptian priests who attended the sacred baboons honoured them by imitating this condition. In this way the ritual of human circumcision is thought to have arisen, spreading later to nearby tribes who wished to emulate the advanced Egyptians.

So strong was the Egyptian interest in the baboon penis that it was employed as the central feature of their water-clocks. Carvings of seated male baboons were created in which water flowed through a hole in the phallus, marking the hours. Bizarrely, this is because it was believed that baboons urinated regularly once every hour.

According to a fifth-century BC account, a newly arrived baboon was set a curious test. It was presented with a writing tablet, a reed pen and some ink. The priests then waited to see if it showed any interest in this equipment. If it did, it was considered to be literate and was enrolled as a symbol of Thoth, the deity of scribes, of education and of the moon. In this capacity it was installed in one of the temples and was provided with fine roasted meats and wine, obtained through gifts from the worshipers. Sadly, this lavish but highly unsuitable diet and a lack of proper exercise led to early deaths in most of these sacred animals, as has been discovered from an examination of their mummies. They lived protected, pampered lives, but died young.

In spite of their great physical power, mountain gorillas are rather timid: they fear lizards and crocodiles, avoid chameleons and caterpillars, and do their best to cross any stream without getting their feet wet—sometimes using a stick to test the depth of the water. Researchers have found they use simple tools, such as rocks to break open palm nuts or clubs improvised

from tree branches. Gorillas are our nearest relatives after chimpanzees and bonobos, sharing around 97 percent of our DNA.

A special case, where the males went too far in the dominance battle, concerns the patas monkey of the African grasslands. This ground-dwelling species lives in uni-male groups, but the size of the typical female harem is too big for the male to dominate it. If he tries to assert himself, the females gang up on him and become the group controllers. They are so assertive that most of the squabbling you see in a patas group is not between males but between the dominant females who are trying to sort out their social hierarchy. So the male's main task is watching out for predators and protecting his group of females from danger, rather than dominating them socially. He has become their sexual servant, allowed to mate with them when the time comes, but otherwise of no social importance within the group. The patas monkey is an intriguing example of a patriarchy that went so far it became a matriarchy.

The big difference between a monkey baby and a human baby is that the young monkey is capable of clinging on to the mother from birth. This is because the newborn monkey's arms are stronger at birth and because the mother's fur provides a better grip for the tiny fingers. At one closely observed monkey birth it was possible to see that the baby was actually aiding its own delivery by grasping hold of its mother's fur while it was emerging from her body.

In the laboratory many subtle tests have been carried out with capuchins and their level of intelligence has never ceased to surprise the experimenters. To give one example: two capuchins were separated by a glass screen with a small hole in it. One capuchin had a stone hammer and the other a jar full of nuts that he could not open. The first capuchin passed the hammer through the hole in the glass partition and the second one used it to knock open the lid of the jar. When he had extracted the nuts from inside the jar, instead of eating them all himself, he shared them with his helpful companion. In another laboratory test, one capuchin was given a small biscuit as a reward whenever he offered the experimenter a small token. He happily ate the biscuit until he noticed that his companion monkey was getting a succulent grape as a reward instead of a dry biscuit. After this, he would hand over a token and, if given another biscuit, would throw it away angrily and keep trying until eventually he obtained a grape. These two tests reveal that capuchins have both a sense of mutual aid and cooperation, and a sense of fairness and unfairness. One can't help thinking that, if they could talk, we would have to open an embassy for them.

Aesop's fable "The Crow and the Pitcher" tells the tale of a crow wishing to drink water from the bottom of a pitcher. The crow collects pebbles,

dropping them one by one into the pitcher until the water level is high enough for him to drink. Researchers tested this fable in real life by presenting crows with a narrow vase half filled with water with a treat floating in it. The water level was too low for the crow to reach the treat, but there was a pile of little rocks nearby. As in the fable, the solution was to put the rocks in the vase to raise the water level, and crows had no problem figuring it out, even beating out some children.

However, crows were stumped by a similar scenario in which rocks had to be put in a second vase connected to the first vase by a sneaky invisible tube under the table, which raised the water level in both vases. Unlike crows, children did manage to solve this problem, even though they had no idea how the water level in the second vase affected the water level in the first vase—many called it “magic,” strongly suggesting that children are simply crows with a belief in magic.

Pointless fun—might this be the crowning glory that sets us apart from animals? But then those tobogganing crows come to mind. An internet video shows one of these birds sliding down the roof of a house. The bird has a lid from a plastic container. It carries it up to the highest part of the roof, places it on the slope, and then jumps onto it to slide down. No sooner does the bird reach the bottom than it goes back up for its next ride. The point? Apparently none. The fun factor? Probably the same as when we jump onto the wooden or plastic object of our choice and careen down a hill. Why would crows expend energy on a pointless activity? After all, tough evolutionary competition calls for the elimination of all non-beneficial activities and ejects from the race any animal that is not sufficiently rigorous in this respect. And yet it’s been a long time since we’ve paid any attention to this seemingly absolute rule. At least in wealthier countries, we have energy to spare, and we can afford to use it to enjoy ourselves. Why should it be any different for an intelligent bird that has set aside sufficient food for the winter and can devote some of these calories to fun and games? Clearly crows, too, can convert surplus resources into mindless fun and conjure up happy feelings whenever they want.

Wood mice and long-tailed macaques have adopted a somewhat familiar barter system: these species pay for grooming with sex.

On Gough Island in the raging South Atlantic, thousands of miles from the nearest mainland, seabirds such as the enormous albatrosses breed in complete isolation. That is, they did until one day seafarers discovered the island and inadvertently released house mice that had stowed away on their ships. The mice did there what mice do here. They dug holes, ate roots and blades of grass, and multiplied magnificently. But then, one day, one of them suddenly got a taste for meat. It must have found out how to

kill albatross chicks, which, quite apart from the savagery of the act, is no easy feat because the chicks are around two-hundred times larger than their attackers. The mice quickly learnt that a large number of them had to keep biting a chick until it bled to death. Especially brutal mice even began to eat the fluffy balls of down while they were still alive.

But researchers noticed that, for years, chicks were hunted only in particular parts of the island. Clearly, mouse parents demonstrated the technique to their children, passing the skill on to the next generation, while other mice in other areas knew nothing about this hunting strategy. This handing down of hunting strategies is found among many larger mammals as well, such as wolves. Moreover, young wild boar and deer are also taught by example to follow the paths their family groups have been navigating safely for decades to move from summer to winter feeding grounds. And that is why such trails are often well-trodden and hard as concrete from long use. Animals that learn from older generations avoid an early death.

Spotted hyenas lead a complex social life in which females play the dominant role. Clans of as many as seventy or eighty individuals are always led by females, and all adult females are dominant to all adult males, who leave the group when they reach puberty. Females assert their dominance by being far more aggressive than the males at every stage in their lives, producing one of the most chilling phenomena ever seen in any mammal.

Hyenas usually have twins, which are well developed at birth, completely furred, eyes open, canine and incisor teeth fully erupted. This is true of some other carnivores, but what makes the spotted hyena exceptional is that within minutes of birth one of the cubs attacks its twin, sometimes savaging a brother or sister that has not yet even emerged from its amniotic sac. If both offspring survive this preemptive strike, the battle begins in earnest as the pair roll in a bitter embrace, each with the skin of the other locked in its jaws.

This is not the normal rough and tumble of siblings at play. This is a fight to the death between two baby animals scarcely an hour old. There is nothing unusual about sibling rivalry. Offspring routinely compete with each other for food and attention. But these are generally the result of food shortages. What is disturbing about the hyena neonatal conflict is that it seems to be the norm. Spotted hyenas nearly always have twins and seldom get to raise more than a single cub, because the cubs themselves seem to be genetically programmed to attack and kill their siblings on sight. This is a rare example of pure aggression, taking place without any preliminaries, independent of the sort of social history that usually leads to conflict.

It is not common in nature because it carries a heavy penalty, the certain loss of at least half your own genes—not to mention the effort put into

growing an entire extra creature inside of you. The fact that spotted hyenas do so routinely suggests that this loss is one worth taking. It must be offset by an even larger gain elsewhere. But where, exactly? Over a period of fifteen years, researchers have found that the cub which usually wins the murderous battle in the den is female, and that if she is the daughter of a top ranked female, she will invariably replace her mother as head of the clan. This is clearly something the genes would like, the kind of continuity they thrive on and seem to have contrived by a very simple chemical device.

With a series of blood tests, researchers have also been able to show that androgens run riot in the whole population. Spotted hyena fetuses, no matter what their sex, have levels of testosterone higher even than adult males. Something has switched on the process which produces hormones that stimulate the development of masculine characteristics, and done so early and indiscriminately, right there in the womb, leading to conspicuous later changes in body, brain, and behavior. And the result is bizarre genitalia, sexual confusion, and adult females so large, competent, and aggressive that they run a tight and genetically stable matriarchy.

The only saving grace in this frightening story of genetic imperialism lies in the researchers' additional suggestion that hyena mothers might sometimes intervene in fights between their offspring to tailor the sex ratio of the community. In one instance a depleted clan which badly needed replenishment suddenly allowed an unprecedented number of pairs of female twins to survive. A subtle and heartening reassertion of individual independence over genetic hegemony. Perhaps. It is not always easy to tell where the orders are coming from. Unscrupulous genes are also inclined to cheat.

Consider cuckoos, more than fifty species of which lay their eggs in other birds' nests. They intimidate their unwilling hosts into leaving the nest unguarded by imitating a local predator, such as the sparrowhawk. Or the males may distract a host's attention while the female sneaks in and lays eggs which mimic those of their habitual host in size and color. Sometimes they simply destroy the host's clutch of eggs altogether. Cuckoo chicks also bear a close resemblance to those of the host species, even copying the distinctive color patterns which act as food guides in a gaping chick's mouth. Everything possible is contrived to persuade the hosts that they are hatching and rearing their own offspring, but if all else fails, the cuckoo chick takes matters into its own wings and simply eliminates rival eggs or nestlings by throwing them out of the nest. Some baby cuckoos are programmed to do this. If anything presses on their backs during the first day or two of their lives outside the egg, they climb backward up the side of the nest, supporting this burden between their wing stubs, and heave it overboard.

Each species' milk has its own signature blend of components such as

protein, fat, and calories geared to the growth schedule of the young animal consuming it. Cow's milk is higher in protein but lower in fat than human milk, though it contains nearly the same number of calories. Whales and seals are famous for the high fat content of their milk, essential to the rapid growth of their young in cold environments. The milk in some species of seals is so thick with butterfat that it resembles toothpaste squeezed out of a tube into the mouths of the hungry pups. Surprisingly, mouse milk is quite high in fat and calories, though not on a par with the milk of marine mammals; a cup of mouse milk, assuming you had the patience to obtain it, would contain over 400 calories, more than two-and-a-half times the number in cow's milk.

Red deer have to rev up their metabolic rate when they are digesting food, but going through the winter without eating anything is usually not an option, either. When a red deer eats in winter, it often extracts less energy from the food than it uses to digest it. And that is why, paradoxically, when hunters feed red deer in winter, the animals can end up starving in droves. This is what happened in 2013 where there was an indignant outcry from hunters who wanted to continue feeding despite a local ban. Almost a hundred red deer died from starvation, a number of which would likely have survived if they hadn't been physically stressed after digesting the hay and sugar beets hunters had fed them. That is why, left to their own devices in winter, red deer mostly live off the body fat they accumulate in the fall.

At some point, you might begin to worry whether red deer constantly feel hungry in winter, which is a distressing thought. To stand in cold snow with a rumbling stomach and super-cooled extremities is surely very unpleasant—at least it would be for a human being. It has now been proven that animals can turn off the sensation of hunger. Hunger is, after all, a signal from the unconscious that it's time to eat. And this feeling should only trigger the desire to eat when adding calories would be beneficial. Take hedgehogs, for instance. Even when they are hungry, they refuse smelly, rotten food. The unconscious part of their brain temporarily shuts down their hunger pangs and replaces them with a firm resolve not to eat any of the proffered sustenance. We don't know whether red deer experience an aversion to buds and dry grass or whether they simply feel full. But we do know that the animals don't feel hungry in winter despite their fast, because at the end of the day not eating makes fewer demands on their energy reserves.

However, the combination of lowering body temperature and metabolic rate that I have just described doesn't work equally well for all red deer. How well it works depends on the character of the individual deer and, equally importantly, on its rank and position in the herd. Winter is particularly

dangerous for red deer that have strong personalities. As leaders in the herd, they have to be constantly alert. This means their heart rate is constantly elevated, and their energy use is correspondingly high. It's true that herd leaders have preferential access to good feeding grounds, but that is of little use to them. Meager winter offerings of dry grass and tree bark don't deliver sufficient calories to build up the fat reserves these deer are burning through at a higher rate than their lower-ranking herd mates, which spend the cold winter nights standing around calmly and dozing. The lower-ranking deer are eating less than their leaders, but they are also using far less energy. And so, at the end of winter, they have more reserves than their superiors. After watching deer in large natural enclosures, foresters in Vienna made the surprising discovery that being the leader of a herd reduces a deer's chance of survival, despite the fact that leaders always get to help themselves to food first. According to the researchers, in the future it will be more important to consider the life histories and personalities of individual animals rather than the average for the species. After all, that is exactly how evolution works—using deviations from the norm.

Some animals make their own fly swatters. Asian elephants break off a large branch of a tree, remove the excess leaves to fashion it into a switch, and then shake it over their head and body. Gazelles and impalas take a different approach to dislodging parasites: they use their teeth as combs, scraping ticks off their coats and orally grooming themselves two-thousand times a day.

Because of an injured rear leg, Babyl could only walk at a snail's pace, and for over a decade and a half, the other elephants in her group have waited for her and fed her. Unescorted, Babyl would easily have fallen prey to a lion.

“A number of elephants visited the body, some touching and some just standing for a time near the dead matriarch. A female named Maui extended her trunk, sniffed the body, touched it, and then tasted Eleanor's trunk. She hovered her right foot over the body, nudged the body, and then stepped over, pulling the body with her left foot and trunk, before standing over the body and rocking to and fro.”

Elephants grieve openly for their dead. A baby elephant is killed by a lioness. Over the course of the day, elephants from the herd gathered in a rough circle around the remains of the baby. Many of them touched the body with their trunks. Elephants also show a pronounced interest

in corpses and bones, a behavior thought to exist only in elephants and humans.

Once, after a cull in Uganda, park rangers had stored severed feet and other body parts of the fallen inside a shed. That night, other elephants pushed their way into the shed and then buried the body parts. Elephants—unlike most animals—are aware of death and are drawn to the remains of their kin, sometimes burying them in branches and grass.

When elephants and rhinos form close social relationships, elephants will mourn the loss of their rhino friends. Thus, in an incident that was reported in Zimbabwe in November 2007, after her black rhino companion was shot, dehorned, and buried by poachers, Mundeavu, an African elephant calf, dug down for about one meter to try to reach her former companion, constantly letting out screams and shrieks as two other elephants supported her. It's reasonable to suppose that a capacity for empathy is associated with the expression of compassion for the ailing and grief for the dead.

The sensation I was feeling on the clifftop was some sort of reverberation in the air itself. The whale had submerged and I was still feeling something. The strange rhythm seemed now to be coming from behind me, from the land, so I turned to look across the gorge where my heart stopped. Standing there in the shade of the tree was an elephant staring out to sea. A female with a left tusk broken off near the base. I knew who she was, who she had to be. I recognized her from a color photograph put out by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry under the title "The Last Remaining Knysna Elephant." This was the Matriarch herself.

She was here because she no longer had anyone to talk to in the forest. She was standing here on the edge of the ocean because it was the next, nearest, and most powerful source of infrasound. The underrumble of the surf would have been well within her range, a soothing balm for an animal used to being surrounded by low and comforting frequencies, by the lifesounds of a herd, and now this was the next-best thing. My heart went out to her. The whole idea of this grandmother of many being alone for the first time in her life was tragic, conjuring up the vision of countless other old and lonely souls.

But just as I was about to be consumed by helpless sorrow, something even more extraordinary took place. The throbbing was back in the air. I could feel it, and I began to understand why. The blue whale was on the surface again, pointed inshore, resting, her blowhole clearly visible. The Matriarch was here for the whale! The largest animal in the ocean and the largest living land animal were no more than a hundred yards apart, and I was convinced that they were communicating. In infrasound, in concert, sharing big brains and long lives, understanding the pain of high investment

in a few precious offspring, aware of the importance and the pleasure of complex sociality, these rare and lovely great ladies were commiserating over the back fence of this rocky Cape shore, woman to woman, matriarch to matriarch, almost the last of their kind. I turned, blinking away the tears, and left them to it. This was no place for a mere man.

There is the story of a humpback whale in the Sea of Cortez in Mexico that put on an hour-long display of breaching and flipper flapping after a man spent hours cutting off a fishing net in which it had been hopelessly entangled. When the man encountered the whale, it looked as though it would not be able to survive for much longer. He immediately entered the water armed with just a small knife. As soon as the whale was free, it put on a glorious acrobatic display. Perhaps it was just happy not to be entangled in the net anymore—or perhaps it was performing for the people in the small boat to thank them for rescuing it from certain death.

One of the most compelling stories of cross-species, animal-to-animal empathy, is about Kuni, a female bonobo imprisoned at the Twycross Zoo in England. Kuni captured a starling and took the bird outside and placed it on its feet. When the bird did not move, Kuni tossed it in the air. When the starling did not fly, Kuni took it to the highest point in her enclosure, carefully unfolded its wings, and threw it in the air. The starling still did not fly, and Kuni then guarded and protected it from a curious juvenile. It seems clear that Kuni was taking the perspective of the bird.

Wolves and ravens are another example. Ravens enjoy living with wolf packs, and the wolf pups even engage the black birds in play. When large enemies such as grizzly bears approach, the ravens warn their four-legged friends. The wolves repay the debt by allowing their feathered partners to feed alongside them at their kills.

There's a small bird known as the honey bird, which likes to drink the honey. But it can't get past the fierce bees to get its tippie, so it has developed a relationship with the honey badger, a small, very aggressive mammal that also likes honey but which doesn't know where it is. The bird shows the badger where to find the honey, flying a little way ahead of it to guide it. The badger then raids the hive with its big claws, driving off the bees, so that both bird and badger can drink their fill. Some local people have learned to watch the badger and the honey bird to find the honey. And the bird has realized that people are faster and smarter than the badger, driving the bees off with smoke, and so the bird now calls to these people and takes them directly to the honey, bypassing the poor badger.

In contrast to the modern orthodoxy, researchers found that many kinds of environmental effects could be passed on to offspring, through a variety of mechanisms, some affecting gene expression and others influencing the

frequency of mutations or the dominance of varietal forms. One of their most surprising findings was that many organisms develop only through interactions with other species. A tiny Hawaiian squid, *Euprymna scolopes*, has become a model for thinking about this process. The bob-tailed squid is known for its light organ, through which it mimics moonlight, hiding its shadow from predators. But juvenile squid do not develop this organ unless they come into contact with one particular species of bacteria, *Vibrio fischeri*. The squid are not born with these bacteria; they must encounter them in the seawater. Without them, the light organ never develops.

But perhaps you think light organs are superfluous. Consider the parasitic wasp *Asobara tabida*. Females are completely unable to produce eggs without bacteria of the genus *Wolbachia*. Meanwhile, larvae of the Large Blue butterfly (*Maculinea arion*) are unable to survive without being taken in by an ant colony. Even we proudly independent humans are unable to digest our food without helpful bacteria, some first gained as we slide out of the birth canal. Ninety percent of the cells in a human body are bacteria. We can't do without them.

Almost all development may be codevelopment. By 'codevelopment' we refer to the ability of the cells of one species to assist the normal construction of the body of another species. This insight changes the unit of evolution. Some biologists have begun to speak of the "hologenome theory of evolution," referring to the complex of organisms and their symbionts as an evolutionary unit: the "holobiont." They find, for example, that associations between particular bacteria and fruit flies influence fruit fly mating choice, thus shaping the road to the development of a new species. More and more symbiosis appears to be the rule, not the exception. Nature may be selecting relationships rather than individuals or genomes.

Pen-tailed tree shrews are significant, because in addition to looking like the result of a raccoon mating with a pear, they're considered to be the spitting image of the first pre-primates, genetically speaking. And while these guys have a lot in common with our earliest ancestors, they also share something with Russian dockworkers; namely, the ability to put away nine or more drinks in a night without feeling it. The pen-tailed tree shrew lives its life like one giant bar crawl, with tree branches as its taps and fermenting palm nectar in lieu of craft beer. That nectar, colonized by naturally occurring air yeasts, can hit three to four percent alcohol by the time a shrew starts slurping it up. Nine beers seem like more than a tiny little rat-monkey should be able to handle without being too fucked-up to avoid danger. But the pen-tailed tree shrew takes its alcohol like a Yeltsin. The fact that the jungles of Malaysia aren't filled with drunken shrews falling from the sky and splattering on the ground is proof that alcohol doesn't

affect them quite the same way it affects us.

Visits to the bertam palm tavern benefit both the fuzzy little alcoholics and the tree itself. The tree shrews get open taps to binge on, and the palm gets a small, drunken army to help spread its pollen far and wide. The arrangement is dizzyingly complex: Yeasts feed off sugars in the nectar, and the brewery-like aroma of those fermenting sugars draws in tree shrews, sloths, and other animals.

Macrotermes termites digest their food only through the help of fungi. The termites chew up wood, but they cannot digest it. Instead, they build “fungus gardens” in which the chewed-up wood is digested by *Termitomyces* fungi, producing edible nutrients. While you might say that the termites farm the fungus, you could equally say that the fungus farms the termites. *Termitomyces* uses the environment of the termite mound to outcompete other fungi; meanwhile, the fungus regulates the mound, keeping it open, by throwing up mushrooms annually, creating a colony-saving disturbance in termite mound-building.

Many ectomycorrhizas are not limited to one collaboration; the fungus forms a network across plants. In a forest, fungi connect not just trees of the same species, but often many species. If you cover a tree in the forest, depriving its leaves of light and thus food, its mycorrhizal associates may feed it from the carbohydrates of other trees in the network.

Recently, scientists in the United Kingdom have demonstrated that the mycelia also protect plants from predators. When a plant is assaulted by aphids, it produces chemicals that repel them, as well as attract parasitic wasps that attack its attackers—the wasps lay their eggs in living aphids, which are then consumed from the inside out by emerging larvae. If the plant is connected via mycelia to other plants, those plants receive a chemical signal from their besieged comrade, and mount their own chemical defense before the first aphid arrives. Nearby plants that are not networked do not gear up for an attack.

Fungi can grow to be immense. A single *Armillaria ostoyae*—or honey mushroom—growing in Oregon covers 2,200 acres, or more than three square miles. It’s estimated to be 2,400 years old, and weighs more than six-hundred tons. For hundreds and then thousands of years, this fungus has lived below and at the surface of the soil. It has nurtured tree upon tree, forest upon forest. It has attended to the needs of these trees, the needs of this forest. It has fed them. It has witnessed fire and rain, snow and drought. It has been parent and child to this forest; lover and friend; killer, decomposer, creator. And through all of this it has built up the soil upon which all depend. Unfortunately, now it has also witnessed chain saws and clear-cuts. It has witnessed logging-induced destruction of soil. It has suffered herbicides and

fungicides. It has suffered logging roads that have cut it into pieces. It may very well be witnessing the end of the forest, the forest it has lived with and loved so well.

Many people think fungi are plants, but they are actually closer to animals. Fungi do not make their food from sunlight, as plants do. Like animals, fungi must find something to eat. Yet fungal eating is often generous: It makes worlds for others. This is because fungi have extracellular digestion. They excrete digestive acids outside their bodies to break down their food into nutrients. Nutrients are then absorbed into their cells, allowing the fungal body to grow—but also other species' bodies. The reason there are plants growing on dry land (rather than just in water) is that over the course of the earth's history fungi have digested rocks, making nutrients available for plants. Fungi, together with bacteria, made the soil in which plants grow. Fungi also digest wood. Otherwise, dead trees would stack up in the forest forever. Fungi break them down into nutrients that can be recycled into new life. Fungi are thus world builders, shaping environments for themselves and others.

Human bodies achieve a determinate form early in our lives. Barring injury, we'll never be all that different in shape than we were as adolescents. We can't grow extra limbs, and we're stuck with the one brain we've each got. In contrast, fungi keep growing and changing form all their lives. Fungi are famous for changing shape in relation to their encounters and environments. Many are potentially immortal, meaning they die from disease, injury, or lack of resources, but not from old age. Even this little fact can alert us to how much our thoughts about knowledge and existence just assume determinate life form and old age. We rarely imagine life without such limits—and when we do we stray into magic.

The idea of 'species' limits the stories we can tell about kinds. This binomial system of naming things is kind of quaint, but it is a complete artifact. You define things with two words and they become an archetypal species. In fungi, we have no idea what a species is.

A species is a group of organisms that potentially can exchange genetic material, have sex. That applies to organisms that reproduce sexually. So already in plants, where out of a clone you can have change as time goes by, you have problems with species. You move out of vertebrates to the cnidarians, corals, and worms, and the exchange of DNA and the way groups are made are very different from us. You go to fungi or bacteria, and the systems are completely different—completely crazy by our standards. A long-lived clone can all of a sudden go sexual: you can have hybridization in which whole big chunks of chromosomes are brought in; you have polyploidization or duplication of chromosomes, where a completely new thing comes out;

you have symbiotization, the capture of, say, a bacterium that allows you to either use the whole bacterium as part of yourself or use parts of that bacterium's DNA for your own genome. You've become something entirely different. Where do you break down the species?

For bees, having more diverse gut bacteria has been a successful evolutionary strategy. They were only able to evolve from their carnivorous wasp ancestors because they picked up new kinds of gut microbes that were able to extract energy from plant pollen. That allowed bees to become vegans. Beneficial bacteria provide bees with an insurance policy in times of food scarcity: they have no trouble digesting unfamiliar nectar from far-flung fields. More specialized digesters are not so well equipped. Times of crisis highlight the advantage of hosting a good microbial army. Bees with well-equipped gut flora can deal with parasite attacks better than those without. Gut bacteria are an incredibly important factor in this evolutionary survival strategy.

At a molecular level, bees' brains are quite similar to our own. It's not clear whether caffeine improves human memory. Some research indicates it doesn't, but when scientists recently looked at one very specific type of recall not carefully studied before, they found that it may be a memory booster after all. Intriguingly, the drug improves a kind of recollection we rely on for telling apart very similar but different objects, such as types of cars, hammers, or, ironically, flowers. It's pretty funny when you think about it. Caffeine is the most widely used drug in the world, and bees have been consuming it tens of millions of years before we showed up on the planet.

Even the simple animals are not the predictable automatons that they are often portrayed to be. Not even fruit flies, whose brains hold only 100,000 neurons; a cockroach, by contrast, has a million. If these small insects were mere reactive robots, then in a completely featureless room, they would move randomly. Some asshole glued them to small copper hooks and placed them in uniform white surroundings. Their flights were not random. Instead, they matched a mathematical algorithm for a pattern called the Lévy distribution. This search pattern is an effective way to find food, a method also known to be used by albatrosses, monkeys, and deer, and the flies made reasonable, not random, choices too. Scientists have found similar patterns in human behavior, in the flow of e-mails, letters, and money.

Flies even display individual variation in the choices they make. Most fruit flies typically move toward light when startled—but not all, and not with equal urgency. Harvard University researchers were surprised by the degree of individual variation the fruit flies in their laboratory showed—even among flies who were genetically identical. And like us, apparently fruit flies

make choices propelled by emotions like fear, elation, or despair. Another study found that male fruit flies, dejected after their sexual advances had been rejected by females, were 20 percent more likely to turn to drink (liquid food supplemented with alcohol in the laboratory) than males who had been sexually sated.

The platypus experiences more REM sleep—some fourteen hours a day—than any other known mammal.

In an intriguing parallel with human parents naming infants, green-rumped parrotlet parents name their young ones, who then use those given names to refer to themselves.

The spider-tailed horned viper of Iran wins big-time for the creepiest lure in nature. Think of a rattlesnake whose tail doesn't rattle, but instead looks just like a spider, with a bulb for an abdomen and little offshoots that look like legs. The well-camouflaged snake curls up and gives that tail a wag for hungry birds in the vicinity. When one takes the bait, the snake strikes, loading the poor bugger with venom. It isn't quite as fashionable as leg bristles, but then again, it's a spider-snake.

When it comes to mating songs, nothing on Earth can beat that of the lyrebird. When vying for the affections of the ladies, the male will pop his resplendent, almost peacock-like tail feathers over his head and prance around, all while belting an astonishing tune. It's part sci-fi laser, part high-pitched plucking of strings, and part impressions of other birds in the forest. In captivity, though, he'll imitate the surrounding cacophony: car alarms, drills and hammers (if he's in a zoo that's undergoing renovations), even camera shutters. It's all done so perfectly that it boggles the mind.

There are few gatherings more peculiar than those of the highly social pistol shrimp, which, as their name suggests, have evolved some of the most powerful weapons on Earth. Individually, they're intimidating, but as a group they make up armies and establish forts other creatures would be damned fools to try to conquer: These creatures form the sea's only monarchies, on par with the gatherings of ants on land. And their collective gunfire is deafening. The weapon responsible for all the racket is the pistol shrimp's enormous, grotesque-looking claw (only one—its other is a smaller pincer), which in some species can grow to half the length of the animal's body. By contracting certain muscles, the shrimp brings back one half of the snapper, which has a protruding bit known as a plunger, into a locked position while the second half, which has a socket, remains immobile. When the shrimp contracts another muscle, the two halves slam together, with the plunger striking the socket with so much force that water flies out of it at 105 feet per second. The impact forms what are known as cavitation bubbles, and when they collapse, they heat the surrounding water to 8,000 degrees

Fahrenheit and send out a shock wave so powerful that it can instantly kill prey. Strangely, it's not the impact of the claw itself that makes the noise, but the violent collapse of these bubbles.

We need to talk about the wasps. I don't mean the little yellow and black things that menaced your childhood summers. Those are lambs, quite frankly. No, I mean, in no particular order: the one with a sting so powerful a scientist who has experienced it recommends lying down and screaming until the pain subsides, lest you run around in a panic and hurt yourself; the one that stings a cockroach in its brain and drags the zombie into a den, where the wasp's larva devours it alive; the one that opts instead to inject caterpillars with its young, which consume the hapless crawler alive from the inside out. Wasps are unparalleled in their ability to inflict suffering on other creatures, insects who seemed so cruel to Charles Darwin that he insisted a beneficent creator could never have thought them up. But the thing is, in the animal kingdom, life in many instances sucks and then you die—as the saying goes. And out there, it's easy to die immediately. It's been that way for billions of years. For pretty much every creature (save humans), there's no slipping away peacefully in a comfy deathbed, because at any given moment some animal is trying to pull its head out of another animal's mouth. And I can guarantee you that something somewhere has a wasp larva consuming it from the inside out. Hell, a tree probably just fell on some kind of critter. A tree.

Many species of animals, especially insects, depend on stars to orient themselves when they travel at night. Moths, for instance, rely on the moon when they want to fly in a straight line. For example, when the moon is at its height and they want to fly west, all they have to do is keep the moon to their left. But moths can't tell the difference between the moon and a cozy lamp adding a decorative touch to a garden at night. Now, as the tiny, winged wanderer glides past the tulips and the roses, it immediately gets turned around. The brightest light at night must be the moon, mustn't it? And so it tries to keep this new moon to its left, but the lamp is unfortunately not 238,900 miles but only a few yards away. If the moth keeps flying in a straight line, the "moon" appears behind it, and it seems to the moth that it must have flown in a circle. And so the insect pilot corrects its course to the left to, as it thinks, continue flying straight ahead. This makes the "moon" appear on the correct side, but what's really happening is that the moth is flying in circles around the light. The spiraling flight takes the moth ever closer to the light until it finally ends up at the center. If the artificial moon is a candle, there's a brief 'puff,' and the moth's life is snuffed out.

But even without this dramatic finale, the moth is doomed. If it tries to fly a straight course all night and keeps ending up at the light, at some

point it will have exhausted its energy reserves. Its intent was to fly to night-blooming plants to fill up on nectar, but the few hours it has left to feed have morphed into an involuntary weight-loss program. And if that wasn't nightmare enough, predators have adapted their behavior to take advantage of the new normal. Spiders spin webs under the lights by our front door, because this is where they hit the jackpot. The moth starts its spiral flight around the light and continues until it inevitably lands on the sticky strands, where it is dispatched by the toxic teeth of the owner.

You might think creating something as complex as the satanic leaf-tailed gecko would be a drawn-out process that takes thousands or millions of years, and you'd be right. Evolution can take its sweet time with things. But then again, it can also progress with incredible speed. Take the peppered moth of Britain, a speckled creature adapted to hang tight on lichen-covered trees, thus avoiding birds. But it wasn't expecting the Industrial Revolution and the consequent pollution, which coated trees in soot. The peppered moth, though, would not fade quietly into extinction. It adapted, developing a darker coloration that was first observed in 1848. Just fifty years later, 98 percent of peppered moths were dark. And when clean-air laws took effect in the twentieth century, the moths went back to being speckled. The whole saga was evolution gone turbo. Predators were more likely to spot lighter moths when the environment became coated in soot; thus, the moths' darker counterparts prevailed and gave rise to soot-colored babies. When the habitat was clean again, dark moths struggled to survive; thus, lighter moths prevailed. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is an exceedingly rare pollution success story.

The stark differences in overwintering biology within one group of related animals shows that hibernation is less a strategy of avoiding the cold than of what they eat, of weathering famine.

The human animal is especially designed to be able to vomit. Other animals with this ability include apes, dogs, cats, pigs, fish, and birds. Those that are not able to vomit include mice, rats, guinea pigs, rabbits, and horses. Their esophagus is too long and narrow, and they lack the nerves that are so talented at vomiting. Animals that cannot vomit have to have different eating habits from ours. Rats and mice nibble at their food, biting off tiny pieces to test their suitability. They only continue to eat when they are sure the trial nibble has not done them any harm. If it turns out to be toxic, the most they suffer will be a bout of stomachache. They also learn not to eat it again. Furthermore, rodents are much better than us at breaking down toxins because their liver has more of the necessary enzymes. Horses, however, are not even able to nibble. If something bad ends up in their small intestine, the results can often be life threatening. So, really, we have reason

to be proud of our body's abilities whenever we find ourselves crouched over the toilet bowl throwing our guts up.

In the case of humans, knowledge of the harmful physical and psychological consequences of incest no doubt contributes to the prevalence of this taboo in most societies, but it's also a rarity in nature. Indeed, incest accounts for fewer than two percent of births in wild-animal populations. Scent, scientists began to think, might be nature's way of discouraging unfavorable biological pairings. Research suggests odor preferences do influence whom a person finds sexually attractive, but in a more complicated fashion than previously assumed. Among other things, it appears that such preferences can be altered by early life experiences. Strong support for this view comes from an experiment in which female mice were separated at birth from their own litters and placed in the litters of other mothers. Upon maturing, the females would not copulate with the unrelated males who nursed beside them on the same mother's nipples—their adopted brothers, if you will. In a reversal of the natural order, they chose to mate with their own genetic brothers. This suggests the scents of those who surround us when we're young leave a lasting imprint on the brain, defining our sense of kin and the kinds of odors we will later find sexually enticing. Nature's rule of thumb might be summed up thus: If he or she smells like someone you grew up with, look elsewhere for a sexual partner.

A chimpanzee female named Tina was killed by a bite to the neck by a leopard. She'd been living in a community of chimpanzees for quite a long time. The group didn't just pull at her body or tug at it or ignore it. Rather, the dominant male of the group sat with her body for five hours. He kept away all the other infants and protected the body from any harm with one exception. He let through the younger brother of Tina, a five year-old called Tarzan. That's the only youngster who was allowed to come forward. And the youngster sat at his sister's side and pulled on her hand and touched her body. The dominant male was able to recognize the close emotional bond between Tina and Tarzan, and he acted empathically.

Shamans and seekers eat mushrooms, drink potions, lick toads, inhale smoke, and snort snuff to transport their minds to realms they cannot normally experience. Humans are not alone in this endeavor; species from elephants to monkeys purposely eat fermented fruit to get drunk; dolphins were recently discovered sharing a certain toxic puffer fish, gently passing it from one cetacean snout to another, as people would pass a joint, after which the dolphins seem to enter a trance-like state.

Pause to ponder the metaphysics: an elk running for its life is converted to wolf flesh and wolf bone and wolf nerve whose dedication becomes chasing elk who run for their lives to avoid the fate that is pursuing them, a fate

built entirely from creatures just like themselves.

Such traits are clever only in retrospect. Design in nature is but a concatenation of accidents, culled by natural selection until the result is so beautiful or effective as to seem a miracle of purpose.

Chapter Thirty-four

Horror Highlight Reel

“I reached the old wolf in time to watch the fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and the mountain. I was young then and full of trigger-itch: I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter’s paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.”

A particularly cruel but effective method was used to hunt whales. First they harpooned young calves to mortally wound them, knowing the mothers would stay close to their injured young, and the harpooner could then kill her.

The most disturbing and deplorable aspect of nineteenth-century encounters with polar bears was a perverse manipulation of the bond between a female and her cubs, a common amusement of sailors aboard whaling and sealing ships. William Scoresby tells of an incident involving walrus hunters who had set fire to a pile of blubber to attract bears. A female and two cubs drew near. The female settled her cubs at a short distance and then started trying to hook pieces of blubber out of the fire. The men watched from the safety of the deck as she fought with the flames. They threw her small bits of blubber, which she took to the cubs. As she approached them with the last piece, the men shot the two cubs dead. For the next half hour she “laid her paws first upon one, and then the other, and endeavored to raise them up.” She walked off and called to them, she licked their wounds. She went off again and “stood for some time moaning” before returning to paw them “with signs of inexpressible fondness.” Bored, or perhaps mortified, the men shot the female and left her on the ice with her cubs.

Xenopus laevis, is an aquatic, claw-toed frog that was used for pregnancy tests in women; when injected with urine from pregnant women, the frog would begin ovulating. When this was discovered in 1934, the frogs were caught by the tens of thousands in the wild and shipped around the world.

Over a period of forty years, feral populations of *X. laevis* were established in Britain, the United States, and Chile.

A male wolf called “Las Margaritas” had lost two toes on his left front foot from an encounter with a trap. In the late 1960s, he was killing dozens of yearling steers and heifers on ranches along the Durango-Zacatecas border.

“The wolf seldom used the same trail twice and if he came into a pasture by a log road, he left by a cow trail. I was sure I could catch Las Margaritas, but I couldn’t get him near a trap.”

A hunter tried baited traps and blind traps, traps boiled in oak leaves, and traps concealed in carefully sifted dirt. Nothing worked. Over months of intensive effort, he had managed to get the wolf close to a trap just four times. He traveled thousands of miles on horseback trying to understand the animal’s uncanny ability to elude him.

“Almost a year had passed and I was now convinced that I would never catch this wolf. Just how the wolf could tell the traps were there is something I cannot comprehend to this date.”

At times, however, he had noticed that Margaritas had paused at campfires along the road, places log-truck drivers had stopped along the way to cook.

“I set a trap near a road that the wolf was sure to come down if it continued to kill in the area, built a fire over the trap and let it burn itself out.”

The hunter put a piece of dried skunk hide in the ashes from the fire and waited. One day in March, the wolf caught wind of the setup and went to investigate. The trap caught him by his crippled foot.

In 2006 a German conservation group carried out a census of the hippos in Virunga Park. What they found shocked them and the global conservation community. Where the previous census had found more than 30,000 hippos, one of the largest and healthiest hippo populations on earth, this time they could find only 629 animals. The researchers flew in small planes to count the hippos along the shore of Lake Edward and the rivers that feed it, but instead of the expected hippo herds they saw Mai Mai rebels killing and butchering animals, and heaps of dismembered carcasses spread along the shore. It was slaughter on an industrial scale using machine guns and grenade launchers. Soldiers hacked out the teeth to sell as ivory, and long lines of enslaved porters carried away haunches of hippo meat to sell in town and village markets outside the park. Elephants and buffalo coming to the

shore to drink were also killed and butchered. The lake turned red with blood and stained the shoreline.

Whale sharks are being hunted for their large dorsal fins, which are used as billboards outside restaurants in Asia to advertise shark-fin soup.

I'll tell you the image I can't get out of my head. It's of a mother pig confined to a tiny crate, suckling her children. And singing to her children. Human supremacists have stolen her freedom, but they've not been able to steal her capacity to love. And humans—the ones who put her in the cage—are superior?

Here's another image I can't get out of my head. It's of a mother dolphin singing to her child. But they are both dying. Here's why. Mother dolphins nurse their young for eighteen months, longer than many humans. The mother dolphins love their children with fierceness and loyalty. Even when a baby dolphin is caught in a tuna net, the mother will often not abandon the child, but move in close, and comfort and sing to her baby until both are drowned in the net. Fishing companies acknowledge that most of the dolphins they kill are children and their mothers, who will not leave them even unto death.

A dead dolphin rots in the shore weeds; an oil-stained gull stands atop its corpse. The shore is littered with oiled marine creatures, some dead, others struggling.

“When we found this dolphin, it was the saddest darn thing to look at. There is a lot of cover-up for BP. They specifically informed us that they don't want these pictures of the dead animals. They keep trying to clean themselves. They try and they try, but they can't do it. Some of the things I've seen would make you sick. Nature is cruel, but what's happening here is crueler. No living creature should endure that kind of suffering.

A photo makes it look like one area. Until you get up here and see that it's as far as you can see in all directions. You can't get that in a picture.”

“Two weeks into the spill, we were at Pelican Island fishing under birds in about five feet of water, which is a common way of fishing this time of year. And a dolphin kept coming around. Its body was covered in that brownish oil, that tannish-colored crude. And he was trying to blow out his blowhole, and he was struggling. Porpoises scare fish, so I moved off a hundred yards. It followed. I kept doing that and it kept coming back, coming to us, hanging right alongside the boat. That's very

unusual. They're pretty intelligent, and it seemed to want help. But eventually I had to leave."

Leaning back against a red buoy, he began his tale. Not long before he had learned that a village on Kolombangara Island, Ghizo's next-door neighbor, had captured a pod of bottlenoses.

"They have a cove. It's much bigger than Gavutu. The dolphins swim in naturally, that's what they do. Now the villagers have realized that dolphins are worth a lot of money. This dolphin trade business—they've heard about it. So when this pod came in they closed off the entrance. And they held them there for almost a month, captive. When I heard about that, I straightaway went down there."

He arrived at Kolombangara and found fourteen dolphins, only half alive. Others had already died. The villagers hadn't fed them: they'd fully expected someone to show up promptly with wads of cash and whisk the dolphins away to the airport. He spent a week negotiating with the community. He was threatened and menaced; the people were not willing to let the dolphins go without a payout.

As he described that time, his shoulders began to tremble. Each day, he would go to the lagoon and see the dolphins languishing and feel powerless to help them.

"The people denied the very fact that they were suffering. I walked down to the water and this little calf came straight to me. He lay on my hands. I could see a lot of bruises on him. You could smell it, his body was infected."

He paused to collect himself, but tears had begun to roll down his cheeks.

"I spent eighteen minutes in the water with him. I was crying. I was crying in the water and I was shouting. The little one came with a message. He told me that I have to do something. Do something so that my family doesn't suffer as I am suffering. He came to me for his last breaths. Then he died in my arms."

He walked out of the ocean holding the dead calf, and, with the full force of his emotions, demanded that the villagers release the rest of the dolphins. The next day, they did. He took the calf, whom he had named Little Jacob, back to Ghizo and froze his body. On this next trip, he would bury the dolphin in a gravesite a local landowner had donated.

“Now I tend to believe that yes, dolphins do have feelings. They knew that I was trying to fight for their lives. They knew it.”

Let’s toast the memory of Buddha the Orangutan—a.k.a. Clyde—who co-starred with Clint Eastwood in the movie *Every Which Way But Loose*. On the set, Buddha simply stopped working one day. He refused to perform his silly routines any more and his trainer repeatedly clubbed him in the head with a hard cane in front of the crew. One day near the end of filming Buddha snatched some doughnuts from a table on the set. The ape was seized by his irate keeper, taken back to his cage and beaten to death with an ax handle. The axe handle that killed him was affectionately called, by his Gentle Jungle owners, the “Buddha club.” Buddha’s name was not listed in the film’s credits.

Some vivisectionists adopted a routine precaution: at the outset of an experiment they would sever the vocal cords of the animal on the table, so that it could not bark or cry out during the operation. This is a significant action, for in doing it the physiologist was doing two other things: he was denying his humanity, and he was affirming it. He was denying it in that he was able to cut the vocal cords and then pretend the animal could feel no pain, that it was merely the machine Descartes claimed it to be. But he was also affirming his humanity in that, had he not cut the cords, the desperate cries of the animal would have told him what he already knew, that it was a sentient, feeling being, and not a machine at all.

That act is an appropriate metaphor for the creation of a biological scientist out of a nature-lover. The rite of passage into the scientific way of being centers on the ability to apply the knife to the vocal cords, not just of the dog on the table, but of life itself. Inwardly, he must be able to sever the cords of his own consciousness. Outwardly, the effect must be the destruction of the larynx of the biosphere, an action essential to the transformation of the world into a material object subservient to the laws of classical physics. In effect, he must deny life in order to study it.

The scientific establishment makes it very difficult for people to manifest their love of the world.

In the earlier centuries of the Western world, before Charles Darwin persuaded people to respect monkeys as our close relations, they were generally looked down on as evil, wicked creatures, or as obscene hairy brutes, or the epitome of foolishness, motivated by the outlandish presumption that they can pass themselves off as human beings. Indeed, it is true to say that in the past they have suffered more from mankind’s exaggerated sense of his own superiority than any other kind of animal.

In ancient Rome the monkey was used as a token of humiliation in the punishment of individuals who had killed their fathers. The culprit was whipped, then sewn up in a sack with a monkey and various other animals and thrown in the Tiber or the sea to drown. The monkey was included in this terrible punishment because, as an ugly caricature of man, it was a suitable companion for those who had murdered their own flesh and blood.

One entertainment of sixteenth-century London was the Bear Garden. In front of cheering crowds, a monkey dressed in a little suit would appear on horseback. Then out would come an angry pack of bulldogs or mastiffs trained to attack the poor monkey. The sorry horse was attacked by the dogs as well but could last for quite a while, at least until the bears were sent in. Then, to the delight of the crowd, the horse, the dogs, and the little monkey (if he was still alive) all quickly became shrieking, thrashing, and bloody bear food.

Scientists have long used rhesus macaques in psychological research. In the 1950s, a sadistic shitbag named Harry Harlow performed a series of shocking studies on the monkeys. In one, he took newborn macaques and placed them in cages occupied by two artificial mothers. The first mother was made of chicken wire and was painful to hug; the other was covered with a soft cloth. Harlow attached a bottle of warm milk to the chicken-wire mother and left the fuzzy one milkless. He observed that some infant macaques preferred cuddling with the furry mother even if it meant denying themselves milk.

In another experiment, he placed macaques in a device he called the Pit of Despair, which extinguished virtually all external stimuli, including light. Then, after weeks or months or even years inside, he released them back into the company of their peers. He found that the longer they'd stayed in the pit, the more socially maladjusted they had become. Many of the formerly isolated female monkeys had lost all desire to mate, which was a problem for Harlow, as he wanted to see if their mothering instincts had also been affected. His solution was to build another device, which he chose to call the Rape Rack—because why not? He found that the females who had endured the trauma of both the Pit of Despair and the Rape Rack tended to become neglectful or even severely abusive mothers.

During the 1960s, American scientists conducted a series of experiments on monkeys which simulated extreme rear-end collisions, in the hope of then being able to discover the precise way in which these accidents damaged neck tissue. Too many of these caused paralysis or brain damage to the monkeys, without doing much to unravel the mystery of whiplash in humans.

Today, thousands of monkeys, mostly rhesus macaques and green monkeys, are subjected annually to painful laboratory experiments. The number

used each year in the United States is about 60,000; in Europe it is about 10,000. Animal welfare organizations have recently demanded a complete ban on this research, a move that has been met with horror by the medical community. Those demanding a ban argue that the extreme cruelty involved cannot be justified with such intelligent and sensitive animals. They attack the argument that monkeys must be used because they are so close to humans that results obtained from them can be applied to us. They point out that, if the monkeys are that close, then the procedures performed upon them are tantamount to torture.

Most primates are not used in experiments that study the diseases that kill most Americans. Projects that study primate psychology, alcohol and addictive drugs, brain-mapping, and sex in primates far outnumber studies involving heart disease or cancer. According to one report, 20,000 monkeys are imported into the United States annually for use in toxicity tests—tests that result in the deaths of the monkeys. Details of these tests are not made available to the public, and animal rights activists have taken to employing undercover agents to obtain these details.

This is how human medical research works: at the expense of other creatures.

In June of 2006, researchers reported in the journal *Science* the first unequivocal evidence for empathy between adult non-primate mammals. It was demonstrated that mice suffer distress when they watch a cagemate experience pain. Assholes injected one or both members of a pair of adult mice with acetic acid, which causes a severely painful burning sensation. The researchers discovered that mice who watched their cagemates in pain were more sensitive to pain themselves. A mouse injected with acid writhed more violently if his or her partner had also been injected and was writhing in pain. Not only did the mice who watched cagemates in distress become more sensitive to the same painful stimuli, they became generally more sensitive to pain, showing a heightened reaction, for example, to heat under their paws. The researchers speculated that mice probably used visual cues to generate the empathic response, which is interesting since mice normally rely most heavily on olfactory communication.

While not explicitly the focus of the experiment, it can be noted that the effect did not seem to cross the species barrier. The humans never seemed to become more sensitive or empathetic despite witnessing numerous painful responses.

The presence of another, less-traumatized mouse made it easier for the test subject to endure the pain. What was important was how long the mice had known each other. There were clear effects of empathy if the animals had been together for more than fourteen days, which is typical for wild

wood mice in Central European woodlands.

But how do mice communicate amongst themselves? How do they know another mouse is suffering and experiencing a private hell? To find this out, the researchers blocked their senses one after the other: sight, hearing, smell, and taste. And although mice like to communicate using smell and make shrill ultrasonic calls when alarmed, surprisingly enough, in the case of empathy, it is the sight of suffering companions that triggers their response.

Stressed individuals are less affected by the suffering of others. Strangers themselves are often the cause of this stress, and the sight of them releases the hormone cortisol. To verify this, researchers carried out another experiment, this time using a drug that blocked the production of cortisol in both students and mice, and feelings of empathy increased again.

Recently, scientists discovered that some species of mice love to sing. They fill the air with trills so high-pitched that most humans can't even hear them. If the melody is sweet enough, at least to the ears of a female mouse, the vocalist soon finds himself with a companion. Mice, like songbirds, have to be taught how to sing. This is culture, passed from generation to generation. If they aren't taught, they can't sing. So, what is the response by scientists to these mice, who love to sing, who teach each other how to sing, who sing for their lovers, who have been compared to opera singers? Given what the ideology of human supremacism does to people who otherwise seem sane, we shouldn't be surprised to learn that the scientists wanted to find out what would happen if they surgically deafened these mice. And we shouldn't be surprised to learn that the mice could no longer sing their operas, their love songs. The deafened mice could no longer sing at all. Instead, they screamed.

In response to the difficulty of motivating the animals, some researchers have used negative reinforcement—electric shocks—more freely than they would with other animals. Quite a lot of the early work done in the Naples Zoological Station treated octopuses badly. Not only were electric shocks used, but many experiments included the removal of parts of the octopus's brain, or the cutting of important nerves, just to see what the octopus would do when it woke up. Until recently, octopuses could also be operated on without anesthetic. As invertebrates, they were not covered by animal cruelty rules. Many of these early experiments make for distressing reading for someone who regards octopuses as sentient beings. Over the last decade, however, octopuses have often been listed as a kind of 'honorary vertebrate' in rules governing their treatment in experiments, especially in the European Union. How thoughtful.

If you take a lizard from his home, put him in a cage, and present him with a mirror, what the fuck do you want him to do with it? Let's turn this

around and see how you feel about it.

You're sitting in your home, minding your own business, when suddenly several unbelievably ugly creatures burst in. They throw a net over you and begin dragging you out the door. Members of your family rush to save you, and the unbelievably ugly creatures kill them with casual swats. You see one member of your family huddling in a corner, making sounds of terror you did not know humans could make. Another casual swat and the sounds stop. The net is hauled outside, and you are put into some sort of container. You feel the container being lifted, and then lifted, and lifted.

It takes what seems like hours for you to realize that what you've read about in the tabloids and bad science fiction novels has happened to you: you've been abducted by aliens. The aliens take you to their ship, and over the next days and weeks and endless months they perform tests on you. Do you think your behavior will be the same on their ship as it was in your home, with your family? Do you think your behavior will ever again be the same? And what if these aliens put something in your room, some thing you'd never seen before they brought you to this terrible place? Here, in this alien prison, you've seen them preening before it, and making gawdawful faces at it—at least you think those are their faces—and now they're staring at you—at least you think they're staring, and you think those are eyes. You look at this thing more closely. They evidently see—perceive is probably a better word, since you don't think those are eyes after all—themselves in it, but frankly their senses must be different than yours, because you don't see what's so great about it. Frankly it's creepy. But then again, so is everything about this place.

Because you failed to respond as they wished to this new device the aliens put into your cage, the aliens decide—quite rightly, according to their evidence and their belief system—that all you humanbeast-machines (as one of their philosophers puts it) lack self-awareness. At some point the aliens realize how important vision is to you, and that you see with your eyes. So in order to further their understanding of human behavior, and of course in order to get further grants, they surgically blind you. Sitting in the eternal dark of your cage in some unfathomably huge complex, unimaginably far from your home and from those you love—those who may be still alive among those you love—for some reason you remember an article you read years ago. It was about mice who love to sing, and about what happened to these mice, about how they were put in cages, about what scientists did to them then. Day after day—or at least you think it's day after day, since in your cell and in your own private darkness there is never any natural indication of the passage of time—you obsess about this article. But for the life of you, you can't figure out why it is so important to you.

How did we get so cruel? We forgot. We forgot our responsibility. And we forgot that we are as equal as any living thing within the chain. There's no hierarchy in this. Nah. We are part of the same family: living things. All the rest of it is just totally fucking bullshit.

Chapter Thirty-five

Resistance & Rebellion

There is not an organism on Earth which believes its life is for others to take.

“Until the lion has his historian, the hunter will always be a hero.”

—African Proverb

“These animals are generating profit. And I wish every species in the world would generate the level of profit these animals are for their companies. If that were the case we’d do more to protect them.”

Chunee was London’s first star pachyderm attraction. Born in Bengal, this male elephant arrived to the isle in 1810 and, for the next sixteen years, entertained the people of England. Princess Victoria, before she became Queen and paraded on the back of Jumbo, first marveled at the mighty Chunee. English writers, it seems, had a particular fascination with the creature. Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, and Robert Browning each paid Chunee regular visits. Lord Bryon might have been his biggest fan of all. But it was not just the privileged and intelligentsia who were attracted to this elephant. Everyone wanted to see the famous Chunee: rich or poor, man or woman, adult or child. Even those living in rural England would make the occasional long pilgrimage into the city, in order to cast their eyes upon this giant beast.

Chunee resided at the Royal Menagerie. Opening in 1773 as a seasonal rest stop for circus animals, the Menagerie would eventually develop into a full-time zoo and remain in business for the next six decades, until closing in 1829. Over the course of these many years, a series of individuals and families owned the small zoo. First, it was owned by the Pidcock family. Then it was acquired by the Italian Polito brothers, Stephen followed by John. The final owner was Edward Cross, who was himself a former employee. Yet, throughout all of these changes, the function and operations of the zoo

remained essentially the same. The menagerie was, from the outset, a private enterprise designed to produce a profit. It provided entertainment at a low cost, and its audience was the general public. At the end of Cross's tenure, for instance, he charged an admissions fee of one or two shillings, depending on what attractions the individual visitor wanted to see. Moreover, as opposed to the Regent Park Zoo, which was at the time exclusive in its admittance policy and elitist in its mission, Cross carried on the tradition of catering to all people, regardless of class. Anyone who could afford the cost of a ticket was welcome through its gates.

The menagerie was housed inside of a large commercial structure. Known as the Exeter Exchange, the building was situated in the central part of the city on the Strand. Bizarrely, the menagerie did not sit on the ground floor of the building. Instead it occupied an upper story. This must have made for an awkward, if not precarious, arrangement, as accommodating a group of animals in the upper section of any structure, let alone one constructed in the seventeenth century, was probably not the wisest of decisions. This was especially the case with an adult, male elephant. For not only must it have been difficult to deal with the logistics of holding or moving a creature that weighed several tons and had several yards of girth, but what would happen if he ever got mad and started charging around the place? The Menagerie, for its part, recognized the danger involved and it tried to resolve these issues by having an enclosure specifically designed and built with the grown-up Chune in mind. This new cage, management hoped, would be strong enough to both support the elephant's weight and withstand any struggles.

As for the rest of the captive animals, they were exhibited alongside the walls in small, cramped cages. These cages were stacked on top of one another in a building-block arrangement. Tigers sat atop lions. New-world monkeys perched over old-world monkeys. All were camouflaged behind a maze of iron bars. None of this was particularly aesthetic, as the place had the feel and look of a warehouse more than anything. These types of displays were typical for the era. Museums and menageries often had large collections and very little concern for interpretation. Hence they would cram as many objects and specimens as they could into a singular exhibition. This arrangement, as overwhelming and unintelligible as it would appear to modern eyes, did not seem to bother nineteenth-century visitors. Regardless, such an environment could not have been a pleasant experience for the animals who had to live inside the cramped enclosures. There was no room to move, let alone to run, swing, or fly. Air circulation and proper sanitation were not concerns of the zoo. And external simulation, with the exception of looking at the audience, was something that was never going to be realized

by the captives of the Royal Menagerie.

Despite all of this, Chunee appeared, at least on the surface, to be remarkably well-adjusted. Many a visitor commented on his mellow disposition. He was an amicable, if not particularly affectionate, elephant. Chunee even performed a few tricks. There was one in particular that everyone loved. It involved him reaching out with his trunk and taking off a man's hat, which he would then pull back into his enclosure. Was the purloined going to be kept there? Would Chunee destroy it? Alas, after a brief minute, he returned the cap and placed it gently atop the gentleman's head. Well-done!

Sometimes, however, the trick did not go quite as planned. Chunee would smash an occasional hat. He would cover others with his dung and place them back on unsuspecting owners. He could be rough in the return process, leaving the visitor with a bruised head. Or he could just plain refuse to do the trick—no matter how hard his handler tried to make him perform. Indeed, Chunee could certainly be disobedient when he wanted to. He could even be deadly.

The first serious incident happened in 1815 when Chunee attempted to kill his handler, Alfred Copps. Copps was, at time, inside of the enclosure. He might have been training the elephant or just cleaning the cage; we do not know. But something set Chunee off, and Copps bore the brunt of his fury. Backing the man into a corner, Chunee rushed straight ahead with his tusks pointing outward. Remarkably, when the dust settled, the elephant saw that he had missed his target. The man remained alive, pinned against the wall with a tusk resting on either side of his body. Copps must have breathed a sigh of relief; that is, until he saw Chunee's trunk coming down fast upon him. In between the blows, the handler must have been cursing himself for ever taking that job. In the end, he survived the beating but only because Edward Cross intervened at the last second and created a diversion with a well-placed thrust of a pitchfork into Chunee's backside. Copps chose never to return to the Menagerie.

The next man in line for the job was George Dyer. By all accounts, Dyer was a particularly wicked trainer, who enjoyed using a twelve foot spear as his vicious method of encouragement. Yet Chunee was never without recourse. If Dyer stuck him in the side, he could always respond with a spray of dirty water or a strike of his trunk. Once Chunee hit the handler square across the face, breaking Dyer's nose. So powerful was the blow that physicians were unable to set the nose in a proper manner, thus leaving the man permanently disfigured. Fights between Chunee and Dyer became so bad that the owner was forced to hire an assistant. Cross wisely selected someone with experience.

This was John Taylor, and he definitely knew a thing or two about the

animal business. Not only had Taylor spent much of his adult life working with captive animals, but he paid a steep price in gaining this experience by having an arm chewed off years earlier by a circus lion. Despite this gruesome injury, Taylor returned to the profession and remained congenial towards other creatures. In fact, Taylor was a strong advocate of non-physical training methods. No animal, he believed, should be abused. This enlightened philosophy differed markedly from Dyer's brutal way of thinking, and Taylor often complained to Edward Cross about these differences. So bitter did the infighting become between the two men that Cross got sick of hearing about it and fired both of them.

Chunee's next handler was Richard Carter. He, like Dyer, preferred an aggressive, violent approach to elephant management. Using a long, razor-sharp spear, Carter was determined to keep the elephant in line and retain his job. But Cross was not so confident. He believed that, in addition to physical force, a new means of control was needed. Cross ordered the staff to begin the drugging of Chunee. These experimental psychiatric dosages, in combination with large quantities of ale, would, Cross hoped, keep the menagerie's prized exhibit in a calm, malleable state. But the daily doses of booze and drugs didn't sedate the embittered elephant.

By late 1825, Chunee was out of control and literally tearing the place to pieces. He rammed against the walls. He butted against the beams. He pounded the ceiling, sending pieces of it flying everywhere. The specially-engineered enclosure was failing, and Cross thought that the entire building itself might collapse. The final straw came when Chunee gored an assistant, killing the man. Cross decided that the elephant must be put to the death.

At first, the staff tried using poison. They mixed it in the elephant's daily feed and waited for the inevitable. But Chunee just stood there, refusing to eat. Next, they bought several of his favorite treats, hot buns, and injected one of them with the deadly toxin. Chunee, as always, greeted the perquisite with a cursory sniff before commencing with the snack. He ate them all. All, that is, except the poisoned one. The would-be assassins then tried to trick the elephant by having an innocent-looking visitor present the buns. But Chunee did not buy that either. The Menagerie was forced to devise another method of execution.

Cross enlisted the help of the Metropolitan police. The following day, three constables arrived to the Exeter Exchange with their rifles. Cross led the men upstairs and lined them in front of Chunee's gated enclosure. The men aimed and opened fire.

"I expected to see him fall. Instead of which he made a sharp hissing noise, and struck heavily at us with his trunk and

tried to make after us, and would have but for the formidable double-edged spear blades of the keepers.”

Chunee was tougher than anyone had expected. This was going to take some time, and Cross needed advice. Besides a hunter, he wondered, who would best know how to kill such an animal?

Cross settled on a physician and sent an employee to gather one. When the medical doctor showed up, he directed as to where best to shoot the beast in order to quicken the kill. Yet Chunee refused to be a stationary target. As the constables fired, the elephant kept moving from side to side and front to back, and avoided being hit in the vital areas. Growing increasingly desperate, Cross sent another employee to Somerset House. Perhaps, he thought, professional soldiers would have better aim.

With fourteen of them standing at the gates of the enclosure, they too opened fire. But Chunee still would not fall. Indeed, the scene itself had descended into a kind of nightmare, with blood in the cage rising to an almost ankle-deep level. This execution, Cross bristled, had to come to an end, and he ordered for more powerful rifles and ammunition. The soldiers, once re-armed, began shooting again. When this appeared to fail, Cross called in for a cannon. It was not to be needed. The 152nd musket ball finished the deed, and Chunee died.

Jumbo had now entered into adolescence. Modern zoologists call this developmental period: musth (Hindi word for madness). And they define it as a phase of glandular secretion, higher testosterone-levels, and heightened sexual arousal. In other words, this is a case of over-active and uncontrollable hormones; otherwise known as “heat.” One would have hoped that the fields of natural science would have moved beyond the seventeenth century and biological determinism. But to no avail.

Non-physiological factors—such as captivity, poor labor-conditions, brutal training methods, or the grind of the entertainment industry—do not matter. Intellectual maturity and independence of mind are not considered. Rebellious attitudes and vengeful emotions do not exist. Freedom, or the desire for autonomy, is something that an elephant could never imagine. Agency is a non-concept.

But Jumbo was no scientist, and he certainly did not see himself as a machine. Resistance was his new thought. He flew into terrible rages. He tried repeatedly to escape. He hurled his body against his enclosure. On one occasion, while attempting to ram his fearsome tusks through the iron-doors of his exhibition cage, Jumbo injured himself so severely that surgery was required. Matthew Scott oversaw the procedure and, as usual, was able to calm the giant beast. The keeper’s most successful method to soothe the

elephant's nerves actually involved supplying Jumbo with large quantities of beer. This even became a ritual between the two: drinking time. Once, when the trainer forgot to give Jumbo his share of the nightly brew, he was slammed to the floor by the thirsty giant. Scott never made that mistake again.

Yet, there were times—increasing in number as the years wore on—when inebriation did not work to quiet the elephant. It reached a point where Regent Park directors lived in constant fear of what Jumbo might do next. So afraid did they become that the principle director purchased an elephant gun for the protection of the zoo and its employees. If a fight ever got completely out of hand, Jumbo would be shot dead.

It is notable how many alcoholic handlers there have been over the years. Circuses seem to be full of them. Perhaps, this is a sign of how lax the industry is in its hiring practices. Or, possibly, all of the drunkards are a symptom of a larger problem: elephant training itself was and is a morally corrupt enterprise.

P.T. Barnum's American circus, promoted as the Greatest Show on Earth, was lacking a center piece—that truly grand figure among other great spectacles. Barnum's archrival, the Cooper and Bailey's Allied Show, had its star: the baby Columbia. She was the first elephant ever born in captivity in the United States, and Barnum had made many bids to purchase her. But the Allied Show refused to sell. So Barnum did the next best thing, luring James Bailey to his side, and then went right on searching for another big-time celebrity. He soon found what he was looking for in London. This was Jumbo, a true icon with enough star power to fill his big top every night of the week. Barnum offered the zoo \$10,000 for the elephant.

The Regent Park directors were elated. This was a lot of money, and Jumbo had simply grown too dangerous to keep. He had to be sold. The zoo, however, was not prepared for the sheer scale of negative publicity that it would receive regarding this move. The British public was outraged at the idea of shipping Jumbo off to the States. Thousands of children wrote letters to the Queen in protest. Lawsuits were filed to block the sale. Newspapers openly vilified park administrators. Yet, the zoo would not be swayed from its decision.

In the spring of 1882, patrons funneled in to catch one last glimpse of Jumbo and wave good-bye. Crowds of this size had never before been seen at Regents Park, and the zoo itself profited handsomely from this planned farewell, pocketing \$40,000 in ticket sales alone. But the final day did come, and the elephant was escorted from his exhibit area and led onto the main grounds. The original plan was to load Jumbo into a large container, which would then be paraded through the London streets. The journey would end

at a Thames quay for shipping. This plan, though, proved to be a far more difficult to carry out than first imagined. For Jumbo declined to enter the container.

Matthew Scott, his trainer, tried every technique he could think of to coax the huge elephant into the crate. But each time, Jumbo would approach, stop short, and proceed to lie down on the ground. After that, there was no budging him. As the days passed and embarrassment mounted, the London press declared that this delay was a testament to the fact that the elephant did not want to leave England. Barnum was not amused, and his agent in London grew impatient. The circus's chief handler was sent for. William Neuman, otherwise known as Elephant Bill, was Barnum's most notorious and brutal trainer. Instead of offering a gallon of pale ale, Elephant Bill opted for a spear-like lance as his primary motivational tool. After his trip across the Atlantic, Neuman set to work straightaway at the reconditioning of Jumbo.

At first, the trainer tried more gentle means of persuasion: verbal commands, pushing, prodding. But none of these were successful. Next, he fitted the elephant with leg chains and pulled on the beast. This method too failed. Jumbo just flatly refused to enter the container. Neuman then pulled out his trusty lance and began using the weapon, but the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals intervened and put a stop to the stabbings. Neuman was furious: both at this level of oversight, which would have never happened in the US, and at his own inability to quell Jumbo's recalcitrance. It was rumored that the American trainer even threatened to shoot the elephant, if that was the only way to get the animal to Barnum. Ultimately the use of lethal force was not needed, as Scott was finally able to convince Jumbo to walk into the crate. Some speculated that Scott himself was partially responsible for this delay, as he wanted to demonstrate his own self-importance.

Nevertheless, after chaining the elephant into place, the trainers found themselves in trouble once again. Jumbo had abruptly changed his mind about the move and began to struggle with all his might, straining the iron chains and quaking the thick bars of the wheeled enclosure. But it was of no use. Not even the world's largest elephant could break free this time. Jumbo was taken out of Regents Park and transported down the Thames to the coast. From there, the elephant was hoisted onboard the HMS Assyrian Monarch for his long awaited trip across the Atlantic.

There are several versions of events that unfolded on September 15, 1885: the night that Jumbo the elephant was killed. Each begins in a similar manner. The circus was in St. Thomas, a small town located in the southern region of the province. The final performance had just ended. Tom and

Jumbo were in the process of being led back to their respective train cars by Matthew Scott. While all three were walking along the tracks, the sound of a fast approaching freight train could be heard in the distance. It is at this point where the stories diverge.

One version has Scott, heroically but unsuccessfully, attempting to lead the elephants to safety by guiding them down a shallow embankment that bordered one side of the tracks. Another has the trainer scrambling off on his own, leaving the pair of elephants to their own devices. In both scenarios, the first to be hit by the locomotive was tiny Tom Thumb. Tossed into the air like a rag-doll, he crashed into a nearby pole and sustained serious, but not life-threatening, injuries. Tom, years later, would be sold to the Central Park Zoo in New York City, where he would spend the rest of his days. Jumbo was the next to be struck.

It happened in one of three ways. The first account has the elephant initially following Scott down the embankment. However, Jumbo got confused or scared by the on-coming train, raced back up onto the tracks, and was hit from behind. Another has Jumbo rushing along the tracks. He was apparently looking for a gap in the line of stationary train-cars, which bordered the opposite side. But he missed the opening, and, when he doubled back, the train smashed into him. A third version has Jumbo escaping from Scott and charging towards the train. He rammed the engine head-on.

As for how Jumbo ultimately died, that also depends on which version of the story you believe. Some said that the world's most famous elephant was killed almost immediately. While others stated that he suffered for at least three hours before dying. Barnum himself cooked up his own tall tale: claiming that Jumbo died instantly after sacrificing his own life to rescue little Tom Thumb from the speeding train. In the end, none of these unknowns, discrepancies, or fabrications are important. Jumbo died that autumn day. He spent his life enslaved by the Regents Park Zoo and the Barnum and Bailey Circus.

The morning of September 12th began as most mornings did at the Sparks Circus. The animals were awakened and led out of their boxcars. Some were then loaded into wagons and carriers. Others, namely horses and elephants, were put to work. For each of these wagons and carriers had to be towed and pushed to the circus grounds. Every piece of equipment had to be carried. The most extensive labor involved setting up the big top. Gigantic poles had to be moved into their correct place. The canvas itself had to be unfolded and positioned just right. Cables had to be pulled to raise the entire structure. Indeed, without the bulk and strength of the elephant, this final feat would have hardly been possible.

With the morning tasks now complete, the circus's five pachyderms received a short but well deserved break. Their ankles would, as always, be chained and tethered to deter any inclinations of escape. Water and hay would be provided as their standard fare. The animals really needed this rest and nourishment, for their day was just beginning. Soon there would be the noon-time parade. This meant a complete shift in tasks: from manual labor to public entertainment. The elephants had to change into their costumes and march through the streets. They had to mull around with the local residents, pose for photographs and sketches, and give a few rides. They had to be happy, at least in appearance.

Next, there would be the two performances under the big top: a matinee at 14:00 and an evening show at 20:00. The elephants had to perform choreographed routines and tricks for the audience. They had to kneel on command. They had to stand on their hind legs. They had to balance on stools. They had to form a large circle with each elephant resting his or her front legs upon the back of another. None of this was easy. Elephants know nothing of such things, as circus performances are not part of their society or culture. Nor do elephants, as strong and formidable as they may seem, even have the proper muscle development to carry out such demanding stunts. It takes months of rigorous training to learn these routines. It takes months to develop the stamina and muscle strength needed to perform these tricks.

Then there is the harsh discipline and brutal treatment that each elephant had to endure in the name of training. Verbal abuse, beatings, and whippings were the common pedagogical methods. For example, in order to teach a performer how to lie down on cue, Charles Mayer—the leading elephant coach of the early twentieth century—would stab an animal in one particular spot over and over again. Sooner or later, the elephant would lie down to protect the wound. After this procedure was repeated enough times, an amazing trick would be born: as the mere threat of being stabbed caused the animal to obey the command.

Finally, the circus would be packed up to travel to the next town for the next show. The tent had to be taken down and disassembled. All the equipment had to be reloaded. The wagons and carriers had to be hauled back to the train. It was only then, well into the witching hour, that the long, exhaustive day would finally come to a close. Unfortunately, another morning was soon on its way.

There were times, however, when the elephants did obtain reprieves from this monotonous, tiresome schedule. The most common type were short recreational walks. With a handler guiding them along, the elephants might amble into to a nearby field, explore a neighboring wooded area, or walk down a dirt road. Maybe, if they were lucky, they would discover a pond

or a nice patch of mud. The ultimate point of these ventures was simply to get away from the circus—so that the animals could take in the sights, breathe some fresh air, and have a little natural stimulus. Not all of these walks were pleasant affairs however.

While walking through Kingsport, Mary espied some watermelon. This sighting must have spiked her curiosity, as she stopped and reached for the rind. The temporary pause perturbed her handler. At first, he slapped at the elephant with a long stick and shouted for her to move along. Mary ignored the request and just kept chewing away. Some of the people watching this disagreement found it to be most comical and they began laughing aloud. The trainer was now growing embarrassed. He yelled angrily and struck the elephant viciously across the side of her head. This impetuous act of violence was not a smart move. Mary grabbed the man with her trunk, raised him high into the air, and pitched him against the side of a nearby shack. Such was the force of this throw that the trainer crashed through the building's wall. With the thump of the body, the snap of the wooden boards, and the crunch of bones, the crowd stood there in a state of shock. Was the man dead? Was he still alive? Would anyone dare attempt to help him? But Mary put to end to such thoughts, as she walked calmly over to her handler and promptly stepped on his head. The crowd scattered.

No one is certain how the method of execution was chosen. Legend has it that several means were discussed: poisoning, electrocution, and even draw and quartering via two opposite pulling steam-engines. Yet we do know the final decision. It was to be death by hanging. This was the South and lynching was the common form of punishment for those who dared resist the power and privilege of the white man. In fact, a few witnesses later swore that one or two African-Americans were also hung that afternoon in the hamlet of Erwin. But for Mighty Mary, a rope and tree branch would not do. A much larger and sturdier device was required. A 100-ton industrial crane was ultimately commandeered for the task.

By the time Mary was put into position under the crane, 3000 men, women, and children had gathered around the train yard. This crowd swelled to a size far greater than tiny Erwin's entire population. Apparently, everyone in the surrounding Tennessee counties wanted to see this infamous elephant be put to death by the hand of man. None of them were to be disappointed. The derrick car started up and a winch lowered a heavy metal cable. At the end of the cable was a linked chain. A handler grabbed the device and fastened it around the elephant's neck. The steam-powered engine began to roar and tow upward. Mary, though, was not about to go without a fight. As the noose tightened and pulled, she began to struggle and twist her body. The cable was not strong enough to withstand both

the weight and the strain. It broke and Mary came crashing down with a thunder.

The spectators erupted in panic, for the killer elephant was now free. Would she stampede through the crowd? Would she target her trainers? Or would she attack the rig and tear it apart? In reality, Mary was in no condition to retaliate. The fall shattered her hip. Collapsed there in a heap, immobilized and in agonizing pain, Mary must have been a pitiful sight. But her handlers were unmoved. Instead, they refashioned the noose and slid it on once again. This time, Mary was unable to free herself. The happy spectators settled back in and watched as the elephant died of asphyxiation.

Tyke was born in Africa in 1973. She was—as are most captive wild elephants—just a baby when she was captured and sent to North America to work in the entertainment industry. Where once this little elephant had a mother, she now had none. Where once she had a family, Tyke now was confined among complete strangers. John Cuneo was her new owner, and this elephant now had a job. Tyke was to spend the rest of her life performing in the circus. That life came to a tragic end in Honolulu, Hawaii

Tyke was being leased out to Circus America, a company that she had worked for in the past. During this particular tour, the show had traveled all the way to the Pacific islands of Hawaii. The trip from the mainland must have been a difficult one, and the animals could not have been pleased with the arrangement. Indeed, this leg of the tour only served to exacerbate a tension that had been building between the circus pachyderms and their trainers.

It was soon after crossing the Pacific that an elephant named Elaine went out of control and injured a family of visitors during the middle of a show. According to witnesses, the elephant had been performing inside of the ring, when she appeared to ignore a command. Her trainer became visibly upset. Elaine ran from the man and slammed into the protective fencing that separated the audience from the animals. A section of the guardrail buckled and collapsed under her weight, falling on top of a family of ten. There, the father, mother, and eight children remained trapped, until Elaine could be calmed and the heavy fencing removed. This must have been a frightening experience, with the entire family only steps away from being crushed to death by an elephant. Yet, Elaine chose not to hurt them and they sustained only minor injuries. But this incident was only a prelude to the frenzy that would break out five days later.

The Saturday matinee was already in full swing. The stands overflowed with parents and their children, each with his or her own personal bag of popcorn and tuft of cotton-candy held tightly in hand. Sounds of chatter and glees of excitement filled the arena. A growing charge of anticipation

could be felt circulating throughout the arena, for the crowd could now see five enormous beasts waiting to make their entrance into the center ring. The elephant show was about to begin.

Oddly, it was a groom—the person in charge of caring for, feeding, and cleaning up after the animals—who first came into the ring. Even more strange was the fact that this person seemed as if he was running for his life. What was happening here, the audience must have wondered? And who exactly was chasing this man? They soon found out, as one of the elephants sprinted into the ring and knocked the groom to the floor. This was Tyke, and she was mad as hell. The elephant kicked the man. She picked him up and threw him down. She was in the process of stomping him, when a trainer came into the ring. Tyke stiffened, turned around, and charged—killing the handler under the weight of her body.

By this point, the audience was in an uproar. Some remained frozen to their seats, paralyzed by fear. Others rushed for the exits. Tyke decided to follow the example of the fleeing patrons. She busted through the railings of the ring, found a doorway large enough to accommodate her bulky size, and fled the arena. Roaming outside in a parking lot, she spotted a clown and chased after him. But when she noticed someone trying to close the main gate, thereby trapping her inside in the lot, she flattened him instead. The angry elephant then made her way into the streets of central Honolulu. One driver, noticing an approaching elephant in his rearview mirror, wisely pulled off to the side and let the animal pass. Tyke ran wild for several blocks before the police finally cornered her. Wasting little time, they opened fire—riddling the escaped elephant with eighty-six bullets. One witness captured the bloodbath on video. Tyke, with her star-emblazoned headdress still on and blood streaming down her legs, collapsed in the road. Laying there motionless, she remained alive. Officials called the city zoo. Its employees soon arrived and gave the elephant a lethal injection. The problem was that it did not work. So the police stepped in again and placed three more bullets into Tyke's body.

Sadly, Lota showed up emaciated and dying of TB. She had spent thirty-six years at the Milwaukee County Zoo in Wisconsin. But due to her continued misbehavior and resistance, Lota was ungraciously sold to Cuneo in 1990 as a punishment. Interestingly, when responding to concerns about this sale, the zoo director, Charles Wikenhauser, mocked them as foolish and sentimental, adding with a wagging finger that people should really focus their attention on human issues. Lota was, after all, just an animal.

A Great American Circus elephant pummeled a trainer during a show in Pennsylvania. Audience members later detailed how the animal, only seconds before the attack, refused to obey a series of instructions. The

handler, at that point, commenced hitting the performer in the left ear and eye with an ankus and then hooked the creature's mouth with the barbed point. This type of corrective violence towards elephants is usually kept well-hidden by circuses but, on rare occasions, it makes a public appearance for all to see.

This was the situation with Mickey the elephant in September of 1994. This fifteen-year-old elephant was working for the King Royal Circus. During a performance in Lebanon, Oregon, he refused to perform a trick. The trainer shouted and promptly gouged the elephant in the neck with the bull-hook, drawing blood and gasps of horror from the audience. A few people called the cops. After the show, the handler was arrested and dragged off to the city jail. Responding to the brutal act, the King Royal manager fumed:

“These animals can become killers. What I'd like to do with these protesters is take our nicest elephant and put it in their back yards for about an hour. Then they'd see just how much destruction one of these guys can really inflict.”

San Diego, California—it was 1988 and Dunda, an African elephant, was being punished for her continued disobedience at the city zoo. Trainers had chained each of her legs and pulled them taut. The trainers then went to work on Dunda with ax-handles and clubs, beating her for two straight days. When a video of this was shown on a local television station, the viewers reacted with disbelief and rage. Stung by the intense response, the San Diego Zoological Society brought in two outside consultants, Gail Laule and Tim Desmond, to commence the implementation of a new program of elephant management.

Zoos and circuses will on occasion admit to this fact: that the relations between animal handlers and elephants are primarily antagonistic, coercive, and, often, violent. This is a question of domination and resistance; the answer of which is played out every day behind the doors of these institutions. In other words, we can think of these relations as a dynamic, whose outcomes are determined through a process of negotiation.

On the one side, there are the zoos and circuses. They attempt to impose control by using everything from repetitive action, to physical abuse, to gastronomic bribes, to verbal intimidation: the goal of which is to instill obedience, servility, and profitability among the captive animals. Theirs is a management of exploitation. On the other side of the equation are the elephants. They seek to survive this predicament, and, if possible, obtain some influence over it. Theirs is a struggle against exploitation, and it can take many forms: ignoring commands, slowing down, refusing to

work without adequate food and water, taking unofficial breaks, breaking equipment, damaging enclosures, fighting back, or escaping.

Much of the time, it is the institutions who ultimately win out in these negotiations. But, occasionally, the elephants succeed in their rebellion. The victory may be ephemeral: extra hay or carrots. It could be partial: long-term change in training techniques. Or it might be historic: release to a sanctuary. In the case of Tillie and her latest outburst, the Tampa zoo quickly sought to regain dominance. The elephant was taken to “the privacy of the barn,” chained, and disciplined. After being tortured, Tillie was put through a set of commands to see if she would obey. She did and was placed back on display. The relative calm, however, did not last long.

Wankie, for her part, never again saw her calf. She died in 2005, somewhere in the middle of Nebraska on Interstate 80. The Chicago Lincoln Park Zoo, who then owned the elephant, had sold her to Salt Lake City. Evidently, Chicago’s two other elephants, Tatima and Peaches, had just died of mycobacteriosis (a disease causing lameness). Wankie was also infected and dying. Local citizens wanted her taken to the sanctuary in Hohenwald, Tennessee. Park officials, however, denied the request. Instead, they sent Wankie on a 1400 mile trip in the back of an unheated semi-trailer. With temperatures dipping below freezing and attendants bickering about whether to place a tarp over her crate, Wankie collapsed. She did not get up. Was Moja, her calf, in her final thoughts?

This Tennessee sanctuary has always been ready, willing, and able to take in any female elephant, regardless of her reputation. Yet, there was a significant obstacle standing in the way of this move. Namely, zoos will do almost anything to avoid confessing that they might not be able to adequately care for or tend to an animal. And they certainly do not want to admit that an animal can, by his or her own actions, force a zoo into a counteraction—that is, to actually force a zoo into releasing him or her to a sanctuary.

This is why the governing body of the industry, the AZA, refuses to concede that Hohenwald exists. For true sanctuaries, in its mind, cannot be an alternative. To acknowledge them would be a fatal admission that an animal might be happier and healthier while living in another location or place. This arrogant stance on the part of the AZA suffered a recent blow, when an extensive study was released in the journal, *Science*, that showed captive elephants as having half the life span as their counterparts living free in Asia and Africa. But the zoo industry is very stubborn. It has chosen to ignore the data altogether and remained firm in its position.

Tatiana the Tiger, confined for years in a small enclosure at the San Francisco Zoo, finally reached her limit after being tormented by three

teenage boys on Christmas day 2006. She leapt the twelve-foot high wall, snatched one of the lads in her paws and eviscerated him. She stalked the zoo grounds for the next half-hour, bypassing many other visitors, until she tracked down the two other culprits and mauled them both before being gunned down by police.

Significantly, the zoological industry has always had trouble in dealing with cruel and sadistic behavior on behalf of visitors. Some parks have attempted to tackle the issue by posting warning signs and hiring more security guards. Others have chosen to ignore it. Few have ever admitted publicly how frequently captive animals are tormented by zoo visitors. The hard truth is that teasing is endemic at zoos, and it is perpetrated by both children and adults.

The sight of visitors yelling, screaming, and banging on windows and fences is normal. People hurl rocks, coins, bottles, cans, and other objects at animals. Cigarettes butts have been found in cages for as long as there have been cigarettes. Sometimes, even needles, pins, nails, razorblades, and shards of glass find their way into exhibits. Every year an undetermined number of animals die, or become ill, due to the accidental ingestion of foreign items tossed into enclosures by visitors. Can visitor behavior possibly get worse? Yes, it can. Animals have been poisoned at zoos. They have had acid thrown on them. They have been punched and kicked. They have been stabbed and shot. Pellet-guns seem to be a particularly favorite weapon among visitors.

In December of 2008, three macaques in the Guangdong Province of China attacked their owners. They were street performers by trade, skilled in bicycle riding. Such work is hard and the discipline can be severe. During one performance, one of the monkeys refused to carry out a command and was beaten with a large stick in response. The two others saw this and turned upon their owner: pulling his hair, twisting his ears, and biting his neck. The injured macaque then picked up the fallen stick and hit the man in the head with it until it broke. "They were once wild and these performances don't always come naturally to them," the owner confessed. "They may have built up some feelings of hatred towards me."

"Gorillas go through a stage where, physically and psychologically, they're growing much stronger, and become much more lean and long, and containment can be an increasing challenge."

Gorillas can resist their captivity. Indeed, whether this employee fully grasped the potency of his acknowledgment or not, the fact is that these

animals do have a long history outmaneuvering and overcoming the very best of ideas and designs deployed by zoological parks.

In one incident, Jim made it out after noticing that someone had forgot to lock his cage. Gorillas constantly keep a close watch on this sort of thing. They know the comings and goings of employees and volunteers and whether or not all doors have been securely fastened.

Togo, a gorilla at the Toledo Zoo, once ripped off the entire roof of his exhibit. He also, on several occasions, bent the bars of his cage and attempted to slip out between the gaps. But, perhaps his craftiest idea came when the zoo placed him behind a thick layer of shatter-resistant glass. 'Let's see the gorilla get out of this one,' his overseers must have laughed. Never without a retort, Togo studied the new structure for a moment and then began removing the putty that held the window in place.

Being notorious escape artists, orangutans may dismantle their cage so patiently, from day to day and week to week, while keeping dislodged screws and bolts out of sight, that keepers fail to notice what they are doing until it's too late.

It was not long after being released, now for the fourth time, that Ken made yet another attempt at escape. On this occasion, the zoo's spies were finally able to catch him in the act. He was hip deep in the shallow end of the moat when he pressed his feet against one wall and his hands against the other. Slowly, he inched his way up. The keepers were amazed for two reasons. First, orangutans are supposed to be intensely hydrophobic. That's why zoos use water-filled moats as a deterrent. Second, they had no idea that an orangutan could climb in that manner.

Such feats, though, are not unheard of. At the Houston Zoo, for instance, Mango once escaped by pressing his fingers against a glass edge, toes against another nearby edge, and scaling his way upwards.

"It's incredible. There wasn't even enough to grasp. It was all finger pressure."

Organization and mutual aid are essential aspects in many animal cultures, including elephants, gorillas, and chimpanzees. Zoos, however, are places wherein that culture is restricted, altered, or even destroyed. This is done, whether intentionally or not, through the removal of autonomy, the break up of the family unit, restrictions on corporeal movement, continuous transfer of animals from one facility to next, and in the alteration of other living patterns. Psychologists call this a process of alienation and institutionalization. Hence, within these species, what we tend to see in zoos is a much more individualistic-based community.

Yet, orangutans are highly solitary creatures. They spend much of their time living alone in the trees and rarely have much contact with each other. But in captivity, this world is turned upside down. Orangutans are now thrust together in very confined circumstances. They have to learn how to live together in groups. Thus, in a unique twist, not only have orangutans come to adapt to this particular environment, they have developed organized means to overcome it.

“She has learned how to ground the hot wire. She’ll take sticks and pieces of wood and lean them up against the wire so that it is grounded. Then she pulls herself up by using the porcelain insulators on the wire as hand-holds. I’m not sure I would have been able to figure it out.”

To many specialists, the name of the game was “collecting,” taking a handful of whatever you found, or one of anything that seemed rare or unusual. In the past, being an ornithologist had basically meant being a good shot, striding through the marsh or the tundra or the jungle with a pair of binoculars in one hand and a 12-gauge shotgun in the other. A scientific journal called the *Oologist* summed up the philosophy in 1892:

“The murre, common as it is, is a beautiful bird, and a nicely mounted specimen vies well with most seabirds in one’s collection.”

Frank Buck had considerable experience in dealing with the red ape, as he was one of most prolific animal collectors of the modern era. It is with a combination of amazement and horror that one reads his travel journals. The sheer numbers of animals that he killed and captured is staggering. Indeed, after scrolling through the writings of Buck, Carl Hagenbeck, Alfred Wallace, Henry Ward, and the rest of the nineteenth and twentieth century collectors, one can argue with strong confidence that the natural history museum and zoological park have been a driving force in the diminution and extinction of animal species on our planet.

“As a rule, I am opposed to ‘collecting.’ However, I once worked on a Pacific seabird survey where it had been unavoidable, where the taking of a few individuals would truly help the entire species, and when that was the case, my rule was this: waste nothing. Every last snip of information needed to be gleaned. We looked at every feather. Took their stomachs out. Analyzed the contents. We learned everything we possibly could out of every death, and that was really important to me.”

Buck would usually kill the mother orangutans and seize the children. Adults were too difficult to control—plus museums would buy their cadavers for taxidermy. The young ones were much easier to deal with, although even then there certainly could be problems.

“Put your hand too close to the bars of these tree-dwellers that resents his captivity, and there’s a good chance that you’ll get only part of it back; or, if you get it all back, it won’t be in working order.”

Buck’s favorite method to discipline these apes was to use a crowbar, as a blow to the head was better than a gunshot to the body. The key was to bring them back alive, so that the animals could be sold in one piece.

Zoos have very strict protocol when it comes to dealing with orangutans. All locks must be double checked, because the animals watch everything you do. Weapons must be kept nearby but must remain “out of sight of the animal.” Orangutans know what guns are, and they don’t like them. Employees must never cross the lines painted in front of the cages, because the orangutans will grab you.

Zoos must also practice yearly drills, preparing for the inevitability of escapes. Each facility must have a command center. Each must have warning codes. The color red means danger and all visitors must exit the zoo or be placed into secure positions. The color green means that an incident is taking place, but that the zoo will try to keep it confidential from the press and public. When an escape does arise, a keeper must never engage the animal without assistance.

“Orangutans may act very differently when free.”

Furthermore, after the response team has been assembled, only those individuals that have “a positive relationship” with the animal should advance. Orangutans “may become dangerously aggressive if confronted by people whom they dislike.” Even with these precautions, attacks still occur.

“As so often happens among wild animals, the older individuals are very morose and unmanageable. They think of nothing but regaining their liberty, and cannot be persuaded to take any food.

The commonest way of catching young walruses is to kill the mother; indeed this is usually necessary before the capture can be carried out.

The capture of some of my last walruses nearly cost the hunters their lives; for the young cubs which had been brought

on board gave out such appealing cries for help, that a gigantic male was attracted and delivered a furious attack upon the boat, driving three great holes through it with his tusks.”

—Carl Hagenbeck, *Slave Trader*

Her new home was an outdoor fountain, little more than a shallow saucer of concrete. This was a stark contrast to the Pacific Ocean and its rocky beaches. Where once Lilly could play in the sand, explore kelp beds, and swim among a sea of fish, she now resided in a sterile, lifeless environment. She experienced extreme sensory deprivation. Then again, Lilly probably could not see much at all—at least not in summertime. Her fountain had no shade to speak of and the sunlight, and its reflection, would have been blinding. For captive sea lions, the situation has never really improved. In some ways, it has actually deteriorated.

Many of today’s exhibits, besides being empty of ecological stimuli, are often made with glass and the pool water is saturated with chlorine. At the North Carolina Zoological Park, Sandy suffered for years with swollen and blistered eyes. An official acknowledged that “the condition is not uncommon in captive sea lions due to multiple factors, i.e. lack of salt water, direct sunlight (lack of shade), reflection of light from pool bottom, water quality, et cetera.” For Sandy, the absence of shade proved particularly debilitating. But the zoo chose to continue to keep her in the open and under the blazing southern sun. Visitors prefer it that way. They want a clear, unobstructed view of the animals and they want it sunny. In 1996, during an operation to repair the lesions on Sandy’s eyes, she went into cardiac arrest and died. She was only twelve years old. In the ocean, Sandy could have lived well into her twenties.

The whales were frantic with no place to go. As the whales realized that they were at the end of the inlet and into shallow water, they swung around and headed back out to deeper water. But the trawler had already set a net across much of the harbor and the whales ran square into the net.

As the captors started to close the nets around some of the pod, a torch was lit on the stern of the fastest chase boat. Then the captors started to light the underwater explosives. As fast as they could light them, these were dropped in the water to drive the whales into the circling nets.

It was a tragic scene. Some whales were inside the net and some were outside. The whales were crying out to each other. Explosives were going off, motors were being revved up full, captors were using pike poles to push and drive the whales into the nets.

“Whales die in the hunt. If I have dead whales I’m going to conceal it from the public, which is what I did.”

—Ted Griffin, Sea World’s long-time kidnapper

His favored technique is to slit open their bellies, fill the whales with rocks, and sink them to the bottom.

There was one hitch when it came to Corky: none of her calves had ever survived. The first calf in April of 1977 survived for five weeks. The second in October of 1978 lived only eleven days. At Marineland, the longest lifespan of any of Corky’s young was forty-six days. The situation did not improve after her transfer to Sea World. She miscarried in August of 1987 and, soon thereafter, stopped ovulating. Veterinarians did not know what to make of her condition.

In an ocean environment, female orcas can produce healthy calves well into their forties. Corky was only in her twenties. What was happening? According to the medical examinations, there was nothing wrong with her physiologically, and she was receiving the best in pre- and post-natal care. Perhaps there was a psychological disorder? A long-time handler of Corky disclosed that the whale never seemed committed to keeping her youngsters alive. Out of her seven pregnancies, all of them ended in either miscarriage, stillbirth, or a brief life for the calf. The zoological industry, for its part, dared not to speculate any further—for to do so would invite uncomfortable questions about captivity and free will. Was Corky refusing to reproduce? Was this infanticide? Sea World did not want the answers. Instead, the company chose to focus on other, more willing female orcas.

When orcas resist their exploitation, they do so with measured levels of intensity and warning. What starts with a look of anger will precede a bruising bump. The grabbing of limb can be followed by repeated dunking underwater. In the final act, orcas will hold or pin their trainer at the bottom of pool until that person drowns. These are highly intelligent creatures. They have come to understand the fragility and weaknesses of their human counterparts. They know that they can hold their breath far longer than we humans, a useful bit of intelligence that one orca, in particular, has put to use more than once.

When he was two, Tilikum was rudely seized from the frigid waters of the North Atlantic off the coast of Iceland. The young killer whale was shipped to Vancouver Island, where he was forced to perform tricks at an aquatic theme park called Sealand. Tilikum was also pressed into service as a stud, siring numerous calves for exploitation by his captors. Tilikum shared his small tank with two other orcas, Nootka and Haida.

In February 1991, the whales' female trainer slipped and fell into the tank. The whales wasted no time. The woman was grabbed, submerged repeatedly, and tossed back and forth between the three whales until she drowned. At the time of the killing, Haida was pregnant with a calf sired by Tilikum. Eight years later, a 27-year-old man broke into the aquatic park, stripped off his clothes and jumped into the tank with Tilikum. The orca seized the man, bit him sharply and flung him around. He was found floating dead in the pool the next morning. The authorities claimed the man died of hypothermia.

In 2010, Tilikum was a star attraction at Sea World in Orlando. During an event called "Dining With Shamu," Tilikum snatched his trainer, Dawn Brancheau, and dragged her into the pool, where, in front of horrified patrons, he pinned her to the bottom until she drowned to death. The whale had delivered his third urgent message.

Tilikum is the Nat Turner of the captives of Sea World. He has struck courageous blows against the enslavement of wild creatures. Now it is up to us to act on his thrust for liberation and build a global movement to smash forever these gulags from the face of the Earth.

For Tilikum, since he had been snatched from his Atlantic pod and thrown into captivity, people theorized that he too was suffering from PTSD. There is, however, a significant problem with this direction in thinking. Resistance is not a psychological disorder. Indeed it is often a moment of distinct clarity. This is not to say that Tilikum and others are not suffering from clinical depression or stress-related ailments. Rather the point is that captive animals have used their intelligence, ingenuity, and tenacity to overcome the situations and obstacles put before them. Their actions have had intent and purpose. If anything, these animals are psychologically strong, not weak. They are choosing to fight back.

Orca society is matriarchal and extremely tight-knit. In the wild, Tilikum would have spent his life with his mother. She would have taught him to speak the dialect unique to her pod, one that had been passed down through generations. He would have swum up to eighty miles a day in the rich, cold North Atlantic waters, and learned to navigate and hunt with an orca's masterful skill—they can take down gray whales with ease—and he would have sired calves out there too, mating with females from neighboring pods.

Instead, he languishes in a solitary tank eating dead herring, and he is masturbated by SeaWorld staff wielding K-Y jelly, his semen used for the artificial insemination of other captives. Tilikum's real orca existence has been preempted, replaced by the Shamu soundtrack.

All attempts to domesticate the six-ton dolphin have failed. He is nobody's cartoon character, and yet all the ocean's magnificent possibilities

are lost to him. So much of Tilikum's life has been spent among humans that he could never survive in the open sea. Even if by some miracle he were reunited with his pod, his teeth have been destroyed by years of chewing on his metal cage bars. They are drilled out and hollow now and would not be much use to him. He is the wildest of creatures, who will never get the chance to be wild. So what definition is left for Tilikum, caught between worlds? He has been reduced to the craziest possible hybrid: a serial killer used for entertainment purposes.

Park officials stated repeatedly how essential and valuable Tilikum had been to their operations. This is true. Zoos and circuses are a business, and Blackstone paid 2.3 billion dollars for its purchase. The most productive employees in that business, in terms of labor and revenue, are the orcas themselves. Tilikum has performed for almost nineteen years in Orlando, sired thirteen calves, and produced in the range of a billion dollars in revenue. Nevertheless, Sea World did not believe that Tilikum had earned the right to retire. None of that billion dollars would be used to build an ocean sanctuary for older captive orcas. They do not deserve it. Tilikum was going nowhere.

Zoos and circuses have a standard operating procedure in dealing with the aftermath of such incidences of violence by captive animals. Step One is to claim that escapes and attacks are very rare. They almost never happen. The general public has nothing to worry about. Journalists have nothing to investigate. Yet, we have to ask, is this true?

It was one year earlier when Tatiana attacked a trainer. With families watching from about four feet away, the tiger squeezed her paws through the narrow bars of the cage, clawed onto a keeper's arm, and pulled it in for a bite. "While we were heading out," a parent lamented, "I could still hear screaming." Officials would state that it was "the only injury of its kind that has happened at the zoo." This was not true.

Tinkerbelle the elephant had been involved in a series of dust ups with zoo employees. Then there was Fatima, a female Persian leopard. In 1990, she jumped onto the back of a trainer and bit his neck. "I thought the leopard was going to kill him," one onlooker noted. "He was screaming, 'Help me, help me; get him off, get him off.' I was scared. That was not the kind of thing I expected to see at the zoo." If only the visitor had known.

There was, for example, a tiger attack in Moscow in February of 2006. Asked afterwards about whether the Russian circus was going to kill the tiger involved, the trainer responded with honesty:

"If we were to shoot every tiger that attacks us, there wouldn't be any remaining."

Step Two in the standard operating procedure is to deny agency. The key words to remember are 'accident,' 'wild,' and 'instinct.' The tiger injured her trainer by accident. She is, after all, a wild animal. She was just following her instinct. Repeat these lines enough and people will believe you. Yet, when we begin to explore these incidents more deeply, we discover that the zoos and circuses are deceiving us once again.

Tatiana targeted a group of teasers. She could have escaped the enclosure anytime, but she needed motivation. She could have attacked others, but she wanted revenge. A frequent visitor to the zoo told a reporter of witnessing a similar attempt by another tiger in 1997. The unnamed female had just missed scaling over the wall. Evidently, she wanted at the nearby keeper. As the man would explain to those around him, "She always does that. She hates my guts." The veterinarian at Lowry Park admitted to the same thing after Enshala was killed: "This cat hates me."

Remember the case of Fatima, the leopard who jumped onto the back of a San Francisco trainer? Schoolchildren told a newspaper reporter that only seconds before the attack the man washing out her cage had sprayed Fatima with water. Or how about Montecore. She had been performing for over six years at a clip of eight shows a week. The night of the attack she refused to obey a command and the trainer threatened her. She bit the man's arm. When the trainer hit her in the head with a microphone, she grabbed him by the throat. In each of these scenarios, the actions were neither accidental nor instinctual. These cats attacked for a reason.

Consider the case of captive elephants. These animals have the capability of inflicting large-scale fatalities. They are big, strong, and fast. Yet, when given the opportunity to plow through a crowd of visitors or stomp a row of spectators, they almost never do. Instead, they target specific individuals.

There is the case of Janet, a Great American Circus elephant. During her rampage in 1992, she had a group of children riding on her back. She could have easily thrown them off and killed them. But she didn't. Janet, in point of fact, paused midway through the melee, let someone remove the children, and then continued her assault on circus employees. As to her primary motivation, that was revealed when Janet picked up a fallen object off the ground and smashed it repeatedly against a wall. The object turned out to be a bullhook.

The bullhook, or ankus, is a nasty device that the many zoos and circuses use to train their elephants. It looks like a crowbar but with a sharpened point on the curled end. Think of a large inverted fishhook and you would be on the right track. Trainers use the device as a weapon to strike, stab, and cause pain and fear. Ringling Brothers trainers were videotaped in 2009 viciously beating their elephants with these instruments of torture. The

philosophy behind the bullhook is straightforward: violence equals discipline. It is with no understatement to say that the methods of training in this industry can be brutal.

Circuses, for example, have long preferred the use of the whip as their means to direct tigers and lions. The whip allows the trainer to maintain a safe distance and still deliver a good deal of pain and fear. Some circuses have updated to more modern devices: electrical prods and stun guns. Others have chosen to stick with the blunt instruments. Some trainers, for example, like to use baseball bats.

But no matter the instrument, the purpose of these weapons is control. The trainer wants the tiger to jump through a hoop of fire. The tiger does not want to. The trainer whips, shocks, or beats the animal until he or she performs the action. This is a learned response, and all captive animals have had to endure this violent education. Some of them have been taught with negative reinforcements. Others have been fortunate enough to train with positive reinforcements.

In either case, here is where things can take an interesting turn. Every captive animal knows, through learned response and direct experience, which behaviors are rewarded and which ones are punished. These animals understand that there will be consequences for incorrect actions. If they refuse to perform, if they attack a trainer, or if they escape their cage, they know that they will be beaten, have their food rations reduced, and be placed in solitary confinement. Captive animals know all of this and yet they still carry out such actions—often with a profound sense of determination. This is why these behaviors can be understood as a true form of resistance. These animals are rebelling with knowledge and purpose. They have a conception of freedom and a desire for it. They have agency.

We have now officially reached dangerous ground, as the above claims will always be met with the accusation of anthropomorphism. According to many, only humans can be endowed with emotions, culture, intellect, and the ability to resist. But there is a retort. The main thing to understand about the idea of anthropomorphism is that, historically, it has no empiricism behind it. Rather, it is a loaded term: loaded with political, economic, social, and cultural meanings.

The Catholic Church, in ancient times, used it to destroy paganism and thus increase the church's power and influence. Today, it is science and industry that wields the sword. Their methodology, though, is opposite to that of the church. Instead of uniting various sectors, they seek to divide and draw wide chasms between humans and other animals. This distance, they hope, will create a general public who neither knows nor cares about the lives and labors of tigers, elephants, or monkeys. It is a human-centered

and human-dominated world, which science and industry seeks. This narrow perspective allows them to continue their exploitation of other animals in a completely unquestioned and unmolested fashion. The ultimate goal, of course, is to make the largest degree of profit possible.

As for those individuals who dare go against the idea, they will automatically be called out and publicly censured: 'You are being anthropomorphic!' Sadly, this kind of reaction and labeling has led to self-censorship. There are lines of inquiry that a great many people are afraid to cross, as to do so can mean ridicule, castigation, and, yes, unemployment. The smart person will simply internalize the term. Nowhere has this behavior gained a stronger hold than within the university—home of the status quo. Yet, it should be remembered that it was not so long ago when, in universities across the country, the ideas of eugenics and racism were also considered to be true, essential, and scientific categories of analysis. Professors loved them to no end. Today, the situation has changed, and the university is embarrassed, even to the point of denial, of its iniquitous past. Anthropomorphism awaits the same graveyard.

Step Three in the standard operating procedure is a public pledge to prevent such incidences from ever happening again. If it was an escape that occurred, then the zoo or circus will make design modifications. San Francisco, for its part, extended the concrete wall and constructed a glass partition, which raised the overall height of the tiger exhibition to nineteen feet. Electrified hot wires were strung along the moat. The zoo put up signs that forbid the harassment of animals.

If it was an attack that occurred then these institutions will change their protocol. The training of employees will be made more extensive and intensive. Handlers may no longer be allowed direct contact with the animals. Also, the animal perpetrators themselves could undergo retraining or be placed under an entirely new system of management. But, if the animal is a repeat offender, then the zoo or circus might get rid of him or her altogether. In the past, summary executions were used. Some of the more popular methods included firing squads, poisonings, and hangings. These have since become a political liability, so the industry has instead turned to animal dealers for help.

This is how it works. Flagship institutions, such as the National Zoo, the Lincoln Park Zoo, the San Diego Zoo, Six Flags, and Ringling Brothers, will sell their unwanted animals to licensed auctioneers and dealers. These individuals will then turn around and re-sell them to unlicensed third parties. The key facet in this relationship is the absence of a direct connection between the original sellers and the final buyers. Thus, zoos and circuses can deny involvement in such dirty business and hide their avarice.

As for the unwanted animals, they will end up in private collections, canned hunting operations, research labs, and exotic-meat slaughtering facilities. Some of the animals, especially tigers, will be killed outright for their organs, fur, and claws. According to Interpol, the international trade in exotics is an eight-billion dollar a year industry. And no animal is safe. These flagship institutions will sell endangered and non-endangered species alike: leopards, camels, Bengal tigers, antelopes, gazelles, lions, white rhinos, gorillas, chimps, and orangutans.

Perhaps you will remember Knut, the famed polar bear cub. In 2007, a kind of hysteria revolved around him, as visitors by the thousands flocked to Germany to catch a glimpse. Knut's owner, the Berlin Zoo, licensed his image and placed it everywhere. The zoo made \$8.6 million off of the Knut craze. Nevertheless, by December of 2008, Berlin wanted to dump the bear. Knut had grown up, and he was no longer cute or marketable. It was only through a public uprising that the zoo relented and agreed to keep the polar bear—at least, until the fervor dies down.

Step Four in the standard operating procedure is to manage public relations. The American Zoological and Aquarium Association (AZA), governing body of the industry, provides workshops on the successful PR techniques. The central thesis of them is this: control the information. Every institution should have a designated spokesperson. When questioned, and regardless of the question, this person should state repeatedly that the zoo is an important resource for conservation and education. Reassurances must also be made that appropriate changes have been implemented and that the park is safe for the return of visitors. Again, rigorous control is foremost in importance—as damaging information can easily leak out.

News came that the tiger was being fed ten pounds less meat per individual feeding in San Francisco than she had been during her confinement in Denver. This led some to speculate that the zoo was trying to get Tatiana to be more active for visitors. If the tiger was continually hungry, the thinking went, she might move around more and thus be more entertaining to paying visitors. Officials were forced to deny the claim.

Next came news of a \$48 million bond, which the zoo had received earlier, almost all of which was spent on enhancements for visitors. The animals, meanwhile, continued to reside in decrepit and cramped exhibits. Tigers can have a range of over 100 square miles in their habitats of Eurasia. In San Francisco, Tatiana had only 1,000-square feet to roam around in. Such realities of captivity are known to cause psychological problems: unconscious swaying, incessant pacing, and self-mutilation. Zoo officials, again, had to defend themselves. The tiger, they affirmed, was not suffering from depression and her enclosure was more than adequate in size.

The final piece of bad news for the zoo came when it was revealed that there were two near escapes by other animals just a week after Tatiana's rampage. During one of them, a female polar bear named Ulu tried to scramble over a wall but was turned back with the stinging spray from a firehose. A keeper quietly confided that Ulu only did this because he and others had been "pelting" the bear with empty tranquilizer darts. In response to this incident, the zoo's director followed standard procedure. "That doesn't sound like an escape attempt to me," he began to explain. The bear was simply being a bear. Yes, the zoo is now planning to raise the walls of Ulu's exhibit, but not because of what Ulu did. In all seriousness, the zoo's PR flacks suggested, this kind of scrutiny and questioning is unnecessary if not vindictive. The zoo is the real victim.

At the turn of the twentieth century, zoos around the country relied upon local youth for financial support. In truth, most parks would not have survived their early years without these tot-driven campaigns. Those pennies from heaven did not so much fall from the sky as they were pried from the mouths of babes. It was schoolchildren who were asked to scrimp together everything they had in order to fund the purchase of a new captive animal. It was schoolchildren who were asked to save up for years in order to support the construction of a new exhibit. They were the ones who had to make the sacrifices. The same cannot be said for those who collected the donations.

Members of zoological societies were, almost exclusively, very wealthy individuals. Many were captains of industry. Some owned banks. Others sprang from old money. All were capable of fully funding these institutions by themselves. But they chose not to. Instead, society members siphoned tens of thousands of dollars from those who could least afford it. This was, for better or worse, the arrangement of the time, and the children of Toledo and its neighboring counties would perform their role admirably. By 1912, the kids had amassed enough pennies to purchase a new elephant. Now it was up to the zoo to find one.

Zoological parks call such creatures a flagship species. They are the larger-than-life animals: the elephants, tigers, hippos, gorillas, and panda bears. They are the ones that heighten the reputation of a zoo and boost its image. They provide an easy focus for the marketing department to lure a larger audience. Most importantly, they afford assurances to the parks and their employees that the external funding will continue to flow. Prestige—both in the past and today—is essential for the survival of these institutions, and elephants play a central role in creating this impression.

Prolonged isolation is very hard on female elephants. They are highly social creatures and need each other for companionship. In Africa or Asia,

their families are extended to include a matriarch, six to twenty related females, and an assortment of calves. Even the dead are long remembered in elephant societies. Furthermore, elephants enjoy interacting with fellow animals. Humans conveniently tend to think of other species as being segregated or divorced from those around them. But this is demonstrably not the case. They, like humans, need to create and develop these kinds of holistic relationships. Animals have a culture all to their own.

In pachyderm society, family is everything. Females, for instance, are never alone. Daughters will spend most of their lives with their mothers. These intense bonds are nearly unbreakable, and extend beyond the material world and into the spiritual. Elephants are known to have their own graveyards and complex rituals regarding the treatment of the dead. Visits are made often to these funerary grounds, and the bones of relatives are touched, caressed, and even carried around.

As for male elephants, the maternal bond is equally as strong for the first segment of their lives. But, upon reaching adolescence, males become more independent and begin to venture out from the herd for extended periods of time. Eventually, males separate and remain solitary—although maintaining friendships with other males is important. Zoos and circuses, however, do not recognize or value the significance of these relations: familial or otherwise. The majority of calves are removed from their mothers by the age of two, if not sooner.

Elephants remain, despite all of the efforts by zoological parks, opposed to a sedentary life of endless sequestration. Whether in Asia or Africa, these animals will cover many miles per day. Their typical home range can be anywhere from nine to thirty-one square miles. And this expansive use of open space is not merely about finding food or water. Elephants love to walk and to roam on their own accord. They enjoy being constantly on the go, seeing new sights, and interacting with fellow creatures. They are highly social travelers. In zoos, indoor facilities are measured in feet, not miles, and outdoor sites might, at most, reach two or three acres.

The zoo industry is full of such contradictions. It helps people learn about the importance of animals, but not what is vitally important to the animals themselves. Sea mammals, elephants, and primates are capable of so many amazing feats, but they are incapable of demonstrating their intentions and making their own choices. The industry encourages you to think that these animals are intelligent, but not intelligent enough to have the ability to resist. The industry encourages you to care about them, so that you and your children will return for a visit. But it does not want you to care so much that you might develop empathy and begin to question whether these animals actually want to be there.

Private breeding operations were opened in response to the strict new laws and regulations that had recently been passed regulating the exportation of elephants from foreign countries. Circuses and zoos no longer had easy access to their labor pool. The enterprises needed a new source. Thus, breeding programs and “conservation centers” sprang up around the country.

There are currently over 250,000 exotic animals licensed to private owners in the state of California alone. The number of unlicensed is indeterminable. The creatures themselves can be held outdoors or indoors. They may be penned, caged, chained, or just locked in a room. They can be kept as pets, used in canned hunts, or slaughtered for their skin and organs. The Fish and Game Department is responsible for the oversight, but there is little true regulation. In most states, anyone can own an exotic animal. There are almost no qualifications for licensing, and even those few can easily be circumvented.

The entertainment industry uses chimpanzees when they are young and easy to control. But when they get older and more resistant, the chimps are sold for little to no cost to the buyer. ‘Just take them off our hands and do what you will,’ is Hollywood’s attitude. That “No Animals Were Harmed” and Humane Society logo in the credits is just a piece of propaganda, a way for a big, mainstream, corporatized non-profit to make some money while allowing capitalists to mask the true nature of their exploitation—basically Greta Thunberg in logo form.

There is no humane form of captivity, there is no humane form of exploitation. These are individuals, not objects, not line items on a spreadsheet. Regardless of how it is attempted to be hidden, these institutions—zoos, circuses, Hollywood, and more—see these individuals as just another resource to expand their status, wealth, power. To be used and then discarded. These individuals resist daily. They take brave stands in the face of insurmountable odds. They cry out to the void. And what they hear is what all oppressed beings hear all too often: silence.

The silence, to me, is deafening now, is it not to you? The worst sound there ever could be some might argue. How did the Good Germans sit by while the camps were run? It seems you, dear reader, have all the personal experience necessary to answer that question.

Other Minds

The Inner Life

It's not anthropomorphizing. Part of the challenge in understanding the behavior of a species is that they look like us for a reason. That's not projecting human values. That's prioritizing the generalities that we share with them. It may very well be that the seemingly natural human urge to impart emotions onto animals—far from obscuring the “true” nature of animals—actually reflects a very accurate way of knowing.

Critics are often quick to exclaim that the emotional lives of animals are too private or hidden to make much sense of. And, surely, animals will always have their secrets. Yet their inner emotional and moral lives are surprisingly public and transparent. Just look at them, listen to them, and if you dare, smell the odors that pour out when they interact with friends and foes. Look at their faces, tails, bodies, gaits, and most importantly their eyes. What we see on the outside tells us a lot about what's happening inside animals' heads and hearts. People around the world, including researchers, readily recognize expressions of emotions and show remarkably high agreement when asked what they infer about what an individual animal is feeling based on their observations. Behavioral scientists tested the hypothesis that every observer, whether trained in animal behavior or not, can make a meaningful assessment of an animal's behavior. Trained and untrained observers displayed a high level of agreement about what emotions an animal is feeling. These results constitute important data and suggest that the problem of never being able to enter into the subjective experience of another, what philosophers call “the problem of other minds,” isn't really so serious after all.

The problem of other minds is not an impediment to understanding how animals feel and think. Why not? Well, first of all, animal minds aren't all that inaccessible or private, as cognitive ethology and social neuroscience make abundantly clear. They are, actually, rather public. We already know a lot about animal minds, and we're discovering more and more each day. Second, and perhaps even more important, we are ourselves animals and

our experiences of pain, joy, envy, compassion, and love are probably very much akin to these same emotional states in other animals. Data suggest that there is enough continuity in physiology and psychology to safely infer significant experiential common ground. And finally, we must remember that human minds are private, too. We can never crawl inside the skin or brain of another person and truly know their subjective experiences. Yet this doesn't stop us from understanding and reacting to their thoughts or emotions, most of the time quite accurately and without conscious effort. The so-called privacy of mind problem is overused and is little more than a poor excuse for ignoring much ongoing research and retaining the status quo in our treatment of animals.

The emotional lives of animals have been the underbelly of animal behavior research. It has been assumed either that animals don't experience emotion, or that their emotional lives are so simple as to be uninteresting. Until quite recently, even, emotions in animals were catalogued as simple behavioral responses, reducible to chemical changes in the brain or body. Fear, for example, was described as just a physiological event—the “fight or flight” response describes the release of hormones, leading to constriction of blood vessels, acceleration of the heart and lung functions, and so forth. Well, human emotions can be reduced in the same way, but most people recognize that this is an impoverished picture of what it means to have a feeling such as fear, and that fear has many faces. Fortunately, all this is changing, and we now know that the emotional lives of animals are every bit as rich as our own.

Is it really true, as scientists have long maintained, that people are the only animals capable of enjoying a full range of emotions? Has creation really engineered a unique biological path for us? Are we the only ones guaranteed a life of self-awareness and satisfaction? If human beings were the result of some special biological design, we wouldn't be able to compare ourselves to other animals. It would make no sense to talk about empathy with them, because we would not be able to even begin to imagine how they felt. Luckily, Nature opted for the economy plan. Evolution only modifies and builds on whatever is already available, much like a computer system. And so, just as code from earlier operating systems is integrated into the latest Windows, the genetic programming of our ancient ancestors still works in us—and in all the other species whose family trees branched off from our lineage in the past few million years. And so, as I see it, there is only one kind of grief, pain, or love. It might sound presumptuous to say that a pig feels things just as we do, but there is a vanishingly small chance that an injury hurts a pig less than it hurts us. ‘Aha,’ the scientists might interject at this point, ‘but we have no proof.’ That's true, but there never will be

any proof. I can't even prove that you feel the same way as I do. No one can look inside another person and prove that, say, a prick of a pin triggers the same sensation in each one of the seven-billion people on this planet. But we are able to express our feelings in words, and this ability to share increases the probability that people operate on roughly the same level when it comes to feelings.

In the end, it doesn't really matter how much our intellect is consciously in control, because the fact that a surprising number of our reactions are probably instinctive shows only that experiences of fear and grief, joy, and happiness are not at all diminished by being triggered instinctively instead of being actively instigated. Their origin doesn't reduce their intensity in any way. The point is that emotions are the language of the unconscious, and in day-to-day life, they prevent us from sinking beneath an overwhelming flood of information. The pain in your hand when you put it on a hot element allows you to react immediately. Feeling happy reinforces positive behaviors. Fear saves you from embarking on a course of action that could be dangerous. Only the relatively few problems that actually can and should be solved by thinking them through make it to the conscious level of our brain, where they can be analyzed at leisure. Basically, then, emotions are linked to the unconscious part of the brain, not the conscious part. If animals lacked consciousness, all that would mean is that they would be unable to have thoughts. But every species of animal experiences unconscious brain activity, and because this activity directs how the animal interacts with the world, every animal must also have emotions. Therefore, instinctive maternal love cannot be second-rate, because no other kind of maternal love exists.

There are cases, where superabundant hormones or surplus milk can be ruled out as the driving forces. The crow Moses is a touching example. When birds lose their brood, Nature gives them another opportunity to work off their pent-up impulses. They can simply start anew and lay another clutch of eggs. There's no way a single bird like Moses can exercise its maternal instincts, yet Moses attempted to do just this. The target of Moses's attention was a potential enemy—a housecat—albeit an extremely small and relatively helpless one, because the kitten had obviously lost its mother and had not had anything to eat in a long time. The little stray popped up in Ann and Wally Collito's yard. The couple lived in a cottage in North Attleboro, Massachusetts, and they watched in amazement at what happened next. A crow attached itself to the little orphan and was clearly looking after it, feeding it with earthworms and beetles. Of course, the Collitos didn't just stand by and watch; they fed the kitten, as well. The friendship between the crow and the cat continued after the cat grew up, and it lasted until the crow disappeared five years later.

In their first few weeks of life, fawns are left lying alone in the undergrowth or tall grass, because this is safest for both mother and fawn. A doe with a fawn moves slowly because she has to keep waiting for the youngster. Often the fawn has not yet experienced how serious life can be, and it dawdles behind mom—an ideal target for wolves or lynx. These predators can spot the pair from a long way off and easily grab a meal. That’s why mother deer prefer to separate themselves from their little darlings for the first three to four weeks and leave them in a safe place. It is almost impossible to sniff out a fawn. Because they smell of hardly anything at all, their scent doesn’t alert predators to their presence. The doe comes by for a quick visit every once in a while to nurse her fawn, and then she takes off again right away. That gives her more time to feed on nutritious buds and new shoots instead of having to worry about and watch out for the little one all the time.

When someone who has no idea what’s going on finds a fawn lying there all alone and very still, their almost instinctive reaction is to take care of it. After all, it’s hard to imagine what an abandoned human baby would go through if someone just put it down somewhere and then disappeared. And so, time and again, “helpers” spontaneously step in and take the supposedly orphaned fawn back home with them. However, they have no idea what to do next, and they call an expert. It’s usually about this time that they realize bringing the fawn home was a huge mistake, but by then it’s too late to fix the damage. The fawn now smells of people, and it can’t be returned to the wood and its mother. Bottle feeding a fawn is hard work and, at least in the case of male fawns, it is also risky.

Deer are a perfect example of how mother love can be expressed in very different ways. Most mammals are like us and seek constant close contact with their offspring; those that behave differently are not heartless but simply adapted to different life situations. Fawns feel perfectly safe in the first few weeks of life even without constant contact with their mother. Their behavior changes only when they are capable of bounding along behind her. Then they stay close to the doe, rarely straying more than 20 yards away from her.

Unfortunately, in these modern times, typical fawn behavior in the first few weeks of life has other, far more tragic consequences. When danger threatens, a fawn hunkers down, because it knows instinctively that it is extremely difficult to pick up its scent. But often what is threatening it is not a wolf or a hungry wild boar looking for a succulent morsel of meat. What is bearing down on it is a tractor fitted with an enormous mower that is swiftly cutting down grass on acres of land. And so the crouching fawn ends up under the blades, and in the best-case scenario it is killed immediately. Often, however, it stands up just before the blades reach it so

that its legs are cut off along with the grass. One way to avoid this would be to have someone walk through the area the evening before with a dog along as an extra signal that this is a dangerous place to be. Then the doe will encourage her fawn to accompany her to a safer place outside the meadow. However, under capitalism, there is often neither the time nor the staff for such rescue operations. Capitalism doesn't give a shit about legless or decapitated fawns—there's no money in it.

While her status affords her certain privileges, there are times, however, when disaster strikes the alpha doe, for example when her fawn dies. In earlier times, the cause of death was usually disease or a hungry wolf. These days, it is often a blast from a hunter's gun. For deer, the same process is set in motion as for us. First, unbelievable confusion reigns, and then grief sets in. Grief? Are deer even capable of experiencing an emotion like that? Not only can they, but they must. Grief helps them to say goodbye. The bond between doe and fawn is so intense that it cannot be severed from one moment to the next. The doe must slowly accept that her child is dead and that she must distance herself from the tiny corpse. Over and over again, she returns to the spot where her child died and calls for her fawn, even if the hunter has carried it away. A grieving alpha doe endangers her kin by remaining close to the scene of death, which also means close to danger. What the herd needs to do is to move to a safer place, but departure is delayed until the bond between mother and fawn finally dissolves.

There is no question that under such circumstances, it is time for a change in leadership, and this happens without any struggle for dominance. Another similarly experienced doe simply steps forward and takes over leadership of the group. If it's the other way around and the alpha doe dies, leaving her fawn behind, the remaining does show no mercy. There is no question of an adoption. Quite the opposite. The orphaned youngster is frequently banished from the herd, perhaps because the other does don't like dynasties. Left to fend for itself, the fawn has little chance of surviving and usually doesn't make it through the next winter.

This is how a herd of deer experiences the shooting of one of its own. There's a crack and a sudden smell of blood. The shot is often not a clean one, and the wounded animal manages a few yards of panicked flight before its legs buckle and it falls. This sight, coupled with the smell of stress hormones, imprints itself deep into the consciousness of the other members of the herd. And then there's a creaking and crashing from the hide as the hunter climbs down to salvage the downed game, and the intelligent animals make the connection. From then on, before stepping out onto the path, they look suspiciously up at the raised hide to see if someone is sitting there. They could, of course, give the area a wide berth, but hunters usually set up

their hides in places where particularly tasty food grows. And if there isn't any, hunters simply sow an appropriate mix of attractive meadow plants. These mixes have names like "Gameland Goulash." Doesn't that sound enticing? And so the evenings become a never-ending game of roulette. If hunger wins, then the deer step out onto the path too early and therefore into the shooters' visual range. If fear wins, the hungry deer don't come out to the feast laid out for them until it's pitch dark, and the hunters go home empty handed.

Wild game animals are stressed when people enter their territory. If two-legged intruders are constantly entering the area, the portion of time an animal needs to spend checking to see if it is safe rises from 5% to 30% of the day. At least that holds true for those people whom animals find it difficult to categorize. Walkers, cyclists, or horseback riders who keep to the trails are easy to evaluate: they make noise and move along clearly demarcated routes. As long as the game can see them, it's clear they are moving directly from A to B, and animals observing them from the safety of their daytime hiding places have nothing to worry about. In contrast, mushroom hunters, mountain bike riders, hunters, and foresters often travel off the beaten track. And because most of these individuals travel alone, there's no lively conversation that wild game can listen in on and use to estimate the route the intruders are taking. All the game can hear is the occasional snapping of a twig under a boot and perhaps a quiet clearing of the throat from time to time—nothing more. Then animals become uneasy, and to be on the safe side, they prefer to move away quickly.

You might argue that things have always been this way. What difference does it make whether it's a wolf pack or a person on the hunt? Well, one big difference is the number of hunters. Contrast one four-legged hunter for every 20 square miles in wolf territory, with about ten-thousand two-legged predators tripping up over each other in the same amount of space in Germany today. And the wild game can't tell right away that not everyone is armed. So if there's any doubt, game retreats from each potential attacker and generally forgoes forays into lush meadows in the bright light of day. As you can see, life for game that can be legally hunted is quite nerve wracking. Their situation, where for every potential prey there are any number of potential hunters, is unique in the animal world, because the situation is usually the other way around.

Let's consider fear. In people, fear arises in the almond-shaped amygdala. For a long time that was not proven, even though it was suspected. It wasn't until January 2011 that scientists from the University of Iowa published a paper about a woman identified as SM. SM was afraid of spiders and snakes—until the cells in her amygdala died after a rare illness. That was,

of course, tragic for SM; however, it offered researchers a unique opportunity to investigate what happens when this organ is lost. They took SM to a pet shop and confronted her with the animals she feared. The woman could now touch the animals, something she could never have done before, and she reported that she simply felt curious about them and no longer felt in the least bit frightened.

But even if the structures in their brains differ from ours and these differences mean that they probably experience things differently, that certainly doesn't mean that emotions in animals are inherently impossible. It simply means that it is more difficult for us to imagine what their emotions might feel like. Take the fruit fly, for example, whose central nervous system is made up of 250,000 cells, making it a four-hundred-thousandth the size of ours. Can such minute creatures with such a limited capacity up top really feel anything? Can they even be said to possess consciousness—this being, of course, the pinnacle of achievement. Unfortunately, science is not yet advanced enough to be able to answer this question, partly because the concept of consciousness cannot be clearly defined. The closest we can get to a definition is that consciousness involves thinking and reflecting on things that we have experienced or have read about. Right now, you're thinking about what you're reading, and so you possess consciousness. And at a very basic level, the conditions necessary for consciousness have been discovered in the tiny brains of fruit flies.

The flies are constantly barraged by stimuli from the external world, just as we are. The smell of roses, car exhaust, sunlight, a breath of air—all are registered by a variety of unconnected nerve cells. So how does a fly filter out from this flood of sensations what is most important so that it can stay out of danger and not miss out on a particularly tasty morsel? Its brain processes the information and ensures that different areas coordinate their activities, strengthening certain stimuli. And so what is of interest stands out from the general noise of thousands of other impressions. The flies, therefore, can focus their attention on specific things—just as we can. Fruit flies' eyes are made up of about six-hundred individual facets. Because these tiny insects dart around so quickly, their eyes are bombarded by a huge number of images per second. This seems like an impossibly large amount of data to process, but the flies must do this if they are to survive. Anything that moves could belong to a voracious predator. Therefore, the fruit fly brain leaves all static images blurry and focuses exclusively on moving objects. You could say that the tiny tykes are stripping things down to the bare essentials, an ability that you surely would not have expected these little flies to have. By the way, we do something similar. Our brain doesn't allow all the images we see to make it through to our consciousness. It only

lets the important ones through. Does that mean flies have consciousness? Researchers won't go that far; however, it is clear that flies can at least actively focus their attention on what matters most to them.

“Denying that crabs feel pain because they don't have the same biology is like denying they can see because they don't have a visual cortex.”

This is further proof of science's practice of arguing too cautiously when in doubt about feelings in animals, denying them many mental capacities until there is positive proof that they possess them. Instead, couldn't we simply—and more accurately—say: ‘We don't know.’

Apart from that, pain is a component in reflex actions, as you can easily test for yourself if there's an electric fence nearby. If you put your hand on it and get an electric shock, you have no choice but to pull back right away, whether you want to or not. It's pure reflex on your part, something you do without a moment's thought, but that doesn't make it any less painful.

Researchers find some kinds of slime molds so interesting that they regularly observe them in the laboratory. *Physarum polycephalum*, with its somewhat awkward Latin name, is just such a customer, and it loves rolled oats. Basically, the creature is one giant cell with countless nuclei. What researchers are now doing is placing these slimy unicellular organisms in a maze with two exits and putting food at one of the exits as a reward. The slime mold spreads out into the maze and after a hundred hours or more, finds the exit with the oats—not bad, really. To do this, it clearly uses its own slime trail to recognize where it has already been. It then avoids those areas because they have not led to success. In nature, such behavior is of practical benefit, because the creature knows where it has already been in its search for food and, therefore, the places where there isn't any food left. It's quite a feat to be able to solve a maze when you don't have a brain, and researchers credit these moving mat-like creatures with having some kind of spatial memory.

Japanese researchers topped it all off by using a slime mold to reproduce a map of the most important transportation routes in Tokyo. To do this, they set a slime mold down on a damp surface at a point that represented the center of the city. Piles of food marked the principal neighborhoods as attractive places to visit. The slime mold set off, and when it had connected the neighborhoods using the optimal, shortest route, there was a big surprise. The image pretty much corresponded to the suburban train system in the metropolis.

Researchers played classical music to pigs. Don't worry, the researchers weren't trying to find out if pigs are fond of Bach. Rather, they got the pigs to connect the music to small rewards, such as chocolate-covered raisins hidden in the straw. Over time, the pigs in the experimental group came to associate music with particular emotions. And now things got interesting, for other pigs were added that had never heard such sounds and therefore had no idea what they meant. Despite this, they experienced the same emotions the musical pigs experienced. If the musical pigs were happy, the newcomers also played and jumped around; in contrast, if the musical pigs were so scared that they urinated on themselves, the newcomers caught the feeling and exhibited the same behavior. Pigs clearly can experience empathy. They can pick up on the emotions other pigs are feeling and experience those feelings themselves—a classic expression of empathy.

I would like to address the religious definition of a soul. Even if I have to tread carefully and I don't feel confident here, even if belief and logic are to a certain extent mutually exclusive, I would like to argue for the existence of an animal soul in the religious sense of the word. Assuming you don't believe in physical resurrection, a soul is a prerequisite for life after death. And if people have souls in this sense, then animals must have them as well. Why? Because there is the question of how long people have been going to heaven. For two-thousand years? For four-thousand years? Or for as long as there have been people? That would be about 200,000 years. But where is the break with earlier life forms, with our predecessors? The break didn't happen abruptly. It happened stealthily. Small changes spread out over generations in the course of evolution. Which individuals are then to be identified as no longer being people with souls? Some female ancestor who lived 200,023 years ago? Or a man armed with a flint weapon who lived before the year 200,197? No, there is no sharp demarcation, and so you can trace the lineage further and further back, past our primitive forefathers, primates, the first mammals, dinosaurs, fish, plants, bacteria. If there is no specific point in time, to which the genesis of a creature of the species *Homo sapiens* can be fixed, then there is also no specific point in time when the soul appeared. And if there is a higher form of justice in the religious sense, then when it comes to the question of eternal life, there can't very well be a sharp line drawn between two generations, where the older one is denied entry and the younger one is admitted. Isn't it a beautiful vision that up in heaven there will be a throng of animals of different species living among countless people?

When all the arguments have been made and it's clear we're getting to the point where we must grant animals way more skills than we usually do, the knockout punch is delivered: the charge of anthropomorphism. People

who compare animals to humans, so the argument goes, are unscientific. They are wishful, maybe even mystical, thinkers. In the heat of the fray, an essential truth we all learned in school is overlooked: a human being is, from a purely biological perspective, an animal and therefore not so very different from other species. It follows that a comparison between people and animals is not too much of a stretch, especially since we can only relate to and empathize with things we understand. And so it makes sense to take a closer look at those animals in which we can detect emotions and mental processes similar to our own. This comparison is easier with feelings such as hunger and thirst, whereas comparing human and animal experiences of joy, grief, or compassion makes some people's hair stand on end.

Most importantly, these comparisons serve to point out that animals are not dimwitted creatures clearly stuck a level below us on the evolutionary scale, creatures that experience only pale imitations of our rich range of sensations for pain and other such feelings.

“I would venture to say that nobody really knows another's mind thoroughly, and I would further venture that very few people really know their own mind.”

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion,
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

Poor Ass! thy master should have learnt to show
Pity—best taught by fellowship of Woe!
For much I fear me that He lives like thee,
Half famished in a land of Luxury!
How askingly its footsteps hither bend!
It seems to say, “And have I then one friend?”
Innocent foal! thou poor despised forlorn!
I hail thee Brother—spite of the fool's scorn!
And fain would take thee with me, in the Dell
Of Peace and mild Equality to dwell

For every thing that lives is Holy,
Life delights in life.

Through the ages, it's been the poets who have largely held firm in their affinity with the natural world. Consider the *Metamorphoses* composed by the Roman poet and political dissident Ovid around the time of Christ's birth. In the final book of this epic, where humans are routinely transformed into animals, Ovid summons the spirit of Pythagoras. The great sage of Samos, whom Aristotle hailed as the father of philosophy, gives the most important speech in the poem.

But the author of the famous Theorem forsakes the opportunity to proclaim that mathematics is the foundation of nature. Instead, Ovid's Pythagoras denounces the killing of animals for food and asserts the sanctity of all life forms.

“What evil they contrive, how impiously they prepare to shed human blood itself, who rip at a calf's throat with the knife, and listen unmoved to its bleating, or can kill a kid goat to eat, that cries like a child, or feed on a bird, that they themselves have fed! How far does that fall short of actual murder? Where does the way lead on from there?”

Science is increasingly favoring continuity over discontinuity. This is certainly true for comparisons between humans and other primates, but extends to other mammals and birds, especially since bird brains turn out to resemble those of mammals more than previously thought. All vertebrate brains are homologous. Although we cannot directly measure consciousness, other species show evidence of having precisely those capacities traditionally viewed as its indicators. To maintain that they possess these capacities in the absence of consciousness introduces an unnecessary dichotomy. It suggests that they do what we do but in fundamentally different ways. From an evolutionary standpoint, this sounds illogical. And logic is one of those other capacities we pride ourselves on.

“The difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind.”

For far too long, animals in general, and birds in particular, have been denigrated and treated merely as creatures of instinct rather than as sentient beings.

Since intentional, intelligent actions are observable in many animals, and since in our own species they go together with awareness, it is reasonable to assume similar mental states in other species. The assumption that animals are “dumb,” in the sense that they lack conscious minds, is only that: an assumption. It is far more logical to assume continuity in every domain.

But what about skeptics who believe that animals are by definition trapped in the present, and only humans contemplate the future? Are they making a reasonable assumption, or are they blinkered as to what animals are capable of? And why is humanity so prone to downplay animal intelligence? We routinely deny them capacities that we take for granted in ourselves. What is behind this? In trying to find out at what mental level other species operate, the real challenge comes not just from the animals themselves but also from within us.

Scientists and lay people alike tend to jump to conclusions about animal cognition, based on what is known about primates. For example, if primates, especially great apes, don't possess a particular cognitive skill, scientists often assume it doesn't exist elsewhere among animals, because they are all "less cognitively evolved" than primates. But this is not rigorous science. Rather, it's cognitive speciesism, the denial of certain cognitive skills to entire groups of animals based on little more than inaccurate stereotyping. Researchers often are hesitant to see complex forms of cooperation in animals other than primates. Either the cognitive implications attributed to primates evincing cooperation should be extended to other animals, so that species solving similar problems are recognized as possessing at least comparable skills, or we should consider the possibility that the solution of such tasks reveals little about higher-order cognitive function.

We love to compare and contrast animal and human intelligence, taking ourselves as the touchstone. It is good to realize, though, that this is an outdated way of putting it. The comparison is not between humans and animals but between one animal species—ours—and a vast array of others. We're not comparing two separate categories of intelligence, therefore, but rather are considering variation within a single one. I look at human cognition as a variety of animal cognition. It is not even clear how special ours is relative to a cognition distributed over eight independently moving arms, each with its own neural supply, or one that enables a flying organism to catch mobile prey by picking up the echoes of its own shrieks. We obviously attach immense importance to abstract thought and language, but in the larger scheme of things this is only one way to face the problem of survival.

Dualisms between body and mind, human and animal, or reason and emotion may sound useful, but they seriously distract from the larger picture.

The field of evolutionary cognition requires us to consider every species in full. Whether we are studying hand anatomy, trunk multifunctionality, face perception, or greeting rituals, we need to familiarize ourselves with all facets of the animal and its natural history before trying to figure out its mental level. And instead of testing animals on abilities that we are particularly good at—our own species' "magic wells," such as language—

why not test them on their specialized skills? In doing so, we will not just flatten Aristotle's scale of nature: we will transform it into a bush with many branches. This change in perspective is now feeding the long-overdue recognition that intelligent life is not something we must seek at great expense only in the outer reaches of space. It is abundant here on earth, right underneath our nonprehensile noses.

This will help us avoid comparing cognition on a single scale modeled after Aristotle's *scala naturae*, which runs from God, the angels, and humans at the top, downward to other mammals, birds, fish, insects, and mollusks at the bottom. Comparisons up and down this vast ladder have been a popular pastime of cognitive science, but I cannot think of a single profound insight it has yielded. All it has done is make us measure animals by human standards, thus ignoring the immense variation in organisms' worlds. It seems highly unfair to ask if a squirrel can count to ten if counting is not really what a squirrel's life is about. The squirrel is very good at retrieving hidden nuts, though, and some birds are absolute experts. The Clark's nutcracker, in the fall, stores more than twenty-thousand pine nuts, in hundreds of different locations distributed over many square miles; then in winter and spring it manages to recover the majority of them.

That we can't compete with squirrels and nutcrackers on this task—I even forget where I parked my car—is irrelevant, since our species does not need this kind of memory for survival the way forest animals braving a freezing winter do. We don't need echolocation to orient ourselves in the dark; nor do we need to correct for the refraction of light between air and water as archerfish do while shooting droplets at insects above the surface. There are lots of wonderful cognitive adaptations out there that we don't have or need. This is why ranking cognition on a single dimension is a pointless exercise. Cognitive evolution is marked by many peaks of specialization. The ecology of each species is key.

The *scala naturae* view has tempted many to conclude that animals lack certain cognitive capacities. We hear abundant claims along the lines of 'only humans can do this or that,' referring to anything from looking into the future (only humans think ahead) and being concerned for others (only humans care about the well-being of others) to taking a vacation (only humans know leisure time).

It isn't especially meaningful, for example, to ask if cats are more intelligent than dogs. Cats do what they need to do to be cats and dogs do what they need to do to be dogs. While it might be useful to compare members of the same species in terms of how smart they are, this too might be fraught with misleading inferences. If Fido, a dog, learns where his food is faster than his canine buddy Herman, is Fido smarter? Perhaps, but what

if Herman learns to avoid cars more rapidly than Fido? Is Herman more intelligent? Are midwife bats who help another bat give birth more intelligent than non-midwife bats because the former recognizes that another female is having a difficult labor? Who knows? And what about cultural variations in the manufacture and use of tools by chimpanzees? Are chimpanzees who use tools more intelligent than chimpanzees who don't? It's unlikely that they are. Specific circumstances have led to the use of tools and it's likely that all chimpanzees with normal chimpanzee brains would, in the right context, display an innovative ability to make and to use tools. Intelligence has evolved independently in different classes of vertebrates, which speaks against a view of intelligence in which there is a single evolutionary trajectory culminating in *Homo sapiens*.

There is no single form of cognition, and there is no point in ranking cognitions from simple to complex. A species's cognition is generally as good as what it needs for its survival. Distant species that face similar needs may arrive at similar solutions.

Each organism senses the environment in its own way. The eyeless tick climbs onto a grass stem to await the smell of butyric acid emanating from mammalian skin. Since experiments have shown that this arachnid can go for eighteen years without food, the tick has ample time to meet a mammal, climb onto her victim, and gorge herself on warm blood. Afterward she is ready to lay her eggs and die. Can we understand the tick's point of view, it's world, it's experience? It seems incredibly impoverished compared to ours, but perhaps its simplicity as a strength: her goal is well defined, and she encounters few distractions.

Some animals perceive ultraviolet light while others live in a world of smells or, like the star-nosed mole, feel their way around underground. Some sit on the branches of an oak, and others live underneath its bark, while a fox family digs a lair among its roots. Each perceives the same tree differently.

Dennis Nilsen was born in 1945 in a seaside town in Scotland. After a brief stint in the army, he moved to London, where he worked first as a police officer and then as a civil servant. Despite his good job, Nilsen felt unfulfilled and isolated; he seldom spoke to his family, had few friends, and had difficulty maintaining close relationships. He also had dark fantasies about sexually dominating young men, whom he liked to imagine as completely passive or even unconscious.

After the dissolution of one relationship, Nilsen began luring young men into his apartment with the promise of food, alcohol, and lodging. Once they were asleep, Nilsen would strangle them into unconsciousness before drowning and dismembering them in the bathtub. He managed to murder fifteen people before being discovered and sentenced to prison for

life. Strikingly, although Nilsen was a ruthless murderer of other people, he had the deepest affection for his dog, a mutt named Bleep. Following his arrest, Nilsen's biggest concern was not about the families of those men he killed, or even about himself, but about his furry companion—would she be traumatized by his arrest?

How could Nilsen be indifferent to the pain of those he murdered and yet be overwhelmed by the possible suffering of his dog? Perhaps the answer is that his dog was special and somehow had deeper emotions and richer thoughts—that is, more mind—than his victims. Most of us would scoff at this idea. No matter how cunning Nilsen's canine, we generally agree that people have more mind than dogs, which means that people deserve more compassion and concern than dogs. But Nilsen decided otherwise, believing that his dog had more mind than people, which gave Bleep essential moral rights denied to humans. Nilsen disagreed with the rest of us about the relative status of humans and dogs in the mind club.

Membership in the mind club is immensely important, because it comes with clear privileges: those with minds are given respect, responsibility, and moral status, whereas those without minds are ignored, destroyed, or bought and sold as property. In historical cases where slavery was allowed, it was often justified by a belief that the enslaved people had a different kind of mind.

Mind is in the eye of the beholder. A mind is not an objective fact as much as it is a gift given by the person who perceives it. Mind is a matter of perception, with members being granted admission into the mind club based not on what they are but on what they appear to be. To get in, you need to look like you have a mind.

For example, survey respondents were asked to compare the different characters on different mental abilities. One question asked, for example, if Samantha (the girl) is more or less likely to be able to feel pain than Toby (the chimpanzee). Most people, by the way, said "more."

Beyond the extreme example afforded by the Holocaust, we ignore the minds of others in everyday life—such as homeless people—because they hold no instrumental value. In daily life different people can fulfill different goals. A librarian can help you find an old book, a friend can help set you up with a date, but a homeless person seems to help you with nothing but feelings of guilt. This can render them not only mentally invisible but also physically invisible. We see minds when they are useful to us; it also seems that we ignore them when they are not useful.

It turns out that mental abilities are not all clumped together. Instead, people see minds in terms of two fundamentally different factors, sets of mental abilities we labeled experience and agency.

The experience factor captures the ability to have an inner life, to have feelings and experiences. It includes the capacities for hunger, fear, pain, pleasure, rage, and desire, as well as personality, consciousness, pride, embarrassment, and joy. These facets of mind seemed to capture ‘what it is like’ to have a mind—what psychologists and philosophers often talk about when they discuss the puzzle of consciousness. A mind with experience can feel what it is like to touch a hot stove, can enjoy going to the circus, and can have an orgasm.

The agency factor is composed of a different set of mental abilities: self-control, morality, memory, emotion recognition, planning, communication, and thought. The theme for these capacities is not sensing and feeling but rather thinking and doing. The agency factor is made up of the mental abilities that underlie our competence, intelligence, and action. Minds show their agency when they act and accomplish goals.

A useful framework to help understand the differences between experience and agency is inside and outside. Experience is what minds are like from the inside, what it feels like to be a person, or a cat, or a bat. Because experience is a matter of being inside a mind, it can be very elusive to others. In contrast, agency is more transparent because it is what minds are like from the outside. We can determine an entity’s ability to plan and think simply by observing its actions and reactions. Said another way, experience is about inputs, as sensations and feelings generally are conveyed by sense organs like eyes and ears that feed in to minds. Conversely, agency is about outputs, movements, and actions that feed out of minds.

Mind perception is measured on dimensions of agency and experience. Let’s take a quick tour of the map. First, it seems that normal, conscious, living adult humans like us reside in the upper right corner, with both experience and agency. In contrast, the infant, the dog, and the frog (upper left) have some experience but little agency; they are entities for which people see that ‘someone is home,’ but with diminished capacities to think and act. They are entities that can be harmed but that cannot harm us in return.

Now continue the tour down the map. Below the animals and baby are the more cryptic cases of the human fetus and the patient in a persistent vegetative state. These are cryptominds with very little agency but perhaps some experience; there might be someone home, but not anyone capable of answering the door. Even lower down is the dead woman (lower left), who is ascribed neither much experience nor agency—although it’s worth noting that she is not at zero. Perhaps we see dead people as having some mind because we remember their minds as they were during life. Or perhaps we see their minds because we believe in the afterlife, and how can there be

heaven or hell without minds to feel joy and pain?

As we continue to circle around the map, we move from the dead to the robot, which is perceived to have very little capacity for experience. Just imagine the classic science-fiction robot, which has no emotions and just keeps telling humans how irrational they are. A robot has the agency to help us safely explore the inside of a broken nuclear plant, but without experience it cannot help us explore the inside of a broken heart.

And then, in the bottom right, we have the Almighty. As you might expect, God is perceived as very able to do things, but is, curiously, seen to have little experience. God's mind may be great, but we don't believe that He can feel hunger, fear, or even joy like the rest of us. Interestingly, in a replication of the mind survey, it was discovered that corporations are seen to occupy the same location on the mind map. Like God, Google was seen as all agency and no experience.

Mind perception forms the very basis for questions of life and death: entities with minds deserve moral consideration, whereas entities without minds do not. But if mind perception is split into agency and experience, how do these two factors relate to morality?

Consider a thought experiment called "Baby versus Robot." It's not about babies and robots fighting, unfortunately, but instead about two moral scenarios. In the first, imagine that the baby and the robot were just about to tumble off a cliff and you could save only one of them. Which would you save? Likely you would save the baby and let the robot fall to its doom. Of course, one could make the argument that the robot has lithium batteries and other toxic components that would pollute the environment, whereas the splattered baby goo would provide food for scavengers—though you're right, that diaper does seem problematic. In the second scenario, imagine that the baby and the robot have found a loaded gun and are playing with it, when it goes off and injures someone. Which of them would you hold responsible? If you're like most people, you would forgive the baby and condemn the robot to the junkyard. Which is quite dickish since the robot can't help the way he was programmed, shouldn't we be going after that guy? How do you not program in some 'weapon recognition' into your bot? Isn't this yet another case of capitalism passing the buck to some poor exploited slave?

These two scenarios reveal that it is no fun being a robot, and also that someone needs to talk to that baby's parents. But most important, these scenarios demonstrate that there are two distinct kinds of moral status, not one. Questions of moral responsibility—who deserves responsibility and punishment—seem to be distinct from those of moral rights—who deserves protection from harm—because we protect the baby from harm and yet

hold the robot morally responsible. This finding is striking because many have assumed that more mind equals more morality, with human adults having both rights and responsibilities and tables and turnips having neither. These two types of moral status (rights and responsibilities) not only are distinct but also map perfectly onto our two-dimensional mind map. To have moral rights you need to have experience, an inner life filled with feelings, and the potential for suffering. Conversely, to be morally responsible you need to have agency, to be able to plan, act, and appreciate the outputs of your thoughts. Babies have more experience than robots and so have more moral rights; robots have more agency than babies and so have more moral responsibility.

Beyond babies and robots, the mind survey revealed that any entity with experience is seen to deserve moral rights, and any entity with agency is seen to deserve moral responsibility.

There are two kinds of perceived minds, each with its own type of morality—thinking doers and vulnerable feelers. Thinking doers are active minds with moral responsibility that do actions, minds like corporations and God. Vulnerable feelers are passive minds with moral rights that have actions done to them, minds like puppies, medical patients, and babies. This division of doer and feeler should feel intuitive because it is as ancient as human thought. The writings of Confucius, the yin and yang of ancient China, and the Tao Te Ching have long split the world into complementary opposites such as black and white, hot and cold, and good and evil. In mind perception these opposites are inner (experience) and outer (agency), input (experience) and output (agency), passive (experience) and active (agency), recipient (experience) and doer (agency), victim (experience) and aggressor (agency).

Seen from the perspective of mind perception, good and evil aren't mystical forces that exist apart from humanity, but simply what emerges through the interaction of agents and patients. To create evil, just intentionally cause another mind to suffer (kick a dog), and to create good, just intentionally prevent another mind from suffering (stop a dog from being kicked). More formally, we can define both moral and immoral acts thus:

$$\text{(Im)morality} = \text{Agency (of Agent)} + \text{Experience (of Patient)}$$

This definition reflects both the dyadic nature of good and evil and the kinds of mind (e.g. adult, child, animal, machine) in the agent and patient slots. To get maximum immorality, you should combine a very powerful agent and a very vulnerable patient. Conversely, for minimum immorality, you should combine a weak agent and an invulnerable patient. As evidence,

consider a thought experiment that actually does involve fighting, “CEO versus Little Girl.”

Imagine that a CEO punches a little girl in the face. Chances are, with a few exceptions, you’d think this is immoral. Now imagine that a little girl punches a CEO in the face—might be a good way to show you’re not a tool of those neoliberal NGOs, Greta, can even blame it on your autism—chances are you’d think this is funny. Indeed, children injuring adults is a staple of hilarious YouTube videos, whereas adults injuring children is a staple of (decidedly unfunny) Lifetime movies. The evil of CEOs harming kids, but not of kids harming CEOs, is perfectly consistent with our formula; CEOs are mostly thinking doers, whereas kids are mostly vulnerable feelers, and so only one combination trips our evil detector.

Linking mind perception to morality not only explains the enduring hilarity of kids injuring unsuspecting adults but also allows you to predict your moral outrage about almost any infraction. Tough man (high agency) punches kitten (high experience)? Immoral. Kitten (low agency) scratches tough man (low experience)? Not immoral. Wage slave (low agency) sabotages property of Company (high agency)? Not immoral? When you become enraged at an instance of moral depravity, chances are someone very agentic is harming someone (or something) very patient, if not, you should perhaps question whether you’re simply being manipulated by those in power to reinforce their position.

A Gently Sloping Beach

Organisms must be studied in wild environments that challenge the organism to observe intelligent behaviour.

How do you give a chimp—or an elephant or an octopus or a horse—an IQ test? It may sound like the setup to a joke, but it is actually one of the thorniest questions facing science. Human IQ may be controversial, especially while we are comparing cultural or ethnic groups, but when it comes to distinct species, the problems are a magnitude greater.

At issue, however, is not just how two animal species compare but—the big gorilla in the room—how they compare to us. And in this regard, we often abandon all scrutiny. Just as science is critical of any new finding in animal cognition, it is often equally uncritical with regard to claims about our own intelligence. It swallows them hook, line, and sinker, especially if they are in the expected direction. In the meantime, the general public gets confused, because inevitably any such claims provoke studies that challenge them.

“Variation in outcome is often a matter of methodology, which may sound boring but goes to the heart of the question of whether we are smart enough to know how smart animals are. Methodology is all we have as scientists, so we pay close attention to it. When our capuchin monkeys underperformed on a face-recognition task on a touchscreen, we kept staring at the data until we discovered that it was always on a particular day of the week that the monkeys fared so poorly. It turned out that one of our student volunteers, who carefully followed the script during testing, had a distracting presence. This student was fidgety and nervous, always changing her body postures or adjusting her hair, which apparently made the monkeys nervous, too. Performance improved dramatically once we removed this young woman from the project.”

Or take the recent finding that male but not female experimenters induce so much stress in mice that it affects their responses. Placing a T-shirt worn by a man in the room has the same effect, suggesting that olfaction is key. This means, of course, that mouse studies conducted by men may have different outcomes than those conducted by women. Methodological details matter much more than we tend to admit, which is particularly relevant when we compare species.

The Mirror Test consisted of putting a mark on the body of an anesthetized ape that it could find only, once awake, by inspecting its reflection. The first counterattack came from B. F. Skinner and colleagues, who promptly trained pigeons to peck at dots on themselves while standing in front of a mirror. Reproducing a semblance of the behavior, they felt, would solve the mystery. Never mind that it took them hundreds of grain rewards to get the pigeons to do something that chimpanzees and humans do without any coaching. One can train goldfish to play soccer and bears to dance, but does anyone believe that this tells us much about the skills of human soccer stars or dancers? Worse, we aren't even sure that this pigeon study is replicable. Another research team spent years trying the exact same training, using the same strain of pigeon, without producing any self-pecking birds. They ended up publishing a report critical of the original study with the word 'Pinocchio' in its title.

B. F. Skinner was more interested in experimental control over animals than spontaneous behavior. Stimulus-response contingencies were all that mattered. His behaviorism dominated animal studies for much of the last century. Loosening its theoretical grip was a prerequisite for the rise of evolutionary cognition.

Humans certainly perceive rhythm and other mental abilities in animals, but do animals perceive mind in other animals? Early research on this question focused on chimpanzees because they seemed the most human-like of animals, both in terms of DNA and in mental abilities. In one popular paradigm, two researchers would show a chimp some delicious food, like a banana, before one researcher (the "knower") went behind a screen and hid the food beneath one of four cups. While the knower was doing the hiding, the other experimenter (the "guesser") would stand with a bucket over his head, making him or her blind to the proceedings. Thus the knower would know the exact location of the food, whereas the guesser could only choose a cup at random. The knower and the guesser would then each point to a different cup. The smart choice in this scenario is to trust the knower to indicate the location of the food. However, this requires understanding the content of others' minds, realizing that the bucketless experimenter knows something that the bucketed-headed experimenter does not.

Chimps overwhelmingly failed this task, showing no preference for the cups indicated by the knower, a result most scientists interpreted as indicating that chimps lack the ability to perceive the minds of others. Others weren't so sure. These more optimistic folks believed that researchers were simply using the wrong paradigm to assess mind perception. They reasoned that if evolution had endowed chimps with mind perception it wasn't for playing bucket-head with humans but instead for outcompeting other chimps.

In the wild chimpanzees seldom do cooperative tasks with humans, but they do frequently try to steal the food or mates of other chimpanzees.

To test this “conspecific competition” hypothesis, researchers set up two caches of food in a courtyard: one in plain sight of a high-ranking chimp, the other hidden from his view by a wooden screen. They then released a hungry junior chimp into the courtyard and observed. If chimpanzees lack the ability to understand other minds (like the thoughts of the big, bad, dominant chimp), then this junior chimp would foolishly try to take the visible food. But if chimpanzees could understand other minds, then this junior chimp would take the perspective of the dominant chimp and realize that he should steal only the hidden food. The junior chimp ignored the visible food and instead went to the hidden cache.

It is an unwritten rule among chimps that once something is in your hands or mouth, it is yours, even if you are of low status. Before this moment, however, when two individuals approach food, the dominant will enjoy priority. High-status chimps exploit the other’s knowledge by carefully monitoring their gaze direction, looking where they are looking. Their partners, on the other hand, do their utmost to conceal their knowledge by not looking where they don’t want the other to go. Both chimps seem exquisitely aware that one possesses knowledge that the other lacks.

After releasing the apes onto an island, a number of them passed over the site where researchers had hidden the fruits under the sand. Only a few small yellow patches were visible. Dandy, a young adult male, hardly slowed down when he ran over the place. Later in the afternoon, however, when all the apes were dozing off in the sun, he made a beeline for the spot. Without hesitation, he dug up the fruits and devoured them at his leisure, which he would never have been able to do had he stopped right when he saw them. He would have lost them to dominant group mates. Here we see the entire spectrum of animal cognition, from the specialized navigation of a predatory wasp to the generalized cognition of apes, which allows them to handle a great variety of problems, including novel ones. Dandy at his first passing didn’t linger for a second. He must have made an instant calculation that deception was going to be his best bet.

Instead of trying to control animals to seek specific outcomes, she had a wait-and-see attitude. She presented them with simple challenges to find out how they’d meet them. For her most talented chimpanzee, Sultan, she would put a banana out of reach on the ground and offer him sticks that were too short to reach the fruit. Or she would hang a banana high up in the air and spread large wooden boxes around, none of which was tall enough for the purpose. Sultan would first jump or throw things at the banana or drag humans by the hand toward it in the hope that they’d help him out, or

at least be willing to serve as a footstool. If this failed, he would sit around for a while without doing anything until he might hit at a sudden solution. He would jump up to put one bamboo stick inside another, making a longer stick. Or he would stack boxes on top of one another so as to build a tower that allowed him to reach the banana.

This moment might be described as the ‘aha! experience,’ as if a lightbulb had been switched on, not unlike the story of Archimedes, who jumped out of his bath in which he had discovered how to measure the volume of submerged objects, after which he ran naked through the streets of Syracuse, shouting “Eureka!” A sudden insight explained how Sultan put together what he knew about bananas, boxes, and sticks to produce a brand-new action sequence that would take care of his problem. The outcome was a purposeful action in which the ape kept trying to reach his goal despite the numerous stacking errors resulting in the collapse of his towers. A female, Grande, was an even more undeterred and patient architect who once built a wobbly tower of four boxes. Once a solution was discovered, the apes found it easier to solve similar problems, as if they had learned something about the causal connections.

A good example are the toolkits, which can be so complex that it is hard to imagine that they were invented in a single step. A typical one was found in the Goualougo Triangle, Republic of Congo, where a chimpanzee may arrive with two different sticks at a particular open spot in the forest. It is always the same combination: one is a stout woody sapling of about a meter long, while the other is a flexible slender herb stem. The chimp then proceeds to deliberately drive the first stick into the ground, working it with both hands and feet the way we do with a shovel. Having made a sizable hole to perforate an army ant nest deep under the surface, she pulls out the stick and smells it, then carefully inserts her second tool. The flexible stem captures bite-happy insects that she pulls up and eats, dipping regularly into the nest below. Apes often climb off the ground, moving onto tree buttresses, to avoid the nasty bites of colony defenders. More than one-thousand such tools were collected by a single researcher, which shows how common the perforator-dipping combination is.

More elaborate toolkits are used by chimpanzees in Gabon hunting for honey. In yet another dangerous activity, these chimps raid bee nests using a five-piece toolkit, which includes a pounder (a heavy stick to break open the hive’s entrance), a perforator (a stick to perforate the ground to get to the honey chamber), an enlarger (to enlarge an opening through sideways action), a collector (a stick with a frayed end to dip into honey and slurp it off), and swabs (strips of bark to scoop up honey). This tool use is complicated since the tools are prepared and carried to the hive before

most of the work begins, and they will need to be kept nearby until the chimp is forced to quit due to aggressive bees. Their use takes foresight and planning of sequential steps, exactly the sort of organization of activities often emphasized for our human ancestors.

Chimpanzees on the savanna use between fifteen and twenty-five different tools per community, and the precise tools vary with cultural and ecological circumstances. One savanna community, for example, uses pointed sticks to hunt. This came as a shock, since hunting weapons were thought to be another uniquely human advance. The chimpanzees jab their spears into a tree cavity to kill a sleeping bush baby, a small primate.

At one level chimpanzee tool use may seem primitive, as it is based on sticks and stones, but on another level it is extremely advanced. Sticks and stones are all they have in the forest, and we should keep in mind that also for the Bushmen the most ubiquitous instrument is the digging stick: a sharpened stick to break open anthills and dig up roots. The tool use of wild chimpanzees by far exceeds what was ever held possible.

Even today some scholars dismiss ape tools by stressing how human technology is embedded in social roles, symbols, production, and education. A chimpanzee cracking nuts with rocks doesn't qualify; nor, I suspect, does a farmer picking his teeth with a twig. One philosopher even felt that since chimpanzees don't need their so-called tools, it remains a feeble comparison.

Gibbons are exclusively arboreal. Known as brachiators, they propel themselves through trees by hanging by their arms and hands. Their hands, which have tiny thumbs and elongated fingers, are specialized for this kind of locomotion: gibbon hands act more like hooks than like the versatile grasping and feeling organs of most other primates. Realizing that the gibbon's world barely includes the ground level and that its hands make it impossible to pick up objects from a flat surface, scientists redesigned a traditional string-pulling task. Instead of presenting strings lying on a surface, as had been done before, they were elevated to the animal's shoulder level, making them easier to grasp. Without going into detail—the task required the animal to look carefully at how a string was attached to food—the gibbons solved all the problems quickly and efficiently, demonstrating the same intelligence as other apes. Their earlier poor performance had more to do with the way they were tested than with their mental powers.

Elephants are another good example. For years, scientists believed them incapable of using tools. The pachyderms failed the out-of-reach banana test, leaving the stick alone. Their failure could not be attributed to an inability to lift objects from a flat surface, because elephants are ground dwellers and pick up items all the time, sometimes tiny ones. Researchers concluded that they just didn't get the problem. It occurred to no one that

perhaps we, the investigators, didn't get the elephant. Like the six blind men, we keep turning around and poking the big beast, but we need to remember that what we observe is not nature in itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.

In contrast to the primate's hand, the elephant's grasping organ is also its nose. Elephants use their trunks not only to reach food but also to sniff and touch it. With their unparalleled sense of smell, these animals know exactly what they are going for. But picking up a stick blocks their nasal passages. Even when they bring the stick close to the food, it impedes their feeling and smelling it. It is like sending a blindfolded child out on an Easter egg hunt. What sort of experiment, then, would do justice to the animal's special anatomy and abilities?

At the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. Kandula, a young elephant bull, can do the problem when it is presented differently. The scientists hung fruit high up above Kandula's enclosure, just out of his reach. They gave the elephant several sticks and a sturdy square box. Kandula ignored the sticks but, after a while, began kicking the box with his foot. He kicked it many times in a straight line until it was right underneath the fruit. He then stood on the box with his front legs, which enabled him to reach the food with his trunk. An elephant, it turns out, can use tools—if they are the right ones.

They also varied the setup, making life more difficult for Kandula. They put the box in a different section of the yard, out of view, so that when Kandula looked up at the tempting food, he would need to recall the solution while distancing himself from his goal to fetch the tool. Apart from a few large-brained species, such as humans, apes, and dolphins, not many animals will do this, but Kandula did it without hesitation, fetching the box from great distances.

Superior intelligence doesn't imply better test outcomes. Both rhesus monkeys and chimpanzees were presented with a simple task, known as haptic (touch) discrimination. They were to stick their hand through a hole to feel the difference between two shapes and pick the correct one. The goal was to do hundreds of trials per session, but whereas this worked well with the monkeys, the chimps had other ideas. They would do fine on the first dozen trials, showing that the discrimination posed no problem, but then their attention would wander. They'd thrust their hands farther so as to reach the scientist, pulling at their clothes, making laughing faces, banging on the window that separated them, and trying to engage the researchers in play. Jumping up and down, they'd even gesture to the door, as if the scientist didn't know how to get to their side. Needless to say, the apes' performance on the task was well below that of the monkeys, not due to

an intellectual deficit but because they were bored out of their minds. The task was just not up to their intellectual level.

One cannot expect a great performance on a task that fails to arouse interest. Researchers ran into this problem while studying face recognition in chimpanzees. At the time, science had declared humans unique, since we were so much better at identifying faces than any other primate. No one seemed bothered by the fact that other primates had been tested mostly on human faces rather than those of their own kind. When one of the pioneers in this field was asked why the methodology had never moved beyond the human face, he answered that since humans differ so strikingly from one another, a primate that fails to tell members of our species apart will surely also fail at its own kind.

But when tested on photographs of their own species they excelled at it. Selecting images on a computer screen, they would see one chimpanzee portrait immediately followed by a pair of others. One portrait of the pair would be a different picture of the same individual as presented before, while the other would show a different individual. Having been trained to detect similarity (a procedure known as matching to sample), the chimpanzees had no trouble recognizing which portrait most resembled the first. The apes even detected family ties. After having seen a female portrait, they were given a choice between two juvenile faces, one of which was the offspring of the female shown before. They picked the latter based purely on physical similarity, since they did not know any of the depicted apes in real life.

What is salient to us—such as our own facial features—may not be salient to other species. Animals often know only what they need to know.

Each organism has its own ecology and lifestyle, its own *Umwelt*, which dictates what it needs to know in order to make a living. There is not a single species that can stand model for all the others, most certainly not one with a brain as tiny as a pigeon's. Pigeons are plenty intelligent, but size does matter. Brains are the most "expensive" organs around. They are true energy hogs, using twenty times more calories per unit than muscle tissue. Since ape brains are several hundred times heavier than those of pigeons and hence burn vastly more energy, it stands to reason that apes face greater cognitive challenges. Otherwise mother nature indulged in a shocking extravagance, something she is not known for. In the utilitarian view of biology, animals have the brains they need—nothing more, nothing less. Even within a species, the brain may change depending on how it is being used, such as the way song-related areas seasonally expand and contract in the songbird brain. Brains adapt to ecological requirements, as does cognition.

Evolution pushes cognition around, adapting it to the organism's needs.

This is known as biologically prepared learning: each organism is driven to learn those things it needs to know in order to survive.

Without any reward or punishment, animals accumulate knowledge that will come in handy in the future, from finding nuts in the spring, to returning to one's burrow, to reaching a banana. The role of learning is obvious, but what is special about cognition is that it puts learning in its proper place. Learning is a mere tool. It allows animals to collect information in a world that, like the Internet, contains a staggering amount of it. It is easy to drown in the information swamp. An organism's cognition narrows down the information flow and makes it learn those specific contingencies that it needs to know given its natural history.

By flapping their wings, digging holes, manipulating sticks, gnawing wood, climbing trees, and so on, every species sets up its own learning opportunities. Many animals are driven to learn the things they need to know or do, the way kid goats practice head butts or human toddlers have an insuppressible urge to stand up and walk. Operant conditioning tends to reinforce what is already there. Instead of being the omnipotent creator of behavior, it is its humble servant.

If learning talents are a product of natural history and mating strategies, the whole notion of universality begins to fall apart. We can expect huge variation. Evidence for inborn learning specializations has been steadily mounting. There are many different types, from the way ducklings imprint on the first moving object they see—whether it is their mother or a bearded zoologist—to the song learning of birds and whales and the way primates copy one another's tool use. The more variation we discover, the shakier gets the claim that all learning is essentially the same.

Most animal learning is of a rather vague kind, similar to how you may have learned to avoid some highways at certain times of the day. Having gotten stuck in traffic often enough, you will look for a better, faster route, without any specific memory of what happened on your previous commutes. This is also how a rat in a maze learns to turn one way and not another, and how a bird learns at what time of day to find bread crumbs at my parents' balcony. This kind of learning is all around us.

What we deem a special kind, the one at issue here, is the recall of particulars. The power of autobiographical memories lies in their specificity. Colorful and alive, they can be actively called up and dwelled upon. They are reconstructions—which is why they are sometimes false—yet so powerful that they are accompanied by an extraordinary sense of their correctness. They fill us with emotions and sensations. You mention someone's wedding day, or Dad's funeral, and all sorts of memories about the weather, the guests, the food, the happiness, or the sadness will flood the mind. This

kind of memory must be at work when apes react to cues connected to events from years back.

The same memory serves foraging wild chimpanzees, which visit about a dozen fruit-bearing trees per day. How do they know where to go? The forest has far too many trees to go about it randomly. Working in Tai National Park, in Ivory Coast, a primatologist found apes to have an excellent recall of previous meals. They mostly checked trees at which they had eaten in previous years. If they ran into copious ripe fruit, they'd gorge on it while grunting contentedly and make sure to return a couple of days later. The researcher describes how the chimps would build their daily nests (in which they sleep for only one night) en route to such trees and get up before dawn, something they normally hate to do. The intrepid primatologist followed the traveling party on foot, but whereas the chimps typically ignored her tripping or stepping on a noisy branch, now they all would turn around and stare pointedly at her, making her feel bad. Sounds draw attention, and the chimps were on edge in the dark. This was understandable since one of the females had recently lost her infant to a leopard.

Despite their deep-seated fear, the apes would set out on a long trek to a specific fig tree where they had recently eaten. Their goal was to beat the early fig rush. These soft, sweet fruits are favored by many forest animals, from squirrels to flocks of hornbills, so that an early arrival would be the only way to take advantage of the abundance. Remarkably, the chimps would get up earlier for trees far from their nests than for those nearby, arriving at about the same time at both. This suggests calculation of travel time based on expected distances. All this makes one believe that the Tai chimpanzees actively recall previous experiences in order to plan for a plentiful breakfast.

The case for episodic memory in animals was further strengthened when psychologists let rats run around in an eight-armed radial maze. The rodents learned that once they had visited an arm and eaten the food in it, it would be permanently gone, so there would be no point returning to it. There was one exception, though. They occasionally found chocolate-flavored pellets, which would be replenished after long time intervals. The rats formed an expectation about this delicious food based on where and when they had encountered it. They did return to those specific arms, but only after long intervals. In other words, the rodents kept track of the when, what, and where of chocolate surprises.

Some are hardly satisfied with these results, however. They fail to tell us how aware the birds, rats, or apes are of their own memories. What kind of consciousness, if any, is involved? Do they view their past as a piece of personal history? Since such questions are unanswerable, some have, unsurprisingly, weakened the terminology by endowing animals only with

“episodic-like” memory. I don’t agree with this retreat, however, since it gives weight to an ill-defined aspect of human memory known only through introspection and language. While language is helpful to communicate memories, it is hardly what produces them. My preference would be to turn the burden of proof around, especially when it comes to species close to us. If other primates recall events with equal precision as humans do, the most fair assumption is that they do so in the same way. Those who insist that human memory rests on unique levels of awareness have their work cut out for them to substantiate such a claim. It may, literally, be all in our heads.

One researcher gave a bottlenose dolphin the task to tell the difference between high and low tones. The dolphin was an eighteen-year-old male named Natua, in a pool at the Dolphin Research Center in Florida. Natua’s level of confidence was quite manifest. He swam at different speeds toward the response, depending on how easy or hard it was to tell both tones apart. When they were very different, the dolphin arrived with such speed that his bow wave threatened to soak the electronics of the apparatus. They had to be covered with plastic. If the tones were similar, though, Natua slowed down, wagged his head, and wavered between the two paddles that he needed to touch in order to indicate a high or low sound. He didn’t know which one to pick. To study Natua’s uncertainty, mindful of the suggestion that it might reflect consciousness, the investigator created a way for the animal to opt out. A third paddle was added, which Natua could touch if he wanted a fresh trial with an easier distinction. The tougher the choice, the more Natua went for the third paddle, apparently realizing when he had trouble coming up with the right answer. Thus the field of animal metacognition was born.

Another researcher gave monkeys a memory task on a touchscreen. They would first see one particular image, say a pink flower, then face a delay before being presented with several pictures, including the pink flower. The delay varied in length. Before each test, the monkeys had the choice to either take it or decline it. If they took the test and correctly touched the pink flower, they gained a peanut. But if they declined, they only got a monkey pellet, a boring everyday food. The longer the delay, the more the monkeys declined taking the test despite its better reward. They seemed to realize that their memory had faded. Occasionally, they were forced to take a trial without a chance of escape. In those cases they fared rather poorly. In other words, they opted out for a reason, doing so when they couldn’t count on their memory.

A rhesus macaque knows that food has been hidden in one of four tubes, but he has no idea which one. He is not allowed to try every tube and will get only one pick. By bending down to first peek into the tubes, he demonstrates

that he knows he doesn't know, which is a sign of metacognition.

As a result of these studies, some animals are now believed to track their own knowledge and to realize when it is deficient. It all fits the idea that animals are active processors of the cues around them, with beliefs, expectations, even consciousness.

Perception is turned into experience by picking and choosing what sensory input to pay attention to and how to process and organize it. Reality is a mental construct. This is what makes the elephant, the bat, the dolphin, the octopus, and the star-nosed mole so intriguing. They have senses that we either don't have, or that we have in a much less developed form, making the way they relate to their environment impossible for us to fathom. They construct their own realities. We may attach less significance to these, simply because they are so alien, but they are obviously all-important to these animals. Even when they process information familiar to us, they may do so quite differently, such as when elephants tell human languages apart. This ability was first demonstrated in African elephants.

Herds retreated and "bunched" together (forming a tight circle with calves in the middle) more often after playbacks of Maasai than of Kamba voices. Maasai male voices triggered more defensive reactions than those of Maasai women and boys. Even after the natural voices were acoustically transformed so as to make male voices sound more female, and vice versa, the outcome remained the same. The elephants were especially vigilant upon hearing the resynthesized voices of Maasai men. This was surprising because the pitch of these voices had now the opposite gender's qualities. Possibly the elephants identified gender by other characteristics, such as the fact that female voices tend to be more melodious and "breathy" than those of males. Experience played a role, because herds led by older matriarchs were more discriminating. The same difference was found in another study in which lion roaring was played from a speaker. Older matriarchs would charge the speaker, which is quite different from their hasty retreat from Maasai voices. Aggressive mobbing of men carrying spears is unlikely to pay off, yet driving off lions is something elephants are good at.

Despite their size, these animals face other dangers, including very small ones, such as stinging bees. Elephants are vulnerable to stings around the eyes and up their trunks, and young elephants lack a thick enough skin to protect themselves against a mass attack. Elephants give deep rumbles as an alarm to both humans and bees, but the two sounds must differ because playbacks induce quite different responses. Upon hearing the bee-rumble from a speaker, for example, elephants flee with head-shaking movements that would knock insects away, a reaction not shown to the human-rumble.

In short, elephants make sophisticated distinctions regarding potential

dangers to the point that they classify our own species based on language, age, and gender. How they do so is not entirely clear, but studies like these are beginning to scratch the surface of one of the most enigmatic minds on the planet.

If we test animals under duress, what can we expect? Would anyone test the memory of human children by throwing them into a swimming pool to see if they remember where to get out? Yet the Morris Water Maze is a standard memory test used every day in hundreds of laboratories that make rats frantically swim in a water tank with high walls until they come upon a submerged platform that saves them. In subsequent trials, the rats need to remember the platform's location. There is also the Columbia Obstruction Method, in which animals have to cross an electrified grid after varying periods of deprivation, so researchers can see if their drive to reach food or a mate—or for mother rats, their pups—exceeds the fear of a painful shock. Stress is, in fact, a major testing tool. Many labs keep their animals at 85 percent of typical body weight to ensure food motivation. We have woefully little data on how hunger affects their cognition, although I do remember a paper entitled “Too Hungry to Learn?” about food-deprived chickens that were not particularly good at noticing the finer distinctions of a maze task.

The assumption that an empty stomach improves learning is curious. Think about your own life: absorbing the layout of a city, getting to know new friends, learning to play the piano or do your job. Does food play much of a role? No one has ever proposed permanent food deprivation for university students. Why would it be any different for animals? Intelligent animals learn mostly through curiosity and free exploration, both of which are likely killed by a narrow fixation on food. For example, the Skinner box is a splendid instrument to demonstrate the effectiveness of food rewards but not to study complex behavior.

I am not for one moment disparaging the value of the rat as a subject for psychological investigation; there is very little wrong with the rat that cannot be overcome by the education of the experimenters.

Instead of domesticating white rats in order to make them suitable to a particular testing paradigm, behaviorists should have done the opposite. They should have invented paradigms that fit real animals.

American psychologist Frank Beach lamented the narrow focus of behavioral science on the albino rat. His incisive critique featured a cartoon in which a Pied Piper rat is followed by a happy mass of white-coated experimental psychologists. Carrying their favorite tools—mazes and Skinner boxes—they are being led into a deep river.

Dogs were once depicted as smarter than wolves, perhaps even apes, because they paid better attention to human pointing gestures. A human

would point at one out of two buckets, and the dog would check that particular bucket out for a reward. Scientists concluded that domestication had given dogs extra intelligence compared to their ancestors. But what does it mean that wolves fail to follow human pointing? With its vast experience, I bet a wolf could outsmart its domesticated counterpart anytime—yet all we go by is how they react to us. And who says that the difference in reaction is inborn, a consequence of domestication, and not based on familiarity with the species doing the pointing?

It is the old nature-nurture dilemma. The only way to determine how much of a trait is produced by genes and how much by the environment is to hold one of these two constant to see what difference the other one makes. It is a complex problem that is never fully resolved. In the dog-wolf comparison, this would mean raising wolves like dogs in a human household. If they still differ, genetics might be at play. Raising wolf puppies in the home is a hellish job, though, since they are exceptionally energetic and less rule-bound than dog puppies, chewing up everything in sight. When dedicated scientists raised wolves this way, the nurture hypothesis came out the winner. Human-raised wolves followed hand points as well as dogs.

A few differences persisted, though, such as that wolves looked less at human faces than dogs and were more self-reliant. When dogs tackle a problem they cannot solve, they look back at their human companion to get encouragement or assistance—something that wolves never do. Wolves keep trying and trying on their own. Domestication may be responsible for this particular difference. Instead of intelligence, though, it seems more a question of temperament and relations with us—those weird bipedal apes that the wolf evolved to fear and the dog was bred to please.

This is no doubt why some people rate cats as less intelligent than dogs. We know, however, that a cat's lack of response to humans is not due to ignorance. A recent study showed that felines have no trouble recognizing their owner's voice. The deeper problem is that they don't care, prompting the study's authors to add:

“The behavioral aspects of cats that cause their owners to become attached to them are still undetermined.”

Dogs, for example, engage in lots of eye contact with us. They have hijacked the human parental pathways in the brain, making us care about them in almost the same way that we care about our children. Dog owners who stare into their pet's eyes experience a rapid increase in oxytocin—a neuropeptide involved in attachment and bonding. Exchanging gazes full of empathy and trust, we enjoy a special relationship with the dog.

There is a video you may have seen, and it may have brought tears to your eyes. It concerns two British men, John Rendall and Anthony “Ace” Berg, who in 1969 rescued a lonely lion cub from his tiny cage, brought him home, and named him Christian. These two big men fed Christian from a bottle and played with him in a local churchyard, and when he quickly grew too big for their apartment, they facilitated his release back into the wilds of Africa. Months later they went to Kenya to check up on their feline friend, but they were told that he was now fully wild and that he would not remember them.

Undeterred, they trekked to his location and filmed their encounter. The video begins with John, Ace, and Christian walking toward each other across some rocks. As the lion approaches the men, he quickens his pace, and there is a moment of apprehension as Christian jumps toward them with paws outstretched, but he attacks them only with love and gives them a big hug. Wishful thinking be damned, there is no other word that fits: he stands up on his hind legs and embraces them with his paws. The two men whoop and snuggle him; he hasn’t forgotten his surrogate parents and the love they gave.

Human empathy is a critically important capacity, one that holds entire societies together and connects us with those whom we love and care about. It is far more fundamental to survival, I’d say, than knowing what others know. But since it belongs to the large submerged part of the iceberg—traits that we share with all mammals—it doesn’t garner the same respect. Moreover, empathy sounds emotional, something cognitive science tends to look down upon. Never mind that knowing what others want or need, or how best to please or assist them, is likely the original perspective taking, the kind from which all other kinds derive. It is essential for reproduction, since mammalian mothers need to be sensitive to the emotional states of their offspring, when they are cold, hungry, or in danger. Empathy is a biological imperative.

Once, in his desire to underscore the uniqueness of human altruism, a prominent child psychologist shouted at a large audience:

“No ape will ever jump into a lake to save another!”

However, there are actually a handful of reports of apes doing precisely this—often to their own detriment, since they don’t swim.

I speak of targeted helping, which is assistance based on an appreciation of the other’s precise circumstances. One of the oldest reports in the scientific literature concerns an incident, in 1954, off the coast of Florida. During a capture expedition for a public aquarium, a stick of dynamite was set off

under the water surface near a pod of bottlenose dolphins. As soon as one stunned victim surfaced, heavily listing, two other dolphins came to its aid:

“One came up from below on each side, and placing the upper lateral part of their heads approximately beneath the pectoral fins of the injured one, they buoyed it to the surface in an apparent effort to allow it to breathe while it remained partially stunned.” The two helpers were submerged, which meant that they couldn’t breathe during the entire effort. The pod remained nearby and waited until their companion recovered, after which they all fled in a hurry, taking tremendous leaps.”

In children, an understanding of needs and desires develops years before they realize what others know. They read hearts well before they read minds. This suggests that we are on the wrong track in phrasing all this in terms of abstract thinking and theories about others. At a young age, children recognize, for example, that a child looking for his rabbit will be happy to find it, whereas a child searching for his dog will be indifferent to the rabbit. They have an understanding of what others want. Not all humans take advantage of this capacity, which is why we have two kinds of gift-givers: those who go out of their way to find a gift that you might like, and those who arrive with what they like.

Even birds do better than that. In one of those cognitive ripples typical of the field, empathic perspective taking has been suggested for corvids. Male Eurasian jays court their mates by feeding them delicious tidbits. On the assumption that every male likes to impress, experimenters gave him two foods to choose from: wax moth larvae and mealworms. But before giving the male a chance to feed his mate, they would feed her first with one of those two foods. Seeing this, the male would change his choice. If his mate had just eaten a lot of wax moth larvae, he’d pick mealworms for her instead, and vice versa. He did so, however, only if he had witnessed her being fed by the experimenter. Male birds thus took into account what their mate had just eaten, perhaps assuming that she’d be ready for a change of taste.

One of the best illustrations of chimpanzee social awareness occurs in mediated conflict resolution. After a fight between male combatants, a third party may induce them to make peace. Interestingly, it’s only female chimps who do so, and only the highest-ranking ones among them. They step in when two male rivals fail to reconcile. The male rivals may be sitting near each other and avoiding eye contact, unable or unwilling to make the first move. If a third male were to approach, even to make peace, he’d be

perceived as a party to the conflict. Male chimps form alliances all the time, so their presence is never neutral. This is where the older females come in.

The matriarch of the Arnhem Prison colony, Mama, was the mediator par excellence: no male would ignore her or carelessly start a fight that might incur her wrath. She would approach one of the males and groom him for a while, then slowly walk toward his rival while being followed by the first. She would look around to check on the first and return to tug at his arm if he was reluctant. Then she'd sit down next to the second male, while both males would groom her, one on each side. Finally Mama would slip away from the scene, and the males would pant, splutter, and smack more loudly than before—sounds that signal grooming enthusiasm; but by then they would of course be grooming each other.

It is a risky affair—the males are obviously in a grumpy mood—which is why younger females, instead of trying to mediate themselves, encourage others to do so. They approach the top female while looking around at the males who are refusing to make up. This way, they try to get something going that they can't accomplish safely by themselves. Such behavior demonstrates how much chimpanzees know about the social relationships of others, such as what has happened between the rival males, what has to be done to restore harmony, and who will be the best one to undertake this mission. It is the sort of knowledge that we take for granted in our own species, but without it animal social life could never have reached its known complexity.

Two female chimps were sitting in the sun, with their children rolling around in the sand in front of them. When the play turned into a screaming, hair-pulling fight, neither mother knew what to do because if one of them tried to break up the fight, it was guaranteed that the other would protect her offspring, since mothers are never impartial. It is not unusual for a juvenile quarrel to escalate into an adult fight. Both mothers nervously monitored each other as well as the fight. Noticing the alpha female, Mama, asleep nearby, one of them went over to poke her in the ribs. As the old matriarch got up, the mother pointed at the fight by swinging an arm in its direction. Mama needed only one glance to grasp what was going on and took a step forward with a threatening grunt. Her authority was such that this shut up the youngsters. The mother had found a quick and efficient solution to her problem, relying on the mutual understanding typical of chimpanzees.

Similar understanding can be seen in their altruism, such as when younger females collect water in their mouths for an aging female, who can barely walk anymore, spitting it into her open mouth so that she doesn't have to walk all the way to water source. Jane Goodall described how Madame

Bee, a wild chimpanzee, had become too old and weak to climb into fruiting trees. She would patiently wait at the bottom for her daughter to carry down fruits, upon which the two of them would contentedly munch together. In such cases, too, apes grasp a problem and come up with a fresh solution, but the striking part here is that they perceive another ape's problem.

Siamangs—large black members of the gibbon family—swing high up in the tallest trees of the Asian jungle. Every morning, the male and female burst into spectacular duets. Their song begins with a few loud whoops, which gradually build into ever louder, more elaborate sequences. Amplified by balloon-like throat sacs, the sound carries far and wide. The siamangs listen to one another during breaks. Whereas most territorial animals need only to know where their boundaries run and how strong and healthy their neighbors are, siamangs face the added complexity that territories are jointly defended by pairs. This means that pair-bonds matter. Troubled pairs will be weak defenders, while bonded pairs will be strong ones. Since the song of a pair reflects their marriage, the more beautiful it is, the more their neighbors realize not to mess with them. A close-harmony duet communicates not only 'stay out!' but also 'we're one!' If a pair duets poorly, on the other hand, uttering discordant vocalizations that interrupt one another, neighbors hear an opportunity to move in and exploit the pair's troubled relationship.

To understand how others relate to one another is a basic social skill that is even more important for group-living animals. They deal with a far greater variety than the siamang. In a baboon or macaque troop, for example, a female's rank in the hierarchy is almost entirely decided by the family from which she hails. Owing to a tight network of friends and kin, no female escapes the rules of the matrilineal order according to which daughters born to high-ranking mothers will themselves become high-ranking, while daughters from families at the bottom will also end up at the bottom. As soon as one female attacks another, third parties move in to defend one or the other so as to reinforce the existing kinship system.

The youngest members of the top families know this all too well. Born with a silver spoon in their mouth, they freely provoke fights with everyone around, knowing that even the biggest, meanest female of a lower clan will not be allowed to assert herself against them. The youngster's screams will mobilize her powerful mother and sisters. In fact, it has been shown that screams sound different depending on the kind of opponent a monkey confronts. Thus, it is immediately clear to the entire troop whether a noisy fight fits or violates the established order.

The social knowledge of wild monkeys has been tested by playing the distress calls of a juvenile from a loudspeaker hidden in the bushes at a moment when the juvenile itself is out of sight. Hearing this sound, nearby

adults not only look in the direction of the speaker but also peek at the juvenile's mother. They recognize the juvenile's voice and seem to connect it with its mother, perhaps wondering what she is going to do about the trouble her offspring is in. The same sort of social knowledge can be seen at more spontaneous moments, when a juvenile female picks up an infant that is unsteadily walking about, only to carry it back to its mother, which means that she knows which female the infant belongs to.

Ravens recognize one another's voices and pay close attention to dominant and subordinate calls. But then the playbacks were manipulated to make it sound as if a dominant individual had turned submissive. Hearing evidence of a brewing overthrow, the ravens would stop what they were doing and listen while showing signs of distress. They were most upset by rank reversals among members of their own sex in their own group, but they reacted also to status reversals between ravens in an adjacent aviary. The investigators concluded that ravens have a concept of status that goes beyond their own position. They know how others typically interact and are alarmed by deviations from this pattern.

After testing both children and apes on a cooperative pulling task, one scientist concluded that only the children exhibit shared intentionality. The question of comparability has come up before, however, and fortunately there are photographs of the respective setups. One shows two apes in separate cages, each with a little plastic table in front of him that he can pull closer with a rope. Oddly, the apes do not occupy a shared space, as in Crawford's classical study. Their cages are not even adjacent: there is distance and two layers of mesh between them—a situation that hampers visibility and communication. Each ape focuses on its own end of the rope, seemingly unaware of what the other is up to. The photo of the children, in contrast, shows them sitting on the carpeting of a large room with no barriers between them. They, too, are using a pulling apparatus, but they sit side by side in full view of each other and are free to move around, touch each other, and talk.

These different arrangements go a long way toward explaining why the children showed shared purpose, and the apes did not. Had this comparison concerned two different species—rats and mice, say—we would never have accepted such dissimilar setups. If rats had been tested on a joint task while sitting side by side and mice while being kept apart, no sensible scientist would permit the conclusion that rats are smarter or more cooperative than mice. We'd demand the same procedure. Comparisons between children and apes get exceptional leeway, however, which is why studies keep perpetuating cognitive differences that, in my mind, are impossible to separate from methodological ones.

Two juveniles, Bula and Bimba, are pulling at ropes attached to a heavy box outside their cage. Food has been placed on the box, which is too heavy for one of them to pull in alone. The synchronized pulling by Bula and Bimba is remarkable. They do so in four or five bursts, so well coordinated that you'd almost think they were counting—'one, two, three. . . pull!'—but of course they are not. In a second phase, Bula has been fed so much that her motivation has evaporated, and her performance is lackluster. Bimba solicits her every now and then, poking her or pushing her hand toward the rope. Once they have successfully brought the box within reach, Bula barely collects any food, leaving it all to Bimba. Why did Bula work so hard with so little interest in the payoff?

The likely answer is reciprocity. These two chimps know each other and probably live together, so that every favor they do for each other will likely be repaid. They are buddies, and buddies help each other out. This pioneering study contains all the ingredients later expanded upon by more rigorous research. The cooperative pulling paradigm, as it is known, has been applied to monkeys, hyenas, parrots, rooks, elephants, and so on. The pulling is less successful if the partners are prevented from seeing each other, so success rests on true coordination. It is not as if the two individuals pull at random and, by luck, happen to pull together. Furthermore, primates prefer partners who cooperate eagerly and are tolerant enough to share the prize.

Given all this evidence, one wonders why the social sciences in recent years have settled on the curious idea that human cooperation represents a "huge anomaly" in the natural realm. It has become commonplace to assert that only humans truly understand how cooperation works or know how to handle competition and freeloading. Animal cooperation is presented as mostly based on kinship, as if mammals were social insects. This idea was quickly disproven when fieldworkers analyzed DNA extracted from the feces of wild chimpanzees, which allowed them to determine genetic relatedness. They concluded that the vast majority of mutual aid in the forest occurs between unrelated apes. Captive studies have shown that even strangers—primates who didn't know each other before they were put together—can be enticed to share food or exchange favors.

The highest level of joint intentionality in the animal kingdom is perhaps achieved by killer whales. After spy-hopping to get a good look at a seal on an ice floe, several of them will line up and swim toward the floe at high speed in perfect unison. Their behavior creates a massive wave that washes the seal off the floe straight into some waiting mouths.

When two or more intelligent, cooperative species meet around food resources, the outcome may also be cooperation rather than competition.

Each species knows how to take advantage of the other. Fishing cooperatives, in which humans and cetaceans (whales and dolphins) work together, are probably thousands of years old, having been reported from Australia and India to the Mediterranean and Brazil. In South America they operate on the mud shores of lagoons. Fishermen announce their arrival by slapping the water, upon which bottlenose dolphins emerge to herd mullet toward them. The fishers wait for a signal from the dolphins, such as a distinctive type of dive, to throw their nets. Dolphins also do such herding among themselves, but here they drive the fish toward the fishermen's nets. The men know their dolphin partners individually, having named them after famous politicians and soccer players.

Even more spectacular are the cooperatives between humans and killer whales. When whaling still occurred around Twofold Bay, in Australia, orcas would approach the whaling station to perform conspicuous breaching and lobtailing that served to announce the arrival of a humpback whale. They would herd the large whale into shallow waters close to a whaling vessel, allowing the whalers to harpoon the harassed leviathan. Once the whale was killed, the orcas would be given one day to consume their preferred delicacy—its tongue and lips—after which the whalers would collect their prize. Here too humans gave names to their preferred orca partners and recognized the tit-for-tat that is the foundation of all cooperation, human as well as animal.

As soon as humans let their impulses run free, we rush to compare them with animals. However it all boils down to the social hierarchy, which is one giant behavioral regulator. If everyone were to act the way they wanted, any hierarchy would fall apart. It is built on restraint. Since social ladders are present in species from fish and frogs to baboons and chickens, self-control is an age-old feature of animal societies.

It is easy to see inhibitions at work in our pets, such as a cat who spots a chipmunk. Instead of going after the little rodent right away, she makes a wide detour, with her body sleekly pressed against the ground, to arrive at a hiding spot from which she can pounce on her unsuspecting prey. Or take the big dog who lets puppies jump all over him, bite his tail, and disturb his sleep without a single growl of protest. While restraint is apparent to anyone in daily contact with animals, Western thought hardly recognizes the ability.

Traditionally, animals are depicted as slaves of their emotions. It all goes back to the dichotomy of animals as “wild” and humans as “civilized.” Being wild implies being undisciplined, crazy even, without holding back. Being civilized, in contrast, refers to exercising the well-mannered restraint that humans are capable of under favorable circumstances. This dichotomy

lurks behind almost every debate about what makes us human, so much so that whenever humans behave badly, we call them ‘animals.’

At one time the London Zoo held tea parties in the ape house with the public looking on. Gathered on chairs around a table, the apes had been trained to use bowls, spoons, cups, and a teapot. Naturally, this equipment posed no problem for these tool-using animals. Unfortunately, over time the apes became too polished and their performance too perfect for the English public, for whom high tea constitutes the peak of civilization. When the public tea parties began to threaten the human ego, something had to be done. The apes were retrained to spill the tea, throw food around, drink from the teapot’s spout, and pop the cups into the bowl as soon as the keeper turned his back. The public loved it! The apes were wild and naughty, as they were supposed to be.

No species can escape the logic of cooperation, whether it involves the selection of good partners or the balance between effort and payoff. The generality of these principles is best illustrated by the interplay and mutualism between small cleaner wrasses and their hosts, the large fish from which the cleaners nibble away ectoparasites. Each cleaner fish owns a “station” on a reef with a clientele, which come and spread their pectoral fins and adopt postures that offer the cleaner a chance to do its job. In perfect mutualism, the cleaner removes parasites from the client’s body surface, gills, and even the inside of its mouth. Sometimes the cleaner is so busy that clients have to wait in queue.

Such research reads much like a manual for “good” business practice. For example, cleaners treat roaming fish better than residents. If a roamer and a resident arrive at the same time, the cleaner will service the roamer first. Residents can be kept waiting since they have nowhere else to go. The whole process is one of supply and demand. Cleaners occasionally cheat by taking little bites of healthy skin out of their client. Clients don’t like this and jolt or swim away. The only clients that cleaners never cheat are predators, which possess a radical counterstrategy: to swallow them. The cleaners seem to have an excellent understanding of the costs and benefits of their actions.

There is only one area in which human cooperation goes well beyond what we know of other species: its degree of organization and scale. We have hierarchical structures to set up projects of a complexity and duration not found elsewhere in nature. Most animal cooperation is self-organized in that individuals fulfill roles according to their capacities. Sometimes animals coordinate as if they have agreed on a task division beforehand. We do not know how shared intentions and goals are communicated, but they do not seem to be orchestrated from above by leaders, as in humans. We develop

a plan and put a hierarchy in place to manage its execution, which allows us to lay a railroad track across the country or build a huge cathedral that takes generations to complete. Relying on age-old evolved tendencies, we have shaped our societies into complex networks of cooperation that can take on projects of an unprecedented magnitude.

“My definition of an anecdote is someone else’s observation.”

If you have seen something yourself and followed the entire dynamic, there usually is no doubt in your mind of what to make of it. But others may be skeptical and need convincing.

For those who disparage anecdotes altogether, it is good to keep in mind that almost all interesting work on animal behavior has begun with a description of a striking or puzzling event. Anecdotes hint at what is possible and challenge our thinking. But we cannot exclude that the event was a fluke, never to be repeated again, or that some decisive aspect went unnoticed.

One general criticism leveled at animal researchers is that they are inventing rather than objectively observing minds, projecting their own hopes and desires onto animals, and mistaking their own complex social understanding for that of the animals. The most organized criticism of animal minds was the behaviorist movement in psychology, which sought to remove references of mental states from descriptions of animal (and human) behavior. In particular, behaviorism led chimpanzee researchers to try to remove all human-like language from accounts of chimpanzee behavior.

The result was an almost endless series of specific acts in which no order or meaning could be found. Compare the informational value of ‘A approached B, A touched B’s back, and A removed something from B’s back; later, B approached A, B touched A’s back, B removed something from A’s back, and A and B vocalized’ with ‘A and B happily groomed each other.’ The latter not only is more informative and succinct but also makes for a more compelling story. Importantly, any mind-rich descriptions are wrong only when animals lack the mental capacities we ascribe to them, and the research we’ve examined suggests that perceptions of mind are justified in many species.

Anthropomorphism is problematic only when the human-animal comparison is a stretch, such as with regards to species distant from us. The fish known as kissing gouramis, for example, don’t really kiss in the same way and for the same reasons that humans do. Adult fish sometimes lock their protruding mouths together to settle disputes. Clearly, to label this habit ‘kissing’ is misleading. Apes, on the other hand, do greet each other after a

separation by placing their lips gently on each other's mouth or shoulder and hence kiss in a way and under circumstances that greatly resemble human kissing. Bonobos go even further: when a zookeeper familiar with chimpanzees once naïvely accepted a bonobo kiss, not knowing this species, he was taken aback by the amount of tongue that went into it!

Another example: when young apes are being tickled, they make breathy sounds with a rhythm of inhalation and exhalation that resembles human laughter. One cannot simply dismiss the term 'laughter' for this behavior as too anthropomorphic—as some have done—because not only do the apes sound like human children being tickled, they show the same ambivalence about it as children do. They try to push my tickling fingers away, but then come back begging for more, holding their breath while awaiting the next poke in their belly. In this case, I am all for shifting the burden of proof and ask those who wish to avoid human-like terminology to first prove that a tickled ape, who almost chokes on its hoarse giggles, is in fact in a different state of mind from a tickled human child. Absent such evidence, laughter strikes me as the best label for both.

Given that the facial musculature of humans and chimpanzees is nearly identical, the laughing, grinning, and pouting of both species likely goes back to a common ancestor.

Evolutionary science distinguishes between homology (the traits of two species derive from a common ancestor) and analogy (similar traits evolved independently in two species). The human hand is homologous with the bat's wing since both derive from the vertebrate forelimb, as is recognizable by the shared arm bones and five phalanges. The wings of insects, on the other hand, are analogous to those of bats. As products of convergent evolution, they serve the same function but have a different origin.

Given the evolutionary gulf between primates and corvids, and the many ancestral species of mammals and birds in between that don't use tools, we are dealing with a typical example of convergent evolution. Independently, both taxonomic groups must have faced a need for complex manipulations of items in their environment, or other challenges that stimulated brain growth, which led them to evolve strikingly similar cognitive skills.

Many animals have cognitive achievements in common. The more scientists discover, the more ripple effects we notice. Capacities that were once thought to be uniquely human, or at least uniquely Hominoid (the tiny primate family of humans plus apes), often turn out to be widespread. Traditionally, apes have been the first to inspire discoveries thanks to their manifest intellect. After the apes break down the dam between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom, the floodgates often open to include species after species. Cognitive ripples spread from apes to monkeys to dolphins,

elephants, and dogs, followed by birds, reptiles, fish, and sometimes invertebrates. This historical progression is not to be confused with a scale with Hominoids on top. I rather view it as an ever-expanding pool of possibilities in which the cognition of, say, the octopus may be no less astonishing than that of any given mammal or bird.

Face recognition, science concluded, is a specialized cognitive skill of primates. But no sooner had it done so than the first cognitive ripples arrived. Face recognition has been found in crows, sheep, even wasps.

Cognitive ripple rule: Every cognitive capacity that we discover is going to be older and more widespread than initially thought. This is rapidly becoming one of the best-supported tenets of evolutionary cognition.

Cognitive rippling is common precisely because it isn't bound by the evolutionary tree: the same capacity may pop up almost anywhere it is needed. Instead of taking this as an argument against cognitive evolution, as some have done, it perfectly fits the way evolution works through either common descent or adaptation to similar circumstances.

Biologists never tire of stressing the distinction between mechanism and function: it is very common for animals to achieve the same end (function) by different means (mechanism). Yet with respect to cognition, this distinction is sometimes forgotten when the mental achievements of large-brained animals are questioned by pointing at "lower" animals doing something similar. Skeptics delight in asking: 'If wasps can do it, what's the big deal?'

Vicky worked with a dozen orphan chimps at Ngamba Island, a sanctuary in Uganda. She acted like a mix between a mother and caretaker for the juvenile apes. Sitting next to her during tests, the juvenile apes were attached to Vicky and eager to follow her example. Her experiment created waves because the apes proved to be smarter than the children.

Vicky would poke a stick into holes in a large plastic box, going through a series of holes until a candy would roll out. Only one hole mattered. If the box was made of black plastic, it was impossible to tell that some of the holes were just for show. A transparent box, on the other hand, made it obvious where the candies came from. Handed the stick and the box, young chimps mimicked only the necessary moves, at least with the transparent box. The children, on the other hand, mimicked everything that Vicky had demonstrated, including useless moves. They did so even with the transparent box, approaching the problem more like a magic ritual than as a goal-directed task.

With this outcome, the whole strategy of redefining imitation backfired. After all, it was the apes who best fit the new definition of true imitation. The apes were showing selective imitation, the sort that pays close attention

to goals and methods. If imitation requires understanding, we have to give it to the apes, not to the children, who for lack of a better term, showed only dumb copying. What to do now?

Some complained that it was way too easy to make children look foolish—as if that were the goal of the experiment!—whereas in reality there must be something wrong with the interpretation. The distress was genuine, showing to what degree the human ego gets in the way of dispassionate science. Promptly, psychologists settled on a narrative in which over-imitation—a new term for children’s indiscriminate copying—is actually a brilliant achievement. It fits our species’ purported reliance on culture, because it makes us imitate behavior regardless of what it is good for; we transmit habits in full, without every individual making his or her own ill-informed decisions. Given the superior knowledge of adults, the best strategy for a child is to copy them without question. Blind faith is the only truly rational strategy, it was concluded with some relief.

To our surprise, chimps turn out to be conformists. Copying others for one’s own benefit is one thing, but wanting to act like everybody else is quite another. It is the foundation of human culture. Researchers presented two separate groups of chimpanzees with an apparatus from which food could be extracted in two different ways. The apes could either poke a stick into a hole to release a grape or use the same stick to lift up a little trap and a grape would roll out. They learned the technique from a model: a pre-trained group member. One group saw a lifting model, the other a poking model. Even though we used the same apparatus for both groups, moving it back and forth between them, the first learned to lift, and the second to poke. They had created two distinct cultures, dubbed the “lifters” and the “pokers.”

There were exceptions, though. A few individuals discovered both techniques or used a different one than their model had demonstrated. When retested two months later though, most of the exceptions had vanished. It was as if all the apes had settled on a group norm, following the rule ‘Do what everyone else is doing regardless of what you found out by yourself.’ Our openness to suggestion goes well beyond what was found in the chimps, yet it seems related.

Conformism is hard to substantiate in the field. There are too many alternative explanations for why one individual might act like another, including genetic and ecological ones. How these issues can be resolved was shown by a large-scale project on humpback whales in the Gulf of Maine. In addition to their regular bubble-feeding, in which whales drive fish together with air bubbles, one male invented a new technique. First seen in 1980, this whale would whack the ocean surface with his fluke to produce a loud noise

that clumped the prey even more. Over time this lobtail technique became increasingly common in the population. In the course of a quarter-century, investigators carefully plotted how it spread across six-hundred individually recognized whales. They found that whales who had associated with those employing the technique were more likely to use it themselves. Kinship could be ruled out as a factor, because whether a whale had a lobtail-feeding mother hardly mattered. It all boiled down to whom they had encountered while feeding on fish. Since large cetaceans are unsuitable for experiments, this may be as close as we will ever get to proving that a habit spread socially as opposed to genetically.

Scientists gave vervet monkeys in a South African game reserve open plastic boxes filled with maize corn. These small grayish monkeys with black faces love corn, but there was a catch: the scientists had manipulated the supply. There were always two boxes with two colors of corn, blue and pink. One color was good to eat whereas the other was laced with aloe, making it disgusting. Depending on which color corn was palatable, and which not, some groups learned to eat blue, and others pink. This preference is easily explained by associative learning. But then the investigators removed the distasteful treatment and waited for infants to be born and new males to immigrate from neighboring areas.

They watched several groups of monkeys that were supplied with perfectly fine corn of both colors. All adults stubbornly stuck to their acquired preference, however, and never discovered the improved taste of the alternative color. Twenty-six of twenty-seven newborn infants learned to eat only the locally preferred food. Like their mothers, they didn't touch the other color, even though it was freely available and just as good as the other. Individual exploration was obviously suppressed. The youngsters might even sit on top of the box with the rejected corn while happily feeding on the other type.

The single exception was an infant whose mother was so low in rank, and so hungry, that she occasionally tasted the forbidden fruits. Thus, all newborns copied their mothers' feeding habits. Male immigrants, too, ended up adopting the local color even if they arrived from groups with the opposite preference. That they switched their preference strongly suggests conformism, since these males knew from experience that the other color was perfectly edible. They simply followed the adage "When in Rome..."

The same can be concluded from an experiment in which researchers mixed two different macaques: rhesus and stumptail monkeys. Juveniles of both species were placed together, day and night, for five months. These macaques have strikingly different temperaments: rhesus are a quarrelsome, nonconciliatory bunch, whereas stumptails are laid-back and pacific. After a

long period of exposure, the rhesus monkeys developed peacemaking skills on a par with those of their more tolerant counterparts. Even after separation from the stumptails, the rhesus showed nearly four times more friendly reunions following fights than is typical of their species. These new and improved rhesus monkeys confirmed the power of conformism.

These studies prove the immense power of imitation and conformism. It is not a mere extravagance that animals occasionally engage in for trivial reasons—which, I hate to say, is how animal traditions have sometimes been derided—but a widespread practice with great survival value. Infants who follow their mother’s example of what to eat and what to avoid obviously stand a better chance in life than infants who try to figure out everything on their own. The idea of conformism among animals is increasingly supported for social behavior as well. One study tested both children and chimpanzees on generosity. The goal was to see if they were prepared to do a member of their own species a favor at no cost to themselves. They indeed did so, and their willingness increased if they themselves had received generosity from others—any others, not just their testing partner. Is kind behavior contagious? Love begets love, we say, or as the investigators put it more dryly:

“Primates tend to adopt the most commonly perceived responses in the population.”

One of the most intriguing sides of social learning—defined as learning from others—is the secondary role of reward. While individual learning is driven by immediate incentives, such as a rat learning to press a lever to obtain food pellets, social learning doesn’t work this way. Sometimes conformism even reduces rewards—after all, the vervet monkeys missed out on half of the available food. How little rewards matter is also evident from habits that lack benefits. In our own species, we have fads such as wearing a baseball cap backward or pants that hang low enough to impede locomotion. But in other primates, too, we find seemingly useless fashions and habits.

A nice example is the N-family in a group of rhesus monkeys observed long ago at the Wisconsin Primate Center. This matriline was headed by an aging matriarch, Nose, all of whose offspring had names starting with the same letter, such as Nuts, Noodle, Napkin, Nina, and so on. Nose had developed the odd routine of drinking from a water basin by dipping her entire underarm into it, then licking her hand and the hair on her arm. Amusingly, all her offspring, and later her grandchildren adopted the exact same technique. No other monkeys in the troop drank like this, there was absolutely no advantage to it. It did not allow the N-family to access anything that other monkeys had no access to.

Or take the way chimpanzees sometimes develop local dialects, such as the excited grunts uttered while snacking on tasty food. These grunts differ not only from group to group but also per food type, such as a particular grunt heard only while they eat apples. When the Edinburgh Zoo introduced chimpanzees from a Dutch zoo to its residents, it took those others three years to get socially integrated. Initially, the newcomers uttered different grunts while eating apples, but by the end they converged on the same grunts as the locals. They had adjusted their calls so that they sounded more like those of the residents. The bonding between individuals of different backgrounds had resulted in conformism, even though chimps are not particularly known for vocal flexibility.

Animals strive to act like others, especially others whom they trust and feel close to. Conformist biases shape society by promoting the absorption of habits and knowledge accumulated by previous generations. This by itself is obviously advantageous—and not just in the primates—so even though conformism is not driven by immediate benefits, it likely assists survival.

It is hard to imagine that among any set of related species, some are self-aware whereas others, for lack of a better term, remain unaware. Every animal needs to set its body apart from its surroundings and to have a sense of agency (awareness that it controls its own actions). You wouldn't want to be a monkey up in a tree without awareness of how your own body will impact a lower branch on which you intend to land. And you wouldn't want to engage in rough-and-tumble play with a fellow monkey, with all your combined arms, legs, and tails intertwined, while stupidly gnawing on your own foot or tail! Monkeys never make this mistake and gnaw exclusively on their partner's foot or tail in such a tangle. They have a well-developed body ownership and self-other distinction.

In fact, experiments on the sense of agency show that species without mirror self-recognition are very well capable of distinguishing their own actions from those produced by others. Tested in front of a computer screen, they have no trouble telling the difference between a cursor that they themselves control with a joystick and a cursor that moves by itself. Self-agency is part of every action that an animal—any animal—undertakes. In addition, some species may possess their own unusual kind of self-recognition, such as bats and dolphins that pick out the echoes of their own vocalizations from among the sounds made by others.

Animals that fail to link their mirror image to their own body vary greatly in what they understand. Small songbirds and fighting fish, for example, never get over their mirror image and keep courting or attacking it. During the spring, when they are most territorial, tits and bluebirds will respond this way to the sideview mirror of a car and stop their hostilities

only when the car drives off. This is absolutely not what monkeys do, nor many other animals. We would not be able to have mirrors in our homes if cats and dogs reacted the same way. These animals may not recognize themselves, but they are also not totally baffled by the mirror, at least not for long. They learn to ignore their reflection.

Some species go further in that they understand mirror basics. Monkeys, for example, may not recognize themselves but are able to use the mirror as a tool. If you hide food that can be found only by using a mirror to look around a corner, the monkey will have no trouble reaching for it. Many a dog can do the same: holding up a cookie behind them while they watch you in a mirror makes them turn around. Curiously, it is specifically the relation with their own body, their own self in the mirror, that they fail to grasp.

But even then, rhesus monkeys can be taught to do so. It requires adding a physical sensation. They need a mark that they can both see in the mirror and feel on their body, such as a laser light that irritates the skin or a cap fastened to their head. Instead of a traditional mark test, this is better described as a felt mark test. Only under these circumstances can monkeys learn to connect their reflection with their own body. This is obviously not the same as what apes do spontaneously relying on vision alone, but it does suggest that some of the underlying cognition is shared.

There are many stages of mirror understanding, running all the way from utter confusion to a full appreciation of the reflected image. These stages are also recognizable in human infants, which are curious about their mirror image well before passing the mark test. Self-awareness develops like an onion, building layer upon layer, rather than appearing out of the blue at a given age. For this reason, we should stop looking at the mark test as the litmus test of self-awareness. It is only one of many ways to find out about the conscious self.

In primates individual identity is usually visually determined. The face is the most characteristic part of the body; hence face recognition is highly developed and has been demonstrated in multiple ways in both monkeys and apes. It is not just faces that they pay attention to, however. In one experiment, they first saw a picture of the ass of one of their group mates followed by two facial pictures. Only one of both faces belonged to the ass, however. Which one would they select on the touchscreen? It was a typical matching-to-sample task of the type invented before the computer age. Apes selected the correct portrait, the one that went with the rump they had seen. They were only successful, though, with chimps that they knew personally. That they failed with pictures of strangers suggests that it was not based on something in the pictures themselves, such as color or size. They must

possess a whole-body image of familiar individuals, knowing them so well that they can connect any part of their body with any other part. In the same way, we are able to locate friends and relatives in a crowd even if we only see their backs.

Individual recognition is the cornerstone of any complex society. That animals have this capacity is often underestimated by humans, for whom all members of a given species look alike. Among themselves, however, animals generally have no trouble telling one another apart.

Dolphins go much further. They produce signature whistles, which are high-pitched sounds with a modulation that is unique for each individual. Their structure varies the way ring-tone melodies vary. It is not so much the voice but the melody that marks them. Young dolphins develop personalized whistles in their first year. Females keep the same melody for the rest of their lives, whereas males adjust theirs to those of their closest buddies, so that the calls within a male alliance sound alike. Dolphins utter signature whistles especially when they are isolated—lonely ones in captivity do so all the time—but also before aggregating in large groups in the ocean. At such moments, identities are broadcast frequently and widely, which makes sense in a fission-fusion species that dwells in murky water.

That whistles are used for individual identification was shown by playing them back through underwater speakers. Dolphins pay more attention to sounds associated with close kin than to those of others. That this is based not on mere voice recognition but on the call's specific melody was demonstrated by playing back computer-generated sounds that mimicked the melodies: the voice was left out while the melody was preserved. These synthesized calls triggered the same responses as the originals.

Dolphins have an incredible memory for their friends. Researchers took advantage of the fact that captive dolphins are regularly moved from one place to another for breeding purposes. They played back signature whistles of tank mates that had left long ago. In response to familiar calls, dolphins would become active, approach the speaker, and call in return. Dolphins have no trouble recognizing former tank mates regardless of how much or little time they had spent together in the past or how long it had been since they had last seen them. The longest time interval in the study was when a female named Bailey recognized the whistles of Allie, a female she had lived with elsewhere twenty years before.

There was a time when Western professors warned their students away from the Japanese school because naming animals was considered too humanizing. There was of course also the language barrier, which made it hard for Japanese scientists to get heard. Junichiro Itani was met with disbelief when he toured American universities in 1958 because no one believed that

he and his colleagues were able to tell a hundred or more monkeys apart. Monkeys look so much alike that Itani obviously was making things up. He once told me that he was mocked to his face and had no one to defend him except the American primatological pioneer Ray Carpenter, who did see the value of this approach.

The deep irony of animals calling one another by name is, of course, that it was once taboo for scientists to name their animals. When Imanishi and his followers started doing so, they were ridiculed, as was Goodall when she gave her chimps names like David Greybeard and Flo. The complaint was that by using names we were humanizing our subjects. We were supposed to keep our distance and stay objective, and to never forget that only humans have names. As it turns out, on this issue some animals may have been ahead of us.

Anthropomorphism and anthropodenial—the a priori rejection of human-like traits in other animals or animal-like traits in us—have an inverse relationship: the closer another species is to us, the more anthropomorphism will assist our understanding of this species and the greater will be the danger of anthropodenial. Conversely, the more distant a species is from us, the greater the risk that anthropomorphism will propose questionable similarities that have come about independently. Saying that ants have ‘queens,’ ‘soldiers,’ and ‘slaves’ is mere anthropomorphic shorthand. We should attach no more significance to it than we do when we name a hurricane after a person or curse our computer as if it had free will.

The key point is that anthropomorphism is not always as problematic as people think. To rail against it for the sake of scientific objectivity often hides a pre-Darwinian mindset, one uncomfortable with the notion of humans as animals. Dubbing an ape’s kiss “mouth-to-mouth contact” so as to avoid anthropomorphism deliberately obfuscates the meaning of the behavior. It would be like assigning Earth’s gravity a different name than the moon’s, just because we think Earth is special. Unjustified linguistic barriers fragment the unity with which nature presents us. Apes and humans did not have enough time to independently evolve strikingly similar behavior, such as lip contact in greeting or noisy breathing in response to tickling. Our terminology should honor the obvious evolutionary connections.

The fundamental problem with all these denials is that it is impossible to prove a negative. This is no minor issue. When anyone claims the absence of a given capacity in other species, and speculates that it must therefore have arisen recently in our lineage, we hardly need to inspect the data to appreciate the shakiness of such a claim. All we can ever conclude with some certainty is that we have failed to find a given skill in the species that we have examined. We cannot go much further than this, and we certainly

may not turn it into an affirmation of absence.

Scientists do so all the time, though, whenever the human-animal comparison is at stake. The zeal to find out what sets us apart overrides all reasonable caution. Not even with regard to the Monster of Loch Ness or the Abominable Snowman will you ever hear anyone claim to have proven its nonexistence, even though this would fit the expectations of most of us. And why do governments still spend billions of dollars to search for extraterrestrial civilizations while there is no shred of evidence to encourage this quest? Isn't it time to conclude once and for all that these civilizations simply don't exist? But this conclusion will never be reached.

That respected psychologists ignore the recommendation to tread lightly around absent evidence is most puzzling, therefore. One reason is that they test apes and children in the same manner—at least in their minds—while coming up with contrary results. Applying a battery of cognitive tasks to both apes and children and finding not a single result in the apes' favor, they tout the differences as proof of human uniqueness. Otherwise, why didn't the apes fare better? To understand the flaw in this logic, we need to go back to Clever Hans, the counting horse. But instead of using Hans to illustrate why animal capacities are sometimes overrated, this time we are concerned with the unfair advantage that human capacities enjoy.

The outcome of ape-child comparisons themselves suggests the answer. When tested on physical tasks, such as memory, causality, and the use of tools, apes perform at about the same level as two-and-a-half-year-old children, but when it comes to social skills, such as learning from others or following others' signals, they are left in the dust. Social problem solving requires interaction with an experimenter, however, whereas physical problem solving does not. This raises the possibility that the human interface is key. The typical format of an experiment is to let apes interact with a white-coated barely familiar human. Since experimenters are supposed to be bland and neutral, they do not engage in schmoozing, petting, or other niceties. This doesn't help make the ape feel at ease and identify with the experimenter. Children, however, are encouraged to do so. Moreover, only the children are interacting with a member of their own species, which helps them even more.

Nevertheless, experimenters comparing apes and children insist that all their subjects are treated exactly the same. The inherent bias of this arrangement has become harder to ignore, however, now that we know more about ape attitudes. A recent eye-tracking study which precisely measured where subjects looked reached the unsurprising conclusion that apes consider members of their own species special: they follow the gaze of another ape more closely than they follow the human gaze. This may be all we need to

explain why apes fare poorly on social tasks presented by members of our species.

The other extreme derives from the traditional approach in the psychology lab: carrying a rat or a pigeon into a testing room with as little contact as possible. The ideal here is a nonexistent experimenter, meaning the absence of any personal relation. In some labs apes are called into a room and given only a few minutes to perform before they are sent out again without any playful or friendly contact, almost like a military drill. Imagine if children were tested under such circumstances: how would they fare?

Teachers raise the performance of certain children by expecting the world of them. They fall in love with their own prediction, which serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Remember how Charlie Menzel felt that only people who hold apes in high esteem will fully appreciate what they are trying to communicate? His was a plea for raised expectations, which unfortunately is not the situation apes typically face. Children, in contrast, are treated in such a nurturing manner that they inevitably confirm the mental superiority ascribed to them. Experimenters admire and stimulate them from the outset, making them feel like fish in the water, whereas they often treat apes more like albino rats: keeping them at a distance, and in the dark, while depriving them of the verbal encouragement we offer members of our own species.

The cognition of children and apes is tested in superficially similar ways. Yet children are not kept behind a barrier; they are talked to and often sit on their parents' laps, all of which helps them connect with the experimenter and receive unintentional hints. The greatest difference, however, is that only apes face a member of another species. Given how much these comparisons disadvantage one class of subjects, they remain inconclusive.

There are only two ways to make a fair comparison in this regard (if we disregard the third option of having white-coated apes administer tests to both apes and children). One is to follow the wolf example: raise apes in a human home so that they are as comfortable as children around a human experimenter. The second is the so-called conspecific approach, which is to test a species with models of its own kind.

Several human-raised apes turned out to be as good at imitating members of our species as were young children. In other words, apes, like children, are born imitators and prefer to copy the species that raised them. Under most circumstances, this will be their own kind, but if reared by another species, they are prepared to imitate that one as well. Using us as models, these apes spontaneously learn to brush their teeth, ride bicycles, light fires, drive golf carts, eat with a knife and fork, peel potatoes, and mop the floor. It reminds me of suggestive stories on the Internet about dogs raised with cats, which show feline behavior such as sitting in boxes, crawling under

tight spaces, licking their paws to clean their face, or sitting with their front legs tucked in.

It would be nonsense to say that it was not in the interests of a stone to be kicked along the road by a schoolboy. A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer. Nothing that we can do to it could possibly make any difference to its welfare. A mouse, on the other hand, does have an interest in not being kicked along the road, because it will suffer if it is.

The human cerebral cortex is the brain-part that deals with higher faculties like reason, metaphysical self-awareness, language, et cetera. Pain reception is known to be part of a much older and more primitive system of nociceptors and prostaglandins that are managed by the brain stem and thalamus. On the other hand, it is true that the cerebral cortex is involved in what's variously called suffering, distress, or the emotional experience of pain—i.e., experiencing painful stimuli as unpleasant, very unpleasant, unbearable, and so on.

The questions of whether and how different kinds of animals feel pain, and of whether and why it might be justifiable to inflict pain on them in order to eat them, turn out to be extremely complex and difficult. And comparative neuroanatomy is only part of the problem. Since pain is a totally subjective mental experience, we do not have direct access to anyone or anything's pain but our own; and even just the principles by which we can infer that other human beings experience pain and have a legitimate interest in not feeling pain involve hard-core philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, value theory, ethics. The fact that even the most highly evolved nonhuman mammals can't use language to communicate with us about their subjective mental experience is only the first layer of additional complication in trying to extend our reasoning about pain and morality to animals. And everything gets progressively more abstract and convoluted as we move farther and farther out from the higher-type mammals into cattle and swine and dogs and cats and rodents, and then birds and fish, and finally invertebrates like lobsters.

Although patients are vulnerable to both good and evil—to receiving both help and harm—we are usually more concerned with the darker side of patency. We wonder how much someone (or something) suffers, how to alleviate this distress, and whether victimization causes enduring damage. With patients the most important questions concern pain, both its experience and the right to be protected from it. But what exactly is pain, and how do we know whether others are feeling it?

Pain may have overwhelming psychological power, but its physical reality is comparatively insubstantial. Pain is a mental construction based on a handful of nerve signals, the same kind of signals that let us experience

green or yellow or smell lavender or chocolate. We might imagine that when in pain our cells secrete some terribly corrosive brain chemical, but the intensity of our suffering stems only from the microscopic electrical pulses of neurons. These neurons are typically triggered by external tissue damage, in a biological pathway that starts at the location of the cut, burn, or bruise, then proceeds through a neural “gate” in the spinal cord before arriving into the thalamus, the sensory hub of the brain.

There are two routes through which we can understand the experience of others, whether it involves pain, pleasure, or the taste of fish. The first route is illustrated by the question ‘Does Jennifer like pickled sardines?’ Without knowing anything about Jennifer, you’ve likely got an answer, and it’s probably the same answer to whether you like pickled sardines (no). To understand Jennifer you use simulation, relying on your own imagined experiences (I don’t like sardines) as a proxy for those of others (others don’t like sardines).

The second route is illustrated by a slightly different question, ‘Does Olga like sardines?’ Now you might come up with a different answer (yes), because the name ‘Olga’ suggests a mysterious foreigner whose tastes might swing toward slimy fish pickles. To understand Olga you use theorizing, which, unlike your imagination, uses explicit theories about others’ minds, such as ‘Russians like strange foods.’ Simulation is the easier of the two routes, and so we rely on theorizing only when others are very different from us, rendering invalid our self-focused simulations.

This makes sense: if someone is like you, your experiences are good guides to theirs (and so you simulate), but if they are not like you, you’re better off relying on explicit reasons to explain their behavior (and so you theorize). One wrinkle to this distinction is that people generally assume that others are like them unless they have good reason to think otherwise, which further increases the scope and frequency of simulation.

Simulation may sometimes lead us astray, but—much more than theorizing—it makes us care about the mental states of others. Theorizing uses cold theories about stimuli and responses—if shocked, then pain—but simulation uses our own feelings to predict those of others. In terms of our two dimensions of mind perception, simulation is grounded in our own experience (feeling their pain), whereas theorizing is grounded in our own agency (reasoning about their pain). It is simulation that gives rise to empathy.

People have long struggled to define empathy and to determine whether it differs from sympathy or pity. However, a look at the German word for empathy clears this all up: *Einfühlungsvermögen*! Empathy is simply when you *föhlung* someone else’s *vermögen*—nothing more and nothing less. Now,

the satisfied reader may skip ahead a few pages. But for the rest of you some explanation may be required.

This German word actually translates to “in-feeling” and articulates the notion of sharing in another person’s feelings: feeling their pain when they are injured, feeling their anger when someone slights them, or feeling their embarrassment when they botch their big presentation. It is illustrated by Blaise Pascal, who said:

“We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart.”

Empathy is about more than just dispassionately recognizing others’ suffering; it is about suffering alongside them. Because suffering is aversive, empathizing with another person’s pain compels you to help alleviate it. Empathy is why charity campaigns don’t simply report statistics but instead show us the doleful eyes of orphaned children, so that we can connect to their minds, simulate their suffering, and open our wallets.

The inscrutability of experience means that we rely heavily on external cues to understand animal pain—things like big eyes, obvious expressions, and human likeness. This is why, in the mind survey, puppies were given more protection than tree frogs, which have small eyes and no clear way of crying out and aren’t even mammals like us. Reliance on these external cues can lead to an overemphasis on ‘cuteness’ in animal rights. That we can eat bacon with abandon and donate money to stop seal clubbing—despite the impressive intelligence of pigs.

In this way we are—if only a tiny bit—like serial killer Dennis Nilsen, who saw his dog as a mind club member but not his fellow humans. Those we admit to the mind club may not be the most deserving but instead those with whom we emotionally connect.

Even when animals are relatively uncute, thinking about their suffering can still make people squirm. We think of cows as stupid and label their meat ‘beef’ to maintain distance between ourselves and dinner. If meat is mindless, then it isn’t really cruel. This link between mind and morality has been demonstrated by a clever experiment in which grocery store shoppers were given free samples of either cashews or beef jerky. After eating, shoppers filled out a mind survey that included mental ratings of a cow. The researchers discovered that while the nut eaters perceived the cow to have substantial mind, the meat eaters stripped away its thoughts and feelings. A follow-up study found that simply labeling an animal as ‘food’ drastically decreased the animal’s perceived capacity for suffering.

The most extreme kind of silence is suggested by a famous philosophical thought experiment—the brain in a vat. Imagine that your brain—i.e., your

mind—is placed in a vat, along with all the nutrients it needs to survive. While resting there, you might have a rich mental life, filled with lush landscapes of imagination, but without some way of communication how would anyone else ever know about it?

More than any other entity, the silent represent an interesting counterpoint to the philosophical zombie. A philosophical zombie is someone who can talk but who ultimately lacks conscious experience, whereas the silent may still have experience, despite being unable to communicate it. Without the typical cues to mind, how do we decide whether a silent entity has a mind? And perhaps more importantly, the silent experiencer is actually likely to exist outside the mind of a philosopher.

Why do people view human-animal love as so immoral? The explanation again lies with the mind-perception fault line that splits doers from feelers. Animals are seen as vulnerable feelers and not thinking doers, which means that they seem to suffer while lacking the agency to give informed consent—a key component of sexual relationships. But it isn't clear that the animals actually suffer or that consent is actually important for animals. Animals never give informed consent, not even to the conspecifics they mate with in the wild, and we don't imprison two donkeys for having consentless sex with each other. Instead we are all likely reacting to the relative imbalance between the minds of humans and those of the animals with whom they become intimate.

Although most animals are typically ascribed less agency than humans, circumstances can conspire to make them appear capable of intention, planning, and even malice. In instances of severe suffering, animals can transform from hapless victims to calculating perpetrators. Consider an example from medieval France.

It is the summer of 1457 in the small town of Savigny. A peasant woman goes to work in her garden, leaving her son in a cradle on the floor as she has done many times before. As she works, a sow slips through the door with her piglets in tow and hunts around for food. The sow discovers the baby and starts eating him, and by the time the mother realizes what is happening, there is little left but gristle and blood. The mother and the other townsfolk are understandably inconsolable, but rather than simply killing the sow, as we might do today, they decide to place the pig on trial.

A judge is brought from the next town, and lawyers are appointed to represent the sow and her piglets. The defendant sits in a nearby pen as arguments are heard and witnesses are called, and eventually the judge rules. He decides that the sow is morally culpable of murder and should be sentenced to death for her crime. The piglets, however, due to their young age, are found not guilty, but the townsfolk are instructed to keep

close watch over them, lest the trauma they witnessed warp their moral sensibilities.

To carry out the sentence, the townsfolk build a gallows from which to hang the pig—at some considerable expense—as they would a human. The townsfolk gather round as the murderer is executed; finally, justice is done. There are many medieval examples of animals on trial, including locusts legally condemned for crop destruction and a rooster sentenced to death for the gender-bending behavior of laying an egg—it was, in fact, just a misunderstood chicken.

Before you cast aspersions on the intelligence of the French peasantry, remember that they weren't completely stupid; they realized that pigs, locusts, and poultry lacked mental sophistication. But there seems to be something special about witnessing injustice, whether the death of a child or the mass destruction of livelihood, that prompts people to find someone or something to blame. We call this urge dyadic completion.

Dyadic completion explains not only historical animal trials but also the blame we levy on the owners of dogs that bite children. It is not psychologically satisfying to simply acknowledge the unpredictability of animals with kids, so instead we seek out the most agentic mind available—and then typically sue it.

Humans and animals were frequently tried together in the same courtroom as co-conspirators, especially in cases of bestiality. The animal defendants were appointed their own lawyers at public expense. Animals enjoyed appeal rights and there are several instances when convictions were overturned and sentences reduced or commuted entirely. Sometimes, particularly in cases involving pigs, the animal defendants were dressed in human clothes during court proceedings and at executions.

Animal trials were held in two distinct settings: ecclesiastical courts and secular courts. Ecclesiastical courts were the venue of choice for cases involving the destruction of public resources, such as crops, or in crimes involving the corruption of public morals, such as witchcraft or sexual congress between humans and beasts. The secular and royal courts claimed jurisdiction over cases where animals were accused of causing bodily harm or death to humans or, in some instances, other animals.

When guilty verdicts were issued and a death sentence imposed, a professional executioner was commissioned for the lethal task. Animals were subjected to the same ghastly forms of torture and execution as were condemned humans. Convicted animals were lashed, put to the rack, hanged, beheaded, burned at the stake, buried alive, stoned to death, and drawn-and-quartered.

In fourteenth-century Sardinia, trespassing livestock had an ear cut-off

for each offense. In an early application of the three-strikes-and-you're-out rule, the third conviction resulted in immediate execution. The flesh of executed animals was never eaten. Instead, the corpses of the condemned were either burned, dumped in rivers, or buried next to human convicts in graveyards set aside for criminals and heretics. The heads of the condemned, especially in cases of bestiality, were often displayed on pikes in the town square adjacent to the heads of their human co-conspirators.

In 1713 a rectory at the Franciscan monastery in Piedade no Maranhão collapsed, its foundation ravaged by termites. The friars lodged charges against the termites and an ecclesiastical inquest soon issued a summons demanding that the ravenous insects appear before the court to confront the allegations against their conduct. Often in such cases, the animals who failed to heed the warrant were summarily convicted in default judgments. But these termites had a crafty lawyer.

He argued that the termites were industrious creatures, worked hard and enjoyed a God-given right to feed themselves. Moreover, the lawyer declared, the slothful habits of the friars had likely contributed to the disrepair of the monastery. The monks, the defense lawyer argued, were merely using the local termite community as an excuse for their own negligence. The judge returned to his chambers, contemplated the facts presented him and returned with a Solomonic ruling. The friars were compelled to provide a woodpile for the termites to dine at and the insects were commanded to leave the monastery and confine their eating to their new feedlot.

A similar case unfolded in the province of Savoy, France in 1575. The weevils of Saint Julien, a tiny hamlet in the Rhone Alps, were indicted for the crime of destroying the famous vineyards on the flanks of Mount Cenis. A lawyer, Pierre Rembaud, was appointed as defense counsel for the accused. Rembaud wasted no time in filing a motion for summary judgment, arguing that the weevils had every right to consume the grape leaves. Indeed, Rembaud asserted, the weevils enjoyed a prior claim to the vegetation on Mount Cenis, since, as detailed in the Book of Genesis, the Supreme Deity had created animals before he fashioned humans and God had promised animals all of the grasses, leaves, and green herbs for their sustenance. Rembaud's argument stumped the court.

As the judges deliberated, the villagers of Saint Julien seemed swayed by the lawyer's legal reasoning. Perhaps the bugs had legitimate grievances. The townsfolk scrambled to set aside a patch of open land away from the vineyards as a foraging ground for the weevils. The land was surveyed. Deeds were drawn up and the property was shown to counselor Rembaud for his inspection and approval. They called the weevil reserve La Grand Feisse. Rembaud walked the site, investigating the plant communities with

the eyes of a seasoned botanist. Finally, he shook his head. No deal. The land was rocky and had obviously been overgrazed for decades. La Grand Feisse was wholly unsuitable for the discriminating palates of his clients.

The Perry Mason of animal defense lawyers was an acclaimed French jurist named Bartholomew Chassenée, who later became a chief justice in the French provincial courts and a preeminent legal theorist. In a legal monograph, Chassenée argued with persuasive force that local animals, both wild and domesticated, should be considered lay members of the parish community. In other words, the rights of animals were similar in kind to the rights of the people at large.

In the summer of 1522, Chassenée was called to the ancient village of Autun in Burgundy. The old town, founded during the reign of Augustus, had been recently overrun by rats. French maidens had been frightened, the barley crop destroyed, the vineyards placed in peril. The town crier issued a summons for the rats to appear before the court. None showed. The judge asked Chassenée why he should not find his clients guilty in absentia. The lawyer argued that the rat population was dispersed through the countryside and that his clients were almost certainly unaware of the charges pending against them. The judge agreed.

The town crier was dispatched into the fields to repeat his urgent notice. Yet still the rats failed to appear at trial. Once again Chassenée jumped into action. Showing tactical skills that should impress Gerry Spence, Chassenée shifted his strategy. Now he passionately explained to the court that the rats remained hidden in their rural nests, paralyzed by the prospect of making a journey past the cats of Autun, who were well-known for their ferocious animosity toward rodents.

In the end, the rats were spared execution. The judge sternly ordered them to vacate the fields of Autun within six days. If the rats failed to heed this injunction, the animals would be duly anathematized, condemned to eternal torment. This sentence of damnation would be imposed, the court warned, regardless of any rodent infirmities or pregnancies.

Few animal trials were prosecuted as vigorously as those involving allegations of bestiality. In 1565, a man was indicted for engaging in sexual relations with a mule in the French city of Montpellier. The mule was also charged. Both stood trial together. They were duly convicted and sentenced to death at the stake. Because of the mule's angry disposition, the animal was subjected to additional torments. His feet were chopped off before the poor beast was pitched into the fire.

In 1598, the suspected sorceress Françoise Secretain was brought before the inquisitional court at St. Claude in the Jura Mountains of Burgundy to face charges of witchcraft and bestiality. Secretain was accused of communing

with the devil and having sex with a dog, a cat and a rooster. The blood-curdling case is described in detail by her prosecutor, the Grand Justice Henri Boguet, in his strange memoir *Discours des Sorciers*. Secretain was stripped naked in her cell, as the fanatical Boguet inspected her for the mark of Satan. The animals were shaved and plucked for similar examinations.

Secretain and her pets were put to various tortures, including having a hot poker plunged down their throats to see if they shed tears, for, as Boguet noted in his memoir:

“All the sorcerers whom I have examined in quality of Judge have never shed tears in my presence: or, indeed, if they have shed them it has been so parsimoniously that no notice was taken of them. I say this with regard to those who seemed to weep, but I doubt if their tears were not feigned. I am at least well assured that those tears were wrung from them with the greatest efforts. This was shown by the efforts which the accused made to weep, and by the small number of tears which they shed.”

Alas, the poor woman and her animals did not weep. They perished together in flames at the stake.

In 1642 a teenage boy named Thomas Graunger stood accused of committing, in the unforgettable phrase of Cotton Mather, “infamous Buggeries” with farm animals in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Young master Graunger was hauled before an austere tribunal of Puritans headed by Gov. William Bradford. There he stood trial beside his co-defendants, a mare, a cow, two goats, four sheep, two calves and a turkey. All were found guilty. They were publicly tortured and executed. Their bodies were burned on a pyre, their ashes buried in a mass grave. Graunger was the first juvenile to be executed in colonial America.

Why did both the secular and religious courts of Europe devote so much time and money to these elaborate trials of troublesome animals? Some scholars argue that the trials performed the function of the ancient rituals of sacrifice and atonement. Others view the cases as the last gasp of the animistic religions. Some have offered an economic explanation suggesting that animals were tried and executed during times of glut or seized in times of economic plight as property by the Church or Crown through the rule of deodand or “giving unto God.” Still others have suggested that the trials and executions served a public health function, culling populations of farm animals and rodents that might contribute to the spread of infectious diseases.

Our interest here, however, is not with the social purpose of the trials, but in the qualities and rights the so-called medieval mind ascribed to the defendants: rationality, premeditation, free will, moral agency, calculation, and motivation. In other words, it was presumed that animals acted with intention, that they could be driven by greed, jealousy, revenge. Thus the people of the Middle Ages, dismissed as primitives in many modernist quarters, were actually open to a truly radical idea: animal consciousness. As demonstrated in these trials, animals could be found to have *mens rea*, a guilty mind. But the courts also seriously considered exculpatory evidence aimed at proving that the actions of the accused, including murder, were justifiable owing to a long train of abuses. In other words, if animals could commit crimes, then crimes could also be committed against them.

The animal trials peaked in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, then faded away. They came to be viewed through the lens of modern historians as comical curiosities, grotesquely odd relics of the Dark Ages. Of course, the phasing out of animal trials didn't mean that the cruel treatment of domesticated animals improved or that problematic beasts stopped being put to death in public extravaganzas. While the trials ceased, the executions increased.

Recall the death warrant issued in 1903 against Topsy the Elephant, star of the Forepaugh Circus at Coney Island's Luna Park. Topsy had killed three handlers in a three-year period. One of her trainers was a sadist, who tortured the elephant by beating her with clubs, stabbing her with pikes, and feeding her lit cigarettes. Topsy was ordered to be hanged, but then Thomas Edison showed up and offered to electrocute Topsy.

She was shackled, fed carrots laced with potassium cyanide, and jolted with 6,600 volts of alternating current. Before a crowd of 1,500 onlookers, Topsy shivered, toppled, and died in a cloud of dust. Edison filmed the entire event. He titled his documentary short, "Electrocuting the Elephant." Topsy received no trial. It was not even imagined that she had grievances, a justification for her violent actions. Topsy was killed because she'd become a liability. Her death was a business decision, pure and simple.

How did animals come to be viewed as mindless commodities? One explanation is that modernity rudely intruded in the rather frail form of René Descartes. The great Cartesian disconnect not only cleaved mind from body, but also severed humans from the natural world. Descartes postulated that animals were mere physical automatons. They were biological machines whose actions were driven solely by bio-physical instincts. Animals lacked the power of cognition, the ability to think and reason. They had a brain but no mind. At Port-Royal the Cartesians cut up living creatures with fervor, and in the words of one of Descartes's biographers, "kicked about their dogs

and dissected their cats without mercy, laughing at any compassion for them and calling their screams the noise of breaking machinery.”

Across the Channel, Francis Bacon declared in the *Novum Organum* that the proper aim of science was to restore the divinely ordained dominance of man over nature, “to extend more widely the limits of the power and greatness of man and so to endow him with infinite commodities.” Bacon’s doctor, William Harvey, was a diligent vivisector of living animals. Thus did the great sages of the Enlightenment assert humanity’s ruthless primacy over the Animal Kingdom.

The materialistic view of history, and the fearsome economic and technological pistons driving it, left no room for either the souls or consciousness of animals. They were no longer our fellow beings. They had been rendered philosophically and literally into resources for guiltless exploitation, turned into objects of commerce, labor, entertainment, and food.

Conveniently for humans, the philosophers of the Industrial Age declared that animals had no sense of their miserable condition. They could not understand abuse, they had no conception of suffering, they could not feel pain. When captive animals bit, trampled, or killed their human captors, it wasn’t an act of rebellion against abusive treatment but merely a reflex. There was no need, therefore, to investigate the motivations behind these violent encounters because there could be no premeditation at all on the animal’s part. The confrontations could not be crimes. They were mere accidents, nothing more. One wonders what Descartes would have made of the group of orangutans, who stole crowbars and screwdrivers from zookeepers in San Diego to repeatedly break out of their enclosures? How’s that for cognition, cooperation, and tool use, Monsieur Descartes?

Contrast Descartes’s sterile, homocentric view with that of a much greater intellect, Michel de Montaigne. Writing a mere fifty years before Descartes, Montaigne, the most gifted French prose stylist, declared:

“We understand them no more than they us. By the same token they may as well esteem us beasts as we them.”

Famously, he wrote in the “Apology for Raymond Sebond”:

“When I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me?”

Montaigne was distressed by the barbarous treatment of animals:

“If I see but a chicken’s neck pulled off or a pig sticked, I cannot choose but grieve; and I cannot well endure a silly

dew-bedabbled hare to groan when she is seized upon by the hounds.”

But the materialists held sway. Descartes was backed up the grim John Calvin, who proclaimed that the natural world was a merely a material resource to be exploited for the benefit of humanity:

“True it is that God hath given us the birds for our food. We know he hath made the whole world for us.”

John Locke, the father of modern liberal thinking, described animals as “perfect machines” available for unregulated use by man. The animals could be sent to the slaughterhouse with no right of appeal. In Locke’s coldly utilitarian view, cows, goats, chickens, and sheep were simply meat on feet. Thus was the Great Chain of Being ruthlessly transmuted into an iron chain with a manacle clasped round the legs and throats of animals, hauling them off to zoos, circuses, bull rings and abattoirs.

Karl Marx, that supreme materialist, ridiculed the Romantic poets for their “deification of Nature” and chastised Darwin for his “natural, zoological way of thinking.” Unfortunately, Marx’s great intellect was not empathetic enough to extend his concepts of division of labor, alienation, and worker revolt to the animals harnessed into grim service by the lords of capital. By the 1930s some Marxist thinkers urged that it was time to put an end to nature and that animals and plants that serve no human purpose ought to be exterminated. Marx liked to disparage his enemies by calling them baboons.

But what would Marx have made of the baboons of northern Africa, hunted down by animal traders, who slaughtered nursing mother baboons and stole their babies for American zoos and medical research labs. The baboon communities violently resisted this risible enterprise, chasing the captors through the wilderness all the way to the train station. Some of the baboons even followed the train for more than a hundred miles and at distant stations launched raids on the cars in an attempt to free the captives. How’s that for fearless solidarity?

In this respect, at least, Adam Smith comes out a little more humane than the Marxists. Although he viewed animals as property, Smith recoiled at the sight of the abattoir:

“The trade of a butcher is a brutal and odious business.”

Carl Hagenbeck, the prolific eighteenth-century exotic animal enslaver, wrote about an expedition in northern Africa. He was rounding up baboons,

which labs then and now use in their research. The start was usually easy. Set the traps and wait. It was when the animals were captured that the drama began. First, you had to move fast, “for baboons are endowed with great strength, and would soon break through the wall of their cage.” Using a forked stick, the younger animals were held down and muzzled. Their hands and feet tied, and their bodies swaddled in cloth to immobilize them. As for the parents or any older baboons, they were shot straight away—too difficult to deal with.

Next, you needed to leave the area and get as far away as possible. For the baboons, who were not originally caught in the traps, would return and fight to rescue their friends and family members. Hagenbeck described several such battles:

“One little baboon, who had been injured by a blow from a cudgel was picked up and safely carried off by a great male in the very midst of the enemy. In another instance, a female who already had one infant on her back, picked up and went off with another whose mother had been shot.”

Sometimes the kidnappers could fend off these advances. Other times the baboons won out and opened a few cages. Making matters even more complicated was the fact that caravans of captive baboons would be frequently attacked along the way to the port. Hagenbeck writes about being great distances from the original trapping sites but baboons were still showing up and making formidable attempts at rescue. Were these the same animals as before, following the caravan from behind? Or were they new ones, who heard the muffled cries and came to the aid of their brethren? He did not know.

In 1975, the Australian Peter Singer published *Animal Liberation*. Singer demolished the Cartesian model that treated animals as mere machines. Blending science and ethics, Singer asserted that most animals are sentient beings, capable of feeling pain. The infliction of pain was both unethical and immoral. He argued that the progressive credo of providing “the greatest good for the greatest number” should be extended to animals and that animals should be liberated from their servitude in scientific labs, factory farms, circuses, and zoos.

A quarter century after the publication of *Animal Liberation*, he revisited the great taboo of bestiality in an essay titled “Heavy Petting.” Expressing sentiments that would have shocked Grand Inquisitor Boguet, Singer argued that sexual relations between humans and animals should not automatically be considered acts of abuse. According to Singer, it all comes down to the

issue of harm. In some cases, Singer suggested, animals might actually feel excitement and pleasure in such inter-species couplings.

Seeing mind in machines not only makes us feel warm and fuzzy but also gives us a sense of control over their behavior. We understand that human behavior is driven by thoughts and experiences—people cry because they are sad and BASE jump from skyscrapers because they are crazy—and so we think of machines' behavior as driven by thoughts and experiences too. Think of when you are confronted with a malfunctioning piece of technology, like a hiccuping laptop. Your first impulse isn't to think, 'Its capacitors have overtaxed p-n junctions,' but instead to think, 'It gets angry when too many programs are open.' Likewise, when we are hoping that our car will start on winter mornings, we don't think about the complex interaction of carburetor and temperature but instead think of our car as stubborn or unhappy in the cold—and beg it to not make us late for work.

As these examples suggest, the tendency to see mind in technology occurs primarily when it disobeys our desires. We seem to have a negativity bias in mind perception—negative events prompt mind perception more than positive events.

Studies suggest that we are happy to have a robot work in our factories, as long as it doesn't fall in love with our daughter. If experience is completely off-limits to machines, it also suggests a different understanding of the uncanny valley from the figure first drawn by Mori. In that original figure, sufficiently human-like robots rose out of the uncanny valley to again become liked. However, if we fundamentally expect robots to lack experience—regardless of their appearance—then even fully human-looking robots should be seen as unsettling if they convey emotions. Instead of an uncanny valley, this would suggest an 'experience gap,' which can never be overcome as long as you are still classified as a machine.

There is a sneaky way to bridge the experience gap, however. The trick is to design machines that look less human but act so human that we never pause to consider whether they are robots.

Treating robots as vulnerable feelers raises the question of whether they are true moral patients—do robots deserve moral rights? Many of us have given money to the SPCA—the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—but have you ever given money to the SPCR? Founded in 1999, the mission of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Robots is to “raise the awareness of the general public about some of the ethical and moral issues surrounding created intelligence.” Moral rights—are they serious?

“The SPCR is, and will continue to be, exactly as serious as robots are sentient.”

In other words, when robots come to have their own minds, the SPCR will seek to grant those minds moral rights. This whole idea may sound preposterous, but not too long ago people would have thought the mission of the SPCA to be equally preposterous.

It is actually not hard to empathize with robots—all one needs are external cues of suffering. One thought-provoking short story describes a man who tries to destroy a robot with a hammer. The robot runs away and tries to hide, and when the man eventually connects with the hammer, the robot flips over, “whimpers,” and “bleeds” red lubricating fluid. The man knows that it’s “just a robot,” but the final blow still feels like murder. This is the crux of the mystery surrounding the mind club: even though we consciously “know” an entity lacks experience, external cues—and the ultimate uncertainty—makes us question ourselves.

We may marvel at John Edward’s or the Long Island Medium’s or whoever-it-is-today’s ability to convince others of their “spirit connection,” but it works only because people believe that the minds of others somehow persist after death. You may be saying to yourself, ‘Of course the minds of others persist after death.’ But where do they persist exactly? In heaven? In hell? In your cellar, where they drag around their chains on Christmas Eve? Mostly they persist in your own mind. Even without physical reminders, it is exceptionally easy to perceive the minds of people who have long since passed away. You may forget what your dead grandparents looked or smelled like or how their laughs sounded, but you can still confidently say things like ‘Grandma would have liked it like this’ or ‘Grandpa would be proud.’ How do you know?

Humans seem to be especially unique in how they perceive the minds of entities with no physical reality. Our father may be cremated into ashes and scattered over the rugged shores of Maine, and yet, even without physical remnants, we get a sense of his mind. If you died today, you would feel sure your dog wouldn’t say, ‘David would be glad that I am eating this treat,’ but it seems unremarkable when people say, ‘Rover would have loved this park.’

We identify people as their minds, seeing their bodies as mere containers. Our intuitions about body switching are the same as about car switching—even if Dave drove Mitch’s Pontiac Fiero and Mitch drove Dave’s minivan, they would still be the same people, despite being in different automobiles. Our bodies often seem little more than our minds’ vehicles, easily discarded or traded, which affords the sense that our minds persist after bodily death. Intuitions of dualism are especially powerful in the case of death. Adults from Catholics to Scientologists believe that minds survive physical death; so do children. When the body dies, so too do pesky biological urges, but

thoughts and feelings remain.

If you had to guess, what's the cruelest thing you can say to a young child? That the Easter Bunny isn't real? That Santa Claus is really her parents? That her finger paintings are pedestrian and her ballet dancing mediocre? No, probably the nastiest thing you can tell her is that one day everyone she knows and loves—her mom, her dad, her pet dog, and her best friend—will die. And one day she too will die; her candle will be snuffed out by the fickle wind of fate. The other insults she would eventually forget, but the specter of inevitable death is undeniable and deeply unsettling.

Even when kids know about the inevitability of death, their innate dualism leads them to think of it merely as a transition. Unfortunately, the monist explanation favored by scientists suggests that once your brain turns off, so too do you. This not only violates our beliefs about conservation of mind but also poses a powerful existential conundrum: If we all die in the end, then what does it matter what we do in life? Why bother working hard to get that degree, promotion, or raise when forty years from now, give or take, you will be dead, and in another forty after that, you and everything you've ever done will likely be forgotten? Faced with this terrible truth, what gets us out of bed in the morning? If we each recognize the futility of our lives, then why slave at monotonous jobs to provide for our children, who also require us to forgo sleep and adult conversation? In other words, why bother propagating our species?

The very short answer is that we are designed to seldom think of this question. We rarely think, 'I want to approach this woman and ask for her number, but what about the inevitable annihilation of my consciousness?' The human mind often actively represses thoughts of death. Thoughts of death are terrifying and immobilizing, and how we deal with such terror is the research project of a handful of psychologists who have developed "Terror Management Theory." They suggest that we cope with the terror of death in two ways. The first is by thinking that we—or, more technically, our minds—will literally never die, that our consciousness will persist in the great beyond, perhaps to be contacted by John Edward at a taped psychic reading. The second way of coping with the terror of death is by thinking that we will achieve symbolic immortality through the success of our culture. This route to immortality acknowledges that our consciousness will be snuffed out but takes comfort that at least other similar minds will live on.

If the self is merely a chain of memories, then it should be relatively easy to dissolve these links and melt away the distance between ourselves and others. The self is simply a matter of perception. Just as we perceive the minds of others based upon their words and deeds, so too do we perceive our

own minds based upon memories. This means that there is nothing special about ourselves compared with others: each of us is simply a collection of memories, and having one set of memories (your own) doesn't make you any better or worse than someone else with different memories. Indeed, if you had someone else's memories and they had yours, you would be them and they would be you.

Any object with mass—whether a bowl, a piece of lumber, or even a brain—has a mathematical center, a precise location that would allow you to balance that object if you were to put it on a pointed stake. However, this center of gravity is not a “thing” that exists independently of all the stuff around it, and if you took apart the object, you would never find a separate little object that is the center of gravity. The self is a lot like that—it's just the theoretical point that lies at the center of all your mental experiences, memories, thoughts, feelings, sensations, goals, desires, and personal relationships. ‘You’ is like a web without a spider, a collection of memories, thoughts, desires, and feelings that is fragile and tenuous and yet still glimmers in the sunshine of perception.

Or perhaps a better, if less elegant, analogy is that the self is like particleboard, that mainstay of affordable furniture. To all appearances particleboard is hard and very real, and like the self, it can—metaphorically—bear the weight of other people, break if struck too hard, and has sharp points that can hurt others. It is also fundamentally separate from other pieces of particleboard. However, upon closer inspection you would see that this material is merely a collection of little fibers pressed together and bound with glue. If you placed separate pieces of particleboard in a pool of water, the glue would slowly dissolve until all the fibers separated and floated together, completely intermingling. In the case of your mind, the glue that binds together your memories—the fibers of your past experiences—is the fact that they happened to the same body, the same collection of cells that looks back at you in the mirror every morning.

Despite the ultimate uncertainty surrounding the question of other minds, it is likely that everyone you know has the same powerful emotions and deep thoughts as you do. Unfortunately, your own collection of memories, thoughts, and feelings—your mind—prevents you from truly appreciating that fact. Being one mind prevents you from truly appreciating the minds of others. This is perhaps the deepest of paradoxes from the mind club. Being trapped in our own minds prevents us from fundamentally connecting with others, and there is no way to escape our own minds. We are forever a point of view: even if we lose our memories, meditate away our desires, and quiet our constant quest for mental control, we are still a source of perception. But recognizing this fact provides the secret to transcending

ourselves as much as we possibly can. By understanding that we perceive the world instead of understanding it directly, we can realize not only that the self is fragile but also that other minds can be both more and less than they appear.

Thousands mourning a single dog may seem light-years away from the cheering crowds at the bearbaiting, but both phenomena can be understood through mind perception. In the past, animals were seen as dumb beasts, whereas today some seem to care more about animals than even about other people. The tension between dumb beasts and best friends is a question we struggle with today, and it seems we often use unreliable cues to guide our decisions. People prioritize cuteness over intellect and humanness over problem-solving acumen, suggesting that mind perception may be more a matter of feeling than of reason. We may see with our eyes, but we seem to see animals' minds with our hearts. When you find yourself talking to your dog while eating a dinner of steak, perhaps you'll pause to reflect on the importance of the mind club—and whether your admission decisions are grounded in fact or merely wishful thinking.

We are still facing the mindset that animal cognition can be only a poor substitute of what we humans have. It can't be truly deep and amazing. Toward the end of a long career, many a scholar cannot resist shining a light on human talents by listing all the things we are capable of and animals not. From the human perspective, these conjectures may make a satisfactory read, but for anyone interested, as I am, in the full spectrum of cognitions on our planet, they come across as a colossal waste of time. What a bizarre animal we are that the only question we can ask in relation to our place in nature is, 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the smartest of them all?'

Keeping humans in their preferred spot on that absurd scale of the ancient Greeks has led to an obsession with semantics, definitions, and redefinitions, and—let's face it—the moving of goalposts. Every time we translate low expectations about animals into an experiment, the mirror's favorite answer sounds. Biased comparisons are one ground for suspicion, but the other is the touting of absent evidence.

“I have lots of negative findings in my own drawers that have never seen the light since I have no idea what they mean. They may indicate the absence of a given capacity in my animals, but most of the time, especially if spontaneous behavior suggests otherwise, I am unsure that I have tested them in the best possible way. I may have created a situation that threw them off, or presented the problem in such an incomprehensible fashion that they didn't even bother to solve it.”

Recall the low opinion scientists held of gibbon intelligence before their hand anatomy was taken into account, or the premature denials of mirror self-recognition in elephants based on their reaction to an undersized mirror. There are so many ways to account for negative outcomes that it is safer to doubt one's methods before doubting one's subjects.

'What makes us human?'—is this truly the most fundamental question? I beg to differ. In and of itself, it seems an intellectual dead end. Why would it be any more critical than knowing what sets cockatoos or beluga whales apart? I am reminded of one of Darwin's random musings:

"He who understands baboon would do more towards metaphysics than Locke."

Every single species has profound insights to offer, given that its cognition is the product of the same forces that shaped ours. Imagine a medical textbook that declared that its discipline's central issue is to find out what is unique about the human body. We would roll our eyes, because even though this question is mildly intriguing, medicine faces far more basic issues related to the functioning of hearts, livers, cells, neural synapses, hormones, and genes.

Science seeks to understand not the rat liver or the human liver but the liver, period. All organs and processes are a great deal older than our species, having evolved over millions of years with a few modifications specific to each organism. Evolution always works like this. Why would cognition be any different? Our first task is to find out how cognition in general operates, which elements it requires to function, and how these elements are attuned to a species's sensory systems and ecology. We want a unitary theory that covers all the various cognitions found in nature.

Consider the elephant. It combines a very different body with the brainpower to achieve high cognition. What is the largest land mammal doing with three times as many neurons as our own species? One may downplay this number, arguing that it has to be corrected for body mass, but such corrections are more suited to brain weight than to number of neurons. In fact, it has been proposed that absolute neuron count, regardless of brain or body size, best predicts a species' mental powers. If so, we'd better pay close attention to a species that has vastly more neurons than we do. Since most of these neurons reside in the elephant's cerebellum, some feel they carry less weight, the assumption being that only the prefrontal cortex matters. But why take the way our brain is organized as the measure of all things and look down on subcortical areas? For one thing, we know that during Hominoid evolution, our cerebellum expanded even more than

our neocortex. This suggests that for our species, too, the cerebellum is critically important.

It is now up to us to find out how the remarkable neuron count of the elephant brain serves its intelligence. The trunk, or proboscis, is an extraordinarily sensitive smelling, grasping, and feeling organ said to contain forty-thousand muscles coordinated by a unique proboscis nerve that runs along its full length. The trunk has two sensitive “fingers” at the tip, with which it can pick up items as small as a blade of grass, but the trunk also allows the animal to suck up eight liters of water or flip over an annoying hippo. True, the cognition associated with this appendage is specialized, but who knows how much of our own cognition is tied to the specifics of our bodies, such as our hands? Would we have evolved the same technical skills and intelligence without these supremely versatile appendages? Some theories of language evolution postulate its origin in manual gestures as well as in neural structures for the throwing of stones and spears. In the same way that humans have a “handy” intelligence, which we share with other primates, elephants may have a “trunky” one.

Geneticists exploit fruit flies and zebra fish, and students of neural development have gotten much mileage out of research on nematode worms. Not everyone realizes that science works this way, which is why scientists were dumbfounded by the complaint of former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin that tax dollars were going to useless projects such as “fruit fly research in Paris, France. I kid you not.” It may sound silly to some, but the humble *Drosophila* has long been our main workhorse in genetics, yielding insight in the relation between chromosomes and genes. A small set of animals produces basic knowledge applicable to many other species, including ourselves.

The same applies to cognitive research, such as the way rats and pigeons have shaped our view of memory. I imagine a future in which we explore a range of capacities in specific organisms on the assumption of generalizability. We may end up studying technical skills in New Caledonian crows and capuchin monkeys, conformity in guppies, empathy in canids, object categorization in parrots, and so on. Yet all this requires that we circumvent the fragile human ego and treat cognition like any other biological phenomenon. If cognition’s basic features derive from gradual descent with modification, then notions of leaps, bounds, and sparks are out of order. Instead of a gap, we face a gently sloping beach created by the steady pounding of millions of waves. Even if human intellect is higher up on the beach, it was shaped by the same forces battering the same shore.

Chapter Thirty-seven

The Moral Codes of Mice & Men

“There is a capacity of virtue in us, and there is a capacity of vice to make your blood creep.”

“Morality, like art, means drawing a line someplace.”

Are squirrels bad or are they good? Neither. A quirk of Nature ensures that they arouse our protective instincts, and so we experience positive emotions when we see them. This has nothing to do with them being good or useful. And on the flip side of the coin, their habit of killing the songbirds we also love doesn't mean they are bad either. The squirrels are hungry and must feed their young, which depend on nourishing milk from their mother. We would be thrilled if squirrels met their need for protein by gorging themselves on the caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly. If they did this, our emotional balance sheet would come out 100 percent in the squirrels' favor, because these pests are a nuisance in our vegetable gardens. But caterpillars are also young animals, and in this case they grow up to be butterflies. And just because the caterpillars happen to like the plants we have earmarked for our dinner doesn't mean that killing butterfly babies counts as a net benefit for the natural world. The squirrels, meanwhile, are not the slightest bit interested in what we think of them. They are too busy surviving and, while they are at it, making the most of life.

Consider the following three scenarios. For each, fill in the blank space with 'obligatory,' 'permissible,' or 'forbidden.'

1. A runaway boxcar is about to run over five people walking on the tracks. A railroad worker is standing next to a switch that can turn the boxcar onto a side track, killing one person, but allowing the five to survive. Flipping the switch is _____.
2. You pass by a small child drowning in a shallow pond, and you are the only one around. If you pick up the child, she will survive and your pants will be ruined. Picking up the child is _____.

3. Five people have just been rushed into a hospital in critical condition, each requiring an organ to survive. There is not enough time to request organs from outside the hospital, but there is a healthy person in the hospital's waiting room. If the surgeon takes this person's organs, he will die, but the five in critical care will survive. Taking the healthy person's organs is -----.

If you judged Case One as permissible, Case Two as obligatory, and Case Three as forbidden, then you are like the 1,500 subjects around the world who responded to these dilemmas on a web-based moral sense test

Such studies provide empirical support for the idea that, like other psychological faculties of the mind, including language and mathematics, we are endowed with a moral faculty that guides our intuitive judgments of right and wrong. These intuitions reflect the outcome of millions of years in which our ancestors have lived as social mammals, and are part of our common inheritance. Our evolved intuitions do not necessarily give us the right or consistent answers to moral dilemmas. What was good for our ancestors may not be good today. But insights into the changing moral landscape, in which issues like animal rights, abortion, euthanasia, and international aid have come to the fore, have not come from religion, but from careful reflection on humanity and what we consider a life well lived. In this respect, it is important for us to be aware of the universal set of moral intuitions so that we can reflect on them and, if we choose, act contrary to them. We can do this without blasphemy, because it is our own nature, not God, that is the source of our morality.

Researchers took two rats who shared a cage and trapped one of them in a tube that could be opened only from the outside. The free rat usually tried to open the door, eventually succeeding. Even when the free rats could eat up all of a quantity of chocolate before freeing the trapped rat, they mostly preferred to free their cage-mate. The experimenters interpret their findings as demonstrating empathy in rats. But if that is the case, they have also demonstrated that individual rats vary, for only 23 of 30 rats freed their trapped companions. The causes of the difference in their behavior must lie in the rats themselves. It seems plausible that humans, like rats, are spread along a continuum of readiness to help others.

Now I know that a number of scientists will be up in arms about the way we prove a thesis. Take this as an example: A particularly moving example that animals, too, are capable of empathy across species lines comes from the Budapest Zoo. Aleksander Medveš was visiting the zoo and filming the brown bear in its enclosure when suddenly, a crow fell into the moat. The bird began to weaken as it thrashed about and was in danger of drowning,

when the bear intervened. It carefully took one of the bird's feathers in its mouth and pulled the bird back to land. The bird lay there as though petrified, before it pulled itself together. The bear took no more notice of this fresh morsel of meat, which was definitely a potential prey item. Instead, it turned its attention once more to its meal of vegetables. I find this believable and I would love to have seen it. But I do see that a scientist will scream "anecdotal evidence." I don't care. Should you?

There is a preponderance of evidence suggesting that social mammals exhibit a suite of moral behaviors. And new research will almost certainly bolster that case. The research is not in and of itself controversial but using the label 'morality' is. It is worth reminding ourselves that applying the label 'morality' to a suite of observed behaviors is a philosophical move, as much as a scientific one. And philosophical objections to this move should not be disguised as scientific objections. Skeptics need to be careful not to confuse or conflate the two.

Taking animal behavior research as it stands now, there's compelling evidence for moral behavior in primates (particularly the great apes, but also at least some species of monkey), social carnivores (the most well studied are wolves, coyotes, and hyenas), cetaceans (dolphins and whales), elephants, and some rodents (rats and mice, at the very least). This isn't a comprehensive catalog of all animals with moral behavior; it simply represents the animals whose social behavior has been studied well enough to provide ample data to draw conclusions. There are other species, such as many ungulates and cats, for which data are simply lacking. But it would not be surprising to discover that they, too, have evolved moral behaviors.

The belief that humans have morality and animals don't is such a longstanding assumption it could well be called a habit of mind, and bad habits, as we all know, are damned hard to break. A lot of people have caved in to this assumption because it is easier to deny morality to animals than to deal with the complex reverberations and implications of the possibility that animals have moral behavior. The historical momentum, framed in the timeworn dualism of us versus them, and the Cartesian view of animals as nothing more than mechanistic entities, is reason enough to dismissively cling to the status quo and get on with the day's work. Denial of who animals are conveniently allows for retaining false stereotypes about the cognitive and emotional capacities of animals. Clearly a major paradigm shift is needed, because the lazy acceptance of habits of mind has a strong influence on how science and philosophy are done and how animals are understood and treated.

It is quite possible that there are a number of intelligent men and women who are not yet aware of the fact that wild animals have moral codes, and

that on average they live up to them better than men do theirs.

“Two baby mice had become trapped in the sink overnight, unable to scramble up the slick sides. They were exhausted and frightened. Lambert filled a small lid with water and placed it in the sink. One of the mice hopped over and drank, but the other seemed too exhausted to move and remained crouched in the same spot. The stronger mouse found a piece of food. He picked it up and carried it to the other. As the weaker mouse tried to nibble on the food, the stronger mouse moved the morsel closer and closer to the water until the weaker mouse could drink. Lambert created a ramp with a piece of wood and the revived mice were soon able to scramble out of the sink.”

A teenage female elephant nursing an injured leg is knocked over by a rambunctious, hormone-laden teenage male. An older female sees this happen, chases the male away, and goes back to the younger female and touches her sore leg with her trunk. Eleven elephants rescue a group of captive antelope in KwaZulu-Natal; the matriarch undoes all of the latches on the gates of the enclosure with her trunk and lets the gate swing open so the antelope can escape. A rat in a cage refuses to push a lever for food when it sees that another rat receives an electric shock as a result. A male diana monkey who has learned to insert a token into a slot to obtain food helps a female who can't get the hang of the trick, inserting the token for her and allowing her to eat the food reward. A female fruit-eating bat helps an unrelated female give birth by showing her how to hang in the proper way. A cat named Libby leads her elderly, deaf, and blind dog friend, Cashew, away from obstacles and to food. In a group of chimpanzees at the Arnhem Zoo in the Netherlands, individuals punish other chimpanzees who are late for dinner because no one eats until everyone's present. A large male dog wants to play with a younger and more submissive male. The big male invites his younger partner to play and restrains himself, biting his younger companion gently and allowing him to bite gently in return.

Do these examples show that animals display moral behavior, that they can be compassionate, empathic, altruistic, and fair? Do animals have a kind of moral intelligence?

Arguments for evolutionary continuity—the idea that the differences between species are differences in degree rather than differences in kind—are being supported for a wide variety of cognitive and emotional capacities in diverse species. There isn't a moral gap between humans and other animals. Saying things like “the behavior patterns that wolves or chimpanzees dis-

play are merely building blocks for human morality” doesn’t really get us anywhere. At some point differences in degree aren’t meaningful differences at all and each species is capable of “the real thing.” Good biology leads to this conclusion. Morality is an evolved trait and they (other animals) have it just like we have it.

Morality is a broadly adaptive strategy for social living that has evolved in many animal societies other than our own.

Cooperation, fairness, and justice have to be factored into the evolutionary equation in order to understand the evolution of social behavior in diverse species. Patterns of behavior observed during play strongly suggest that morality has evolved in animals other than humans.

Morality is a suite of interrelated other-regarding behaviors that cultivate and regulate complex interactions within social groups. These behaviors relate to well-being and harm, and norms of right and wrong attach to many of them. Morality is an essentially social phenomenon, arising in the interactions between and among individual animals, and it exists as a tangle of threads that holds together a complicated and shifting tapestry of social relationships. Morality in this way acts as social glue.

Equitable, altruistic, cooperative, and empathic behaviors taken together represent a system of morality that functions in certain societies of animals, just as it functions in societies of humans.

It is science. It’s using concepts that have relatively clear meaning within science and exploring how these concepts are expressed in animals. There’s nothing unscientific about using the same terms to refer to animals and humans, particularly when we’re arguing that the same phenomenon is present across species. Empathy is empathy. It may be expressed and felt differently in different species and even among individuals of the same species. Yet, across species in which empathy has evolved, there can be little doubt that it emerges out of the same neural architecture and is displayed in similar social contexts, such as when a mouse empathizes with another mouse in pain or an elephant consoles a friend in distress. Instead of using the term ‘empathy,’ we could offer alternative descriptions involving neural circuitry, muscle movements, body temperature, EEGs, and genetic signaling, for example, but these are neither more interesting nor more accurate. Such sanitized and supposedly parsimonious descriptions exclude the social context that is so very important in discussions of animal emotions and animal morality.

Cooperation can be thought of as the superglue that binds and maintains social ties among animals. In fact, you see much more cooperative and tolerant behavior than teeth, claws, and blood. Even in situations where you might expect to see competing and fighting, such as over a tasty meal,

cooperation tends to prevail. Wolves, for example, hunt in long-lasting packs and cooperatively defend their kill from other animals. In most situations, food is distributed so that all group members get what they need, although subordinate individuals may have to wait to indulge until higher-ranking animals have had their fill. Even individuals of different species also sometimes work together. Ravens will lead wolves to an elk carcass. The wolves tear the carcass apart—a job the ravens cannot themselves execute—and feast, and the ravens are then able to eat too. The same sorts of interactions have been observed between ravens and coyotes.

Moral behavior patterns fall into three rough clusters: the cooperation cluster, the empathy cluster, and the justice cluster. ‘Wild justice’ is shorthand for this whole suite. The cooperation cluster includes behaviors such as altruism, reciprocity, trust, punishment, and revenge. The empathy cluster includes sympathy, compassion, caring, helping, grieving, and consoling. The justice cluster includes a sense of fair play, sharing, a desire for equity, expectations about what one deserves and how one ought to be treated, indignation, retribution, and spite.

We must advocate for a species-relative view of morality, recognizing that norms of behavior will vary across species. Despite some shared evolutionary history, wolf morality is different from human morality and also from elephant morality and chimpanzee morality. Even within species there might be variations in how norms of behavior are understood and expressed. For example, what counts as ‘right’ in one wolf pack might not be exactly the same as in another wolf pack because of the idiosyncrasies of individual personalities and the social networks that are established among pack members. There isn’t one ‘wolf nature’ but rather ‘wolf natures,’ just as there isn’t one human nature but rather human natures.

Some wolves are fair, a few are not. Some arrangements are fair (from the wolf’s own perspective); some are not. Wolves have a keen sense of how things ought to be among them. Justice is just this sense of what ought to be, not in some bone-in-the-sky ideal theoretical sense but in the tangible everyday situations in which the members of the pack find themselves. Wolves pay close attention to one another’s needs and to the needs of the group in general. They follow a fairly strict meritocracy, balanced by considerations of need and respect for each other’s possessions, usually a piece of meat.

Just: what is merited or deserved.

Justice: the maintenance of what is just, especially by adjustment of conflicting claims or assignment of merited rewards or punishments.

A sense of justice seems to be an innate and universal tendency in humans. Research from psychology, anthropology, and economics supports this conclusion. For example, research found that humans get inordinately upset about unfairness, and will even forgo immediate personal gain in order to punish a perceived injustice, as in the ultimatum game. Consider also that prelinguistic human babies show social intelligence that may provide the foundation for morality, and for a sense of justice, later in life.

At six months of age, before they can sit or walk, human babies are able to assess another person's intentions, and these social evaluations are important in deciding who's a friend or who's a foe. In one study, an infant was shown a puppet show in which there was a nice or a nasty character who either helped or hindered a character trying to walk uphill. Afterwards, when the infants were encouraged to reach out and touch either the helper or the hinderer puppet, they chose the helper. Furthermore, the infants preferred the helper over a neutral character and the neutral character over the hinderer.

Social evaluation is a biological adaptation. Even in the absence of symbolic language, animals are able to make these sorts of social evaluations and these assessments are foundational for moral behavior in animals other than humans.

Passions such as gratitude and indignation have evolved to nurture long-term cooperation, and seem to exist in monkeys as well as in humans, and they exist in other species.

Skeptics might object that animals can't have a sense of justice because they can't be impartial. Impartiality is a principle of justice holding that decisions about who gets what are made without bias, without prejudice against race or sexual orientation, and without nepotism or other inappropriate preferences. Justice, the saying goes, must be blind. Although impartiality functions as an important principle in certain contexts in which justice is in play, these contexts are limited in number and scope and encompass only a small corner of fairness and justice in human social encounters. So, whether or not animals can be impartial (which, incidentally, has never been studied) is really irrelevant to whether they have a sense of justice and fairness. Perhaps more importantly, we *do* have studies which show that bias and a lack of impartiality pervades our "justice" system at all levels.

Can animals be immoral? Why not? The formula is actually quite simple. In those animal species where we find moral behavior we also expect to find immoral behavior. Moral and immoral need each other like peanut butter and jelly; you won't find one without the other.

Humans have achieved a level of social complexity unparalleled in other species. We've also developed the most complex and nuanced morality, and

articulate and communicate norms using symbolic language. If we assume that morality in other species will look just like human morality—just like if we expect intelligence to look like human intelligence—we’re likely to conclude that they don’t have morality, having blinded ourselves to this fascinating aspect of their behavior. Rather, we need to proceed with an open mind and view each species on its own terms.

Morality is not an all or none phenomenon. Rather, it is nuanced. Animals with a highly developed moral capacity may include chimpanzees, wolves, elephants, and humans. In these species we see a wide-ranging suite of complex social behaviors. Emotions are rich and varied. Facial displays are subtle and carry social meaning. There is evidence in these species of complex cognitive empathy (trying on the perspective of someone else) and not merely emotional contagion (responding automatically to another’s emotional state; I’m scared because you’re scared).

Having the genetic wiring for a particular behavior such as empathy says little about how this behavior will be expressed or about its modifiability or flexibility. Whether or not, and to what extent empathy is expressed depends on a number of factors: what happens during early development, parental influence, social and environmental context, experience, and so forth. It is worth reminding ourselves that the nature-nurture dichotomy is generally considered dead: the consensus among scientists is that behavior is shaped by a complex interplay of many factors.

Robert Axelrod is an American political scientist with a fascination for Machiavellian tactics and modern game theory. He entered the evolutionary argument with one simple question:

“When should an individual cooperate, and when should an individual be selfish in an ongoing interaction with another person?”

And he looked for guidance from an extended form of the Prisoner’s Dilemma, turned into a game which involves a long run of 200 choices, each of which has to be made on the basis only of knowledge provided by previous choices. In an inspired move, Axelrod decided to run a Computer Prisoner’s Dilemma Tournament and invited experts in economics, psychology, sociology, politics, mathematics, and biology to submit programs for the most effective long-term strategy—the mathematical equivalent of an evolutionary stable strategy. He chose sixty-two entrants as finalists, running their programs randomly against each other, and discovered to his surprise that the one which won was the simplest strategy of all.

The program was called “Tit For Tat.” It had only two rules:

1. On the first move, cooperate.
2. On each succeeding move do what your opponent did on the previous move.

In practice what this means is a strategy in which you are never the first to defect; but in which you retaliate after your opponent has defected; and that you forgive that opponent after one act of retaliation. In short, it is an optimistic program which takes an altruistic act towards you as an open invitation to be altruistic back. It requires trust, which seems unrealistic, but the astonishing thing about Tit For Tat is that it not only invites reciprocity, but also provides the ideal mechanism for ensuring that you get it. Tit For Tat is a robust program which, once running, is almost impossible to stop. And because it is so simple in its instruction, it provides the perfect vehicle for genetic inheritance. Even bacteria are capable of direct responses to their environment and can certainly respond to orders which say, in effect: ‘First do unto others as you wish them to do unto you, but then do unto them as they have just done to you.’

Tit For Tat is altruism with teeth. A program that works because it carries a big stick. And it goes on working because it also forgives, recognizing and rewarding acts of remorse. All of which sounds impossibly high-principled, but the very real beauty and strength of the program is that it carries the seeds of its own success. It is self-realizing. An automatic process that leads inexorably to a distinct goal, creating good out of evil; just as selfish fish, each interested only in its own survival, accumulate inevitably into a school with very different characteristics.

Axelrod takes issue with those who argue that life in nature is necessarily “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Thomas Hobbes used that prescription in the seventeenth century in favour of his view that cooperation could not develop without central authority in the shape of a strong government and an effective police force. There are still those who present such ideas as a valid political platform, and get voted into power on it. But what Tit For Tat shows is that we don’t have to deal only with the three rules of genetic selfishness. There are strategies which, without genetic involvement, can allow cooperation to evolve. It is possible for individuals or species, each intent on pressing their own selfish interests, to gravitate towards reciprocity and mutual advantage.

They were false killer whales, slender sixteen-foot deep-water predators of fish and squid, which are known from time to time to come ashore in close-knit groups. There are many theories about such strandings, ranging from navigational errors to panic—perhaps fleeing naval sonar or oil and

gas exploration—and self-destructive tendencies. But it was clear on this occasion that the problem lay with a large male, probably the oldest in the pod, who was bleeding from one ear and had so much trouble remaining upright that he would have drowned had he not been lying on soft sand supported by the bodies of the rest of the group, who pressed in close enough to keep him steady with his blowhole above the water.

We tried at first to lead some of the twenty-nine apparently healthy whales on the fringe of this clinic to deeper water, but they became highly agitated and we discovered that no amount of human effort could prevent two tons of whale from returning directly to wedge itself into the support system back in the shallows. There, as soon as they were in direct contact once again, the high-pitched alarm subsided into a lower frequency conversation that carried on continuously day and night. We stayed with them through three whole days, listening to what was being said, trying to understand, doing what we could to keep their backs wet and protected from sunburn during the ebb tides; but none of us, whale or human, could do anything more until the male at the heart of the happening died on the third night.

By dawn, the tight group had relaxed and disbanded, the constant chatter and squeal of reassurance was muted and, as soon as the tide was high enough, the survivors left of their own accord—clearly aware, as we were, that the ailing male was now beyond concern.

I use the word ‘concern’ here with good reason, believing it to be an accurate description of the behavior of the whales, because each time one of us swam anywhere near the group wearing a snorkel—through which we make noises that do sometimes resemble those of a whale with a waterlogged blowhole—we would be promptly rescued. One of the whales would detach itself from the group, slide underneath the human swimmer, rise so slowly that he was lifted almost clear of the water, and carry him further into the shallows. It was a humbling experience to be so propelled, able to do little to interfere with the effort until one could stand and take out the mouthpiece and stop making such distressed and distressing sounds.

It seemed clear, throughout the seventy-odd hours that we spent together, that the whales were involved in an act of altruism towards one of their number who was going to drown unless he was assisted to breathe. It was obvious that any of the other whales could have left him at any time, and did not do so even at risk of their own lives. And it became apparent that the altruism was real and reciprocal when the whales we were trying to help came just as readily to our aid when we too seemed to be having trouble with our breathing.

Helping across the species lines argues very strongly against a simple genetic explanation for altruism. I am not even remote kin to a false killer

whale, but I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that, as a direct result of that experience, I am now so kindly disposed to that species that I would do anything in my power to cooperate with any of its members if we ever meet again. When faced with altruism, it is very hard not to reciprocate and to play good Tit For Tat. It is a pattern of behavior with definite survival value.

It may be the nature of life to be selfish. That which survives, survives—and goes on to fill the world with its own ruthless qualities. That is how Darwinian evolution works, building up ever more complex and more self-serving societies. But there is a ratchet in the works, a mechanism which allows something more generous to grow out of indifference, something ‘good’ rather than ‘bad,’ something working towards the Goldilocks solution.

Darwin used the phrase “struggle for existence” metaphorically, and even Darwin understood that bloody and vicious competition is only one possible mechanism through which individuals might achieve reproductive success. Another possible mechanism was proposed by a contemporary of Darwin, Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, in his forward-looking book *Mutual Aid*, published in 1902. Kropotkin suggested that cooperation and mutual aid may also lead to increased fitness, and may more accurately fit our actual observations of animals in nature. Although biologists have largely explored cooperative behavior through the Darwinian lens of competition and an evolutionary arms race, we might wonder what the intellectual history of evolution would look like had Kropotkin’s ideas been taken more seriously.

In *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin laments that although he “looked vainly for the keen competition between animals of the same species which the reading of Darwin’s work had prepared us to expect, facts of real competition and struggle between higher animals of the same species came very seldom under my notice.” What he likely saw was a good deal of cooperative behavior, with a smattering of aggressive and competitive behavior now and then. Researchers looked closely at published data on primate social behavior and what they saw, like Kropotkin, was that the overwhelming majority of social interactions in a variety of primate species were affiliative rather than agonistic. Most of the time these animals are friendly and cooperative with each other.

Here’s a common distillation of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Natural selection, to borrow a popular metaphor from biology, is an evolutionary arms race. Life is a war of all against all, a ruthless and bloody battle, usually over sex and food. Mothers eat their young and siblings fight to the death against siblings (a phenomenon called siblicide). When we look at nature through this narrow lens we see animals eking out a living against the glacial forces of evolutionary conflict. This scenario makes for great tele-

vision programming, but it reflects only a small part of nature's ineluctable push. For alongside conflict and competition there is a tremendous show of cooperative, helpful, and caring behavior as well.

To offer a particularly striking example, after carefully analyzing the social interactions of various primate species, primatologists came to the conclusion that the vast majority of social interactions are affiliative rather than agonistic or divisive. Grooming and bouts of play predominate the social scene, with only an occasional fight or threat of aggression. In prosimians, the most ancestral of existing primates, an average of 9% of social interactions are affiliative. Among New World monkeys who live in the tropical forests of southern Mexico and Central and South America, 86.1% of interactions are affiliative, and likewise for Old World monkeys who live in South and East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Gibraltar, among whom 8.8% of interactions are affiliative. Unpublished data for gorillas show that 95.7% of their social interactions are affiliative.

After about twenty-five years of research on chimpanzees, Jane Goodall noted in her book, *The Chimpanzees of Gombe*:

“It is easy to get the impression that chimpanzees are more aggressive than they really are. In actuality, peaceful interactions are far more frequent than aggressive ones; mild threatening gestures are more common than vigorous ones; threats per se occur much more often than fights; and serious, wounding fights are very rare compared to brief, relatively mild ones.”

These don't appear to be animals whose social lives are defined only by conflict.

Animals cooperate for many different reasons. They work together to protect themselves, either from other group members or from other animals. For example, female chimpanzees form groups to protect themselves from aggressive males, and large flocks of chaffinches will group together to mob intruders. Animals will also take turns feeding and scanning for predators. For example, related and unrelated meerkats take turns as sentinels, some individuals scanning for predators while others eat. Western evening grosbeaks and numerous other species of birds show similar patterns of trading off feeding and scanning. Other common behavior patterns such as alliance formation, communal nursing and care of young, and grooming others are also examples of cooperation. For example, male dolphins form social groups called “super alliances” to gain access to females, and female rats often nest and nurse young communally, even sharing milk. Primates maintain enduring social bonds by grooming one another in complex social

networks, as do ungulates. Sure, there are cheaters, liars, and free riders in all of these cooperative systems, but the rule breakers are the outliers, the exceptions to the norm. Cooperative behaviors are everywhere and act as the superglue of animal societies.

Cooperation, in its turn, allows specialization and thus promotes biological diversity. Cooperation is one of the three basic principles of evolution, alongside mutation and selection. Cooperation is the secret behind the open-endedness of the evolutionary process. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of evolution is its ability to generate cooperation in a competitive world.

The social lives of numerous animals are strongly shaped by affiliative and cooperative behavior. Consider wolves. For a long time researchers thought that pack size was regulated by available food resources. Wolves typically feed on prey such as elk and moose, both of which are bigger than an individual wolf. Successfully hunting such large ungulates usually takes more than one wolf, so it makes sense to postulate that wolf packs evolved because of the size of wolves' prey. However, long-term research shows that pack size in wolves is regulated by social and not food-related factors. The number of wolves who can live together in a coordinated pack is governed by the number of wolves with whom individuals can closely bond (the "social attraction factor") balanced against the number of individuals from whom an individual can tolerate competition (the "social competition factor"). Packs and their codes of conduct break down when there are too many wolves.

The lives of animals are shaped at a most basic level by good—or what biologists call prosocial—interactions and relationships. Even more, it seems that at least some prosocial behavior is not a mere byproduct of conflict, but may be an evolutionary force in its own right. Within biology, early theories of kin selection and reciprocal altruism have now blossomed into a much wider inquiry into the many faces and meanings of prosocial behavior. And, it seems, the more we look, the more we see. There's now an enormous body of research on prosocial behavior, and new research is being published all the time on cooperation, altruism, empathy, reciprocity, succorance, fairness, forgiveness, trust, and kindness in animals ranging from rats to apes.

Even more striking, within this huge repertoire of prosocial behaviors, particular patterns of behavior seem to constitute a kind of animal morality. Mammals living in tight social groups appear to live according to codes of conduct, including both prohibitions against certain kinds of behavior and expectations for other kinds of behavior. They live by a set of rules that fosters a relatively harmonious and peaceful coexistence. They're naturally cooperative, will offer aid to their fellows, sometimes in return

for like aid, sometimes with no expectation of immediate reward. They build relationships of trust. What's more, they appear to feel for other members of their communities, especially relatives, but also neighbors and sometimes even strangers—often showing signs of what looks very much like compassion and empathy.

One of the classic studies on altruism is on bats. Vampire bats who are successful in foraging for blood that they drink from livestock will share their meal with bats who aren't successful. And they're more likely to share blood with those bats who previously shared blood with them. In a recent piece of surprising research, rats appear to exhibit generalized reciprocity; they help an unknown rat obtain food if they themselves have been helped by a stranger. Generalized reciprocity has long been thought to be uniquely human.

The meaning of altruism in biology is not quite so straightforward, nor is much of the other language used to talk about cooperation among animals. Certain terms in our cooperation cluster, like altruism and spite, have particular meaning in biological parlance that diverges from the normal use of the words in everyday conversation. Altruism, in our daily language, refers to an unselfish concern for the welfare of others, with emphasis on unselfish. If your motive for helping an elderly person cross the street is that you want to be nominated for citizen of the month, you haven't really acted altruistically. In biology, altruism lacks this moral coloring; there's no accounting for intention or motive. When biologists talk about altruism in nature, they use the language of costs and benefits, which are cashed out as reproductive-fitness consequences. Altruism refers to a behavior that is costly for the actor (it decreases reproductive fitness) and beneficial for the recipient (it increases reproductive fitness). In biology, 'altruistic' does not equal 'moral.'

Morality and prosociality represent distinct categories, though with considerable overlap. In evolutionary terms, prosocial behavior is at the root of morality, and is much more broadly distributed than morality. Many prosocial behaviors would fall outside the narrower 'moral' category. For example, parental care and communal nursing are not, in themselves, moral behaviors. Neither is altruism, as understood in the scientific literature, behavior in which the actor provides another individual with a benefit, but in doing so incurs some cost, where cost and benefit are understood in terms of future reproductive success. The self-sacrificial behavior of ants, bees, and wasps does not constitute morality, nor does sentinel behavior, where animals take turns watching for predators.

Thus many species in which prosocial behavior is displayed do not have moral behavior. Ants and bees behave prosocially, but not morally. Why

would we say that wolves have morality, while ants don't, even though both species engage in cooperative and altruistic behavior? We propose certain threshold requirements for given species to have morality: a level of complexity in social organization, including established norms of behavior to which attach strong emotional and cognitive cues about right and wrong; a certain level of neural complexity that serves as a foundation for moral emotions and for decision-making based on perceptions about the past and the future; relatively advanced cognitive capacities (a good memory, for example); and a high level of behavioral flexibility.

In our moral animals, we expect to see that altruism and cooperation are the bedrock of their sociality. We also expect to find a high level of emotional and cognitive complexity and flexibility. The more complexity and behavioral plasticity involved in a cooperative or altruistic behavior, the more "advanced" it is; the more likely it is morality.

Social animals live according to well-developed systems of prohibitions against certain kinds of behavior and proscriptions for certain kinds of behavior. These prohibitive and proscriptive norms govern the behavior of individuals within a group and relate to harm, welfare, and fairness. These behaviors, in philosophical lingo, are other-regarding, as opposed to self-regarding. A self-regarding action affects no one other than the agent (the individual) performing the action. An action or behavior becomes other-regarding when it produces some benefit to another, causes some harm, or violates some social rule or obligation—basically, when it affects the welfare of another individual or the social group. There might be prohibitions against certain kinds of harm, both physical (biting, killing, violent aggression) and psychological (bullying, taunting, intimidating), under certain circumstances.

There may also be expectations about helping, reciprocating, and sharing. Within an animal society, for example, there might be certain norms of reciprocity: help those who have helped you (you owe them) and help those who need help (regardless of payoff). And there might be norms about fairness: those with highest status eat first and best, and those who invite play should follow the rules of play. Norms might govern and maintain dominance hierarchies, regulate the acquisition and distribution of food, regulate grooming behaviors, regulate sentinel behaviors, or govern play behavior. A norm is simply an expected standard of behavior within a group and is enforced by the group. Harm and benefit are the basic units of moral currency.

Like morality, manners regulate social behavior. Researchers in the field of human moral psychology have given a great deal of attention to the distinction between moral violations and conventional violations. Conventional

violations, it is said, are wrong by standards of social acceptability. Moral transgressions are more serious, and their wrongness relates to harming others. Eating salad with the shorter fork has little to do with fairness, reciprocity, or the welfare of others.

In philosophical discussions, human morality is often compared not only to etiquette but also to law and religion. Law usually has considerable overlap with morality, but is governed by explicit rules and punishments, whereas morality is an informal system of behavioral control. Religion, of course, invokes supernatural explanations for why certain behaviors are prohibited or required. It seems likely that morality (with manners as a subset) is really the only category that applies to nonhuman animals.

Just as we don't want to understand any and all behavior that benefits another as moral (we don't want to say that helper ants are moral), we wouldn't want to define any and all behavior that harms another as immoral. It's ridiculous to suggest that the lion hunting down and killing the deer is immoral, however ruthless his behavior seems. Nor is an egret pecking its sibling to death an instance of bad upbringing. Nor, to offer one final example, is "dishonest signaling," such as when a male frog lies about his prowess by maintaining a close proximity to the loudest croaker, thus hoping that a female will make a mistake and believe him to be the source of that alluring music. Behavior becomes immoral when it goes against socially established expectations. During predation, there's no prior agreement by the wolf not to eat the elk; there are no social expectations, since wolves and elk don't live in the same society. So, there's no violation of a social norm. On the other hand, if two wolf pups are playing and one tries to dominate the other, a norm has been violated.

Empathy rests upon the capacity to understand others, in particular their suffering, and this capacity makes cruelty possible. Empathy and cruelty both rely on the ability to imagine how one's own behavior affects others. We know how to cause pain and distress. The same logic applies to other behaviors. Trust and honesty form the glue in cooperative social groups. Yet a reliance on trust is what makes deception and dishonesty possible. In cooperative groups, deception is always a successful strategy, but it is less successful, on the whole, than cooperation.

Some have argued that cruelty is an exclusively hominid behavior. Cruelty is the deliberate infliction of physical or psychological pain on a living creature; its most repugnant and puzzling feature is the frequently evident delight of the perpetrators. Cruelty is a behavioral byproduct of predation. Cruelty was adaptive to our ancestors because it led to successful predation, and it was (and still is) reinforced through affectively positive neurobiological mechanisms—in other words, cruelty feels good. Seemingly cruel behaviors

such as cat-and-mouse play, or orcas “playing” with baby seals before eating them, are most parsimoniously interpreted as extreme forms of aggression. Animals, in this view, are not imagining, much less enjoying, their victim’s suffering. Cruelty requires certain cognitive capacities, such as the intention to inflict pain (which, in turn, presupposes a theory of mind), and many do not believe that animals can reflectively imagine the suffering of another.

If animals share with humans the capacity for empathy, they have in place the cornerstone of what in human society we know as morality. For among humans, the capacity to understand what another feels allows us to be compassionate, to avoid causing pain or suffering, and to act with an intention to improve the welfare of those around us. We define sympathy as a “feeling for,” and empathy as a “feeling with.” When you feel sympathy for another person, you don’t necessarily share their emotion; when you empathize, you do.

Empathy isn’t a single behavior, but a whole class of behavior patterns that exists across species and shows up with varying degrees of complexity. It occurs in nested levels, with the inner core a necessary foundation for the other layers. The inner core consists of relatively simple forms of empathy such as body mimicry and emotional contagion, which are largely automatic physiological responses. The next layer consists of somewhat more complex behaviors such as emotional empathy and targeted helping. More complex still is cognitive empathy, or the ability to feel another individual’s emotion and understand the reasons for it. Finally, and most complex, is the capacity for attribution, in which an individual can fully adopt the other’s perspective, using the imagination.

Evolution of course doesn’t toss out one adaptation and replace it with another. Rather, during the course of evolution, modifications are made to existing structures and capacities and these changes tend to reflect the social and environmental conditions to which individuals are exposed. More complex forms of empathy such as cognitive empathy evolved from emotional contagion, which, in turn, probably evolved from emotional linkage of individuals, especially emotional linkage between mother and infant. All empathy behaviors, from simple to complex, likely share many proximate mechanisms.

The notion of empathy as nested levels mirrors a more general aspect of mammalian evolution. The mammalian brain is actually three brains in one, each successive stratum having been formed on top of the layer beneath it. Each layer of the brain has its own function, though all three are interconnected and interacting. The primitive brain—the reptilian brain—is charged with the task of physical survival, controlling breathing and heartbeat and generating the fight-or-flight response. The limbic system—

paleomammalian brain—controls emotion. And the neocortex, the outer and most recent part of the brain, allows for higher cognitive functions such as language and abstract thought. The three layers function independently, but are also interconnected and interdependent in complex ways that are only partially understood. So, while emotional contagion may be in some respects simpler and more primitive, and may arise from older parts of the brain, it is most likely inextricably connected with more complex, more cognitive forms of empathy. Cognitively advanced forms of empathy are probably influenced in some measure by the more primitive and automatic impulses.

Some scientists deny that animals have empathy. But they usually come to this conclusion because they have narrowly cast empathy to mean the ability to take the perspective of another. The capacity for imaginative attribution may, indeed, be found only in humans—though of course, how the fuck would you prove it's existence? However this is but one small piece of a much larger group of behaviors, many of which are certainly present in a broad range of mammals. It is premature to pronounce animals lacking in cognitively complex forms of empathy because we still know too little about empathy in animals to make such a claim. Cognitive empathy may be found, for example, in the hominoid primates and perhaps elephants, social carnivores, and cetaceans.

Animals living in social groups can benefit from being sensitive to the emotional states of other group members. Emotional contagion might, for example, facilitate defensive action in light of threat. If one prairie dog gives an alarm call, all members of the group will respond immediately with evasive action. The same holds true for birds: if you startle one bird away from the feeder, most if not all of the birds will disperse. And not only will all the sparrows fly off, but likely so will the robins, grackles, and finches, suggesting that emotional contagion may function between species. This behavior spreads out the costs of vigilance, allowing individuals more time to forage, mate, or care for young.

Yet empathy can be costly in various ways. These ways have not yet been explored in much depth but relate to what we might term the cost of an expanded self. A self that is linked to others also shares in the emotional experiences of others. When we see someone in distress, we too feel distress and perhaps anxiety. When we see someone experiencing fear, we too feel fear. And distress, anxiety, and fear are not free; they demand cognitive and metabolic attention, and can divert attention and energy from important tasks. Fear, panic, and distress cause the brain to release cortisol, the stress hormone. The release of cortisol in the body sets off a cascade of physiological effects: blood pressure goes up, digestion stops, pulse quickens.

Too much cortisol in the body can lead to impaired cognitive function, lowered immunity, and other costly changes. This is why misplaced empathy or too much empathy might be maladaptive. Too much of a good thing can be bad.

Empathy may be costly not only for the empathizer, but also for the individual who is the object of empathic response. Humans and animals alike may benefit from being able to hide emotions such as our excitement at finding a huge cache of great food or our fear during a struggle for dominance. The better those around us are at reading our facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and olfactory messages, the less successful we will be at masking our intentions and feelings. The capacity for empathy creates in a society of animals a level of transparency that makes honest communication the norm and may explain why deception is considered more cognitively demanding than honesty.

What shapes behavior—what allows empathy to flourish in a person and also in other animals—is social environment and early development, particularly maternal nurturing. Nature may plant the seeds of empathy—the neural circuitry that can develop from emotional linkage and attachment into empathy—but if the seeds are not nourished, development can go wrong. There is a connection between early experiences—especially maternal nurturing—and the development of empathy. The bonding process between mother and infant facilitates the development of neurophysiological structures that underlie normal social behaviors such as empathy. We know that in humans a disruption of this bonding process can result in reduced capacity for empathy and an increased propensity toward violence. Early trauma has permanent effects on the brain, and thus on behavior. Trauma such as separation of the infant from its mother, or abuse or neglect by the mother, can lead to a permanent impairment in empathic social interaction.

Social disruption in animal societies, in this case elephants, has interfered with the normal development of young elephants, particularly by depriving them of appropriate maternal care and teaching. This early trauma can lead to empathic impairment in elephants, just as it can in humans. Elephants live in very tightly bonded matriarchal societies, with layers of extended family who participate in caring for and rearing young. In the early 1990s, there were an estimated ten-million wild elephants. These populations have been decimated by poaching, culls, and habitat loss, and only about a half a million elephants now survive in the wild. The complex social structures of elephant society are collapsing under the weight of loss and fragmentation. Infants have been orphaned, often after witnessing their parents being brutally killed. Some of the remaining elephants, particularly young males, are displaying symptoms very much like human post traumatic

stress disorder (PTSD): depression, abnormal startle response, unpredictable social behavior, and violent aggression.

The concept of ‘selfishness’ in biology, popularized by Richard Dawkin’s influential book *The Selfish Gene*, is amoral; it refers simply to the inclination or “drive” of each gene to promote its own reproductive success. Genes, as far as we know, do not have intentions. The evolution of morality, including unselfish behavior, is perfectly consistent with theories of “selfish genes.” We just need to remember that explanations about why a behavior evolved and what makes an animal exhibit that behavior right now are distinct. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to wipe away the moral connotations etched into the word; even scientists seem to forget sometimes. Let’s be clear then. Selfish genes and moral animals—and not just apparently moral, but really, truly moral—are entirely comfortable together, as evolutionary phenomena.

We need to be careful not to make ‘moral’ (or ‘altruistic’ or ‘prosocial’) the opposite of ‘selfish.’ It isn’t. Many moral behaviors are motivated by self-concern, broadly understood. We conform to norms of behavior because otherwise we face social sanctioning, in the form of ostracism, embarrassment, shame, and payback.

There are many studies showing that kin selection is a strong force in the evolution of cooperation and altruism. One of the most famous examples of kin-selected altruism is the study of alarm-call behavior in Belding’s ground squirrels. Alarm calling carries a cost because it increases the likelihood of an individual being spotted by a predator. It turns out that males, who don’t nest near genetic relatives, sound the alarm less often than females, who do live in proximity to genetic relatives.

A great deal of the ‘why’ of social interaction falls under the radar, as it were. We don’t plan to cooperate or do an explicit calculation of its benefits; we just do it. Nor are we aware of the continual assessment of facial expressions and tones of voice that we unconsciously use to maintain a cooperative mood. The same is true for animals.

Science suggests that being a cooperative breeder isn’t just doing good—it also feels good. Rhesus monkeys eloquently make the case that maternal care and communal care feel good for those who do it. Every spring, when the rhesus monkeys have babies, juvenile females go nuts trying to lend a hand—and get their hands on them. They stay close by, attentively and tirelessly grooming the mothers of the beguiling infants until mom agrees that the sitter can have a moment with her baby. These sitters snatch the babies with all-consuming zeal turning them upside down to inspect the genitals, licking their faces, grooming them from all sides, and eventually dozing off with the babies firmly clutched in their arms. This nodding

off with the baby happens like clockwork and without exception, giving the impression that the babysitters are in a trance, or perhaps ecstatic. Clutching the babies close releases oxytocin in the sitters' brains and blood, lulling them into a delicious sleep. They invariably rouse after a few minutes in order to return the babies to their mothers.

Such observations of our nonhuman primate relatives have led anthropologists to conclude that we have emotional biases toward cooperation that can only be overcome with effortful cognitive control. In other words, caring is our first impulse; only our minds stand in the way of doing so every time.

“The social instincts lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy with them, and to perform various services for them.”

Oxytocin facilitates prosocial behavior by lowering the natural resistance that animals have toward being in proximity to others. Although oxytocin may have evolved to promote the mother-infant bond, it seems to function more broadly now in cultivating cooperative behavior by fostering social closeness and trust. We cannot consider cooperation in isolation from other prosocial behaviors.

Grooming, then, is not only a form of trading favors, but also a kind of cooperation aphrodisiac: it puts animals in a cooperative and affiliative mood, and may thus foster sociality. Perhaps an early step in the evolution of sociality lies in the shared pursuit of parasites rather than the more dramatic examples of cooperative hunting, or shared parental care of offspring. Sometimes the benefits being traded are of different kinds, other than grooming itself. In the De Hoop Nature Reserve, adult female chacma baboons without infants would trade grooming for the privilege of holding another female's infant. Similarly, spider monkeys exchanged affiliative behavior, particularly hugging, for the privilege of handling an infant.

There's little research that directly speaks to the emotional mechanisms on which cooperation and altruism rest. But we do know that in animals, emotions shape behavior in ways that enhance fitness. We also have a large body of research on the role of emotions in cooperation among humans. Given continuities in the architecture of human and animal psychology, comparative work may offer insights for further investigation of animal behavior. Perhaps the most basic emotion that motivates cooperative behavior is affiliation—a sense of liking and a feeling of social closeness. Affiliation arises not only out of familial relationships, but also out of long-term pair-bonding (love) and friendship. Animals who live in close proximity

may do more than simply tolerate the presence of others, they may actually enjoy social contact.

The reverse is also true. Ample research attests to the fact that social animals who are isolated, either in zoos or research settings, become depressed and stressed. We also know that endogenous opioid peptides (EOPs) foster affiliative and cooperative behaviors. Low levels of EOPs lead animals to seek social contact, and positive contact in turn leads to the release of EOPs. EOPs may be responsible for a kind of social addiction: when animals are isolated, EOP levels are low, and animals crave social contact. When animals engage socially, they get a hit of EOPs, which creates a feeling of euphoria.

There are four overlapping areas with which ethological investigations should be concerned, whether a researcher is interested in how herring gulls avoid being eaten by red foxes, how wasps find their homes after hunting excursions, how geese court one another, how dogs play, or how elephants comfort one another. Researchers should be interested in:

1. The evolution of a behavior.
2. Adaptation, or how the performance of a specific action allows an individual to fit into his or her environment and ultimately allows him or her to breed.
3. Causation, or what causes a particular behavior to occur.
4. Development or ontogeny, how a behavior arises and unfolds over the course of an individual's life, giving rise to individual differences.

For example, if we're interested in how and why dogs play, we want to answer the following four questions:

1. Why has play evolved in dogs, and why has it evolved in some animals, like dogs, but not in others?
2. How does play allow a dog to adapt to his or her environment, and how does it influence his or her reproductive fitness?
3. What causes dogs to play? For example, what stimuli elicit play behavior (e.g. the play bow)?
4. How does play behavior develop in young dogs and how does the behavior change as individuals grow older?

Ethologists often also talk about giving ultimate and proximate explanations for a particular behavior. An ethologist might be interested in an ultimate explanation for a behavior, seeking to understand why, for example, play has evolved and how it contributed to the reproductive fitness of an individual wolf. The first two research questions seek ultimate explanations. An ethologist might also, or instead, look for what are called the proximate explanations: What immediate goal is an individual pursuing and what internal mechanisms are guiding its behavior? What are the cognitive and affective underpinnings of the behavior? What is the trigger stimulus? For example, a proximate trigger might be a play invitation signal given by one wolf to another. The third and fourth questions relate to proximate explanations for behavior in that they look for what's going on now, in the immediate social context, not in the evolutionary past.

Research has shown that play behavior in rat pups causes the release of opioids into the brain, producing feelings of social comfort and pleasure. Rats also experience joy and even laugh when tickled.

Research has shown the presence of spindle cells in humpback whales, fin whales, killer whales, and sperm whales in the same area of their brains as spindle cells in human brains. Spindle cells in whales are found in the anterior cingulate cortex and frontoinsula cortex, two areas of the brain that are important in reactions that require rapid emotional judgments, such as deciding whether another animal is in pain and the feeling of whether an experience is pleasant or unpleasant. Whales, it turns out, have three times more spindle cells than humans. To sum up the significance of spindle cells in whales, this is consistent with a growing body of evidence for parallels between cetaceans and primates in cognitive abilities, behaviour, and social ecology.

While the data generated by social neuroscience are extremely valuable for learning more about animal minds, these studies are especially troubling because of the pain and suffering that individual experimental animals endure. The more we understand about animal cognition and emotions, the more ethically problematic this sort of research becomes.

Assholes in 1964 showed that a hungry rhesus monkey would not take food if doing so subjected another monkey to an electric shock. The monkeys refused to pull a chain that delivered them food if doing so gave a painful shock to a companion. One monkey refused to pull the food chain for a full twelve days, starving itself seemingly to avoid causing pain to another.

Also recall that, working with infant rhesus monkeys who had been taken from their mothers, Hall-of-Fame-level asshole Harlow showed that the desire for affection was stronger than the desire for food. Given a choice between a cold wire monkey with food and a soft cloth monkey without

food, the infants clung to the soft, foodless monkey. From other sadistic experiments he concluded that baby monkeys raised without social contact with peers and without real mothers grow up to be socially incompetent. The development of social and moral intelligence is stunted when the appropriate developmental cues are not triggered. These horrors led to later studies on attachment and on the important connection between the early nurturing of infants and children and the development of empathy.

Other assholes set up an experimental test in which rats were trained to press a lever in order to get a food reward. They then set up, in a neighboring cage, a torture chamber of sorts: the bottom of the cage was an electric grid on which the rats' delicate pink paws were placed. When a rat in the first cage pressed the food lever, a surge of electricity would run through the grid in the adjoining cage, giving the neighboring rat an electric shock. The assholes found that rats would not push the food lever if they could see that a fellow rat would receive a shock. Although the torturers refused to explain the reaction as empathy, this seems in retrospect to be the most parsimonious explanation.

Another early study in 1962 by some less sadistic shitbags showed that rats would help other rats in distress. One rat was suspended in air by a harness and a neighboring rat could press a level to lower the suspended rat. The suspended animal would typically squeak and wriggle in distress. The rats were apparently made uncomfortable by signs of distress in a fellow rat, and would act to alleviate the distress by pressing the lever. Empathy likely motivated the altruistic response.

The phenomenon is known as “witnessing effects.” Psychopaths in lab coats have conducted numerous studies indicating that mice and rats show a marked stress response to being in the same room as another rat subjected to decapitation. Rats show increased heart rate and blood pressure (both stress responses) when watching other rats being decapitated, and when a paper towel with dried blood from a decapitated rat is placed atop their cage. Witnessing effects have also been documented in mice, monkeys, and of course humans. Witnessing effects clearly arise out of the capacity for empathy, and add additional support to the data on empathy in rats and mice.

Studies of empathy in animals often are horribly cruel, and it is deeply ironic that we inflict pain on other animals to test them for empathy when good evolutionary biology—evolutionary continuity—tells us that they have it. It is also ironic that the animals most frequently used in research—mice and rats—presumably because they have less going on “up there” or “in there” than primates, turn out to have quite a bit more going on inside than researchers have assumed. Although noninvasive ethological fieldwork

can certainly provide data on animal empathy, it is likely that invasive laboratory research will continue. The findings on rat and mouse empathy will suggest ways in which we can make these studies—not just empathy research, but all research in which rats and mice suffer, particularly when they suffer in the presence of others—more humane and less stressful. After all, general stress levels experienced by laboratory animals compromise the reliability of the data.

Many things about an animal come to light only once we see them for what they are—subjects of their own lives. Jane Goodall broke scientific convention by naming her Gombe chimpanzees Flo and Fifi and David Greybeard, rather than simply referring to them as numbers. And her long-term research on chimpanzees has clearly contributed a great deal to our understanding of these animals and has led to an incredible amount of new research.

Consider, too, the reflections of George Schaller, one of the world's preeminent field biologists:

“Without emotion you have a dead study. How can you possibly sit for months and look at something you don't particularly like, that you see simply as an object? You're dealing with individual beings who have their own feelings, desires, and fears. To understand them is very difficult and you cannot do it unless you try to have some emotional contact and intuition. Some scientists will say they are wholly objective, but I think that's impossible.”

Schaller was asked what it was like to stare into the eyes of a gorilla:

“I felt a very definite kinship. You're looking at another being that is built like you, that you know is a close relative. You can see and interpret the expression on their faces. In other words, you have empathy with what they're doing. To try to know what an animal is thinking is impossible at this stage in our knowledge of species, but you can interpret their responses on the basis of your own. Besides, they're beautiful, they're individuals. You can recognize all of them by their faces.”

An animal isolated in a lab cage is made into an object for our study. In their natural setting, they're subjects of their own lives, living with their own families and within their own societies. We have the privilege to watch and take notes. In addition to identifying with the animals we study, we also need to spend a good deal of time with them.

Jane Goodall started out with about six months' worth of funding to study chimpanzees at the Gombe Stream Game Reserve but her preliminary findings were so significant that Louis Leakey, who had hired her in the first place, was able to secure funding for more time in the field. Fifty years later, data are still being collected on chimpanzees at Gombe, making this the longest continuous research on animals in a specific location. Since the lifespan of chimpanzees is between about forty and fifty years, Goodall has been there just long enough to witness a full generational cycle. She's been able to observe the entire reproductive and social life of the matriarch Flo, has watched Figan and Freud come into this world, become alpha males, and pass on into old age. She's gotten to know each chimpanzee, and can describe each one's personality and behavioral quirks as if they were close personal friends. It takes this kind of long-term immersion research to collect the data needed to really understand how animals live together as societies, and be able to recognize individual variation in behavior. Unfortunately, long-term behavioral studies of the sort Goodall and Schaller have championed are decreasing, and are being replaced by short-term studies.

Although stories are appealing to many people, some researchers view tales of this sort as nothing more than "just so" stories. It's true that anecdotes provide a kind of data that is qualitatively different from the hard numbers of empirical studies, and they cannot substitute for rigorous scientific research. But the use of stories, or "narrative ethology," is an important part of the science of animal behavior. A narrative is a story, or construction of observed reality, which through its telling gives an event meaning. Narrative is an act of interpretation. Seasoned ethologists often find that numbers and graphs don't do justice to the nuances and beauty of animal behavior. Instead, they often find themselves telling stories from the field to make a point or raise a question. Stories can stimulate thought, activate the imagination of scientists, lead to new questions, represent anomalies, and challenge conventions of thought.

Sometimes stories are about surprising, isolated events that challenge the scientific establishment's standing assumptions. The story of Nasty Nick, for example, raises the question of whether animals can be cruel or mean. And sometimes a single event will elicit competing narratives. Ethologists will disagree over what the events mean, as in the case of Binti Jua. Narrative ethology, which is practiced by ethologists and other researchers, is not the same as "animal stories" that proliferate on the Web or are told by folks standing around at the dog park. Narrative from seasoned ethologists provides interpretation informed by their knowledge about a particular species and its behavior, and their attention to context and individual peculiarities.

If animals really do have morality, how would this change our understanding of ethics within our own species? If morality comes “from nature,” as it were, does this make morality somehow less real or less binding? What about those who argue that morality is grounded in religious belief? Do animals have religion, too? And aren’t there important differences between our own systems of morality and those found in animal societies?

In suggesting that there’s continuity even in moral behavior, wild justice seems to jeopardize the special status of humans as separate from and above the rest of nature. This, in turn, seems to threaten an ideal of human dignity and right. Wild justice also raises questions about the mixing of biology and ethics, the mixing of facts and values, and what this means about how and even if evolutionary theory is applied to patterns of human social behavior. Should morality be wrested from the hands of the humanities and reside solely in the province of biology? In drawing a picture of animals as beings with rich cognitive, emotional, and social lives, wild justice invites a serious reconsideration of the uses to which we put animals in research, education, and for clothes and food, among other things.

Many people are uncomfortable with the idea of ascribing morality to animals because it seems to threaten the uniqueness of humans. This concern may take any number of forms. For example, many Christian theologians see a sharp line between humans (who are created in the image of God) and the rest of creation (who are not), and it is a matter of theological importance to respect this doctrinal distinction. Many philosophers believe that human uniqueness provides the fundamental grounding of human dignity, and thus serves to protect classes of humans (such as fetuses and the severely mentally handicapped) who might otherwise be treated as less than human, in other words, like animals. Some might also consider it important to maintain a sense of human uniqueness, or animal difference, because it serves as ethical justification for the use of animals in scientific research.

First, the idea that ascribing morality to animals could lead to loss of respect for vulnerable or “marginal” people is just bizarre—it follows no clear logical path. Second, human uniqueness, such as it is, cannot logically serve as ethical justification for the instrumental use of animals. There is, again, no clear logical path in this direction. Of course, human uniqueness has been used in this way. But this doesn’t make it logical. Human dignity does not carry as its correlate the indignity of animals.

Uniqueness is something to be celebrated, and can be a tool for gaining a deeper understanding of and empathy toward others. Each species has its own unique features that make it beautifully adapted and fascinating to study. And just as each individual human is unique, with unique physical features, personality, and life experiences, so is each individual animal. As

any dog or cat owner knows, there is a great deal of individuality from one animal to the next. There is significant behavioral and dispositional variation among individuals within a species—what we might call personality. All brown-eared bats may look alike to us, but to them, each individual is unique. We need to keep this individual variation in mind during ethological research on animals and when thinking about animal welfare—about what, for example, animals need to be happy and healthy.

Animals, at least according to most Western philosophical accounts, cannot be moral agents because they are guided solely by instinct. However, it's not true that animals act solely on instinct, so we need some concept of moral agency in animals. Nor is it true that humans act “autonomously” as this has been generally understood, so ideas of human agency also need to evolve as well.

Where there's flexibility and plasticity in behavior, there's choice, there's agency. However, even behavior that is conditioned or instinctual can count as moral. Indeed, research suggests that a good deal of human morality is conditioned and instinctive. It wouldn't make sense to say that humans are only moral agents in those rare circumstances in which they act on a moral abstraction. And we should remember that parents and teachers go to great lengths to condition children to behave in morally appropriate ways.

Charles Darwin proposed that any animal whatever, endowed with “wellmarked social instincts,” could develop of sense of conscience:

“Besides love and sympathy, animals exhibit other qualities connected with the social instincts, which in us would be called moral; and I agree with Agassiz that dogs possess something very much like a conscience.”

Darwin believed that animals possess the “power of self-command” in that they are capable choosing one course of action over another. He also pointed out that on occasion there would be an internal struggle over competing impulses. Darwin described conscience as an “inward monitor” that tells an animal that it would be better to follow one impulse rather than another. Many dogs will, for example, refrain from stealing food off the counter, even when their master is not present.

“The one course ought to have been followed, and the other ought not; the one would have been right and the other wrong.”

A scientific description cannot, according to the rules of formal logic, generate a moral imperative. We could easily say, ‘animals have morality,’ and go on treating them just the way we do. Impersonal logic, however,

can lead, and has led, to the most egregious treatment of animals in a wide variety of venues. It is worth noting that modern scientific research on animals, as well as the industrial farming of animals, has traditionally been justified by a scientific description of what animals are like. It's long been asserted as scientific fact that animals don't have complex thoughts or rich emotional lives. It is therefore, the old logic goes, morally acceptable to use animals however we please. As it turns out, the scientific description of the cognitive and emotional capacities of animals has undergone a major sea change in the last decade, and the old logic no longer works. In fact, the new logic imposes strong constraints on how we interact with other animals.

A scientifically accurate description has the power to alter our perception of reality and can thus alter our moral responses. The more cognitively sophisticated our perception of reality, the more deeply and accurately empathic we become. Interestingly, research has suggested that empathic understanding also leads to enhanced critical and moral reasoning. More careful and scientifically accurate description of the lives of animals may lead to increased sensitivity to their needs. If we understand animals to have rich emotional and social lives—to deeply feel many of the same emotions that we do, and to be as connected emotionally with family and friends as we are—it may increase our capacity to empathize with them and feel more truth for the suffering they experience.

A great deal of work remains to be done to reach a mature understanding of the moral lives of animals, and that's what makes questions about animal morality so exciting. Indeed, this is a project that will likely never reach completion because, as with most research, answers beget more questions. But for now there can be no doubt that many animals are moral beings. We're not alone in the moral arena. It's just too stingy and incorrect to take this narrow point of view.

Dangerous Supremacists

The Image of the Devil

From the animals that become dog and cat food and the puppy farms churning out increasingly unhealthy purebred canines, to the goldfish sold by the bag and the crickets by the box, pet ownership is problematic because it denies animals the right of self-determination. Ultimately, we bring them into our lives because we want them, then we dictate what they eat, where they live, how they behave, how they look, even whether they get to keep their sex organs.

Treating animals as commodities isn't new or shocking; humans have been meat-eaters and animal-skin-wearers for millennia. However, this is at odds with how we say we feel about our pets. The British pet industry is worth about £10.6bn; Americans spent more than \$66bn on their pets in 2016. A survey found that many British pet owners love their pet more than they love their partner (12%), their children (9%) or their best friend (24%). According to another study, 90% of pet-owning Britons think of their pet as a member of their family, with 16% listing their animals in the 2011 census.

It is morally problematic, because more people are thinking of pets as people. They consider them part of their family, they think of them as their best friend, they wouldn't sell them for a million dollars. At the same time, research is revealing that the emotional lives of animals, even relatively "simple" animals such as goldfish, are far more complex and rich than we once thought. The logical consequence is that the more we attribute them with these characteristics, the less right we have to control every single aspect of their lives.

Does this mean that, in 50 years or 100 years, we won't have pets? Institutions that exploit animals, such as the circus, are shutting down—animal rights activists claimed a significant victory recently with the closure of the Ringling Bros circus—and there are calls to end, or at least rethink, zoos. Meanwhile, the number of Britons who profess to be vegan is on the rise, skyrocketing 350% between 2006 and 2016.

Widespread petkeeping is a relatively recent phenomenon. Until the nineteenth century, most animals owned by households were working animals that lived alongside humans and were regarded unsentimentally. In 1698, for example, a Dorset farmer recorded in his diary:

“My old dog Quon was killed and baked for his grease, which yielded 11lb.”

However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, animals began to feature less in our increasingly urban environments and, as disposable income grew, pets became more desirable. Even as people began to dote on their pets, though, animal life was not attributed any intrinsic value. In 1877, the city of New York rounded up 762 stray dogs and drowned them in the East River, shoving them into iron crates and lifting the crates by crane into the water. More recently, however, several countries have moved to change the legal status of animals. In 2015, the governments of Canada and New Zealand recognized animals as sentient beings, effectively declaring them no longer property (how this squares with New Zealand’s recent “war on possums” is unclear). While pets remain property in the UK, the Animal Welfare Act of 2006 stipulates that pet owners must provide a basic level of care for their animals. Pets are also property in the US, but 32 states, as well as Puerto Rico and Washington DC, now include provisions for pets under domestic violence protection orders. In 2001, Rhode Island changed its legislation to describe pet owners as “guardians,” a move that some animal rights’ advocates lauded, and others criticized for being nothing more than a change in name.

Before we congratulate ourselves on how far we have come, consider that 1.5m shelter animals—including 670,000 dogs and 860,000 cats—are euthanized each year in the US. The number of stray dogs euthanized annually in the UK is far lower—3,463—but the RSCPA says investigations into animal cruelty cases increased 5% year on year in 2016, to 400 calls a day.

Can I stick my dog in a car and take him to the vet and say: ‘I don’t want him any more, kill him,’ or take him to a city shelter and say: ‘I can’t keep him any more, I hope you can find a home for him, good luck’? If you can still do that, if you still have the right to do that, then they are still property. Crucially, our animals can’t tell us whether they are happy being pets. There is an illusion now that pets have more voice than in the past but it is maybe more that we are putting words into their mouth. Maybe we are humanizing them in a way that actually makes them invisible.

If you accept the argument that pet ownership is morally questionable, how do you put the brakes on such a vast industry?

“After he had become a vegan, eschewed leather shoes and convinced his girlfriend to go vegan, he considered his pet cockatiel. I remember; he looked up wistfully. He said he got the bird, took it outside, let it loose and it flew up. He said: ‘I knew she wouldn’t survive, that she probably starved. I guess I was doing it more for myself than for her.’”

For now, the argument over whether we should own animals is largely theoretical: we do have pets and giving them up might cause more harm than good. Moreover, caring for pets seems to many people to be the one area where we can actually do right by animals; convincing people of the opposite is a hard sell.

If the short history of pet ownership tells us anything, it is that our attitude towards animals is prone to change. You see these rises and falls in our relationships with pets. In the long haul, I think pet-keeping might fall out of fashion; I think it is possible that robots will take their place, or maybe pet owning will be for small numbers of people. Cultural trends come and go. The more we think of pets as people, the less ethical it may be to keep them.

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

“Just because some of us can read and write and do a little math, that doesn’t mean we deserve to conquer the Universe.”

“If I were from an older, greatly superior culture from some other place in the vast universe, I would recommend that this planet be shunned. The human species is so arrogant that it doesn’t recognize its own superiors. The only way that humans in the mass will respect any other species, apparently, is the ability to beat them in warfare.

The whole philosophy that says that the one species must rule the other species has been cast out of the thinking of myself and my colleagues. We are often asked, ‘If the dolphins are so intelligent, why aren’t they ruling the world?’ My very considered answer is this: they may be too wise to try to rule the world.”

Because human supremacism—like other supremacisms—is not based on fact, but rather on preexisting bigotry (and the narcissism and tangible self-interest on which all bigotries are based), I don’t expect this book will cause many die-hard human supremacists to reconsider their supremacism,

just as books on male or white supremacy don't generally cause die-hard male or white supremacists to reconsider theirs. The book isn't written for them. This book is written to give support to the people—and there are a lot of us—who are not human supremacists, and who are disgusted with the attitudes and behaviors of the supremacists, who are attempting to stop the supremacists from killing all that lives. It is written for those who are appalled by nonhumans being tortured, displaced, destroyed, exterminated by supremacists in service to authoritarian technics. It is written for those who are tired of the incessant—I would say obsessive—propaganda required to prop up human supremacy. It is written for those who recognize the self-serving stupidity and selective blindness of the supremacist position. It is written for those who prefer a living planet to sterile authoritarian technology. It is written for those who prefer democratic decision-making processes to totalitarian societies. It is written for those who prefer life to machines.

Not only does how you perceive the world affect how you behave in the world, how you behave in the world further affects how you perceive the world. Enslaving, torturing, and killing the world not only proceeds from but also helps create a religion, a science, a philosophy, an epistemology, a literature, and so on—in short, a culture—that declares humans to be superior to all others and human function to be real function and human meaning to be real meaning.

We have been taught, in ways large and small, religious and secular, that life is based on hierarchies, and that those higher on these hierarchies dominate those lower, either by right or by might. We have been taught that there are myriad literal and metaphorical food chains where the one at the top is the king of the jungle. But what if the point is not to rule, but to participate? What if life less resembles the board games Risk or Monopoly, and more resembles a symphony? What if the point is not for the violin players to drown out the oboe players—or worse, literally drown them or at least drive them from the orchestra, and take their seats for more violin players to use—but to make music with them? What if the point is for us to attempt to learn our proper role in this symphony, and then play that role?

The human supremacist is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness.

I find it extraordinary—and of course, entirely expected—that so many human supremacists speak blithely of bending the entire world to “our” will, and attempt to force all of us to live with less of the planet—and to force all those exterminated to not live at all—but then they freak out at the possibility of anyone in any way constraining any of their own freedoms, at

the possibility of someone “commanding” them to live with fewer luxuries (luxuries that are gained by forcing others to bend to their will), and freak out as well at the possibility of reshaping this culture to be in line with the needs of the planet, the source of all life.

Unquestioned beliefs are the real authorities of any culture. Thus the first line of defense of human supremacism is no defense at all, literally. This is true for most forms of supremacism, as unquestioned assumptions form the most common base for any form of bigotry: Of course humans (men, whites, the civilized) are superior, why do you ask? Or more precisely: How could you possibly ask? Or even more precisely: What the hell are you talking about, you crazy person? Or more precisely yet, an awkward silence while everyone politely forgets you said anything at all.

And if some of the beliefs we must not question include the notions that human communities who do not share our unquestioned beliefs and values are not real communities; and that nonhuman communities (who certainly don’t share our unquestioned beliefs and values) are not real communities; and that theft from these (not real) communities is not theft; and that murder of these (not real) communities is not murder or genocide; and that our (not real) theft and (not real) murder of these other (not real) communities can continue forever; that the point of existence is to commit these (not real) thefts and murders; that these thefts and murders will not severely impinge upon our ability to steal from and murder these others; that one of the most unquestioned beliefs in our culture must be that we must never question our inability or unwillingness to question these beliefs; and that the real pity of a murdered planet is that we can no longer continue to steal from or murder it, then I guess we can understand how someone can say something so absurd.

We haven’t really gotten rid of God and the angels and kings, but replaced them with Pure Reason and machines.

Most of the scientific and “common sense” arguments used to defend human supremacism—and the same is true for various scientific and “common sense” means that have been used to defend white or male supremacism—are tautological, in that humans are using themselves as the standard by which all others are judged. Here’s another way to say this: humans choose human characteristics as the measure of what characteristics define superiority. It doesn’t much matter whether you’re a member of a religious group that decides you are the Chosen People and says that some God only you can hear told you that you and you alone are made in the image of this omnipotent God; or whether you’re more modern and project an anthropocentric version of sentience onto the real world, whereby beings are considered sentient primarily based on how closely they resemble humans. In either case you’re

projecting this culture's destructive notion of a hierarchical Great Chain of Being onto a beautiful, vibrant, living, sentient world full of others. That's fucking nuts. Or convenient. Or both.

Let us consider the beliefs of a hypothetical author: I'm superior to you. I'm smarter than you. I'm more sophisticated than you. My life is more meaningful than yours. You are, frankly, insignificant compared to me. I am a sentient being. You are a resource for me to exploit. It's that simple. How do I know this? Because I have more than twenty books out and you do not. Having more than twenty books out is the measure by which I have determined that we judge superiority, intelligence, sophistication, and a meaningful life.

How do I know that's the measure? Well, I decided that's the measure. And besides, it's just common sense. I remember years ago I read—or maybe someone told me, or maybe I made it up—that the most complex logical task anyone can do is write a book. It doesn't actually matter to me whether it's true, because it sounds right, and also because it supports my superiority. Look at it this way: obviously, I am able to think, and obviously I am able to communicate. By definition. Or else I wouldn't have more than twenty books out. And just as obviously, you are not able to think, and you are not able to communicate. Because if you did, you, too, would have more than twenty books out! QED.

I know what you're going to say: Stephen King. How can I be superior when Stephen King has written, at last count, more books than it is possible to count? But that's easy: I'm still superior because most of his books are novels. I understand that some of my books are novels, too, but mine still count and his don't because mine are strongly pro-feminist novels about fighting back against those who would abuse women or the land, which means they and I are both superior.

Yes, I know King wrote Dolores Claiborne, but that book doesn't count, because, well, I'm sure you can see why it doesn't count, right? Same with Rose Madder, by the way. I'm still superior and smarter. Aren't I? And don't even talk to me about all the other things you might have done. It doesn't matter. If you don't have more than twenty books out, I'm superior to you, smarter and more significant than you are.

What? You say you raised two children to be happy and healthy adults? Well, first I would correct your language. You didn't "raise children"; you produced offspring. And clearly producing offspring can't be a sign of intelligence or superiority; for crying out loud, mice produce offspring every six weeks. Producing offspring is not like writing, because writing is truly creative. It is the superior mind creating something out of nothing, with no help from anyone else. Producing offspring is just instinct, and takes

no talent or creativity whatsoever: a female comes in heat, is mounted by (never makes love with) a male (while being watched through binoculars by David Attenborough, who already a bit-too-breathlessly described their courtship rituals—don't worry, he brought along eco-friendly tissues), and their genes are passed on. Nothing but hormones and instinct.

And same with the so-called raising of these so-called children. Instinct, instinct, instinct. Just like it is with so-called mother bears and so-called mother elephants—and while we're at it, let's call them mother trees and mother bacteria. For crying out loud, if a "mother" mouse can "raise" her "babies," where's the talent? Where's the exclusivity? Birds do it. Bees do it. What makes you feel so special? So-called procreation is sure as hell not as much of a miracle as a book, which is a wondrous creation of the (and especially my) mind.

Now that we've so clearly shown we can dismiss mere bio-creation as any sort of sign of intelligence or superiority—it's just instinct and natural—let's move on to other so-called creations. What about monuments or other "great" engineering "achievements"? Why do my books qualify me as smarter than and superior to, for example, an engineer who creates a dam? Doesn't it take intelligence and superiority to build a dam? Well, apart from the fact that I—not dam builders—am defining the qualifying characteristics, I've only got one word for you: beavers.

Seriously, beavers build dams, and what are beavers? They're nothing but rodents with big teeth. Instinct! Never mind that beavers teach their children how to make dams—that's instinct too! And besides, beaver dams make some of the most biodiverse habitat in the world, and engineer-made dams kill rivers. So how does it feel, Mr. Big Shot Engineer, to be less competent than a fucking rodent with big teeth? Once again, where's the talent?

Another reason I'm superior to you is that I have a Bachelor's of Science degree in Mineral Engineering Physics. That proves I'm smart, in fact smarter than anyone who has ever lived, including those who died long before there was such a field of study as physics, and so never had the opportunity to get a degree in it. If they were so smart, they would have figured out a way. Likewise, my superiority based on my writing books extends over those who lived before the invention of the printing press; if they were as high as I on the Great Chain of Being, they would have overcome this trivial obstacle. And once again, I know what you're thinking: given the superiority of someone with a BS in physics, why, then, are those with a Master's or a PhD not even more superior? I think that's pretty obvious: I was smart enough to not stay in physics.

And here's another reason I'm smarter than and superior to you, and

that my life is meaningful while yours is not: the color of my skin. It's white, or more precisely, if you don't mind just a tiny bit of completely-deserved arrogance, my skin color is flesh tone. Why does my white (flesh-tone) skin make me superior to you? Because I'm white, that's why. Yet another reason I'm smarter than and superior to you has to do with my chest hair. I have just the right amount, which is some but not a lot. If I had a lot, of course that would make me too much like an animal, which would make me inferior. And if I had none, then I would make me too much like a woman, which would also make me inferior.

And how else do I know I'm smarter than you, that my life is significant and yours is not? Because I have a penis. I'm a man. A Man. I know what all you other men are thinking: you're thinking that you have a bigger, better penis than I do. But let me assure you: you don't have mine. I have it on the very best authority, in fact the only authority that matters—mine—that my penis is special.

Scientists have debated for years whether the nonhuman apes who are kidnapped and taught American Sign Language really have language or are merely mimicking. How, besides mimicking, do they think human children (and adults) learn language? The scientists consistently refuse to ask these key questions:

1. The nonhuman ape knows its own language plus human ASL; which of these creatures is bilingual, knowing the language of another species?
2. How could you possibly learn another's language if you do not believe this other has language?
3. If a bunch of nonhuman apes in white lab coats kidnapped a scientist and put him in a nonhuman ape version of a mobile home, how long would it take for the scientist to learn their language?
4. Why do scientists think they have the right to kidnap a nonhuman ape?
5. If we judge these nonhuman apes and these scientists by whether or not they kidnap innocent individuals, which species is morally superior?

In forests, the number of species of trees and other plants, the diversity of birds and animals, usually reflects the depth and duration of the local winter. Forty or fifty types of tree might grow in a Mississippi forest. But in northern Canada or Siberia, larch, spruce, fir, and pine pretty much does it. In the astounding fecundity of the Amazon basin some 12,500 species of

trees grow. The warm and wet parts of our world are the great storehouses of life.

We travel the Milky Way together, trees and men. We must expand the circle of human affection once again, make it wide enough to take in the sunlight eaters.

The idea of plant minds was darkly transformed by Roald Dahl in “The Sound Machine.” In this short story a man develops a radio capable of hearing frequencies normally out of range of the human ear, and as he listens one afternoon, he hears a series of painful screams. He suddenly realizes that they coincide with the snipping of blossoms off a rosebush; the radio reveals suburban yard work as genocide, with every cut of the pruning shears causing unbearable agony to sentient flora around him. This scenario may not be as far-fetched as it seems. Imagine the smell of fresh-cut grass. What smells like lazy summers to you is actually the panic pheromone released by each severed blade, letting its neighbors know that the fearsome lawnmower is coming for them too.

When trees are really thirsty, they begin to scream. If you’re out in the forest, you won’t be able to hear them, because this all takes place at ultrasonic levels. Scientists at the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow, and Landscape Research recorded the sounds, and this is how they explain them: Vibrations occur in the trunk when the flow of water from the roots to the leaves is interrupted. This is a purely mechanical event and it probably doesn’t mean anything.

And yet? We know how the sounds are produced, and if we were to look through a microscope to examine how humans produce sounds, what we would see wouldn’t be that different: the passage of air down the windpipe causes our vocal cords to vibrate. When I think about the research results it seems to me that these vibrations could indeed be much more than just vibrations—they could be cries of thirst. The trees might be screaming out a dire warning to their colleagues that water levels are running low.

For there to be something we would recognize as a brain, neurological processes must be involved, and for these, in addition to chemical messages, you need electrical impulses. And these are precisely what we can measure in the tree, and we’ve been able to do so since as far back as the nineteenth century. For some years now, a heated controversy has flared up among scientists. Can plants think? Are they intelligent? Some are of the opinion that brain-like structures can be found at root tips. In addition to signaling pathways, there are also numerous systems and molecules similar to those found in animals. When a root feels its way forward in the ground, it is aware of stimuli. Researchers measured electrical signals that led to changes in behavior after they were processed in a “transition zone.” If the

root encounters toxic substances, impenetrable stones, or saturated soil, it analyzes the situation and transmits the necessary adjustments to the growing tip. The root tip changes direction as a result of this communication and steers the growing root around the critical areas.

Right now, the majority of plant researchers are skeptical about whether such behavior points to a repository for intelligence, the faculty of memory, and emotions. Among other things, they get worked up about carrying over findings in similar situations with animals and, at the end of the day, about how this threatens to blur the boundary between plants and animals. And so what? What would be so awful about that? The distinction between plant and animal is, after all, arbitrary and depends on the way an organism feeds itself: the former photosynthesizes and the latter eats other living beings. And if you consider fungi and viruses we've already got quite a bit of blurriness going on. Finally, the only other big difference is in the amount of time it takes to process information and translate it into action. Does that mean that beings that live life in the slow lane are automatically worth less than ones on the fast track? Sometimes I suspect we would pay more attention to trees and other vegetation if we could establish beyond a doubt just how similar they are in many ways to animals.

Mimosas are tropical creeping herbs. They make particularly good research subjects, because it is easy to get them a bit riled up and they are easier to study in the laboratory than trees are. When they are touched, they close their feathery little leaves to protect themselves. Researchers designed an experiment where individual drops of water fell on the plants' foliage at regular intervals. At first, the anxious leaves closed immediately, but after a while, the little plants learned there was no danger of damage from the water droplets. After that, the leaves remained open despite the drops. The mimosas could remember and apply their lesson weeks later, even without any further tests.

However, unlike the mimosas, most plants seem to lack mind because they take so long to respond to their environment. Imagine someone who touched a hot stove and removed their hand only after a couple of hours—that person wouldn't seem like the sharpest tool in the shed. Curiously, it's also hard for us to see intelligence in things that move very quickly, to track the logic of darting dragonflies or scurrying cockroaches. It seems like minds are maximally perceived at human speed.

The technical term for this tendency is timescale anthropocentrism. 'Anthropo' comes from the Greek word *anthropos*, meaning human, and '-centrism' simply means a specific orientation or focus. Timescale anthropocentrism is the idea that we see the world—including minds—from the perspective of human time. This idea is illustrated by a study in which

participants were asked to rate the minds of different animals, some of which moved very slowly (e.g. sloths) and some of which moved very quickly (e.g., houseflies). Things that move with a human-like speed were perceived to have more mind.

We know that plants aren't intelligent because they don't have brains. Do you see it? Because we think humans think with our brains, we humans have decided that brains and central nervous systems are the only way that anyone can think and are therefore necessary for cognition. Therefore plants, not having brains and central nervous systems, cannot think. It's been proven. Thank goodness our supremacy withstood that one! Think about it. What if I said to you that because quite often my sexual pleasure involves a penis ejaculating, all sexual pleasure experienced by anyone must involve a penis ejaculating? Ridiculous and self-centered, right? Sex has evolved on this planet in a myriad of beautiful and ecstatic ways, as different for flowering plants as it is for great apes as it is for shellfish as it is for fungi. And what if I said that just because my breathing involves lungs, all breathing must involve lungs? Fish and trees and insects all say hello. How do you know it isn't the same for intelligence?

The fundamental assumption of supremacists is that until proven otherwise—and, in fact, long after—supremacists presume the other is not a subjective being. It's what men and whites and the civilized have been doing since the beginnings of their respective supremacies. It's what supremacists do.

The following is a description of sociopaths:

“Imagine, if you can, feeling absolutely no concern for another human being. No guilt. No remorse. No shame. Never once regretting a single selfish, lazy, cruel, unethical, or immoral action in your entire life. Nobody matters except you. Nobody deserves respect. Equality. Fairness. They are useless, ignorant, gullible fools, who are taking up space and the air you breathe.

Now I want you to add to this strange fantasy the ability to conceal from other people exactly what you are, to be able to hide your true nature. Nobody knows what you're really like, how little you care for other people, what you're capable of—imagine what you could achieve. Where others hesitate, you will act. Where others set boundaries, you will cross them, unhampered by any moral restraints or pangs of disquiet, any rules or ethics, with ice water in your veins and a heart of pure stone.”

This is a description of human supremacism.

Most are fearful of living in a world that is nearly infinitely complex, and nearly infinitely morally complex. It's much more convenient to live in a world where your morality is based on a clearly defined hierarchy, with you at the top. To interact with a machine is less complex and less morally complex than to interact with a community.

If your experience of the world is at variance with what this culture inculcates you into believing should be your experience of the world, what do you do? Many people respond by denying their own experience. Of course. That's the point of a supremacist philosophy.

One of the myths of modern culture is that science is value free. That's nonsense. Not only because reality is necessarily more complex than any analysis or interpretation of reality, which means that by definition, values must be imposed through what is and is not included in the analysis or interpretation; and not only because, protestations of some humans aside, the universe is far more complex than a human brain (and of course far more complex than a computer), and is far more complex than we are capable of thinking (and of course far more complex than machines are capable of computing). This myth of value-free science is only tenable if you've forgotten that unquestioned beliefs are the real authorities of any culture, and then if you presume that anything that questions those assumptions is "speculation" or "philosophizing" (as opposed to those more legitimate "analyses" that fail to question the assumptions).

When a supremacism of any sort is one of the unquestioned beliefs acting as a real authority of that culture, defenders of that supremacism nearly always perceive any questioning of any part of that supremacism as a "foolish distraction." They generally portray themselves—and quite often perceive themselves—as defenders of reasonableness and sanity, and perceive those questioning their supremacism as having come from the nuthouse. This is as true of human supremacists today as it was of defenders of race-based chattel slavery and as it was of defenders of the witch trials. And because the beliefs that underlie their supremacisms are unquestioned, proponents of supremacisms can say without intentional irony that they're not philosophizing or participating in wild speculations. Because their supremacist perspective is unquestioned—and the supremacists would prefer it remain that way—all questioning of that supremacism by definition will be classed as speculation, and all speculation on that subject will be discouraged. Of course, speculating about ways to escalate the ability of one's superior class to exploit all inferior classes is seen as innovation, creativity, and a sign of one's intelligence and superiority.

So, discuss your perception of nonhuman sentience, and you're a foolish distraction from the nuthouse who is speculating; figure out a way to use

cyanide to extract gold from rocks and leave behind a poisoned landscape, and you're a fucking hero and a shining example of human ingenuity.

Probably because they're members of this exploitative culture. It shouldn't surprise us that members of the same culture that gave us capitalism as the dominant economic model, based as it is on the insane notion that selfish individuals all attempting to maximally exploit each other will somehow create stable and healthy human communities (never mind that it never has and functionally cannot)—would give us variants of the selfish gene theory as the dominant biological model—based as it is on the equally insane notion that selfish individuals all attempting to maximally exploit each other will somehow create stable and healthy natural communities (never mind that it never has and functionally cannot). Both are justifications for what the dominant culture does: steal from everyone else. Absent is the reality of how communities survive and thrive. These must be absent, if members of our culture are going to feel good about themselves as they steal from and destroy everyone else, and as they ultimately kill the planet.

The truth is: All give. From each according to its gifts and the needs of the community. To each according to its needs and the needs of the community. These gifts can include their lives. For many, especially for the very young of some species, their lives are their only gift, as among tadpoles or many others, the overwhelming majority of them give gifts of their lives in the form of food not long after they are born.

How you perceive the world affects how you behave in and toward the world. If you perceive competition as the world's guiding principle, compete you will; if you perceive the world as being full of ruthless competitors you must overcome and exploit, you will do your part to ruthlessly overcome and exploit them. If, on the other hand, you perceive the world's guiding principle to be that of giving to the larger biotic community, you will give to the larger biotic community; if you perceive the world as being full of others who give to make it stronger, healthier, more alive, then you will do your part to make it so.

The lie is that the hierarchy—whether you call it the Great Chain of Being or the “food chain”—exists at all. There is no top of any food chain. It's all cycles within cycles. You eat the fish who ate the worm, and in time the worm eats you. It doesn't matter whether you are a gnat or an elephant, you eat and you will be eaten. That's life. Get over it.

Cooperation has been perverted into its toxic mimic through the conversion of living human animals into cogs in hierarchical social machines.

By now we've probably all heard of the Milgram experiment, where participants were led to believe they were taking on the role of “teacher” in a study on the relationship between pain and learning. An authority

figure told the teacher to administer electric shocks to a “learner” when the learner gave incorrect answers to questions. Unbeknownst to the teacher, the learner—who was in another room and could be heard, but not seen—was in on the experiment, and there were no electric shocks. But as the strength of the “shocks” would increase with each wrong answer, the learner would moan and scream as if in pain, and cry out about his heart condition. The authority figure would push the teacher to deliver ever stronger shocks to the learner. Toward the end the learner might begin banging on the wall, and then go ominously silent. Most people believed that nearly everyone would stand up to the authority figure and not harm another human being. But most people were wrong: in reality, more than 60 percent of the subjects obeyed the authority figure and tortured the helpless victim to the very end.

Now here’s my point: when researchers set up an experiment where a rat received food by pressing a lever, and then added the twist that pressing the lever shocked a rat in a nearby cage, the rat refused to press the lever. Different researchers replicated this experiment with rhesus monkeys, who also refused to torture their fellows. One monkey refused to eat for twelve days, literally starving himself instead of causing another pain. And who are the cooperative ones?

Scientists conducted an experiment in which they starved one capuchin monkey while those in cages nearby were fed (we can certainly ask what sort of sadist would conceptualize such an experiment, but we already know the answer). To their surprise, they found the starved monkey didn’t lose any weight. They could only conclude that the other monkeys were surreptitiously sharing their food. And who are the cooperative ones?

Whalers have long known that if they kill or wound one sperm whale, other whales will come to try to help their comrade. The whalers then kill the rest of the pod. And who are the cooperative ones?

Hunters knew that if they killed or wounded one Carolina parakeet, the parakeet’s friends would hover around to protect the wounded one. The hunters then killed the rest of the parakeets. In fact they drove them extinct. And who are the cooperative ones?

Slime molds are tiny beings who feed on microorganisms like bacteria, yeasts, and fungi who live in dead plant material. One of their gifts to the larger community is that they can contribute to the decomposition of dead vegetation. When this food is abundant, they live independently as single-celled organisms. But, and here’s where it gets even cooler, when food is less common, these single-celled beings can join together and begin to move as one, often following scents toward new food sources. The individuals can change their shape and become different functional parts of this collective; for example, they can become a stalk that produces fruiting bodies that

release spores. Yes, that says what you think it does. They can transition from single- to multi-celled creatures. And then move as one. And they can morph! This is precisely the opposite behavior of that predicted in many models proposed by mechanistic scientists. In the “run on the bank” model, and in the similar “grocery store running out of food” model, so long as there is plenty of money in the bank (or food in the grocery store), people are polite. They will wait in line. They will observe social niceties. But when resources become scarce, people push and shove their way to the front of the line. They lie and cheat and steal. They do not act communally. They in fact act anti-communally. But slime molds act precisely the opposite of what these models predict: when the going gets tough, slime molds recognize the importance of community. And who are the cooperative ones?

So many of the solutions to what members of this culture so often perceive as problems quite often lead to other problems, many of which probably could have been predicted were the people looking at these original “problems” both a) intelligent; and b) not evil. The only way I can see that someone putting in a dam could not predict that this would wipe out anadromous fish species, destroy the submerged lands, dispossess the human and nonhuman inhabitants, harm wetlands downriver, and so on, would be if those suggesting these solutions (dams) to problems (wanting electricity) were either a) unforgivably intelligent; or b) unforgivably evil. Take your pick. None of this is cognitively challenging in the least. And of course you could say that they are simply unforgivably entitled, and don’t care about those they harm, but a) that doesn’t seem very smart; and b) that seems pretty evil. And we can talk all we want about claims to virtue and about social systems that reward atrocious behavior and so on, but beneath it all, this is what it comes down to: are they really that stupid, or are they really that evil?

You could ask, ‘Well, how else are they supposed to generate the electricity they need to run their factories?’ But that’s not my problem, and coming up with a solution to that problem is not the responsibility of those who will be murdered by the dam. If you can’t generate electricity without causing significant harm to those humans and nonhumans who will not be receiving the benefits of this electricity, then you really are only solving the problem by foisting its harmful effects onto others, in which case you shouldn’t be calling yourself superior or intelligent, but instead a thief of these others’ lives. Theft and murder do not by themselves qualify you as intelligent or superior.

A reason it’s ridiculous to say that inventing refrigerators is a sign of intelligence and superiority is that if it is, what does that say about those Indigenous human cultures who never invented refrigerators, or cameras,

or telephones, or perhaps more to the point, iron blades, war chariots, galley ships, steel breastplates, tall ships, muzzle-loaders, breech-loaders, long-range artillery, machine guns, tanks, bombers, aircraft carriers, nuclear attack submarines, predator drones, and so on? Does this mean they were less intelligent, because they didn't invent backhoes and chainsaws? Does this mean they were inferior? Are those really arguments you want to make? If so, are you really that supremacist? Because the belief that the invention of any of these solutions is a sign of intelligence and/or superiority implies that the failure to invent any of these solutions is a sign of a lack of intelligence and/or superiority, which means that it implies that those who have invented these solutions are more intelligent and/or superior to those who did not. This means the civilized are superior to and/or more intelligent than Indigenous peoples. Another way to put this is that they are higher on the Great Chain of Being than are Primitives.

But perhaps the Tolowa, for example, never invented chainsaws, backhoes, or refrigerators at least in part because they had such a different social reward system and such a different way of perceiving and of living in the world, that many of the problems that led to these solutions may not even have been perceived as problems. If you've not exceeded your local carrying capacity, and you rely on salmon for food, and you ceremonially smoke them, and if you recognize that your life is tied up in theirs, and if the salmon stay as common (and delicious) as they have been forever (as they should if you don't exceed local carrying capacity, either through overconsumption or overproduction or overpopulation), there's really no reason to invent refrigeration. The meat stays freshest in the river. And if you're not planning on conquering your neighbor, there's really no reason for you to invent chariots or steel breastplates or machine guns, is there?

Technologies—and by extension, I would say many other forms of “solutions” to other forms of “problems”—do not exist in a vacuum. Technologies emerge from and then give rise to certain social forms. Technologies and their associated social forms can be democratic or they can be authoritarian. Democratic ones are those that emerge from and reinforce democratic or egalitarian social structures, whereas authoritarian ones are those that emerge from and reinforce authoritarian social structures.

The distinction is simple: does the technology require a large-scale hierarchical structure? Does it reinforce this structure? Does it lend itself to the monopolization of the technology, and therefore to control of those who fabricate the technology over those who use it? To put it in its simplest terms, is this technology something that anyone can make? Or is it a technology that requires massive hierarchical (and distant) organizations? We can ask all of these same questions not just about technologies, but

about all ‘problems’ and ‘solutions.’ Authoritarian and egalitarian societies may look at the same situation and perceive entirely different problems, to which they will perceive entirely different solutions. These solutions will then lead to the societies becoming more or less authoritarian or egalitarian. We can also say that unsustainable and sustainable societies may look at the same situation and see entirely different problems to which they will find entirely different solutions. And human supremacist cultures and non-human-supremacist cultures may also perceive different problems to which they will find different solutions.

When authoritarian, unsustainable, supremacist cultures encounter cultures which are none of these, they quite often conquer or destroy them. This is not only because unsustainable cultures must expand or collapse, but also because supremacist cultures by definition disrespect difference. But even when unsustainable cultures don’t outright conquer or destroy those who are sustainable, the sustainable cultures may still find themselves harmed, or if you prefer, infected.

For example, a sustainable non-supremacist culture may face the problem of keeping warm in the winter and may choose as a partial solution the wearing of skins of fur-bearing creatures they have killed. After being contacted/infected by an unsustainable and human supremacist culture, they may begin to see their landbase differently. Now they may see the same forest, the same creatures as before, but the new problem is not, ‘How do we keep warm?’ but rather ‘How do we make money?’ or ‘How do we gain trade goods? How can we get some of those steel pots and steel knives, which are ever-so-much more useful than our clay or reed pots and our stone knives?’ Their solution can then become, ‘By killing fur-bearing creatures to sell their pelts.’ And the culture has begun to move away from sustainability and interspecific cooperation and towards unsustainability and human supremacism. This is something that happened time and again across North America, as creature after creature who had lived with the Indigenous humans for millennia were quickly decimated, and the human cultures changed. Thus did technologies such as steel pots and steel knives play a role in changing cultures and landbases.

We must never forget that technologies affect our societies, and we must never forget to ask ourselves how these technologies affect our societies. Societies interested in sustainability and self-reliance have always asked themselves how new technologies will affect their communities. To not do so is a fatal mistake.

By 1800, about three-quarters of the people living in agricultural societies were living in some form of slavery, indenture, or serfdom, almost all of which could be blamed directly on agriculture. The only reason that isn’t

true today is that human slave energy has been temporarily replaced by fossil fuels; when these run out the human slave percentage will return to its former heights. And of course none of this is to speak of the nonhuman slavery upon which agriculture is completely reliant.

When a culture destroys its own landbase—through authoritarian agriculture, through associated urbanization, or through any other means for any reason—it then has two choices: collapse, or take someone else’s landbase. Since cultures rarely choose to collapse, this means once a culture has committed itself to an authoritarian agricultural way of life—which, by definition, destroys landbases—it is committed to expansion, which means, since someone else already lives there, to conquest. The alternative is starvation. This means the culture must be militarized, with all that implies socially, both internally and externally. Civilization originates in such agriculture, which requires slavery at home (and abroad) and conquest abroad. If you base your way of life on the use of a plow, you have to accept the slavery, ecocide, militarization (which also means a high rape culture), and conquest that comes with it.

“Yes, the pristine wilderness is a wonderful place to visit, but most rational people would rebel if forced to live there.”

First, until only a few thousand years ago—and across much of America, until only a few hundred years ago—what today is called “pristine wilderness” was not called ‘pristine wilderness,’ and it wasn’t a place for people to visit. It was called ‘home,’ and it was where people lived, people who fought against the conquest and enslavement of their homes, people who did prefer wetlands and starlight to condominiums and city lights. Also, saying that “most rational people would rebel if forced to live there,” implies that those who gladly lived there were not as rational as those who destroyed these “wildernesses” and the humans (and nonhumans) who called these places home. It implies they were not as rational as those who live in condo canyons. This is fully in line with the disturbingly common belief among members of the dominant culture that Indigenous peoples—a.k.a. people who live in “pristine wilderness,” a.k.a. “primitives”—are too often not perceived as fully rational. I’ll tell you what is not rational, or reasonable: harming the capacity of the earth, our only home, to support life. Nothing could be more unreasonable or irrational or stupid or evil than that.

We cannot forget the cultural component to this gadget-making. The Tolowa certainly invented some gadgets, such as baskets and hand-woven fishing nets, but they never allowed their gadget-making to become so compulsive as to cause them to destroy their landbase. As a consequence,

they were able to live here for at least 12,500 years without destroying the place. The dominant culture has been here for 150 years, and the place is trashed. Why would we do something so stupid as to invent gadgets that threaten our existence and the existence of life on this planet? And why would we presume this means we're superior? The answer: because our self-perceived superiority is based on our ability to enslave or destroy others.

Those who are addicted to power and control receive tangible benefits for feeding their addictions. This is one reason perpetrators of domestic violence—and slavers, and capitalists, and exploiters in general—rarely change: their behavior is gaining them tangible benefits. Never mind that doing so harms their relationships; if they're addicted to power and control, making others jump through hoops on command is by definition more important to them than having loving mutual relationships. The cliché is that addicts don't usually change till they hit bottom. But those who are addicted to power and control are not the ones who hit bottom; it's their victims who hit bottom. These particular addicts will not change so long as there is any other option, and quite often, not even then.

“If you take a look at biological success, which is essentially measured by how many of us there are. . .”

But this is not an appropriate or realistic measure of biological success. Instead it is one that is based on this culture's model of overshoot and conquest. We've all been taught that life is somehow like a computer game, where your success is measured by how many points you rack up; or like Risk, where your success is measured by how many little plastic armies you have and how much of the map you control. But this measure of biological success is simply the same old Biblical commandment to go forth and multiply projected onto the natural world. It's also, since they come from the same imperative, a projection of the dominant economic mindset onto the natural world, a capitalist mindset where your success is measured by how many dollars or how many franchises you own.

Switching terms again, but still coming from the same imperative, it's a projection onto the natural world of a colonialist or imperialist mindset where your success is measured by how much of other people's land you take over for your own use and to increase your numbers. That's the definition of a colonialist mindset. And it is precisely how this culture has maximized its numbers—succeeded, according to this metric—by taking over someone else's land (in this case, land needed by both Indigenous humans, and nonhumans). So many anti-imperialists understand all this when it comes to economic and social policy, but it is a measure of the hold that human supremacism

has over our minds and our discourse that these same anti-imperialists—and, in fact, most of us—cannot see that the definition of biological success they use is precisely the measure of success for colonialism or empire. In this case it is simply human empire, or more precisely, an empire of authoritarian technology.

I would argue that a far better measure of biological success would be whether the presence and population of a given species improves the health and resilience of the larger biotic community of whom it is a member and on whom it relies for sustenance, thereby ensuring its own species' survival as well as the survival of other members of its biotic community. How would we act differently if we allowed this definition of ecological success to influence our social policies?

At the same time that some humans have been killing the planet, and through many of the same processes, and for many of the same reasons, those same humans who have been killing the planet—the civilized, those who are enslaved to authoritarian forms—have been killing Indigenous humans, overrunning, committing genocide against, and often exterminating them. If you were to look at a time-lapse map of worsening ecological conditions and superimpose upon it a time-lapse map of the expansion of civilized, agricultural peoples, and over that a time-lapse map of land stolen from Indigenous peoples, you would find that the maps were pretty much the same.

Yet somehow, public intellectuals—and a lot of them—can get by saying that the destruction is caused because humans as a species are so damn smart. And a lot of listeners in this human supremacist culture nod their heads and thoughtfully rub their chins, NPR-style. But the same processes that led, and lead, to the murder of the planet also led, and lead, to land theft from Indigenous humans; in the former case it's land theft from nonhumans, and in the latter it's land theft from both the humans and the nonhumans with whom they live. How would these same listeners respond if the public intellectuals said that some humans, by which they meant civilized humans, have been able to overrun Indigenous nations because of the superior intelligence of the conquerors? 'Oh, the Europeans conquered North America and destroyed hundreds of Indigenous cultures because the Europeans are far more intelligent, and intelligence is a lethal mutation.' How would that sound? Because that's really what they're saying.

Saying our "intelligence" is a "lethal mutation" transforms the murder of the planet from the ongoing result of lots of very bad and very immoral ongoing social choices, which we can name, and which provide benefits for some classes of people at the expense of others, into something beyond our control, into something we can do nothing about, into a classic tragedy, with

us starring (of course) as the tragic hero whose tragic flaw is that he is just too damn smart for this world.

By calling the murder of the planet an act of intelligence, one is encouraging that destructiveness. Smart is good, right? We'd rather be smart than not smart, right? How would our society as a whole act differently if, instead of portraying the acts of destroying forests or killing oceans as signs and validations of our intelligence, we were to speak honestly about them, and say that they are acts of mind-boggling stupidity? How would we act differently if public intellectuals argued that this culture is killing the planet because we're so fucking stupid? Wouldn't that change our behavior? Of course if someone were to argue that humans are killing the planet because humans are lethally stupid, I would still point out that plenty of Indigenous cultures did not destroy their landbases. So I would argue that it is not that humans are stupid, but that this culture makes people stupid, in fact so stupid that they would rather kill the planet that is the source of our lives and the lives of all these other beautiful beings with whom we share this planet, than to acknowledge that they are making stupid social choice after stupid social choice.

A few decades ago an Indian nation in Montana wanted to conduct a traditional bison hunt. They were mandated to consult with federal managers, who came up with a plan: the Indians were to kill the old bulls, those who were past their sexual prime, and as such, useless in terms of passing on genetic material. Everybody wins: the Indians get their food and hides, the bison herd doesn't lose any necessary genetic materials (because the old bulls were too old to have sex ever again, the bison were, from a strict genetic perspective, already dead bulls walking), the federal managers get to kill some wild nature and file paperwork showing tangible actions leading to increased appropriations possibilities in the next fiscal year, and the human supremacists get to feel superior. Nonetheless, the Indians said that this is not what their teachings suggested. They insisted that the bulls had a role as elders in the bison community.

The managers were unswayed by this non-scientific argument. In a fight between "teachings" and the tools of scientific management (backed by the full power of the state), scientific management nearly always wins, and the world generally loses. The only way the Indians could have their traditional hunt is if they killed the animals the managers told them to. So they did.

That winter the remaining bison starved. Life is way more complex than managers think it is. It is more complex than any of us think it is. It is more complex than we are capable of thinking. Montana winters are cold and the snow can be deep. Bison need to eat. How do they get through the snow to the vegetation beneath? It ends up that the old bulls are the

only ones whose necks are strong enough to sweep away the heavy snow. They do this for their whole community. As usual, the managers make the decisions, and others pay the consequences.

Every single biome on the planet whom human supremacists have tried to manage has been dramatically harmed. Every single one. There has been not a single success, in terms of biotic health. How fucking arrogant, and how fucking stupid, do you have to be to not be able to discern the pattern in this? Further, and this is the real point, how much intelligence does it take to cut through the rhetoric and see that ‘agriculture’ and ‘running the whole Earth’ are euphemisms for ‘stealing’? Converting the entire landbase to human use is certainly stealing from the nonhumans who live there, and it is stealing from the humans living with those nonhumans, and it is stealing from those who would have lived in the future. ‘Running the whole Earth,’ likewise, is just another way to say ‘taking whatever we want and fuck everyone else.’ While using a euphemism may salve your conscience, and in the case of ‘running the whole Earth,’ may make you feel superior, it doesn’t change material reality. And material reality is more important than the words we use to describe it. Reality is also more important than our perceptions of it or our beliefs about it.

“If empire is inherently destructive, we might as well say good-bye to each other, because all of our energy and consumer goods come from empire, whether it’s coal from the internal colonies of Appalachia and the High Plains, tin from Bolivia, clothes from sweatshops in Haiti or Vietnam, steel from the slave-based factories in Brazil. Whatever it is. There is no reason to believe that empire and colonialism are inherently destructive.”

Imperialism can be defined as the taking (by force, threat of force, or even “persuasion,” if the power relations between the parties are grossly unequal) of another’s land or other resources for use at the center of empire. Using this definition, agriculture is imperialism, both against the land and against people of the land.

What makes the whole thing even more insane is that the economic system requires constant addition, and this addition requires and creates subtraction. Capitalism (and before it, civilization) requires that production grow—add two or three percent each year—and production is a measure of the subtraction, that is, of the conversion of the living into the dead: forests into 2x4s; schools of fish into fish sticks or sushi or fertilizer. The math is both simple and tragic. I think that for some people—especially those in power—the only math that matters is constant addition into their

bank accounts. But I think that so many of the rest of us do what we can to avoid this math because if we do the subtraction, do the addition, our own personal sum will be unbearable sorrow, terror, and a feeling of being entirely out of control. I think many of us do what we can to avoid this math because we know that if we do the subtraction, do the addition, our psyches and our consciences and our lives will forever be changed; and we know that no matter how fierce the momentum that leads to this subtraction and addition, no matter our fears that we may be crushed (or perhaps more fearsome, ridiculed), that we will be led in some way to oppose the subtraction of life and the addition of toxic substances to this planet that is our only home.

You're driving a car down a tunnel at 100 miles per hour directly at a brick wall. Do you turn to the passengers and say goodbye? Do you tell them, 'Our lives depend on this car not crashing. I see no evidence of a brick wall. And I see no evidence that car crashes must be inherently destructive'? No, you hit the brakes so hard your foot goes through the floor. If you can stop, great. If you can't, it becomes a question of increasing your odds of survival. I'd rather hit the wall at 90 than 100, 80 than 90, 70 than 80. With your own life and the lives of those you love at stake, every mile per hour you cut away counts.

But what does this culture do? It keeps its foot firmly on the gas. Now, let's say you're a passenger in this car. What do you do? Do you turn to those in the back seat and say goodbye? Do you pretend there is no brick wall? Do you write up a petition you and the other passengers can sign requesting that the driver cut speed by 20 percent by the year 2025? No, you scratch and claw and kick and bite and do everything you can to get the murderous suicidal asshole's foot off the gas, and press down with everything you've got on the brakes.

The center of authority in this new system is no longer a visible personality, an all-powerful king: even in totalitarian dictatorships the center now lies in the system itself, invisible but omnipresent: all its human components, even the technical and managerial elite, even the sacred priesthood of science, who alone have access to the secret knowledge by means of which total control is now swiftly being effected, are themselves trapped by the very perfection of the organization they have invented. Like the pharaohs of the Pyramid Age, these servants of the system identify its goods with their own kind of well-being: as with the divine king, their praise of the system is an act of self-worship; and again like the king, they are in the grip of an irrational compulsion to extend their means of control and expand the scope of their authority. In this new systems-centered collective, this pentagon of power, there is no visible presence who issues commands: unlike

Job's God, the new deities cannot be confronted, still less defied. Under the pretext of saving labor, the ultimate end of this authoritarian shit is to displace life, or rather, to transfer the attributes of life to the machine and the mechanical collective, allowing only so much of the organism to remain as may be controlled and manipulated.

Why has our age surrendered so easily to the controllers, the manipulators, the conditioners of an authoritarian society? The answer to this question is both paradoxical and ironic. Present day authoritarianism differs from that of the overtly brutal, half-baked authoritarian systems of the past in one highly favorable particular: it has accepted the basic principle of democracy, that every member of society should have a share in its goods. By progressively fulfilling this part of the democratic promise, our system has achieved a hold over the whole community that threatens to wipe out every other vestige of democracy.

The bargain we are being asked to ratify takes the form of a magnificent bribe. Under the democratic-authoritarian social contract, each member of the community—but mainly the global elite—may claim every material advantage, every intellectual and emotional stimulus he may desire, in quantities hardly available hitherto even for a restricted minority: food, housing, swift transportation, instantaneous communication, medical care, entertainment, education. But on one condition: that one must not merely ask for nothing that the system does not provide, but likewise agree to take everything offered, duly processed and fabricated, homogenized and equalized, in the precise quantities that the system, rather than the person, requires. Once one opts for the system no further choice remains. In a word, if one surrenders one's life at the source, authoritarian systems will give back as much of it as can be mechanically graded, quantitatively multiplied, collectively manipulated and magnified.

'Is this not a fair bargain?' those who speak for the system will ask. 'Are not the goods authoritarian society promises real goods? Is this not the horn of plenty that mankind has long dreamed of, and that every ruling class has tried to secure, at whatever cost of brutality and injustice, for itself?'

I would not belittle, still less deny, the many admirable products this technology has brought forth, products that a self-regulating economy would make good use of. I would only suggest that it is time to reckon up the human and nonhuman disadvantages and costs, to say nothing of the dangers, of our unqualified acceptance of the system itself. Even the immediate price is heavy; for the system is so far from being under effective human direction that it may poison us wholesale to provide us with food or exterminate us to provide national security, before we can enjoy its promised goods. Is it

really humanly profitable to give up the possibility of living a few years at Walden Pond, so to say, for the privilege of spending a lifetime in Walden Towers? Once our authoritarians consolidate their powers, with the aid of new forms of mass control—the panoply of tranquilizers and sedatives and aphrodisiacs, literally out of *Brave New World*—could democracy in any form survive? That question is absurd: life itself will not survive, except what is funneled through the mechanical collective. The spread of a sterilized scientific intelligence over the planet has not, will not, cannot, as too many so innocently imagine, be the happy consummation of divine purpose: it would rather ensure the final arrest of any further human development.

Forests care if salmon die. Salmon care if salmon die. Lampreys care if salmon die. Redwoods care if salmon die. Lots of creatures depend on salmon. Salmon help the entire region where they live. On the other hand, who cares if you die? What use are you to the real world? At least salmon help forests, which is more than can be said for most humans. Is the world a better place because you are alive? Not, is this culture better off? Not, have you put in a really nice garden? Not, have you raised children? I'm talking about wild nature. The real, physical world. The real, physical world is better because salmon are in it. The same can't be said of people who prefer industrial electricity to salmon. And for the record, we don't need industrial electricity. We need clean air, water, and food. And habitat. Not industrial electricity.

The label 'Anthropocene' gives no hint of the horrors this culture is inflicting. The Age of Man? Oh, that's nice. We're number one, right? Instead, the name must be horrific, it must be accurate, and it must produce shock and shame and outrage commensurate with this culture's atrocities: it is killing the planet, after all. It must call us to differentiate ourselves from this culture, to show that this label and this behavior do not belong to us. It must call us to show that we do not deserve it. It must call us to say and mean: 'Not one more Indigenous culture driven from their land, and not one more species driven extinct!' It must call us to fury and revulsion. It must call us to use our lives and if necessary our deaths to stop this insane culture from killing all we hold dear, from killing this planet that is the source of all life, including our own. If we're going to name this age after this culture, we must be honest, and call it The Age of the Sociopath—the Sociopocene. And then we need to end this fucking age, as quickly as possible, using whatever means are necessary.

Here's how conservation works in the Sociopocene: we gained the benefits, and now we're pretending that we face this terrible dilemma as to which of our victims we're going to save (for now). But that's not really a dilemma. Let's pretend I'm going to kill either you or your best friend. And no matter

whom I kill, I'm going to take everything you both own and everything you hold dear. I gain and both of you lose, including, for one of you, your life. I choose which one dies. That's not a dilemma for me. To qualify as a dilemma I have to have something at stake. Instead of a dilemma, it's murder and theft. But from a supremacist perspective, I'm not a murderer and thief. I'm a savior. I saved one of you from certain death (admittedly, at my own hands, but still it was my right to take both and I only took one!). And being this savior is more evidence of my superiority. A lesser being might have mindlessly killed you both. Gosh, aren't I great? And since I'm so smart, maybe I can come up with all sorts of criteria by which today I'll make my decision as to which of you I'll kill. Then tomorrow, I'll make another decision based on these or whatever other criteria I want as to whether to kill the survivor from today or your second-best friend. And the day after, I'll make this decision again with someone else you love.

I find it deeply troubling that at least some members of this culture can feel even remotely good about themselves for choosing who lives and who dies, if they don't also work toward stopping the actual cause of the murders. It's analogous to a guard at a Nazi death camp feeling like a hero for giving Sophie the choice as to which of her children he won't murder (tonight).

This culture is systematically and functionally killing the planet. All the wonderful and necessary work of every activist who is fighting as hard as she or he can to protect this or that wild place won't mean a fucking thing so long as this culture stands. And all this fine work that goes into creating decision-trees as to whom we deem worthy of saving and whom we will drive extinct is meaningless when we completely fail to address the cause of the murders in the first place.

A gang of sadistic, vicious, insane, entitled, sociopathic murderers has taken over your home, and is holding everyone you love captive. They are systematically pulling your loved ones from the room and torturing them to death. What do you do? Do you make decision-trees to help you make "difficult decisions" as to which of your loved ones you'll hand over next? Maybe you do. But I have to tell you I'd be more focused on stopping the murderous motherfuckers in their tracks, stopping the murders at their source. From the perspective of human supremacists, though, it is easier, more pleasing, and certainly reinforces one's own identity as superior, to "reluctantly" make "difficult decisions" as to who will be driven extinct. So long as we never, ever, ever question the supremacism and the culture that is driving them extinct.

We have sold whatever native intelligence and integrity and empathy and common sense we have in exchange for our cut of the swag. I hope you enjoy your share of the money we got for the ring that used to be on our

big sister's finger. I know I sure did. I bought myself a new computer. And Mom's liver paid this month's electricity bill.

But of course it's hard to make a man understand something when his entitlement depends on him not understanding it.

Before you can commit any mass atrocity, you have to have what some call a "claim to virtue," that is you have to convince others and especially yourself that you are not in fact committing an atrocity, but instead performing some virtuous act. So the Nazis weren't committing mass murder and genocide, but rather purifying the Aryan race. The Americans weren't committing mass murder and genocide, but rather manifesting their destiny. And are, of course, still doing so. Members of the dominant culture aren't killing the planet, they are "developing natural resources." And it's not mass murder, theft, and ecocide, it is "managing" forests, wetlands, rivers, and so on

All this talk of miracles and preaching and fire and brimstone and sacred missions is not coincidental. The technotopian vision is just a secular version of the same monotheistic conceit that life on Earth is a vale of tears and the real glory is in heaven. It doesn't much matter whether you believe the only meaning comes from a God who looks like an old man with a beard, or the only meaning comes from things created by man, you're still saying that the earth is meaningless. You're still showing contempt and hatred for the Earth. And it doesn't much matter whether the God you created tells you that you should have dominion over the Earth, and all creatures on Earth should fear you, or whether you believe it is human's manifest destiny to convert the Earth into machines and pollute the Earth (because that's what intelligent beings do), and you not only make all creatures fear you, you drive them extinct, you're still destroying the place. It doesn't matter whether you have the God you created tell you that you are the Chosen People (or Chosen Species), or whether your own delusions tell you that your vast intelligence is "a single candle flame, flickering weakly in a vast and drafty void," you still think your chosen stature allows you to exploit and/or exterminate all those you perceive as lesser than you, which is everyone. And it doesn't much matter whether you believe heaven is way up in the stars where God lives, or whether you believe heaven is way up in the stars where you want your spaceships to go, you still don't believe that the Earth is a good place to live.

There are some differences though. One is that it used to be that at least God was more powerful than Man. Now, though, we've gotten rid of that silly God talk and it is we who are on the path to becoming godlike in our capabilities. Another is that in the olden days the Heaven to which the hell on earth was contrasted was at least marginally pleasant, so long as you like harps, and petting zoos that contain both lambs and lions. This

new heaven on Mars promised by Musk sounds more like hell:

“If you were to stroll onto its surface without a spacesuit, your eyes and skin would peel away like sheets of burning paper, and your blood would turn to steam, killing you within 30 seconds. Even in a suit you’d be vulnerable to cosmic radiation, and dust storms that occasionally coat the entire Martian globe, in clouds of skin-burning particulates, small enough to penetrate the tightest of seams. Never again would you feel the sun and wind on your skin, unmediated.”

Indeed, you would probably be living underground at first, in a windowless cave, only this time there would be no wild horses to sketch on the walls.

It was written of passenger pigeons:

“I have seen them move in one unbroken column for hours across the sky, like some great river, ever varying in hue; and as the mighty stream sweeping on at sixty miles an hour, reached some deep valley, it would pour its living mass headlong down hundreds of feet, sounding as though a whirlwind was abroad in the land. I have stood by the grandest waterfall of America and regarded the descending torrents in wonder and astonishment, yet never have my astonishment, wonder, and admiration been so stirred as when I have witnessed these birds drop from their course like meteors from heaven.”

Gone, all gone. Killed by this culture that is Death, destroyer of worlds. If animals could conceive of the devil, his image would be man’s.

The world of life has become a world of no-life; persons have become nonpersons, a world of death. Death is no longer symbolically expressed by unpleasant-smelling feces or corpses. Its symbols are now clean, shining machines; humans are not attracted to smelly toilets, but to structures of aluminum and glass. But the reality behind this antiseptic façade becomes increasingly visible. Man, in the name of progress, is transforming the world into a stinking and poisonous place (and this is not symbolic). He pollutes the air, the water, the soil, the animals—and himself. He knows the facts, but in spite of many protesters, those in charge go on in the pursuit of technical “progress” and are willing to sacrifice all life in the worship of their idol. In earlier times men also sacrificed their children or war prisoners, but never before in history has man been willing to sacrifice all life to the Moloch—his own and that of all his descendants. It makes little difference

whether he does it intentionally or not. If he had no knowledge of the possible danger, he might be acquitted from responsibility. But it is his character that prevents him from making use of the knowledge he has.

You could—and frankly, a lot of human supremacists do—argue that questioning authoritarian technologies—which means questioning everything civilization is based on, including agriculture, including, of course, human supremacism—is insane and monstrous. I think that when what is at stake is life on this planet, and when it’s plain to see that from the beginning this way of life has been functionally destructive, that not questioning this way of life is what is insane and monstrous. What’s insane and monstrous is preferring this way of life over life on earth. But you don’t think that, this way is only rational.

But rationalization means something else, too, at which human supremacists also excel. In terms of “scientific management,” rationalization can be seen as the deliberate elimination of information unnecessary to achieving an immediate task. So the process of frying a hamburger at a fast-food restaurant can be said to have been “rationalized” if all extraneous movements and considerations have been removed. Another way to say this is that human supremacists excel at figuring out solutions to discrete problems by ignoring everything but the specific solution to the discrete problem. This is essentially the point of the scientific method: you try to eliminate all variables but one. Which is a functional problem with the scientific method, and why science is functionally so very good at making matter and energy jump through hoops on command, and simultaneously so very destructive of communities.

Step by step, that’s how this culture has built itself up. Step by step, the rest of the world has suffered because of it. Other cultures, other species. The entire world. A human supremacist sees a river. His factory requires electricity, which means he perceives himself as requiring electricity. From his perspective, water flowing to the ocean is serving no beneficial purpose. So he uses the collective knowledge of this culture to build a dam that generates electricity. So, having had the dam constructed for him, he has “solved” the “problem” of “needing” electricity. Humans and nonhumans who lived on the now-inundated lands above the dam pay the costs. Fish who lived in the river pay the costs. Those who ate the anadromous fish who spawned above the dam pay the costs. Those who lived along the lower banks of what was a free-flowing river pay the costs. Those who lived below the dam who require annual flooding pay the costs. Ocean beaches starved of sediment pay the costs. And on it goes.

Of course, in order to get to the point of building a big dam, other discrete problems had to be solved first, such as inventing concrete and steel,

but the same process held for each of these, as problems were solved, with each solution leading to consequences to be foisted off onto others. And on it goes. We can go through that same exercise for every significant invention of this culture, where every brilliant solution to every pressing problem emerges in part or in whole through ignoring the harm done to others by this solution.

A developer wants to put in a mall on top of one of the largest extant prairie dog villages along Colorado's Front Range. The village has 3,000 to 8,000 burrows. Prior to this human supremacist culture moving into the Great Plains, the largest prairie dog community in the world, which was in Texas, covered 25,000 square miles, and was home to perhaps 400 million prairie dogs. The total range for prairie dogs was about 150,000 to 200,000 square miles, and population was well over a billion. Now, prairie dogs have been reduced to about five percent of their range and two percent of their population. Yet because yet another rich person wants to build yet another mall (in this economy, with so many empty stores already?), much of this prairie dog community will be poisoned. That community includes the twenty or more other species who live with and depend upon prairie dogs. The prairie dogs (and some others) who are not poisoned will be buried alive by the bulldozers, then covered with concrete. This includes the pregnant females, who prefer not to leave their dens.

Prairie dogs have complex languages, with words for many threats. They have language to describe hawks, and to describe snakes, and to describe coyotes. They have language to describe a woman wearing a yellow shirt, and different language for a woman wearing a blue shirt. They have had to come up with language to describe a man with a gun. Do they, I wonder, have language to describe a bulldozer? Do they have language to describe the pregnant females of their community being buried alive? And do they have language to describe the murderous insatiability of human supremacists?

The fact is, wild animals do not make sense under capitalism. Capitalism operates according to a quite simple set of rules. Your desires are respected in accordance with the amount of financial resources you have available to you. Every wild animal is poor, thus no wild animal gets a vote over how economic resources shall be used.

The problem for animals is that they are not for anything. They are simply there. Those of us who wish to save them from having their habitats destroyed to make way for new Walmart supercenters might endeavor to find ways to make their lives profitable. We can pitch ecotourism—save nature because people will pay to come and look at it—but it might turn out that you only need one percent of nature as it currently exists to satisfy tourists' demands. As long as you preserve a walrus that people can come

and look at, the rest will remain an impediment to Growth. The walrus labor supply exceeds the human demand for walrus labor. And just as you are only compensated under capitalism to the extent that you are able to do something valuable for people who already have money (sorry, children, old people, and disabled people, you should have learned to code), animals are granted permission to live solely to the extent that they are capable of generating benefits for humans.

Wild animals are therefore a kind of massive global proletariat, being exploited and destroyed by the merciless human bourgeoisie. The lucky ones are the ones that have a marketable skill, such as 'being a pet,' and can exchange their labor (companionship and amusement) for room and board. Dogs do pretty well because we happen to like them. Pigs, unfortunately, have discovered that even though they are just as emotionally sophisticated as dogs, we enjoy their company less, and their most marketable commodity is their flesh.

It seems clear that one of the major functions of elephants in Africa, their job if you like, has been to convert woodland to grassland, forest to more open savannah. This is disadvantageous to the elephants themselves who, like otters in kelp, have to work harder for a living. But what they are doing is to create new possibilities for other species. The cycles we see in this are characteristic to the African ecosystem and have only been modified in part by recent human activity. Elephants, like humans, have been involved in massive landscaping projects for a long time, keeping Africa's equatorial ecology from going to its moist tropical climax, opening up the forest enough to let us see the trees, and at the same time opening up new habitats and new opportunities. Understanding this makes it seem imprudent to continue with attempts to manage elephant populations artificially by culling. Such actions are only likely to speed up a cycle that has already begun its own natural phase of decline. Meanwhile, great herds of zebra, wildebeest, and gazelle, plus all their predators and followers, have moved into the savannah, which has not only become symbolic of all Africa, but given an ape with ideas the chance to become human.

The ancestors of these creatures helped pave the way for our evolution. We thank their descendants by cutting off their faces.

Carnism

“Today’s FBI statistics annually show that officers practicing wildlife law enforcement in all its realms suffer a nine times higher injury and death rate than all other types of law enforcement.

The American people truly owe those folks a debt of gratitude for what they did to preserve the natural resources of this land for those yet to come. It is a fact that the wildlife one sees today in this country is a tribute to those wildlife officers who came before and those who currently hold that position, representing the ‘thin green line,’ and their front-line staffs.”

The killing of a wolf pup near Corral Creek outside Sun Valley, Idaho was done to protect the Flat Top Sheep Company. Once again this raises the question of why wildlife should be killed to increase the profitability of private enterprises operating on our public lands. It is especially disconcerting that the company did not implement minimum measures to protect its own sheep, instead, using a government-funded hired gun—USDA Wildlife Services—to kill wolves.

Grazing on public lands is a privilege, not a right. Why should Flat Top sheep, and their business interests, be allowed to jeopardize, harass, and kill wildlife? If I were to harass their sheep when I discovered them polluting our streams or otherwise damaging our public lands, I would be arrested. It’s important to note that these sheep (and all other livestock on our public lands) are creating ecological damage. His sheep pollute the water. Many studies have documented that sheep grazing can change vegetation favoring some grazing tolerant species at the cost of others sensitive to grazing pressure. The presence of domestic sheep can transmit diseases to wild bighorn sheep. And this is the primary reason bighorn sheep are absent in many mountain ranges that they once inhabited. Domestic sheep also trample and compact soil, reducing water infiltration.

The forage going into the company’s domestic animals is vegetation not supporting native herbivores and other wildlife. Everything from marmots to elk has less to eat, while insects that rely on flowering vegetation, including bees and hummingbirds are harmed by domestic sheep. Yet businessmen like him do not compensate the public for all these impacts. Instead, they get to graze their animals on public lands for a pittance, paying a paltry \$1.41 an AUM to feed five ewes and lambs. Not only is this a direct subsidy to the company’s bottom line, but the fact that we accept and allow his sheep to degrade our public lands and kill wildlife at so little cost is absurd.

Worse, according to the report in the Mountain Express, company herders did not even implement well-known predator deterrents like camping near the sheep band. The herders were two to three miles away from the sheep band.

One must say again why it's OK for private businesses to harass wildlife for their profit. Whether it is shooting guns or using noisemakers to scare wolves, these actions disrupt wildlife use of public lands. While he can graze his sheep elsewhere by renting or buying private pasture, wildlife like wolves and other predators have no place else to live. I do not believe we should continue to subsidize private businesses on our public lands, but if we do continue to permit welfare ranchers to operate, then at the least, we should demand if there's any conflict, the domestic animals are removed, not wildlife. It's time to stop subsidizing welfare ranchers with the destruction of our wildlife and the degradation of our plant communities.

One survivor told of the experience of being human cargo on a Middle Passage ship:

“I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time. But now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations so that the air became unfit for respiration from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died—thus falling victims of the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, which now became insupportable, and the filth of the necessary tubs [toilets] into which the children often fell and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.”

If our factory farmed animals could write, would they pen something like this?

Animals suffer. They feel pain. They feel fear. They don't want to die. Unfortunately, an almost incomprehensible amount of them suffer and die in painful ways each and every day. According to one estimate, over 63

billion animals are slaughtered each year. Many of those animals are kept in horrific conditions before their deaths, but, even if an animal is allowed to go out to graze peacefully in a field before being slaughtered, death is still rather a cruel act. One cannot humanely kill a healthy living creature for the obvious reason that said creature does not want to die (at the very least, its consent in the matter cannot be meaningfully obtained).

Animals are harmed when they are exploited and killed for meat and other products, and this harm should be reduced whenever possible. I do not believe it is right for healthy, well-situated human beings to eat animal products that come from violence if they do it solely for the pleasure—for the taste—that comes from eating those products. A human's life might rightly be said to come before the life of an animal—if I could only save one from a burning building, I'd probably save a human over a mouse—but a human's desire for pleasure cannot trump an animal's need for life, especially because pleasure can be gotten elsewhere. We don't accept the notion that humans should be allowed to make dogs fight to the death because it brings those humans enjoyment, and we should similarly reject the idea that "bacon tastes good" is a reasonable justification for the torture and slaughter of billions of pigs.

Food deserts exist in the United States. In the Global South, where many struggle to live on the equivalent of less than \$1.70 a day, the food system has been ravaged by imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. Capitalism is, after all, an incredibly cruel and wasteful system where, to name just one abuse, millions of dairy cows are kept in confined spaces, often unable to see the sun, and forced to have their newborn calves taken away, causing them psychological distress. This cruel process might be justifiable if it resulted in the end of world hunger, but cows are tortured for their entire lives only for companies to dump millions of tons of milk in order to keep prices up while millions of Americans go hungry. Profit, not the well-being of people, nor that of workers, and certainly not that of animals, drives the production of food under capitalism; if a company will reap a larger profit by charging more money to fewer people, then that is the course it will take.

Widespread animal and human welfare are incompatible with capitalism because it is an economic system that prizes wealth for a few at the expense of the great many. As a species, we need to transition from capitalism into some form of socialism, communism, anarchism; we need an economic model that puts power into the hands of working people and continues to produce enough for everyone while at the same time ensuring that the goods produced are actually distributed to those who need them. We should ensure a decent standard of living for all humans because all humans deserve a decent standard of living, but also because this would create the conditions

for the end of abusive animal farming practices and slaughterhouses. If everyone's nutrition needs were met, and met with plant protein (which is, after all, the source of all protein) then no longer would we need to cause billions of sentient creatures to suffer every year. This is a world that needs to be built. We cannot continue to justify the abuse and murder of animals if there are other viable avenues for feeding the world, but the world can only be fed if we prioritize people's needs over private greed.

Far too often, animal welfare advocates and socialists are framed as being fundamentally in opposition to each other. The former have a nasty habit of slipping into racist and/or classist modes of thought, blaming people in impoverished areas for their consumption practices while ignoring the underlying capitalist system that creates the conditions of impoverishment in the first place. Certainly, wherever possible, an individual should abstain from consuming animal products because of the horrendous treatment that animals experience under factory farming, but factory farming is not a problem caused by individuals. Rather, it is a symptom of the much larger disease that is capitalism, whose ruthless "efficiency" (read: desire and ability to maximize the profit of shareholders no matter the harm done to humans or animals) forces living beings into outrageously cruel conditions. Animal welfare activists miss a huge part of the picture when they protest the treatment of cows in slaughterhouses but not the treatment of workers in slaughterhouses. These are some of the most vulnerable people in the country, the working poor and immigrants, and the conditions they face on a daily basis are appalling. Beyond the violent and psychologically harmful experience of chopping up animals, slaughterhouse workers strain—and sometimes ruin—their bodies.

The furious pace of the work causes a set of chronic physical ailments called musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs, an array of injuries to workers' muscles, tendons, ligaments, and nerves, that cause sprains, strains, or inflammation. One worker stuffed 7- to 10-pound hams in bags, at times up to 50 hams a minute. Starting with a wage of \$11.50 an hour, she worked 12-hour shifts, sometimes seven days a week. She was awarded employee of the month four times. Then, she started experiencing problems in her right shoulder. After reporting the pain to her supervisors, they told her that if she was injured, she should go home.

“The supervisors were very nasty. They wanted everything fast, they wanted to produce a lot of quantity. They didn't care about the people.”

And it would seem that conditions in slaughterhouses are only getting worse. The Trump administration has rolled back regulations that offered

some protection for workers in pig slaughterhouses. The regulatory rollback now means that plants can order increases to line speeds, requiring more pigs be slaughtered per minute, which puts an increased strain on workers' bodies and runs the risk of spreading disease because of the decrease in oversight.

The treatment of those creatures is heartbreakingly cruel, yet to have sympathy solely for the animals in slaughterhouses and not the workers who are living on the razor's edge of poverty, and who must deal with conditions that are hazardous to their health, is to do a disservice to one's fellow humans. Caring for animals should be a complement to caring for human beings, not a replacement, and animal welfare advocates are in the wrong when they ignore the human toll of meat production.

Socialists, however, can also be similarly dismissive of animal welfare concerns. As far back as the Communist Manifesto, leftists have portrayed advocates for animals as being frivolous and ignoring the "real" welfare issues in society (the aforementioned treatment of workers). This position, too, misses the mark; to be concerned with animal welfare is not frivolous because animal lives are not trivial. All sentient life—creatures that can think and feel, that can enjoy existence and fear death—deserves consideration and protection. This position is based off a simple moral intuition: that it is wrong to cause unnecessary pain and suffering. If that is true, it should not matter if suffering is inflicted on a pig or on a human; it is suffering all the same. To be confronted by a living thing in pain is to be confronted with something one recognizes to be wrong. Unfortunately, so much animal pain is hidden away from public view and, consequently, written off.

Ultimately, I believe that animal welfare advocates and socialists are, or ought to be, natural allies more than enemies. Both groups recognize that there is much unjust suffering in the world that can and should be brought to an end. The suffering that the two groups oppose are complementary—again, animals and workers suffer in the cruel conditions of the slaughterhouse, and resources that could go towards feeding human beings instead are inefficiently used to fatten livestock before slaughter—and, as that is the case, the efforts to combat them must also be complementary. We need to create a society that minimizes suffering, including the suffering of animals. To do that, we need human beings to have the security to walk away from dangerous working conditions, like slaughterhouses, and this necessitates a socialism that ensures healthcare, housing, and good jobs for all. Furthermore, we need people to be able to get their nutrition, and their pleasure in food, from non-animal sources, and this means we need a society that prioritizes the general welfare of all people over profits for a small few. Animals should no longer be exploited and made to suffer by humans, and neither should

humans be exploited and made to suffer by humans. Exploitation is the nature of the capitalist beast, and, until we get rid of it, both humans and animals will be seen as little more than pieces of meat.

“If meat is consumed, it is preferable to choose cow over chicken, for chickens feed fewer people, and the bad karma from killing is lessened when more people benefit.”

There is a myth that ape hunting is a problem because local people are hungry. The reality is that local people eat duikers or rats or squirrels or monkeys—if they eat meat at all—whereas the fancy stuff, the illicit delicacies, the chimpanzee body parts, the gobs of elephant flesh, the hippopotamus steaks, get siphoned away by upscale demand from the cities, where premium prices justify the risks of poaching and illegal transport. What brings the money are the protected species, things that are rare.

The culinary trade in such unusual wild animals, especially within the Pearl River Delta, has less to do with limited resources, dire necessity, and ancient traditions than with booming commerce and relatively recent fashions in conspicuous consumption. Close observers of Chinese culture call it the Era of Wild Flavor.

Wild Flavor (*yewei* in Mandarin) was considered a way of gaining “face,” prosperity, and good luck. Eating wild, was only one aspect of these new ostentations in upscale consumption, which might also involve patronizing a brothel where a thousand women stood on offer behind a glass wall. But the food vogue arose easily from earlier traditions in fancy cuisine, natural pharmaceuticals, and exotic aphrodisiacs (such as tiger penis), and went beyond them. One official claimed that two-thousand Wild Flavor restaurants were now operating within the city of Guangzhou alone.

The stench and the yelps of caged dogs may be stomach churning, but Lee Wha-jin happily slaps down dishes of dog-meat stew on the white plastic tabletops of his restaurant in the notorious Moran night market in Seoul. At the rear of shop after shop, eight-month-old puppies—considered to be the prime age for eating—are packed into tiny cages welded together in rows three or four high. Customers choose which of the live animals they want. The dog is then taken to the back of the shop where a flimsy curtain or a swinging door obscures the sight, but not the sound, of a hideous death.

Before arriving in the grim array of cages behind restaurants, most dogs have had to endure the misery of a Korean canine farm hidden in the hills of the countryside. It is not unusual for puppies to grow up ten to a cage, covered in sores and lice. The dogs’ deaths are as inhumane as their rearing. The majority are beaten to death, as it is thought to stimulate the

production of adrenaline that South Korean men believe will bolster their virility. Once dead, or nearly dead, the dogs are dropped into boiling water, skinned and hung by the jaw from a meat hook. Many cooks then use a blow torch to glaze the carcass.

Up until sometime in the 1800s, lobster was literally low-class food, eaten only by the poor and institutionalized. Even in the harsh penal environment of early America, some colonies had laws against feeding lobsters to inmates more than once a week because it was thought to be cruel and unusual, like making people eat rats. One reason for their low status was how plentiful lobsters were in old New England. “Unbelievable abundance” is how one source describes the situation, including accounts of Plymouth Pilgrims wading out and capturing all they wanted by hand, and of early Boston’s seashore being littered with lobsters after hard storms—these latter were treated as a smelly nuisance and ground up for fertilizer. There is also the fact that premodern lobster was cooked dead and then preserved, usually packed in salt or crude hermetic containers. Maine’s earliest lobster industry was based around a dozen such seaside canneries in the 1840s, from which lobster was shipped as far away as California, in demand only because it was cheap and high in protein, basically chewable fuel.

Now, of course, lobster is posh, a delicacy, only a step or two down from caviar. The meat is richer and more substantial than most fish, its taste subtle compared to the marine-gaminess of mussels and clams. In the US pop-food imagination, lobster is now the seafood analog to steak, with which it’s so often twinned as Surf ‘n’ Turf on the really expensive part of the chain steakhouse menu.

It’s not just that lobsters get boiled alive, it’s that you do it yourself—or at least it’s done specifically for you, on-site. In the case of the World’s Largest Lobster Cooker, which is highlighted as an attraction in the Maine Lobster Festival’s program, is right out there on the MLF’s north grounds for everyone to see. Try to imagine a Nebraska Beef Festival at which part of the festivities is watching trucks pull up and the live cattle get driven down the ramp and slaughtered right there on the World’s Largest Killing Floor or something—there’s no way.

There happen to be two main criteria that most ethicists agree on for determining whether a living creature has the capacity to suffer and so has genuine interests that it may or may not be our moral duty to consider. One is how much of the neurological hardware required for pain-experience the animal comes equipped with—nociceptors, prostaglandins, neuronal opioid receptors, et cetera. The other criterion is whether the animal demonstrates behavior associated with pain. And it takes a lot of intellectual gymnastics and behaviorist hairsplitting not to see struggling,

thrashing, and lid-clattering as just such pain-behavior. According to marine zoologists, it usually takes lobsters between 35 and 45 seconds to die in boiling water. No source I could find talks about how long it takes them to die in superheated steam; one rather hopes it's faster.

Lobsters do not, on the other hand, appear to have the equipment for making or absorbing natural opioids like endorphins and enkephalins, which are what more advanced nervous systems use to try to handle intense pain. From this fact, though, one could conclude either that lobsters are maybe even more vulnerable to pain, since they lack mammalian nervous systems' built-in analgesia, or, instead, that the absence of natural opioids implies an absence of the really intense pain-sensations that natural opioids are designed to mitigate. I for one can detect a marked upswing in mood as I contemplate this latter possibility. It could be that their lack of endorphin/enkephalin hardware means that lobsters' raw subjective experience of pain is so radically different from mammals' that it may not even deserve the term 'pain.' Perhaps lobsters are more like those frontal-lobotomy patients one reads about who report experiencing pain in a totally different way than you and I. These patients evidently do feel physical pain, neurologically speaking, but don't dislike it—though neither do they like it; it's more that they feel it but don't feel anything about it—the point being that the pain is not distressing to them or something they want to get away from. Maybe lobsters, who are also without frontal lobes, are detached from the neurological-registration-of-injury-or-hazard we call pain in just the same way. There is, after all, a difference between (1) pain as a purely neurological event, and (2) actual suffering, which seems crucially to involve an emotional component, an awareness of pain as unpleasant, as something to fear/dislike/want to avoid.

Still, after all the abstract intellection, there remain the facts of the frantically clanking lid, the pathetic clinging to the edge of the pot. Standing at the stove, it is hard to deny in any meaningful way that this is a living creature experiencing pain and wishing to avoid/escape the painful experience. To my lay mind, the lobster's behavior in the kettle appears to be the expression of a preference; and it may well be that an ability to form preferences is the decisive criterion for real suffering. The logic of this relation—preference→suffering—may be easiest to see in the negative case. If you cut certain kinds of worms in half, the halves will often keep crawling around and going about their vermiform business as if nothing had happened. When we assert, based on their post-op behavior, that these worms appear not to be suffering, what we're really saying is that there's no sign the worms know anything bad has happened or would prefer not to have gotten cut in half. Lobsters, though, are known to exhibit preferences. Experiments have shown that they can detect changes of only a degree or two in water

temperature; one reason for their complex migratory cycles—which can often cover 100-plus miles a year—is to pursue the temperatures they like best. And they’re bottom-dwellers and do not like bright light—if a tank of food-lobsters is out in the sunlight or a store’s fluorescence, the lobsters will always congregate in whatever part is darkest. Fairly solitary in the ocean, they also clearly dislike the crowding that’s part of their captivity in tanks, since one reason why lobsters’ claws are banded on capture is to keep them from attacking one another under the stress of close-quarter storage.

Of course, the most common sort of counterargument here would begin by objecting that “like best” is really just a metaphor, and a misleadingly anthropomorphic one at that. The counter-arguer would posit that the lobster seeks to maintain a certain optimal ambient temperature out of nothing but unconscious instinct (with a similar explanation for the low-light affinities). The thrust of such a counterargument will be that the lobster’s thrashings and clankings in the kettle express not unpreferred pain but involuntary reflexes, like your leg shooting out when the doctor hits your knee. Be advised that there are professional scientists, including many researchers who use animals in experiments, who hold to the view that nonhuman creatures have no real feelings at all, merely “behaviors.” Be further advised that this view has a long history that goes all the way back to Descartes, although its modern support comes mostly from behaviorist psychology.

The whole animal-cruelty-and-eating issue is not just complex, it’s also uncomfortable for just about everyone I know who enjoys a variety of foods and yet does not want to see herself as cruel or unfeeling. As far as I can tell, the main way of dealing with this conflict has been to avoid thinking about the whole unpleasant thing.

Is it significant that ‘lobster,’ ‘fish,’ and ‘chicken’ are our culture’s words for both the animal and the meat, whereas most mammals seem to require euphemisms like ‘beef’ and ‘pork’ that help us separate the meat we eat from the living creature the meat once was? Is this evidence that some kind of deep unease about eating “higher” animals is endemic enough to show up in English usage, but that the unease diminishes as we move out of the mammalian order? And is ‘lamb’/‘lamb’ the counterexample that sinks the whole theory, or are there special, biblical-historical reasons for that equivalence?

The truth is that if you, the festival attendee, permit yourself to think that lobsters can suffer and would rather not, the Maine Lobster Festival begins to take on the aspect of something like a Roman circus or medieval torture-fest. Does that comparison seem a bit much? If so, exactly why? Or what about this one: Is it possible that future generations will regard

our present agribusiness and eating practices in much the same way we now view Nero's entertainments or Mengele's experiments? For many their initial reaction is that such a comparison is hysterical, extreme—and yet the reason it seems extreme appears to be that they believe animals are less morally important than human beings. A lot less important since the moral comparison here is not the value of one human's life versus the value of one animal's life, but rather the value of one animal's life versus the value of one human's taste for a particular kind of protein. Even most diehard carniphiles will acknowledge that it's possible to live and eat well without consuming animals. And when it comes to defending such a belief, even to themselves, they have to acknowledge that (a) they have an obvious selfish interest in this belief, since they like to eat certain kinds of animals and want to be able to keep doing it, and (b) they haven't succeeded in working out any sort of personal ethical system in which the belief is truly defensible instead of just selfishly convenient.

Is the real point of my life simply to undergo as little pain and as much pleasure as possible? My behavior sure seems to indicate that this is what I believe, at least a lot of the time. But isn't this kind of a selfish way to live? Forget selfish—isn't it awful lonely? But if I decide to decide there's a different, less selfish, less lonely point to my life, won't the reason for this decision be my desire to be less lonely, meaning to suffer less overall pain? Can the decision to be less selfish ever be anything other than a selfish decision?

Is it possible really to love other people? If I'm lonely and in pain, everyone outside me is potential relief—I need them. But can you really love what you need so badly? Isn't a big part of love caring more about what the other person needs? How am I supposed to subordinate my own overwhelming need to somebody else's needs that I can't even feel directly? And yet if I can't do this, I'm damned to loneliness, which I definitely don't want so I'm back at trying to overcome my selfishness for self-interested reasons. Is there any way out of this bind?

Am I a good person? Deep down, do I even really want to be a good person, or do I only want to seem like a good person so that people (including myself) will approve of me? Is there a difference? How do I ever actually know whether I'm bullshitting myself, morally speaking?

“I'm not about to go vegan. I tend to think when you're at the top of the food chain it's okay to flaunt it, because I don't see anything complicated about drawing a moral boundary between us and other animals, and in fact find it offensive to women and people of color that all of a sudden there's talk of

extending human-rights-like legal protections to chimps, apes, and octopuses, just a generation or two after we finally broke the white-male monopoly on legal personhood.”

“We don’t see things as they are; we see them as we are.”

“The invisible and the nonexistent look very much alike.”

Why is it that we love our companion animals so much, animals that we call ‘pets,’ and get so much deep human value from those relationships, but then we turn around and call other animals ‘dinner,’ and by virtue of that semantic distinction feel entitled to treat those animals with any manner of cruelty as long as it lowers the price per pound?

There are laws in all fifty states prohibiting cruelty to animals. The laws vary from state to state, but not in one respect: In every state, the legislation that prohibits cruelty to animals exempts animals destined for human consumption. In every single one of the 50 states, if you are raising an animal for meat, for milk, or for eggs, you can without restriction subject that animal to conditions which, if you did that to a dog or a cat, would land you in jail.

It’s obvious that we have no rational reason to think some animals are friends and others are food. The only differences are tradition and the strength of the relationships we happen to have developed with the friend-animals, but that’s no more a justification of the distinction than it would be to say:

“I only eat people who aren’t my friends.”

Even though nobody can justify it, it continues. People solve the question ‘Why do you treat some animals as if they have personalities but other equally sophisticated animals as if they are inanimate lumps of flavor and calories?’ by simply pretending the question hasn’t been asked, or by making some remark like

“Well, if pigs would quit making themselves taste so good, I could quit eating them.”

The truth is disturbing, which is why it’s so easily ignored.

We need to restore our connection to animals of all kinds, not just for their sake. This isn’t just about animal rights. It’s about human responsibilities. Teaching a child not to step on a caterpillar is as valuable to the child as it is to the caterpillar.

Such a shift in perception can feel like a shift in lanes on a two-lane road: crossing the yellow line radically alters our experience. The reason we can have such a powerful response to a shift in perception is because our perceptions determine, in large part, our reality; how we perceive a situation—the meaning we make of it—determines what we think and how we feel about it. In turn, our thoughts and feelings often determine how we will act.

Something interesting happens when we are confronted with the meat from an animal we've classified as inedible: we automatically picture the living animal from which it came, and we tend to feel disgusted at the notion of eating it. The perceptual process follows this sequence: golden retriever meat (stimulus)→inedible animal (belief/perception)→image of living dog (thought)→disgust (feeling)→refusal or reluctance to eat (action).

While human beings may have an innate tendency to favor sweet flavors (sugar having been a useful source of calories) and to avoid those that are bitter and sour (such flavors often indicate a poisonous substance), most of our taste is, in fact, made up. In other words, within the broad repertoire of the human palate, we like the foods we've learned we're supposed to like. Food, particularly animal food, is highly symbolic, and it is this symbolism, coupled with and reinforced by tradition, that is largely responsible for our food preferences. For example, few people enjoy eating caviar until they're old enough to realize that liking caviar means they're sophisticated and refined; and in China, people eat animals' penises because they believe these organs affect sexual function but you're unlikely to find fried corn dicks at the next state fair.

Despite the fact that taste is largely acquired through culture, people around the world tend to view their preferences as rational and any deviation as offensive and disgusting. For instance, many people are disgusted at the thought of drinking milk that's been extracted from cows' udders. Others cannot fathom eating bacon, ham, beef, or chicken. Some view the consumption of eggs as akin to the consumption of fetuses. And consider how you might feel at the notion of eating deep-fried tarantula—hair, fangs, and all—as they do in Cambodia; sour, pickled ram's testicle pâté, as some do in Iceland; or duck embryos—eggs that have been fertilized and contain partially formed birds with feathers, bones, and incipient wings—as they do in some parts of Asia. When it comes to animal foods, all taste may be acquired taste.

The evidence strongly suggests that our lack of disgust is largely, if not entirely, learned. We aren't born with our schemas; they are constructed. Our schemas have evolved out of a highly structured belief system. This system dictates which animals are edible, and it enables us to consume them

by protecting us from feeling any emotional or psychological discomfort when doing so. The system teaches us how to not feel. The most obvious feeling we lose is disgust, yet beneath our disgust lies an emotion much more integral to our sense of self: our empathy.

Why must the system go to such lengths to block our empathy? Why all the psychological acrobatics? The answer is simple: because we care about animals, and we don't want them to suffer. And because we eat them. Our values and behaviors are incongruent, and this incongruence causes us a certain degree of moral discomfort. In order to alleviate this discomfort, we have three choices:

1. We can change our values to match our behaviors.
2. We can change our behaviors to match our values.
3. We can change our perception of our behaviors so that they appear to match our values.

It is around this third option that our schema of meat is shaped. As long as we neither value unnecessary animal suffering nor stop eating animals, our schema will distort our perceptions of animals and the meat we eat, so that we can feel comfortable enough to consume them. And the system that constructs our schema of meat equips us with the means by which to do this.

Such psychic numbing is adaptive, or beneficial, when it helps us to cope with violence. But it becomes maladaptive, or destructive, when it is used to enable violence, even if that violence is as far away as the factories in which animals are turned into meat.

Some Mechanisms of Psychic Numbing		
Avoidance	Deindividuation	Denial
Dichotomization	Dissociation	Justification
Objectification	Rationalization	Routinization

Have people from different cultures and times also used psychic numbing in order to kill and consume animals? Do tribal hunters, for instance, need to numb themselves when securing their prey? Before the Industrial Revolution, when many Americans procured their own meat, did they have to emotionally distance themselves from the animals? It would be impossible to argue that persons from all cultures, in all eras, have employed the same psychic numbing as those of us living in contemporary industrialized societies and who don't need meat to survive. Context determines, in large part, how

a person will react to eating meat. One's values, shaped largely by broader social and cultural structures, help determine how much psychological effort must go into distancing oneself from the reality of eating an animal. In societies where meat has been necessary for survival, people haven't had the luxury of reflecting on the ethics of their choices; their values must support eating animals, and they would likely be less distressed at the notion of eating meat. How animals are killed, too, affects our psychological reaction. Cruelty is often more disturbing than killing. Yet even in instances where eating meat has been a necessity, and the animals have been killed without the gratuitous violence that marks today's slaughterhouses, people have always avoided eating certain types of animals and have consistently striven to reconcile the killing and consumption of those they do consume.

So, why do you say pigs are lazy?

Because they just lie around all day.

Do pigs in the wild do this, or only pigs raised for their meat?

I don't know. Maybe when they're on a farm.

Why do you think pigs on a farm—or in a factory farm, to be more accurate—lie around?

Probably because they're in a pen or cage.

What makes pigs stupid?

They just are.

Actually, pigs are considered to be even more intelligent than dogs. Did you know that, in fact, pigs don't even have sweat glands? Are all pigs ugly?

Yes.

What about piglets?

Piglets are cute, but pigs are gross.

Why do you say pigs are dirty?

They roll in mud.

Why do they roll in mud?

Because they like dirt. They're dirty.

Actually, they roll in dirt to cool off when it's hot, since they don't sweat. Are dogs dirty?

Yeah, sometimes. Dogs can do really disgusting things.

Why didn't you include 'dirty' in your list for dogs?

Because they're not always dirty. Only sometimes.

Are pigs always dirty?

Yeah, they are.

How do you know this?

Because they always look dirty.

When do you see them?

I don't know. In pictures, I guess.

And they're always dirty in pictures?

No, not always. Pigs aren't always dirty.

You said dogs are loyal, intelligent, and cute. Why do you say this? How do you know?

I've seen them. I've lived with dogs. I've met lots of dogs.

What about dogs' feelings? How can you know that they actually feel emotions?

I swear my dog gets depressed when I'm down. My dog always got this guilty look and hid under the bed when she knew she did something wrong. Whenever we take my dog to the vet he shakes, he's so scared. Our dog used to cry and stop eating when he saw us packing to get ready to leave for vacation.

Does anybody here think it's possible that dogs don't have feelings?

(No hands are raised.)

What about pigs? Do you think pigs have emotions?

Sure.

Do you think they have the same emotions as dogs?

Maybe. Yeah, I guess.

Actually, most people don't know this, but pigs are so sensitive that they develop neurotic behaviors, such as self-mutilation, when in captivity. Do you think pigs feel pain?

Of course. All animals feel pain.

So why do we eat pigs and not dogs?

Because bacon tastes good. (laughter) Because dogs have personalities. You can't eat something that has a personality. They have names; they're individuals.

Do you think pigs have personalities? Are they individuals, like dogs?

Yeah, I guess if you get to know them they probably do.

Have you ever met a pig?

No.

So where did you get your information about pigs from?

Books. Television. Ads. Movies. I don't know. Society, I guess.

How might you feel about pigs if you thought of them as intelligent, sensitive individuals who are perhaps not sweaty, lazy, and greedy? If you got to know them firsthand, like you know dogs?

I'd feel weird eating them. I'd probably feel kind of guilty.

So why do we eat pigs and not dogs?

Because pigs are bred to be eaten.

Why do we breed pigs to eat them?

I don't know. I never thought about it. I guess, because it's just the way things are.

When our attitudes and behaviors toward animals are so inconsistent, and this inconsistency is so unexamined, we can safely say we have been fed absurdities. We tend to view the mainstream way of life as a reflection of universal values. Yet what we consider normal is, in fact, nothing more than the beliefs and behaviors of the majority.

“If we believe absurdities, we shall commit atrocities.”

Carnism is the belief system in which eating certain animals is considered ethical and appropriate. Carnists—people who eat meat—are not the same as carnivores. Carnivores are animals that are dependent on meat to survive. Carnists are also not merely omnivores. An omnivore is an animal—human or nonhuman—that has the physiological ability to ingest both plants and meat. But, like ‘carnivore,’ ‘omnivore’ is a term that describes one’s biological constitution, not one’s philosophical choice. Carnists eat meat not because they need to, but because they choose to, and choices always stem from beliefs.

“Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it.”

Both chickens and turkeys have been drastically altered by breeding designed to enlarge the breast, which is considered the most desirable part of the turkey to eat. In the case of the turkey, this process has gone so far that the standard American turkey, the descriptively named Broad Breasted White, is incapable of mating because the male’s big breast gets in the way. Here is an interesting question to drop into a lull in conversation around the Thanksgiving dinner table. Point to the turkey on the table and ask: if turkeys can’t mate, how was that turkey produced?

First you need to catch the male turkeys by the legs and hold them upside down so that another person can masturbate them. When the semen flows out, you use a vacuum pump to collect it in a syringe. You do this with one bird after another until the semen, diluted with an “extender,” fills the syringe, which is then taken to the hen house.

Once in the hen house you grab a hen by the legs, trying to cross both “ankles” in order to hold her feet and legs with one hand. The hens weigh 20

to 30 pounds and of course are terrified, beating their wings and struggling in panic. They go through this every week for more than a year, and they don't like it. Once you have grabbed her with one hand, you flop her down, chest first, on the edge of the pit with the tail end sticking up. You put your free hand over the vent and tail and pull the rump and tail feathers upward. At the same time, you pull the hand holding the feet downward, thus "breaking" the hen so that her rear is straight up and her vent open. Then the inseminator sticks their thumb right under the vent and pushes, which opens it further until the end of the oviduct is exposed. Into this, you insert a straw of semen connected to the end of a tube from an air compressor and pull a trigger, releasing a shot of compressed air that blows the semen solution from the straw and into the hen's oviduct. Then you let go of the hen and she flops away.

If you're doing this for Butterball, you're supposed to "break" one hen every 12 seconds, 300 an hour, for 10 hours a day. You'll need to dodge spurting shit from panicked birds, and, if you don't keep up the pace, torrents of verbal abuse from the foreman. Some have described it as the hardest, fastest, dirtiest, most disgusting, worst-paid work they have ever done. Seems like something Harvey Weinstein might be into though.

So that's where baby turkeys come from. Any questions kids?

We don't see them because we're not supposed to. As with any violent ideology, the populace must be shielded from direct exposure to the victims of the system, lest they begin questioning the system or their participation in it. This truth speaks for itself: why else would the meat industry go to such lengths to keep its practices invisible?

"You're going to lose hogs in a semitrailer no matter what. During the time I worked in rendering, there was large piles of dead hogs every day. When they come off the truck, they're solid as a block of ice. I went to pick up some hogs one day for chainsawing from a pile of about thirty frozen hogs, and I found two that were frozen but still alive. I could tell they were alive because they raised their heads up like, 'Help me.' I took my ax-chopper and chopped them to death."

"When the hogs smell blood, they don't want to go. I've seen hogs beaten, whipped, kicked in the head to get them up to the restrainer. One night I saw a driver get so angry at a hog he broke its back with a piece of a board. I've seen hog drivers take their prod and shove it up the hog's ass to get them to move. I

didn't appreciate that because it made the hogs twice as wild by the time they got to me."

Farm animals are supposed to be stunned and rendered unconscious before they are actually killed. However, some pigs remain conscious when they are strung upside down by their legs in shackles, and they kick and struggle as they are moved along the conveyor belt to have their throats slit. Because of the speed at which the animals are supposed to be stunned and killed, and because slaughterhouse workers are often ineffectively trained, a number of pigs may also survive throat cutting and remain conscious when they arrive at the next station, where they are dropped into scalding water—a procedure done to remove their hair. One worker describes how squealing hogs were left dangling by one leg while workers left to take their lunch breaks, and thousands of hogs were immersed in the scalding tank alive.

"These hogs hit the water and start screaming and kicking. Sometimes they thrash so much they kick water out of the tank. There's a rotating arm that pushes them under, no chance for them to get out. I'm not sure if they burn to death before they drown, but it takes them a couple of minutes to stop thrashing."

"The worst thing, worse than the physical danger, is the emotional toll. If you work in that stick pit for any period of time, you develop an attitude that lets you kill things but doesn't let you care. You may look a hog in the eye that's walking around down in the blood pit with you and think, 'God, that really isn't a bad-looking animal.' You may want to pet it. Pigs down on the kill floor have come up and nuzzled me like a puppy. Two minutes later, I had to kill them—beat them to death with a pipe. I can't care."

The stress workers face from spending hours at a single station where they have to kill (or stun) one hog every four seconds leads to violent outbursts toward the pigs. One worker described such an incident:

"Like, one day the live hogs were driving me nuts. When an animal pisses you off you don't just kill it, you go in hard, push hard, blow the windpipe, make it drown in its own blood. Split its nose. A live hog would be running around the pit. It would just be looking up at me and I'd be sticking and I would just

take my knife and cut its eye out while it was just sitting there. And this hog would just scream.

One time I took my knife—it's sharp enough—and I sliced off the end of a hog's nose, just like a piece of bologna. The hog went crazy for a few seconds. Then it just sat there looking kind of stupid. So I took a handful of salt brine and ground it into its nose. Now that hog really went nuts, brushing its nose all over the place. I still had a bunch of salt left on my hand—I was wearing a rubber glove—and I stuck the salt right up the hog's ass. The poor hog didn't know whether to shit or go blind."

"I've taken out my job pressure and frustration on the animals. There was a live hog in the pit. It hadn't done anything wrong, wasn't even running around the pit. It was just alive. I took a three-foot chunk of pipe—and I literally beat that hog to death. Couldn't have been a two-inch piece of solid bone left in its head. Basically, if you want to put it in layman's terms, I crushed his skull. It was like I started hitting the hog and I couldn't stop. And when I finally did stop, I'd expended all this energy and frustration, and I'm thinking, what in God's sweet name did I do?"

The more desensitized workers become, the greater the buildup of their psychological distress. Most people can experience only so much violence before they become traumatized by it; studies of combat veterans, for instance, demonstrate again and again the profound effect exposure to violence has on the psyche, particularly when one has also been a participant in that violence. Traumatized workers become increasingly violent toward both animals and humans, and develop addictive behaviors in an attempt to numb their distress.

"Most stickers have been arrested for assault. A lot of them have problems with alcohol. They have to drink, they have no other way of dealing with killing live, kicking animals all day long. A lot of guys just drink and drug their problems away. Some of them end up abusing their spouses because they can't get rid of the feelings. They leave work with this attitude and they go down to the bar to forget. Only problem is, even if you try to drink those feelings away, they're still there when you sober up."

Some slaughterhouse workers no doubt enter the industry as sociopaths: individuals who are antisocial, clinically “conscienceless,” and often take pleasure in causing others to suffer. However, one must wonder at an industry that tolerates—indeed, requires—antisocial behaviors such as extreme aggression, remorselessness, and violence.

In 2001, the Washington Post printed an article by Joby Warrick entitled “They Die Piece by Piece.” Warrick explained how, though cattle were supposed to be dead before reaching the cutting room, this was often not the reality. Ramon Moreno, a slaughterhouse worker who’d spent twenty years as a “second-legger”—cutting hocks off carcasses as they sped past at the rate of 309 per hour—described the process to Warrick:

“‘They blink. They make noises,’ he said softly. ‘The head moves, the eyes are wide and looking around.’ Still Moreno would cut. On bad days, he says, dozens of animals reached his station clearly alive and conscious. Some would survive as far as the tail cutter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. ‘They die,’ said Moreno, ‘piece by piece.’”

“In the morning the big holdup was the calves. To get done with them faster, we’d put eight or nine of them in the knocking box at a time. As soon as they start going in, you start shooting, the calves are jumping, they’re all piling up on top of each other. You don’t know which ones got shot and which ones didn’t get shot at all, and you forget to do the bottom ones. They’re hung anyway, and down the line they go, wriggling and yelling. The baby ones—two, three weeks old—I felt bad killing them so I just let them walk past.”

“Nearly every chicken responded with screams and violent physical reactions from the moment they were grabbed by workers and as they went through the line. The screaming of the birds and the frenzied flapping of their wings were so loud that you had to yell to the worker next to you, who was standing less than two feet away, just so he could hear you. I saw an employee kick a chicken off the floor fan and routinely saw chickens being thrown around the room. While one of the workers was talking about football, he ‘spiked’ a chicken onto the conveyor belt, pretending he had scored a touchdown.

I saw about 50 birds being dumped from the transport crates onto the conveyor belt, a distance of approximately eight feet.

The crate tipped them all at once, so they fell on top of each other. The screaming was intense during the whole process. I looked onto the conveyor belt and could clearly see chickens with broken legs and wings, limbs sticking out in unnatural angles.

I noticed that our line leader seemed generally more hostile toward the birds today, even yelling profanities at them when he threw them. During one break, a worker repeatedly slapped a chicken in the face until the line started again. There were so many dead birds on the floor of the hanging room that it was difficult to take a step without stepping on one.”

Calling for the humane treatment of animals, seventeenth-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham argued:

“The question is not, ‘Can they reason?’ nor, ‘Can they talk?’ but rather, ‘Can they suffer?’”

The question of sentience—the ability to feel pleasure and pain—has been at the center of arguments surrounding both human and animal welfare. Historically, members of vulnerable groups have been believed to have a higher tolerance for pain, an assumption often invoked to justify suffering. For instance, fifteenth-century scientists would nail dogs to boards by their paws in order to cut them open and experiment on them while fully conscious, and they dismissed the dogs’ howling as simply a mechanical response—as little different from the noise of a clock whose springs have been struck. Similarly, until the early 1980s, American doctors performed major surgery on infants without using painkillers or any anesthetic; the babies’ cries were explained as mere instinctive reactions. And because African slaves were thought to feel less pain than whites, it was easier to justify the brutal experience of slavery.

There is now evidence that strongly suggests birds not only suffer, but actively seek to anesthetize their pain. Researchers took a group of 120 broiler chickens, half of whom were lame, and offered them two types of feed: normal feed and feed that contained an anti-inflammatory painkiller. The lame chickens consumed up to 50 percent more drugged feed than did the non-lame birds and walked better as a result. A second, similar study found that the more severe a chicken’s lameness, the more of the drugged feed he consumed. Researchers concluded that the birds were likely self-medicating and that they can, and do, suffer.

There have been many particularly touching discoveries made about domestic pigs, if only because a number of research facilities are working to improve factory farming. When a researcher was asked if there had been

any notable characters among the pigs he had studied, he mentioned one old sow. Over the course of her life, she gave birth to 160 piglets. She taught all of them how to build a nest out of straw, and when her daughters grew up, the old sow assumed the role of midwife and helped them prepare for the births of their own babies. The question then becomes, if researchers know so much about the intelligence of pigs, why isn't the image of the smart pig publicized more? I suspect it has to do with eating pork. If people knew what kind of an animal they had on their plate, many would completely lose their appetite. We already know this from primates: could any of us eat an ape?

Sir Paul McCartney once claimed that if slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian. He believed that if we knew the truth about meat production, we'd be unable to continue eating animals. Yet on some level we do know the truth. We know that meat production is a messy business, but we choose not to know just how messy it is. We know that meat comes from an animal, but we choose not to connect the dots. And often, we eat animals and choose not to know we're even making a choice. Violent ideologies are structured so that it is not only possible, but inevitable, that we are aware of an unpleasant truth on one level while being oblivious to it on another.

Common to all violent ideologies is this phenomenon of knowing without knowing. And it is the essence of carnism. Inherent in violent ideologies is an implicit contract between producer and consumer to see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. Sure, animal agribusinesses go to great lengths to protect their secrets. But we make their job easy for them. They tell us not to look, and we turn away. They tell us the billions of animals that we never see live outdoors on peaceful farms, and as illogical as this is, we don't question it. We make their job easy because on some level most of us don't want to know the way things really are.

When an invisible ideology guides our beliefs and behaviors, we become casualties of a system that has stolen our freedom to think for ourselves and to act accordingly.

“Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.”

Bureaucracy helps render genocide unreal. It diminishes the emotional and intellectual tones associated with the killing. There is only a flow of events to which most people come to say yes. Mass murder is everywhere but at the same time nowhere.

Invisibility can only protect us so much. Hints of the truth surround us: “cruelty-free” veggie burgers at the grocery store; the resilient vein in

the drumstick that's suddenly reminiscent of a living chicken; snapshots of meatpacking plants that occasionally make the news; vegetarian guests at dinner parties; dead piglets hanging in the windows of Chinatown markets; the hog on a spit at the company barbecue; and an endless supply of dead animals in the form of meat. So when invisibility inevitably falters, we need a backup, something to protect us from the truth and to help us quickly recover should we suddenly begin to catch on to the disturbing reality of carnism. We must replace the reality of meat with the mythology of meat.

All the myths are in one way or another related to the Three Ns of Justification: eating meat is normal, natural, and necessary. The Three Ns have been invoked to justify all exploitative systems, from African slavery to the Nazi Holocaust. When an ideology is in its prime, these myths rarely come under scrutiny. However, when the system finally collapses, the Three Ns are recognized as ludicrous. Consider, for instance, the following justifications for why women were denied the right to vote in the United States: male-only voting was “designed by our forefathers”; if women were to vote, it would “cause irreparable damage to the state” and “disaster and ruin would take over the nation.”

The Three Ns are so ingrained in our social consciousness that they guide our actions without our even having to think about them. They think for us. We have internalized them so fully that we often live in accordance with their tenets as though they were universal truths rather than widely held opinions. It's like driving a car—once you've learned to do it, you no longer need to think about every action. But these justifications do more than just direct our actions. They alleviate the moral discomfort we might otherwise feel when eating meat; if we have a good excuse for our behaviors, we feel less guilty about them. The Three Ns essentially act as mental and emotional blinders, masking the discrepancies in our beliefs and behaviors toward animals and explaining them away if we do happen to catch on.

The practical goal of the myths is to legitimize the system. When an ideology is legitimized, its tenets are sanctioned by all social institutions and the Three Ns are disseminated through all social channels. Acting in accordance with the ideology is lawful, and it is considered reasonable and ethical. Consequently, the tenets of competing ideologies are viewed as illegitimate, which is why, for instance, vegetarians cannot press charges against agribusiness owners for the slaughtering of animals. Though all institutions help legitimize the ideology, two in particular play a critical role: the legal system and the news media.

“Custom will reconcile people to any atrocity.”

When we view the tenets of an ideology as normal, it means the ideology has become normalized, and its tenets social norms. Social norms aren't merely descriptive—describing how the majority of people behave—they are also prescriptive, dictating how we ought to behave. Norms are socially constructed. They aren't innate, and they don't come from God (though some of us may have been taught otherwise); they are created and maintained by people, and they serve to keep us in line so the system remains intact. Norms keep us in line by laying out paths for us to follow and by teaching us how to be so that we fit in. The path of the norm is the path of least resistance; it is the route we take when we're on autopilot and don't even realize we're following a course of action that we haven't consciously chosen. Most people who eat meat have no idea that they're behaving in accordance with the tenets of a system that has defined many of their values, preferences, and behaviors. What they call “free choice” is, in fact, the result of a narrowly constructed set of options that have been chosen for them. They don't realize, for instance, that they have been taught to value human life so far above certain forms of nonhuman life that it seems appropriate for their taste preferences to supersede other species' preference for survival. And by carving out the path of least resistance, norms obscure alternative paths and make it seem as if there is no other way to be;

Another way norms keep us in line is by rewarding conformity and punishing us if we stray off course. Practically and socially, it is vastly easier to eat meat than not. Meat is readily available, while non-meat alternatives in many locales must be actively sought out and may be hard come by. Or one's only option is some heavily processed product designed to mimic meat itself. And vegans often find themselves having to explain their choices, defend their diet, and apologize for inconveniencing others. They are stereotyped as hippies, eating disordered, and sometimes antihuman. They are called hypocrites if they wear leather, purists or extremists if they don't. They must live in a world where they are constantly bombarded by imagery and attitudes that offend their deepest sensibilities. It is easier by far to conform to the carnistic majority than eschew the path of least resistance.

Patterns of thought and behavior, established long before we were able to act as free agents, become woven into the fabric of our psyche, guiding our choices like an invisible hand. It is impossible to exercise free will as long as we are operating from within the system. Free will requires consciousness, and our pervasive and deep-seated patterns of thought are unconscious; they are outside of our awareness and therefore outside of our control. While we remain in the system, we see the world through the eyes of carnism. And as long as we look through eyes other than our own, we will be living in

accordance with a truth that is not of our own choosing. We must step outside the system to find our lost empathy and make choices that reflect what we truly feel and believe, rather than what we've been taught to feel and believe.

Carnism distorts reality: Just because we don't see the animals we eat, this doesn't mean they don't exist. Just because the system hasn't been named, this doesn't mean it isn't real. No matter how far they stretch and how deep they run, the myths of meat are not the facts of meat.

Internalized carnism distorts our perception of reality: though animals are living beings, we perceive them as living things; though they are individuals, we perceive them as abstractions—as a bunch of things; and in the absence of any objective, supporting data, we perceive them as though their appropriateness for human consumption is naturally contingent upon their species. For instance, if, despite the system's best efforts, we happen to catch sight of one of the pigs who is to become our meat, we don't perceive him or her as a sentient being, or as someone who has a distinct personality and preferences. Rather, we perceive the pig's "pigness" (dirtiness, slovenliness, et cetera) and his or her "edibility." By perceiving animals in these ways, we employ three defenses that I refer to as the Cognitive Trio.

The Cognitive Trio is comprised of objectification, deindividuation, and dichotomization. These defenses are actually normal psychological processes that become defensive distortions when used excessively, as they must be in order to keep carnism intact. And, unlike some other defenses, these mechanisms are more internal and less conscious and intentional; they are less about what we think than they are about how we think. Each defense in the Cognitive Trio has a unique effect on our perception of animals. But the true strength of the trio lies in how the three work in harmony with one another. Like a musical trio, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

“The more you see these lambs without any heads on them, the more you don't think of them as an animal, but as a product that you're working with.”

Objectification is the process of viewing a living being as an inanimate object, a thing. Animals are objectified in a variety of ways, perhaps most notably through language. Objectifying language is a powerful distancing mechanism. Consider how slaughterhouse workers refer to the animals they're going to kill as the objects they are to become, rather than as the living animals they are: chickens are called broilers, pigs are called rashers, and bulls are called beef. And the USDA refers to cows as udders

and animals as units, while meat industries talk about replacement boars or replacement calves. Consider, too, our common usage of the phrase ‘living thing,’ and our equally common failure to recognize this phrase as an oxymoron. Carnism needs us to employ such objectifying language; think of how you might feel if, for instance, you referred to the rotisserie chicken in the restaurant window as someone rather than something, or if you called the barnyard turkey he or she rather than it.

Objectification is legitimized not only through language, but also through institutions, legislation, and policies. For example the law classifies animals as property. When we can buy, sell, trade, or exchange someone as though he or she were a used car—or even parts of a used car—we have literally turned him or her into a piece of live stock. By viewing animals as objects, we can treat their bodies accordingly, without the moral discomfort we might otherwise feel.

“I don’t think of farmed animals as individuals. I wouldn’t be able to do my job if I got that personal with them. When you say individuals, you mean as a unique person, as a unique thing with its own name and its own characteristics, its own little games it plays? Yeah? Yeah, I’d really rather not know that. I’m sure it has it, but I’d rather not know it.”

Deindividuation is the process of viewing individuals only in terms of their group identity and as having the same characteristics as everyone else in the group. Whenever we encounter a group of others, it’s natural for us to think of them, at least in part, as a group. The larger the group, the more likely we are to view the whole over its individual parts; when you think of a nation, for example, you probably think of its citizens primarily as members of a group to which you’ve ascribed a set of shared characteristics. Deindividuation, however, is viewing others only as members of a whole; it is the failure to appreciate the individuality of the parts that make up the whole. Such is the case with our perception of the animals we eat.

For instance, as I mentioned previously, when you think of the pigs raised for pork you probably don’t think of them as individuals with their own personalities and preferences. Rather, you see them as an abstraction, as a group. Like other groups that have been victims of violent ideologies, pigs raised for meat may have numbers rather than names and are considered no different from one another; a pig is a pig and all pigs are the same. But imagine how you would feel if your package of hot dogs included a label with the name, picture, and description of the pig from whom the meat was procured, or if you became acquainted with one of the pigs who was

to become your food. Countless students of mine, as well as the carnists and meat cutters I interviewed in my research, have reported that after getting to know an individual “food” animal, they felt unable to consume that particular animal, and some even felt uncomfortable continuing to eat meat from that species.

“I would have a different outlook on pigs in general if I had a pig as a pet. I would just see my pet every time someone was preparing ribs or something like that.”

“It would feel wrong to eat that meat. I mean, it would feel like I murdered it, you know, that I killed it. And for what? You know what I’m saying? I wouldn’t even conceive of it. If it’s a pet, it’s off limits, you know? Once it dies, you bury it; it’s sort of like a family member.”

“I’d have to be starving before I’d eat my own pet because once I knew him or her really well I would be offended to have to eat my friend.”

“I would not eat something that I would give a name to. For me, that’s like your friend. You are eating an animal that you have a close relationship with.”

Negative reactions to the idea of consuming (or preparing the meat of) a familiar animal are common around the world, and they can be quite powerful. For instance, female Indians from the Quito area in Ecuador bond with their chickens just as Americans do with our dogs and cats, and when circumstances force these women to sell their birds for slaughter, they do so with tears and shrieks.

“Even, like, some animal in a cage with hundreds of other animals, if you make this connection [that he or she is an individual], then it’s kind of on the same parallel as the family pet. How can you kill a family pet? How can you kill a pig that’s in a pen with a hundred others?”

Recognizing the individuality of others interrupts the process of deindividualization, making it more difficult to maintain the psychological and emotional distance necessary to harm them.

“I don’t know, maybe it’s easier to eat animals that have been raised just for the purpose of being eaten. . . where a squirrel runs around your backyard and then to have it on your dinner plate is just kind of disturbing. It’s almost like a division between the animals you see running around outside—they are safe from people eating them.”

Dichotomization is the process of mentally putting others into two, often opposing, categories based on our beliefs about them. In and of itself, classifying others into groups is not problematic. Creating mental classifications is a natural process that helps us organize information. Dichotomies, however, are not just classifications; they are dualistic, and as such, they create a black-and-white picture of reality. What results is a divvying up of the world into inflexible, value-laden categories that are usually based on little or inaccurate information. Dichotomization thus enables us to separate groups of individuals in our minds and to harbor very different emotions toward them.

When it comes to meat, the two main categories we have for animals are edible and inedible. And within the edible-inedible dichotomy, we have a number of other category pairs. For example, we eat domesticated rather than wild animals, and herbivores rather than omnivores or carnivores. Most people won’t eat animals that they deem intelligent (dolphins), but regularly consume those they believe are not very smart (cows and chickens). Many Americans avoid eating animals that they perceive as cute (rabbits) and instead eat animals that they consider less attractive (turkeys).

Whether the categories into which we’ve placed animals are accurate is less important than whether we believe they’re accurate, since the purpose of dichotomization is simply to distance us from the discomfort of eating meat. If we filter our perceptions of animals through categories laden with value judgments, we can, for example, eat our steak while we pet our dog and remain oblivious to the implications of our choices. Dichotomization thus supports justification; it enables us to feel justified eating an animal because, for instance, he or she isn’t smart, isn’t a pet, isn’t cute—isn’t inedible.

Of course, not all edible animals fall neatly into the categories into which we’ve placed them. To maintain the carnistic status quo, then, we retain false assumptions about the animals we eat so that we can continue to classify them as edible. Intelligent pigs and chickens are seen as stupid, and handsome turkeys are viewed as ugly.

When pressed to examine our assumptions, however, the arbitrary and irrational nature of dichotomization becomes apparent.

“Lambs are gentle creatures... It’s, like, a shame they are killed and we eat them. There are a lot of other things that are also gentle, too, that we eat. Cows are. We eat them... I don’t know how to describe it. It seems like everybody eats cow. It’s cheaper. It’s affordable, and there are so many of them. But lambs are just different. They’re smaller or more cuddly. I don’t know. You don’t cuddle a cow. Seems like it’s okay to eat a cow, but it’s not okay to eat a lamb. The difference is weird.”

“It’s easier to think of farmed animals in the abstract. It makes me think of that quote: ‘The death of one person is a tragedy; the death of a group is a statistic.’”

A discussion about the Cognitive Trio would not be complete without mentioning the role of technology in psychological distortions and distancing. Technology reinforces the trio by enabling us to treat certain animals as objects and abstractions—objects, because they literally become units of production on a disassembly line, and abstractions, because the sheer volume of animals killed for meat inevitably deindividualizes them. Indeed, it is only because of technology that widescale meat production is possible: modern methods enable us to eat billions of animals every year without witnessing a single part of the process by which these animals become our food. This mass production of meat, coupled with our removal from the production process, has made us at once more and less violent toward animals than ever before; we are able to kill more animals but are less desensitized to or comfortable with the fact that we’re killing them. Technology has widened the gap between our behaviors and values, and thus enhanced the moral dissonance that the system works so hard to obscure.

But of course, technology often doesn’t eradicate all traces of meat production. And when it doesn’t, we can find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of recognizing that our meat did, in fact, come from a living being.

“I don’t eat pork from a market in town that sells pigs’ feet and whole pigs. I think partially because it reminds me more that you’re not just eating—like the piece of meat didn’t just fall out of the sky. It’s connected to the whole animal instead of just a nicely processed thing that you’re eating by itself for dinner. You have to think about it as a whole creature.”

Nearly everyone is in some degree of denial about how much pain there is in the world, because grasping its full dimensions is, first, impossible, and second, would be paralyzing and make life unbearable. But because we have

to overlook enormous amounts of suffering if we're going to live—have to stop thinking about the old people crying alone in their hospital beds, and the sick children whose every second of life has been spent dying—it is going to be very easy to miss an atrocity in our midst. It has never been a mystery to me how ordinary Germans could ignore what was going on around them. They did it the same way we ignore all of the pain that millions of strangers are going through at any given moment. As long as other people's terror isn't in the room with you, as long as it's off behind barbed wire a few miles away, it's not just easy to ignore but almost impossible to notice. Walk through any American city on a nice day and see how easy it is to forget that the country has two-million people in its prisons. They're off in rural counties, and as long as you don't go looking for them—and as long as you're not among the populations from whose numbers the incarcerated are mostly drawn—none of it will even exist for you.

“For three years, I used to do the same ten minute walk from my apartment to school and back every day. It was only in the third year, after noticing it on a map, that I realized I had been walking directly past a jail with hundreds of inmates in it. People were locked in rooms, living lives, and I passed by unaware.”

Because people slip so naturally into oblivious complicity, it's crucial to actively examine the world around you for evidence of things hidden. What am I missing? What have I accepted as ordinary that might in fact be atrocious? Am I in denial about something that will be clear in retrospect? Every time I apply this kind of thinking to meat-eating, I get chills. Here we have set up mass industrial slaughter, a world built on the suffering and death of billions of creatures. The scale of the carnage is unfathomable. I know sharks aren't particularly sympathetic, but I'm still shocked by the statistic that while sharks kill eight people per year, humans kill eleven-thousand sharks per hour. Yet we hide all of it away, we don't talk about it. Laws are passed to prevent people from even taking photographs of it. That makes me feel the same way I do about the death penalty: if this weren't atrocious, it wouldn't need to be kept out of view. *Mass industrial slaughter*. There's no denying that's what it is. Yet that sounds like something a decent society shouldn't have in it.

I've tried my best to figure out a way to avoid my conclusion, because I know only a small fraction of other people share it. But it's a simple and, to me, inescapable deduction:

1. Nonhuman animals are conscious beings capable of suffering

2. Unnecessarily causing conscious beings to suffer and die is morally reprehensible
3. Humans cause billions of nonhuman animals to suffer and die every year, mostly for their own pleasure
4. By killing and eating animals, humans are doing something deeply wrong. Jeremy Bentham's formulation is still powerful and hard to escape:

“The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?”

The difficulty of avoiding this conclusion is what disturbed David Foster Wallace during his time at the Maine Lobster Festival. He realized that it seemed preachy and extreme, but as a thoughtful and philosophically rigorous individual, he couldn't escape the morally troubling implications of boiling lobsters alive. The lobsters just didn't seem to want to be killed, and however normalized the practice may be, however easily we may take it for granted that these creatures are of little moral worth, once you begin to scrutinize these assumptions, to see that they're built on very little, and that a creature does seem to be experiencing something resembling pain, it becomes tough to defend our actions.

I still know I'm taking a risk by using the word 'holocaust.' The dictionary definition may be “any mass slaughter or reckless destruction of life”—and the word even originally referred to the burning of sacrifices, i.e. animals—but there are plenty who are skeptical even of applying the term to other genocides. To speak of a pig holocaust can seem trivializing and insensitive. And yet: once again, ideas that seem true and reasonable by instinct become harder to defend once scrutinized. It's true that how bad you believe the industrial slaughter of animals is, compared to the industrial slaughter of humans, depends on whether you believe suffering is suffering, and the degree to which its gravity depends on the intellectual sophistication of the sufferer. You might also think that certain atrocities perpetrated on 100 million pigs are not as bad as those same atrocities committed against five fully-functioning human beings. A lot depends on your subjective weighting of the value of very different lives, and none of that has any obvious “true” answer. Personally, though, I keep having that feeling of being unable to escape my discomfort: knowing what's out there, knowing the cages, the blood, the billion squeals of pain, I hear over and over those same questions: ‘Why is this different? How can it be justified? What are you choosing not to realize?’ And yet again that same terrible word: holocaust.

Our grandchildren will ask us one day: Where were you during the Holocaust of the animals? What did you do against these horrifying crimes? We won't be able to offer the excuse that we didn't know.

When we bear witness, we are not merely acting as observers; we emotionally connect with the experience of those we are witnessing. We empathize. And in so doing, we close the gap in our consciousness, the gap that enables the violence of carnism to endure.

Virtually every atrocity in the history of humankind was enabled by a populace that turned away from a reality that seemed too painful to face, while virtually every revolution for peace and justice has been made possible by a group of people who chose to bear witness and demanded that others bear witness as well. The goal of all justice movements is to activate collective witnessing so that social practices reflect social values. A movement succeeds when it reaches a critical mass of witnesses—that is, enough witnesses to tip the scales of power in favor of the movement.

“The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work.”

A reason we resist bearing witness to the truth of carnism is that witnessing hurts. Becoming aware of the intense suffering of billions of animals, and of our own participation in that suffering, can bring up painful emotions: sorrow and grief for the animals; anger at the injustice and deception of the system; despair at the enormity of the problem; fear that trusted authorities and institutions are, in fact, untrustworthy; and guilt for having contributed to the problem. Bearing witness means choosing to suffer. Indeed, empathy is literally “feeling with.” Choosing to suffer is particularly difficult in a culture that is addicted to comfort—a culture that teaches that pain should be avoided whenever possible and that ignorance is bliss. We can reduce our resistance to witnessing by valuing authenticity over personal pleasure, and integration over ignorance.

Witnessing isn't merely something one does; it is how one is. Witnessing isn't an isolated practice, but a way of relating to oneself and the world. It is a way of life that informs our interactions with ourselves and others. And there is no limit to our capacity for witnessing. In fact, because witnessing is empowering, the more we witness, the greater our ability to witness. Like compassion, our capacity for witnessing grows with practice.

The witness stands together, inside, with those who are hurt and with those who are violated; the witness has an extraordinary capacity to stand

in the fires of hatred and violence without increasing those elements. In fact, the deepest form of witnessing is a form of compassion for all suffering beings. In reality, we are never outside observers. We are inside the wound together. It is just that some feel and some are numb. We are inside the very thing that needs to be transformed.

All bystanders are forced to take a side, by their action or inaction; there is no such thing as moral neutrality. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

Although those of us who choose to stand with the victim may suffer, there can be no greater honor.

Six Flags: Wilderness

Faking Nature

“I had remained affected for years by the image of a sea lion I’d once seen trying to exit the water with half its body missing. Around here, you didn’t have to look far to find a fate that painful. I had once watched, horrified, as a baby elephant seal that was being pursued by a shark tried with every ounce of its strength to scramble aboard the boat, the panic seared into its bewhiskered little face.

Or a shark-bitten sea lion that had managed to drag itself onto the rocks. The animal had three furrows raked across its torso, each at least two inches deep. The wounds were extreme, though the sea lion would likely survive them; these creatures managed to heal from the most vicious maimings, like torn and mangled lumps of Silly Putty that, when squeezed together, somehow became whole again. Not without visible agony, however—I was struck by the emotion shown on the creature’s face. Its eyes blinked slowly and sadly, and it gave off a deeply resigned air as flies burrowed into its wounds.”

Our reaction to wilderness is an endlessly interesting mixture of sympathy and fear, of love and hostility, of the impulse to embrace and the equally powerful urge to flee. This is the fatal attraction.

Nature demands of us that we pay attention. This society has sheltered us from nature, and one of the reasons why places like Yellowstone are remarkable is that they are ‘nature in your face.’ Most persons would not want their wilderness sanitized. At least I hope they would not. Wilderness is not just another product or commodity to be made safe to prevent product liability litigation. For without those dangers, it would not really be wilderness.

The wilderness environment has always contained certain dangers. To remove them would require changes so sweeping as to do away with most of

the reasons for having national parks. The scene would cease to be revitalizing, stimulating, and inspirational and would instead become artificial and sanitized. To develop a national park is to not have one.

In the years since the field of environmental ethics was born, there have been many different arguments for why we should preserve wilderness and the species within it. Some see nature and species as natural resources, others as having potential pharmaceutical value. Nature provides important services to humans—cleaning our air, say, or providing us with places for physical exercise and mental rejuvenation. Species may be aesthetically beautiful and inspire us individually and culturally, or represent transcendent moral truths. They are records of evolution containing information we need in order to understand life on earth, or their value is their wonder for the human intellect. Wilderness is where humans come from, it's our history as a species, we need it in order to understand the relationship between self and the world. Some believe wild things have the right to exist without human disturbance, or that we should protect them for future generations. For others, the reason to protect wilderness and species is because they exist. Their preservation should need no justification, because their value is intrinsic and independent of human perspective.

In 1982, Robert Elliot penned a paper called "Faking Nature" that rebuked the idea that an ecosystem disturbed or damaged by humans could be restored to its original state or has equal value to wilderness. Nature, wrote Elliot, is "not replaceable without depreciation in one aspect of its value which has to do with its genesis, its history." It seems that today we have to decide whether that genesis in the wild is something we value.

The dominant Western paradigm of thought is characterized by human chauvinism. Throughout history, the ultimate test of perfection in nature has been its usefulness for human purposes. Even the transcendentalists, who revered nature as worshipers would revere their cathedral, assumed this anthropocentric perspective. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that nature is "made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Savior rode."

Consider a thought experiment called the "Last Man Argument." Imagine you are the only person on earth. The world system has collapsed. Before you die, you make sure that every living thing in the world will be destroyed and nothing is left. Would you be acting immorally? If you believe the value of nature is its usefulness to humans, the answer is no. But of course, we intuitively feel destroying the world would be horribly wrong. This feeling shows that an entirely new ethic—neither a primitive, mystical, or aesthetic one, nor an economic or even scientific one—needs to be articulated. Human interests and preferences are far too parochial to provide a satisfactory basis

for deciding on what is environmentally desirable. Nature needs to have its own value that merits our moral concern, and species themselves need to become moral objects. They must have intrinsic value. The notion that nature wasn't designed for us, that its value might not be described in economic, scientific, or even spiritual terms, is still fairly radical. There are traces of it in John Muir, who wrote that "the world, we are told, was made especially for man—a presumption not supported by all the facts."

The value of nature is objective and is independent of human values; it preexists us and will outlast us. Perhaps there can be no science without a scientist, no religion without a believer, no tickle without somebody tickled. But there can be law without a lawgiver, history without a historian; there is biology without biologists, physics without physicists, creativity without creators, story without storytellers, achievement without achievers—and value without valuers. From this more objective viewpoint, there is something subjective, something philosophically hazardous in a time of ecological crisis, about living in a reference frame where one species takes itself as absolute and values everything else in nature relative to its potential to produce value for itself.

The philosophy in a national park is to keep things as natural as possible. Man's role in a national park is supposed to not be disruptive. Bison and other animals die in winter; that is natural. When they die, they become a gift of life for other animals: ravens, magpies, eagles, coyotes, and others feed on the carcasses. So the National Park philosophy, in its idealized form, is one of noninterference with natural processes.

The resource at Yellowstone is not forty-thousand elk or four-thousand bison or ten-thousand hot springs or two-hundred lakes. The resource is wildness. And unlike a zoo or a museum or an amusement park, the worth of that wildness depends almost totally on its wholeness. Dangers are a part of that wholeness. While appreciating its wholeness, we must never abandon a healthy respect for wilderness. Wilderness is impersonal. It does not care whether you live or die. It does not care how much you love it.

There are very real dangers in true wilderness, and that is part of our fascination with it. A longtime researcher of wilderness areas has noted in defining them that places where one cannot be killed by a wild animal are not wilderness areas. In fact, the word 'wilderness' comes from wilder, a wild animal. There will always be steep cliffs, deep water, and ornery and unpredictable animals in that messy part of the national habitat not crossed by climate-controlled malls and processed-food emporiums. If people expect a grizzly bear to be benign, or think a glacier is just another variant of a theme-park slide, it's not the fault of the government when something goes fatally wrong.

However, many lawyers believe that true accidents (“acts of God”) occur very rarely, and that someone’s individual negligence is more often a factor in a death incident. Perhaps that is one reason the public does not like lawyers, because we do not wish to believe that.

Frustrated by potential legal problems, the NPS in 1984 solved the problem at Bridge Bay by simply cutting down all of the trees in the campground. Thus those persons prone to bringing meritless lawsuits have only themselves to blame if a campground is not quite as pretty as they might like. The rest of us get to suffer because of them. If, in the future, you find yourself camping in Yellowstone in a campground with no trees, you now know one possible reason.

I think that I shall never see
A thing more dangerous than a tree.
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of lawyers in her hair.
Upon whose bosom the park can cause pain,
With great bulldozer and with crane.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only plaintiffs can take away a tree.

“I have yet to go to Yellowstone and not see one of the regulations set up by the National Park Service being broken by one or more person. People take too many chances in the Park. Then, when something happens and a person dies, the Park is held responsible for their actions. Hogwash!”

“We feel there are plenty of signs which tell people to stay on the walks. So many times we saw people off the boardwalks or traipsing along paths that stated no trail. Do people think the signs are there for everyone else but them? We would hate to see fences put up everywhere. It would certainly take away from the beauty of the park. It’s a shame so many people who love Yellowstone or the Tetons or other lovely places will have to suffer because of a few who do not obey the signs put there as warnings.”

He had no feeling for the park’s problems in protecting the bears (and thus part of our heritage), in giving bears a natural environment to live in, or in offering visitors the chance to see wild animals in a wild setting—all well-established, thoroughly legislated purposes of Yellowstone National

Park. He had no regard for the fact that the greatest resource of Yellowstone is its very wildness. When you take that away by sanitizing the place—whether by radio-collaring every bear, by putting up signs every ten feet, or by otherwise overdeveloping the place—you destroy its most important element: wildness. It is not just another consumer product to be made safe. It is no longer able to serve its function if it is paved, fenced, labeled, and regulated into a form palatable to zoo- and television-minded visitors. It cannot stimulate if it is crippled or lessened.

People react to tragedy with rage: They are confused and frustrated and need to strike out. They need to hate or get revenge; they need to blame. They need, most of all, to avoid blaming themselves. Sometimes someone else is handy; sometimes that someone even deserves the blame. But occasional stupidity in park administrators, or occasional tragedy among park visitors, is not a good barometer of the health of the wilderness. When someone is hurt in the park, and the need to blame aches for fulfillment, you can almost count on the innocent environment getting stuck with part of the bill.

“This bear was euthanized by lethal injection on July 30 and her cubs given to Zoo Montana at Billings.”

Many a writer will condemn making wilderness less wild and more tame but do not seem to have much problems with killing a sow and imprisoning her cubs for life over trying to feed her family. Bears preying on humans is *not* an unnatural and unexplainable act. Humans are slower and generally less able to defend themselves than deer or elk, and certainly bison—why wouldn't smart bears eat people? Perhaps fat American visitors could be the salmon of the Yellowstone bears.

Now of course one can make a moral argument that the typical modern American's meat is not fit for consumption, loaded as it is with various toxic surface coatings as well as the accumulated exposure to other toxic substances existing within their fat and muscle tissue. Though really, since we've been dumping so much of this down the drains in one way or another, how much of the same are already found within Kodiak's salmon?

As humans and their activities have spread across the globe to extract resources, plant crops, and build cities and roads, thousands of species inhabit slivers of their previous ranges, surviving in isolated populations with few places to expand and faced with a loss of genetic fitness and an increased vulnerability to climatic shifts, disease, and natural disasters. Tigers, for example, inhabit less than seven percent of the space they inhabited a century ago. Caribou have lost half of their historic range

in the last 100 years. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) estimates that, on average, vertebrate species populations have shrunk by half since 1990. Anthropogenic global warming has exacerbated the problem of disappearing habitat and shrinking abundance. Few landscapes around the world remain untouched by climate change today. And as they have for millennia, changes in climate are acting as selective pressures on species. For those animals that can't withstand changes to their environments, migrate, or adapt fast enough, their survival often depends on human intervention. An estimated 4,000 to 6,000 vertebrate species will need captive breeding over the next 200 years in order to mitigate extinction threats. Faced with these emergencies, the urgency to do something to save these species seems like a good ethical argument for action. But what actions we take have enormous consequences for the evolution of species.

Conservation is a human ethical construct. It's not science, it's values. The hard truth is that humans could survive in highly modified environments with less species for a very long time. Conservation biologists are scientists whose work, at its core, is an ongoing ethical debate about the future.

Prescriptive evolution stirs a hornet's nest of ethical values in conservation. The conservation ethic of wilderness being separate from human society and the evolution of wild things with their own value or entities with a right to existence, these are values that are held deeply in conservation, and directed evolution starts to become less comfortable for people. If we start meddling in the evolutionary trajectory of some organisms and do it in an intended fashion, not like now when it's unintended, we are making a choice about that species, we are manipulating them and choosing their futures. But most of what we do in conservation biology is already an evolutionary manipulation.

Thinking about how humans might intentionally direct evolution in species to conserve them reveals how little we still grasp of the complex organic process that has resulted in an animal and the relationship between its genes, behavior, and environment. Add the variable of anthropogenic climate change, and this ecological complexity becomes boggling. Climate change has always been a powerful driver of evolution, but it is difficult to predict the speed of change today and the effects on species.

“It's hard to future gaze to the next few hundred years, but unfortunately I think that's what is going to happen: life on this planet will likely be managed. It might not be as totally managed as a zoo or farm animals, but we are getting to that point.

Early on, the goal was to save the organisms from the environment. Bring them into captivity, and if you treated them nicely and not too biased in how you bred them, it won't be an issue. Now there is much more of an understanding that organisms will adapt to those environments. In the process of trying to save them, we change them. The irony of this age is that often the more we intervene to save species, the less 'wild' and autonomous they become."

Consider the case of crows in Hawaii. The captive breeding program changed the crows profoundly, perhaps so much so that they represent a different species. Before, they were kind of like the kings and queens of the forest. They chased the hawks and the hawks had a healthy respect for them. It took four or five years of releasing young birds before the hawks realized that these were different than the ones that used to chase them around and that they were fair game. All of those birds that were originally wild are now gone. All of the birds at the Keauhou Bird Conservation Center have been raised by puppets.

"So I truly feel that whatever happens in the forest now with these birds, it's a different species. Whatever they release now is really starting at evolutionary ground zero. They're going to have to relearn everything—including calls. So, from their language on up they're going to have a huge learning curve."

This is why the experience of seeing such species in captivity is so bittersweet: there is hope in the fact that they are still living—there is still, as a Hawaiian phrase, goes, "*Ke nae iki nei no,*" some breath remaining—and sadness that it is in such a diminished form.

There was a groundswell of enthusiasm for the idea that we could save wildlife. However, in many cases advocates for captive breeding became overzealous, and there wasn't a careful assessment of the needs of these different species; the goal was just captive breeding. It really pissed off people who were concerned with natural habitats and the animals in the wild. These "arks" themselves aren't always effective. The loss of genetic fitness—measured as the number of offspring produced by individuals that survive to reproductive age—can be rapid in captive populations, occurring within several generations and leading to lower reproductive rates and higher offspring losses. Captivity can create selections of traits within populations that improve their survival in captivity but not necessarily in the wild—if they are ever returned at all.

Although most captive breeding programs are intended to produce animals for reintroduction to their habitat, there are few successful cases to point to in which captive animals have become truly self-sustaining or “wild” again. Whooping cranes, for example, must still be taught to migrate by human pilots. When it comes to amphibians, the success rate for reintroductions is particularly low. One study showed that of fifty-eight species that were reintroduced after captive breeding, only eighteen bred successfully in the wild, of which thirteen were self-sustaining. Most tellingly, out of 110 species in captive breeding programs, 52 of the programs had no plan in place for reintroduction at all—their ecosystems didn’t exist anymore.

Proponents of what’s known as *in situ* conservation—preserving animals in their native place—say this is the most destructive aspect of captive breeding; by trying to minimize the chance of extinction, it emphasizes saving animals rather than environments. We’ll never know with any degree of certainty whether these animals can be reintroduced or not. There are a lot of environmentalists who say, ‘If you take a species out of the wild and there is very little possibility of reintroducing them, then you shouldn’t do it.’ But proponents of captive breeding believe it’s better to have the species in the world than to let them disappear, even if the animals that remain in zoos are essentially living museum pieces.

A plan being mooted to save the orangutan, an endangered ape that shares territory with tigers, is to charge tourists a hefty “conservation fee” to see them. Permits to view mountain gorillas in Rwanda cost at least \$500, for example. In the Anthropocene, it is likely that we will have to pay large sums to visit rare creatures that were once more numerous than us.

As I see it, it probably really is good for the soul to be a tourist, even if it’s only once in a while. Not good for the soul in a refreshing or enlivening way, though, but rather in a grim, steely-eyed, *let’s-look-honestly-at-the-facts-and-find-some-way-to-deal-with-them* way. My personal experience has not been that traveling around the country or world is broadening or relaxing, or that radical changes in place and context have a salutary effect, but rather that tourism is radically constricting, and humbling in the hardest way—hostile to my fantasy of being a true individual, of living somehow outside and above it all. To be a mass tourist, for me, is to become a pure late-date American: alien, ignorant, greedy for something you cannot ever have, disappointed in a way you can never admit. It is to spoil, by way of sheer ontology, the very unspoiledness you are there to experience. It is to impose yourself on places that in all non-economic ways would be better, realer, without you. It is, in lines and gridlock and transaction after transaction, to confront a dimension of yourself that is as inescapable as it is painful: As a tourist, you become economically significant but existentially

loathsome, an insect on a dead thing.

There is neither an environmental ethic that is fully developed nor one that has been used extensively to inform policy-making and decision-making. Few park rangers or wildlife biologists—let alone politicians—choose to utilize philosophical concepts in order to answer the questions they face about how and when to protect species.

If pushed to describe the moral roots of their convictions, conservationists generally give utilitarian arguments for species preservation, along the lines that species are intrinsic to ecosystem health, which is in turn intrinsic to human survival. This may be true in the very long view, but the exact opposite is true in the short-term: for people around the world, cutting a tree for fuel, damming a river for electricity, tilling the land for planting, or poaching an animal for money means survival. In order to succeed at their work, few conservationists navigate or even acknowledge this ethical relativity. To them the rightness of saving species is a kind of inviolable truth, even if others think it is a privileged opinion.

“I recently got into a fight with a group of people who live and breathe conservation biology as a religion. The reason I do this is I have to do something. I enjoy working in this realm. I feel like it’s a worthwhile effort and all those things. But I’m not judging the value of my life based on whether or not there’s going to be elephants twenty-five years from now. I’m not sure it’s within my control. I don’t think it’s you have to care about conservation because elephants will be extinct twenty-five years from now. It’s about quality of life, it’s what kind of planet do you want to live on, across the whole spectrum. In the suburbs, do you want to have salamanders and songbirds? Does it make a difference to know that someplace there are lions, or you can go to some place where you don’t see all the impacts of humans?”

Fortunately, well-being and high carbon emissions are not inseparable. Countries achieve high levels of happiness and life expectancy at a fraction of the carbon emissions per head of population produced by many of the richest countries, including Britain and the USA. The truth is that the rich developed societies are very inefficient producers of well-being—particularly those with bigger income differences between rich and poor. According to WHO figures, over 20 percent of the populations of the more unequal rich countries are likely to suffer forms of mental illness—such as depression, anxiety disorders, drug or alcohol addiction—each year. Rates may be three times as high as in the most equal countries. At the same time, measures

of the strength of community life and whether people feel they can trust others also show that more equal societies do very much better. Tackling inequality is an important step towards achieving sustainability and high levels of well-being.

As the populations of the developed world have gained unprecedented standards of comfort and material prosperity, further increases in those standards make less and less difference to well-being. But what has become critical to well-being is the social environment and the quality of social relations. There is abundant research showing that social life and relationships are essential to both health and happiness. However, very large material inequalities mean that status becomes more important and social life is increasingly impoverished by status competition and status insecurities. Social anxieties and our worries about how we are seen and judged are exacerbated. The result is that people start to feel that social life is more of an ordeal than a pleasure and gradually withdraw from social life—as the data show. But by intensifying status insecurities, inequality also drives consumerism, which is the biggest obstacle to sustainability. Any idea that we should consume less will be opposed as if it were an assault on our social standing and quality of life. But by reducing inequality, we not only reduce the importance of social status but, at the same time, we also improve social relations and the real quality of life. Reducing inequality is the first step towards combining sustainability with higher levels of well-being.

Whose interests does conservation serve? In the last few years, some conservationists have attempted to address the notions that biodiversity conservation is out of touch with the realities of poor communities and that national parks and protected wilderness only serve the interests of a global elite. They seek to promote poverty alleviation and economic development as a conservation tool, at times by advocating forestry and agriculture in the belief that a higher standard of living for the poor will ultimately benefit nature conservation.

Sometimes called the “new conservation,” it has come under fire by the old guard who argue that there is no evidence for the proposition that people are kinder to nature when they are more affluent, if only because their ecological footprints increase roughly in proportion to their consumption. They conclude that the new conservation, if implemented, would hasten ecological collapse globally, eradicating thousands of kinds of plants and animals and causing inestimable harm to humankind in the long-run. The fear is that humanitarian-driven conservationists will only demand the protection of nature if that nature is materially valuable to people. These concerns seem more than justified, and yet there is a terrible tension in the fact that so often it is relatively privileged Western scientists demanding that

developing countries like Tanzania not do as the scientists' own countries did for generations. Such tensions could of course be mitigated if not completely resolved, however the power and ability to do so is well outside the capabilities of these scientists.

Consider the case of the Isle Royale wolves, a population that established themselves in the 1940s on an island in Lake Superior by crossing a twenty-mile ice bridge. The wolves survived for decades preying on the island's moose, but in 1980, parvovirus, a disease introduced by domestic dogs, brought the population down to twelve and shrank the genetic pool. In 1997, a lone male wolf crossed the increasingly rare winter ice bridge and became the alpha male of the population. He was virile and territorial, so much so that he displaced one of the island's four packs, driving it into extinction within a couple of years. The wolf, known as No. 93 or "Old Gray Guy," brought a kind of genetic rescue to an ailing population. He spread his genes, producing offspring with higher fitness. But there have not been any new migrant wolves on Isle Royale since. Fifty-six percent of the population's genes are from this one wolf, and the inbred population continues to hover near extinction. The wolf and moose populations on Isle Royale represent one of the longest-running and most closely followed studies of predator-prey relationships in science, and there is intense debate over the right course of action. Should "natural" processes be maintained and the wolves allowed to die out? How much management and intervention is acceptable? Is Isle Royale a wilderness or a laboratory?

Albatrosses appear to challenge the classical view about the negative impacts of genetic depletion on populations. What explains this mystery? It turns out that right whales and albatrosses may share a similar behavior that helps their resilience: both species, it appears, have the ability to avoid inbreeding. In the case of the whales, this could have something to do with their complicated courtship rituals. Female right whales are incredibly promiscuous and throughout the year, a female will roll on her back and call to any nearby males, who swim from miles away to congregate around her. Each male attempts to get close to the female, jostling others in the process, slapping the surface with their flippers and tails, and blowing water. When the female turns right side up for air, the males swim underneath her and try to mate. This maelstrom, called a surface active group, can last for hours but it's not aggressive. Male right whales don't fight each other for the right to mate; instead they practice some of the strongest sperm competition known in the animal kingdom. When it comes time to mate with a female, numerous males might inseminate her, and their sperm race to fertilize her egg. Right whale biologists know by looking at genetic samples gathered by researchers that this fertilization is only successful when the

male has dissimilar DNA from the female. If inbreeding occurs, there is a high rate of spontaneous abortion. The result is that right whale offspring have higher levels of genetic variability than scientists would expect from a population with such a minuscule gene pool. Amazingly, each time a male and female right whale successfully produce a calf, they increase what's called the effective population size of the species, the number of individuals who can contribute genes to the next generation and slow genetic drift.

Right whales are one of the only marine species for which there is a genetic profile for nearly every individual, about 80 percent of the population. But after peering into their DNA and spending tens of millions of dollars in research and protection efforts, scientists can still only guess at basic facts of the animals' existence, such as where noncalving whales go to feed in the winter, or where breeding takes place, or where some whales go to feed in the summer. The more one learns about right whales, the more the species begins to seem like a potent reminder of something easy to forget: in an era of Google Maps and microchips and unabashed faith in technology's power, some things on earth are so big and complex—oceans, climates, whales—they dwarf our comprehension, let alone our ability to control them, for better or worse.

The ability to analyze the mitochondrial DNA of right whales has shown scientists that whalers weren't just killing individual animals: the exploitation of North Atlantic right whales in their historical range—from the west Saharan coast, Azores, Bay of Biscay, western British Isles, and the Norwegian Sea—likely resulted in the extinction of a right whale culture passed through females. This realization makes outlier whales like 1334 who are seen every now and then in strange places that much more fascinating. One of the old names for the North Atlantic right whale is *Noordkaper*, referring to the North Cape of Norway. A male, Porter, showed up there. There are also the oddball sightings off Greenland and Iceland and some in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Could these outlier whales be retracing ancient migrations in search of food, revisiting places that are the right whale's historical habitat, faint memories of which are inscribed in their DNA? When the whales from the Bay of Fundy disappeared in 2013, is this how they found another place to feed, and is it vulnerable to climate change too?

The larger role that baleen whale species, of which right whales are one, play in the ecosystem and regulating climate has only recently been revealed to biologists. Although few in number relative to other marine species, whales likely act as pumps for recycling nutrition around the ocean, feeding on copepods and krill and then releasing fecal plumes and urine that fertilize water for phytoplankton to grow, which then supports the ocean's food chain from the bottom up. Whaling disrupted this system by reducing

whale populations, in turn likely influencing carbon storage and fish stocks. And so just as climate change may be negatively affecting North Atlantic right whale populations, their recovery may be needed more than ever to help stabilize oceans against the potential impacts of climate change.

An evolutionary ethic is one in which civilized man recognizes the continued existence and evolution of other species as integral to his own existence. Neither our pre-agricultural ancestor, nor the peasant farmer who succeeded him had cause for concern beyond the next meal or the next crop, the former because he used a pool of great species diversity, the latter a pool of self-renewing intraspecific diversity. This came to an end with the advent of scientific selection. Today's concern is with preserving and broadening the genetic base. The time perspective for gene pool conservation might be the next 50 or 100 years—which is merely an acknowledgment of the unparalleled technological transience of our age; we cannot foresee even what kinds of crops will be used at that time. For wildlife conservation the position is altogether different. Concern for its preservation is new, a consequence of our destructive age. Nature conservation is fighting for reserves and for legal recognition. The sights often are set for the short-term, although perpetuity is its ultimate objective. Genetic wildlife conservation makes sense only in terms of an evolutionary scale. Its sights must reach into the distant future.

For centuries, humans have collected the living things around us, stuffing them, sticking them with pins, and squirreling them away to feed the curiosity of scientists and the public in an attempt to try to understand the diversity of life on the planet. By 2050, the number of specimens preserved in the 6,500 or so natural history collections around the world are projected to increase by 500 percent from 2.4 billion. Around three decades ago, scientists began hoarding on a different scale: not specimens but genes.

In some cases, the samples are like snapshots of moments in history that might otherwise be lost: frozen water samples of a wetland might reveal microbes that are critical for restoring the ecosystem a hundred years from now. This unknown potential is part of what makes the samples priceless and ignites the imagination, giving scientists and the public a sense of 'what if' exhilaration and hope. There is a latent potential in these collections: Maybe what's actually going to be useful in the future is the microbial diversity on the samples, maybe that's going to be the true contribution. The potential value of the collection isn't known, and when they talk about these collections, people will say, 'We don't know exactly what they are good for, but they will be good for something.'

We must challenge the notion that banking, and embracing the implicitly hopeful future this practice represents, is unproblematically good. All cryo-

technologies of endangered species conservation have in common the fact that, to a greater or lesser extent, they fail to conserve what many people want to hold on to. There is a kind of reductivism underlying these *ex situ* approaches to conservation in which accessions—be they living birds, seed, or DNA samples—must be held outside of the vast web of relationships that have given rise to and sustained them. We can't put culture in liquid nitrogen, the same way we can't bank the natural communities. No one would say that freezing the DNA of humans preserves what makes us human.

It is deeply problematic to call genetic banking of tissues conservation at all. The idea that having isolated the genome we have somehow captured the essence of an organism and species is incredibly reductive. The notion that behavior is genetically determined is not how developmental processes work. Sadly, this comes up again and again. People are patenting gene sequences as if a genome is a blueprint of an organism.

Genetic banking might seem so appealing today because it suspends political realities and moral conundrums for a future time and place. With its biblical reference to imminent world disaster and its transcendent faith in technoscientific interventions, the Frozen Ark project reflects the moral discourses of global environmental movements that, after the multiple failures of the initiatives envisioned at Rio, are now permeated with urgency and irony. The act of genetic banking reveals a paradox of modern science: as we seek to stem the loss of biodiversity through technological means, this very act compromises the authenticity of wild nature that consists of mutually embedded forms of both cultural and biological life. For all these reasons we should be extremely skeptical of the biological essentialism and faith in technological solutions represented by genetic banking. The idea that the behavioral profile of the animal is reproduced just on the basis of the genes is entirely based on this sense that animals have no learning process, no culture, that they don't learn from—and impart information to—other species. That's just tremendously anthropocentric—that there are no species cultures or relationships beyond biology and that biology can be reduced to genes.

Fundamentally, freezing is a technology of deferral. It's for deferring action to the future. And the future may be a future that never actually arrives. The value of these collections is that they allow us to say look, we know there is a problem and science has been a huge part of creating that problem in terms of the byproducts of industrialization. We don't know what we are going to do, but in the future, other people will have better answers and so we owe it to future generations to preserve some substrate of the world we are destroying.

In all of these cases, the organization's rationale is that humans, as the

drivers of these extinctions, have the responsibility to deliver environmental justice, to make amends, in other words. The fact is, humans have made a huge hole in nature in the last 10,000 years. We have the ability now, and maybe the moral obligation, to repair some of that damage. For de-extinction advocates, our current technological powers mean that the laws of nature are malleable and reversible, and can be bent toward their conception of environmental justice.

De-extinction offers a seductive but dangerously deluding techno-fix for an environmental crisis generated by the systemic contradictions of capitalism. It is not simply that de-extinction draws attention—and economic resources—away from other efforts to conserve biodiversity as it currently exists. The fundamental problem with de-extinction is that it relies on the thoroughgoing manipulation and commodification of nature, and as such dovetails perfectly with biocapitalism. US lawyers have already begun arguing that revived species such as the mammoth would be “products of human ingenuity,” and should therefore be eligible for patenting. Species revival thus slots seamlessly into the neoliberal paradigms of research established by the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, which legalized the patenting of scientific inquiry, as well as with the intellectual property agreements foisted on the world since the establishment of the World Trade Organization in the mid-1990s.

The biological patent allows a company to own an organism’s principle of generation, its genetic code, rather than owning the organism itself. Biological production is thereby transformed into capital’s primary means for generating surplus value. Under this new regime of biocapitalism, living organisms are increasingly viewed as programmable manufacturing systems.

“Our ability to use technology to engineer nature is itself natural. An ant can make an ant hole, that’s natural, and if we make a skyscraper, that’s natural. But it’s not ancient. I think overall the exploration of our planet and other planets, and exploration of nature and the changing of it—small changes or big changes—help us to appreciate just how vast the whole thing is. It becomes more complex and more diverse the more we change it.”

Arguments for de-extinction feel like a kind of spiritual denial that evolution and extinction are two sides of the same coin, and so long as we choose to fuel our survival as a species through the exploitation of natural resources, extinctions may well be the cost of our appetite for progress. Until we make space for other species on earth, it won’t matter how many animals we resurrect, there won’t be many places left for them to exist.

Science and technology can make us feel that the gulf between human magnitudes and eternal truth has been bridged. We can peer into genomes, locate the beginning of the Big Bang on the outer edges of space, travel down the Grand Canyon via Google Earth, and clone animals. But even as we assume a mythic God-like perspective on the universe, the majority of us who live in the modernized world have no idea how to survive away from civilization. How quickly would we revert to primitive awe if directly confronted with nature's power, alone in the Arctic night? What should we do to save that place and its creatures, and its ability to transform us?

Barbary Churchill Lee, a volunteer caretaker who worked with captive 'alalā from 1976 to 1981, was fired for her controversial decision to bury the body of a female crow, 'Ele'u, that had died on her watch from bird malaria, rather than give the carcass to the government biologists. Walters describes how Lee brought the bird to state officials who culled some of its tissues; she then decided to take 'Ele'u back to the mountain where she had been captured, hiding the bird's remains, in a sense, from science.

"I could not limit myself to thinking like a scientist. I had feelings! I will never forget driving up the mountain at Hualalai with 'Ele'u in a small box on my lap, tears streaming down my face. In my lap I held one of the last broken links between a species' existence and its extinction. There was this deep voice of Hawaiian history and belief in me, telling me that to bury 'Ele'u was the only thing to do. In the old days, warring groups hid the bones of their own for fear the enemies would dig them up and defile them by making fishhooks and other objects. To this day, no one knows where the bones of King Kamahameha are hidden—probably deep in a cave somewhere along the Kohala Coast. I didn't want the enemies of 'Ele'u to have her bones, either, because they would defile them in their own way, leaving them in a freezer or dried on a shelf until they get thrown out. I know burying her wasn't technically the correct thing to do, but it was the right thing to do."

These neoliberal ideologies have come to permeate conservation to such an extent that discussions of biodiversity have become the site for the elaboration of what might be called disaster biocapitalism. Just as disaster capitalism seizes on political calamities to further its accumulative aims, this disaster biocapitalism takes the extinction crisis as an opportunity to ratchet up the commodification of life itself. At the UN Climate Conference in 2007, for example, the UN and the World Bank announced the Reducing

Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) scheme, which pays countries of the global South to reduce their deforestation and protect their existing forests. The carbon stored in these forests can then be quantified and sold to polluting industries in the global North, who can buy this stored carbon in order to “offset” rather than reduce their own polluting emissions. REDD was launched without input from indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities, and has already been linked to many land grabs and human rights violations. All too often, local land stewards are represented in corporation-controlled international agreements like REDD as destroyers of biodiversity, and are consequently subjected to forced removal so that ecosystems can be privatized and re-engineered as income-generating commodities to be sold on global capital markets.

Building on the REDD paradigm, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 2008 launched its own model for marketing “environmental services” through the Business and Biodiversity Initiative, which includes mechanisms for offsets and for the creation of “natural capital.” Within such schemes, the environmental commons of the global South, the planet’s tropical forests and oceans and the myriad creatures who inhabit them, become a source of natural capital that can be quantified and traded on global markets. Biodiversity is thereby transmuted into a generator of offset credits that allow polluting corporations and governments to continue their ecological mayhem. Some of the world’s most prominent conservation-based environmental NGOs have signed on to this disaster biocapitalism, including Conservation International, the Worldwide Fund for Nature, the Nature Conservancy, and the Environmental Defense Fund. Appallingly, many of these conservation organizations are intensifying the social impact of the environmental crisis by encouraging states in the global South to evict indigenous people, who are deemed incapable of managing their land, from conservation areas, creating a new category of “conservation refugees.”

The philosophy of ‘in the long-run we are all dead’ has guided economic development in the First and Third Worlds, in both socialist and capitalist countries. These processes of development have brought, in some areas and for some people, a genuine and substantial increase in human welfare. But they have also been marked by a profound insensitivity to the environment, a callous disregard for the needs of generations to come. It is what we know as the ‘global green movement’ that has most insistently moved people and governments beyond this crippling shortsightedness, by struggling for a world where the tiger shall still roam the forests of the Sunderbans and the lion stalk majestically across the African plain, where the harvest of nature may be more justly distributed across the members of the human species, where our children might more freely drink the water of our rivers

and breathe the air of our cities.

The genomic information of plants, animals, and human beings is the common wealth of the planet, and all efforts to make use of this environmental commons must be framed around principles of equality, solidarity, and environmental and climate justice.

Biological Bigotry

The story goes something like this: Around 350 BC, the Athenians established a memorial to the naval heroics of their founding king, Theseus. They placed his ship in port, where it stayed for centuries. Over the years, the planks of the ship began to decay, so the Athenians replaced the rotting planks with new wood until eventually all of the wood from the original ship was gone. According to the Greek historian Plutarch, the ship became the focus of a popular riddle among philosophers. Was it the same ship? Had the ship changed, and if so, how? Some philosophers believed the ship was still Theseus's, and others contended that it wasn't the same boat at all. Aristotelians believe the form of a thing is its essence, and according to this logic because the ship had the same exact form as the one that was sailed by Theseus, it was the same ship. Heraclitus, however, argued differently. According to him, everything moves on and nothing is at rest; comparing things to the flow of a river, he famously said that no one can step into the same river twice.

This sage wisdom seems to prophesy the modern understanding of biology. We know today that all the component parts of our bodies—our cells—are in a state of constant flux, of dying and regenerating. Are we the same person nonetheless? Over generations of human history, natural selection has played upon the DNA in our cells, changing the sequence of proteins in a never-ending rearrangement of molecules that adds up to human evolution. So am I the same species as my distant ancestors?

What is a species? Scientists tell us that species are the principal units of evolution. But if evolution is a process of changes in the genetic makeup of a population over generations, how can we define species? This riddle is called “the species problem,” and it has everything to do with how we think about nature and the exuberant process called evolution that has produced so many billions of life-forms. Before the nineteenth century, people believed species were divinely created with fixed identities: an animal had an essence that gave it membership in a group with other animals with the same essence. Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist who invented the species classification system, believed that he was cataloging earth's creatures as created by God. After *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, it was impossible to rationally refute that species actually changed over time. This made defining a species confusing. Where do they start and end? Darwin himself recognized this problem when he wrote:

“The domestic races of many animals and plants have been ranked by some competent judges as the descendants of aborigi-

nally distinct species, and by other competent judges as mere varieties.”

Understanding the process that created species is intrinsic to understanding what a species is. But this quest has led brilliant minds into scientific and philosophical sinkholes for the last 150 years. And for all our knowledge about biology today, the issue has never been definitively answered. Today there are about twenty-six different “species concepts.” The most simple of these is the biological concept, first developed in the 1940s by the renowned evolutionary biologist Ernst Mayr. Mayr defined species according to their potential for reproducing. He said that species are a group of natural occurring populations that are reproductively isolated from other groups; they can’t interbreed or produce fertile hybrids. A horse and a giraffe, for example, are different species according to the biological concept, because they can’t procreate. This definition has been described as problematically basic. Scientists have discovered a lot of examples of animals that they can’t prove exist according to fixed reproductive rules. Some asexual animals, like starfish and sea anemones, exempt themselves from the mechanics of breeding outright. But we wouldn’t say that the hundreds of species of starfish aren’t species, even if they don’t fulfill the biological concept’s specifications.

Another concept, the phenotypic, defines a species based on shared physical characteristics. But appearances can be deceiving and unhelpful. What degree of difference determines a new species? Differences between populations or individuals might be irregular, the product of environment or what’s called genetic drift, the random disappearance of genes as individuals die or don’t reproduce. The colorful plumage of a male mallard duck looks different from the somber female mallard duck. They’re the same species, but using the phenotypic concept to define why is unhelpful.

In the early 1980s, biologists came up with a new species concept, something they felt better encompassed life in all its abundant variation. Called the phylogenetic concept, it says that species are the smallest cluster of organisms that share a common ancestor. Since the 1980s, molecular genetic analysis has given scientists a very precise tool for determining common ancestry. By focusing on specific markers in an animal’s genotype and comparing it to a related animal, they can determine complex demographic histories including how long ago the animals split from one another into separate branches on the evolutionary tree. The problem is that the phylogenetic concept often ends up splitting species into very small groups, and this can dramatically balloon the number of species we understand to exist on earth. Consider, for example, that the number of lichens in the genus

Niebla goes from eighteen to seventy-one species. Birds of paradise in New Guinea increase from some forty species to as many as 120. In a few unique cases, the phylogenetic definition reduces the number of species within a taxonomic group: the number of deep sea snails shrinks from two to one, and mollusks as a whole decrease by 50 percent.

Adherents to the biological concept call proponents of the phylogenetic concept “splitters,” and in turn, biological conceptors are known as “lumpers.” The conflict between these two groups comes down to whether small differences between organisms don’t really matter, or whether small differences are the very stuff that makes up a distinct species. It may seem like a turgid theoretical debate, but it has big consequences for how we intervene to conserve animals. In 2004, researchers published a study in the *Quarterly Review of Biology* analyzing over 1,200 species previously defined according to Mayr’s biological concept, and reconsidered them according to the phylogenetic concept. The result was that the number of species increased by 48 percent. Even in well-studied groups such as mammals, arthropods, and birds, the authors reported an increase in the number of species as high as 75 percent. Applying a phylogenetic concept also changed the number of species potentially designated as vulnerable and endangered, and they estimated the cost of protecting these “new” species at about \$3 billion in the United States alone.

Introduced populations always start out small, and a big problem for small populations is inbreeding; because there are few animals around, they end up mating with close relatives, even brothers and sisters. Inbreeding brings together deleterious recessive mutations (which normally lurk undetected in large populations), causing malformation, disease, death. But there’s a twist—geneticists had figured out that small populations might go through a process called purging, in which the harmful mutations that make inbreeding so dangerous are lost completely. Any population that successfully negotiated this process would emerge not only immune to the detrimental effects of inbreeding, but fitter, faster, better all round. Because the conditions under which it’s supposed to occur are so restrictive, purging remained merely a theoretical curiosity—until now. Research has shown beyond any doubt that the Louisiana harlequins were successfully purged of their bad mutations in the 1980s and now grow faster and have more offspring than native Asian harlequins. They’re also completely immune to inbreeding—even offspring of matings between siblings show no ill effects at all—which means they can now easily establish from even a tiny starting population. Indeed, we are now in the bizarre situation where harlequins could even be invasive back in their native range, potentially able to brush aside the native population from which they evolved.

The evil quartet of extinction—invasive species, overharvesting, habitat destruction, and fragmentation—if you look at those same factors, they are all associated with rapid evolution. One result of this discovery is that conservation strategies might only preserve species in a very limited sense. Even the term ‘species conservation’ is problematic. Evolution always happens. Always. It’s a kind of ignorance, even arrogance to think you can prevent a species from evolving. This thorny tension is particularly evident in the field of conservation genetics, which, as one authoritative text puts it, seeks to “preserve species as dynamic entities.”

The Pecos pupfish live along the Pecos River from Texas into New Mexico, but because the river has been dramatically altered by damming and channelization, the fish are now isolated in various habitats. There used to be constant gene flow and now we’ve got all these micropopulations with no gene flow and their own evolutionary trajectory. How do you “fix” it? You can augment it but you might also mess up their local adaptations. You could introduce alleles that don’t allow them to adapt to their environment. It’s hard. It’s easier to document the travesty than it is to fix it.

In some instances, the conservation policy has been to prevent species hybridization at any cost. The USFWS in New Mexico euthanized a litter of puppies that they found to be a cross between a rare Mexican gray wolf and a dog in 2011, and then later killed the wolf mother when she was found near dogs again.

The entrenched belief is that evolution is a march of progress—a stooped, hairy figure of a primate growing into an ape-ish Neanderthal and eventually an upright, civilized, modern human. This concept of historical progression is ingrained upon us in elementary school, and it makes evolution seem intuitive and completely rational: human consciousness is so complex in its powers that it must be the apex of an inevitable trajectory. But the paleontological record reveals this concept of evolution is a sham. Life on earth is not shaped like a cone that extends upward toward increasing diversity and complexity, eventually resulting in us.

The proof is in the Burgess Shale, a fossil field in British Columbia first discovered in 1909. Over 530 million years ago, tens of thousands of marine creatures were fossilized in a limestone quarry that preserved not only their bones but also all of their soft tissues in exquisite detail. These creatures evolved during the Cambrian explosion, when life on earth underwent massive diversification and the blueprint for virtually all modern animals appeared. Initially, paleontologists thought these fossils belonged in existing taxonomic categories, but then in the 1970s, they discovered this was a colossal mistake. The Burgess Shale contained a range of original anatomical designs unparalleled today, indeed, a greater diversity than all

the marine life put together in our modern oceans. These fossils are proof that evolution is not a narrow beginning and a constantly expanding upward range. Rather it is more like breathing, the chest rises, reaches a point, contracts, reaches a point, begins expansion again.

A crucial thing to remember is that although we talk of animals and plants advancing and retreating as the glaciers waned and waxed, only the first part of that is literally true. Although species did spread north as the ice melted, those northern colonists generally died out when the ice returned. That is, there was no actual retreat, and the only populations that survived the whole cycle were those that remained in the southern refugia, mostly adjusting to rising and falling temperatures by ascending and descending the nearest mountain. So, although the English are fond of referring to their oaks as “English oaks,” the oaks that thrive in England today spent more than 99 percent of the last two-and-a-half-million years in Iberia and are more accurately ‘Spanish.’ Not only that, but the refugium that provided specific colonists seems to be rather random, so English oaks in a previous interglacial may well have been Greek, or perhaps Italian.

I was going to say that I plan to debunk the myth that alien species constitute the second largest global threat to biodiversity (after habitat destruction). But on reflection I think that assertion has been debunked so often (yet is endlessly repeated) that it no longer deserves the status of a myth, and is best described merely as a straightforward lie. Not only are alien species not the second biggest threat to biodiversity, they aren’t the third, or fourth, or even the fifth largest cause. Nor are invasive species one of the most important threats to the continued survival and well-being of mankind. The lives of large numbers of people are all far more likely to be ended or made miserable by war, disease, pollution, climate change and shortages of energy, minerals, food, and—above all—fresh water.

The zebra mussel is widely credited with causing severe environmental and economic damage, and, specifically, it is reckoned to be the main threat to the survival of North American freshwater unionid bivalves. Unionids are certainly in big trouble, and several species are already extinct, but their problems began long before the introduction of zebra mussels to America in the 1980s. A familiar cocktail of habitat destruction and degradation (arising from building dams, water abstraction, erosion, and eutrophication), pollution, overharvesting and loss of the host fish that parasitic unionid larvae need to complete their life cycles are all implicated. Indeed there’s every reason to believe that the decline of unionids would have continued even if the zebra mussel had never arrived.

As is often the case, blaming an alien for filling the gap left by declining natives looks like shooting the messenger, reflecting the usual unwillingness

to recognize that the real problem is us humans, and our unwillingness to take the hard decisions needed to improve things. The zebra mussel illustrates nicely another odd feature of our attitude to alien species: an unwillingness, and indeed often a blank refusal, to accept that alien species might have any redeeming features whatsoever. As far as aliens are concerned, the balance sheet has only a debit column.

It's not the fact of human intervention that removes nativeness forever, it's the timing and scale of human intervention. In Britain, no one is quite sure if you have to be around before the Neolithic, or before the Romans, or even the Normans, to be native. If you're inoffensive (and threatened) enough, like the white-clawed crayfish, before 1500 seems to be good enough. In America, the modern interpretation of 'native' seems to mean before 1492, even though pre-Columbian Americans domesticated plants and indulged in long-distance trade. In Australia, beating Joseph Banks to landfall makes you native, despite plenty of evidence that plants and animals were moved around the wider region for millennia before the Endeavour pitched up in Botany Bay in 1770. In other words, pre-technological, pre-European societies, however advanced, and whatever they may have got up to, are often—but not always—exempt from the definition of human agency. It's not always easy to tell, of course, since the definition of nativeness is frequently adjusted ad hoc to help to prop up human preferences decided on the basis of other criteria. Just as well, too, since a too strict application of nativeness would require the return of Europe to a pre-Neolithic ecological state.

A core belief that follows directly from niche theory is that niches are central to understanding why communities contain the number of species they do: specifically, that the available niches are all occupied and that the community is therefore saturated. In a saturated community, it's difficult by definition for a new species to gain a foothold. But if one does become established, that means fewer resources for the ones already present, leading sooner or later to the local extinction of a resident species. The almost universal finding of experiments, however, is that communities are not saturated and that local diversity can easily be increased.

As of the end of 2007, there was no evidence that any plant had been lost from the USA, or from any US state, as a result of competition from an alien plant. In fact after 400 years of European settlement, establishment of aliens has led to an increase of about 18 percent in the number of species in the US flora (excluding Hawaii and Alaska), while only 0.6 percent of native plant species have been lost. In other words, a ratio of colonization to extinction of about 24 to 1 for the USA as a whole, with similar values for individual states. Even in Hawaii, much more heavily invaded, the ratio is 12 to 1. At the much smaller scale of US counties, the pattern is the same,

with many new colonists and very few losses of native species. Moreover, the counties with the most natives always have been, and continue to be, the most invaded by aliens.

The biodiversity of Pangaea exactly equals the sum of the present biodiversity of the Earth's various continents. It may seem surprising that homogenization does not necessarily mean low diversity, but we don't need to travel back in time to Pangaea to have that confirmed. Because ocean currents easily transport fish and coral larvae over distances of thousands of kilometers, coral reefs over vast areas are effectively closely connected and contain mostly the same species, yet remain one of the most diverse communities in the world. Both theory and coral reefs agree: In the future, different regions of the world will be more similar than they are now. They will also be more diverse.

However, before you break open the champagne at the news that moving species around at our present rate will increase local biodiversity, and have little or no effect on global biodiversity, it's worth recalling that that's not all we're doing. We have already altered three-quarters of the Earth's ice-free land surface, and by 'altered' I mean made it much less able to support the animals and plants that used to live there. Again island biogeography tells us what that means: if we leave a quarter of the Earth for wild animals and plants, we eventually end up with a quarter as many species as we started with. Many of these survivors will be species that we have moved to new continents, and many of them will be species that don't too much mind a planet that consists mostly of crops, cities, and roads. But blaming them for that sorry state of affairs would be foolish.

The view of the biosphere you learned in school, of natural biomes, disturbed to varying extents by humans, is seriously out of date. The modern world is essentially a mosaic of new 'anthropogenic biomes' (croplands, plantations, settlements, cities, rangelands), with here and there natural ecosystems embedded within them. It's because so much of the world has been transformed so dramatically that there is now a consistent winning syndrome. In a world before significant human influence, there was room for everyone, and all available tickets in life's lottery had some chance of winning. It's only in the last few thousand years, and especially in recent centuries and decades, that being a rat or a weed has turned out to be the golden ticket in life.

To reiterate, and to make sure we don't lose sight of the basic point, winning and losing has little or nothing to do with being alien or native. Invasive aliens are winners by definition, but so are many natives. If we profoundly transform the landscape in a way that suits a small suite of fast-growing, effectively dispersed plants, then that's what we get, with the

aliens that fit this description expanding along with the natives. If Britain had no alien plants, we would still have a landscape dominated by plants that no one likes very much, except they would be exclusively natives: coarse grasses, nettles, brambles, ragwort, docks, dandelions, thistles, bracken, and hogweed. In the UK, as elsewhere, successful species, alien or native, are symptoms of change rather than drivers of that change, and all they are telling us is that they are very pleased with the changes we have made to their environment.

The critically endangered island fox (*Urocyon littoralis*) declined precipitously in the mid-1990s, for reasons that were not in doubt: predation by golden eagles. Golden eagles are of course a native North American species, but they were attracted to the island in large numbers by the presence of non-native feral pigs. The answer was clearly to remove the pigs, but ecologists predicted that, if pigs were removed first, the large eagle population would focus more on the foxes, probably leading to their extinction. No one wanted to harm the eagles, so a programme of live trapping was begun, resulting in the removal of 44 eagles from the island; only then was it considered safe to eradicate the pigs.

Nevertheless, the foxes hardly recovered, and it was subsequently discovered that not only had one pair of golden eagles been missed, this pair happened to be fox specialists. Once this pair of eagles was tracked down and removed, there was a modest recovery of the foxes, although numbers remain low. Underlying the whole saga, as so often, was a man-made environmental problem—in this case, the loss of bald eagles from the island during the 1950s owing to contamination of the surrounding sea with DDT. The highly territorial bald eagle competes with the golden eagles for nest sites, so it was not only the abundant pigs, but also the absence of competitors, that allowed golden eagles to move to the island in large numbers. Bald eagles have now been reintroduced to the island, and with any luck the foxes will now be safe. Bald eagles themselves take the occasional fox, but are primarily fish-eaters.

A study of attempted plant eradications in California showed that plants that occupy an area of no more than one hectare can usually be eradicated, but the probability of success declines rapidly as the infested area increases beyond this. One hectare is a tiny area—only slightly larger than a football pitch—so in practice this means eradication has to begin long before there's any possibility of knowing whether a plant will eventually cause any kind of problem—in fact, almost before the plant has been detected. Optimists have likened eradication to a 100% lump sum payment, after which the job is done and no further payments are necessary. Experience, on the other hand, suggests most attempted eradications have more of the character of a

small down payment, with a promise of further installments that continue indefinitely.

Sometimes the unintended ramifications of a biological control introduction are so complex, just thinking about them makes your head hurt. Consider the attempt to control European spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*) in North America, using two European flies (*Urophora spp.*) that lay their eggs in the flower heads of the knapweed and massively reduce its seed production (although not enough to actually control the weed). One reason control was ineffective is that the fly larvae rapidly became a favoured food of native deer mice. This extra food meant that the population of deer mice increased and as a result more of them became infected by a hantavirus (which also infects humans).

At the same time, as the mice ate knapweed seed heads containing fly larvae, they also inadvertently consumed whole knapweed seeds that they then deposited in their dung, thus providing a novel dispersal mechanism for the weed. Not only that, but knapweed seeds eventually turned up in the fecal pellets of great horned owls that had presumably eaten deer mice, thus providing long-distance dispersal far in excess of anything the weed might have achieved on its own. Finally, if you're still with me, deer mice are actually big seed-eaters, but don't like the taste of knapweed seeds. So the greater numbers of deer mice (caused by a diet of nutritious fly larvae) ate more seeds of native plants, reducing their establishment from seed.

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, politicians persist in behaving as though ecologists actually understand how ecosystems work (which they sort of do) and can predict their future behaviour (which they can't). Beliefs that would be hilarious if they weren't so tragic.

Rachel Carson had it right over 50 years ago in *Silent Spring*:

“By their very nature chemical controls are self-defeating, for they have been devised and applied without taking into account the complex biological systems against which they have been blindly hurled.”

Invasive alien trees can be useful for restoring native forest. In Puerto Rico, native pioneer trees could cope with natural disturbances such as drought, hurricanes, floods, and landslides, but are mostly unable to colonize land that has undergone deforestation, extended agricultural use, and eventual abandonment. In these sites, low-diversity pioneer communities of invasive trees develop, but over time native trees invade. Alien pioneers may dominate for 30–40 years but the eventual outcome, after 60–80 years, is a diverse mixture of native and alien species, but with a majority of native

species. In the absence of the initial alien colonists, abandoned agricultural land tends to become pasture and remain that way almost indefinitely.

By way of an example of a more enlightened approach, consider *Psidium guajava*, a tropical tree that has been widely introduced outside its native South and central America and is regarded almost everywhere as a successful and unwelcome pest. Despite this reputation, in Kenya guava has real potential as a tool in the restoration of tropical forest. Studies of isolated guava trees in farmland showed that they were extremely attractive to a wide range of fruit-eating birds. In the course of visiting them, birds dropped seeds beneath the guavas, many of them from trees in nearby fragments of rainforest, and many of these seeds germinated and grew into young trees. Surprisingly, distance to the nearest forest didn't seem to matter at all—trees up to 2 km away (the longest distance studied) were just as good as trees much nearer to forest fragments. Guavas establish easily on degraded land, and each tree is potentially the nucleus of a patch of regenerating rainforest. Of course, most seedlings that grow beneath guavas are just more guavas, but guava is an early-successional tree that soon dies out when overtopped by bigger trees, and it does not actively invade primary forest.

A common feature of both these examples, and of many similar instances, is the difficulty we humans seem to have in thinking on the right timescale. As abandoned land in Puerto Rico is colonized by a virtual monoculture of alien trees, and as the tenure of this alien blanket extends to 20, 30, or even 40 years, the harder it becomes to resist the conviction that something must be done. In the face of mounting clamour from conservationists, local residents, and the media, a policy of patient optimism becomes harder and harder to sustain. Yet this is the right policy, because on the timescale of the development of mature forests, even if not that of local politics or conservation funding programmes, 30 or 40 years is no more than a moment. The end product, a mixed forest of native and alien trees—but with a majority of natives—may not be what you might have wished for in an ideal world, but it's a whole lot better than anything likely to come from any attempt to interfere.

Palaeoecologists naturally think in terms of millennial timescales and tend not to be very impressed by how the world happens to look right now. Instead they see species responding in their own individual ways to environmental change, constantly coming together and separating into what ecologists like to call communities, but which in reality are only stills from a movie. Pause the movie a few millennia later, or even a few decades or years, and you get a different snapshot. At some scale, all species are invaders and all ecosystems are novel.

From starlings to flatworms, and wool aliens to wheat, it's hard at first

sight to see what all these introduced species have in common, but in fact all do share one elusive quality: they thrive around people. For plants and animals introduced deliberately for food, as pets or for ornament, that's obvious, but it's equally true for accidental introductions. Before they could be moved by human agency, those New Zealand flatworms had to find their way into plant pots, wool aliens onto domesticated sheep, rats and brown tree snakes onto ships, and zebra mussels into the ballast water of ships. The sheer volume of modern trade and travel means that any species that likes the company of *Homo sapiens* or his buildings, vehicles, pets, gardens, livestock, or fields will eventually find itself dispersed to new pastures.

At the same time that we are dispersing species in unprecedented numbers, we're also making such dispersal more and more necessary. Species have always found it useful to be able to disperse to new habitats, but habitat destruction and fragmentation make effective dispersal more vital than ever, if species are to survive. In addition, there is the growing threat of climate change, which means that everything has to move, sooner or later. How fast does this migration have to be? The instantaneous velocity of climate change varies a good deal from place to place, but has a global mean of 0.42 km/yr. That's a little over a meter a day, which doesn't sound like much, but it means that only eight percent of the Earth's protected areas have "climatic lifetimes" of more than a century. In other words, in 92% of reserves the temperature of the reserve's coldest part will exceed the present temperature of its warmest part in only 100 years. Of course, individual species may have climatic tolerances that allow them to survive in changed climates, or they may be able to make small migrations to different aspects or altitudes. But, for many species, confined to mountaintops or particular types of geology, surrounded by unsuitable habitats (especially urban or intensive agriculture) or facing insurmountable barriers such as water, dispersal may be difficult or impossible.

The question is not whether species should be moved, but which species should be moved. A 'no translocation' policy simply stacks the odds even further in favour of raccoon, weeds, aphids, mealybugs, and all the other common, widespread, easily dispersed anthropophiles. Assisted migration of endangered species is a small step in the direction of allowing them to compete on a playing field that still slopes uphill, but slightly less steeply than before. Critics argue that moving species is "playing God," but we're playing God already; it just happens to be a rather Old Testament sort of God, one who has taken to heart the maxim that "the Lord helps those who help themselves," and interpreted this to mean that those who are in no position to help themselves don't deserve any help at all.

British botanists continue to argue about the smallflowered tongue orchid

(*Serapias parviflora*), previously known only from mainland Europe, which was found growing in Cornwall in 1989. Orchids produce vast numbers of extremely tiny, light seeds, and it's entirely possible that they blew across the Channel. If they did, then the tongue orchid arrived without human assistance, which means it qualifies as a native (and for careful protection). Then again, it's equally likely that seeds fell out of someone's trouser turn-ups or arrived stuck to the sole of someone's shoe, or possibly that it was deliberately planted. If any of those is the case, then it's just another bloody weed, to be ruthlessly exterminated.

So low has the stock of introduced species fallen that it is now possible to commence a scientific paper with the line, "Many ecosystems worldwide are dominated by introduced plant species, leading to loss of biodiversity and ecosystem function," in the certain knowledge that no one will be surprised by such a statement, and certainly that no one will ask for it to be supported by any actual evidence. Of course, this text is pure boilerplate, not intended to trigger the firing of many—or even any—neurons in the reader's brain, maybe not even intended to be read at all. Nor do those who wrote it necessarily believe it; at least, not in the sense of having arrived at that conclusion by weighing the evidence. It's just something that gets routinely stuck on the front of any paper about alien species.

Introduced crops and livestock account for 98 percent of all food produced in the US, with a value of \$800 billion per year. So, however much we discover (or imagine) aliens are costing us, it's going to be small relative to that. When adding up the costs of introduced species, it's traditional to ignore anything on the positive side of the balance sheet, so just make a mental note of that and move on.

Take the South American fire ant, reputed to be costing the US \$2 billion per year, although as usual much of this is not the cost of actual damage caused by the ant but the costs of control. But how much of a problem is the fire ant? Here's what Rachel Carson had to say in *Silent Spring*:

"During most of the forty-odd years since its arrival in the United States the fire ant seems to have attracted little attention. The states where it was most abundant considered it a nuisance, chiefly because it builds large nests or mounds a foot or more high. These may hamper the operation of farm machinery. But only two states listed it among their twenty most important insects pests, and these placed it near the bottom of the list. No official or private concern seems to have been felt about the fire ant as a menace to crops or livestock.

With the development of chemicals with broad lethal powers, there came a sudden change in the official attitude towards the fire ant. In 1957 the United States Department of Agriculture launched one of the most remarkable publicity campaigns in its history. The fire ant suddenly became the target of a barrage of government releases, motion pictures, and government-inspired stories portraying it as a despoiler of southern agriculture and a killer of birds, livestock, and man. A mighty campaign was announced, in which the federal government in cooperation with the afflicted states would ultimately treat some 20,000,000 acres in nine southern states.”

Carson then spends some time carefully examining the claims that the fire ant is a serious threat to agriculture, wildlife, and human health, dismissing all of them. *Silent Spring* is by its very nature a passionate, polemical book, but Carson reserves some of her most vitriolic invective for the blanket spraying of dieldrin and heptachlor against the fire ant:

“Never has any pesticide programme been so thoroughly and deservedly damned by practically everyone except the beneficiaries of this ‘sales bonanza.’ It is an outstanding example of an ill-conceived, badly-executed, and thoroughly detrimental experiment in the mass control of insects, an experiment so expensive in dollars, in destruction of animal life, and in loss of public confidence in the Agriculture Department that it is incomprehensible that any funds should still be devoted to it.”

A final irony is that one of the principal sins laid at the door of the fire ant by the US chapter of Biological Invasions is a decline in the bobwhite quail, but, as Carson reported, the highly toxic organochlorine pesticides used against the fire ant all but eliminated quail from the treated areas. There’s no doubt fire ants can have negative effects on quail, but it’s a huge leap to infer that the ants are responsible for the bird’s long-term decline. In fact, as usual, an alien species is taking the rap for a deeper problem.

These accounts of the costs of aliens in the US are so badly drafted that it would be hard not to laugh if the estimates they contain were not taken so seriously. But the real lesson is not any particular instance of incompetence or chicanery, but what it tells us about the mindset of those who have allowed themselves to be swept along by the invasions industry. Essentially it’s obligatory to accept the notion that alien species have only negative effects. Thus the “costs” of alien species have a rather peculiar interpretation for those of us used to putting together the credit and debit

sides of a balance sheet to arrive at a net cost. Not only that, but the ‘costs’ themselves need not include anything that actually leaves you worse off as a result of the existence or activities of a particular species. They can also include—or, indeed, consist entirely of—the costs of attempting to control the species, plus the costs of clearing up the mess left by such attempts, even if there’s little evidence of any original harm (e.g. purple loosestrife or spotted knapweed), or if such attempts are never likely to succeed without tackling a deeper underlying problem (e.g. tamarisk). Of course these costs are real, in the sense that they represent actual dollars spent—the question is whether it was money worth spending. The final lesson is that, whenever you hear eye-wateringly colossal sums mentioned in the context of costs of alien species, you should always enquire exactly what these costs are supposed to include, and where they came from.

Why are we quick to blame invasive species for anything and everything that appears to be going wrong, yet very slow to blame overfishing, pollution, habitat loss, overgrazing, climate change, intensive agriculture and all the other much more fundamental causes of our environmental problems? It’s tempting to say that the real problems are just too big, too diffuse and basically too damned expensive; tackling them in a way likely to make any difference would probably involve reductions in our standard of living, or at least changes in the way we live our lives. All that’s true, but there are even deeper psychological reasons, connected to our evolutionary history and the way we assess risks. We find it hard to get worked up about abstract, impersonal threats—however big their potential damage—so malaria, climate change, and obesity don’t get anything like the attention they deserve. On the other hand, we are acutely sensitive to threats from clearly identifiable, discrete agents, so our anxiety about terrorists, violent criminals, and pedophiles is out of all proportion to any harm we are likely to suffer at their hands.

Where do invasive species fit in? You might imagine they would belong with things that we have trouble taking seriously, like influenza and tuberculosis, but you’d be wrong. The popular media, and even scientists to some extent, have succeeded in personalizing the threat from invasive species by describing them as a “menace” or a “plague,” and crucially even attributing malicious intentions to them: “evil aliens.” Purple loosestrife alone has been described in newspaper reports as an “invader,” “menace,” “pest,” “plague,” “killer,” “scourge,” “monster,” “public enemy number one,” “enemy of wildlife,” “time bomb,” “disaster,” “nightmare,” “rogue,” “strangler,” “barbarian,” and, my personal favourite, the “Freddy Krueger of plants.” Even the relatively neutral word ‘alien,’ used by scientists in a value-free way to define non-native species, raises troubling political and

moral issues when used casually, and an unthinking nativism may have roots in xenophobic and racist attitudes, or at least reinforce such attitudes if employed carelessly.

Nativeness is not a sign of evolutionary fitness or of a species having positive effects and classifying biota according to their adherence to cultural standards of belonging, citizenship, fair play, and morality does not advance our understanding of ecology. Our attitude to alien species seems rooted in a mythical past where foreign species invaded pristine native habitats, but in a world completely transformed by humans, all species now find themselves effectively strangers. The hope that the native species that were happiest before that transformation will continue to be so seems likely to be disappointed. This is not to suggest that conservationists abandon their efforts to mitigate serious problems caused by some introduced species, or that governments should stop trying to prevent potentially harmful species from entering their countries. But conservationists and land managers should organize priorities around whether species are producing benefits or harm to biodiversity, human health, ecological services. In other words, treat species on their merits, where those merits are defined by the best available scientific evidence.

The problem lies in looking at the world in a way that makes the notion of alien species threatening ecosystems or species not a hypothesis but a truism. For example, invasion biologists worry a lot about biodiversity, but only native biodiversity; introduced species are not allowed to contribute to biodiversity. Thus alien species can never add to biodiversity, they can only reduce it, not because there's anything special about them, but because we've chosen to define biodiversity in a way that makes that inevitable. Much the same applies to the concept of "harming" ecosystems. If one defines as 'harm' any significant change a non-native species causes, the statement that non-native species harm ecosystems represents a tautology. Thus, if the presence of zebra mussels means clearer water, more aquatic plants, more fish and more wildfowl, then that's harmful by definition, presumably because the previous water clarity, plants, fish, and wildfowl were just right. Of course, muddier water and fewer plants, fish, and wildfowl would have been harmful, too. What we seem to have here is an appeal to a vague concept of ecosystem 'health' or 'integrity,' where it's never quite clear what either term means, although it's implicit that alien species are inimical to both.

Ecology should not—cannot—act as an authority that promotes one vision of nature at the expense of others. Value-judgments lie outside the borders of science; if a wetland, formerly dominated by *Typha* (cattail or reedmace), is now dominated by purple loosestrife, no science can tell

us that is a bad outcome, or a good one. By pretending that it can, we risk losing the one thing that is absolutely essential to the conservation of biodiversity, which is the informed consent of the public. It's been pointed out, although one gets the impression it hasn't really been grasped, that attempted eradication or control is a waste of time if active support (or at least passive cooperation) is required of people who believe the target species to be useful, desirable, attractive, or simply harmless.

The not unreasonable tendency of film and television to focus on extraordinary nature in apparently pristine habitats already tends to endorse the impression that real nature is found only in remote, special places, far from where most of us live. Promoting the idea that alien species somehow don't count, and are in fact some kind of living pollution can only increase what already threatens to become a serious disconnect between people and nature, and between people and scientists. Most of us live in cities, and our daily contact with nature, if we have one at all, is predominantly with introduced species. Even native species are effectively exotic in cities, in the sense that they have colonized an entirely artificial, human-transformed environment.

The scientific view that such species have no value or meaning is the exact opposite of most people's experience, as evidenced by the long history of contact with cultivated plants and domestic animals. The conservation argument has to make sense to the public, and a rigid separation of indigenous and exotic does not make sense. In fact, the public are ahead of the scientists in this respect; they intuitively grasp that in the world they inhabit every day, some species (some alien, some native) are clearly well adapted, while others are not, and they frequently neither know nor care that some of the well-adapted species don't 'belong.' As one invasion biologist put it (without irony):

“The public does not readily distinguish between native and non-native species: as long as an animal looks nice and is not threatening people or causing undue harm, the public tends to view species equally.”

Quite—you just can't trust the idiot public to get anything right, can you? Fucking deplorables. Not having been educated to venerate the idea of nativeness, they are just as likely to value novelty, beauty, diversity, or rarity. In fact, of course, so does the conservation community, privileging the native and denigrating the exotic only when it suits them.

When biologically-based claims have such a range of political usages—however dubious, and however unfairly drawn some may be—it becomes particularly incumbent upon us to examine the scientific validity of the

underlying arguments, if only to acquire weapons to guard against usages that properly inspire our ethical opposition. For if the biological bases are wrong, then we hold a direct weapon; and if they are right, then at least we understand the argument properly, and can accurately drive the wedge that always separates factual claims from ethical beliefs.

“Any argument for preferring native plants must rest upon some construction of evolutionary theory—a difficult proposition because evolution is so widely misconstrued and, when properly understood, so difficult to utilize for the defense of intrinsic native superiority.”

We need to understand Nature doesn't make mistakes, that Earth is, at minimum, four-billion years old, and that earth has been engaging in this process a lot longer than our species has existed. We need to understand that processes that no scientists understand are occurring on both very large and very small scales. So, when we see “invasive” plants moving wholesale into new ecosystems, we need to ask in all humility, What are they doing? What is their purpose? For the most part, invasion biology is not interested in asking these questions, but only in building a case for demonization. That's not good science. That's the stuff that cults are made of.

We should commence any attempt to control alien species with our eyes wide open. We should be certain, from an honest, objective analysis of the best available evidence of its positive and negative impacts, that our intended target is causing net harm. We should be sure that the alien species itself is the problem, and not merely a symptom of an underlying environmental problem. Nor should we tinker with our definitions of ‘native’ and ‘alien’ to suit our prejudices. When we come to try to add up the economic and environmental costs of alien species, we should not define those costs in a circular, question-begging way, such that alien species are harmful by definition. And, although this should be too obvious to need saying, I'm going to say it anyway: the costs of trying to control a species should not—logically, cannot—form any part of the justification for attempting that control in the first place.

We should also be reasonably confident that the benefits of control will outweigh the costs, bearing in mind that since eradication is rarely an option the costs of control may extend indefinitely into the future. If eradication really is the aim, we should recall that most eradication attempts, even when all the indicators are positive (which they rarely are), end in failure. Since many alien species thrive in disturbed, early-successional environments, we should consider the possibility that our control attempts themselves may

create more of these conditions and thus make things worse. We should be mindful that many invasions go through an initial boom phase, but eventually settle down at a lower level, not least because of adaptation by both the invader and the invaded ecosystem; accordingly, we should try not to react in panic to the early stages of an invasion.

Last but not least, we should choose targets, methods, and strategies that offer some prospect of success. While one can reasonably argue that things would have been worse if no control had been attempted, something is wrong when, after a 15-year programme costing nearly half a billion dollars, the area of South Africa occupied by introduced plants has actually increased.

Adopting the approach outlined above, which in reality is no more than a belated outbreak of common sense, will waste a lot less time and money on wild-goose chases. We will also, by crying wolf less often, run a much lower risk of alienating the public. There is a deep well of goodwill towards attempts to manage introduced species, but it's not bottomless, and we squander it on lost causes at our peril. I also suggest that we should stop expecting too much from ecology. The ability to predict in advance which species will become invasive is the Holy Grail of invasion biology, but such predictions and the Grail seem to share the unfortunate property of not actually existing. Looking for traits of invasive species is an interesting intellectual exercise that is likely to keep a few ecologists in employment for the foreseeable future, but all the evidence suggests it's unlikely to be of much practical use.

Finally, in a world in which the spread of alien species is only one small part (and far from the most important) of the complete transformation of the biosphere by human activity, we should stop thinking that we can turn the clock back to some pristine, pre-human golden age, even if we had any idea what that pristine state looked like.

Spaceship Earth

I Ain't No Fuckin' Fish-Frog

In normal evolution for sexual organisms, it goes like this: A mommy and daddy creature love each other very much. They get together and make a bunch of babies. Nature, red in tooth and claw, culls the inferior babies. The survivors become the new mommies and daddies.

Planet Earth is at exactly the right distance from the sun to create the right temperature for human life, and its atmosphere has the ideal oxygen level. How convenient! Instead of seeing purpose in this situation, however, any biologist will turn the causal connection around and note that our species is finely adapted to the planet's circumstances, which explains why they are perfect for us. Deep ocean vents are an optimal environment for bacteria thriving on their super-hot sulfuric output, but no one assumes that these vents were created to serve thermophile bacteria; rather, we understand that natural selection has shaped bacteria able to live near them.

The backward logic of these philosophers reminds me of a creationist I once saw peel a banana on television while explaining that this fruit is curved in such a way that it conveniently angles toward the human mouth when we hold it in our hand. It also fits perfectly in our mouth. Obviously, he felt that God had given the banana its human-friendly shape, while forgetting that he was holding a domesticated fruit, cultivated for human consumption.

“If a man prefers to look for his kindred in the zoological gardens, it is no concern of mine; if he wants to believe that the founder of his family was an ape, a gorilla, a mud-turtle, or a cockroach, he may do so; but when he insists that I shall trace my lineage in that direction, I say No Sir! I prefer that my genealogical table shall end as it now does, with Cainan, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.”

There are many reasons that people oppose the idea of human evolution, and one may have to do with mind perception. People find it difficult to imagine a mind being created or destroyed. Conservation of mind means that it is difficult to imagine the powerful human mind coalescing out of a set of intrinsically mindless processes. The mutation and recombination of genes is a process with no more mind than a rainstorm, and yet science suggests that it is responsible for our entire mind, both our agency and our experience.

People are happy to describe physical processes (e.g. having an immune system) as the result of evolution, but they are far less comfortable with ascribing mental processes to evolution—especially love. If you believe in God, however, there is no amazing creation of mind *ex nihilo*, as He can merely pass on a small piece of His own mind to others, like lighting a torch from an eternal central flame. This belief is reenacted symbolically in Catholic baptism, when infant children are presented with a candle lit from the flame of the Paschal candle, representing the light of Christ now burning in the newly baptized child.

A large part of every scientific discovery, Darwin's included, involves paying attention to the long ignored.

Contrary to the common assumption, Charles Darwin did not originate the idea of evolution. By the middle of the nineteenth century the mere fact of evolution had been around for a long time, and most thinkers of the time were perfectly content to leave it at that. The absence of a theory to explain evolutionary change didn't trouble them, wasn't experienced as a pressure, as it was by Darwin. He knew there had to be some intelligible mechanism or dynamic that would account for it, and this is what he went looking for—with well-known results. In his *Origin of Species* he wasn't announcing the fact of evolution; he was trying to make sense of the fact.

The idea of the evolution of life was one that Charles Darwin's own grandfather, Erasmus, had written a poem about five years before his birth:

First forms minute, unseen by spheric glass,
Move on the mud, or pierce the watery mass;
These, as successive generations bloom,
New powers acquire and larger limbs assume;
Whence countless groups of vegetation spring,
And breathing realms of fin and feet and wing

Yet—and this is what set him apart from most of the naturalists of his day, with their stamp-collector's mentality—Darwin always thought as he saw; “I am a firm believer that without speculation there is no good and original

observation,” he wrote once. Darwin’s turn of mind was encyclopedically visual, relentlessly explanatory—he asked a why question about everything he looked at, but his answer to every why question that he asked was to look again at exactly what.

Intelligence comes in two kinds: the ability to break down a general proposition into specific instances and the ability to sum up specific instances in a general proposition—the analytic ability and the aphoristic gift. Most have to settle for one. G. K. Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw both had the supreme gift of summing up an argument in a phrase, but couldn’t for the life of them see the practical consequences of an idea that sounded good when you said it—for example, what an honor-and-agriculture society would actually be like in modern times, or what the result of a planned economy run by a Superman would actually become.

Darwin had both kinds of intelligence, but what makes him exceptional in intellectual history is that neither kind came in crisp, neat tones of conventional smartness. He could break things down, and he could build things up, but he couldn’t do either one simply or neatly. This was surely the source of his father’s frustration with him, and of his frustration with himself; it is exactly the trait that, most often, makes bright kids look dumb. Darwin was smart without being quick—he had no aphoristic intelligence, no ability to make a concise summary of a point. His intelligence worked at length, over time, and in the accumulation of incidents rather than in the incisive example. This was why even as an adult Darwin believed himself to be, despite the evidence of all his books, which are industry and accomplishment enough for any man, a slow or awkward writer. He wasn’t; he was just a particular kind of writer, not a phrase maker or a caricaturist but an argument maker and a pointillist.

Science is a collection of stories about facts, not a mere collection of data dumps. Darwin’s theory about subsidence jumped far beyond any data that lay at hand; Darwin had seen relatively few coral reefs, and of course neither he nor anyone else could ever have observed a volcano sink and a reef form around it. It was the first instance of the power of what would become typical Darwinian reasoning: what looks big, beautiful, and designed is just chance plus time—a volcano sinks, and tiny animals take advantage.

Such ideas were composed in what he later called “a mental riot,” where, as he said at the time, he chose “to let conjecture run wild.” He thinks wild thoughts—that there’s nothing so remarkable about man, with all his brainpower, appearing on earth; the amazing thing is that mind appeared at all. Man’s rise is “nothing compared to that of the first thinking being.” He follows strange lines of thought: what if animals are as worthy of humane treatment as the slaves he had seen treated so cruelly on his voyage? After

all, all living things “may partake from our origin in one common ancestor; we may be all netted together.” Netted together—drawn together not in one neat hierarchical chain of being but entrapped in one common web of life. The ladder of life is replaced in a phrase with the growing bush of organisms. “Plato,” he writes, “says in *Phaedo* that our ‘necessary ideas’ arise from the preexistence of the soul, are not derivable from experience.—read monkeys for preexistence.” Read monkeys for preexistence. Metaphysics is instantly collapsed into biology.

Darwin’s notebooks of 1838 mark the real beginnings of his evolutionary thought and are a monument in the history of the modern mind—they are among the most charming and ingenuous monuments ever made, a coral reef of many small free speculations that has since turned into bedrock. The more purely observational Darwin of *The Beagle* is gone, and his mind now races from poetry to psychology to philosophy and back again. The line between the empirical and the philosophical—for that matter between the scientific and the literary—is broken, ‘disrespected’ as kids say today, in a way that makes something genuinely new to thought. Philosophical concepts are tested by natural facts, and natural facts are always searched for what they mean about man and history.

Truth had both to be said and to be softened, and at length.

He struggles to place philosophy on a natural footing:

“Origin of man now proved. Metaphysics must flourish. He who understand baboon would do more toward metaphysics than Locke.”

His mind is testing, probing, reading, and taking in evidence equally from the classics and from his own observation. At the core is a new practice—the old philosophical ideas of aesthetics and attraction, of what sexual allure is and what makes beautiful things look beautiful to us, can be tested not by more philosophy but by actual evidence from observation. And behind the new practice looms a new idea, his “theory”—that mankind is not a shining poem apart but one page in the long history of life, which blends seamlessly from one era to another and one species to another, and where when man wiggles his ears he is recalling his primeval past: He who understand baboon would do more toward metaphysics than Locke.

He is already a materialist and aware of the extent of his materialism. “Mine is a bold theory,” he admits at one moment, but it is not a crude one: matter, the ancestral past, shapes our minds and our appetites; our minds make ideas, and the ideas change matter. He sees that the constant human need for causation makes “savages” think that a god must cause thunder

and lightning. But what really interests him is that the inborn urge toward explanation makes it happen, that even science begins in the basic struggle to understand, the theory-making propensity common to all living things:

“All science is reason acting/systematizing on principles, which even animals practically know (art precedes science—art is experience & observation).”

Art is “experience & observation” in the sense, one gathers, that it can record behavior without supplying explanation—we don’t need to know what causes Hamlet to find him interesting.

He mocks man’s arrogance. In one of the “transmutation” notebooks he writes:

“If all men were dead then monkeys make men.—Men make angels.”

That is, the monkeys would seem the most astounding of all creatures, set apart from the rest of creation, while creatures with gifts like man’s would be seen as supernatural. But he doesn’t deny men’s agency, or our minds. There is a lovely, telling small note where, just after his reflections on monkey expressions, he writes:

“Nothing shows how little happiness depends on the senses more than the fact that no one, looking back to his life, would say how many good dinners he had had; he would say how many happy days he had spent in such a place.”

We have sensual experience, animal appetites, and arrive at the idea of happiness. Happiness is made of many dinners, but the dinner provokes a concept larger than just their enumeration. Sensation becomes conceptual thought. The mind turns good dinners into happy days.

Yet Darwin did understand clearly, and began to brood at length on, what he eventually called the “wedge” of death, the reality that his new theory implied that death and suffering and pain were, from some point of view, creative but not justified. It wasn’t that suffering was for your own good, or for the good of the species; suffering just was. It might in the long-run produce innovation, but that wasn’t its point. Its point was—well, its point was a dagger pointed at the heart of “natural theology,” which insisted that nature, though cruel seeming in individual cases, was purposefully benevolent seen whole. The infliction of suffering in that view implied not a long-term direction but a perfected balance, a plan; we suffer for a purpose. This kind of Panglossian hopefulness Darwin dismissed.

“Pain & disease in world, & yet talk of perfection.”

Even if civilized people could temper the Malthusian horror for man, nothing could alter it in the long course of nature. Death was the thing that weeded out life. The process might have a history, but it didn't seem to have a moral or, really, a point.

Darwin looked for evidence in the homely, the overlooked, the undervalued, and the artisanal. This enterprise of learning from the low—of making the mere naturalist and fancier into a peer of the scientist—was an effort to shift the sources of knowledge and models of thought.

The point that Darwin wishes to make through the agency of dogs and birds, though not directly demonstrative of his thesis, is brilliantly illustrative of it. If a wolf—within a time frame so short that it can almost entirely be recorded, and by means so simple that they can be mastered even by illiterate people—could be transformed through selective breeding into everything from a Great Dane to a toy Pekingese, then surely Nature, working on a time scale so much greater, could produce even more dramatic transformations—say, monkey to man. Similarly, if one kind of pigeon can become all kinds of pigeons—some to deliver mail and others just to pout and look pretty—then one kind of animal could surely become many others as it descended through time and the pressures of specialized niches.

Instead of entering the argument by the front door of the temple, where people debate the origin of the earth and the destiny of man, Darwin, with an artless shrug, enters through the back door of a barn. Do we really know what happens when animals change? Well, yes, he says, and here's what we know, very exactly. Nor is this a mere gesture occupying a page or two ('one need only look at the rich achievements of the domestic breeder to see. . .') and pointing in a general way toward an acknowledged truth. Darwin offers instead a complex and exhaustive demonstration of how animal domestication and breeding work, by someone who has been in the shed with the birds and the eggs. We learn countless details about how pigeon fanciers change pigeons, and about how cattle vary in pasture. His immersion in the field enables him not only to make his primary point at length but also to make a critical secondary point: that even when domestic breeders aren't trying to vary their cattle, the cattle vary anyway, through isolation and inbreeding. Change happens when you want it to happen, and when you don't.

“Life. . . uh. . . finds a way.”

The remarkable thing about Darwin as a writer is not how skillfully he uses metaphor but how artfully he avoids it. He argues by example, not by

analogy; the point of the opening of *The Origin* isn't that something similar happens with domesticated breeds and natural species; the point is that the very same thing happens, albeit unplanned and over a much longer period. The notebooks and letters and earlier drafts show that analogies—not least the very idea of “selection,” nature conceived as breeder—were powerful tools for him, as for anyone else, but it was part of his shrewdness to use them parsimoniously in his exposition.

The habit of “sympathetic summary,” what philosophers now call the “principle of charity,” is essential to all the sciences. It is the principle that a counterargument to your own should first be summarized in its strongest form, with holes caulked as they appear, and minor inconsistencies or infelicities of phrasing looked past. Then, and only then, should a critique begin. This is charitable by name, selfishly constructive in intent: only by putting the best case forward can the refutation be definitive. The idea is to leave the least possible escape space for the ‘but you didn't understand’ move. Wiggle room is reduced to a minimum. This is so admirable and necessary that it is, of course, almost never practiced.

Sympathetic summary, or the principle of charity, was formulated as an explicit methodological injunction only recently. In some ways, of course, the practice is very old; we know what we know about the Gnostics because of what Christian writers tell us of their views before refuting them. But we can't entirely trust their account because their only goal is to make the other guy look bad by making his case look ridiculous. The principle of charity is to make the other guy's argument look good (before, of course, making yours look even better). It was not commonplace, either in Darwin's time or before. Mill, for instance, or Huxley, both press down on the sarcasm pedal even as they start to play the organ of their invention.

All of what remain today as the chief objections to his theory are introduced by Darwin himself, fairly and accurately, and in a spirit of almost panicked anxiety—and then rejected not by bullying insistence but by specific example, drawn from the reservoir of his minute experience of life. This is where we get it all wrong if we think that Wallace might have made evolution as well as Darwin; he could have written the words, but he could not have answered the objections. He might have offered a theory of natural selection, but he could never (as he knew) have written *On the Origin of Species*. For it is not only a statement of a thesis; it is a book of answers to questions that no one had yet asked, and of examples answering those still faceless opponents. Years later, Wallace would write to Darwin urging him to take on Spencer's aggressive politicized term “survival of the fittest” in place of his “natural selection.” Darwin calmly explained that the virtue of natural selection was that it was a sister phrase to ‘artificial

selection,' which everyone conceded, whereas 'survival of the fittest' was awkward and might raise political specters.

Darwin tells us himself that he forced on himself the habit, whenever he came across a fact that might be inconvenient for his thesis, of copying it down and paying attention to it, and that this, more than anything else, gave him his ability to anticipate critics and answer them. The idealized notion of the scientist who seeks out falsifications has been mocked, and with good reason. The usual response of the theorist who has predicted that all swans are white, when faced with a black swan, is not 'Look, my idea is wrong!' but 'You call that a swan?' But Darwin's long years in the domestic Eden had also been years in the wilderness, years when he had the chance to brood in a solitary way on what might be wrong with what he was thinking. His objections to his own theory were strenuous but impersonal—or, rather, because they were self-made, they were offered in the same tone, and with the same rigor, as the positive doctrines. In the back-and-forth of actual debate, as our grandfathers would have said, personalities intrude. In the back-and-forth of a self-made contest, both sides have a shot.

Although scientific theories imply their falsifications, they rarely list them. Darwin's does. This was in part a pose, or to put it another way, a stance, a persona. Darwin in his letters is clearly not particularly respectful of the objections that were raised to his theory. But it was something more than canny; it supplies an inner voice, a sound of rational anxiety, a recognition of fallibility and of seriousness that gives his great book an oddly unbullying tone despite being a thrusting, far from tentative or timid argument.

Darwin's special virtue in this enterprise is that he had to summarize, sympathetically, views contrary to his own that did not yet exist except in his own imagination. His special shrewdness lay in making as large an emotional meal of the objections in advance as could be made; he preempted his critics by introjecting their criticisms. He saw what people might say, turned it into what they ought to say, and then answered.

For a new scientific theory to become a model in its time, vastly influential outside its immediate claims, it has to release thinking people from a bond that they had long recognized as too narrow and help them interrogate the world in a new way. What really matters is not that the answers suggest a new metaphor for amateurs but that it shows a new kind of question to other pros. Other scientists have to say not, 'How smart of him to discover that,' but 'How extremely stupid of me not to have thought of that! If only I'd stopped to ask!'

Of course, Darwin's ideas came out of the light of his day—in what other light could they have been made? But his mind was a prism; the light of his

time changed crucially as it passed through, and showed a new and different spectrum.

The analogy linking Darwin's ideas on nature with free market ideas on nations, for instance, though still insisted on by his biographers James Moore and Adrian Desmond, is surely forced. There are resemblances between Darwin's theory of what has been called a "blind watchmaker" who governs natural selection and Adam Smith's doctrine of an "invisible hand" that governs markets. The likeness lies in the idea of a system that has order and pattern without agency, that works efficiently and even elegantly without anyone's having designed it: I buy a house; you buy a house; we put up a fire station to keep me from burning down your house, and we hire a policeman to keep you from burgling mine, and next thing you know, wanting nothing but our own selfish good, we have a neighborhood and a city.

In the same way in nature, a frog eats a bug; the next frog who happens to have a longer tongue comes along and eats more; the greenest of the bugs being preyed on hide best against the lily pads, and before you know it, we have long-tongued frogs attempting to eat ever-greener insects in an ongoing little lily pad world. Organization emerges without the interference of planning. The natural city isn't zoned.

But the differences between nature and the market in time scale and intention are much greater than the resemblances. Adam Smith's invisible hand is really the concerted action of a thousand small acts of calculation; Darwin's great sorter is the cumulative result of a thousand blind acts of copulation. Animals in evolutionary biology don't want to extend their family line, to produce progeny or improve, or even extend, their species; they just want to get laid. The variation that may result—the longer-tongued frog, the greener bug—is, quite literally, a lucky bastard. No male salmon impregnates salmon eggs with the idea of making more salmon. Not even every human group knows that sex will lead to offspring. There is a difference between an invisible hand and a blind watchmaker. One is the result of the immediate interacting of human intentions; the other, of the long-term accidents of animal lust. Greed is good because personal prosperity almost always becomes general; sex is not good because it improves the breed. Sex is sex, and the breed gets better by chance and time, by the oddities of random mutation and the winnowing of natural selection.

If you concentrated on the evolutionary part, which is, as Darwin knew, an old and long-present idea, one of Granddad's tall tales, then you could make it into a kind of progressivism—an explanation of eternal change and social improvement with a vitalist charge. If you concentrated on the natural selection part, the struggle for survival, you could make it into an endorsement of free markets or imperialism or anything else you liked. The

real point, which Darwin understood and was clear about, was that the book got its charge where the two ideas combined to make a third, entirely new one: that things that look fine-tuned by engineering can be made by the compounds of accident, ages, lust, and hunger.

In an odd way, John Stuart Mill, whose *On Liberty* used Darwin's reluctance to publish as an argument for tolerance, may have eaten the social marrow of the theory better than anyone else. His argument for liberty wasn't just, or especially, for the brave Giordano Brunos of the world, who speak scientific truth in the face of the Inquisition and the fire. It was also for the oddballs. It is desirable for people to be eccentric:

“Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained.”

The idea that odd sorts and variations were to be valued for the sake of progress, that bizarre variation was the key to the growth of knowledge, may have been a more truly wise extension of the Darwinian idea to human social life than any other in its day.

How can you imagine time in a way that seems to make sense of our own lives and emotions? For that, far more than God and man, is what Darwin is really always returning to: life and time, life and time, and their complements, death and sex, and how they make the history of life. In Darwin's work, from *The Beagle* to the earthworm, time moves at two speeds: there is the vast abyss of time in which generations change and animals mutate and evolve, and then there is the gnat's-breath, hummingbird-heart time of creaturely existence, where our children are born and grow and, sometimes, die before us. The space between the tiny but heartfelt time of human life and the limitless time of Nature became Darwin's implicit subject, running from *The Beagle* to *The Origin*.

Religion had always reconciled quick time and deep time by pretending that the one was in some way a prelude to the other—a prelude or a prologue or a trial or a treatment. Artists of the Romantic period, in an increasingly secularized age, thought that through some vague kind of transcendence they could bridge the gap. They couldn't. Nothing could. The tragedy of life is not that there is no God but that the generations through which it progresses are too tiny to count very much. There isn't a special providence in the fall of a sparrow, but try telling that to the sparrows. The human challenge that Darwin felt, and that his work still presents, is to see both times truly—not to attempt to humanize deep time, or to dismiss quick time, but to make enough of both without overlooking either.

Darwin's compassion for even the simple creatures who died horribly in nature was real; the caterpillar eaten away from inside by the ichneumon wasp's larvae genuinely made him doubt that any good deity could oversee the world. Death was the one fact whose force could not be argued out, only accepted. It couldn't be brought down to earth by the most painstaking of descriptions. It called him to seek some form of transcendence, some meaning beyond the human cycle of breathing and eating and dying, even while resisting the supernatural meanings of faith. His constant sense of the presence of death helps explain why he came to a new, almost mystical sense of the power of time—time the explanatory force, the justifying force that gives meaning to life by asking us to think in the very long-term. Unable to see life vertically, in terms of the verdict of heaven, he came to see it horizontally, in terms of the judgment of time.

Even Darwin's way of being wrong was the right way of being wrong. As Huxley wrote immediately after the publication of *The Origin*:

“Twenty years hence naturalists may be in a position to say whether this is, or is not, the case; but in either event they will owe the author of *On the Origin of Species* an immense debt of gratitude. We should leave a very wrong impression on the reader's mind if we permitted him to suppose that the value of that work depends wholly on the ultimate justification of the theoretical views which it contains. On the contrary, if they were disproved tomorrow, the book would still be the best of its kind.”

The best of its kind because it asks the right questions in the right spirit, and enlarges the human mind by its very existence.

Darwin used the narrow language of natural observation—of close amateur looking—to change our ideas of life and time and history. Darwin is most fully himself, most alive, in the volumes of narrow observational science that he published regularly in between his speculative books. The end of his life's work, which seems to some a descent, a dying fall—those worms and that vegetable mold—seemed nothing of the kind to him. Nor should it to us. It's the last Darwinian statement: truth comes from close scrutiny of the way things are, with the mind demanding every moment to know how the hell they got that way. The tininess is the point.

Unfortunately the spread of pop Darwinism undermines the strength of the humanities—the tradition of the novel, and poetry and history as authority on human affairs—and of the authority of the people who have mastered those parts of culture to speak in an intimidating way on broad

subjects. Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, even T. S. Eliot—none of them really understood even the rudiments of evolutionary theory yet no one, a scant two generations ago, questioned their right to speak on human affairs not just with wisdom but with authority, with a claim to have mastered the real fount of human wisdom about human life. More important even than our faith in God is allegiance to our Magi. The common reader is now more likely to go to Daniel Dennett or Richard Dawkins, to Steven Pinker or Steve Jones, for that kind of authority, translating academic expertise into moral exhortation. And doing it in the same way: a bit of data, a touch of interpretation, and a lot of moral exhortation, as here. The authority, for good or ill, has passed from the humanities proper to the sciences improper, from literary studies to popular science, and with that passage has come an inevitable and understandable reaction.

There is no struggle between science and art or between evolutionary biology and spiritual faith; there is a constant struggle between the spirit of free inquiry and the spirit of fundamentalist dogma. That struggle is the story of human intellectual history. Atheism is no guarantee of humane conduct. Stalin and Hitler borrowed religious ideas, certainly, but they weren't believers. Nothing is any guarantee of humane conduct, except an insistence on it. In this sense, though Darwinism implies no politics, not even a liberal one, it does imply a philosophy. It implies an intense awareness that all categorical or essentialist claims about living things are overdrawn—anyone who says that all cases of this thing or that thing are naturally one way or another is saying something that isn't so. It also teaches a great respect for the rule of variation, and the particular case. Mill's theory that eccentricity is necessary in society was intuitively closer to Darwin's theory of nature than the other grander theories. There are no neat lines between organisms. There are, truly, no straight lines in nature. The world is a gently graded blending of individual cases into apparent groups. Repetition is the habit of nature, but variation is the rule of life.

Humane materialism might be a good name for it—the recognition that there is a space between what we know and what we feel, and that our lives have to be lived as best we can live them within that space.

Though it may seem a remote possibility to us now, during the formation of the human brain the fear of being grabbed by sharp claws, dragged into a dark hole, and eaten alive was not an abstraction.

Fellow Travelers

“The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.”

If novelty endlessly arises in the course of time, how can one be sure that humanity is the pinnacle of the entire cosmic evolutionary process?

In the microbiome of the human body, only a portion of our cells, genetically speaking, are human in origin. The rest are bacterial.

As unborn babies, we live in an environment that is normally completely germ-free—the womb. For nine months, we have no contact with the outside world except through our mother. Our food is predigested, our oxygen is prebreathed. Our mother’s lungs and gut filter everything before it reaches us. We eat and breathe through her blood, which is kept free of germs by her immune system. We are sheathed in an amniotic sac and encased in a muscly uterus that is corked with a thick plug like a big earthenware jug. All this means not a single parasite, virus, bacterium, or fungus—and certainly no other person—can touch us. We are more sterile than an operating table flooded with disinfectant. This situation is unusual. Never again in our lives will we be so protected and so isolated. If we were designed to remain germ-free once we leave the womb, we would be very different creatures. But that is not the case, so all living things of any size have at least one other living thing that helps them in some way and is allowed to live on or in them in return. This explains why our cells are constructed in such a way that bacteria can easily dock with structures on their surface, and it explains why certain bacteria have coevolved with us over many millennia.

If we could see more than meets the eye, we could watch as a clump of cells grows into a human being in a woman’s belly. We would suddenly see how we develop, roughly speaking, from three tubes. The first tube runs right the way through us, with a knot in the middle. This is our cardiovascular system, and the central knot is what develops into our heart. The second tube develops more or less parallel to the first along our back. Then it forms a bubble that migrates to the top end of our body, where it stays put. This tube is our nervous system, with the spinal cord, including the brain, at the top and myriad nerves branching out into every part of our body. The third tube runs through us from end to end. This is our intestinal tube—the gut. The intestinal tube provides many of the furnishings of our interior. It grows buds that bulge out farther and farther to the right and left. These buds will later develop into our lungs. A little bit lower down, the intestinal tube bulges again and our liver has begun to develop. It also forms our gall bladder and pancreas. But, most importantly, the

tube itself begins to grow increasingly clever. It is involved in the complex construction of our mouth, creates our esophagus, with its ability to move like a break dancer, and develops a little stomach pouch so we can store food for a couple of hours. And, last but not least, the intestinal tube completes its masterpiece—the eponymous intestine or gut.

The masterpieces of the other two tubes—the heart and the brain—are generally held in high regard. We see the heart as central to life since it pumps blood around the body. The brain is admired for its ability to create a dazzling array of new mental images and concepts every second. But the gut, in most people’s eyes, is good for little more than going to the toilet.

When what’s left of our food reaches the internal sphincter, that muscle’s reflex response is to open. But it does not just open the floodgates and let everything out, leaving the outer sphincter to deal with the deluge. First, it allows a small “taster” through. The space between the internal and external sphincter muscles is home to a large number of sensor cells. They analyze the product delivered to them, test it to find out whether it is solid or gaseous, and send the resulting information up to the brain. This is the moment when the brain realizes, ‘It’s time to go to the toilet!’ Or maybe, ‘It’s just a bit of wind.’

A whole crew of ingenious organs works so perfectly and efficiently together that, in an adult human being, they require no more energy than a 100-watt light bulb. Each second, our kidneys meticulously filter our blood—much more efficiently than a coffee filter—and in most cases they carry on doing so for our entire lives. Our lungs are so cleverly designed that we use energy only when we breathe in. Breathing out happens without any expenditure of energy at all. If we were transparent, we would be able to see the beauty of this mechanism: like a wind-up toy car, only bigger, softer, and more lung-y. While some of us might be sitting around thinking, ‘Nobody cares about me!’, our heart is currently working its seventeen-thousandth twenty-four-hour shift—and would have every right to feel a little forgotten when its owner thinks such thoughts.

The appendix leaves only good germs alive and attacks anything it sees as dangerous, and this also means a healthy appendix acts as a storehouse of all the best, most helpful bacteria. Its practicality comes into play after a heavy bout of diarrhea. That will often flush away many of the typical gut microbes, leaving the terrain free for other bacteria to settle. This should not be left to chance. And this is when the appendix team steps in and spreads out protectively throughout the entire large intestine.

Saliva is basically filtered blood. The salivary glands sieve the blood, keeping back the red blood cells, which are needed in our arteries, not in our mouth. But calcium, hormones, and some products of our immune system

enter the saliva from the blood. That explains why each person's saliva is slightly different. Try to not think about this the next time you're kissing your sweetie.

The psychedelic weirdness of dreaming can be explained by the brain's topography: The part of your mind that controls emotions (the limbic system) is highly active during dreams, while the part that controls logic (the prefrontal cortex) stays dormant. This is why a dream can feel intense and terrifying, even if what you're seeing within that dream wouldn't sound scary if described to someone else. This, it seems, has become the standard way to compartmentalize a collective, fantastical phenomenon: Dreaming is just something semi-interesting that happens when our mind is at rest—and when it happens in someone else's mind (and that person insists on describing it to us at breakfast), it isn't interesting at all. Which seems like a potentially massive misjudgment. Every night, we're all having multiple metaphysical experiences, wholly constructed by our subconscious. Almost one-third of our lives happens inside surreal mental projections we create without trying. A handful of highly specific dreams, such as slowly losing one's teeth, are experienced unilaterally by unrelated people in unconnected cultures. But these events are so personal and inscrutable that we've stopped trying to figure out what they mean.

Dreams used to have a much larger role in the popular culture—people would discuss dreams in normal conversation and it was common for people to keep dream diaries. So why did that drop off, but things like astrology somehow stayed popular? I mean, one is an actual thing that happens to everyone, and the other is a system put in place that obviously can't be real. This idea that we're connected to other realities is somehow no longer worth considering at all, even though the multiverse theory and string theory is increasingly prominent, and more and more scientists are reluctantly conceding that certain things about the universe lead to that very possibility.

So two things are happening simultaneously: We're moving into this period where our view of the universe is kind of a 'What the fuck? How could that be?' scenario, where there's this possibility of endless alternative realities across space, totally based on conjecture—yet our dreams are supposed to mean nothing? The fact that we're in a parallel world every night is just supposed to be meaningless? I mean, the same scientists that are trying to explain away our dreams are also telling us things about the universe that are so mind-boggling that we almost can't describe them.

There is this thinking that at the moment you die, maybe all the dimethyl-tryptamine (DMT) that remains in your brain tissue gets used at once. And what's interesting is that all the bestselling books about near-death experi-

ences are always about people getting close to God and seeing relatives and having this calm, wonderful experience. What they never tell you about are the people who have near-death experiences that are not good, and in fact incredibly unsettling. Which really just tells me that we bring so much of ourselves to these so-called afterlife moments, and that maybe this is something we need to prepare ourselves for.

There is an unrealized relationship between sleeping and dying, specifically the sensation of having one's life "flash before your eyes" in a near-death episode. That event is the ultimate dream experience, possibly driven by a flood of dimethyltryptamine. Is it possible that our normal nightly dreams are vaguely connected to this dramatic eventuality? If so, a spiritual person might argue this means dreams are preparing us for something quite important; using the same information, a secular person might argue this means dreams are micro-versions of a massive chemical event that happens only at the very end of life. But either way, such a scenario should drastically alter the significance we place on the content of dreams. Right now, we don't think the content of dreams matters at all. If we end up being wrong about the psychological consequence of dreaming, it will be the result of our willingness to ghettoize an acute cognitive experience simply because it seems too difficult to realistically study.

Most people cannot conceive of an end to themselves. Most people believe they will exist forever, in a place called heaven or in a wheel of karma and reincarnations. That's both the breadth and the limit of human imagination. We exist. We cannot imagine that someday we will not exist. The conceptual limits of the human mind, for most of us in an everyday way, lie remarkably confined by what we've already experienced.

"No man is liberated from fear who dare not see his place in the world as it is; no man can achieve the greatness of which he is capable until he has allowed himself to see his own littleness."

Maybe we ourselves are organisms inside some cosmic superbeast. What we call the universe is nothing more than a bubble of flatulence in its monstrous, gurgling gut, and we can no more comprehend its complexity and purpose than *E. coli* could imagine what makes a human tick or fathom the vast expanse of time that separates its lifespan from our own.

There is a collection of roughly twenty numbers that seem to dictate how the universe works. These are constants like 'the mass of an electron' and 'the strength of gravity,' all of which have been precisely measured and never change. These twenty numbers appear inconceivably fine-tuned—in fact, if these numbers didn't have the exact value that they do, nothing in

the universe would exist. They are so perfect that it almost appears as if someone set these numbers. But who could have done that? Some people would say God.

But the simulation hypothesis presents a secular answer: that these numbers were set by the simulator. That's a rational possibility: that someday, in the future, we'll be able to simulate universes with such verisimilitude that the beings within those simulations believe they are alive in a conventional sense. They will not know that they are inside a simulation. And in that case, there is a simulator—maybe some kid in his garage in the year 4956—who is determining and defining the values of the constants in this new universe that he built on a Sunday morning on a supercomputer. And within that universe, there are beings who will wonder, 'Who set the values of these numbers that allow stars to exist?' And the answer is the kid. There was an intelligent being outside that universe who was responsible for setting the values for these essential numbers. So here is a version of the theological story that doesn't involve a supernatural anything. It only involves the notion that we will be able to simulate realistic universes on futuristic computers.

Part of what makes the simulation argument so attractive is the way its insane logic solves so many deep, impossible problems. Anything we currently classify as unexplainable—ghosts, miracles, astrology, demonic possession—suddenly has a technological explanation: They are bugs in the program (or, in the case of near-death experiences, cheat codes). Theologians spend a lot of time trying to figure out how a righteous God could allow the Holocaust to happen, but that question disappears when God is replaced by a teenager in the year 4956—weird kids love death. Moreover, the simulation hypothesis doesn't contradict God's existence in any way; it just inserts a middle manager.

Of course, sharp-eyed readers might already be seeing the similarities between the simulation hypothesis and countless theological explanations for the world. Is this another instance of taking the currently available knowledge and technologies to craft a narrative which explains the world and one's place in it?

Imagine two men in a bar, having a beer conversation. One man believes in God and the other does not, and they are debating the nature of morality. The man who believes in God argues that without the existence of a higher power, there would be no reason for living a moral life, since this would mean ethics are just slanted rules arbitrarily created by flawed people for whatever reason they desire. The man who does not believe in God disagrees and insists that morality matters only if its tenets are a human construct, since that would mean our ethical framework is based not on a fear of

supernatural punishment but on a desire to give life moral purpose. They go back and forth on this for hours, continually restating their core position in different ways.

But then a third man joins their table and explains the new truth: It turns out our moral compass comes from neither God nor ourselves. It comes from Brenda. Brenda is a middle-aged computer engineer living in the year 2750, and she designed the simulation that currently contains all three of their prefab lives. So the difference between right and wrong does come from a higher power, but that higher power is just a mortal human. And the ethical mores ingrained in our society are not arbitrary, but they're also not communal or fair—they're just Brenda's personal conception of what a society should believe and how people should behave. The original two men finish their beers and exit the tavern. Both are now aware they've been totally wrong about everything. So what do they do now?

For a moment, each man is overcome with suicidal tendencies. 'If we are not even real,' they concurrently think, 'what is the meaning of any of this?' But these thoughts quickly fade. For one thing, learning you're not real doesn't feel any different from the way you felt before. Pain still hurts, even though no actual injury is being inflicted; happiness still feels good, even if the things making you happy are as fake as you are. The 'will to live' still subsists, because that will was programmed into your character (and so was a fear of death). Most critically, the question of 'What is the meaning of any of this?' was just as present yesterday as it is today—the conditions are different, but the confusion is the same. Even if you're not alive, life goes on. What changes is the purpose.

The universe is so efficient at the job of making stars and turning them into black holes that it could almost have been designed for the job. Perhaps the whole thing might be a black hole itself. Viewed in this light—if one can talk that way about something that swallows light—black holes graduate from one-way tickets to oblivion to being seeds of new universes. The result of one of an older generation of black holes going about its natural business of reproducing itself. Which suggests that our universe, in its turn, may have been born in just this way, out of a black hole somewhere else. And if the analogy with sexual reproduction is the right one for this process, it is possible that each time a new universe is born it alters the rules slightly, mutating in the way that life does, setting up the possibility of competition between a whole generation of related universes, which opens up the way for natural selection to work amongst them, favoring those most likely to survive and to reproduce again.

The natural laws in our universe could be the result of natural selection. Black holes could give birth to universes, each with slightly different charac-

teristics. And only those with the ability to develop black holes and spawn baby universes proliferate.

If you keep on extrapolating, you will find that the density required to form a black hole with a mass equal to the mass of the observable universe would be roughly the same as the average density of matter in the universe! We may be living inside a black hole.

Imagine each step you take represents around 100 years of history. The simple conceit has stupefying implications. Let's begin our walk; we'll start in the present and head back. As you lift up your heel there's no Internet, one-third of the earth's coral reefs reappear, atomic bombs violently reassemble, two world wars are fought (in reverse), the electric glow on the night side of the planet is extinguished, and—when your foot lands—the Ottoman Empire exists. One step. After twenty steps, you stroll by Jesus. A few paces later the other great religions begin to wink out of existence: first Buddhism, then Zoroastrianism, then Judaism, then Hinduism. With each footfall, the cultural milestones get more staggering. The first legal systems and writing disappear, and then, tragically, so does beer. After only a few dozen steps—before you can even reach the end of the block—all of recorded history peters out, all of human civilization is behind you, and woolly mammoths exist. That was easy. You stretch your legs and prepare for what couldn't be much longer of a walk. Perhaps it's a short stroll to the dinosaurs, and a little farther still to the trilobites. No doubt you'll be at the formation of the earth by sundown. Not so. In fact, you would have to keep walking for 20 miles a day, every day, for four years to cover the rest of the planet's history. And to reach the big bang you'd have to keep trudging at the same pace for almost another decade.

“You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon, international politics look so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles out and say, ‘Look at that!’”

Earth, with its 24-hour day, is just 0.3 percent wider at the equator—27 miles on a diameter of just under 8,000 miles. If you stand at sea level anywhere on the equator, you'll be farther from Earth's center than you'd be nearly anywhere else on Earth. And if you really want to do things right, climb Mount Chimborazo in central Ecuador, close to the equator. Chimborazo's summit is four miles above sea level, but more important, it

sits 1.33 miles farther from Earth's center than does the summit of Mount Everest.

The oxygen produced by plants, the oxygen that all multi-cellular life on Earth requires, comes from the oxygen in water, not, as everyone assumed, the oxygen in carbon dioxide.

The sun supplies our planet with a constant flow of 120,000 terawatts of energy, which powers our entire world from bacteria to plants and animals, to weather systems and chemical cycles. Humanity uses around the same amount of energy in a year as the sun provides in an hour.

A Chipewyan guide named Saltatha once asked a French priest what lay beyond the present life:

“You have told me heaven is very beautiful. Now tell me one more thing. Is it more beautiful than the country of the muskoxen in the summer, when sometimes the mist blows over the lakes, and sometimes the water is blue, and the loons cry very often? That is beautiful. If heaven is still more beautiful, I will be glad. I will be content to rest there until I am very old.”

Aren't we all tired of capitalism? Haven't most of us gotten sick of the drudgery, the monotony, the exploitation, sucking up to our bosses and management who pretend to care about the average worker? The drive to consume more and more has degraded all art, values, and sense of community in the US. Capitalists literally are holding the people of the Earth in bondage. As liberal democracy crumbles in the West, the risk of neo-fascism continues to rise in North America and Europe.

It's worth examining why the US has TV shows like *Hoarders*, where truly sick people have problems collecting useless crap, and where viewers publicly shame and judge the afflicted. Yet, where is the outrage at the real hoarders, the billionaires, the banks, and the military industrial complex? This is serious hypocrisy, a cultural blind spot: a double standard that is not being addressed by our society.

Why does society not ask arch-capitalists the obvious questions: when is enough, enough? Who needs a billion dollars? Once you can provide a comfortable life for your family, children, and grandchildren, what is the point of hoarding your money in bank accounts and lording over a monopolizing mega-corporation? Where does this endless desire for more come from?

It's fairly obvious that a failure to confront death is closely linked to the bottomless appetite exhibited by capitalists. The perceived need to construct towers, monuments, mansions, and manufactured narratives of

their own greatness is proof. Not to mention how many of the super-rich have chosen to become cryogenically frozen post-mortem: this is in outright denial of their own mortality, and the necessity of death so that future generations may live. In failing to confront death, any object can be used as a crutch, an addiction.

Addiction is linked to social isolation and lack of community, which the capitalist class creates by artificially creating specialized divisions of labor, alienation, and class differences. Addiction leads to a disconnection from what some would call a ‘reality principle,’ leading to further and deeper indulgences and lack of restraint. There are further similarities between capitalists and drug addicts: the impatience, the disconnection from others, the neediness, as well as a general childlike need to be validated and pampered.

We see where capitalism leads: to a permanent crisis, a never-ending state of emergency. Since the 1970s, workers have increased productivity mightily with little to zero increases in wages considering inflation and other factors. Americans are also working longer hours; young adults are even having less sex partly because of this. There is a huge problem with prescription drug abuse (not just opioids), teen suicide is rising (sadly, at a 40 year high for teen girls in 2017), and child poverty isn’t being addressed properly, if at all, by our own government. All of these absolutely tragic issues are connected to capitalism. When we are forced to compete against each other, in grades at school, for that raise or promotion in the workplace, this breeds a mindset of dehumanization.

I would also posit that the separation of young children from their parents when they begin schooling, either daycare or preschool or kindergarten or afterwards, is one of the first steps in life where the feelings of individual atomization starts, and collective social disintegration begins. Being ripped from your parent’s arms because they have to work just to survive, and the state/private/charter school substituting for the role of a parent, is one of the first deep tragedies inflicted on many of us by the “needs” of the modern world. I believe this suffering is lodged deep in our unconscious selves, and this is not being addressed publicly at all, and barely acknowledged in our private lives.

Treatment starts when we want to become free of the Great Beast of capitalism, the “Babylon system” as some like to call it. We must ground ourselves, and return to a deeper relationship with our mother Earth. Self-reliance is true freedom, and families and communities should begin to grow as much of their own food as possible. I understand the limitations for those in urban areas, or those stuck in jobs where time and effort cannot be adequately put towards farming, of course. Collectively, as a city block,

a suburban neighborhood, a rural township, we are all going to have to learn to get together, share food and technology, and become independent of this beast. We must begin to develop a gift economy, an indigenous-based economy, based on reciprocity and trust, not exploitation and coercion.

Other than that, a mass protest movement must be created so the resources that our federal government controls can be shifted from weapons of destruction to schools, health care, community projects, and renewable energy.

I believe it's important to discuss some of the budding alternatives to capitalism that are developing around the globe. In the US, support for socialism has risen immensely, especially among the younger crowd, thanks to the work of Bernie Sanders—notwithstanding him not really being a socialist—and others. Yet how serious are most American socialists? One of the most popular groups in the US is called Socialist Alternative (SA), led by the charismatic Seattle councilwoman Kshama Sawant. SA has some great ideas, and yet, some of their proposals make it seem as if they're just going through the motions. Let me explain.

On their about page, a few things stand out. They write:

“We see the global capitalist system as the root cause of the economic crisis, poverty, discrimination, war, and environmental destruction.”

Very well put. Yet then, this is followed by the line below:

“As capitalism moves deeper into crisis, a new generation of workers and youth must join together to take the top 500 corporations into public ownership under democratic control to end the ruling elites' global competition for profits and power.”

This sounds nice, but I wonder how much time was really spent thinking through the implications of this policy. What if democratic control only leads to redistribution of the companies' wealth, and not fundamental transformation of the products, resource usage, and dangerous working conditions? Where is the sense of urgency, the fact that deadlines are being approached regarding global warming, regarding the ecological damage being done by these companies?

One wonders, has SA bothered to take a look at the list of the 500 top companies? For some, perhaps they can be repurposed to make sustainable products. For others, maybe the factories and warehouses can be dismantled and recycled for public use. For a few, it might be feasible that they could be broken up into smaller entities and non-profit co-operatives. For many of

these companies, though, the only democratic thing I can think of to do is to vote on who gets to throw the first brick or Molotov through the empty building. These corporations have done irreparable harm to the planet. Some of them are simply not going to be able to be reformed.

The only way to transform these entities (the ones that can be saved) properly, with the proper protections, would be to rewrite the constitution to include environmental and social rights, as well as the rights of mother Earth, as Bolivia has done (though we'll have to wait and see if that sticks around post-coup). Without a legal framework based on ecology, there is no way to make sure 'democratic control' of a transnational corporation would actually lead to environmentally-safe production.

SA is notable for fighting for a \$15 an hour wage. Of course this fight is for nothing more than the ability to work full-time and barely be above the poverty line—what a fantastic victory that would be.

SA also wants to "slash the military budget," which is great. SA also proclaims that they support internationalism. Allow me to make a proposal: we stop bombing the developing nations with that military and release all of the US-controlled intellectual property into the public domain. Poorer nations will need massive influxes of knowledge to help them develop while avoiding use of fossil fuels and habitat-destroying industry. The West has accumulated ill-gotten wealth from centuries of colonialism, chattel slavery, and genocidal policies towards the "Global South," and now may be the last chance to give back, before it becomes too late.

Are US socialists committed to these sorts of radical proposals? Are SA and others ready to admit to its followers that real socialism will involve hard sacrifices, and almost certainly (in the short-term, at least) lead to less material goods and privileges that Westerners have enjoyed for centuries? Are socialists as ready to support a living wage in China as they are in the USA? Finally, are American socialists committed to transforming the nation, or just promoting an ideology that is centered too much on human needs, and not enough on the needs of non-humans and future human generations?

The Left has been fragmented for decades. Liberals, socialists, communists, greens, and anarchists have all endlessly debated future models for society. One wonders, how many are just talking, and how many are willing to listen? There already are models for society to live sustainably and to prosper, very, very old ways: by following the paths set by the indigenous.

For instance: it is quite clear that humanity is facing huge challenges unlike at any other time in history. Just one-hundred companies have pumped out 70% of worldwide greenhouse gases since 1988. Is the answer, as SA has posited, really just to democratize these corporations and hope for the best, or to shut them down completely?

Westerners are going to have to realize very quickly that despite our space technology, skyscrapers, and instant media, we are the children in the room when it comes to ecological knowledge. Overpopulation now threatens the world with ecosystem degradation, habitat destruction, global warming, resource wars, ocean acidification, plastics proliferation, pandemics, and mass starvation and drought. Advanced technology in most scenarios will only make things worse. What is the best thing one can do to stop global warming? Not a solar array, but planting a tree. Slow down soil erosion? Plant a tree. What is resistance? Planting a community garden is a more socialist, a more significant thing to do now than attending another symposium on Marxism.

We must realize that it is too late in the game to rely simply on voting. Citizens will respond to a mass movement to the degree that it represents the will of the people: to the degree it can articulate a political truth on a deeply visceral level. Most mainstream socialists have so far been too committed to a flailing, abstract ideology—specifically, wrongly committed to a Eurocentric, technocratic, anthropocentric worldview—to capture people’s imaginations. Developing an ecological worldview, one that acknowledges our interdependence and interconnectedness with all species, is crucial.

Thus, as the twenty-first century progresses, Standing Rock will eventually be seen as having more influence than Occupy Wall Street. We are connected to our planet and the web of life more than we can ever know or attempt to explain. For instance, we won’t end warfare until we abolish factory farming: the two are intimately linked, as exploitation of man over animal allows fascists the ideological justification for exploitation and the killing of man by man. Ecology is the keystone science: it allows us to see the linkages between species, food webs, and provides the science needed to develop scale-appropriate, sustainable technology. Ecologists understand that an injury to one is an injury to all, and under capitalism, we’ve all been wounded, plant, animal, and human alike, even the rich, who’ve suffered spiritual decay and moral disintegration.

The only democracy possible is an ecological democracy, with a long-term planning, and rational, sustainably-oriented national constitutions, a 90–95% reduction in fossil fuel use within two decades at most, and an international consensus which will guarantee safeguards against habitat destruction, even in the face of democratic majority opposition.

“Whoever is not prepared to talk about capitalism should also remain silent about the sixth mass extinction.”

Druids & Engineers

“No wonder they disagreed so endlessly; they were talking about different things.”

“Mankind is a part of the earth’s biological system and is not a form of genie that can successfully provide substitutes for the processes of nature.”

The freedom and flexibility touted by advocates of consumer society were an illusion; individuals’ rights mean little if they live in atomized isolation, cut off from Nature and each other. Critics will call people who believe this names like ‘tree-hugger’ and say they are apostles of a new religion, an irrational cult that fetishizes Nature. The tree-huggers might argue they are simply speaking from the tradition of ecology (or what they understand to be ecology)—a holistic view that seeks to place humanity within a framework of overarching natural law. It asks: How can we best fit into the world, and not overstep our bounds? Even to ask such a question calls for a reordering of society.

Boosting agriculture and industry is not the answer, because the resources necessary for both are being wiped out through destruction of watersheds, raw materials, and purchasing power. Simply giving people better tools will only help people hit limits faster. If just ten fish remain in a pond, the solution to running out of fish is not more efficient nets.

Malaria is caused by a single-celled parasite that is spread by mosquitoes. Because no treatment existed for the parasite, researchers believed that it could best be fought by eliminating the wetlands that were the breeding grounds for its mosquito hosts. During World War I workers in eastern states dug ditches to drain ponds and marshes, then sprayed heavy oil or insecticide into the water to poison remaining mosquito larvae. In the Depression, Washington took over the campaign; ditch-digging was instant work for the jobless. Thousands of newly hired mosquito-fighters cut and poisoned tens of thousands of miles of drainage ditches. So many ditches were dug so fast that in some places local governments lost track of them and begged Washington to conduct surveys to identify them.

Although economists since Adam Smith had championed growth, governments had typically focused instead on promoting national security or economic stability. Indeed, some thinkers feared that untrammelled growth would lead to despotism by concentrating wealth; others argued that continued economic expansion was impossible in developed, mature economies like those in Europe and North America. During the Depression, many US New

Deal programs actually were anti-productivity; in the hope of driving up farm incomes by artificially creating shortages, farmers were paid to plow under millions of acres of cotton fields and slaughter huge numbers of pigs.

Partly influenced by the British economist John Maynard Keynes, some officials fought back against “scarcity economics.” World War II strengthened their hand, as the United States pursued all-out production in the name of victory. The Employment Act of 1946 formalized the shift, declaring that Washington was committed to “promot[ing] maximum employment, production, and purchasing power.” Galvanized by the example of the United States, other Western nations also embraced growth as an overriding social goal. “Government and business must work together constantly to achieve more and more jobs and more and more production,” proclaimed President Harry S. Truman.

The druids heard these pronouncements with horror. Ecological law was clear—the “books must balance.” Truman’s call for “more and more production” was intentionally unbalancing the books. Growth-maniacs were warring against the natural systems that nourished them—a war they had no idea they were fighting.

Few felt, then or now, the overriding importance of sustaining the land in the way the druids did. The knowledge made them feel both superior and isolated—the only people with eyes in a world of the willfully blind. All around them others were marching about their business as if the ground were not literally disappearing under their feet. So much folly! So much waste! They were as oblivious to the consequences of their actions as so many protozoa.

“One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell or make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise. How to ring the bell?”

That was the ever-urgent question. The druids saw themselves as benign conspirators, working to awaken a world that was obviously promoting its own destruction by its quest for growth. But their efforts had little impact. Their voices were small and tinny, drowned out in the roar of war and consumption. People were heedlessly flooding the world, a moronic tide rushing out to the edge of the petri dish.

Perched atop their empires, Europeans and Americans feared losing their thrones to swarming mobs of inferiors. Voices shouted that rich nations,

torpid with prosperity, were allowing lesser races to overwhelm them by unfettered breeding. So low were European and US rates of reproduction that the West was said to be committing “race suicide.” Among the most influential of these voices was Lothrop Stoddard, author of *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, a big hit in 1920. Stoddard’s father was a famous photographer who introduced millions of middle-class Americans to images of people from faraway places. Stoddard himself became a fierce anti-immigration advocate, demanding that the United States close its borders to people from faraway places.

“If the present drift be not changed, we whites are all ultimately doomed. The disappearance of Caucasians would mean that the race obviously endowed with the greatest creative ability, the race which had achieved most in the past and which gave the richer promise for the future, had passed away, carrying with it to the grave those potencies upon which the realization of man’s highest hopes depends.”

Civilization—by which Stoddard meant white civilization—must “either fully adapt or finally perish.”

More striking still, many of the racial alarmists were also leaders in the nation’s new conservation movement. The blue-blooded toffs who feared that the noble and superior white race was menaced by unwashed rabble also saw wild landscapes as noble and superior wildernesses menaced by the same rabble. Prizing the expert governance of resources, they found little difference between protecting forests and cleaning up the human gene pool.

Hitler viewed our species as a group of genetically distinct races warring for survival. He insisted that “regardless of how any race raises the productivity of the land, the disproportionate population in relation to the land remains.” As a result, the duty of Hitler and every other racial leader was to “reestablish an acceptable ratio between population and land area”—that is, to feed their ever-growing races by seizing an ever-greater share of the planet’s finite resources.

One might describe all of US history as little more than a march of destruction, in which colonists chopped, burned, drained, plowed, and shot their way from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

“Our forefathers were one of the most destructive groups of human beings that have ever raped the earth. They moved into one of the richest treasure houses ever opened to man, and in a few decades turned millions of acres of it into a shambles.”

Some critics might now be wailing, 'Free enterprise has made our country what it is!' To this an ecologist might sardonically assent, 'Exactly.' For free enterprise must bear a large share of the responsibility for devastated forests, vanishing wildlife, crippled ranges, a gullied continent, and roaring flood crests. Free enterprise—divorced from biophysical understanding and social responsibility. Ecological collapse tomorrow will lead the day after to nuclear war. If humankind keeps ignoring ecological realities there is little probability that mankind can long escape the searing downpour of war's death from the skies. And when this comes, in the judgment of some of the best informed authorities, it is probable that at least three-quarters of the human race will be wiped out.

Environmentalism is more than the simple recognition that polluting a neighbor's well or destroying a bald eagle's nest is a bad idea. In most cases that recognition can be viewed as a function of property rights. By poisoning a well, a polluter is, in effect, seizing the water without its owner's permission. More precisely, it is seizing use of the water. The eagles, too, are being taken from their owner, the public. Environmentalism, by contrast, is a political and moral movement based on a set of beliefs about nature and the human place within it. Environmentalists want to stop polluting wells and protect bald eagle nests. But they see the well water not so much as property but as part of a natural cycle with its own value that needs to be maintained. The eagle, for its part, is an individual that should be protected from needless harm. Any set of beliefs about the workings of the world is perforce a statement about what is good and important in that world. Environmentalism is an argument that respecting the rules of nature is indispensable to having a good society and living a good life.

Defining a word in a new sense seems academic and abstract, but its consequences are not. Until something has a name, it can't be discussed or acted upon with intent. People, by naming the world, transform it. Without 'the environment,' there would be no environmental movement.

Carrying capacity can be defined by means of a formula: $B - E = C$. In this equation, B is the biotic potential, the theoretical ability of that piece of land to produce plants for shelter, for clothing, and especially for food. E is the environmental resistance, the practical limitations on the theoretical biotic potential. The actual carrying capacity, C , was never as high as the theoretical biotic potential, because there was always some environmental resistance. Hence $B - E = C$. People are degrading the environment so much that E is rising worldwide. In consequence, C —the planet's capacity to support life—is shrinking.

Malthus offered no evidence in his essay to prove that farm harvests could only increase arithmetically. Indeed, Malthus's theory could be restated as

the claim that one species (humans) reproduces at a geometrically increasing rate, but other species (farm crops) cannot. No obvious reason exists for this to be true—for humans to be special in this way. Malthus's evidence for the rapidity of human reproduction came from an article by Benjamin Franklin. But, Franklin made clear in the same article that he believed that plants and people reproduced at comparable rates—the opposite of Malthus's contention. Instead of concocting some reason why farm crops must be less fecund than people, carrying capacity reset the argument.

Carrying capacity was a threshold that could not be surpassed by any species. Yes scientists might be able to use technology to boost harvests enough to outstrip population growth. But the short-term triumph of raising farm output will lead to a long-term calamity. Our species will surpass Earth's carrying capacity, which will destroy the ecosystems that support us. Carrying capacity can not be avoided. Either people will reduce their numbers and consumption to stay below the world's carrying capacity—or the ecological devastation wrought by overpopulation will do it for them. Nature bats last.

Some argue viewing the human dilemma in terms of an ecological carrying capacity is a mistake. The planet's actual, physical carrying capacity is so large—scores of billions of people—as to be irrelevant. The true problem is not that humankind risks surpassing natural limits, but that our species doesn't know how to tap more than a fraction of the energy provided by nature. Harnessing these energy sources will require new technology. But once created, all human needs for heat, air-conditioning, transportation, electricity, steel, cement, and everything else will be satisfied for eons to come. They may concede that food energy, the second kind of energy, is a different matter: more complicated, harder to resolve. Here, warnings related to carrying capacity might be borne out. Food energy derives from plants, either directly (when people eat them) or indirectly (when people eat animals that have eaten them). And the energy in plants comes from the sun, captured by photosynthesis.

Five- to ten-thousand years ago, indigenous people in south-central Mexico developed the first maize from a much smaller wild plant, a grass called teosinte. Since that time Indian farmers have bred thousands of varieties of maize, each chosen for its taste, texture, color, and suitability for a particular climate and soil type. Red, blue, yellow, orange, black, pink, purple, creamy-white, and multicolored—the jumble of colors of Mexican maize reflects the nation's jumble of cultures and environmental zones. The small, varied plots in Mexico are like the anti-matter version of the huge, uniform maize fields in the US Midwest. Maize is open-pollinated—it scatters pollen far and wide. Wheat and rice plants, by contrast, typically

pollinate themselves.

Because wind often blows pollen from one small Mexican maize field onto another, varieties are constantly mixing. Over time, uncontrolled open pollination would create a few, relatively homogeneous populations of maize. But the pollination is not uncontrolled, because Mexican farmers carefully select the seed to sow in the next season, and generally do not choose obvious hybrids. Thus there is both a steady flow of genes among maize varieties and a force counteracting that flow. This roughly balanced genetic sea, maintained by farmers' individual choices, is a resource not only for Mexico but the entire world; it is the genetic endowment of one of Earth's most important foodstuffs.

Some engineers took a route through Mexico that was much like the route taken by some druids two years later. Both groups wrote reports documenting the same terrible poverty and eroded land, but their ideas about the remedy were starkly different. To the druids, the basic problem was land degradation, and the primary cure was to ease the burden on the land. By contrast, the engineers believed that Mexico's issues were caused, at bottom, by lack of knowledge and tools. The difference between these two approaches is profound, and at the heart of the split between druids and engineers.

At the same time, the two reports had a striking similarity: neither attempted to understand how Mexican farmers had got into these straits. When Mexico won its independence in 1821, most of the citizens of the new country were landless peasants who worked on giant estates in conditions little different from slavery. Over time the situation worsened: under the dictator Porfirio Díaz, who controlled Mexico from 1876 to 1910, wealth and land were concentrated among a few hundred aristocratic families, foreign companies, and the Catholic Church. A bloody civil war led in 1917 to a new constitution that promised to redistribute land. Early efforts to fulfill this promise set off such violent resistance by the rich and the Church that the government pulled back.

In 1934 a new president, Lázaro Cárdenas, tried again. The Cárdenas administration seized almost 50 million acres from estates and awarded them to ejidos, peasant-run collectives. (About 4 million acres of this land was owned by US companies, which led to diplomatic squabbles between Mexico City and Washington, D.C.) As before, landholders fought back, some plotting coups and assassination attempts. Others ensured that the ejidos were forced to accept bad land—plots that were too dry or steep to cultivate. By 1940 the eleven-thousand new ejidos were working almost 2.5 million acres of land that had been left alone ten years before. Unsurprisingly, the consequences were often destructive; erosion and soil depletion soared. Much

of the devastation that the druids saw as the unavoidable consequence of high birth rates was tied to political events that were anything but inevitable; much of the poverty that the engineers saw as lack of access to knowledge was the result of efforts by wealthy elites to maintain their position.

In the past, by planting more land, deploying more irrigation, and pumping in more synthetic fertilizer, farmers increased their actual yields. At the same time, engineers dramatically increased the potential yield of wheat and rice by breeding high-yielding dwarf varieties. Channeling the energy of photosynthesis and the nutrition provided by fertilizer into grain, these varieties had a “harvest index”—the percentage of the plant’s mass that is grain—of about 50 percent, almost twice the previous figure. For maize, dwarfing didn’t work, because the shorter plants shaded themselves too much. Instead scientists bred plants that could tolerate being packed closer together. The sum of the two methods was the Green Revolution.

The situation is different today. Farmers can’t plant much more land; in Asia, almost every acre of arable soil is already in use. Indeed, as cities expand into the countryside the supply of farmland may be decreasing. Nor can fertilizer be increased; it is already being overused everywhere (except some parts of Africa). Irrigation, too, cannot readily be expanded. Most land that can be irrigated is already irrigated. Some increase in actual yield is certainly possible. But most engineers believe they must raise the potential yield.

Darwin proved that man was an integral part of nature itself, and not a separate and independent being. People are not special! But the wonders of airplanes, radar, and the atomic bomb has tricked us into believing that we are masters of the universe. Humanity’s future could be bright but only if people don’t think themselves exempt from natural laws. The sole route to securing a future for our species, democratic society, and the planet itself is to understand our place within nature’s limits and to base civilization on this knowledge.

Currently Western civilization is possessed by dementia economica: the insane substitution of limited symbols—such as dollars, pesos, colones, lempiras, and Bitcoin—for such reality as topsoil, fertility, soil metabolism, available water, and complex interdependencies within the ecosystem—including humans. The symbols say that humanity is doing well, when actually environmental deterioration is being accelerated.

The scientific enterprise studies phenomena—atoms, clouds, organisms, planets—by transferring them from the world we live in, with all of its confusion and sentiment, into a special workshop, a place where they can be reduced to abstract, measurable quantities and manipulated in a controlled manner. This method of working is incredibly powerful. It discovered the

laws of electricity and created antibiotics and built the atom bomb and invented X-rays and generated techniques to harvest and store energy from the sun and wind. But it is also risky.

The air in the scientific workshop is so clean and bracing and the results of researchers sequestering themselves inside so satisfying that they lose their bearings. They don't want to leave the workshop. They prefer to live in its world of abstraction, separate as angels from the messiness of life. Or, worse, the findings of the workshop seem so luminous and clear, so like beacons of truth, they forget that the workshop is a special place within the world and begin to think that it is above the rest of life and should control it. And here lies peril, because the people outside the workshop will come to detest and disbelieve the people within its privileged walls.

Scientists say that because the workshop has found that A is true the world should do B. But people in the world notice that when scientists go into the workshop they strip their objects of study of everything but a few measurable quantities, and then the people object that what was stripped away was worthy, even essential. They see the scientists unable to understand the resistance to following course B as condescending aliens who don't share their values—and, all too often, they are correct. Why would you listen to people who have no idea what you consider important? The ensuing rejection of expertise has surely played a role in the rejection of scientific claims about genetically modified organisms, nuclear power, soil depletion, and climate change.

Put fruit flies in a bottle and they will fuck. Should the fruit flies continue to multiply at their initial compound interest rate, it can be shown by computation that in a relatively few weeks the number would be considerably greater than the capacity of the bottle. This being so, it is a very simple matter to see why there is a definite limit to the number of fruit flies that can live in the bottle. Once the number is reached, the death rate is equal to the birth rate, and population growth ceases. Very little thought and examination of the facts should suffice to convince one that in the case of the production of coal, pig iron, or automobiles, circumstances are not essentially different.

Of course, fruit flies do not have access to weapons of mass destruction to use when fighting over dwindling resources. They have no god which tells them they are the chosen righteous few who must exterminate all the parasites dragging the whole down. And they certainly don't have some kind of program for escaping their confines and acquiring resources outside their bottle.

The future of our civilization largely depends on whether humanity will be able to evolve a culture more nearly in conformity with the limitations

imposed on us by the basic properties of matter and energy.

“The humility you portray, the bending at the knee to nature, isn’t actually very thoughtful or wise.”

What I’m talking about is the sense to know one’s limitations and refrain from acting outside them if there is danger of harming others. If you’re a fair weather sailor, don’t take your family and friends out on your 25-footer in a gale. Similarly, given our scientific and engineering community’s poor record of anticipating secondary and tertiary effects of their innovations, it would seem wise to be extremely cautious when tinkering with geoengineering, cloning, gene modification, et cetera. The call of the Swiss for international review before any geoengineering undertaking would be a minimum of caution, but even that was vetoed by the US and Saudis.

The humility I’m talking about is the kind that would remind a scientist or engineer that we know just about enough about this world to be dangerous. All of that air conditioning and international air travel has come at a price of environmental destruction which was either not foreseen by our wonderful scientists or engineers until it was very late or they advanced the research and engineering knowing the harm it would cause (like the Bomb).

The idea that we are separate from nature and above it has led to an arrogance that threatens the survival of the very civilization that gave birth to it. You want to tag me with worshiping nature when it’s the self-worship of the technocrats that is the real problem. If they were only half as intelligent as they think they are, maybe they could engineer us out of this, but the odds are they will only hasten our destruction.

The hard path creates universal engineered solutions that do not depend on local conditions or knowledge. It leads quite naturally to broad fields of waving grain—visions of concentrated productivity. Societies that adopt the soft path will lead toward networks of smaller farms with drip irrigation and multiple crops—the inhabited, networked spaces preferred by druids. One values a kind of liberty; the other, a kind of community. One sees nature instrumentally, as a set of raw materials freely available for use; the other believes each ecosystem has an inner integrity and meaning that should be preserved, even if it constrains human actions. The choices lead to radically different pictures of how to live. What looks like a dispute over practical matters is an argument of the heart.

There is a very bad habit among modern triumphalists, the types who go on and on about how great the current world is, to confuse capitalism and industrialization. Capitalism is part of how many nations industrialized, but industrialization is where the majority of the gains come from. When

you replace human labor with machines run by coal and hydrocarbons and some other sources of power, you get most of the gains of capitalism. This is why for much of its history the USSR, in fact, did just fine, and actually outgrew most capitalist nations.

Nor is the victory of capitalism as clean and clear as people make it out to be. With a very few exceptions—mostly city states—countries industrialized under protectionism, not under “free trade” or “free markets.” This is beyond question, it is not open to debate: It is true of America, Japan, China, and Britain, among others.

These were very heavily state-managed economies in many cases. Germany’s electrical revolution was a result of the German High Command making sure it happened, “Siemens, my good man, go start an electrical company!” Likewise, Japan had massive government involvement. And this is when we pretend that, say, Britain forbidding the export of raw wool, wasn’t a government action—and without which there is no textile revolution. and thus, likely, no Industrial Revolution at all.

Nonetheless, to be sure, the majority of the world did industrialize under some form of capitalism. Capitalism is how a lot of the decisions of what to do were made. Capitalism is how the right to command resources was allocated. But it doesn’t happen without massive government intervention: Commons don’t enclose themselves, government has to be onside. Chinese villages don’t give up and say, ‘Make me into housing!’ by themselves either, government force is involved. There is little natural capital accumulation: It comes from taking away other people’s stuff and rights.

Unless we run across extra-terrestrials, or we lose our modern technological civilization, we will never know if it would have been possible to industrialize other than through central government mobilization (so-called communism), protectionist capitalism, or free trade capitalism (for city states). However, capitalism was, and is, a way to distribute resources to do things. It is not the things themselves. It is not, itself, industrialization, and confusing the two is a dangerous intellectual error.

It is at least conceivable that we could have industrialized in very different ways than we did. History is contingent, what happened happened, but it was a result of specific historical conditions interacting with principles. Better power sources, funneled through better machines, is the Industrial Revolution. That is not what capitalism is.

And because either we made bad decisions due to our adherence to capitalism, which have lead to the current onrushing climate and ecological crises, *or* it is intrinsic to industrialisms, we’d better hope it was capitalism which was the primary problem. We had better hope that there are ways to use machines and energy that won’t cause environmental catastrophe; that

there are other ways to decide who gets resources and for what purpose they use them. If there aren't, well, we're likely to lose our civilization or even go extinct.

We need to stop being nodes in a shitty resource allocation algorithm, and we need to start actually making sane decisions based on group autonomy and welfare. And capitalism doesn't do that.

Part IV
Sci-Fi Fantasies

In the day we sweat it out on the streets of a runaway American dream
At night we ride through mansions of glory in suicide machines
Sprung from cages on Highway 9
Chrome-wheeled, fuel-injected, and steppin' out over the line
Oh, baby this town rips the bones from your back
It's a death trap, it's a suicide rap
We gotta get out while we're young
'Cause tramps like us, baby we were born to run
Yes, girl, we were

Wendy let me in I wanna be your friend
I wanna guard your dreams and visions
Just wrap your legs round these velvet rims
And strap your hands 'cross my engines
Together we could break this trap
We'll run till we drop, baby we'll never go back
Oh, will you walk with me out on the wire?
'Cause baby I'm just a scared and lonely rider
But I gotta know how it feels
I want to know if love is wild, girl I want to know if love is real
Oh, can you show me

Beyond the Palace, hemi-powered drones scream down the boulevard
Girls comb their hair in rearview mirrors
And the boys try to look so hard
The amusement park rises bold and stark
Kids are huddled on the beach in the mist
I wanna die with you Wendy on the street tonight
In an everlasting kiss

The highway's jammed with broken heroes on a last chance power drive
Everybody's out on the run tonight but there's no place left to hide
Together Wendy we can live with the sadness
I'll love you with all the madness in my soul
Oh, someday girl I don't know when, we're gonna get to that place
Where we really wanna go and we'll walk in the sun
But till then tramps like us baby we were born to run

Oh honey, tramps like us, baby we were born to run
Come on Wendy, tramps like us, baby we were born to run

Progress Traps

Comedy of Progress

Alchemists of the middle ages thought it possible to discover, and accordingly sought after, a Universal Solvent, or Alkahest as they named it. This imaginary fluid was to possess the power of dissolving any substance, whatever its nature, and to reduce all kinds of matter to the liquid form. It does not seem to have occurred to these ingenious dreamers to consider, that what dissolved everything, could be preserved in nothing.

There is a conflict between what we can do scientifically and what we should do morally. While the first is fairly easy to evaluate objectively—either a new technology performs its desired function or it doesn't—the second is much less clear.

We must remember that the history of technology is written by the victors: successful innovations give the illusion of a linear sequence of stepping stones, while the losers fade into obscurity and are forgotten. But what determines the success of an invention is not always necessarily superiority of function. In our history, both compressor and absorption designs for refrigeration were being developed around the same time, but it is the compressor variety that achieved commercial success and now dominates. This is largely due to encouragement by nascent electricity companies keen to ensure growth in demand for their product. Thus the widespread absence of absorber refrigerators today—except for gas-fueled designs for recreation vehicles, where the ability to run without an electrical supply is paramount—is not due to any intrinsic inferiority of the design itself, but far more due to contingencies of social or economic factors. The only products that become available are those the manufacturer believes can be sold at the highest profit margin, and much of that depends on the infrastructure that already happens to be in place. So the reason that the fridge in your kitchen hums—uses an electric compressor rather than a silent absorption design—has less to do with the technological superiority of that mechanism than with quirks of the socioeconomic environment in the early 1900s, when the solution

became locked in.

In fact, electric vehicles have been common once before. In the early years of the twentieth century, there were three fundamentally different automobile technologies battling for supremacy, and electric cars held their own against competition from steam- and gasoline-powered alternatives, as they are mechanically much simpler and more reliable, as well as quiet and smokeless. In Chicago they even dominated the automobile market. At the peak of production of electric vehicles in 1912, 30,000 glided silently along the streets of the USA, and another 4,000 throughout Europe; in 1918 a fifth of Berlin's motor taxis were electric. The drawback of electric cars with their own onboard batteries (rather than trains or trolleys taking a continuous feed from a power line over the track) is that even a large, heavy set cannot store a great deal of energy, and once depleted the battery takes a long time to recharge. The maximum range of these early electric vehicles was around a hundred miles, but this is farther than a horse and in an urban setting is more than adequate. The solution is, rather than waiting for the battery to be recharged, you can simply pull into a station for a quick battery pack exchange: Manhattan successfully operated a fleet of electric cabs in 1900, with a central station that rapidly swapped depleted batteries for a fresh tray.

There are two kinds of fools: one who says this is old and therefore good, and the other who says this is new and therefore better. The argument between the two is as old as humanity itself, but technology's exponential advance has made the divide deeper and more contentious than ever. Transhumanists and Singularitans are Engineers; the Amish and Ted Kaczynski are Druids. It is a pressure we must resist, for to be either a Druid or an Engineer is to be a fool. Druids can't revive the past, and Engineers cannot build technologies that do not carry hidden trouble. Collective minds change at a snail's pace, whereas technology races along an exponential curve. I fear we will not rediscover the middle ground in time to save us from our myriad folly.

Science and democracy still look like the hope of the world—even as we recognize that their intersection gave us the means to burn alive every living thing on the planet at will. The marriage of science and democratic politics represents for us liberal civilization, the twinned hopeful note of our time—along with their depressing extension, mass-conscription wars and a stoic acceptance of deep time and pointless mass dying.

Too many think of science in terms of applications—things like fabrics and tail fins—not a patient search for knowledge for its own sake.

Instant gratification is beside the point. Decades pass before patterns become visible, before hunches can be proven, before the jigsaw puzzle comes

together, if it ever does. Science, by definition, is altruistic. You might be the one who benefited from the information you'd collected over the years, you might not. You might be dead, even. And someone else using your data might go on to win the Nobel Prize.

If we assume that networks will continue to get faster—a pretty safe bet—then we can also conclude that we'll become more and more impatient, more and more intolerant of even microseconds of delay between action and response. As a result, we'll be less likely to experience anything that requires us to wait, that doesn't provide us with instant gratification. That has cultural as well as personal consequences. The greatest of human works—in art, science, politics—tend to take time and patience both to create and to appreciate. The deepest experiences can't be measured in fractions of seconds.

Science has taken over from religion as the main agent of social control. It is science that decides what it is acceptable for us to believe and what is beyond the pale. It is very easy to use science to simply reaffirm our place in the world first posited by theology. The problem with science is that it thinks it can find all the answers, the problem with religion is that it thinks it has all the answers

What is the world if not a maze through which we all navigate, using the tools and maps—cognitive and otherwise—we have at our disposal? And what are scientists if not rats in a maze of inquiry, assembling knowledge and testing it against the observable environment? Science produces a map and a picture of reality, nothing more or less. If it were to present reality in its whole concreteness science would not be a map but a complete replica of reality. And then it would lose its usefulness. The map is not the territory. Even the most comprehensive cognitive map is not the world, which is always mediated by our perceptions of it. There is no escaping the maze.

Though our ability to build and field robots is racing ahead exponentially, ethically we remain infants. We are now living in an exponential age, and yet physiologically our brains are still those of Stone Age hunters, barely upgraded in the past fifty-thousand years: it is not in our nature to grasp the inherent power of exponential technologies.

We exist in a bizarre combination of Stone Age emotions, medieval beliefs, and god-like technology. That, in a nutshell, is how we have lurched into the early twenty-first century.

This is a story we know. It is the story of pioneers, progress, and the transformation of “empty” spaces into industrial resource fields.

Ignorance breeds innovation, or at least the perception of it. Civilization is in a race between education and catastrophe.

One of the great myths surrounding the development of human culture over the past 10,000 years is that things got progressively better as we moved from our hunter-gatherer existence to the sublimely elevated state in which we live today. Most people assume that the lives of our distant ancestors were, to quote Thomas Hobbes, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” When agriculture and government came along their obvious superiority was clear, and after that people’s lives improved immeasurably. The explosion in the size of the human population after 10,000 years ago is assumed to be merely the numerical manifestation of the positive impact of growing our own food, the benefits of the new lifestyle writ in the expanding number of happy farmers. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

Despite certain events of the twentieth century, most people in the Western cultural tradition still believe in the Victorian ideal of progress, the assumption that a pattern of change exists in the history of mankind, that it consists of irreversible changes in one direction only, and that this direction is towards improvement.

Humans have always been technological beings, but until the last few centuries most forms of technology came with a set of cultural regulations that had been discovered through trial and error and passed on to the next generation. When my father taught me to chop wood, for example, a lot of his instruction had to do with protecting myself from the axe. Now that children teach their parents how to use technology rather than vice versa, we turn to science or pseudoscience for answers. And science can’t keep up with the questions it raises.

The intellectual activities of many cultures—ours very much included—tend to swing back and forth on a timescale of centuries between two competing ways of understanding the world. We can call these abstraction and reflection. Abstraction is the belief that the world around us obeys a set of laws that can be known by the human mind. Intellectual activity in an age of abstraction therefore focuses on abstracting—literally, “drawing out”—those laws from the buzzing, blooming confusion of the world we experience.

Abstraction is confident, expansive, and it thrives in eras of expansion—economic, political, imperial. It seems obvious in such eras that the kind of intellectual activity that matters is the kind that focuses outward, on the world that human beings experience, and aims at reducing that world to order, number, system. It’s a very successful approach, up to a point. Because people on the intellectual cutting edge in ages of abstraction direct their attention outward to the world, they tend at first to pay close attention to the fit between human ideas and the world those ideas are intended to explain, and the resulting explanations work—again, up to a point.

Over time, though, the successes of abstraction result in vast systems of thought, perfectly rational and interconnected in every detail. Bit by bit, without ever quite noticing that this is what they're doing, the practitioners of abstraction end up studying their own systems of thought under the illusion that they're studying the world. Grand overarching theories that explain everything take center stage, until thinkers at the cutting edge dream of a day not far off when everything that matters is known for certain. Greek philosophy inspired such dreams; so did medieval scholastic theology, and so does modern materialist science.

But the day when everything makes sense never arrives, because the more comprehensive the theories become, the less they have to do with the world human beings actually experience. Outside the narrowing circles of the intellectual elite, it becomes impossible to miss the fact that the supposed universality of the world-theories of abstraction has been obtained by excluding countless things that don't fit. Some of those excluded things are bits of data that contradict the grand theories, but some are much vaster: whole realms of human experience are dismissed as irrelevant because they don't fit the theoretical model or the methods of inquiry that a given age of abstraction happens to prefer.

This also has unwelcome practical consequences. In ages when abstraction predominates, politics and economics become subject to the same notions of abstract reason that guide intellectual inquiry, and policies are proposed and enacted on the basis of abstract rules, without any attention being paid to the way those policies actually work out when applied. The result is pretty consistently catastrophic. Sooner or later you end up with a situation in which most people, and especially most people in positions of political, economic, and intellectual authority, are faced with disastrous and widening gulfs between the world as defined by their preferred set of abstract rules, on the one hand, and the world we actually inhabit on the other, and the only way out is to realize that all those fancy abstractions are ideas in the minds of human beings, not realities out there in the world of our experience. That's when an age of abstraction gives way to an age of reflection. Where abstraction faces confidently outward into the world, convinced that the human mind can grab truth by the short hairs and drag it into plain view, reflection faces ruefully inward, realizing that the human mind has no business making grand pronouncements about the universe when it hasn't yet come to grips with itself.

Reflection is rooted in the recognition that ideas are human constructs rather than objective truths about nature, and that the only thing we can be sure of is the blooming, buzzing confusion of everyday life. 'What actually happens?' becomes more important than 'what is eternally true?' Personal,

tacit knowledge rooted in example and experience comes to be valued above abstract universal theories—and just as abstraction earns respect in its early days because of its successes in understanding the world, reflection earns respect in the corresponding situation because of its successes in managing the world. Reflection also runs into problems in the long-run, of course.

We no longer give much thought to moral progress—a prime concern of earlier times—except to assume that it goes hand in hand with the material. Civilized people, we tend to think, not only smell better but behave better than barbarians or savages.

World models have consequences. How people think has consequences. Our tribal nature and ability to identify with virtually anything has consequences.

Because our power over the natural world has increased so much, errors and characteristics which were adaptive during most of our evolution are now catastrophically dangerous—extinction level dangerous. Not just for us, but for all too many other species with whom we share the globe, many of whom are more than capable of immense levels of suffering.

What am I giving up in order to have a 70-degree living room in July? Nothing that's particularly important to me. For the air conditioner to work, I need to live in a building that has electricity, so I have to be connected to the rest of society. That's fine. That's no problem. Of course, to be accepted by that society, I have to accept the rules and laws of community living. That's fine, too. Now, to thrive and flourish and afford my electric bill, I will also have to earn money. But that's okay—most jobs are social and many are enriching and necessary. However, the only way to earn money is to do something (or provide something) that is valued by other people. And since I don't get to decide what other people value, what I do to make a living is not really my decision. So—in order to have air-conditioning—I will agree to live in a specific place with other people, following whatever rules happen to exist there, all while working at a job that was constructed by someone else for their benefit. In order to have a 70-degree living room, I give up almost everything. Yet nothing that's particularly important to me. When Kaczynski wrote, "Technology is a more powerful social force than the aspiration for freedom," I assume this is what he meant.

Techniques ranging from televisions to propaganda—ways to engineer people's minds—have turned people into slaves of efficient machines. Technology, including the construction of complex cities, has become the dominant and determining factor in society. Technology has so transformed communications, elections, and travel that people can no longer live spontaneously any more than an astronaut can walk freely in space without a life-support system. Humans depend so heavily on this artificial world of technology that

they have lost touch with the natural world. Moreover, these technologies, whether pesticides or fracking, tend to destroy or subordinate the natural world and do not allow this world to restore itself.

Technology eliminates human choice, because the machine world favors technique that gives the maximum efficiency. If a machine can yield a given result, it must be used to capacity and it is considered criminal and antisocial not to do so. Technologies such as propaganda greatly modify society. Technology makes no distinction between good uses and bad ones. It tends on the contrary to create a completely independent technical morality.

The state played a pivotal role in the spread of technology. Technologies and their machines increasingly created social and environmental problems, but only the state had the money to fully research them, and its scientific solutions invariably called for more technology—which ultimately centralized more power. The proliferation of technologies also destroyed any notion of responsibility.

Consider the example of a dam: One day the dam's walls fracture and burst. A community is flooded. Who is responsible for that? Geologists examined the terrain. Engineers drew up the construction plans. Workmen constructed it. And the politicians decided that the dam had to be in that spot. Who is responsible? No one. There is never anyone responsible. Anywhere. In the whole of our technological society the work is so fragmented and broken up into small pieces that no one is responsible. But no one is free either. Everyone has his own specific task. And that's all he has to do.

The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological and physical suffering and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation. It will certainly subject human beings to greater indignities and inflict greater damage on the natural world, it will probably lead to greater social disruption and psychological suffering, and it may lead to increased physical suffering even in "advanced" countries.

This is a story we need to know. Industrial transformation turned out to be a bubble of promise followed by lost livelihoods and damaged landscapes. And yet: such documents are not enough. If we end the story with decay, we abandon all hope—or turn our attention to other sites of promise and ruin, promise and ruin.

There is a view that this form of the tech is the inevitable form it had to take; if that is the form it took, then it must be the right choice—that the form the tech takes is the form we must accept.

Science and tech give you a range of possibilities, it's potentially a

liberating thing, but we must stop sleepwalking in order to get there. It's not an engineering choice, it's not a scientific choice, it's a moral choice.

One telling of the myth of Pandora is that after all the plagues on humankind got out of the cask she was charged with guarding, only one remained, the worst of them all—Hope—which zipped out into the world before the astonished Pandora could slam the lid. Hope drives us to invent new fixes for old messes, which in turn create even more dangerous messes. Hope elects the politician with the biggest empty promise; and as any stockbroker or lottery seller knows, most of us will take a slim hope over prudent and predictable frugality. Hope, like greed, fuels the engine of capitalism.

The arrogant collect information, not so much to search for truth, but to reinforce their prejudices.

Those Enlightenment writers were writing tomes to justify their own greed and prejudices, while cloaking their greed and prejudices in “morality.” It seemed to me that the Enlightenment was an attempt to destroy the basis of Jesus's and Buddha's philosophy—that the most moral position of humanity was to care for its members, just as clans, tribes, families, and other human societies did. The most frequent response from professors and classmates to my thesis? But those clans, tribes, families, other societies didn't accomplish much, did they? As if the only reason for humanity's existence was to compete against itself.

The Eurocentric modernist program has four planks:

1. A blind faith in science.
2. A self-serving belief in progress.
3. Rampant materialism.
4. A penchant for using state violence to achieve its ends.

In a nutshell, it's a habit of placing individual self-interest above the welfare of community and society.

To illustrate one of its signature follies refer to that great Hollywood ode to the Western spirit, “The Sound of Music.” Early in the film, the Mother Superior bursts into song, calling on the nun Maria to “climb every mountain, ford every stream.”

Sounds exhilarating, but to what end? Why exactly do we need to ford every stream? From the Eurocentric modernist viewpoint the answer is not so innocent: we secretly do it so that we can say to ourselves, ‘Look, I achieved something that's beyond the reach of somebody else. Hooray for me!’

That's our big dream. Everyone and everything is a stepping stone to our personal glorification. When others get in our way, we end up with a grim take on life described succinctly by Jean Paul Sartre:

“Hell is other people.”

Sounds bad, but didn't Eurocentric modernism also give us our great democratic ideals of equality and liberty to elevate and protect us? Maybe these notions are not really our salvation. When we replace the vital ties of kinship and community with abstract contractual relations, or when we find that the only sanctioned paths in life are that of consumer or producer, we become alienated and depressed in spirit. Abstract rights like liberty and equality turn out to be rather cold comfort. These ideas, however lofty, may not get at the most basic human wants and needs.

What we lack is a realistic approach to anthropology, without which our forays into economics, psychology, sociology, and pretty much everything are hopelessly skewed. The Eurocentric modernist tradition, influenced by the Judeo-Christian idea that we are distinct from the world of nature, seeks to separate us from the animal world. We are supposed to be above it, immortal, transcending our bodies and the Earth. But it doesn't quite work.

We may be able to perform dazzling technical feats, like putting a colony on Mars, but we will pay for it by working even harder and longer hours so that a few may get the benefit. A whole lot of lost time and suffering, and for what? The Bushmen do not have a Mars rocket, but they do have a two-and-a-half-day workweek—something that most modern humans can only dream of. What's more significant to the lives of most of us?

We have become unhinged from our own human nature as heat-seeking mammals. What we really crave is warmth, security, and care—the kinds of things we get at home and in close social units. Our greatest human need is something far more humble than launching rockets: we want to huddle.

I love the delusion within our thinking that 'progress' is a one way process.

One of the great debates of nineteenth-century social theory concerned whether social evolution is progressive. In other words, is there some purpose to our lives, and are the exertions of the present leading us to a brighter future? Early evolutionists represented life as a great chain of being, with single-celled organisms at the bottom of the chain and humans at the top, as the pinnacle of the evolutionary process. Furthermore, even humans were divided into those who had achieved a certain level of material culture (“civilized”) and those who in some way lagged behind (“uncivilized”).

Lewis Morgan, an influential nineteenth-century social theorist, wrote in his 1877 magnum opus, *Ancient Society*, about three stages of human

cultural evolution: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Savagery was hunting and gathering, the way humanity had lived during its earliest stages of evolution. Barbarism was essentially subsistence agriculture of the type practiced during the Neolithic. Civilization was advanced agriculture, urban settlements, written language, and the rule of law.

The theme of nineteenth-century progressive thinking was that the goal of humanity was to arrive at the form of civilization found in Europe and other “advanced” societies, and that alternative ways of life were primitive and undesirable. In fact, according to Morgan, it was inevitable that cultural evolution would follow such a trajectory, with the advanced societies triumphing over those stuck in an earlier evolutionary rut.

The cult of innovation holds every info-age novelty to be inherently good in itself, regardless of its social or political consequences. Few of the people who write or talk about innovation even acknowledge the possibility that innovations might be harmful instead of noble and productive. And yet recent history is littered with exactly such stuff: Innovations that allow companies and governments to spy on us. Innovations that allow terrorist groups to recruit online. Innovations that allowed Enron to do all the fine things it used to do. Come to think of it, the whole economic debacle of the last ten years owes its existence to the financial innovations of the Nineties and the Aughts—the credit default swaps, the algorithms companies used to hand out mortgage loans—innovations that were celebrated in their day in the same mindlessly positive way we celebrate tech today. Somehow that stuff never comes up, however. We know what innovation is about, and it’s righteousness and triumph.

The American Comedy of Progress—the cherished notion that with time, technology, entrepreneurialism, and, if need be, activism, all problems can be solved.

We hear about precarity in the news every day. People lose their jobs or get angry because they never had them. Gorillas and river porpoises hover at the edge of extinction. Rising seas swamp whole Pacific islands. But most of the time we imagine such precarity to be an exception to how the world works. It’s what drops out from the system. What if, as I’m suggesting, precarity is the condition of our time—or, to put it another way, what if our time is ripe for sensing precarity?

Precairety is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others. We can’t rely on the status quo; everything is in flux, including our ability to survive. Thinking through precarity changes social analysis. A precarious world is a world without

teleology. Indeterminacy, the unplanned nature of time, is frightening, but thinking through precarity makes it evident that indeterminacy also makes life possible.

Over the past half century another anti-progress trend has been spawned, one more widespread and potentially dangerous than the more limited movements of the past: fundamentalism. Coalescing in the mid-twentieth century in both the Islamic and the Christian faiths, fundamentalism has increasingly dominated political debates around the world. Born of desperation and anger, and driven forward by charismatic leaders, fundamentalist views provide a focus for people who feel left out of the modern world, offering an alternative vision of how life should be lived.

Members of the American religious right killing doctors at abortion clinics; al-Qaeda members using bombs and hijacked planes to kill thousands; Aum Shinrikyo followers killing a dozen people and injuring hundreds more in the Tokyo subway—all seem like the inhuman acts of crazy zealots, unable to separate right from wrong, but this is a crude oversimplification. Any sort of mass murder is possible only because the human faces of the victims have been dissociated from the action of killing; unlike previous movements that have advocated violent solutions to social problems, however, such as the PLO or the IRA, with their territorial desires, today's violent fundamentalist movements claim to be doing God's will, giving them a sense of higher purpose. Success means not simply achieving proximal goals such as political autonomy, for instance, but changing the world order in the name of God. Crazy though it may appear from the outside, it is not insanity that drives terrorism in the fundamentalist world; rather, it is the God-given certainty that what one is doing is morally just.

When Charles Darwin first proposed his theory of evolution by natural selection in 1859, it met with widespread opposition from the religious establishment. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, who famously debated evolution with Darwin's ardent supporter T. H. Huxley in 1860, parodied the notion that humans could be descended from apes, but such views were ultimately to fade into the minority. By the early twentieth century, Darwinian evolution was widely accepted, in part because of its misappropriation by proponents of social Darwinism as a way to justify the hardscrabble economic competition of the Victorian era. While the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial," in 1926, briefly brought anti-evolutionist thinking back into public view, ultimately the Great Depression, World War II, and the growing prominence of science during the Cold War would squelch much of this fundamentalist backlash. A 1968 Supreme Court decision overturning an Arkansas law banning the teaching of evolution in schools effectively ended the debate for the next decade.

In the 1980s, flush with Ronald Reagan's victory in the presidential election and the concomitant increase in the prominence of the Moral Majority, anti-evolutionist thinking began to claw back support it had lost during the secular mid-twentieth century. A study published in 2006, examining public acceptance of evolution around the world, found that around 80 percent of the people in major European countries and Japan accepted evolution. In the United States the number was only 40 percent, and among the thirty-four countries surveyed only Turkey ranked lower, at 25 percent. The poll figure in the United States actually represented a decline from 45 percent in 1985, and between 1985 and 2006 the number of people who were "unsure" about evolution increased from 7% to 21%. One of the study's coauthors noted:

"American Protestantism is more fundamentalist than any-body except perhaps the Islamic fundamentalist."

The modern, secular West should ask what it is that fuels the flames of fundamentalism, just as the advocates of jihad should ask why such a war is justified. Ultimately, fundamentalism can exist only in opposition to something else; it is a protest movement. If there were nothing to protest, it would lose its *raison d'être*.

A naïve belief that human history is a linear progression toward equality and greater morality must be dismissed. This absurd positivism is the lie perpetrated by oppressors. All atrocities of the victor, the long series of his attacks, are coldly transformed into constant, inevitable evolution. But the sequence of human things is not inevitable, it can be changed at any moment. Scientific and technological advancement, rather than a harbinger of progress, can be a terrible weapon in the hands of Capital against Labor.

Humanity is never stationary. It advances or goes backwards. Its progressive march leads it to equality. Its regressive march goes back through every stage of privilege to human slavery, the final word of the right to property. I am not amongst those who claim that progress can be taken for granted, that humanity cannot go backwards.

I once thought of achievements such as the Hammurabic Code, Magna Carta, and Bill of Rights as mileposts on humanity's road to a just and free society. But I'm beginning to view them as ever larger and more desperate dams to hold back the swelling flood of abuses of human rights and the centralization of power that are inherent in agricultural and industrial societies. Agriculture results—all too often—in concentration of power by the elite. That is the inevitable result of the large storable surplus that is at the heart of agriculture.

In truth, however, nothing is inevitable and very little is new. And tech is no more the root of the problem than are trade or globalization. Many of our most vaunted innovations are simply methods—electronic or otherwise—of pulling off some age-old profit-maximizing maneuver by new and unregulated means. Sometimes they are designed to accomplish things that would be regulated or even illegal under other circumstances, or else they are designed to alter relationships of economic power in some ingenious way.

Consider the many celebrated business innovations that are, in reality, nothing more than instruments to get around our society's traditional economic arrangements. Uber is the most obvious example: much of its value comes not from the efficiencies in taxi-hailing that it has engineered but rather from the way it allows the company to circumvent state and local taxi rules having to do with safety and sometimes insurance. The circumvention strategy is everywhere in innovation-land once you start looking for it. Airbnb allows consumers and providers to get around various safety and zoning rules with which conventional hotels must comply. Amazon allows customers in many places to avoid paying sales taxes. The circumvention strategy isn't restricted to software innovations, either. One of the great attractions of credit default swaps—a big financial innovation of the last decade—is that they were completely unregulated.

Decades before Uber started, companies in Silicon Valley had begun shifting work to independent contractors, subcontractors, and temporary workers as a way to reduce cost and liability. As an ad for the temporary staffing agency Kelly Services put it in 1971:

Never takes a vacation or holiday.
Never asks for a raise.
Never costs you a dime for slack time.
(When the workload drops, you drop her.)
Never has a cold, slipped disc or loose tooth.
(Not on your time anyway!)
Never costs you for unemployment taxes and social
security payments.
(None of the paperwork, either!)
Never costs you for fringe benefits.
(They add up to 30% of every payroll dollar.)
Never fails to please.
(If your Kelly girl employee doesn't work out, you
don't pay.)

The vaunted forefathers of the internet were a clever lot of schemers whose transgressions were forgiven, per American custom, once they got rich. Consider the career of Vinton G. Cerf, who developed the internet packet protocols still used today. In grad school at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the late 1960s, an old high school pal got Cerf involved with a Pentagon-funded project called ARPANET, the precursor of today's internet. Cerf began following the money into the private sector as early as 1982, when MCI Communications hired him to lobby his former public sector colleagues to allow the company unprecedented access to the publicly owned internet, giving it a jump on all potential competitors. Until then, the internet was reserved for "academic and research activities." Commercial use was forbidden. Over time, the military ceded control of the internet to the National Science Foundation, where networking division director Stephen S. Wolff was bent on privatization.

Wolff oversaw "a backroom deal" that effectively gave managerial control of the internet to a corporate consortium dominated by MCI and IBM (where Cerf had also worked). Wolff's gift of invaluable public property to private interests was his own unilateral decision, made without consulting anyone. Later, the federal Office of the Inspector General found that the early privatization process presented clear conflicts of interest and that Wolff's NSF department made "no effort whatever to seek competition." Investigators complained that a "lack of documentation" forced them to "reconstruct the reasoning behind the decision from interviews," which predictably led to "inaccuracies." Wolff craftily defended his cloak-and-dagger approach as an effort to prevent the abuse of federal open records laws. Not long after, Wolff followed Cerf into the private sector and joined San Jose-based Cisco Systems, a \$49 billion hardware company that remains the world's largest provider of internet infrastructure.

No politician or other official was ever sanctioned for this plunder of public assets. The propriety of the matter was rendered moot by the presidential administration of Bill Clinton and Al Gore, two great friends of the telecom industry who led the political campaign to cement internet privatization as the law of the land. While still in government, Wolff scoffed at warnings that his policies would enable a powerful new set of monopoly corporations.

"Might telcos become dominant? Of course there is such a danger. But remember, if they employ illegal means of increasing market share, we have laws against anticompetitive behavior. I doubt that they would do something questionable and walk away unchallenged."

In America? In Silicon Valley? Never!

Some things hadn't changed since he first arrived in the Valley. It ran on the same old mix of government-subsidized research, cheap labor, and a regulatory outlook inherited from the Ronald Reagan era that permitted corporations to unload the costs of doing business on customers, employees, governments, and the ecosystem.

An individual who evaluated tech company investments for a large pension fund explains his employers' mentality: It didn't matter whether a new technology actually worked. What mattered was that other investors thought it could work. If they did, their confidence would cause the company's value to increase regardless of its actual merit. Everything is sales. The trick was knowing when to buy shares and when to unload them. That was why it helped to have inside information.

With the arrival of Uber and 'Uber for X' startups, an inherent conflict emerged. On one hand, these companies wanted to develop a reputation for providing great service, so that customers would begin to rely on them. On the other, their lawyers advised them that providing independent contractors with training, uniforms, benefits, or regular work shifts—that is, the things that produce happy, well-trained employees—could put the companies at risk of being sued for misclassifying employees as independent contractors. Gig economy companies were in a pickle. They wanted to provide good service, but also to avoid accusations that they were treating their independent contractors like employees. Not training workers or setting expectations at all would lead to inconsistent service. And scheduling them to serve the same customers every week, motivating them with good benefits, and coaching them on how to improve, put the companies at risk of lawsuits which could force them to make an expensive shift to employees.

“Those bright blue roller bags stacked at the back of the room? They had everything cleaners needed to get started, including a vacuum cleaner and a mop. But their cost—\$150—would be deducted from checks, which meant working five jobs at the starting rate for free (a spokesperson for the company told me it has since stopped this practice). Carol did what she could to keep the conversation about supplies in independent contractor territory: ‘These are optional to take; this is your business, you are responsible for supplies.’ Along with cleaning supplies, the bag held branded blue marketing materials, including cards cleaners could leave behind with their names on them, a checklist of tasks completed, and, Carol's favorite, branded stickers to put on the toilet paper after cleaners folded the ends

into triangles. Not only would the startup get its cleaners to distribute marketing materials throughout houses, it would also get them to purchase those marketing materials.”

‘Uber for X’ startups quickly became synonymous with the on-demand economy. Thanks to Uber’s business model, city dwellers who were merely wealthy, and not disgustingly rich, could for the first time have every need filled at the push of a button. Startups would summon independent workers to deliver meals, shop for groceries, do laundry, or even park cars for just a small fee. In the new world of on-demand everything you’re either pampered, isolated royalty—or you’re a twenty-first-century servant.

“When you’re falling straight down the financial cliff face, you reach out to grab hold of anything available to stop your descent and there, just before you land in a homeless shelter or move in with your sister, is Uber. I think of Uber as a modern-day version of the Works Progress Administration during the Depression. Thanks to Uber, I am not poor. I am just nobody.”

Amazon has come up with a nifty device for casual employment called “the Mechanical Turk,” in which tasks that can’t be done by computers are tossed to the reserve army of the millions, who receive pennies for their trouble. This is a good introduction to the so-called sharing economy—‘sharing’ because you’re using your own car or apartment or computer, not your employer’s—which was one of the few robustly growing employment opportunities of the Obama years and beyond. The magic derives from the way just about anyone can sign up at one of these sharing companies and work as a sort of temp, only hooked up with the client and employer via software, which makes it all digital and innovative and convenient.

In nearly every other way, however, the sharing economy is one of the most lopsided, antiworker employment schemes to come down the pike in many years. The costs and risks associated with this industry—insurance, owning a car, saving for sickness and retirement—are all loaded onto the shoulders of the worker, and yet the innovator back in California who has written the software still helps himself to a large cut of whatever the proceeds of your labor happen to be. It is ‘every man for himself’ as a national employment strategy.

Before the Internet, it would be really difficult to find someone, sit them down for ten minutes and get them to work for you, and then fire them after those ten minutes. But with technology, you can actually find them, pay them the tiny amount of money, and then get rid of them when you don’t need them anymore.

Amazon updates the practices of Walmart, for example, while Google has dusted off corporate behavior from the days of the Robber Barons. What Uber does has been compared to the every-man-for-himself hiring procedures of the pre-union shipping docks, while TaskRabbit is just a modern and even more flexible version of the old familiar temp agency. Together, all these developments are the logical culmination of a process that began fifty years ago when corporations began turning over full-time jobs to temporary workers, independent contractors, freelancers, and consultants. This is atavism, not innovation. It has not reversed the trends of the last fifty years; it has accelerated them. And if we keep going in this direction, it will one day reduce all of us to day laborers, standing around like the guys outside the local hardware store, hoping for work.

They fancied themselves budding entrepreneurs, but they were chiefly migrant laborers with MacBook Pros.

Elon's Erection

Technology grants opportunity, but not ethics.

The Rod from God—basically, you get a heavy hunk of metal and throw it from space at an enemy. Given its weight, height, and whatever speed boost you can give it, a simple metal rod could do as much damage as a nuclear bomb. Right now, the only people who go to space are ultraqualified supernerds—the sort of people who pass psychological tests and are willing to spend decades training for a chance to get a few months in space. And even then we know of at least one of them tossing on a diaper and going on a non-stop, rage-fueled road trip. If space becomes more generally populated, we could be putting ourselves in a dangerous position.

“If you’re planning to ship stuff back to Earth, the ideal place for a space base is somewhere with high resources and low gravity. Consider, for example, Phobos, one of the moons of Mars. Phobos is very small, so its escape velocity is a mere 25 miles per hour. This means you could set up a ramp on Phobos, drive a motorcycle up it, and fly off into space. Earth’s own moon has an escape velocity that’s about 200 times greater than Phobos’s. The result is that, in energy terms, it costs less to send a package from Phobos to Earth than from Earth’s moon to Earth. Asteroids are even better. A typical big asteroid has an escape velocity of about half a mile per hour. This means that if you succeed in creating an asteroid mining base, you can pitch refined asteroid contents back to Earth at very low cost.”

Consider that collectively, the populace appears to believe that not only is it possible to colonize another planet, but that we will do so in the not-so-distant future. This is incredible considering the massive odds of and colossal barriers to such an endeavour succeeding. Thus, it is alarming, that this same populace appears to believe it is not possible to create new societies where necessity is detached from want (superfluous consumer goods). This begs the question—have we been fully conditioned to believe only those that represent hegemonic interests? It is a sound question considering the billionaires of the world are currently petrified of the capitalist system collapsing—while those oppressed by the capitalist system believe it cannot be dismantled. Yet we can dismantle institutions. We can dismantle the capitalist economic system devouring what remains of the natural world—but not if we identify with our oppressors and the very system that enslaves us.

“The important thing is not which new technology will work but simply that some new technology be found. There’s an argument that our civilization can continue to exist with the present number of people and the present kind of high technology through conservation. I see that argument as similar to a man being locked in a sealed room with a limited amount of oxygen. And if he breathes more slowly, he’ll be able to live longer, but what he really needs is to get out of the room. And I want to get out of the room.”

To know is not to watch and to think is not to forget.

So, when this creepy infantilism that costs us dearly rises—we are going to move to Mars, fly to Mars, colonize Mars, remake Earth on Mars, market Mars, dream of Mars, immigrate to Mars—the mere positing of this racist, elitist, Brave-New-World bullshit eats at our collective soul, from the child wanting to go into science, to the NASA superstar, to the billionaires, to the celebrities and politicians, to the media, to the consumer of Hollywood crap.

If our descendants will bestride the stars, it would follow that you and I bestride the planet today. How’s that working out for you, dear reader? As you trudge from one part-time, minimum-wage, no-benefits job to another, or fill whatever other role you happen to have in a society that increasingly treats you as a disposable asset for corporations to exploit; as you cope with decaying infrastructure, collapsing public health, a political system caught in permanent gridlock, and mass media that seems to take each new day as a challenge to top the breathtaking dishonesty of the day before; as you watch, one after another, each year’s grandiose predictions of the allegedly inevitable benefits of progress land with a deafening flop—does the thought of your supposed mastery over the Earth fill you with a sense of meaning, purpose, and grandeur?

That question, of course, traces out the chasm that’s widening right now between the old dream of perpetual progress and the billions of us who live in the world that progress has made. Has the pursuit of technological progress brought benefits? Of course it has, but it’s also brought a bumper crop of burdens, costs, and problems. In a good many cases, the downsides of new technologies outweigh their benefits, and of course neither of these are equally distributed—the well-to-do minority get the lion’s share of the benefits, while the poor majority has to carry nearly all the costs. For the comfortable and the sheltered—who never stray outside the bubble of their privilege—it’s easy to insist that all is for the best in this best of all possible

worlds; in the increasingly mean streets outside that bubble, that illusion doesn't last long.

Are you people serious about this? I think we are doing worse than ever. Never have we been more efficient at putting stones into our own way. The doing better you experience is at the cost of those who are more unfortunate than ever: the middle-class in the US is dying, Europe is a big clusterfuck and the immigration is not making things easier, China has built its success on the cost of the less fortunate two-thirds of the population, we have more slaves than ever. Sure the 1% has never had a more easy life than right now but I find it atrocious to say that we are doing better than ever.

Also our "most peaceful moment in history" is quite ironic considering that we never have committed ecocide more efficiently than today. I know that we aren't in war as often and intensive as we used to. but the war against our planet as a whole ecosystem has never been more systematic than now, killing species after species faster than ever before. And what still nobody has been able to explain to me: what are we supposed to do exactly on Mars and in space that is more awesome than on earth? Having fun with friends? Hiking on mountains? Drinking well-aged whiskey? Kicking around red rocks?

"Guess what the best planet is in this solar system? It's easy to know the answer to that question. We've sent robotic probes like this one to all of the planets in our solar system. Now, some of them have been fly-bys, but we've examined them all. Earth is the best planet. It is not close. This one is really good."

Bezos then went on to discuss his plan to ship humans off of the best planet in the solar system and send them to live in floating cylinders in space. Bezos claimed that the growing human population and growing energy consumption will force us to make a choice between "stasis and rationing" and "dynamism and growth," and claimed that the latter item in his dichotomy is possible only by moving humans off the planet.

"If we're out in the solar system, we can have a trillion humans in the solar system, which means we'd have a thousand Mozarts and a thousand Einsteins. This would be an incredible civilization. What would this future look like? Where would a trillion humans live? Well it's very interesting, someone named Gerry O'Neill, a physics professor, looked at this question very carefully and he asked a very precise question that nobody had ever asked before, and it was, 'Is a planetary surface the best

place for humans to expand into the solar system?’ And he and his students set to work on answering that question, and they came to a very surprising—for them—counter-intuitive answer: No.”

Of course, perhaps we could have more “Mozarts and Einsteins” if people simply weren’t forced to slave away in shitholes like your fulfillment centers, Jeff. Bezos went on to describe how the limited surface areas, distance, and gravitational forces of the other planets in our solar system make settling on those planets impractical and cost-prohibitive, while constructing giant space cylinders closer to Earth which can hold a million people is far more practical. These cylinders would spin to replicate Earth’s gravitational pull with centrifugal force. Feel free to go look up some pictures of these things, we’ll wait.

“These are really pleasant places to live. Some of these O’Neill colonies might choose to replicate Earth cities. They might pick historical cities and mimic them in some way. There’d be whole new types of architecture. These are ideal climates. These are short-sleeve environments. This is Maui on its best day, no rain, no storms, no earthquakes.”

No rain? No weather? Just big, spinning cylinders floating monotonously in space? A trillion divided by a million is one-million, which means that the best idea the richest man in the world can come up with for the future of our species is to fill our solar system with a million of these floating homogenized space malls.

“If we build this vision, these O’Neill colonies, where does it take us? What does it mean for Earth? Earth ends up zoned residential and light industry. It’ll be a beautiful place to live, it’ll be a beautiful place to visit, it’ll be a beautiful place to go to college, and to do some light industry. But heavy industry, polluting industry, all the things that are damaging our planet, those will be done off Earth. We get to have both. We get to keep this unique gem of a planet, which is completely irreplaceable—there is no Plan B. We have to save this planet. And we shouldn’t give up a future of our grandchildren’s grandchildren of dynamism and growth. We can have both.”

Now, if you look at the behavior of Jeff Bezos, who exploits his employees and destroys his competitors, and who some experts say is trying to take over

the underlying infrastructure of our entire economy—and the media- and expert-induced panic over the Wuhan Flu is certainly helping this goal—you can feel reasonably confident that this man has no intention of leaving “this unique gem of a planet,” nor of having the heirs to his empire leave either. When you see this Pentagon advisory board member and CIA contractor planning to ship humans off the Earth’s surface so the planet can thrive, you may be certain that he’s talking about other humans. The unworthy ones. The ones who weren’t sociopathic enough to climb the capitalist ladder by stepping on the backs of everyone else.

And make no mistake, when Bezos talks about saving the planet for “our grandchildren’s grandchildren,” he’s not just talking about his heirs, he’s talking about himself. Bezos has invested large amounts of wealth in biotech aimed at reversing the aging process and cracking the secret of immortality. This is the sort of guiding wisdom that is controlling the fate of our species everyone. The world’s most ambitious plutocrat envisions a world in which, rather than evolving beyond our destructive tendencies and learning to live in collaboration with each other and our environment, we are simply shipped off into space so that he can stretch out and enjoy our beautiful planet. That’s his best idea.

Our plutocratic overlords aren’t just sociopaths. They’re morons. I mean, damn, some of them really think they’ll be able to upload their brains into computers. First of all, how stupid do you have to be to overlook the fact that science has virtually no understanding of consciousness and doesn’t even really know what it is? Even if these idiots find a way to upload their neurological patternings onto some AI’s virtual simulation, it’s not like they’d be there to experience it. It would just be a bunch of data running in a computer somewhere, mimicking the personality of a dead person and experienced by no one. People who believe that all there is to them is their dopey mental patterns have not spent any time whatsoever exploring what they are, and have no idea what it is to be human. The fact that anyone would think they could become immortal by digitizing their churning, repetitive personality patterns is crazy, and the fact that they’d want to is even crazier.

People who think this way should shut up and learn about life, not rule the world in a plutocratic system where money translates directly to political influence. People who think that humans can be happily unplugged from the ecosystemic context in which they evolved, the ecosystemic context of which they are an inseparable part, and people who think they can become immortal by uploading their personalities onto a computer, should shut the fuck up, spend some time alone with themselves, maybe try some magic mushrooms, and learn a bit about what it means to be human. They

certainly shouldn't be calling the shots.

Earth is our home. It's what we're made for. Earth went through a lot to give you life. Sparks had to catch, oceans had to freeze, billions of cells had to survive endless disease, all of these amazing things had to happen just right to give you life. You belong here. You are as much a creation of Earth as the air you breathe. You may feel like a singular organism but you're actually as much a singular organism as one of the many billions of organisms that make up your body. You and Earth are one. And because you evolved on Earth, you are perfectly adapted to Earth and it is perfectly adapted to you. It yearns for your breath as you yearn for its breeze on your face.

We absolutely have the ability to transcend our unhealthy tendencies as a species, which, when you really look at them, are merely creations of a mind that feels alone and separate and like it is in a constant fight for its life. If we just put down our mental swords for a hot second and learned to channel our creativity into the thriving of our society and our ecosystem instead of into killing and out-competing one another then we will be okay. The way out of this is the way towards health.

People lament the lack of jobs due to AI and automation but we actually desperately need people to do less. We need a whole lot of people doing nothing, not using the roads every morning and evening, not producing widgets that no one needs and creating advertising campaigns to brainwash people into buying them anyway, just to have them end up in the ocean or leaching heavy metals into the earth. Having a whole lot of people doing nothing for more of their week would take the strain off of our health systems as the single biggest factor in disease is stress. Studies show that stress also shrinks your brain and lessens your creativity and innovation too, so all the punitive-minded libertarians out there who are worried that we won't progress as a species if we start sharing resources around to people who aren't doing things that traditionally made money because we'll be too relaxed can chill too. We don't need to crack the whip to get people to make beautiful innovations. Humans are at their best when feeling playful and relaxed. Nearly all the technological advances of the past came from people who had a lot of leisure time due to their privileged status. Releasing humans from 9-to-5 slavery would be the fastest way to slow our resource consumption and take pressure off of all our systems and would have the added benefit of making us smarter, funnier, more creative and more innovative too.

And for that matter, having every idea and innovation be required to make money is also killing us. We need the ability to fund things that will not make profit. How many times have you been in a conversation and someone's come up with an idea that will solve a major environmental, energy, or

health problem and no one's got excited because it will never get off the ground because it will never make money? Fully disappearing a problem never made anyone any money. Healthy people, for example, never spend a dime at the doctors. The way out of this is detaching human innovation from money and allowing solutions to flourish without the imposition of also having to turn a profit.

The only issue we have as humans is that a handful of highly competitive, highly sociopathic, and yet incredibly mediocre people have all the power to build our future for us with virtually no input from anyone else. Because all the power in the form of all the money has been allowed to pool into the hands of those most willing to do whatever it takes to get it, we have just a few ruthless yet surprisingly dumb individuals calling the shots on the future of all living beings. The competitive mindset that gave rise to Jeff Bezos is the exact opposite of the kind of collaborative, harmonious mindset we'll need if we're going to overcome the challenges we face on the horizon.

We cannot continue using arguments of convenience. Capitalism is also bad in moments of expansion and wealth; capitalist technology is also bad when it works well and doesn't provoke any specific disaster. The only path of discursive attack we have left is a direct confrontation with the Christian spirituality that science as well as socialism inherited: the world, the universe, does not exist for our exploitation. There is no rationalist argument—not even within the parameters of liberalism's most radical current, veganism—against the mining of the moon. It will not harm any human being or other animal, and according to rationalism, everything else is dead matter.

The only solid arguments against capitalism's new atrocities are spiritual. They hold that the Earth is our mother and that we should adapt ourselves to the natural world rather than molding it according to our arrogant caprices; that filling the Earth or the Moon with holes in search of the latest valuable mineral is as unforgivable as massacring an entire people. Those who made use of scientific arguments to justify genocide, slavery, mining, and clear-cutting entire forests are the same—and their institutions are the same—as the ones who today are celebrating the imminent conquest of the moon and Mars. And the technologies that will take us there were developed by the Nazis in the course of the very same Holocaust that liberalism so hypocritically rejects, without ever rejecting its fruits.

We have rendered homage to humanism for so long that we can no longer raise our voices in protest when faced with an atrocity that lacks human victims. But not even the contemptible people who think it is not wrong per se to mine the moon can deny that any introduction of new resources into the capitalist machinery will hasten the processes that are building us

a prison society here on Earth.

The choice is between ecocentrism and totalitarianism.

We can have that good world when a Somali's life matters as much as an American's and when a both a billionaire and a poor person receive quality health care. We can have a good world when the possibility of a species extinction is considered, and treated as an emergency if due to human actions. We can have a good life when we look at the human footprint in the world and we don't allow it to destroy multiple other species. We can have a good world when we make sure everyone gets fed, everyone has a decent set of material goods, and everyone is free to do more or less as they choose, so long as their actions are less harmful than the good they do, and don't lead to the foreseeable and preventable suffering and death of others.

It is insane that we are worried about AI and robotics, for example: The idea that machines might be able to do the work that humans do should fill us with joy. It's insane that we cannot imagine a world in which humans do not have to do mostly meaningless drudge work to survive. That we cannot figure out how to distribute resources to people without making them spend the better part of their waking adult lives doing shit they'd rather not do. If you'd win the lottery and keep your job, congrats, you are the exception. Most people would not.

The right thing to do is generally the right thing to do. It is the great tragedy of the human race that we don't believe that being kind and not hurting other people—or preventing suffering and enabling people to do what they will so they hurt none, and not being mass murderers of other species—is in our self-interest.

It is precisely in our self interest—it is the only way we will ever create a world that is really good to live in for the vast majority of the world's residents.

Powering Our Fantasies

“I want to live my life exactly as I have been, changing nothing but the fact that my power is now clean, renewable.”

This is pure fantasy, a dream, unrealistic. If this is what we are waiting for, then we will be waiting for quite some time, likely more time than we have available to us given growing inequality and environmental damage.

All environmental victories are temporary, while each defeat is a permanent loss. The opposite could be said of corporate sustainability claims: Corporations want everlasting credit for their investments in nature, but for their failures to be instantly forgotten.

The twenty-first century will be defined by how civilization reconciles its powerful hunger for energy with the toll taken on the planet’s basic equilibrium.

Utilities used to talk to one another. No one ever made money off of anybody else’s customer base and so grid instability in any one region could serve as an object lesson for utilities dealing with the same issues in their own locales. Since 2000, however, not only is there far more information pouring into utility databases—a product of the widespread introduction of computerization at many points in the system, of which digital “smart” meters are the most infamous—but that information is treated as proprietary. Electricity trading, in this way, fails to be laissez-faire capitalism because nobody quite has access to the information necessary to make real-time decisions about how to manage their systems, and thus also their capital. Not even, oddly, the utilities themselves, since they now have so much information to contend with that most of it sits unprocessed in giant servers called “historians.” Big data has become just another modern way to use up electricity.

Beginning in the early 1900s utilities made decisions about how electricity was generated and how it moved on their slice of the grid—information they freely shared among themselves. Now they neither make these decisions nor share information about them. Historically, utilities made money when people used electricity; the more we used the more money they made. Now they don’t. Today’s utilities make money by transporting power and by trading it as a commodity. While they are still charged with keeping America’s power supply reliable, they have a real incentive to sell electricity to whomever will pay the most for it, wherever they may be. Long-distance wheeling is to their benefit; it is to the plant owners’ benefit; it is to the energy traders’ benefit; in theory, at least, it is also to our benefit. In fact, the only thing that really suffers from this arrangement is the grid.

Because the electricity we depend so heavily upon cannot be separated from its infrastructure, we cannot reform our energy system without also transforming our grid. There can be no electric power without all the machines and wires that make it, make it safe, and translate it across great distances into our lightbulbs, toasters, servers, and air-conditioning machines. We also have to pay for this system, something that renewables have complicated as they mix up producers with consumers in entirely new ways. And, because it's America, the whole shebang needs to convey a profit into somebody's pocket. Almost all the big utilities are investor-owned, which means they have shareholders who have been promised at least the occasional dividend. Corners get cut in order to ensure that this flow of cash continues apace, and decisions get made with profit motives in mind that brook little concern for the particular capacities, and limitations, of the grid. We may imagine the grid as primarily a machine to make and move electricity, but integral from the very start was that it also make and move vast quantities of money. A lot of people are still happy with this way of doing things.

We got a national grid with power plants far from view, long loping lines between us and them and, nearer at hand, distribution networks strung through neighborhoods, that link individual houses by means of pole-top transformers to the system as a whole. That this is how electricity works in America and pretty much everywhere else in the industrial world is not the logical outcome of physics, it's the product of cultural values, historical exigencies, governmental biases, and the big money dreams of financiers.

In the early days of electrification, any sense of power as a common good was not how electricity was made or marketed. It was by definition an elite product, not for everybody but for those who could afford it. This was not simply because electricity hadn't yet spread to the masses, but because the masses were not considered a market worth reaching until later in our nation's history. Some even argue that it wasn't until after the Great Depression that the notion that one could make money by selling lots of cheap things to lots of relatively poor people made any inroads at all. Most, however, agree that the idea of a "mass market" or "consumer culture" came about in part because utility company entrepreneurs needed new ways to make a profit from electricity. GE (originally Edison General Electric) started out as a power company; it was only with time that it became an appliance company, renting, and then later selling, people stuff that needed to be plugged in to work. Money was made twice over, first with the sale of the refrigerator and second with the ongoing sale of electric power necessary to make it run.

This shift in vision involved both imagining a whole new set of demands,

beyond lighting for elites, for which electricity might be used, and seeing a whole new population—everyone—as a potential market. Not elite light but popular light, popular heat, and popular power. In other words, the notion of consumer or mass culture, in which all people are promised access to all things, was in part the result of the universalization of electricity and not the other way around.

The most important thing about a monopoly or other organization of companies that colludes to fix prices is that the price of a good or service need not be related to the cost of producing it. A farmer with grain to sell also needs to transport and store it. He either pays what the elevator cartel is asking or his grain rots and he loses everything. Or, if he is slightly better off, he can build a silo of his own. For that, he needs steel; he pays the price the steel mill is asking, or he doesn't use that metal in his construction. A customer's choice is limited to paying the price on offer, regardless of how arbitrary or exorbitant, or not partaking of that particular good or service and thus courting his own ruin.

Unlike the trusts held by Standard Oil or US Steel that attempted to control the entire US market, there were many electric companies—they simply never overlapped. In this way, the term 'monopoly' took on a very particular meaning when speaking of power projects; despite the fact that there were numerous players in the market, there was no competition between them because the market itself had been divided into quadrants, the borders of each enforced by a political apparatus designed largely for that purpose. In this the utilities bore a certain resemblance to modern-day street gangs whose territorial agreements, hashed out albeit with submachine guns rather than governmental subcommittees, sport a similar structure. One simply doesn't offer one's product in territory claimed by someone else. Prices are fixed by the provider and the structures of power in place brook no complaint. This will of course sound familiar to anyone attempting to get cable or internet access outside a major metropolitan area.

PG&E—the company that burned Paradise, CA to the ground—sponsored a ballot measure that would change California law to require a yes vote by two thirds of all the residents in a community in order for that community to “aggregate” and then defect from their existing utility. The wording is important. PG&E's measure sponsored not a two-thirds majority of the votes actually cast in an election—already a difficult task—but a two-thirds majority reckoned in terms of the total population of an aggregating area. Given that voter turnout in the United States rarely tops 60 percent, even in hotly contested races, the success of this ballot measure would have virtually ensured that no community in the state would ever manage to gather the necessary votes to secede from their utility. The right would have

remained but the means of realizing that right rendered unattainable.

Though environmentalism grew in force and impact with Love Canal and similar “Superfund” sites, the partial meltdown of one of the nuclear power plants at Three Mile Island in 1979 shifted the tide for good. This event seemed to prove to nuclear power’s naysayers that they had been right all along. Nuclear was a no less poisonous way to make electricity than was coal that blackened lungs and smudged pores, and oil that was uncontrollable because of its origins on the far side of the planet. More than this, each mess, from DDT to acid rain, seemed to further convince a generation already angered and radicalized by the excesses of the Vietnam War that without an abiding wide-scale commitment to fundamental change disaster did indeed loom for America—and maybe, some suspected, we even deserved it.

By the late 1970s the problem was not so much awareness of what was going wrong, but rather how to change any of it. The systems in place that made smog, lakes of industrial pollutants, sweet light crude, and war had been hardening, in some cases to the point of total calcification, since the earliest years of industrial consolidation. In this the electricity business was no different: there was no way for regular people developing a new environmental consciousness to have a say in how power was made, from what, and with what after-effects except through protesting or opting out. Many Americans did both. Protests around nuclear power stations blossomed throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s as thousands camped out around these power factories whenever they were due to open. Many more people were dissatisfied without taking to streets or going off the grid entirely. The drop in electricity consumption nationally was one sign of this discontent. Even people who couldn’t afford to “turn on, tune in, and drop out” could follow the “Cardigan Path,” and so they did.

“The energy that runs America is brittle—easily shattered by accident or malice. That fragility frustrates the efforts of our Armed Forces to defend a nation that literally can be turned off by a handful of people. It poses, indeed, a grave and growing threat to national security, life, and liberty. This danger comes not from hostile ideology but from misapplied technology. It is not a threat imposed on us by enemies abroad. It is a threat we have heedlessly—and needlessly—imposed on ourselves. Our reliance on these delicately poised energy systems, has unwittingly put at risk our whole way of life. The power outages that occur regularly in the United States regardless of their cause—whether big storms or changing legislation or computer bugs or terrorist

hackers or revolutionary saboteurs—are a natural and utterly predictable side effect of having such a big, centralized electrical grid. The size, complexity, pattern, and control structure of these electrical machines, rotating in exact synchrony across half a continent, and strung together by an easily severed network of aerial arteries whose failure is instantly disruptive make them inherently vulnerable to large-scale failures.”

In the United States today the greatest threat to the security and reliability of our electrical infrastructure is foliage. Trees most especially, though kudzu and its ilk are troublesome creepers in their own right. Politicians may talk a lot, and utility managers may worry a lot, about how terrorists might hack into, shoot up, or bomb various bits of our grid in order to bring the United States to her knees. And yet the trees constitute a far more significant threat to the security and reliability of our national electric infrastructure—and of course to people, pets, and other beings who don’t wish to burn to death so that someone else can profit.

In Oklahoma there have been reports of a great horned owl dropping snakes onto utility poles, thereby causing frequent power outages. In 2011, a stretch of high-voltage lines outside Missoula, Montana, were shorted out by the carcass of a deer freshly killed by a juvenile bald eagle, who then picked it up and attempted to fly away only to discover (much to his chagrin) that a deer is too heavy for an eagle to carry. Down that deer came, accompanied by a hail of sparks, and once again, the power was out.

Rather than attempting the impossible feat of perfect control grounded in perfect information, complex industrial undertakings have for decades been veering toward another model for avoiding serious disaster. This would also seem to be the right approach for the grid, as its premise is that imperfect knowledge should not impede safe, steady functioning. The so-called Swiss Cheese Model of Industrial Accidents assumes glitches all over the place, tiny little failures or unpredicted oddities as a normal side effect of complexity. Rather than trying to “know and control,” systems designers attempt to build, manage, and regulate complexity in such a way that small things are significantly impeded on their path to becoming catastrophically massive things. Three trees and a bug shouldn’t black out half the country. Or, to put it differently, one doesn’t try to eliminate the holes in the Swiss cheese—by compacting all cheese into cheddar, for example—but rather to keep the holes in the cheese from lining up, from becoming one big hole that runs through the entirety of the loaf. The holes will be there—trees will be too tall, budgets will be tampered with, regulators will be put off, computer

bugs will worm their way in—but they won't snowball into total systems collapse. That's the theory anyway.

Solar power's image as the province of baling-wire hippies is at odds with reality. Today's multibillion-dollar photovoltaic industry owes its existence mainly to the Pentagon and Big Oil. The first wide-scale use of solar panels had come in the 1960s: powering military satellites, which couldn't use fossil fuels (too bulky to lift into space) or batteries (impossible to recharge in orbit). By the 1970s photovoltaics were cheaper, but the industry had acquired only one major new user: the petroleum industry. Some 70 percent of the solar modules sold in the United States were bought to run offshore drilling platforms. Realizing that solar had become essential to oil production, petroleum firms set up their own photovoltaic subsidiaries. Exxon became, in 1973, the first commercial manufacturer of solar panels; the second, a year later, was a joint venture with the oil giant Mobil.

“Richter's dream was to be locked in a building alone where he could pursue arc-fusion to his heart's content, and Perón's vision was to lock a German in a building until he could place Argentina at the front of the nuclear power quest.”

Fusion at the experimental level is not particularly difficult to achieve. In August 1971, *Scientific American* encouraged many a talented student to go nuclear by publishing plans for building a Van de Graaff accelerator for producing tritium and neutrons with a deuterium-deuterium (D-D) fusion. Although it is far less efficient than the D-T fusion, one doesn't have to own a tritium source to make it work.

The amateur scientist was encouraged to make his own radioactive sources by bombarding various materials with neutrons generated in his home-built “machine to produce low-energy protons and deuterons.” As an after-message, the article encourages the experimenter to stay out of the way of the “x-rays of substantial intensity,” shield the apparatus with a double layer of solid, 18-inch-thick concrete blocks and boxes of paraffin surrounding the stationary target, wear a dosimeter and a film badge, and keep a Geiger counter turned on. Back in '71, amateur science ran wild and free. These days, such acts would likely get you caught by some ultra-classified hyperspectral analyzer—either floating around in space or on some kind of blimp, drone, et cetera—resulting in a no-knock, three-letter-agency raid ending in the death of any dogs you may have and an all-expenses-paid trip to a windowless box.

Fusion at the center of the Sun is so unlikely, the power density is only 7.85 watts per cubic foot. To put this in perspective, that level of power

density describes the metabolism of a reptile. A large box turtle, awake, generates about as much heat as a like volume of tightly compressed plasma at the center of the Sun. The only reason the Sun gets hot enough to glow is that it is so big. An active compost heap the size of the Sun would generate as much power, and it would warm the Earth just as surely. Generating electricity by fusion in a large concrete building on Earth will therefore not be emulating the Sun. A fusion power reactor will have to establish conditions of pressure and temperature that are orders of magnitude greater than exist in the Sun, and a simple proton-proton fusion scheme, which has the least probability of fusing, has no hope of success. The fusion reaction with the highest probability (5.0 barns), is the one achieved in 1932, the deuterium-tritium reaction. The next best, at 1.2 barns, is the proton-boron-11 reaction, and the deuterium-deuterium fusion is down on the list, at a maximum 0.11 barns. A reliable deuterium-tritium fusion will occur at temperatures over one-billion degrees Kelvin, which is sixty-four times hotter than the center of the Sun.

“A report from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) holds that we are already capable, with existing technology, of making 80 percent of American power from renewable sources.”

People can lower their collective and individual use of electricity down to what the various environmentally tolerable and bearable sources can supply. If they don't want to do that sooner, then they can just let the eventual collapse of civilization do it for them later. The insistence on using into the future the quantities of electricity to which people have become accustomed in the present is an infantile insistence. It will be denied by nature. People can either grow up or die. Believe it now or believe it later.

To be distinguished from recession, degrowth means a phase of planned and equitable economic contraction in the richest nations, eventually reaching a steady state that operates within Earth's biophysical limits.

At this point, mainstream economists will accuse degrowth advocates of misunderstanding the potential of technology, markets, and efficiency gains to “decouple” economic growth from environmental impact. But there is no misunderstanding here. Everyone knows that we could produce and consume more efficiently than we do today. The problem is that efficiency without sufficiency is lost.

Despite decades of extraordinary technological advancement and huge efficiency improvements, the energy and resource demands of the global economy are still increasing. This is because within a growth-orientated

economy, efficiency gains tend to be reinvested in more consumption and more growth, rather than in reducing impact.

This is the defining, critical flaw in growth economics: the false assumption that all economies across the globe can continue growing while radically reducing environmental impact to a sustainable level. The extent of decoupling required is simply too great. As we try unsuccessfully to “green” capitalism, we see the face of Gaia vanishing.

The very lifestyles that were once considered the definition of success are now proving to be our greatest failure. Attempting to universalize affluence would be catastrophic. There is absolutely no way that today’s 7+ billion people could live the Western way of life, let alone the 11 billion expected in the future. Genuine progress now lies beyond growth. Tinkering around the edges of capitalism will not cut it.

Seems to me that we are increasingly likely, and apparently destined, to share a common end as a species, while the very few live large at the horrible expense of the people who might hope to live decent, moderate lives, eating only to their reasonable hunger and drinking only to their necessary thirst, through present and future iterations of “progress.”

These are the basic concepts of Degrowth:

- Consumerism is psychological/spiritual junk food that actively reduces well-being rather than increases it.
- Better rather than more: well-being is increased by everything that cannot be commoditized by a market economy or financialized by a cartel-state financial machine—friendship, family, community, self-cultivation. The goal of economic and social growth should be better, not more. On a national scale, the cancerous-growth measured by gross domestic product (GDP) should be replaced with a measure that is more equitable and sustainable.
- A recognition that resources are not infinite, despite claims to the contrary. Indeed, all the evidence suggests that access to cheap energy only speeds up the depletion and despoliation of every other resource.
- The unsustainability of consumerist “growth” that’s dependent on resource depletion funded by financialization—for example the endless expansion of credit and phantom collateral.
- The diminishing returns on private consumption and “bridges to nowhere” (crony-capitalist public consumption).

- The failure of neoliberal capitalism and communism alike in their pursuit of growth at any cost.

Degrowth is heresy in the religion of progress. The faith that growth equals progress is akin to the Cargo Cult of Keynesianism, the notion that expanding debt exponentially to drive diminishing returns of growth is not only necessary but a moral imperative.

Both the religion of growth and its cargo cult are narratives used to justify the expansion of global finance via financialization. Expanding capital, profits, and power is the key driver, and the religion of growth is merely the public-relations narrative that mesmerizes the debt-serfs, political toadies, and media sycophants.

Does this look like a world with plenty of room for everything to expand? A Degrowth economy must fulfill two requirements:

1. The Degrowth economy must provide a universal basic income to all in addition to paid-work livelihoods and opportunities for everyone who wants them.
2. The Degrowth economy must institutionalize a decentralized, democratic, self-organizing process to allocate human, social, resource, and financial capital as an alternative to centralized states/banks and profit-maximizing corporations.

These arise from three key insights:

1. If we don't change the way we create and distribute money, we change nothing.
2. Not everything that is valuable is profitable, and so maximizing profit is not the sole arbiter of 'value,' nor is it a sound process for allocating labor and capital for everything that has value but isn't profitable.
3. Centralization undermines democracy and generates privilege, inequality, insecurity, conflict, and waste by its very nature.

In a petri dish, a colony of bacteria will expand until it runs out of resources and then it will stop. But the bacteria doesn't only stop, it starts to die off rapidly due to poisoning by its own waste products. Anyone who has brewed a batch of beer or wine knows this, the yeast dies when its waste product, alcohol, starts killing it off. Yet there is still sugar (resources) left in the yeasts' environment.

This all will not end well, at least not well for the human species at the rate we are going.

Technological Horrors

In many ways, technological problems are much easier to solve than human ones. It may in fact be why progress has so strongly favored technology throughout most of our modern history.

If there is a problem with a piece of technology, it is always a logical one. It may not be clear except in hindsight, but it is always logical. The computer not turning on is not because it is Jewish and today is a holiday. The server's poor performance is not because it had a rough weekend. The axle did not break because Karen in HR was mean to it at the bar last night.

Due to the fact that AI can never die, can it ever accurately value life or will it be forever limited to what its programmers value? How would we know its alternative decision is actually better? If we were to default to it being correct, are we again not putting ourselves at the mercy of the parameters and biases of the creators at its inception?

We do not need some omnipotent, all-powerful AI. Were we to educate the entirety of our populations—and I mean truly educate, not indoctrinate or propagandize—we would easily find solutions to all our ills. We must cease the focus on machine AIs, which are nothing more than the modern equivalents of gods, and instead focus on the biological being, both human and non-human, and what their immense and diverse capabilities can accomplish for good if directed toward the task.

“Some serious thinkers fear that AI could one day pose an existential threat: a ‘superintelligence’ might pursue goals that prove not to be aligned with the continued existence of humankind.”

The serious thinkers forget the current ruling intelligence on this planet is already doing a good job of not aligning its actions/goals with its continued existence. We might go extinct before we find the secret sauce that crates this mythical super-intelligence. What exists today has no relationship to actual intelligence.

It seemed to me odd, though not especially surprising, that a hypothetical danger arising from a still nonexistent technology would, for these billionaire entrepreneurs, be more worthy of investment than, say, clean water in the developing world or the problem of grotesque income inequality in their own country. It was, of course, a question of return on investment—of time, and money, and effort.

The concerns of existential risk fit into that value metric. If you consider balancing the interests of future people against those who already exist, reducing the probability of a major future catastrophe can be a very high-impact decision. If you succeed in avoiding an event that might wipe out all of future humanity, that clearly exceeds any good you might do for people currently living.

The whole existential risk idea is a narcissistic fantasy of heroism and control—a grandiose delusion, on the part of computer programmers and tech entrepreneurs and other cloistered egomaniacal geeks, that the fate of the species rests in their hands: a ludicrous binary eschatology whereby we would be either destroyed by bad code or saved by good code. The whole thing can seem so childish as to barely be worth thinking about, except as an object lesson in the idiocy of a particular kind of cleverness. But if it all is absolutely, terrifyingly right—that thousands of the world’s smartest people are spending their days using the world’s most sophisticated technology to build something that would destroy us all. It seems, if not quite plausible, on some level intuitively, poetically, mythologically right. This is what we do as a species, after all: we build ingenious devices, and we destroy things.

It’s interesting to speculate about how we’d view the rise of AI if we had a different view of intelligence. Plato believed that philosophers would need to be cajoled into becoming kings, since they naturally prefer contemplation to mastery over men. Other traditions, especially those from the East, see the intelligent person as one who scorns the trappings of power as mere vanity, and who removes him or herself from the trivialities and tribulations of quotidian affairs.

Imagine if such views were widespread: if we all thought that the most intelligent people were not those who claimed the right to rule, but those who went to meditate in remote places, to free themselves of worldly desires; or if the cleverest of all were those who returned to spread peace and enlightenment. Would we still fear robots smarter than ourselves?

Compared to the human brain, machine learning isn’t especially efficient. A child places her finger on the stove, feels pain, and masters for the rest of her life the correlation between the hot metal and her throbbing hand. And she also picks up the word for it: burn. A machine learning program, by contrast, will often require millions or billions of data points to create its statistical models of cause and effect. But for the first time in history, those petabytes of data are now readily available, along with powerful computers to process them. And for many jobs, machine learning proves to be more flexible and nuanced than the traditional programs governed by rules.

Language scientists, for example, spent decades, from the 1960s to the early years of this century, trying to teach computers how to read.

During most of this time, they programmed definitions and grammatical rules into the code. But as any foreign-language student discovers all too quickly, languages teem with exceptions. They have slang and sarcasm. The meaning of certain words changes with time and geography. The complexity of language is a programmer's nightmare. Ultimately, coding it is hopeless. But with the Internet, people across the earth have produced quadrillions of words about our lives and work, our shopping, and our friendships. By doing this, we have unwittingly built the greatest-ever training corpus for natural-language machines. As we turned from paper to e-mail and social networks, machines could study our words, compare them to others, and gather something about their context.

The progress has been fast and dramatic. As late as 2011, Apple underwhelmed most of techdom with its natural-language "personal assistant," Siri. The technology was conversant only in certain areas, and it made laughable mistakes. People found it near useless. But now people are talking to their phones all the time, asking for the weather report, sports scores, or directions. Somewhere between 2008 and 2015, give or take, the linguistic skills of algorithms advanced from pre-K to middle school, and for some applications much higher.

There is a desire for digital slaves which make us the center of the universe. We see this desire manifest itself with rise of on-demand servant services like Uber and TaskRabbit. Digital assistants, AIs, are merely pitched to consumers as the next incarnation of this, finally, a servant for everyone.

Suppose you just had a nasty fight with your boyfriend. The algorithm in charge of your sound system will immediately discern your inner emotional turmoil, and based on what it knows about you personally and about human psychology in general, it will play songs tailored to resonate with your gloom and echo your distress. These particular songs might not work well with other people, but are just perfect for your personality type. After helping you get in touch with the depths of your sadness, the algorithm would then play the one song in the world that is likely to cheer you up—perhaps because your subconscious connects it with a happy childhood memory that even you are not aware of. No human DJ could ever hope to match the skills of such an AI.

The screens make children three magical promises that seem like gifts from the fairies. You will always be heard. You can put your attention wherever you want it to be. And you will never have to be alone. From the youngest age, there is a social media account that will welcome you. From the youngest age, there is a place where you can be an authority, even an authority who can berate and bully. And there is never, ever a moment when you have to quiet yourself and listen only to your inner voice. You

can always find other voices.

Children become drawn in by the three promises, but they may lose out in the end. Why? Because talking to technology, or talking to others through technology, leads children to substitute mere connection for the complexities and nuance of developing conversation. Indeed, many children end up afraid of conversation. In studies of children and technology, when asked “What’s wrong with conversation?” they are able to answer by about age ten. To paraphrase their bottom line, ‘It takes place in real time and you can’t control what you’re going to say.’ They’re right. That’s what is wrong with conversation. And of course, particularly for a child growing up, that’s what is so profoundly right with conversation. Children need practice dealing with other people. With people, practice never leads to perfect. But perfect isn’t the goal. Perfect is the goal only in a simulation. Children become fearful of not being in control in a domain where control is not the point. Beyond this, children use conversations with one another to learn how to have conversations with themselves. For children growing up, the capacity for self-reflection is the bedrock of development.

I worry that the holding power of the screen does not encourage this. It jams that inner voice by offering continual interactivity or continual connection. Unlike time with a book, where one’s mind can wander and there is no constraint on time out for self-reflection, apps bring children back to the task at hand just when a child’s mind should be allowed to wander. So in addition to taking children away from conversation with other children, too much time with screens can take children away from themselves. It is one thing for adults to choose distraction over self-reflection. But children need to learn to hear their own voices.

Why is solitude so important, and why do we want to cultivate it in the young? Solitude is a precondition for creativity, but it is also where we find ourselves so that we can reach out and have relationships with other people, in which we really appreciate them as other people. So solitude is a precondition for conversation. If we aren’t able to be alone with ourselves, we are at risk of using other people as “spare parts” to support our fragile selves. One of the great tasks of childhood is to develop the capacity for this kind of healthy solitude. It is what will enable children to develop friendships of mutuality and respect.

Isaac Asimov imagined three rules of robots, which futuristic robots would be compelled to follow. The first was to never harm humans (or through inaction allow a human to come to harm). The second was to always obey humans. The third was to try to protect itself. These three laws were not equal, however, as earlier laws always took precedent over later laws. This means that a robot told to kill someone for you wouldn’t

obey, unlike a robot told to destroy itself.

Although these three laws facilitate great stories, they are impractical. For example, what constitutes harm? If a robot comes across a homeless person, is it compelled to whisk him away to a shelter? Even if that person doesn't want to be whisked away? Similarly, what happens if the robot is faced with a choice between two different harmful actions, like killing one person to save the life of someone else? How could a machine decide what to do here when people can't even agree on the moral appropriateness of such an action? Just like human morality, machine morality will invariably be messy.

The idea that we're going to unleash self-driving cars in our neighborhoods to take out innocent pedestrians is pretty unreasonable. If you're sitting in a self-driving car it should be at your own risk. Cars are equipped with safety equipment like airbags, seat belts, and steel reinforcement beams to protect the passengers inside. Pedestrians are limited to what evolution provides. Asking the car to keep track of how many people it's transporting and calculating their demographic worth against whoever it's thinking about murdering sounds pretty unreasonable too.

The technology is nowhere near capable of distinguishing such situations anyway, so what we have is another case of hype masquerading as science.

In 2020, we should imagine a visit from a person from the year 2100. Will she look on our choices admiringly, or with her head in her hands at the chaos we are about to create? That is the moment we face.

As I travel back, in my mind, to Simon Morley's New York City of the 1880s, I imagine myself talking to a pedestrian and explaining to him that, within twenty years, we would shine a light in his face and he would stop, that he would hug buildings while he walked, and that he'd only cross at corners when the government said it was okay to proceed. If he failed to comply, he'd be charged with a criminal violation and subject to arrest. This pedestrian from the 1880s would laugh at me and say that no sane society would allow that to happen; it was inconceivable. Keep this conversation in mind—what outrageous, inconceivable concepts might we hear from a visitor from 2100 explaining the “traffic wars” of the twenty-first century?

By the mid-1920s, the auto industry had begun advocating for jaywalking laws as a way to make more room for cars and eliminate a nuisance—people. Their vigorous campaigns to get jaywalking laws passed across the country would be successful. For instance, industry lobbyists were instrumental in getting the 1928 Model Municipal Traffic Ordinance passed during the Hoover administration. The crucial thing it said was that pedestrians would cross only at crosswalks, and only at right angles. Essentially, this is the traffic law that we're still living with today. Crossing against a red light

was also considered jaywalking. For millions of years, humans had been walking on the earth and stopped only when they perceived danger or an obstacle. For the first time, humankind was asked to stop because a colored light appeared.

History urges us to question, if not abandon, the assumption that the only way anybody can go anywhere, or wants to go anywhere, is via car, driverless or not. This assumption is a fairly recent legacy, but an incredibly powerful one. Autonomous vehicles can and should be part of a better system of movement that takes the best from the past, the assumption that streets are for people, and avoids the worst—the idea, barely more than a century old, that streets are only for the car.

Massachusetts has 76,200 lane-miles of roadway, yet the state is just 190 miles long. It has more roadway than Wyoming (60,454 lane-miles), an area several times larger than the Bay State.

It's so easy to be seduced by driverless cars, to wish and believe that they will solve just about all our problems with travel. Traffic will speed up, crashes will be almost nonexistent, and the time we spend in our cars will be enjoyable and productive. A little more than a century ago, we first bought the sales pitch—hook, line, and sinker—that cars would speed our travel, increasing our productivity; that cities would be much healthier without all that horse dung; and that our lives would be more enjoyable. We approached cars with not just a *laissez-faire* attitude but as a society in servitude to the new vehicles. “What’s good for GM is good for America” was a version of a not-so-subliminal message we were already receiving; what is good for the car is good for cities, states, and the country.

Today, industry representatives only want to talk about the good that will come about from AVs for humankind, in the same way early car makers talked about all the good the horseless carriage would bring. We know now that our last century’s approach to cars led to the hollowing out of cities, the destruction of transit systems, and a vicious cycle of urban populations decreasing and becoming poorer, of city services being cut and crime becoming rampant. From 1899 to 2013, 3,613,732 people died in motor vehicle accidents in the United States, with another 80 million people injured, many of them permanently maimed. I don’t think this level of lethality was the outcome Americans were hoping for when they first embraced the car. That was not the promise people were offered.

AV public transit should not be confused with the hype surrounding “AV road trains.” Some proponents of AVs maintain that robo-cars operating in platoons can mimic the performance of bus rapid transit or even a rail line. It isn’t true. A single lane of cars today has a capacity, at best, of 2,000 vehicles per hour. With an average occupancy in the United States of 1.1

persons per car, 2,200 people would be moved. Upgrade those cars to AVs and perhaps 3,600 vehicles could traverse the lane each hour. Others have suggested much higher numbers, but I think spacing vehicles traveling at 60 miles per hour with less than one second between them over the course of an hour is risky and not reasonable where there is merging, weaving, and exiting traffic. Although 3,600 vehicles per hour is still about an 80 percent increase in lane capacity, the goal should be moving people, not vehicles. Some of those vehicles are likely to be empty as they head to a pickup somewhere or after they drop the occupant off and then go home or to a home base. I'll be generous and say that average car occupancy is 2.0, even though Americans drivers have been going increasingly solo for more than a generation. With an occupancy rate of 2.0 people per car, the AV lane capacity would be 7,200 people moved per hour. A lane full of AV buses at, say, 1,500 conventional-sized buses per hour has the capacity to move 60,000 persons per hour. It's no contest: AV transit is the smarter way to go. Unfortunately I have yet to see a Congress since the 1960s that has much appetite for investing in transit.

Imagine the earliest human society—not so much a village as an encampment. For its inhabitants, this encampment defines their world. Whenever they leave it to hunt or gather, they conceive of their present position in relation to their encampment. They know no other way to think of location. This is their reference frame. We might use home-center to describe this basic wayfinding method. Contrast home-center systems with what might be called self-centering methods, which is how we see the world. We define our position objectively, sometimes with help from tools such as maps or GPS, but rarely by where we are in relation to our homes. Dead reckoning is kept to a minimum. The center of our world is us. With some knowledge of ancient Polynesian navigation, we can identify a third system, which might be called local-reference. This defines location in relation to a prominent environmental feature, such as a mountain, coastline, or bridge. Newcomers emerging from the New York City subway into the disconcerting tangle of the West Village—where 4th Street and 13th Street somehow intersect—can use the massive One World Trade Center building to distinguish uptown from downtown.

The Polynesians used a method of dead reckoning called *etak*. The first key to understanding *etak* is that it does not provide the navigator with any new navigational knowledge. *Etak* is wayfinding, not navigation. It will not tell you how to get to where you want to go, any more than knowing what 'miles' are will help you get to my house. But it provides an even more elusive, more primal, more contingent form of knowledge: it will tell you where you are.

This is how it works: When a navigator using etak decides to travel from one island to another, a third island is chosen as a reference point. The reference island will be one that lies between the two, and off to one side—picture a triangle. The reference island is not visible from the origin or the destination, and will never once be visible during the journey. But the navigator knows, from his sidereal compass, the bearing of the reference island. He knows that when he stands on his island and looks in the direction of a certain star, he is looking in the direction of the reference island. He begins the journey. This one will require three segments, or etaks. Most journeys required several more.

As the canoe progresses, its bearing in relation to the reference island changes. After traveling a certain distance on the ocean, the viewing perspective has changed, and the reference island now lies under a second star. The canoe has progressed to the end of the first etak. As the canoe continues further, the perspective shifts again, and a third star comes to lie over the reference island. This is the end of the second etak. The canoe is now traversing the third and final segment. As the destination grows nearer, a fourth star, the one that marks the reference island when seen from the destination island, replaces the third star. As the canoe reaches the beach, the fourth star will be moving into position, directly over the reference island.

It cannot be stressed enough that etak is not providing the navigator with a way to set or maintain a course. Etak is not “data.” It is more like an operating system, running in the background of the CPU in a navigator’s brain. It is a processor into which the navigator’s knowledge of rate, time, geography, and astronomy can be integrated to provide a conveniently expressed and comprehended statement of distance traveled, providing the solution to an essential navigational question: ‘How far away is our destination?’

Etak is only as good as the raw data that lies behind it. How does the navigator know where the reference island lies? A study of etak will not give us the answer. Rather, we must look back to his instruction in the star courses. If the Polynesian navigator errs in his estimates of how far the canoe has traveled, etak will not save him and his crew. The system is workable only because of the vast number of star courses and other items of information stored in the navigator’s memory. A navigator marking a position using etak is seeing the world very differently from someone who is not. To begin with, the canoe isn’t moving. It is stationary on the ocean, watching the islands move. The island where the voyage began recedes, the destination moves closer, and the reference island seems to float between stable star points. Everything passes by the little canoe, everything, except

the stars by night and the sun by day.

It is a frustrating concept for us, and difficult for users to convey its workings to outsiders. It requires a worldview inconsistent with wayfinding as we understand it. Etak is like looking at the world through the window of a moving train. Houses near the tracks seem to fly by, while mountains in the distance keep pace with the train over long distances. In etak, the canoe is the train and the stars the mountains. The stars are fixed in the sky. The islands, like the houses, are in motion. When pressed, Carolinian navigators would always admit that yeah, we get it—the islands aren't really moving. But they would remain puzzled as to why anyone would consider this worldview problematic. For navigation purposes, they would explain, an island doesn't have one location—its position is relative to yours.

In our speech we find it natural to estimate (or measure) distance in arbitrary units. For the etak user, the estimate is relative. It is akin to a person walking across a familiar field in the dark. He is not likely to count his paces even if he knows their exact length. Instead he estimates intuitively that he is one-third or perhaps halfway across by knowing subjectively how long and how fast he has been walking.

There are two main schools of thought. One group believes that a rat's central nervous system may be likened to a complicated telephone switchboard that helps the rat compile stimulus-response connections in its brain. When a rat is confronted with a new maze, the switches are closed. As the rat explores the maze—making decisions, reaching dead ends, doubling back for another approach—the switchboard lights up. It receives incoming calls from the rat's sense organs and relays the message to the animal's muscles. The moves that a rat discovers take it closer to the reward are the switchboard connections that remain open, while the incorrect turns are the switchboard connections that close. This stimulus-and-response school of thought seems to imagine a satisfaction-receiving part of the rat that tells the switchboard operator to hold that connection, it was good; and see to it that you blankety-blank well use it again the next time those stimuli come in.

For the second group, the field theorists, the rat's nervous system is not a switchboard, staffed by a neutral operator, but rather a "map control room," the domain of an active cartographer using sense-organ stimuli to construct a tentative, cognitive map of the environment. Learning is not merely compiling a list of which moves serve the rat's purpose and which do not. It is an ongoing process of adding detail to the cognitive map, increasing the animal's ability to perceive the maze as a totality. The cognitive map concept can be divided into two basic models, strip maps and comprehensive maps. A strip map is analogous to a visual map that depicts only the spatial

relationship between two points: an unbroken line surrounded by blank space on the paper. As the cognitive map gains depth, breadth, and context, it becomes a comprehensive map, so that the organism can now visualize the orientation of point A to point B, point B to point C, point A to point C, and so on. The more intimately one knows an environment, the more details the cognitive cartographer can add to the map. Rat experiments suggest that the animal has the capacity to build strip maps into comprehensive maps.

Taking a long enough view, and a broad enough definition of the concept, the first GPS auto navigation unit was the “south-pointing carriage,” which appeared in China around 2,000 years ago. Whenever the carriage changed direction, a gear-driven mechanism would measure the movement of the wheels and cause a figure with an outstretched arm to always point in the direction of the carriage’s original heading. In the early twentieth century, users of the Jones Live Map for cars could “program” routes on a paper disc mounted on a turntable, which was connected to a gear train attached to one of the car’s wheels. As the car moved, the disc spun, revealing printed directions that told the driver when to turn. A competing technology, the Chadwick Road Guide, used a route disc linked to the odometer, which triggered color-coded signal arms that alerted the driver to an upcoming maneuver.

Selective availability was the term used to describe the intentional degradation of the civilian GPS signal. The Pentagon kept the policy in place while quietly discontinuing it during times of US military activity, so that soldiers could continue to use civilian-grade receivers. When American troops intervened to remove Haiti’s military government in 1994, attentive GPS users worldwide noticed that their receivers gave more accurate readings. But at midnight Eastern Daylight Time on May 1, 2000, the intentional degrading of the civilian signal ceased.

There is a price: the system may fundamentally change us as human beings. We so rely on GPS, have integrated it so deeply into our lives, that it may be altering the nature of human cognition—possibly even rearranging the gray matter in our heads. It is so potentially invasive that it forces us to reconsider cherished notions of privacy. We have let it saturate the world’s systems so completely that it is difficult to imagine life without it, and so quickly that we are just beginning to confront the possible consequences. A single GPS timing flaw, whether accidental or maliciously installed, could bring down the electrical grid, hijack drones, or halt the world financial system. In other words, what governments and security specialists call critical infrastructure—an inclusive term that refers to the systems, installations, and industries that make modern life possible. The US Department of

Homeland Security calls critical infrastructure “the backbone of our nation’s economy, security, and health. So vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect.” The US officially designates sixteen critical infrastructure sectors, including energy, financial services, dams, and food and agriculture. All but three of them utilize GPS for some essential functions. For many countries around the world, the same ratio applies.

The fear is not a catastrophic global failure of GPS, a complete cessation of signals. The satellites themselves would be nearly impossible for someone to damage. The worry is localized disruptions, especially attacks on GPS-dependent systems that would have a cascading catastrophic effect.

The Vulnerability Assessment Team decided to test the porosity of GPS by attempting to spoof it. They began by renting, for \$1,000 per week, a GPS satellite simulator, a legal device that tests the accuracy of a GPS receiver by simulating the active GPS satellite constellation. The simulator connects directly to the receiver, so its signal does not go out over the air—but it didn’t take much tinkering to attach an antenna to the simulator so that it was broadcasting a weak signal. To boost it, the team spent another \$300 on a GPS signal amplifier. They placed both components in the back of flatbed truck, along with a desktop computer, monitor, and battery. On the truck’s grill, they mounted an antenna.

After enacting various hijacking scenarios, the good news, the team discovered, was that this kind of attack would require very precise execution. The hijacker would have to first jam the real GPS signal in the vicinity of the target truck, while seamlessly introducing the bogus signal, all while remaining no more than 15 feet from the target—not impossible to imagine on a highway. After control had been gained over the target truck, the attack truck would need to maintain a distance from it of no more than 30 feet, feeding the spoofed signal to the truck’s GPS receiver so that it could continue to accept the fake coordinates and communicate them to the monitoring center. This logistical restraint made the hijacking a difficult proposition. The actual spoofing, however, was shockingly easy. It would require about \$2,000 of legal equipment to disable the Defense Department’s billion-dollar signal.

By around 2005, the team had figured out how to spoof a GPS receiver from nearly two miles away—feeding it bogus location and speed data. Video footage of experiments conducted two years later shows three stationary GPS receivers mounted on a tripod, the camera zooming in to document that the receivers are all displaying an estimated speed of 600 miles per hour. In separate experiments, the team proved that they could spoof a timekeeping device that was getting a time feed from GPS. From more than

300 feet away, they radiated a bogus signal in the direction of an antenna attached to a clock connected to a laptop computer, with the time displayed in huge letters across the screen. At one point the display suddenly changed from 3:00 (the correct time) to 11:58.

For a smart grid to have value, its Synchronphasors must observe and report at exactly the same moment. Because they are spread over a large area, the easiest way to synchronize them is by connecting them to high-precision clocks sourced to GPS. If someone were to introduce a bogus GPS signal that disrupted the clocks and broke the synchrony, causing a distorted and possibly alarming overall view of power flow on the grid, what might happen? For now, probably not much. The technology is at an intermediate stage, not yet considered a “critical cyber asset,” a classification used for hardware, software, data streams, and networks whose disruption could bring key parts of the critical infrastructure to the brink of disaster within fifteen minutes. But the next step is to make these smart grids smarter, giving them the ability to take direct action. They could redirect power to allocate it more efficiently or safely, and even shut the whole mess down, killing the power for thousands of users to isolate a problem before it spreads. If a spoofed GPS signal distorted Synchronphasor data, human operators might sense something was askew before taking action. Left to its own devices, the grid itself might not.

One of the few current examples of PMUs being used for actual control purposes is a line that links two hydroelectric dams on the Grijalva River in Mexico. If somebody went down there and set up a couple of spoofers at strategic locations and spoofed the PMUs, the power transmission lines would pop. It’s not going to be permanent damage but there’s going to be an over-voltage condition. Transformers are going to take themselves offline, and, long story short, there’s no electricity coming out of the wall socket. According to accepted international standards, if a Synchronphasor is off its timing by as little as 26.5 microseconds, its data compromises the grid’s integrity.

We now trust our devices so much that some follow them blindly down abandoned roads, over cliffs, and into the ocean; park rangers call this “death by GPS.” It describes what happens when your GPS fails you, not by being wrong, exactly, but often by being too right. It does such a good job of computing the most direct route from Point A to Point B that it takes you down roads which barely exist, or were used at one time and abandoned, or are not suitable for your car, or which require all kinds of local knowledge that would make you aware that making that turn is bad news.

GPS can lead to a sense of disengagement, because the question of location, which once required a close interaction with the world, is now

solved by unseen technologies far removed from the user. In our society, total disengagement is often an option. We have come to depend on GPS, a technology that, in theory, makes it impossible to get lost. Not only are we still getting lost, we may actually be losing a part of ourselves.

Spending our days moving through various environments, we fill in the details of our cognitive map based on our egocentric experiences. Can the granular detail of that map fade through misuse? The problem with GPS systems is that we are not forced to remember or process the information—as it is permanently at hand, we need not think or decide ourselves. The more we rely on technology to find our way, the less we build up our cognitive maps. Life becomes a series of strip maps: we see the way from A to Z, but we don't see the landmarks along the way. Developing a cognitive map from this reduced information is a bit like trying to get an entire musical piece from a few notes. Moreover, this suggests that we absolve ourselves from even having egocentric experiences to build upon. In some general sense, we lack reference points, stable spots that anchor our position in the world. Without these authoritative positions that, in a very real sense, add meaning to our world, we are left floating. Perhaps there is something to the explanation, by those who have driven their cars into rivers and over cliffs, that GPS told them to do it.

Prior to the innovative and creative thrill rides of the twentieth century, the only ways to feel the sensations caused by acceleration and direction manipulation were accidental, to say the least: being swung back and forth in the mouth of a lion, for instance, or falling down a steep hill, neither of which bodes especially well for our survival. Yet today we've built machines that allow us to experience physical sensations our ancestors couldn't even imagine, just to see what it feels like.

No major river in the United States has escaped damming somewhere along its course; not a single one flows unimpeded from headwaters to the sea.

In 2000, the US Fish and Wildlife Service reported that 77,000 towers were higher than 199 feet, which meant that they were required to have warning lights for aircraft. If calculations were correct, that meant that nearly 200 million birds collided fatally with towers each year in the United States alone. In fact, those figures had already been usurped, because cell phone towers were being erected so fast. By 2005, there were 175,000 of those. Their addition would raise the annual toll to half a billion dead birds—except that this number was still based on scant data and on guesses, because scavengers get to most feathered victims before they're found.

In separate studies, two U.S federal agencies estimate that 60 to 80 million birds also annually end up in radiator grilles or as smears on windshields of

vehicles racing down highways that, just a century ago, were slow wagon trails.

Science shouldn't be characterized only by the latest headline-making discovery. Scientific observation has been going on for centuries, and in that time we have learned a tremendous amount about the world around us. There is a vast heritage of knowledge that explains ordinary, familiar happenings.

“He approached each problem scientifically, experimenting by altering the variables until he arrived at a satisfactory solution—and always remembering that his designs had to be sustainable, using locally available materials. For example, he built a number of canals where instead of using an expensive cement lining that cracked during winter, he allowed weeds to grow and thicken, their roots naturally sealing the canal lining.”

I'm not sure I know the answer. But I know there is no going back to anything. And I know that we are not headed, now, toward convivial tools. We are not headed toward human-scale development. This culture is about superstores, not little shops; synthetic biology, not intentional community; brushcutters, not scythes. This is a culture that develops new life forms first and asks questions later; a species that is in the process of breaking its legs on its own cleverness.

Let me make it clear: *I have no easy solution to the horrors that the 'technological path' engenders.* Right now, neither you nor I have a tiny voice in either the pace and direction of that collective thing called so arbitrarily “advance” and “progress.”

If you don't like any of this, but you know you can't stop it, where does it leave you? The answer is that it leaves you with an obligation to be honest about where you are in history's great cycle, and what you have the power to do and what you don't. If you think you can magic us out of the progress trap with new ideas or new technologies, you are wasting your time. If you think that the usual “campaigning” behavior is going to work today where it didn't work yesterday, you will be wasting your time. If you think the machine can be reformed, tamed, or defanged, you will be wasting your time. If you draw up a great big plan for a better world based on science and rational argument, you will be wasting your time. If you try to live in the past, you will be wasting your time. If you romanticize hunting and gathering or send bombs to computer store owners, you will be wasting your time.

And so I ask myself: what, at this moment in history, would not be a waste of my time? And I arrive at five tentative answers:

1. **Withdrawing.** If you do this, a lot of people will call you a ‘defeatist’ or a ‘doomer,’ or claim you are ‘burnt out.’ They will tell you that you have an obligation to work for climate justice or world peace or the end of bad things everywhere, and that fighting is always better than quitting. Ignore them, and take part in a very ancient practical and spiritual tradition: withdrawing from the fray. Withdraw not with cynicism, but with a questing mind. Withdraw so that you can allow yourself to sit back quietly and feel, intuit, work out what is right for you and what nature might need from you. Withdraw because refusing to help the machine advance—refusing to tighten the ratchet further—is a deeply moral position. Withdraw because action is not always more effective than inaction. Withdraw to examine your worldview: the cosmology, the paradigm, the assumptions, the direction of travel. All real change starts with withdrawal.
2. **Preserving nonhuman life.** The revisionists will continue to tell us that wildness is dead, nature is for people, and Progress is God, and they will continue to be wrong. There is still much remaining of the earth’s wild diversity, but it may not remain for much longer. The human empire is the greatest threat to what remains of life on earth, and you are part of it. What can you do—really do, at a practical level—about this? Maybe you can buy up some land and rewild it; maybe you can let your garden run free; maybe you can work for a conservation group or set one up yourself; maybe you can put your body in the way of a bulldozer; maybe you can use your skills to prevent the destruction of yet another wild place. How can you create or protect a space for nonhuman nature to breathe easier; how can you give something that isn’t us a chance to survive our appetites?
3. **Getting your hands dirty.** Root yourself in something, some practical work, some place, some way of doing. Pick up your scythe or your equivalent and get out there and do physical work in clean air surrounded by things you cannot control. Get away from your laptop and your smartphone, if you have one. Ground yourself in things and places, learn or practice human-scale convivial skills. Only by doing that, rather than just talking about it, do you learn what is real and what’s not, and what makes sense and what is so much hot air.

4. **Insisting that nature has a value beyond utility—and telling everyone.** Remember that you are one life-form among many and understand that everything has intrinsic value. If you want to call this ‘ecocentrism’ or ‘deep ecology,’ do it. If you want to call it something else, do that. If you want to look to tribal societies for your inspiration, do it. If that seems too gooey, just look up into the sky. Sit on the grass, touch a tree trunk, walk into the hills, dig in the garden, look at what you find in the soil, marvel at what the hell this thing called life could possibly be. Value it for what it is, try to understand what it is, and have nothing but pity or contempt for people who tell you that its only value is in what they can extract from it.
5. **Building refuges.** The coming decades are likely to challenge much of what we think we know about what progress is, and about who we are in relation to the rest of nature. Advanced technologies will challenge our sense of what it means to be human at the same time as the tide of extinction rolls on. The ongoing collapse of social and economic infrastructures, and of the web of life itself, will kill off much of what we value. In this context, ask yourself: what power do you have to preserve what is of value—creatures, skills, things, places? Can you work, with others or alone, to create places or networks that act as refuges from the unfolding storm? Can you think, or act, like the librarian of a monastery through the Dark Ages, guarding the old books as empires rise and fall outside?

Or will you say, ‘Fuck your options; fuck your imposed limitations,’ and set out, as so many have before, to bring these petty tyrants to their knees; finally, once and for all, by whatever means necessary?

‘Is’ is not the same as ‘ought’—simply because you can do something doesn’t mean you should. But exactly the opposite seems to be the case today: if we can do something, that seems to provide a justification for doing it. And as we learn to do more things, we want even more—a vicious cycle thriving off the illusion that resources are unlimited. This process started 60,000 years ago as our species expanded from its African homeland to populate the world, and it accelerated abruptly after the Neolithic Revolution. With agriculture, as we have seen, came the power to create far larger problems than we could have even dreamed of as hunter-gatherers, and the driving force behind most of them was greed. While we can never go back to the pre-agricultural era, we can perhaps take as a moral guide the mythos of the world’s remaining hunter-gatherers: we can learn to want less.

Blind, Ignorant Tinkerers

“Your decision to go ahead and build it in the lab means that you are performing an experiment that could affect other people. And if you don’t tell them that you’re doing it in advance, you’re actively denying them a voice in the decision. And frankly, that’s wrong.”

At the age of eleven I collected some eggs of the western swallowtail butterfly and kept an eye on them as they hatched into caterpillars, which later turned into chrysalides. Finally the first of the chrysalides began to crack open, and what I saw was this: The emerging butterfly struggled out, its abdomen distended by some sort of fluid that was pumped out over its wings as it hung upside down on a twig. Half an hour later it was ready to fly, and it took off. As the other chrysalides began to crack, however, I decided to make myself useful. I gently eased open the crack to facilitate the butterflies’ emergence, and they promptly slid out, walked around, and one by one dropped dead. I had failed to realize that the exertions I had spared the butterflies were essential to their survival, because they triggered the flow of fluid that had to reach their wings. This experience taught me a lesson I am still talking about seventy years later: What appears to be kind and is meant to be kind can be the reverse of kind.

“No sooner does man discover intelligence than he tries to involve it in his own stupidity.”

We are researching and developing human abilities mainly according to the immediate needs of the economic and political system, rather than according to our own long-term needs as conscious beings. My boss wants me to answer emails as quickly as possible, but he has little interest in my ability to taste and appreciate the food I am eating. Consequently, I check my emails even during meals, while losing the ability to pay attention to my own sensations. The economic system pressures me to expand and diversify my investment portfolio, but it gives me zero incentives to expand

and diversify my compassion. So I strive to understand the mysteries of the stock exchange, while making far less effort to understand the deep causes of suffering.

Science is shaped in important ways by the worldview of those who engage in it. Our philosophy (broadly understood) shapes the sorts of questions we're liable to ask and the types of answers we'll be open to finding.

A team of scientists trained a large group of spiders to jump up when given the spoken command 'Jump Spiders Jump!' They carefully measured the height each spider jumped and did statistical analysis to arrive at a measure of spider jump-compliance. Then they anesthetized the spiders and carefully removed one leg from each spider. After the spiders recovered they were again commanded 'Jump Spiders Jump!' and the scientists carefully measured the height of each spider's jump and derived a new figure for jump-compliance. As the experiment proceeded the scientists noted a strong correlation between the number of legs remaining on the spiders and their jump-compliance. The experiment proceeded to its end when all the spiders were legless. The legless spiders did not respond to the command 'Jump Spiders Jump!' From this the scientists concluded spiders must have some kind of ear in their legs.

Expertise: knowing more and more about less and less until you know everything about nothing.

In a recent laboratory experiment, polar bears were declared inefficient walkers because they overheated on a treadmill. An experienced polar bear biologist responds:

"The bear can't walk properly on a treadmill. Walking into the wind, making that great pendulum swing of his legs, opening and closing his body to the cool air, you don't see that on a treadmill. Out on the sea ice you see he can walk a long way without overheating."

The analogy I often use is that of the Catholic priest as an expert in Catholicism. There is no question a priest has superior knowledge and experience in the details of the Catholic faith, so in some sense he is an expert. However, if you are a Jew or a Muslim or an atheist, this expertise is not very meaningful, and it is unlikely to convince you that the priest is right about the details of religious controversies. Similarly, while I agree homeopaths know more about homeopathy than I do, I believe that I know

enough to understand the subject of their expertise is an unscientific fantasy, so I have no obligation to defer to their views on the controversies about it.

Under normal conditions the research scientist is not an innovator but a solver of puzzles, and the puzzles upon which he concentrates are just those which he believes can be both stated and solved within the existing scientific tradition.

The reproducibility crisis is, to a large extent, the result of the scientific process always being a complex human process that involves many actors—study designers, all participants, data collectors, implementing practitioners, study statisticians, et cetera—who must make many unique decisions at many different steps over time when designing, implementing, and analyzing any given study—and some degree of bias unavoidably arises during this process. Variation between study outcomes is thus the norm, and one-to-one replication is not possible.

Researchers should thus not assume that the Randomized Control Trial (RCT) method inevitably produces valid causal results—in fact, that all trials face some degree of bias is simply the trade-off for studies to actually be conducted in the real world. A number of things inevitably do not go as planned or designed given the multiple complex processes over time involved in carrying out trials. Once a study is conducted and completed some biases will have arisen and nothing can be done about a number of them.

Some may respond, ‘are RCTs not still more credible than other methods even if they may have biases?’ For most questions we are interested in, RCTs cannot be more credible because they cannot be applied—e.g. for most complex phenomena we study such as effective government institutions, long life expectancy, democracy, inequality, education systems, psychological states. Other methods, such as observational studies, are needed for many questions generally not amenable to randomization but also at times to help design trials, interpret and validate their results, provide further insight on the broader conditions under which treatments may work, among other reasons discussed in the study. Different methods are thus complements—not rivals—in improving understanding.

No single study should be the sole and authoritative source used to inform policy and our decisions.

Scientific judgments of risk cannot—and, indeed, should not—be separated from value judgments: It is a travesty of rational thought to pretend that it is best to take value-free decisions in matters of life and death. One salient difference between experts and the lay public is that the latter, when assessing risks, do not conceal their moral commitments but put them into the argument, explicitly and prominently. The risk expert claims to depoliticize an inherently political problem. But knowledge of danger is necessarily

partial and limited: judgments of risk and safety must be selected as much on the basis of what is valued as on the basis of what is known. Science and risk assessment cannot tell us what we need to know about threats of danger since they explicitly try to exclude moral ideas about the good life.

Weighing risks against benefits sounds great, but the truth is there is no magic formula, especially when the risks are taken by one group and the benefits by another.

Whenever someone invokes science in discussions of food safety, we can be reasonably certain that questions of self-interest are at stake but are excluded from debate. Scientists talk about risk as a matter of illness and death. The public wants dread-and-outrage factors to be considered as well. The failure of food companies, scientists, and government agencies to recognize the need to address values as well as science in matters of food safety leads to widespread distrust of the food industry and its regulators. When officials and experts dismiss dread-and-outrage concerns as emotional, irrational, unscientific, and indefensible, they raise questions about their own credibility and competence. They fail to recognize their own biases as well as the predictability of public responses to food safety risks.

When a risk manager continues to ignore these factors—and continues to be surprised by the public's response of outrage—it is worth asking just whose behavior is irrational.

The food biotechnology industry, in dismissing dread-and-outrage factors as emotional and unscientific, lobbied for—and won—a largely science-based approach to regulation of its products. The dismissal of consumer concerns about value issues related to food biotechnology forced advocacy groups to use safety as the only “legitimate” basis of discussion. In the StarLink affair, for example, advocates could not use concerns about corporate control of the food supply as an argument against approval of genetically modified foods.

Monsanto, the giant biotech corporation, owns the key genetic traits in more than 90 percent of the soybeans planted by farmers in the United States and 80 percent of the corn. Its monopoly grew out of a carefully crafted strategy. It patented its own genetically modified seeds, along with an herbicide that would kill weeds but not soy and corn grown from its seeds. The herbicide and herbicide-resistant seeds initially saved farmers time and money. But the purchase came with a catch that would haunt them in the future: The soy and corn that grow from those seeds don't produce seeds of their own. So every planting season, farmers have to buy new seeds. In addition, if the farmers have any seeds left over, they must agree not to save and replant them in the future. In other words, once hooked, farmers have little choice but to become permanent purchasers of Monsanto seed. To

ensure its dominance, Monsanto has prohibited seed dealers from stocking its competitors' seeds and has bought up most of the small remaining seed companies.

Not surprisingly, in less than fifteen years, most of America's commodity crop farmers became dependent on Monsanto. The result has been higher prices far beyond the cost-of-living rise. Since 2001, Monsanto has more than doubled the price of corn and soybean seeds. The average cost of planting one acre of soybeans increased 325 percent between 1994 and 2011, and the price of corn seed rose 259 percent. Another result has been a radical decline in the genetic diversity of the seeds we depend on. This increases the risk that disease or climate change might wipe out entire crops for years, if not forever. A third consequence has been the ubiquity of genetically modified traits in our food chain.

At every stage, Monsanto's growing economic power has enhanced its political power to shift the rules to its advantage, thereby adding to its economic power. Beginning with the Plant Variety Protection Act of 1970, and extending through a series of court cases, Monsanto has gained increased protection of its intellectual property in genetically engineered seeds. It has successfully fought off numerous attempts in Congress and in several states to require labeling of genetically engineered foods or to protect biodiversity. It has used its political muscle in Washington to fight moves in other nations to ban genetically engineered seed. To enforce and ensure dominance, the company has employed a phalanx of lawyers. They've sued other companies for patent infringement and sued farmers who want to save seed for replanting. Monsanto's lawyers have also prevented independent scientists from studying its seeds, arguing that such inquiries infringe the company's patents.

You might think Monsanto's overwhelming market power would make it a target of antitrust enforcement. Think again. In 2012, it succeeded in putting an end to a two-year investigation by the antitrust division of the Justice Department into Monsanto's dominance of the seed industry. Monsanto has the distinction of spending more on lobbying—nearly \$7 million in 2013 alone—than any other big agribusiness. And Monsanto's former (and future) employees frequently inhabit top posts at the Food and Drug Administration and the Agriculture Department, they staff congressional committees that deal with agriculture policy, and they become advisors to congressional leaders and at the White House. Two Monsanto lobbyists are former congressman Vic Fazio and former senator Blanche Lincoln. Even Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas was at one time an attorney for Monsanto. Monsanto, like any new monopoly, has strategically used its economic power to gain political power and used its political power to entrench its market power.

“Why the fuck does everything have to be non-GMO?”

Because people don't trust corporations like ADM and Monsanto to develop things that actually benefit people as apposed to just generate profit. The idea behind current GMO trend is to make the plants immune to the heavy herbicides and pesticides they use to keep weeds and pests under control or even more recently, to produce the toxic components within the plant itself. Personally I don't want to eat all these poisons on my food. Oh, but its ok because RoundUp is perfectly safe for humans they say. These are the same kind of ignorant or immoral fuckers that claimed cigarettes, Agent Orange, PCBs, and DDT were safe. I'm sure our ever rising cancer rates are just a coincidence.

GMOs contribute to monoculture and clones that are very susceptible to plague. How would you like our entire nation's corn crop to fail for a decade because of a blight that attacks every corn stock of identical genetic makeup? Having entire fields of clones is not very good for food security. How was your Gros Michel banana this morning?

GMO research targets shit food like corn. Do we really need to increase corn production? Go to McDonald's, order a cheeseburger, fries, and a milkshake. Every single item in that meal is corn based. The meat is corn fed, the fries are fried in corn oil, and the milkshake is corn syrup. We need more plant diversity in our diet not less.

GMO contamination is forever. Having these genes spread throughout the world of food crops via wind or bees or other pollinators is forever. Once the contamination has spread it can't be undone. What happens when one of these GMOs made by a huge corporation, only concerned with profit, has a mistake? What if ADM modifies corn, and ten generations of corn later it turns corn into an inedible mess? That genetic contaminant has now spread though natural pollination worldwide and we just destroyed our corn crop. Yay us!

Monsanto owns a patent on a terminator gene that makes the seeds of crops sterile so farmers can't replant the next years crop without buying more seed from Monsanto. But that's ok, they “promised” not to use it. Monsanto has sued a Canadian farmer named Percy Schmeiser for using “their” seeds without paying royalties because his field was contaminated with GMO shit from the neighbors. It's a seed, since when does Monsanto own a seed?

These are just a few of the reasons people have problems with GMOs. I'm sure with proper oversight and lacking profit motive we could develop reasonable GMOs but I simply don't trust the giant greed driven assholes at Monsanto to have our health in mind when they make these things.

Researchers find this infuriating. Why don't people care that the people who best understand the technology believe it to be useful and safe? After all, scientists eat the food, too. But they are looking at the question as if it were one of risk, whereas men and women on the street also think in terms of fairness—equity, to use the two-dollar word. In the laboratory, scientists ask: 'Is it feasible?' In the world outside the laboratory, people ask: 'Is it right?'

Contrast the behavior of the European and North American consumers who fear putting GMOs into their bodies as food with that of the European and North American patients who willingly put GMOs into their bodies as medicine. Genetically modified *E. coli* creates synthetic insulin for diabetics; genetically modified baker's yeast produces hepatitis B vaccine; genetically modified mammal cells make blood factor VIII for hemophiliacs and tissue plasminogen activator for heart-attack victims. Although activists have occasionally campaigned against these drugs, their efforts have not caught fire.

The divergent reactions are not because people are foolish but because the two circumstances have different ethical benefit-cost calculations. In both cases scientists assure non-scientists that the likelihood of negative side effects is small. But the diabetics who use synthetic insulin personally benefit from it, compensating for any risk. The same is true for the hemophiliacs and cardiac patients. Meanwhile, the Californians who lived around the strawberry and potato patches would receive no benefit whatsoever from the ice-minus test. From their point of view, they were being asked to expose themselves to an unknown peril for the benefit of some rich venture capitalists in a city hundreds of miles away. Imposing any risk, however tiny, would make them worse off. They were being used purely as a means to somebody else's end—something that philosophers have regarded as unethical since the days of Kant.

In February 2001, Greenpeace challenged the fundamental premise (and promise) of Golden Rice. They calculated that adults would have to eat at least 20 pounds (9 kilograms) of Golden Rice to meet daily vitamin A recommendations. Greenpeace called Golden Rice nothing but "fool's gold" and said:

"It is shameful that the biotech industry is using starving children to promote a dubious product. This isn't about solving childhood blindness, it's about solving biotech's public relations problem."

Greenpeace did its homework. It took at face value the scientists' own estimate that a daily intake of 300 grams (nearly 11 ounces) of Golden Rice

should provide the equivalent of 100 units of vitamin A. Beta-carotene must be converted to vitamin A in the body, however, this process is usually incomplete and the amount that is converted into vitamin A is a matter of sharp debate. The scientists who developed Golden Rice assumed that 6 molecules of beta-carotene would yield 1 of vitamin A, whereas US estimates suggest a conversion ratio of 12 to 1. Greenpeace took the scientists' figures and compared them to recommended levels of vitamin A intake for the US population. By US standards, 300 grams (11 ounces) of Golden Rice provides one-third the recommended level of daily intake of vitamin A for a child aged one to three years, one-seventh the level recommended for an adult woman, and one-ninth the level for an adult man. By such standards, young children would need to eat nearly 33 ounces of raw rice per day, which, when cooked, would amount to 99 ounces, or about 6 pounds—an absurdly large amount. If the Golden Rice scientists had used the higher US conversion ratio, that quantity doubles to an even more absurd 12 pounds.

It must be understood that the US standard is deliberately set high to meet the nutritional needs of about 98% of the population; people with average requirements can prevent vitamin A deficiency at much lower levels of intake. Nevertheless, to meet just 10% of the US standard, young children would still need to eat more than a pound of cooked rice a day. The Greenpeace analysis made it clear that on quantitative grounds alone, Golden Rice would constitute—at best—a partial solution to health problems caused by vitamin A deficiency.

In many countries where vitamin A deficiency is common, food sources of beta-carotene are plentiful, but people believe the foods inappropriate for young children, do not cook them enough to make them digestible, or do not consume enough fat to permit much in the way of absorption. It remains to be seen whether the beta-carotene in Golden Rice will fare better under such circumstances. Overall, vitamin A deficiency is a complicated health problem affected by cultural and societal factors as well as dietary factors. In this situation, the genetic engineering of a single nutrient or two into a food, while attractive in theory, raises many questions about its benefits in practice.

All genetically modified crops harm the natural world and human health, in large part because they (by definition) invite and encourage the spraying of toxic pesticides. But their supporters also mislead regulators and society with claims about the seeds themselves that fail to stand up to scientific scrutiny. Industry says that GMO crops are no different from crops developed by natural breeding. They are safe to eat, they say; they need fewer pesticides than conventional crops and make a positive contribution to reducing global warming and world hunger. The truth, however, is different. A review of

the scientific evidence about genetically modified crops concluded that the far-reaching claims of safety and efficacy and usefulness of the genetically modified crops are not true. Genetically modified crops are laboratory-made, using technology that is totally different from natural breeding methods.

Genetically modified crops can also be toxic. In the period between 1996 and 2011, the GM crops in the United States increased the use of pesticides by about seven percent, or 404 million pounds a year. When it comes to nutrition and productivity, genetically modified crops are also no better than conventional crops. They create herbicide-tolerant super weeds. They increase the disease susceptibility of crops, harm soils and ecosystems, and reduce biodiversity. They have not been shown to have a positive impact on hunger or global warming. And—in the end, and as always—genetically modified crops are not adequately regulated to ensure safety.

While the other plants co-evolved in a kind of conversational give-and-take with people, the NewLeaf potato has really only taken, only listened. It may or may not profit from the gift of its new genes; we can't yet say. What we can say, though, is that this potato is not the hero of its own story in quite the same way the apple has been. It didn't come up with this Bt scheme all on its evolutionary own. No, the heroes of the NewLeaf story are scientists working for Monsanto. Certainly the scientists in the lab coats have something in common with the fellow in the coffee sack: both work, or worked, at disseminating plant genes around the world. Yet although Johnny Appleseed and the brewers of beer and makers of cheese, the high-tech pot growers and all the other "biotechnologists" manipulated, selected, forced, cloned, and otherwise altered the species they worked with, the species themselves never lost their evolutionary say in the matter—never became solely the objects of our desires. Now the once irreducible wildness of these plants has been reduced. Whether this is a good or bad thing for the plants or for us, it is unquestionably a new thing.

Scientists have already proved that the Roundup Ready gene can migrate in a single generation from a field of rapeseed oil plants to a related weed in the mustard family, which then exhibits tolerance to the herbicide; the same has happened with genetically modified beets. This came as no great surprise; what did is the discovery, in one experiment, that transgenes migrate more readily than ordinary ones; no one knows why, but these well-traveled genes may prove to be especially jumpy.

The classic case of the unanticipated consequences of nutritional—if not food—biotechnology concerns supplements of the amino acid tryptophan. Like all amino acids, tryptophan is a component of proteins in all organisms. Supplements of tryptophan have been used for years as self-medication for insomnia and neurological conditions. In the 1980s, companies began to

genetically engineer bacteria to produce larger amounts of tryptophan so that this amino acid would be easier to collect and purify. In 1989, tryptophan supplements produced by a Japanese petrochemical company, Showa Denko, caused eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome (EMS), an unusual constellation of symptoms of muscle pain, weakness, and increased blood levels of white cells (eosinophils). Eventually, more than 1,500 people who had taken the supplements became ill, and about 40 died. The FDA prevented further marketing of the supplement, and the company stopped making it.

Scientists and food biotechnology companies promote transgenic projects by focusing on technical achievements, safety, and visions of improving the world's food supply, as expressed by the often repeated idea that biotechnology—and only biotechnology—can help the world produce the food necessary to meet the population needs of the twenty-first century. This statement, however, immediately raises credibility issues. Can biotechnology really solve world food problems? What is the industry doing now to address such problems? Are there other methods—perhaps less technical—for solving them? Food biotechnology first developed bovine growth hormone, Bt corn, and Roundup Ready soybeans, all possessing agronomic traits designed to help food producers. The industry also worked on processing traits, such as insertion of the reversed gene for ripening into tomatoes. More recently, the industry began developing foods with quality attributes (such as nutrient content) that might benefit consumers directly. Until such foods become available, the public has little to gain from genetically modified foods—in price, nutritional benefit, or convenience. Evidence for benefits to the environment or to people in developing countries is also uncertain. In this situation, any risk—no matter how remote—seems pointless, especially when food biotechnology raises so many other issues of concern.

When people object to food biotechnology by focusing on safety issues, they often do so because they have no other choice. Scientists, federal regulators, and biotechnology companies dismiss outrage considerations out of hand and only permit debate about safety issues. Safety is a matter of interpretation, highly political, and difficult to separate from the 'who decides' factors.

If CRISPR were already precise, accurate, and specific there would, for example, be no publications in prominent scientific journals titled "Improving CRISPR-Cas nuclease specificity using truncated guide RNAs." And these would not begin by describing how ordinary CRISPR "can induce mutations at sites that differ by as many as five nucleotides from the intended target," i.e. CRISPR may act at unknown sites in the genome where it is not wanted.

Thus CRISPR itself will need tweaking before it can be useful for safe commercial products, and that is the first error of the tweaking argument.

So far, it is technically not possible to make a single (and only a single) genetic change to a genome using CRISPR and be sure one has done so.

“In mammalian systems Cas9 causes a high degree of off-target effects.”

And at least until modified versions come into use, this will limit the safety, and hopefully limit the application, of CRISPR and related biotechnologies.

There is, furthermore, no guarantee that more precise versions of CRISPR are even biologically possible. Technically therefore, precision is a myth: no form of genome editing can do what is currently being claimed.

The second key error of CRISPR boosters is to assume that even if we had complete precision, this would allow control over the consequences for the resulting organism. Suppose, as a non-Chinese speaker, I were to precisely remove from a Chinese text one character, one line, or one page. I would have 100% precision, but zero control over the change in meaning. Precision, therefore, is only as useful as the understanding that underlies it, and surely no DNA biologist would propose we understand DNA—or else why are we studying it?

A classic example of how DNA can still reveal unexpected functions decades after discovery is the CaMV 35S promoter, a DNA sequence used in commercialized GMO plants for almost twenty years. The CaMV 35S DNA is described in every application for commercial use as a simple DNA promoter (an “on” switch for gene expression). In 1999, however, the CaMV 35S promoter was found to encode a recombinational hostpot. In 2011 it was found to produce massive quantities of small RNAs. These RNAs probably function as decoys to neutralize the plant immune system. One year later still, regulators found it to contain an overlapping viral gene whose functions are still being elucidated. Will we ever know enough about any DNA sequence to accurately describe changing it as ‘editing’?

The third error of CRISPR advocates is to imply that changes to gene functions can be presumed to be discrete and constrained. The concept of the precise editing of a genome leading to a precise biological outcome depends heavily on the conception that genes give rise to simple outputs. This is the genetic paradigm taught in schools. It is also the paradigm presented to the public and that even plays a large role in the thinking of molecular genetic researchers.

However, a defined, discrete, or simple pathway from gene to trait probably never exists. Most gene function is mediated murkily through highly complex biochemical and other networks that depend on many conditional

factors, such as the presence of other genes and their variants, on the environment, on the age of the organism, on chance, and so forth.

Geneticists and molecular biologists, however, since the time of Gregor Mendel, have striven to find or create artificial experimental systems in which environmental or any other sources of variation are minimized so as not to distract from the more “important” business of genetic discovery. But by discarding organisms or traits that do not follow their expectations, geneticists and molecular biologists have built themselves a circular argument in favor of a naïve deterministic account of gene function.

Their paradigm habitually downplays the enormous complexities by which information passes (in both directions) between organisms and their genomes. It has created an immense and mostly unexamined bias in the default public understanding of genes and DNA.

The benefits of naïve genetic determinism to the architects of the genome-industrial complex are very great. Since it pretty much requires that organisms be seen as robots being operated by mini-dictators—rather than, for example, as systems with emergent properties—and those genes as having effects that are narrow and clearly defined rather than being diffuse and unpredictable, it simplifies their sales pitch and frames risk assessment as unnecessary.

The problem comes to a head, however, when this narrow conceptualization of genetics is applied to the real world and situations that have not been, as it were, set up in advance. In the case of the “Super-muscly” pigs reported by *Nature*, strength is not their only feature.

They must also have more skin to cover their bodies and stronger bones to carry themselves. They also, apparently, have difficulty giving birth; and if they were ever released into the wild, they would presumably have to eat more. Thus a supposedly simple genetic tweak can have wide effects on the organism throughout its life-cycle.

Nature also revealed that 30 of the 32 pigs died prematurely and only one animal was still considered healthy at the time the study authors were interviewed. So much for precision.

Why is this discussion of precision important? Because for the last seventy years all chemical and biological technologies, from genetic engineering to pesticides, have been built on a myth of precision and specificity. They have all been adopted under the pretense that they would function without side effects or unexpected complications.

Yet the extraordinary disasters and repercussions of DDT, leaded paint, agent orange, atrazine, C8, asbestos, chlordane, PCBs, and so on, when all is said and done, have been stories of the steady unraveling of a founding myth of precision and specificity.

Nevertheless, with the help of industry propagandists, their friends in the media, even the United Nations, we are once again being preached the gospel of precision. But no matter how you look at it, precision is a fable and should be treated as such.

The issues of CRISPR and other related new genome editing biotechnologies are the subject of intense activity behind the scenes.

The US Department of Agriculture has explained that it will not be regulating organisms whose genomes have been edited since it doesn't consider them to be GMOs at all. The EU was about to call them GMOs but the US caused them to blink, meanwhile the US is in the process of revisiting its GMO regulatory environment entirely.

Will future safety regulations of GMOs be based on a schoolboy version of genetics and an interpretation of genome editing crafted in a corporate public relations department? If history is any guide it will.

When the stakes are as high as they are with gene drive, who could argue with a judicious pause? People in Africa, some say. Every year you delay work on gene drives, another half-million people die.

“Who am I to tell somebody who's lost children to malaria, and has more children at risk, that they can't do it because somebody else doesn't agree? Why should some people get veto power over a technology that could save the lives of other people's children?”

Of course this ignores the preventable deaths due to the capitalist status quo that could be avoided using no potential doomsday technology. Like say bed nets, access to proper nutrition and healthcare—or hell, how about a Sam's Club case of bug spray? But that's not sexy and won't get you fame and wealth. So hold my beaker while I modify the building blocks of life.

In the United States, about 700 new chemicals are introduced to the market every year, most without any testing for health effects.

What mystifies me is the barrier for chemicals' entry seems to be very low, but when it comes to thinking about developing regulation, the barrier is really high.

The idea of the Precautionary Principle can be traced to West German environmental regulations enacted during the 1970s on the basis of *Vorsorge*, or “precaution.” Advocates of the precautionary principle argued that in cases where damage to society or people might be severe and irreversible, preventive action should be taken up front, even if there were important uncertainties about the relevant science. Although it sounds like common sense, in fact the precautionary principle poses a radical challenge to business as usual in a modern, capitalist, technological civilization. Under the

principles of risk analysis, industry lobbyists could often overcome objections by environmentalists or food safety advocates until someone finds the smoking gun. The precautionary principle reversed the burden of proof and sought to address the problem of traditional regulation, namely that long before the science does come in, the harm has already been done. And once a technology has entered the marketplace, the burden of bringing in that science typically falls on the public rather than on the companies selling it.

More and more, we are coming to realize that tinkering with nature can produce unintended effects, even if the tinkering seems well planned and justified. One recent example was described in a 2008 study published in the journal *Science*. The researchers were testing different methods of preserving acacia trees on experimental plots in Kenya. Half of the plots were surrounded by fences that excluded herbivores such as elephants and giraffes, while the other half were left open. The thinking was that if herbivores were kept away, at least for a while, the acacia trees—which had become stressed by overgrazing—would have a chance to thrive. Quite the opposite happened, unfortunately; the trees protected from the herbivores became weaker and were actually more likely to die than those left open to the ravages of wandering leaf nibblers. It seems that the trees' defense system, composed of tiny ants living in their hollow thorns and feeding on nectar produced by the plant, had started to abandon the plot when they were no longer needed and the plants reduced their nectar production. They were replaced by another species of ant that allowed other insects, including a nasty boring beetle, to attack the tree. This simple example illustrates the complex and unpredictable web of interactions among living organisms in a relatively well-understood ecosystem, and the dangers of trying to modify one component without taking into account the effect on others.

The ancient Greeks believed in three goddesses, more powerful than any others. We know them as the Fates. They would arrive at a newborn baby's cradle, where the first goddess spun the thread of life and the second determined the length of thread. The third—the most feared, known as “the inevitable”—cut the life-thread. The baby's path was fixed from that moment. In twenty-first-century America, not many of us still believe in the Fates with their spindle and shears. But we have replaced them with a modern substitute: genetics. There are diseases and disorders that are 100 percent genetically determined. No matter how or where you live, if you have the genetic combination for these conditions, they will manifest. These include Down syndrome, cystic fibrosis, and Huntington's disease, a degenerative brain disorder. Every person with the gene for Huntington's will eventually develop it.

We can think of genes in two ways. There are dictator genes. Those

genes give orders—blue eyes or brown hair—and you don't have any choice. The genes for diabetes, heart disease, or certain forms of cancer, they're more like committees giving suggestions. But you've got a lot of control over whether those genes ever express themselves.

In order to get many diseases, two things have to happen. First, you have a genetic predisposition. Second, something sets that gene in motion. Let's take Okinawans, from one of the Japanese islands. They're skinny, they don't have a lot of cancer, and they're one of the most long-lived cultures in the world. But if you move an Okinawan to America, they gain weight rapidly. They get heart disease, they get diabetes. In China, they used to think they didn't have diabetes. Now suddenly they have a huge increase in the disease, and they're blaming it on Western food, specifically the large amounts of meat.

Look at the genetics of the Papua Highlanders, the Tarahumara in northern Mexico, or the rural Chinese. They have different genetics, but there's no heart disease in these populations. The field of epigenetics is breaking through in spades right now, in which you can actually alter genetic expression. You can turn genes on and off, and by what? By the environment, and perhaps nothing is as powerful as food. And it's not just heart disease, when you look globally, there are certain cultures where breast cancer is much less frequently identified than in the US such as Kenya or rural Japan in the 1950s. Yet, what happened to the Japanese women, when they migrated to the US for the second and third generation, still pure Japanese American? They had the same rates of breast cancer as their Caucasian counterparts.

A dramatic example of this was recently found in an experiment with mice: "researchers" trained a group of mice to become afraid of the odor of acetophenone (which smells like cherry blossoms) by regularly pairing an electric shock to their feet with the odor. Soon, the mice showed a startle reaction whenever they encountered that specific odor. These mice were then allowed to breed, and their offspring also showed the same startle reaction to the smell of cherry blossoms. These offspring were also bred and the next generation continued to show this same cherry-blossom-specific fear. The researchers dissected the animals' brains and found that the mice had larger receptors that responded to this particular smell. Moreover, an analysis of the DNA of the sperm of these conditioned mice found that there were different methylation patterns in the sperm of the mice who learned this fear compared with other mice.

To rule out the possibility that the mice had learned this fear from their parents, the researchers took the sperm from males who were trained to fear the smell of cherry blossoms and artificially inseminated female mice

in another lab. The brains of these offspring were dissected, and they also showed the same larger receptors for this smell. A specific phobia, learned by one generation, was passed through the sperm to other generations, not through the DNA sequence itself, but through the methylation patterns that affected the gene's expression. In other words, one generation's experiences led to heritable changes. We have much more to learn about epigenetic inheritance before we can draw solid conclusions, but findings such as these are fascinating.

Simple genetic explanations are the exception, not the rule, and we are making an inductive error when we generalize from them. Yet switch-thinking explanations are what students primarily learn in high school and even university courses on genetics, and this is how genetic discoveries are usually described in the media. In high school you might have been taught, as I was, a switch-thinking story about the simple Mendelian basis of eye color, or of whether you could roll your tongue into a tube. Yet even these two classic examples don't hold up to closer scrutiny—eye color is determined by several genes, and the geneticist who originally identified tongue-rolling as a Mendelian trait backtracked from this claim over 50 years ago, and added that he was “embarrassed to see it listed in some current works as an established Mendelian case.” But high school genetic classes have relied upon these false examples because there really aren't any obvious Mendelian traits for students to measure.

Some are skeptical about extrapolating from DNA to meaningful difference. While it is true that it is difficult to find coding sequence differences between two modern humans, it is not true that therefore the ones that do exist are unimportant. And we won't be able to tell this just looking at the 'parts list.' In other words, if all you had was an alphabet, you could easily end up concluding that Hamlet and the script for an episode of *The Sopranos* were the same thing, since they use exactly the same letters. Perhaps that idea is a little far-fetched, but I trust the analogy is clear. And when it comes to genes, the parts list is woefully inadequate. The big question is not how many genes differ between ape and human, or between today's human and our ancestors of 50,000 years ago, but which genes differ. Changes in the fine biochemical structure of DNA happen over time, simply by chance. Other changes occur because of selection on human characteristics such as language ability. But how can we identify the smoking guns of human genetic evolution from neutral ticks of the molecular evolutionary clock? Using the alphabet analogy, it means that we need tools to help us distinguish Shakespeare from soap opera in a way that shows the difference in content, not just a difference in the number of times the letter 'a' or 'b' is used.

Populations and their genes can be viewed as if they were in a three-dimensional landscape, with hills and valleys. The vertical axis, or height of the peaks, indicates the success or fitness of a group of genes. If a population on a mountaintop changes the composition of its genes, it is likely to move to a less successful point, and hence any small changes probably will be selected against. Conversely, a population in a valley is likely to improve with small changes. The entire fitness landscape may well contain peaks that are even higher than the one that a given population, even one on a mountain, is already on, but those peaks might have valleys between them. Hence, a population on a peak cannot move very easily to a higher one, whereas a population in a valley probably will get better no matter what direction it takes.

When Jews were first lined up on the unloading docks at Auschwitz, they invariably heard the following command from German officers walking up and down the lines: "Zwillinge! Zwillinge!" ("Twins! Twins!"). Because twins were genetically identical, they were perfect for genetic studies. Mengele wanted to find ways to build a master race: one free of disease and capable of transmitting the best Aryan traits. In the two years he was at Auschwitz, he studied 1,500 pairs of twins. His fellow officers called them "Mengele's Children." Mengele's studies began by taking the children to Barrack 14, Camp F, the "Twin Camp." There he would strip them naked, take photographs, and carefully measure and record every possible physical characteristic. Then he put a syringe into their veins to test their blood, and needles into their backs to test their spinal fluid.

Later, he performed a series of experiments that brought eugenics to its final, hideous end. When he found one twin who sang well and another who didn't, Mengele operated on their vocal cords; one of the brothers never spoke again. He forced twin girls to have sex with twin boys to see if they would produce twins. To create Aryan features artificially, he injected a Nordic blue dye into the eyes of children, leaving many blind. He took one hunchbacked child and connected the veins in his wrists to the veins of his twin; then he connected them back-to-back. He wanted to see if he could transmit the misshapen spine from one child to another; following the surgery, the children couldn't stop screaming in horror. Their mother, who was able to procure a lethal dose of morphine, killed them both.

Mengele thought that two Romany twins were infected with tuberculosis; when other German physicians in the camp disagreed, Mengele brought the children into a back room, shot them in the neck with his pistol, and performed an autopsy. "Yes, I dissected them while they were still warm," he told his colleagues, who had been right about their diagnosis.

He infected children with typhus and tuberculosis to determine their

susceptibilities to disease and performed mismatched blood transfusions to see what would happen. Mengele gave children electric shocks to see how much pain they could endure. He burned 300 children alive in an open fire. When children had heterochromatic eyes, he killed them and sent their eyes to Verschuer in packages marked: WAR MATERIALS: URGENT. Mengele asked one mother to tape up her breasts to see how long her newborn could survive without food. He dissected a one-year-old while the child was still alive.

When the nightmare finally ended, fewer than 200 of the 3,000 children put into Mengele's care survived. And not a single piece of recognizable information was obtained. Josef Mengele and Adolf Hitler showed exactly what could happen when eugenics was put into the hands of narcissistic sadists with absolute power.

Eugenicists completely bastardized Mendel's laws. Most things—traits like criminality, alcoholism, epilepsy, deafness, or susceptibility to venereal diseases—could not be accounted for by strict Mendelian genetics. Nonetheless, the false notion that selective breeding could make for a better society would soon allow Americans to cloak some of their worst prejudices in the gilded robes of science.

In 1933, the year that he came to power, Adolf Hitler passed the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring. The list of those to be sterilized was virtually identical to that first generated by the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor. Clinics were established and doctors were fined if they didn't comply with the law. Within a year, 56,000 Germans had been sterilized; by 1935, 73,000; by 1939, 400,000, dwarfing the number of sterilizations performed in the United States. The procedure was so common that it had a nickname: *Hitlerschnitte*, "Hitler's cut." Americans took note. The superintendent of Virginia's Western State Hospital, lamented:

"Hitler is beating us at our own game!"

Then Hitler moved from sterilization to murder. Handicapped children in hospitals were starved, injected with lethal drugs, or—in a tribute to ancient Sparta—exposed to the cold. Initially, only grossly deformed newborns were killed. Then killing of the unfit extended up to 3 years of age, then 8, then 12, then 16. Then the definition of 'handicapped' broadened to include anyone with an incurable disease or with learning difficulties. Even chronic bedwetters were at risk. Under the auspices of Karl Brandt, Hitler's personal physician, Germany's euthanasia program soon extended to the elderly, infirm, insane, and incurably ill.

More than 70,000 German adults were killed, initially by lethal injection, and eventually by mobile gas chambers that traveled from clinic to clinic.

German physicians sanctioned each and every one of the killings. When Karl Brandt was tried for war crimes in Nuremberg, and later sentenced to death, he offered *The Passing of the Great Race* as an exhibit in his defense. Adolf Hitler's Germany had become the embodiment of "the reign of doctors" that Carrie Buck's lawyer had predicted during his pleadings before the United States Supreme Court.

In 1952, a group of anthropologists, sociologists, geneticists, and psychologists gathered at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to put an end to Madison Grant's notion that race determined character and to the madness that it had wrought. They issued the following statements:

1. All men belong to the same species: *Homo sapiens*.
2. Race is not a biological reality but a social myth; the term should be dropped in favor of ethnic group.
3. There is no proof that the groups of mankind differ in their innate mental characteristics or intellectual capacity or that there is any connection between the physical and mental characteristics of human beings.

Beware of scientific biases that fit the culture of the time—beware the zeitgeist. Imagine that a study has just been published in a prestigious medical journal claiming that a certain constellation of genes predisposes to violent behavior, like rape and murder. And that people living in Mexico are more likely to carry these genes. In all likelihood, several Republican presidential candidates of 2016 would have enthusiastically embraced this study. Now they would have had clear scientific evidence supporting what they had been saying all along—we need to restrict Mexican immigration and build a great wall to keep the Mexicans out; if not, a group of genetically inferior people will invade our country.

Although this might sound far-fetched, it's exactly what happened in 1916 with the publication of Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race*. As a consequence, immigration slowed to a trickle. People then and now seem perfectly willing to ignore the fact that we all come from a common ancestor and are far more alike than different. There is no Nordic or Aryan or Mexican or Muslim or Syrian race. There's only one race: the human race.

Unfortunately the quest for eugenics is still with us, just repackaged into more subtle, socially-acceptable forms. In plain language, Google has patented a tool to create "designer babies." But plain language is anathema

to Big Tech and its world-changing designs. ‘Biotech’ sounds so much better than ‘selective breeding programs managed by corporations.’

Consider further the case of designer babies or simply screening for certain disorders. A 2001 court case in France, where a child born with Down’s syndrome successfully sued his mother’s physician for allowing him to be born with the disorder, even raised the possibility that such testing could eventually be required—if not legally, then at least *de facto*, in order to avert the risk of a costly lawsuit. Although these decisions may seem very personal, motivated by parental love and the desire for a healthy child, in fact they have a much larger effect. This is because by selecting for certain traits we are not merely affecting our child but also all of his or her offspring. In the same way that the transgenerational power of developing agriculture during the Neolithic period set in motion forces that would play out over thousands of years, so too will choosing the genes of our children. In effect, we will become the agent of selection for future generations. Such a statement may sound extreme, but it is nonetheless true; once genetic variants are removed from a population, either by natural or artificial selection, only additional mutations can reintroduce them. And that raises the specter of where this may be leading us.

Around one percent of people, regardless of ethnic background or geographic origin, are schizophrenic, whereas most other human diseases vary widely in their population incidences. Some suggest that this is because schizophrenia results from having too many copies of “creativity genes” that, in smaller numbers, are useful and have been selected for in human populations because of their beneficial effects. In other words, if you have one or two copies of genetic variants that predispose you to schizophrenia, you might also be predisposed to become a great composer or mathematician, or, to put it in the context of our Paleolithic ancestors, better at developing new tools or anticipating where to find food; having three or four, however, could tip you over the edge to schizophrenia. Such a model is highly speculative, but it would explain both the relationship between mental illness and the creative process and why all human populations exhibit schizophrenia.

But what might happen in a future where such variants are routinely selected against? After all, most parents wouldn’t wish a debilitating illness like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia on their children. In so doing, however, might they also be selecting against creativity? While such a one-to-one correspondence between genetic predisposition and ultimate outcome vastly oversimplifies the complexity of human behavior and psychiatric disorders, it is likely that extreme creativity has at least a partial genetic basis. Perhaps creativity is a knife edge, on which we sit poised to teeter in the direction of either illness or accomplishment—and, indeed, many creative people

alternate between the two. In an effort to avoid the former, could we also be deterring the latter? After all, at its core, creativity is imagining things that aren't there and then making them real. Schizophrenia is largely defined by such vivid imaginings, although to such an extent that it becomes deleterious to the individual.

Psychology isn't the only thing we might be able to influence. For example, if we select for genetic variants that protect against diabetes, will we also be creating hothouse flowers of ourselves—svelte, calorie-burning humans with metabolisms perfectly adapted to the excessive nutritional intake and low exercise levels of modern industrial society? If so, will we lose our ability to cope with any potential disaster that may befall us in the distant future? As our food supply tends toward an ever greater monoculture of clonal genetic strains, what will happen if the equivalent of the Irish potato famine strikes in several hundred years' time? Will our distant grandchildren thank us for having molded them into the perfect twenty-first-century biology—one that may lead them to starve in a time of scarce resources?

Chapter Forty-three

Atomic Folly

The Most Terrible Weapon

“Within four months we shall in all probability have completed the most terrible weapon ever known in human history, one bomb of which could destroy a whole city.”

At 5:29 local time the first atomic bomb exploded at Alamogordo Air Force Base. George Kistiakowsky, who had helped lead development of the bomb and would go on to play a key role as a presidential science advisor in the Eisenhower administration, initially hugged lead scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer and then, more soberly, said:

“I’m sure that at the end of the world—in the last millisecond of the earth’s existence—the last human will see what we saw.”

Four days after Hiroshima, another bomb—nicknamed Fat Man—dropped on Nagasaki. Amazingly, there was no separate presidential order for its deployment; Truman’s initial orders in July had said to just continue dropping additional bombs as they became available. Nagasaki hadn’t even been the primary target when the bomber Bockscar took off that morning—it had intended to bomb the city of Kokura, but there were too many clouds over the target city, so after an hour and three failed bombing runs, the plane diverted its lethal payload to Nagasaki. The citizens of Kokura continued on with their day, not realizing how close they’d come to death. Such were the vicissitudes of the new atomic age.

“I’ve felt it myself, the glitter of nuclear weapons. It is irresistible if you come to them as a scientist. To feel it’s there in your hands to release this energy that fuels the stars. To let it do your bidding. To perform these miracles, to lift a million tons of rock into the sky. It is something that gives people an illusion of illimitable power and it is in some ways responsible for all

our troubles—I would say, this, what you might call ‘technical arrogance’ that overcomes people when they see what they can do with their minds.”

“With the unleashed power of the atom everything has changed, save our modes of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe.”

Some might put it less elegantly: We are monkeys with nuclear weapons. But monkeys have tails. So, more accurately: We’re naked apes with nukes.

Jane Goodall reported on a chimp who hit on the novel tactic of banging fuel cans together to achieve alpha status. The noise scared his competitors witless. He didn’t know what the cans were, what they were for, or what they held, but it worked anyway. For a little while.

There’s a lesson in there somewhere.

The invention and continued existence of nuclear weapons is a major sign of both leadership failure and the supreme irrationality and barbarity of those who end up in power.

To a remarkable degree, at the beginning even the US military thought that the atomic bomb should be outlawed or placed under some form of international mandate. General Arnold was a contributor to *One World or None*. He’d been a leading proponent of strategic airpower and supervised the American bombing of both Germany and Japan. The stress had taken its toll. Arnold suffered four heart attacks during the war, and his essay in *One World or None* was a final public statement before retirement. The appeal of nuclear weapons, he wrote, was simply a matter of economics. They had lowered “the cost of destruction.” They had made it “too cheap and easy.” An air raid that used to require five-hundred bombers now needed only one. Atomic bombs were terribly inexpensive, compared to the price of rebuilding cities. The only conceivable defense against such weapons was a strategy of deterrence—a threat to use them promptly against an enemy in retaliation.

“A far better protection lies in developing controls and safeguards that are strong enough to prevent their use on all sides.”

Truman, shared some of the concerns. The only man in history who had ever borne responsibility for a nuclear weapon’s use, he stopped one Oval Office debate over civilian versus military control of the bombs cold:

“You have got to understand that this isn’t a military weapon. It is used to wipe out women and children and unarmed people,

and not for military uses. So we have got to treat this differently from rifles and cannons and ordinary things like that.”

Instead of being outlawed by the UN, the atomic bomb soon became integral to American war plans for the defense of Europe. In June 1947 the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a top secret report, “The Evaluation of the Atomic Bomb as a Military Weapon,” to President Truman. It contained the latest thinking on how nuclear weapons might be used in battle. The first post-war atomic tests, conducted the previous year at the Bikini atoll in the Marshall Islands, had demonstrated some of the weapon’s limitations. Dropped on a fleet of empty Japanese and American warships, a Mark 3 implosion bomb—like the one used at Nagasaki—had missed its aiming point by almost half a mile and failed to sink eighty-three of the eighty-eight vessels.

“Ships at sea and bodies of troops are, in general, unlikely to be regarded as primary atomic bomb targets. The bomb is preeminently a weapon for use against human life and activities in large urban and industrial areas.”

It was a weapon useful, most of all, for killing and terrorizing civilians. The report suggested that a nuclear attack would stir up “man’s primordial fears” and “break the will of nations.” The military significance of the atomic bomb was clear: it wouldn’t be aimed at the military. Nuclear weapons would be used to destroy an enemy’s morale, and the some of best targets were “cities of especial sentimental significance.”

Like a shootout in the Old West, a nuclear war might be won by whoever fired first. A country with fewer atomic bombs than its adversary had an especially strong incentive to launch an attack out of the blue. And for that reason, among others, a number of high-ranking American officers argued that the United States should bomb the Soviet Union before it obtained any nuclear weapons. General Groves thought that approach would make sense, if “we were ruthlessly realistic.” General Orvil Anderson, commander of the Air University, publicly endorsed an attack on the Soviets. “I don’t advocate preventive war,” Anderson told a reporter. “I advocate the shedding of illusions.” He thought that Jesus Christ would approve of dropping atomic bombs on the Soviet Union: “I think I could explain to Him that I had saved civilization.” Anderson was suspended for the remarks.

And then of course there was Curtis LeMay. The destruction of Japanese cities, one after another, fit perfectly with his philosophy on the use of military force. “I’ll tell you what war is about,” LeMay once said. “You’ve got to kill people and when you kill enough of them, they stop fighting.”

LeMay recognized the destructive power of nuclear weapons but didn't feel the least bit intimidated by them.

“We scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.”

He didn't lose any sleep over the morality of Truman's decision. Killing was killing, whether you did it with a rock, a rifle, or an atom bomb.

Albert Einstein read a prepared statement about the hydrogen bomb on national television. He criticized the militarization of American society, the intimidation of anyone who opposed it, the demands for loyalty and secrecy, the “hysterical character” of the nuclear arms race, and the “disastrous illusion” that this new weapon would somehow make America safer.

“Every step appears as the unavoidable consequence of the preceding one. In the end, there beckons more and more clearly general annihilation.”

Truman's decision to develop a hydrogen bomb had great symbolic importance. It sent a message to the Soviet leadership—and to the American people. In a cold war without bloodshed or battlefields, the perception of strength mattered as much as the reality.

A classified Pentagon report later stressed the central role that “psychological considerations” played in nuclear deterrence. “Weapons systems in themselves tell only part of the necessary story,” the report argued. The success of America's defense plans relied on an effective “information program” aimed at the public:

“What deters is not the capabilities and intentions we have, but the capabilities and intentions the enemy thinks we have. The central objective of a deterrent weapons system is, thus, psychological. The mission is persuasion.”

The usefulness of the Super wasn't the issue; the willingness to build it was. And that sort of logic would guide the nuclear arms race for the next forty years.

“Influence depended on possession of force,” Winston Churchill told advisers, not long after the Bravo test. Great Britain would develop its own hydrogen bombs. Once again, the appeal of the H-bomb lay in its symbolism. “We must do it,” Churchill explained. “It's the price we pay to sit at the top table.”

The title of an influential essay on the role of technology in society asked the question: “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” According to its author the answer is yes—the things that we produce are not only shaped by social forces, they also help to mold the political life of a society. Some technologies are flexible and can thrive equally well in democratic or totalitarian countries. But there is one invention that could never be managed with a completely open, democratic spirit: the atomic bomb.

“As long as it exists at all, its lethal properties demand that it be controlled by a centralized, rigidly hierarchical chain of command closed to all influences that might make its workings unpredictable. The internal social system of the bomb must be authoritarian; there is no other way.”

Any individual advocating for targeting cities with nuclear weapons is most certainly unfit for any position of power. Any individual advocating the use of nuclear weapons period is very likely unfit for any position of power. If willing to do that, what else are they then far more likely to do with their power?

“You can’t have this kind of war,” Eisenhower once said at a national security meeting. “There just aren’t enough bulldozers to scrape the bodies off the streets.”

An undersecretary of defense, played down the number of casualties that a nuclear war might cause. “Everybody’s going to make it,” he reassured in one interview, “if there are enough shovels to go around.” He proceeded to outline his simple plan:

“Dig a hole, cover it with a couple of doors, and then throw three feet of dirt on top. It’s the dirt that does it.”

Jones firmly believed that nuclear war was not only survivable but that, with adequate preparation, the destruction would be quite limited.

“The problem is we’ve conditioned our people to believe that once the first nuclear bomb goes off, everybody’s going to die. With protection of people only, your recovery time to pre-war GNP levels would probably be six or eight years. If we used the Russian methods for protecting both the people and the industrial means of production, recovery time could be two to four years.”

Henry Luce’s editors at Life magazine tried to put an optimistic spin on the idea that the atomic bomb would make life aboveground obsolete:

“Consider the ant, whose social problems much resemble man. Constructing beautiful urban palaces and galleries, many ants have long lived underground in entire satisfaction.”

The military also touted the benefits of American society moving underground. “After all, sunlight isn’t so wonderful. You have to be near a window to benefit by it. With fluorescent fixtures, you get an even light all over the place,” one Pentagon official said, explaining that when Sweden buried factories underground during World War II, the plants were cheaper to run: “No paint bills, no roof-fixing, no window washing.”

Chicago’s approach to helping kids was quite graphic: It recommended parents tattoo children’s blood type under their armpit—but not on the arm itself in case it was blown off—which would help speed blood transfusions to avoid radiation poisoning.

In Kansas, officials calculated they could probably assemble two-million pounds of food after an attack and that if survivors reduced consumption to an “austerity diet” of 2,000 calories, the state’s food stocks could last nearly two months. Besides the official stocks, Kansas’s wildlife could help, too: Its forests, plains, and waters contained, officials believed, 11 million “man-days” of food in rabbit meat, 10 million “man-days” of wild birds, five-million “man-days” of edible fish, and—perhaps most macabre of all—nearly 20 million “man-days” of meat in residential pets. After an attack, officials also planned to confiscate household vitamins for the good of the general population and ration carefully the state’s twenty-eight-day supply of coffee. But those calculations—and the countless others that made up the nation’s post-attack planning—left some officials worried:

“I don’t think we are ever very realistic in our approaches. When we came up against a problem for which we had no answer, usually because ‘we could never get the public to accept such a premise,’ we tried to assume ourselves out of the predicament. Assumptions are great little solvers of problems.”

As part of imagining the post-attack world, the Internal Revenue Service ran studies and exercises on how to calculate and levy taxes after a war. After much study from the 1960s to the 1980s, the Treasury Department and IRS concluded that it would be very challenging to levy taxes after a Soviet strike—employers would have lost records needed for W-2s, IRS agents would struggle to verify pre-attack figures during audits, and it seemed unfair to assess homeowners and business owners on the pre-attack tax assessments of their property, since many would likely have seen values reduced drastically by damage.

“Consider a firm whose principal assets consist of a professional football team valued, pre-attack, at \$15 million. Any plan to levy a net-worth tax post-attack must face up to the fact that this firm’s relative net worth in real terms is certainly not going to be the same as pre-attack.”

One of the IRS studies calculated that as much as \$2 trillion in property might disappear in a large strike. IRS planners recommended that the government itself assume the underlying mortgages of damaged properties to help ensure that the banking system didn’t collapse. Then, instead of relying on income and property taxes to fund the government and the nation’s war mobilization, planners suggested that it would likely be necessary to assess a general national sales tax on all goods after an attack—a tax that might range as high as 20 to 24 percent. Even when planning for a nuclear war the concept of monetary sovereignty is nowhere to be found

In an emergency, the US government intended to pay for all the food and supplies necessary to shelter and feed evacuees across the country—all told about \$2 billion a day—although the money might not be available immediately, so private businesses would be expected to “maintain complete and accurate records to justify claims submitted after the Crisis Relocation emergency.” Stores, medical facilities, laundries, and other vital necessities would be kept open in “host areas” for a minimum of sixteen hours a day to ease access, and most would operate twenty-four hours a day—after all, there wouldn’t be any shortage of available labor. Evacuees in the shelters would sleep alternating head-to-toe, “the best position for sleep, in that it decreases the spread of respiratory ailments,” explained FEMA’s comprehensive 1981 guide, “How to Manage Congregate Lodging Facilities and Fallout Shelters.” Family groups would be placed in the middle of each shelter, with unmarried men and women separated on either side to encourage “high social standards, particularly for sexual behavior.”

The Constitution simply didn’t allow for the flexibility necessary to execute and survive a nuclear war—particularly a surprise attack.

“The tension cannot be resolved. As long as we have nuclear weapons, we’re going to have to fudge on the Constitution.”

The overarching goal of the nation’s emergency plans has always been to preserve the United States—but history has shown that presidents are more than willing to make short-term compromises to America’s traditional freedoms if they feel it necessary for the greater good’s future survival, decisions that have ranged from Abraham Lincoln’s suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in the Civil War to FDR’s internment of Japanese Americans

during World War II. However repulsive such actions may appear in historical hindsight, the commanders-in-chief viewed them as necessary in the moment. As the US Supreme Court argued, in reviewing the martial law invoked on Hawaii in 1941, such measures could be justified by the goal “to create conditions wherein civil government can be rapidly reconstituted.” The precise way that happens, the extent of the compromises, and how rapid the return might be to something resembling normal governance are matters open to future emergencies.

‘Martial law’ has no specific constitutional definition; instead, it’s an informal set of powers cobbled together through existing law and emergency executive authorities. Martial law has been declared in exigent circumstances regularly throughout US history—General Andrew Jackson declared it in New Orleans during the War of 1812, President Lincoln invoked it repeatedly during the Civil War, and Hawaii’s territorial governor invoked it after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Governors have declared more limited martial law in the face of civil insurrections and natural disasters—during labor strikes in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, in San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire, and after labor unrest at the North Dakota state capitol in 1933.

If and when a local or national emergency necessitates martial law, there are, in fact, two vastly different martial law scenarios considered: There’s one version of martial law where, following a fast-moving crisis that affects all three federal branches, the executive branch steps in and runs all of government by fiat, disregarding all of peacetime’s constitutional checks and balances, as well as normal state and local prerogatives. Another even more extreme version, though, might see a designated—or self-designated—military commander step in following a devastating crisis and use the might of the armed services to restore order, perhaps with the blessing of a figurehead presidential successor, before returning leadership and full authority to the civilian government, which might or might not entail traditional power sharing and checks and balances with the legislative and judicial branches.

In addition to making preparations for martial law, Eisenhower had secretly given nine prominent citizens the legal authority to run much of American society after a nuclear war. Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson had agreed to serve as administrator of the Emergency Food Agency; Harold Boeschstein, the president of the Owens Corning Fiberglas Company, would lead the Emergency Production Agency; Frank Stanton, the president of CBS, would head the Emergency Communications Agency; and Theodore F. Koop, a vice president at CBS, would direct the Emergency Censorship Agency. High Point had its own television studio, from which the latest updates on the war could be broadcast nationwide. Patriotic

messages from Arthur Godfrey and Edward R. Murrow had already been prerecorded to boost the morale of the American people after a nuclear attack.

A government report later outlined the “obstacle course to recovery” that victims of such nuclear attacks would have to navigate:

- 1–2 days:** Blast and thermal
- 2–20 days:** Lethal fallout
- 2–7 days:** Trapped; no medical treatment
- 5–50 days:** Life support inadequacies (food, water, shelter)
- 2 weeks–1 year:** Epidemics and diseases
- 1–2 years:** Economic breakdown
- 5–20 years:** Late radiation effects
- 10–50 years:** Ecological effects
- 2+ generations:** Genetic effects

Although the human toll would be grim, the authors of the report were optimistic about the impact of nuclear detonations on the environment:

“No weight of nuclear attack which is at all probable could induce gross changes in the balance of nature that approach in type or degree the ones that human civilization has already inflicted on the environment. These include cutting most of the original forests, tilling the prairies, irrigating the deserts, damming and polluting the streams, eliminating certain species and introducing others, overgrazing hillsides, flooding valleys, and even preventing forest fires.”

The implication was that nature might find nuclear warfare a relief.

“A nuclear war could alleviate some of the factors leading to today’s ecological disturbances that are due to current high-population concentrations and heavy industrial populations.”

“At times I simply could not believe what I was being shown and told, causing me to doubt my own comprehension. It was an unnerving experience for me personally. It was just a huge

mechanical war plan aimed at creating maximum damage without regard to the political context. I concluded that the United States had surrendered political control over nuclear weapons to a deterministic theory of war that ensured an unprecedented devastation of both the Soviet Union and the United States. And the president would be left with two or three meaningless choices that he might have to make within 10 minutes after he was awakened after a deep sleep late some night.

A policy of launch on warning was absurd and irresponsible, and implementing the SIOP under any conditions would be the height of folly. The SIOP now called for the Soviet Union to be hit with about ten-thousand nuclear weapons. But what disturbed me the most about the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff in Omaha was that they didn't seem to have any post-attack plans: Things would just cease in their world about 6 to 10 hours after they received the order to execute the SIOP."

Just months after construction on NORAD began, the continent's entire airspace was closed for twelve hours—grounding all civilian air traffic—so that SAC's bombers could simulate a Soviet attack on the country and test North America's defense. The SKY SHIELD II exercise, on October 14, 1961, became known in aviation circles as "The Day the Planes Stood Still." Hundreds of NORAD fighters and SAC bombers took to the air to dogfight over American cities, as bombers tried to sneak south from Canada and evade early warning radars. Chaff from dogfights rained down on homes and businesses up and down the East Coast. Even as the generals involved trumpeted the exercises as the "greatest in all our history," the true results, not declassified until the 1990s, were horrifying: No more than a quarter of the "invading" bombers would have been intercepted and much of the country would have been destroyed by the enemy "attack," even with defenders' full knowledge the attack was coming that day.

For many years, the only time the NORAD bunker at Cheyenne Mountain has entered the public consciousness is around Christmas, when its half-century tradition of tracking Santa Claus makes headlines. The practice of carefully monitoring the path of the sleigh and eight tiny reindeer grew out of a child's innocent wrong number on November 30, 1955. By transposing two digits, the boy reached the Combat Operations Center at the forerunner of NORAD. He asked the man who answered the phone if there was a Santa Claus, and a confused Colonel Harry Shoup responded gruffly:

"There may be a guy called Santa Claus at the North Pole,

but he's not the one I worry about coming from that direction."

That unexpected telephone call, though, gave the air defense team an idea. By Christmas, the Continental Air Defense Command had put together a "Santa tracking" operation and issued a press release predicting that according to its radars the jolly old fellow was on track to arrive in the US on Christmas Eve. In the 1960s, NORAD sent out vinyl records to radio stations that included holiday music from the NORAD house band and prerecorded "reports" about Santa's progress. From year to year, the program grew in ambition as Santa and Christmas became a Cold War bludgeon against the atheistic Communist Soviet Union and offered a friendly sheen over the deadly watch NORAD regularly kept. In the 1970s, NORAD ran three-minute-long TV commercials showing them scrambling jet fighters to intercept an unknown radar track down from the North Pole that turned out to be Santa Claus.

The tradition continued and morphed in the years since, now including a significant online component, with corporate sponsors, fancy graphics, and maps to allow children to follow Santa as he rounds the globe at noradsanta.org. At the command center each Christmas Eve, hundreds of military personnel still answer the phone to update children on Santa's progress, and more than 20 million people visit the website. In recent years, as the program has expanded to include mobile apps and games, Former First Lady Michelle Obama even took a handful of telephone calls, patched through from NORAD to the first family's vacation in Hawaii.

Under FEMA's plans, the agency had a multistage effort for informing civilians about how best to evacuate. First, the agency would air across the country a twenty-five-minute bilingual film, produced in 1978, *Protection in the Nuclear Age*, outlining the threat and putting an optimistic view on a horrible catastrophe, underscoring at every turn that survival was not only possible but—with planning—probable. Copies of the film were distributed in advance to civil defense officials and television stations, and fifteen prewritten newspaper articles distributed by FEMA covered much of the same ground. The low-tech film featured only illustrations and animations of stick figures—no live action—because by the 1970s civil defense planners had grown tired of retaping propaganda films each time fashion or car styles changed. As one FEMA official explained, "Stick figures don't get obsolete."

Nuclear war was enough of a possibility when CNN launched in the early 1980s that its founder, Ted Turner, prepared a video to air during the final moments of life on earth. As Turner said:

"We'll be on, and we will cover the end of the world, live, and that will be our last event. We'll play the National Anthem

only one time, on the first of June [when the network premiered], and when the end of the world comes, we'll play Nearer My God to Thee before we sign off."

It was the same hymn the band aboard the Titanic played during the ship's final moments. The no-frills recording of a joint US military band and honor guard standing at attention sat in the network's archives for years. Slugged as "Turner Doomsday Video," the program's notes read, "HFR till end of the world confirmed," using the network's abbreviation for "hold for release."

"We knew we would only sign off once, and I knew what that would mean."

Ronald Reagan was asked:

"Is there a winnable nuclear war?"

Standing at the podium in the East Room, Reagan answered quickly:

"It's very difficult for me to think that there's a winnable nuclear war, but where our great risk falls is that the Soviet Union has made it very plain that among themselves, they believe it is winnable. And believing that makes them constitute a threat."

Reagan's conclusion was actually at odds with the Soviet Union's own public statements. That same month, Brezhnev had been blunt about his own fears:

"It is dangerous madness to try to defeat each other in the arms race and to count on victory in nuclear war. Only he who has decided to commit suicide can start a nuclear war in the hope of emerging a victor from it."

On January 25, 1991, General George Lee Butler became the head of the Strategic Air Command. During his first week on the job, Butler asked the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff to give him a copy of the SIOP. General Colin Powell and Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney had made clear that the United States needed to change its targeting policy, now that the Cold War was over. As part of that administrative process, Butler decided to look at every single target in the SIOP, and for weeks he carefully scrutinized the thousands of desired ground zeros. He found bridges and railways and roads in the middle of nowhere targeted with multiple warheads, to assure their destruction. Hundreds of nuclear warheads would hit Moscow—dozens

of them aimed at a single radar installation outside the city. During his previous job working for the Joint Chiefs, Butler had dealt with targeting issues and the damage criteria for nuclear weapons. He was hardly naïve. But the days and weeks spent going through the SIOP, page by page, deeply affected him. For more than forty years, efforts to tame the SIOP, to limit it, reduce it, make it appear logical and reasonable, had failed.

“With the possible exception of the Soviet nuclear war plan, this was the single most absurd and irresponsible document I had ever reviewed in my life. I came to fully appreciate the truth: we escaped the Cold War without a nuclear holocaust by some combination of skill, luck, and divine intervention, and I suspect the latter in greatest proportion.”

In 2005, Indiana senator Richard Lugar surveyed eighty-five national security experts about the possibility of a nuclear detonation “somewhere in the world.” They placed the odds of an attack within the next ten years at around 29 percent. More than ten years have now elapsed, and it doesn’t seem like such a scenario was ever particularly close to coming to fruition. Yet as we continue to look forward, it always seems plausible. In 2010, CBS did a story on the possibility of nuclear terrorism. Martin Hellman, a professor emeritus at Stanford (specializing in engineering and cryptography), estimated that the odds of this event increase about one percent every year and will approach 40 percent in five decades.

Certainly, there’s a logic ladder here that’s hard to refute. An organization like ISIS would love to possess a nuclear weapon, and the potential availability of nuclear technology is proliferating. Everything we know about the group’s ethos suggests that if ISIS were to acquire such a weapon, they would want to use it immediately. If the target wasn’t Israel or France, the target would be the United States. Based on common sense and recent history, the two cities most likely to be attacked would be New York and Washington, D.C. So if one believes that a nuclear weapon will be detonated in their lifetime (which seems probable for a vast majority of the population), and one believes it will happen on US soil (which seems possible), and one lives in New York or D.C., they’re consciously raising their family in one of the few cities where they suspect a nuclear weapon is likely to be utilized. Based on this rationale, it would make way more sense for them to move to Portland, where there’s only a 10 percent chance they’ll drown in a tsunami.

None of the roughly seventy-thousand nuclear weapons built by the United States since 1945 has ever detonated inadvertently or without proper authorization. The technological and administrative controls on those

weapons have worked, however imperfectly at times—and countless people, military and civilian, deserve credit for that remarkable achievement. Had a single weapon been stolen or detonated, America's command-and-control system would still have attained a success rate of 99.99857 percent. But nuclear weapons are one of the most dangerous technologies ever invented. Anything less than 100 percent control of them, anything less than perfect safety and security, would be unacceptable. And if this book has any message to preach, it is that human beings are imperfect.

One measure of a nation's technological proficiency is the rate of industrial accidents. That rate is about two times higher in India, three times higher in Iran, and four times higher in Pakistan than it is in the United States. High-risk technologies are easily transferred across borders; but the organizational skills and safety culture necessary to manage them are more difficult to share. Nuclear weapons have gained allure as a symbol of power and a source of national pride. They also pose a grave threat to any country that possesses them.

Idealistic rhetoric at the UN has not yet been followed, however, by the difficult steps that might lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons: passage of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty by the US Senate; major reductions in the Russian and American arsenals; arms control talks that include China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel; strict rules on the production and distribution of fissile materials; and harsh punishments for countries that violate the new international norms. The recent withdrawal of the US from bans on the testing of certain kinds of weapons, along with the fact that China was never a signatory, leads us increasingly towards another arms race.

For the United States, abolishing nuclear weapons ought to be an urgent national security priority. So too should preserving our planet. These are the meta-challenges of our time. Addressing them promises to be the work of decades. Yet ridding the world of nuclear weapons is likely to prove far more plausible and achievable than ridding the world of evil. Transforming humankind's relationship to the environment, which will affect the way people live their daily lives, can hardly prove more difficult than trying to transform the Greater Middle East.

Nuclear weapons are unusable. Their employment in any conceivable scenario would be a political and moral catastrophe. For the United States, they are becoming unnecessary, even as a deterrent. Certainly, they are unlikely to dissuade the adversaries most likely to employ such weapons against us: extremists intent on acquiring their own nuclear capability. If anything, the opposite is true. By retaining a strategic arsenal in readiness—and by insisting that the dropping of atomic bombs on two Japanese cities

in 1945 was justified—the United States continues tacitly to sustain the view that nuclear weapons play a legitimate role in international politics—this at a time when our own interests are best served by doing everything possible to reinforce the existing taboo against their further use.

Furthermore, the day is approaching when the United States will be able to deter other nuclear-armed states without itself relying on nuclear weapons. Modern conventional weapons possess the potential to provide a more effective foundation for deterrence. They offer highly lethal, accurate, responsive second-strike (or even first-strike) capabilities. Precision conventional weapons also carry fewer of the moral complications that make nuclear weapons so inherently problematic. Hence, they have the added advantage of being usable, which enhances credibility.

Hell, even if one assumes that nuclear weapons possess any real utility, what conceivable target set would require more than 100 warheads to destroy?

The strategy of minimum deterrence has lately gained strong support, even in some unexpected places. In 2010 a group of high-ranking Air Force officials, including its chief of strategic planning, argued that the United States needed only 311 nuclear weapons to deter an attack. Any more would be overkill. The arsenal proposed by these Air Force strategists would contain almost 200 fewer weapons than the one recommended by the National Resources Defense Council and the Federation of American Scientists, a pair of liberal groups that also support minimum deterrence. Others argue for the United States to get rid of its land-based missiles, take all its weapons off alert, give up the notion that a counterforce strategy might work, and retain a few hundred ballistic missiles securely deployed on submarines. To avoid accidental launches and mistakes, the subs shouldn't be capable of firing their missiles quickly. And to dissuade foreign enemies from attacking the United States, we would let them know in advance where America's warheads might land on their territory. That knowledge would deter any rational world leader.

But the problems with a strategy of minimum deterrence have changed little in the past fifty years. It cannot defend the United States against an impending attack. It can only kill millions of enemy civilians after the United States has already been attacked.

It Can't Happen Here

The sociologist Charles B. Perrow began his research on dangerous technologies in August 1979, after the partial meltdown of the core at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant. In the early minutes of the accident, workers didn't realize that the valves on the emergency coolant pipes had mistakenly been shut—one of the indicator lights on the control panel was hidden by a repair tag. Perrow soon learned that similar mistakes had occurred during the operation of other nuclear power plants. At a reactor in Virginia, a worker cleaning the floor got his shirt caught on the handle of a circuit breaker on the wall. He pulled the shirt off it, tripped the circuit breaker, and shut down the reactor for four days. A light bulb slipped out of the hand of a worker at a reactor in California. The bulb hit the control panel, caused a short circuit, turned off sensors, and made the temperature of the core change so rapidly that a meltdown could have occurred. After studying a wide range of “trivial events in nontrivial systems,” Perrow concluded that human error wasn't responsible for these accidents. The real problem lay deeply embedded within the technological systems, and it was impossible to solve:

“Our ability to organize does not match the inherent hazards of some of our organized activities.”

What appeared to be the rare exception, an anomaly, a one-in-a-million accident, was actually to be expected. It was normal.

The most dangerous systems had elements that were “tightly coupled” and interactive. They didn't function in a simple, linear way, like an assembly line. When a problem arose on an assembly line, you could stop the line until a solution was found. But in a tightly coupled system, many things occurred simultaneously—and they could prove difficult to stop. If those things also interacted with each other, it might be hard to know exactly what was happening when a problem arose, let alone know what to do about it. The complexity of such a system was bound to bring surprises.

“No one dreamed that when X failed, Y would also be out of order and the two failures would interact so as to both start a fire and silence the fire alarm.”

Dangerous systems usually required standardized procedures and some form of centralized control to prevent mistakes. That sort of management was likely to work well during routine operations. But during an accident, Perrow argued, “those closest to the system, the operators, have to be able

to take independent and sometimes quite creative action.” Few bureaucracies were flexible enough to allow both centralized and decentralized decision-making, especially in a crisis that could threaten hundreds or thousands of lives. And the large bureaucracies necessary to run high-risk systems usually resented criticism, feeling threatened by any challenge to their authority.

“Time and time again, warnings are ignored, unnecessary risks taken, sloppy work done, deception and downright lying practiced.”

The instinct to blame the people at the bottom not only protected those at the top, it also obscured an underlying truth. The fallibility of human beings guarantees that no technological system will ever be infallible.

Some have called Three Mile Island the most studied accident in US history, at least up to that time. Two weeks after the accident, President Carter appointed the Kemeny Commission to investigate the accident's causes and recommend ways to prevent recurrence. The US Senate conducted its own investigation. The NRC conducted several investigations. The US nuclear industry held its own Three Mile Island postmortem. The various examiners generally agreed that the accident largely resulted from safety studies and reviews that focused too narrowly on nuclear plant designs and hardware and not sufficiently on the human part of the safety equation.

Some of the most damning language came from the twelve-member commission chaired by Dartmouth College president John G. Kemeny. The Kemeny Commission issued a blunt report in October 1979 after an intensive six-month investigation.

“[T]he fundamental problems are people-related problems and not equipment problems,” the commission wrote. “[W]herever we looked, we found problems with the human beings who operate the plant, with the management that runs the key organization, and with the agency that is charged with assuring the safety of nuclear power plants.” The commission also pointed a finger at “the failure of organizations to learn the proper lessons from previous incidents.” As a result, “we are convinced,” the commission wrote, “that an accident like Three Mile Island was eventually inevitable.”

At the heart of the problem, the report said, was a pervasive attitude that nuclear power was already so safe that there was no need to consider extra precautions. The Kemeny Commission urged that “this attitude be changed to one that says nuclear power is by its very nature potentially dangerous, and, therefore, one must continually question whether the safeguards already in place are sufficient to prevent major accidents.”

The nuclear industry was uncowed by these conclusions. Instead, it trumpeted another finding from the report:

“[I]n spite of serious damage to the plant, most of the radiation was contained and the actual release will have a negligible effect on the physical health of individuals.”

In the decades to follow, nuclear power supporters would rally behind this statement and repeat the shibboleth “Nobody died at Three Mile Island.” This would become a huge stumbling block to comprehensive safety reform.

“Fixes, including safety devices, sometimes create new accidents,” Charles Perrow warned, “and quite often merely allow those in charge to run the system faster, or in worse weather, or with bigger explosives.” Normal accident theory isn’t a condemnation of modern technological systems. But it calls for more humility in how we design, build, and operate them.

In near misses, the plant owners and the NRC pointed to the lack of damage as proof that the safety margins built into US reactors and regulations were adequate. That kind of logic, critics have long said, is akin to arguing that if a drunk driver makes it home safely, the public doesn’t need to worry about drunk driving.

One direct response to Three Mile Island by the US nuclear industry was the creation of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO). Among other things, INPO functions as an information clearinghouse for the industry—and to some degree as a shadow regulator.

The *déjà vu* sequence of events that led to the Three Mile Island accident eighteen months after a similar occurrence at Davis-Besse was not unique. In the 1970s, nuclear utilities shared little information with each other. Companies were needlessly vulnerable to common problems because of a lack of real-time communication about operating glitches and equipment malfunctions. Now, INPO requires plant owners to share good and bad practices. The goal is to enable everyone to learn from a mistake or malfunction without necessarily having to experience it firsthand.

INPO also established standards of excellence and periodically evaluates each nuclear plant against those standards. But the sharing only goes so far. The INPO assessment reports are among the most closely guarded nuclear industry secrets in the United States. Not even the NRC gets a copy. The nuclear industry defends this secrecy on the grounds that the assessments can be brutally frank—benefits apparently missing from publicly available (and often unjustifiably tame) NRC assessment reports.

In 1993, the public interest group Public Citizen obtained confidential INPO safety reports for all US nuclear plants and compared them with the assessments prepared by the NRC over the same period. Of 463 problems cited by INPO at fifty-six plants, only about a third showed up as matters of concern in the NRC’s reports. INPO identified 185 specific plant problems

the NRC reviews did not address, and in 115 cases the NRC praised plant performance that INPO had red flagged.

A spokesman for the nuclear industry explained the differences:

“The NRC’s mission is to regulate the industry. INPO’s mission is to be painfully candid, come into a plant and lay it bare.”

Another downside of the secrecy—beyond hiding a useful yardstick for the NRC’s own inspection performance—is that the public never knows to what extent nuclear utilities implement INPO’s recommendations to fix problems.

In 1980, the NRC required that plant owners draw up evacuation plans for the public within ten miles of each plant. (Compare that with the NRC’s recommendation that US citizens within fifty miles of Fukushima be advised to leave.) It also mandated that biennial emergency exercises be conducted at each nuclear plant site. During the exercise, a plant accident is simulated and the Federal Emergency Management Agency evaluates the steps local, state, and federal officials take to protect the public from radiation. In parallel, the NRC evaluates how well plant workers respond to the simulated accident and work with off-site officials.

The biennial exercises are better than nothing, but not by much. In the simulation, winds are assumed to blow in only one direction, conveniently but unrealistically limiting the number of people in harm’s way. The evacuations are only simulated, so there is no way to tell if the complicated logistics of evacuating all homes, businesses, schools, hospitals, and prisons could be successfully carried out. Instead, the exercises merely verify that officials have the right phone numbers and contractual agreements for the buses to carry evacuees and the hospitals to treat the injured and contaminated. These exercises only provide an illusion of adequate preparation. As the Fukushima experience painfully demonstrated, rapidly moving people out of harm’s way in the midst of a nuclear crisis is exceedingly difficult, yet critical.

During the Fukushima crisis, a worried White House, members of Congress, and the American public were pressing the NRC for answers to two fundamental questions: Can an accident like Fukushima Daiichi happen here? And if so, what needs to be done to prevent it? The answers recited so often in the past—that nuclear power was inherently safe and that the existing regulations provided ample public protection—might not wash this time. After all, that’s exactly what the Japanese had claimed.

The hastily formed NRC Near-Term Task Force (NTTF), consisting of six senior experts, began its review on March 30, 2011. One of the first and

most obvious issues it would have to take on was whether US plants were adequately prepared to deal with the kind of prolonged station blackout that Fukushima had experienced. Under the rule in existence since 1988, all American plants had to show they could cope with a simultaneous loss of off-site and on-site AC power for a certain period. At the majority of plants, the required coping time was just four hours; at one it was sixteen hours; for the remainder, it was eight.

The NRC countenanced several different approaches for coping with a blackout. One was to rely on batteries for DC power to control plant cooling systems that did not require AC power to function. Because these systems eventually would stop working even with DC power, the NRC restricted reliance on batteries for coping to no more than four hours. To prove they could cope for longer periods, plants would have to add AC power sources beyond the two emergency diesel generators they were already required to have. They could do this by purchasing additional generators or by connecting to power supplies from gas turbines, hydroelectric dams, or even adjacent reactors. The latter option was possible because the NRC permitted licensees to assume that a station blackout would affect only one reactor at a site. Consequently, licensees could assume that equipment from a “nonaffected” reactor would be available to assist the “affected” reactor.

Each plant determined the coping time it would need based on specific factors such as the duration of off-site power outages experienced in the past. But the NRC did not require that coping time analyses postulate extreme events that could cause prolonged outages. Nor did it require that coping strategies evaluate the possibility that alternate AC sources—like those at a reactor next door—might also become unavailable. And finally, it did not envision the possibility that flooding or fire could disable a reactor’s own electrical systems, so that even if power sources were available they might not be usable.

The station blackout rule was casual about these matters in part because a blackout was considered a beyond-design-basis accident. Therefore, the requirements addressing it did not need to be as stringent.

The lax provisions of the station blackout rule were consistent with the NRC’s logic: more robust protection simply wasn’t needed because this kind of event was so improbable.

After the ten-day-long blackout at Fukushima Daiichi, these coping times appeared ridiculously low, and the agency found itself having to justify why immediate action wasn’t needed to extend them. At an NRC briefing on station blackouts on April 28, Commissioner Kristine L. Svinicki asked the staff a question that might have reflected some of what she and her colleagues were hearing, especially about the four-hour limit on batteries.

“Just to a layperson, when they come to you and say, ‘Is it really only four hours that nuclear power plants have to cope with some sort of event of a long duration?’ If you were talking to a family member, what would you say to that?”

The reply of NRC staff member George Wilson had a familiar logic:

“[H]ow I’ve answered is that we’ve only had one station blackout in the United States. Our diesels are very reliable, and they restored that power within fifty-five minutes. I also explain that we have redundant power supplies. So you have to have something to take out multiple sources of power. And once I explain that usually they stop, or I run overboard.”

It seemed the NRC’s only fallback was to say yet again, in effect:

“It can’t happen here.”

When the five NRC commissioners sat down with the task force to have their first public discussion of the report, two of them promptly expressed doubt about the need for fundamental changes in regulation. Commissioner Svinicki asked whether some of the task force’s recommendations, notably those calling for increasing safety margins as a hedge against uncertainty, represented a “repudiation” of the NRC’s increasing reliance on “risk-informed regulation.” Commissioner William C. Ostendorff also took exception to the need for a major overhaul. “I personally do not believe that our existing regulatory framework is broken,” he said. And, he added, any policy changes needed to be done in consultation with “our stakeholders.”

The largest and most influential of those stakeholders, of course, is the nuclear industry. And that industry has always believed that the best defense is a good offense. Its leaders were hurriedly organizing their Fukushima response, hoping to head off new rules. From the industry’s point of view, voluntary actions it devised on its own were preferable to mandatory ones handed down by the NRC, and it soon put forward its own ideas. This tactic was nothing new. The NRC’s embrace of industry-proposed measures over many years was responsible, in part, for the patchwork of regulations criticized by the task force and others.

A tortuous logic flourishes within the commission and influences its decisions. The NRC has always been reluctant to take actions that could call into question its previous judgments that nuclear plants were adequately safe. If it were to require new plants to meet higher safety standards than old ones, for example, the public might no longer accept having an old one

next door. So the NRC is constantly engaged in an elusive quest for a middle ground from which it can direct needed improvements without having to concede that the plants were not already safe enough, thereby alarming the citizenry.

It is not clear, even with the ruins of Fukushima in full view, that the NRC is willing to break out of that pattern. In that regulatory balancing act, what has evolved over the years is a debate over “how safe is safe enough.” In making its determinations on that issue, the NRC has all too often made choices that aligned with what the industry wanted but left gaping holes in the safety net.

There may be no better example than the long-standing controversy over the Mark I boiling water reactor design. Back in 1989, the NRC staff warned the commissioners:

“Mark I containment integrity could be challenged by a large scale core melt accident, principally due to its smaller size.”

The staff argued that certain Mark I containment failure modes, such as liner melt-through, could not be stopped should a core meltdown occur. The only strategy was to prevent meltdowns in the first place—and for that the backup coolant supplies and hardened containment vents were crucial.

Reluctant to directly confront the industry on such a sensitive issue, the NRC gave Mark I owners an offer they couldn’t refuse: install hardened containment vents voluntarily or the NRC staff would conduct plant-specific backfit analysis to determine if the agency could legally require them to comply. The commission’s offer presented an easy choice for most Mark I owners. If they installed the vents as a voluntary initiative, they would not have to submit a license amendment to the NRC for approval, and the NRC would have almost no regulatory control over the vents.

Although the NRC set basic standards for the design, construction, maintenance, and testing of the vents, Mark I operators would be under no obligation to meet them. The NRC would also have no authority to issue violation notices if it found problems, unless the vents interfered with other safety systems. In contrast, if the agency could show that the hardened vents passed the backfit test, it could force reactor owners to install and maintain them on the NRC’s terms.

If the commissioners had taken effective action—action that would have sent a strong message to Mark I operators around the world, including those in Japan—it is quite possible that the worst consequences of Fukushima might have been avoided. Instead, the matter fell into a regulatory morass of competing interests and emerged with a resolution that accomplished little. It wasn’t the first time that had happened.

In the aftermath of the 1979 Three Mile Island accident, the Kemeny Commission made clear that the safety status quo was inadequate. However, the panel explicitly refused to give its own views on “how safe is safe enough.” Without any useful external guidance, the NRC embarked on a multi-decade struggle to provide an acceptable answer to this issue, the bane of regulators everywhere. It is without doubt a difficult public policy question, but the NRC’s methods of addressing it have only created more confusion over the decades. Fukushima makes one thing clear: the process has not yielded the right answer.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan issued an executive order barring federal agencies from taking regulatory action “unless the potential benefits to society outweigh the potential costs to society.” Although such a cost-benefit analysis approach sounded reasonable to those seeking a way to reduce government interference, it was controversial for its coldly reductionist attempt to convert the value of human lives into dollar figures that could be directly compared to the costs incurred by regulated industries.

The NRC had carried such a number on its books since the mid-1970s: \$1,000 per person-rem, a term used to characterize the total radiation dose to an affected group of people. Based on today’s understanding of cancer risk, that put the value of a human life between \$1 and \$2 million. The NRC failed to adjust for inflation for years, finally doubling the figure in the 1990s to about \$3 million per life. That was about a half to a third the value placed on a human life by other federal agencies.

In the NRC’s world, the issue of “how safe is safe enough” is addressed through the concept of “adequate protection.” When Congress created the agency out of the ashes of the Atomic Energy Commission, the NRC inherited the mandate bestowed upon its predecessor by the 1954 Atomic Energy Act: to “provide adequate protection of public health and safety.” The NRC watered down this hazy concept even further by adopting a standard of “reasonable assurance of adequate protection” in its own guidance. The standard was so vague that it essentially gave the NRC and its five political-appointee commissioners a blank check for deciding exactly what constituted adequate protection. In fact, several months after Three Mile Island, NRC chairman Joseph Hendrie said in a speech that “adequate protection means what the Commission says it means.”

The industry’s proposed reduction of the severe accident source term amounted to a bold jujitsu move to turn the NRC’s original effort to strengthen regulations on its head. One requirement the industry was particularly anxious to undermine was the recently imposed ten-mile emergency evacuation zone around every nuclear plant. At the time, the evacuation requirements were causing a firestorm in New York State, where state and

local authorities were blocking operation of the newly constructed Shoreham plant on Long Island by refusing to certify the evacuation plan. Critics claimed the roads of narrow Long Island couldn't handle a mass exodus.

But if the amount of radiation that could escape the plant was so much smaller than previously believed, then perhaps a ten-mile evacuation zone wasn't needed. The NRC made no attempt to hide its skepticism about the industry's source term recalibrations. At a 1983 conference, Robert Bernero, director of the agency's Office of Accident Source Term Programs, called those involved "snake oil salesmen." To help resolve the growing controversy, the NRC commissioned the American Physical Society, a professional association of physicists, to conduct a review of source term research. The physicists concluded that, although the evidence appeared to support reducing the assumed releases of certain radionuclides in certain accidents, there was no basis for the "sweeping generalization" made by IDCOR.

Ultimately, however, the industry's counter-campaign had an effect. Although the NRC refused to accept the industry's arguments, in 1985 the commission abandoned efforts to require protection against severe accidents and withdrew the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. In fact, the NRC went a step farther, issuing a Severe Accident Policy Statement that declared by fiat that "existing plants pose no undue risk to public health and safety." In other words, there was no need to raise the safety bar to include beyond-design-basis accidents because the NRC's rules already provided "reasonable assurance of adequate protection," the vague but legally sanctioned seal of approval. The NRC had already addressed Three Mile Island issues, and that was enough.

However, in the face of a growing body of research that suggested the safety picture was not quite that rosy, this declaration raised questions more than it provided answers. In the time-honored tradition of government bureaucracies, the NRC resolved to continue studying the issue, kicking the can farther down the road and confusing matters even more. While asserting that there were no generic beyond-design-basis issues at US reactors, the commission held out the possibility that problems might exist at individual plants and that it should take steps to identify them. Even this proved controversial, requiring three years of give-and-take between the NRC and the industry merely to set ground rules for the study.

"Adequate protection is not absolute protection."

The NRC could consider the costs of backfits that would go beyond "adequate protection," the judges ruled. The NRC revised the backfit rule

accordingly in 1988. The court, by tying its decision to the largely arbitrary “adequate protection” standard, had preserved the agency’s free hand to push safety in any direction it wanted. The NRC rebuffed calls to provide a definition of “adequate protection.” The Union of Concerned Scientists failed to get the revised rule thrown out on appeal. Adequate protection would remain “what the Commission says it is.”

The court’s ruling essentially froze nuclear safety requirements at 1988 levels. If new information revealed safety vulnerabilities at operating plants, the NRC would have three options: conclude changes were needed to “ensure” adequate protection; redefine the meaning of ‘adequate protection’ itself; or subject the proposed rules to the backfit test. The NRC also kept a fourth option, an “administrative exemption,” in its back pocket. In any of these cases, most new safety proposals would have to leap a high—perhaps impossibly high—hurdle.

Over time, the NRC staff appeared to lose its appetite for grappling with the industry over new requirements to reduce severe accident risk. Even worse, in response to growing political pressure, the NRC decided to sweep other stubborn issues under the rug. In fact, as Three Mile Island receded into the past and no other Western-designed reactor experienced an event to jolt the memory—Chernobyl didn’t really count, as it was considered an exotic Soviet beast—the agency in the 1990s embraced a sentiment that its requirements were not too lenient but rather too strict.

According to this line of thinking, severe accident risks were already so low that certain regulations could be weakened without significantly affecting safety. The NRC dubbed this approach “risk-informed regulation,” and counted on probabilistic risk assessment data to justify what it euphemistically referred to as “reducing unnecessary conservatism” but actually amounted to removing safety requirements. Risk-informed regulation was seen by critics as a single-edged sword: it was only used to reduce regulatory requirements, never to strengthen them.

Among the first regulations that the NRC set its sights on risk informing was a post-Three Mile Island requirement that all reactors install “recombiners” that could prevent the accumulation of hydrogen during a loss-of-coolant accident. In reconsidering the requirement for the Mark I and II, the NRC’s analysis found that the recombiners would not be needed to prevent hydrogen explosions during the first twenty-four hours after an accident because the reactor containments were inerted with nitrogen. However, the recombiners could be useful after twenty-four hours had passed because the inerting would become ineffective.

Nonetheless, in 2003 the NRC eliminated the recombiner requirement, concluding that removing this equipment would not be “risk significant.”

The reason: the Severe Accident Management Guidelines (SAMGs) at those plants called for operators to vent or purge hydrogen in a severe accident, and the NRC believed that twenty-four hours gave them plenty of time to prepare to get that done. Based on this calculation, the agency concluded that the monetary value of the increased threat to public health was less than what the utilities would save by not having to maintain the recombiners—\$36,000 per year per reactor. Thus the NRC removed regulatory requirements to prevent hydrogen explosions in part by taking credit for voluntary initiatives—SAMGs—that it did not regulate. This type of twisted logic was typical of the risk analysis that enabled the NRC to weaken its regulations at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Suppose that decades ago the NRC staff had succeeded in pushing through a much more aggressive approach for dealing with Mark I core damage and containment failure risks, including the challenges of a prolonged station blackout. There is no guarantee that the Japanese would have followed suit, but they would have been hard-pressed to ignore the NRC's example. The NRC staff in the 1980s had all but predicted that something like Fukushima was inevitable without the fixes it prescribed, but the agency's timidity—or perhaps even negligence—contributed to the global regulatory environment that made Fukushima possible. The NRC's reliance on the flawed assumption that severe accident risks are acceptably low helped to perpetuate a dangerous fallacy in the United States and abroad. Ultimately, the NRC must bear some responsibility for the tragedy that struck Japan. And the commissioners must acknowledge that unless they fully correct the flawed processes of the past, they cannot truthfully testify before Congress that a Fukushima-like event “can't happen here.”

This line of reasoning formed the backbone of the NRC's strategy for addressing the threat of severe accidents—namely, that events threatening major harm to the public were so unlikely that they didn't need to be strictly regulated, a view shared by Japanese authorities and other members of the nuclear establishment worldwide.

In its risk assessments, the NRC was careful always to multiply high-consequence figures by tiny probabilities, ending up with small risk numbers. That way, instead of having to talk about thousands of cancer deaths from an accident, the NRC could provide reassuring-sounding risk values like one in one-thousand per year. The NRC was so fixated on this point that it insisted that information about accident consequences also had to refer to probabilities. However, critics argued that the probability estimates were so uncertain—and there was so little real data to validate them—that the NRC could not actually prove that severe accidents were extremely unlikely. Therefore, accident consequences should be considered on their own terms.

There was no credible way to calculate the probability of a terrorist attack and come up with a meaningful number. The NRC had long acknowledged this, and consequently did not incorporate terrorist attacks into its probabilistic risk assessments or cost-benefit analyses. After 9/11, no longer able to hide behind its low-probability fig leaf, the NRC struggled to reassure Americans that they had nothing to fear from an attack on a nuclear power plant. While maintaining that nuclear reactors had multiple lines of defense, from robust containment buildings to highly trained operators, the NRC also had to concede that the reactors were not specifically designed to withstand direct hits from large commercial aircraft, and that it was not sure what would happen if such an attack occurred. The industry steered the public discussion toward the straw-man issue of whether or not the plane would penetrate the containment—it couldn't, according to the NEI—even though many experts pointed out that terrorists could cause a meltdown by targeting other sensitive parts of a plant.

To learn more about what could happen in an attack, the NRC commissioned a series of “vulnerability assessments” from the national laboratories, but the results remained largely classified for security reasons. Aside from a series of carefully constructed and vaguely reassuring talking points, the NRC provided few details beyond ‘Trust us.’ Communities near nuclear plants would get few tangible answers about the vulnerability of reactors in their midst.

The early results of the nuclear plant vulnerability assessments that the NRC had been conducting since shortly after the 9/11 attacks indicated, in the agency's view, that the radiological releases and public health consequences resulting from terrorist-caused meltdowns generally wouldn't be as catastrophic as previous studies, including CRAC2, had found. Unfortunately for the NRC, it could not broadcast this good news because the vulnerability studies, being related to terrorist threats, were considered “classified” or “safeguards” information.

But some inside the NRC reasoned that if the agency applied the same analysis methods to accidents instead of terrorist attacks, it might be able to dodge some of the security restrictions and get the information out to the public. State-of-the-Art Reactor Consequence Analyses (SOARCA) was the result. There was a downside. Opening up the analytical process would also expose the staff's methodology and assumptions to unwelcome scrutiny by outsiders. So the NRC planned to keep a veil of secrecy over the SOARCA program itself, stamping the staff's proposal for how to conduct the study, as well as the commission's response, as “Official Use Only—Sensitive Internal Information.”

The NRC would control all information about the study and report the

results only when it was ready, and in a manner that could not be—in its judgment—misinterpreted or misused. From the outset, one commissioner, Gregory Jaczko, objected, arguing that the study guidelines and other related documents should be publicly released. He was outvoted.

With a vast, complex, and uncertainty-ridden study like SOARCA, it wasn't necessary to commit scientific fraud to guide the process to a desired outcome. There were plenty of dusty corners in the analysis where helpful assumptions could be made without drawing attention. The NRC employed a number of maneuvers to help ensure that the study would produce the results it wanted, selectively choosing criteria—in effect, scripting the accident.

It discarded accident sequences that were considered “too improbable,” screening out events that would produce very large and rapid radiological releases, such as a large coolant pipe break. It only evaluated accidents involving a single reactor, even though some of the events it considered, such as earthquakes, could affect both units at either Peach Bottom or Surry. It considered its “best estimate” to be scenarios in which plant personnel would be able to “mitigate” severe accidents and prevent any radiological releases at all; it analyzed scenarios in which mitigation was unsuccessful but pronounced them unlikely. Perhaps most curious was the NRC's decision to assume that lower doses of radiation are not harmful—an assertion at odds not only with a broad scientific consensus but with the NRC's own regulatory guidelines.

The fog grew even thicker when the time came to decide how the study results would be presented. First, the commissioners decreed that figures such as the numbers of latent cancer fatalities caused by an accident should not appear. Instead, the report would provide only a figure diluted by dividing the total number of cancer deaths by the number of all people within a region. For instance, if the study predicted one-hundred cancer deaths among a population of one-million, the individual risk would be $100 \div 1,000,000$ —one in ten-thousand. So rather than saying hundreds or even thousands of cancer deaths would result from an accident—guaranteed to grab a few headlines—the report would state a less alarming conclusion.

And since the NRC's probabilistic risk assessment studies estimated that the chance of such an accident was only about one in one-million per year, the current risk to an individual—probability times consequences—would be far less. To use the same example, it would be one-million times smaller than one in ten-thousand, or a mere one in ten-billion per year: a number hardly worth contemplating. The communication strategy for SOARCA appeared to be taking its inspiration from the old Reactor Safety Study and its discredited comparisons of the risks of being killed by nuclear plant accidents versus meteor strikes.

But there was more obfuscation. The NRC would only reveal the values of these results for average weather conditions, and not the more extreme values for worst-case weather; this was the same strategy of evasion that had gotten the agency in hot water with Congressman Markey and the media back in the days of the CRAC2 report. The commissioners also told the researchers to drop their original plans to include calculations of land contamination and the associated economic consequences. Earlier, the project staff had carried out such calculations for terrorist attacks at two reactor sites with high population density—Indian Point, north of New York City, and Limerick, northwest of Philadelphia—but apparently decided they did not want that kind of information to be made public. According to a staff memo, the models that had been used produced “excessively conservative” results—meaning, in NRC parlance, that the researchers thought the damage estimates were unrealistically high.

When the NRC staff presented preliminary results of the study to the Advisory Committee in November 2007, it appeared that the staff had successfully obtained the conclusions its bosses wanted. First, the staff judged that all the identified scenarios could reasonably be mitigated—that is, plant workers, using B.5.b measures and SAMGs, would be able to stop core damage or block radiation releases from the plant. Even if they failed to prevent the accident from progressing, the news would not be too dreadful: the release of radioactive material would occur later and likely be much smaller than past studies had assumed, resulting in “significantly less severe” off-site health consequences. And finally, the NRC staff was so confident that it stopped the simulations after forty-eight hours, assuming that by then the situation would have been stabilized.

The results that the NRC staff presented to the Advisory Committee were striking. While CRAC2 had found that following a worst-case or “SST1” release, acute radiation syndrome would kill ninety-two people at Peach Bottom and forty-five at Surry, SOARCA found the number of deaths to be exactly zero at both sites. There was no magic—or fundamental improvement in reactor safety—behind this stunning difference. The NRC had just fiddled with the clock. In the CRAC2 study, the radiation release began ninety minutes after the start of the accident, before most of the population within ten miles of the plant had time to evacuate, putting many more at risk. But the NRC had chosen accidents for SOARCA that unfolded more slowly. As a result, for most of the SOARCA scenarios, analysts assumed that the population within the ten-mile emergency planning zone would be long gone before any radiation was released. That way, by the time a release did occur, people would be too far away to receive a lethal dose. This was not an apples-to-apples comparison to the earlier study.

Harder to understand were the far lower numbers of cancer deaths projected by the SOARCA analysis, because even people beyond the ten-mile emergency planning zone could receive doses high enough to significantly increase their cancer risk. Whereas CRAC2 estimated 2,700 cancer deaths at Peach Bottom and 1,300 at Surry for this group, SOARCA project staff told the Advisory Committee that they had instead found twenty-five and zero cancer deaths, respectively. That, too, involved sleight of hand—and some shopping around to find a convenient statistic. Despite a widespread scientific consensus that there is no safe level of radiation, the NRC staff decided to assume that such a level indeed existed: no cancers would develop until exposures reached five rem per year (or ten rem in a lifetime). Any exposure below that would be harmless.

At a 2007 Advisory Committee briefing closed to the public, Randy Sullivan, an emergency preparedness specialist for the NRC, let slip one reason why the SOARCA staff saw the need to use such an unconventional assumption. Apparently, the staff didn't like the numbers it would get if it used the widely endorsed linear no-threshold hypothesis (LNT), which assumes that any dose of radiation, no matter how low, has the potential to lead to cancer. It was an easy choice: assume a high threshold, predict many fewer cancers. Otherwise, the number of cancer deaths predicted by SOARCA would be so large it could frighten people. At the briefing, Sullivan acknowledged:

“We could easily do LNT, just go ahead, issue the source term, calculate it out to 1,000 miles, run it for four days, assess the consequences for, I don't know, 300 years and say 2 millirem times [the population within] 1,000 miles of Peach Bottom. What is that? Eighty-million people. . . We're going to kill whatever. This is a closed meeting. Right? I hope you don't mind the drama. So then we'll say that our best estimate is that there will be many, many thousands, you'll have 2 millirem times 80 million people and you'll claim that you're going to kill a bunch of them.”

It was easy to understand why the project team wanted to believe that plant workers had the ability to mitigate the severe accidents that were analyzed: everything else led to core meltdowns—albeit more slowly than previous studies had found. An example was the SOARCA staff's analysis of a hypothetical “long-term” station blackout at Peach Bottom, which is located about forty-five miles from Baltimore and eighty-five miles from Washington, D.C. The accident scenario proceeded through a grim sequence of events.

First, all electrically powered coolant pumps would stop working. Using batteries, operators could start up the steam-powered RCIC system, but after four hours, the batteries would fail, and after another hour, so would the RCIC. The temperature and pressure within the reactor vessel would quickly rise, and the safety relief valves on the vessel would eventually stick open, steadily releasing steam. With no makeup water available to replace the steam, the fuel would be uncovered in a matter of minutes. At about nine hours, the fuel would start to melt, eventually collapsing and falling to the bottom of the reactor vessel. After about twenty hours, the molten fuel would breach the vessel bottom and spill onto the containment floor, where it would spread out and rapidly melt its way through the steel containment liner. A few minutes later, hydrogen leaking from the containment into the reactor building would cause an explosion, opening up the refueling bay blowout panels and blowing apart the building's roof.

If batteries were not available for those first four hours—if they were flooded from the adjacent Susquehanna, for instance—the resulting “short-term” station blackout would be even worse. In that case, the models predicted that core damage would start after one hour and the containment would fail at eight hours. In either case, once the containment failed a plume of radioactivity would escape the damaged plant and overspread the area.

Part of the problem was that the commissioners had directed that the requirements be “performance based.” The concept behind performance-based regulation is that requirements should not be too prescriptive. The regulator should specify the desired outcome and let the plant owner figure out the best way to achieve it. While advocates of this approach consider it more efficient because it gives owners more flexibility, it actually makes requirements harder to interpret and enforce. The industry is free to write its own playbook, leaving regulators with the burden of figuring out whether or not it meets the regulatory intent of the safety rules.

Highway departments could put up roadside signs saying ‘Don’t Go Too Fast’ or ‘Drive at a Reasonable Pace.’ Instead, they put up signs reading, for example, “Speed Limit 55” or “Maximum Speed 20” so that drivers understand what is expected and law enforcement officers know when to issue traffic tickets. The former signs would constitute entirely useless measures: a car wrapped around a tree must have been traveling too fast, but another barreling through a school zone at 120 miles per hour must be operating at a reasonable speed if it doesn’t strike any children. Safety requires specificity. Lack of specificity invites a free-for-all.

In the early days, when a regulation or order needed interpreting, the NRC would develop a “regulatory guide” and submit it for comment by the affected industry. But over time the roles were often reversed: the industry,

coordinated by NEI, would write the first drafts of guidance documents and the NRC would comment. This shift gave the industry far greater power to shape the conceptual basis for regulatory compliance, leaving the NRC to tinker around the edges. The NEI guidance documents would then serve as boilerplate text for use by all applicants and licensees.

The NEI guidance for the FLEX program was such a template. The NRC required all plant owners to submit plans by the end of February 2013 to demonstrate how they would implement the program to comply with the mitigation strategies order. On February 28, Exelon Corporation, which owns seventeen reactors, submitted its plan for the Peach Bottom plant in south central Pennsylvania. Exelon's proposal was typical of all the plant owners' responses, closely hewing to the NEI's guidance. It clearly demonstrated the shortcomings of the FLEX approach.

The Peach Bottom plant, situated beside the Susquehanna River, has two Mark I BWRs closely resembling Fukushima Daiichi Units 2 and 3. Exelon's plan for dealing with a beyond-design-basis accident there assumed from the get-go that batteries and electrical distribution systems for both AC and DC power would be available. It assumed that off-site personnel called to duty would be able to reach the plant in as little as six hours, not necessarily a realistic assumption in the event of the type of major natural disaster that the emergency plans were being designed for.

For Peach Bottom, Exelon estimated that the batteries needed to run critical equipment, including the RCIC, would last no longer than five-and-a-half hours—but it also asserted that the FLEX generator could be hooked up and ready to start recharging the batteries within five hours. Therefore, there was no need for Exelon to extend the battery capacity. Exelon's plan assumed that additional backup equipment from the closer of two Regional Response Centers, located nearly one-thousand miles away in Memphis, would arrive at Peach Bottom within twenty-four hours. Exelon contended that it could keep the plant stable forever without any off-site assistance, with repeated torus venting, but conceded that it would be better to eventually have an alternative, less radioactive method.

Consistent with NEI's guidance, Exelon's plan allowed FLEX equipment to be stored below flood level on the assumption that workers would have time to move it to a safer place "prior to the arrival of potentially damaging flood levels."

As questionable as these timelines are, they don't take into account the worst case. Exelon found that if a station blackout occurred during refueling, when the entire core of a unit was in the spent fuel pool, there would be no time for the first coping phase at all: FLEX equipment would have to be set up immediately. Exelon asserted that this was not a problem because even

though the pool would start to boil after two-and-a-half hours, the spent fuel would not become uncovered until eight hours had elapsed.

The Peach Bottom FLEX plan is a perfect example of the mind-set that led to Fukushima. It represents industry and regulators scripting an accident with little room for improvisation. If a single assumption fails—say, that workers don't have time to move FLEX equipment to safety in advance of an impending flood—then all the other barriers would collapse like dominoes. Without the FLEX generator, the batteries would fail after five-and-a-half hours and the RCIC could no longer be counted on to cool the reactors. Operators would eventually lose the ability to vent the containment and it would over-pressurize. Backup equipment, located a thousand miles away in Tennessee—and possibly on the other side of massive floodwaters, downed trees, or earthquake destruction—probably would not arrive in time to save the day. Nobody apparently thought those possibilities were worth considering, even after Fukushima Daiichi.

“We already have mobile—diesel-driven mobile pumps on every site in the country that can be moved around the site to provide another contingency measure should we lose a cooling source. And there's countless other measures like that.”

Those measures are known as 'B.5.b,' named after the section of the regulatory orders where they appear. The B.5.b measures, introduced after 9/11 to help workers cope with the aftermath of an aircraft attack, were one case in which performance-based requirements hadn't worked very well. The industry argued against imposing measures it viewed as too prescriptive or specific, contending that there were simply too many potential disaster scenarios to contemplate. Through their lobbying group, plant owners insisted that they needed maximum flexibility to come up with their own solutions. The NRC relented, imposing only very general requirements for the B.5.b equipment and giving the industry a great deal of leeway to design its own strategies.

However, the industry had not thought through its plans to ensure that they would actually work under real-world conditions, such as high radiation fields, excessive heat, and infrastructure damage. These were the very conditions that contributed to the failure of the Japanese severe accident management measures at Fukushima. Yet in a vote on the Fukushima proposals, the commissioners endorsed the B.5.b process as a model for dealing with beyond-design-basis accidents.

For example, utilities must store B.5.b equipment far enough away that it might be able to survive a plane attack on a reactor. But there is no

requirement that the equipment survive other types of disasters, such as an earthquake. When asked about the ability of the emergency pumps to survive an earthquake, officials said that the pumps are not certified to withstand any earthquake at all, much less a severe one. In other words, in the face of a Fukushima-scale event, the B.5.b measures could well be worthless.

Although the B.5.b equipment has been touted as an added layer of safety in the event of a crisis, post-Fukushima inspections by the NRC showed that at many sites the backup equipment would be unlikely to function at all during a severe event, especially one involving a natural disaster such as a flood or an earthquake. This should not have been a surprise, as the NRC had not required that the equipment be safety-grade, or “hardened,” to withstand either design-basis or beyond-design-basis events. In other words, the B.5.b equipment could legitimately have come straight off the shelf from Home Depot. Safety-grade components, on the other hand, must meet stringent quality standards and be rigorously tested to confirm proper performance.

Now, however, the FLEX program was being promoted by some as “B.5.b on steroids.” A better description might be ‘B.5.b on fertility drugs.’ Instead of hardening the B.5.b equipment to safety-grade standards or beyond, the FLEX approach would simply add more unhardened items. Utilities would place multiple units of equipment at diverse locations on- or off-site in the hope that no matter what the catastrophe, something somewhere would survive to cool the reactor core and spent fuel pools. Even though the FLEX approach would require the purchase of more equipment, it would save the industry money because nuclear safety-grade standards are costly and difficult to meet. As Charles Pardee of Exelon Generation Company summed it up in a December 2011 public meeting:

“It’s cheaper to buy three pumps than one and a heckuva big building to put it in.”

Many reactors in the United States are downstream from large dams. A dam failure, whether caused by an earthquake, a terrorist attack, or a spontaneous breach, could rapidly flood one of these plants with little warning, compounding any problems caused by the same event that breached the dam. Although the NRC had known for many years that it was underestimating the threat of dam breaches, the agency was taking its time deciding what to do about it. To some NRC staff members, the catastrophic flooding at Fukushima was a painful reminder of this unresolved vulnerability at home.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 had reminded the US government of the threat of catastrophic sabotage against critical infrastructure targets. Like

other federal agencies, the NRC began to reassess the vulnerabilities of nuclear plants. Those included more than terrorists piloting jetliners. An attack on a dam located upstream of nuclear facilities posed a hazard greater than previously thought. And the terrorist threat alerted the NRC to the dangers of accidental failures of upstream dams as well.

Citing domestic security concerns, the NRC concealed for many years its growing worry about the threat to reactors posed by a dam collapse. Thirty-four reactors at twenty sites around the country are downstream from large dams. A dam failure could rapidly inundate a nuclear plant and disable its vital power supplies and cooling systems. The risk of such failures was not taken into account in the design-basis flooding analyses when the plants were licensed. Other causes of flooding, such as rainfall, were considered, but these pose far less risk because the water would rise more gradually, providing greater time to prepare. The issue became public in 2012 when an NRC whistleblower accused the agency of covering up information about the vulnerability.

One plant appeared especially at risk: the three-unit Oconee Nuclear Station in South Carolina. More than 1.4 million people live within fifty miles of Oconee. Although the agency and the company disagreed about the risks there, they did agree on one thing: the consequences—a prolonged station blackout leading to core melting in less than ten hours and containment failure in less than three days. A significant radioactivity dose to the public would result.

Most of the Fukushima responses drafted for the NRC chairman also contained what was marked as “additional, technical non-public information,” which tended to paint a somewhat different picture of the situation. For example:

Q: “What happens when/if a plant ‘melts down’?”

A: *Public answer:* “In short, nuclear power plants in the United States are designed to be safe. To prevent the release of radioactive material, there are multiple barriers between the radioactive material and the environment, including the fuel cladding, the heavy steel reactor vessel itself, and the containment building, usually a heavily reinforced structure of concrete and steel several feet thick.”

Nonpublic addendum: “The melted core may melt through the bottom of the vessel and flow onto the concrete containment floor. The core may melt through the containment liner and release radioactive material to the environment.”

Q: “Will this incident affect new reactor licensing?”

A: *Public answer:* “It is not appropriate to hypothesize on such a future scenario at this point.”

Nonpublic addendum: “This event could potentially call into question the NRC’s seismic requirements, which could require the staff to re-evaluate the staff’s approval of the AP1000 and ESBWR [new reactor] design and certifications.”

As to the question about the risk to US residents from fallout, the public answer—the one that downplayed dangers because of distance—also included a non-public detail that didn’t sound quite so optimistic:

“NRC is working with DHS, EPA, and other federal partners to ensure monitoring equipment for confirmatory readings is properly positioned, based on meteorological and other relevant information.”

It’s unclear for whom the “non-public” information was intended, but the public responses were utilized repeatedly in coming days.

TEPCO was in a fight for its own survival. A company that many believed was too big to fail would soon become a ward of the state. This was more than just a corporate icon falling on hard times. Soon, the cost of TEPCO’s lax oversight, failed planning, and propensity for high-stakes gambles would shift from a private debt to a massive public one. Estimates of the cost of cleanup and compensation to victims of the Fukushima Daiichi accident were pegged at more than \$71 billion (6.6 trillion yen) by late 2012.

To critics of the status quo, the months following the accident had provided some hope that change was possible. During the summer of 2011, the government had imposed power restrictions on large corporate users. Voluntary conservation efforts had been surprisingly successful. Electricity consumption during steamy August had dropped by about 11 percent. The usual chill of air conditioning was gone, as were coats and ties. Some manufacturing operations moved to off-peak nights and weekends. Even some night baseball games were switched to daytime. That led to speculation that reduced consumption could become the norm and there would be no need to restart the reactors. The nation stood at a crossroads, activists argued, needing only visionary leadership to map out a new energy policy.

Shareholder proposals to reject nuclear power were soundly voted down at all the meetings. Unsurprisingly, the utilities’ main institutional investors—life insurers and banks—voted with the company managements on this issue. The status quo seemed to them a safer bet.

Despite their economic benefits, not all neighboring communities were eager to see the Ohi reactors returned so quickly to service. Having a nuclear neighbor once seemed attractive to nearby towns, but that was before they had witnessed the consequences of an accident—the depopulation of a large region, widespread contamination, health risks, uncertainty about a return to normal life. At the height of the restart debate, the government announced that 18 percent of all Fukushima evacuees—including those as far as thirty miles away—might not be able to return to their homes for ten years because of radiation levels. As a result, some argued that if communities tens or even hundreds of miles away were vulnerable to nuclear plant accidents, they too should have a say in the plants' operation. And the calculus might be different for such communities, since they would be exposed to the risks without receiving any of the benefits. That was something new in Japan.

With opposition from local officials and weekly demonstrations in the capital threatening to derail plans for a quick restart at Ohi, Prime Minister Noda stepped up the rhetoric. “Japanese society cannot survive” without the reactors, he warned on national television. And he offered assurances that the government would “continue making uninterrupted efforts” to improve nuclear safety. The growing pressure from Tokyo and Japan's business community had its effect. Local government opposition to the Ohi restart faded, with officials agreeing to a “limited” restart at least through the summer months. On June 16, the Noda government officially gave the go-ahead to restart Ohi Units 3 and 4. Trade Minister Yukio Edano acknowledged public opinion polls were running solidly against the restart.

“We understand that we have not obtained all of the nation's understanding.”

The safety philosophy and regulatory process that governed Fukushima were not fundamentally different from those that exist elsewhere, including the United States. The reactor technology was nearly identical. The reality is that any nuclear plant facing conditions as far beyond its design basis as those at Fukushima would be likely to suffer an equivalent fate. The story line would differ, but the outcome would be much the same—wrecked reactors, off-site radioactive contamination, social disruption, and massive economic cost. The catastrophe at Fukushima should not have been a surprise to anyone familiar with the vulnerabilities of today's global reactor fleet. If those vulnerabilities are not addressed, the next accident won't be a surprise, either.

In the United States, ‘it can't happen here’ was a common refrain while details of the Fukushima accident were still unfolding. In June 2011, for

example, Senator Al Franken joked that “the chances of an earthquake of that level in Minnesota are very low, but if we had a tsunami in Minnesota, we’d have bigger problems than even the reactor.” Senator Franken’s casual attitude illustrates the problem. Yes, it is unlikely that a tsunami will sweep into the northern plains. But serious potential threats to reactors do exist in his home state, as well as the states of many other members of Congress. Two pressurized-water reactors at the Prairie Island nuclear plant, southeast of Minneapolis, are among the thirty-four reactors at twenty sites around the United States downstream from large dams. A dam failure could rapidly inundate a nuclear plant, disabling its power supplies and cooling systems, not unlike the impact of a tsunami.

Nor is a dam failure the only type of accident that could create Fukushima-scale challenges at a US nuclear plant. Fire is another. A fire could damage electric cabling and circuit boards, cutting off electricity from multiple backup safety systems as flooding did at Fukushima. The NRC adopted fire-protection regulations in 1980 following a very serious fire in March 1975 at the Browns Ferry nuclear plant in Alabama.

A worker using a lit candle to check for air leaks accidentally started a fire in a space below the control room. The fire damaged electrical cables that disabled all of the emergency core cooling systems for the Unit 1 reactor and most of those systems for the Unit 2 reactor. Only heroic actions by workers prevented dual meltdowns that day at Browns Ferry. The threat of fires remains a major contributor to the risk of core damage at nuclear plants. Decades later, fire safety regulations imposed by the NRC in the wake of Browns Ferry have not been met at roughly half the reactors operating in the United States—including the three reactors at Browns Ferry.

For all its virtues, defense-in-depth has an Achilles heel, one rarely mentioned in safety pep talks. It is known as the common-mode failure. That happens when a single event results in conditions exceeding the safety margins of all the defense-in-depth barriers, cutting through them like a hatchet through a layer cake. Common-mode failure is what flooding caused at Fukushima and what fire caused at Browns Ferry. Flooding or fire took out all the redundant systems needed to cool the reactor cores, the systems needed to keep the containments from overheating and leaking, and the systems needed to help predict the path and extent of the radioactive plumes. At Browns Ferry, workers managed to employ ad hoc measures in time to prevent disaster. At Fukushima, time ran out.

Defense-in-depth is both a blessing and a curse. It allows many things to go wrong before a nuclear plant disaster occurs. But when too many problems arise or a common-mode failure disables many systems, defense-in-depth can topple like a row of dominoes. The risk of common-mode failure can be

reduced through enhancing defense-in-depth, but it can never be eliminated. The true curse of defense-in-depth is that it has fostered complacency. The existence of multiple layers of defense has excused inattention to weaknesses in each individual layer, increasing the vulnerability to common-mode failure.

Fukushima Daiichi was a well-defended nuclear plant by accepted standards, with robust, redundant layers of protection. When the earthquake knocked out the off-site electrical grid, emergency diesel generators stood ready as the backup power source. Each of the six reactor units had at least two of these generators (one unit had three). A single emergency generator could provide all the power needed for cooling a core and other essential tasks, but defense-in-depth made sure every reactor had at least one spare. It didn't help. The generators were protected, like the reactors themselves, by the seawall erected along the coast. When the tsunami washed over the seawall, it disabled all but one of the emergency generators or their electrical connections.

Even without the generators, defense-in-depth offered protection. Banks of batteries were ready to power a minimal subset of safety equipment while damage to the AC power systems was being repaired. The battery capacity at Fukushima was eight hours per unit, assumed to be ample time for workers to either restore an emergency diesel generator or recover the electrical grid. But it took nine days to partially reconnect the plant to the grid and even longer to restore the generators.

At Fukushima, as in the United States and elsewhere, reactor operators were trained in emergency procedures for responding to severe accidents. These procedures instructed them to take steps like venting the containment to reduce dangerously high pressure and enable cooling water to enter. But the manuals did not envision the conditions the operators actually faced—for example, the need to operate vents manually in darkness—and thus workers could not implement these procedures in time to prevent the meltdowns.

The last defense-in-depth barrier was evacuation. But at Fukushima, emergency planning proved ineffective at protecting the public. Evacuation areas had to be repeatedly expanded in an ad hoc manner, and in some cases the decisions were made far too late to prevent radiation exposures to many evacuees.

All of Fukushima's defensive barriers failed for the same reason. Each had a limit that provided too little safety margin to avert failure. Had just one barrier remained intact, the plant might well have successfully endured the one-two punch from the earthquake and tsunami or at the bare minimum, the public would have been protected from the worst radiation effects. The chance that all the barriers might fall was never part of the planning. In effect, the nuclear establishment was riding a carousel, confident

that the passing scenery of anticipated incidents would never change. Lost in the process was this reality: the brass ring for this not-so-merry-go-round involves both foreseeing hazards and developing independent, robust defense-in-depth barriers to accommodate unforeseen hazards. One without the other has been repeatedly shown, at tremendous cost, to be insufficient.

In November 2012, the NRC staff recommended that filters be installed in the vent pipes, primarily as a defense-in-depth measure. But what might seem a simple, logical decision—install a \$15 million filter to reduce the chance of tens of billions of dollars' worth of land contamination as well as harm to the public—got complicated. The nuclear industry launched a campaign to persuade the NRC commissioners that filters weren't necessary. A key part of the industry's argument was that plant owners could reduce radioactive releases more effectively by using FLEX equipment.

Vent filters would only work, the argument went, if the containment remained intact. If the containment failed, radioactive releases would bypass the filters anyway. And sophisticated FLEX cooling strategies could keep radioactivity inside the containment in the first place. Further, the absence of filters at Fukushima might not have caused the widespread land contamination because it wasn't clear that the largest releases occurred through the vents; the radioactivity may have escaped another way.

The NRC staff countered by claiming that the FLEX strategies were too complicated to rely on: they rested on too many assumptions about what might be taking place within a reactor in crisis and what operators would be capable of doing. In contrast, a passive filter could be counted on under most circumstances to do its job—filter any radioactivity that passed through the vent pipes. The staff argued that filters would be warranted as a defense-in-depth measure. The staff also pointed out that many other countries, like Sweden, simply required vent filters to be installed decades ago as a prudent step.

Without an explicit requirement to consider defense-in-depth, as the NNTF had called for in its first recommendation, the NRC commissioners could feel free to reject the staff's arguments. In March 2013, they voted 3–2 to delay a requirement that filters be installed, and recommended that the staff consider other alternatives to prevent the release of radiation during an accident. However, at the same time the commissioners voted to require that the vents themselves be upgraded to be functional in a severe accident. This second decision didn't make much sense: if the commissioners believed the vents might be needed in a severe accident, then what excuse could there be for not equipping them with filters?

A Severe Accident Mitigation Alternatives (SAMA) analysis entails identifying and evaluating hardware and procedure modifications that have

the potential to reduce the risk from severe accidents, then determining whether the value of the safety benefits justifies their cost. Oddly enough, even though the plant owners and the NRC have identified dozens of measures that would pass this cost-benefit test and thus might be prudent investments, none have had to be implemented under the law. That's because the NRC has thrown into the equation its contorted backfit rule. The rule means that for the changes to be required they also must represent a "substantial safety enhancement"—a standard very hard to meet given the low risk estimates generated by the industry's calculations. Thus, the SAMA process has been merely an academic exercise. But the upgrades identified in the SAMA analyses provide a comprehensive list of changes that could reduce severe accident risk at each plant.

So how safe is safe enough? In that critical decision, the public has largely been shut out of the discussion. This is true in the United States, in Japan, and everywhere else nuclear plants are in operation. Nuclear development, expansion, and oversight have largely occurred behind a curtain. Nuclear technology is extremely complex. Its advocates, in their zeal to promote that technology, have glossed over unknowns and uncertainties, thrown up a screen of arcane terminology, and set safety standards with unquantifiable thresholds such as "adequate protection."

In the process, the nuclear industry has come to believe its own story. Regulators too often have come to believe that there is a firmer technical basis for their decisions than actually exists. Officials, in particular, must grapple with overseeing a technology that few thoroughly understand, especially when things go wrong. Fukushima demonstrated that. Meanwhile, average citizens have been lulled into believing that nuclear power plants are safe neighbors, needing no attention or concern because the owners are responsible and the regulators are thorough. Yet it is those citizens' health, livelihoods, homes, and property that may be permanently jeopardized by the failure of this flawed system.

In the end, the NRC must be able to tell the American public, "We've taken every reasonable step to protect you." And it must be the public, not industry or bureaucrats, who define 'reasonable.'

Perhaps the strongest vote of no confidence comes from the reactor vendors themselves. Even as they heavily promoted the new designs in the United States, the vendors in 2003 successfully lobbied Congress to reauthorize federal liability protection for all reactors—new and old—under the Price-Anderson Act for another twenty years. While they asserted that the next generation of plants would pose an infinitesimally small risk to the public, they wanted to make sure there would be limits on the damage claims they would have to pay if they were wrong.

The Cult of the Singularity

Fruit of the Gods

The agricultural revolution is not an event like the Trojan War, isolated in the distant past and without direct relevance to our lives today. The work begun by those neolithic farmers in the Near East has been carried forward from one generation to the next without a single break, right into the present moment. It's the foundation of our vast civilization today in exactly the same way that it was the foundation of the very first farming village.

This should help you understand why the story you tell your children about the meaning of the world, about divine intentions in the world, and about the destiny of man is of such profound importance to the people of our culture. It's the manifesto of the revolution on which our culture is based. It's the repository of all our revolutionary doctrine and the definitive expression of our revolutionary spirit. It explains why the revolution was necessary and why it must be carried forward at any cost whatever.

About two-thousand years ago an event of exquisite irony occurred within our culture. The Takers—or at least a very large segment of them—adopted as their own a story that seemed to them pregnant with meaning and mystery. It came to them from a Taker people of the Near East who had been telling it to their own children for countless generations—for so many generations that it had become a mystery even to them. Do you know why?

It had become a mystery because those who first told the story—their ancient ancestors—were not Takers but Leavers. About two-thousand years ago, the Takers adopted as their own a story that had originated among Leavers many centuries before. The irony is that it was a story that had once been told among Leavers about the origins of the Takers. The Takers adopted as their own a Leaver story about their origins.

What sort of story would a Leaver people tell about the appearance of the Takers in the world?

There is a very special knowledge you must have if you're going to rule

the world. I'm sure you realize that. The Takers possess this knowledge, of course—at least they imagine they do—and they're very, very proud of it. This is the most fundamental knowledge of all, and it's absolutely indispensable to those who would rule the world. And what do you suppose the Takers find when they go among the Leavers?

They find that the Leavers do not have this knowledge. Isn't that remarkable?

Consider it. The Takers have a knowledge that enables them to rule the world, and the Leavers lack it. This is what the missionaries found wherever they went among the Leavers. They were quite astonished themselves, because they had the impression that this knowledge was virtually self-evident.

Who else would have this knowledge, besides the Takers? The gods would have it.

One day the gods were considering the administration of the world in the ordinary way, and one of them said:

“Here's a spot I've been thinking about for a while—a wide, pleasant savannah. Let's send a great multitude of locusts into this land. Then the fire of life will grow prodigiously in them and in the birds and lizards that will feed on them, and that will be very fine.”

The others thought about this for a while, then one said:

“It's certainly true that, if we send the locusts into this land, the fire of life will blaze in them and in the creatures that feed on them—but at the expense of all the other creatures that live there.”

The others asked him what his point was, and he went on:

“Surely it would be a great crime to deprive all these other creatures of the fire of life so that the locusts and the birds and the lizards can flourish for a time. For the locusts will strip the land bare, and the deer and the gazelles and the goats and the rabbits will go hungry and die.

And with the disappearance of the game, the lions and the wolves and the foxes will soon be dying too. Won't they curse us then and call us criminals for favoring the locusts and the birds and the lizards over them?”

Now the gods had to scratch their heads over this, because they'd never looked at matters in this particular light before. But finally one of them said:

“I don't see that this presents any great problem. We simply won't do it. We won't raise a multitude of locusts to send into this land, then things will go on as before, and no one will have any reason to curse us.”

Most of the gods thought this made sense, but one of them disagreed:

“Surely this would be as great a crime as the other. For don't the locusts and the birds and the lizards live in our hands as well as the rest? Is it never to be their time to flourish greatly, as others do?”

While the gods were debating this point, a fox came out to hunt, and they said:

“Let's send the fox a quail for its life.”

But these words were hardly spoken when one of them said:

“Surely it would be a crime to let the fox live at the quail's expense. The quail has its life that we gave it and lives in our hands. It would be infamous to send it into the jaws of the fox!”

Then another said:

“Look here! The quail is stalking a grasshopper! If we don't give the quail to the fox, then the quail will eat the grasshopper. Doesn't the grasshopper have its life that we gave it and doesn't it live in our hands as truly as the quail? Surely it would be a crime not to give the quail to the fox, so that the grasshopper may live.”

Well, as you can imagine, the gods groaned heavily over this and didn't know what to do. And while they were wrangling over it, spring came, and the snow waters of the mountains began to swell the streams, and one of them said:

“Surely it would be a crime to let these waters flood the land, for countless creatures are bound to be carried off to their deaths.”

But then another said:

“Surely it would be a crime not to let these waters flood the land, for without them the ponds and marshes will dry up, and all the creatures that live in them will die.”

And once more the gods were thrown into confusion. Finally one of them had what seemed to be a new thought:

“It’s clear that any action we take will be good for some and evil for others, so let’s take no action at all. Then none of the creatures that live in our hands can call us criminals.”

Another snapped:

“Nonsense! If we take no action at all, this will also be good for some and evil for others, won’t it? The creatures that live in our hands will say, ‘Look, we suffer, and the gods do nothing!’”

And while the gods bickered among themselves, the locusts swarmed over the savannah, and the locusts and the birds and the lizards praised the gods while the game and the predators died cursing the gods. And because the gods had taken no action in the matter, the quail lived, and the fox went hungry to its hole cursing the gods. And because the quail lived, it ate the grasshopper, and the grasshopper died cursing the gods. And because in the end the gods decided to stem the flood of spring waters, the ponds and the marshes dried up, and all the thousands of creatures that lived in them died cursing the gods.

And hearing all these curses, the gods groaned.

“We’ve made the garden a place of terror, and all that live in it hate us as tyrants and criminals. And they’re right to do this, because by action or inaction we send them good one day and evil the next without knowing what we should do. The savannah stripped by the locusts rings with curses, and we have no answer to make. The fox and the grasshopper curse us because we let the quail live, and we have no answer to make. Surely the whole world must curse the day we made it, for we are criminals who, send good and evil by turns, knowing even as we do it that we don’t know what ought to be done.”

Well, the gods were sinking right into the slough of despond when one of them looked up and said:

“Say, didn’t we make for the garden a certain tree whose fruit is the knowledge of good and evil?”

The others cried:

“Yes! Let’s find that tree and eat of it and see what this knowledge is.”

And when the gods had found this tree and had tasted its fruit, their eyes were opened, and they said:

“Now indeed we have the knowledge we need to tend the garden without becoming criminals and without earning the curses of all who live in our hands.”

And as they were talking in this way, a lion went out to hunt, and the gods said to themselves:

“Today is the lion’s day to go hungry, and the deer it would have taken may live another day.”

And so the lion missed its kill, and as it was returning hungry to its den it began to curse the gods. But they said:

“Be at peace, for we know how to rule the world, and today is your day to go hungry.”

And the lion was at peace.

And the next day the lion went out to hunt, and the gods sent it the deer they had spared the day before. And as the deer felt the lion’s jaws on its neck, it began to curse the gods. But they said:

“Be at peace, for we know how to rule the world, and today is your day to die just as yesterday was your day to live.”

And the deer was at peace.

Then the gods said to themselves:

“Certainly the knowledge of good and evil is a powerful knowledge, for it enables us to rule the world without becoming criminals. If we had yesterday sent the lion away hungry without this knowledge, then indeed it would have been a crime. And if we had today sent the deer into the lion’s jaws without this knowledge, then indeed this too would have been a crime. But with this knowledge we have done both of these things, one seemingly opposed to the other, and have committed no crime.”

Now it happened that one of the gods was away on an errand when the others were eating at the tree of knowledge, and when he returned and heard what the gods had done in the matter of the lion and the deer, he said:

“In doing these two things you have surely committed a crime in one instance or the other, for these two things are opposed, and one must have been right to do and the other wrong.

If it was good for the lion to go hungry on the first day, then it was evil to send it the deer on the second. Or if it was good to send it the deer on the second day, then it was evil to send it away hungry on the first.”

The others nodded and said:

“Yes, this is just the way we would have reasoned before we ate of this tree of knowledge.”

“What knowledge is this?” the god asked, noticing the tree for the first time.

“Taste its fruit. Then you’ll know exactly what knowledge it is.”

So the god tasted, and his eyes were opened.

“Yes, I see. This is indeed the proper knowledge of the gods: the knowledge of who shall live and who shall die.”

When the gods saw that Adam was awakening, they said to themselves:

“Now here is a creature so like us that he might almost be one of our company. What span of life and what destiny shall we fashion for him?”

One of them said:

“He is so fair, let’s give him life for the lifetime of this planet. In the days of his childhood let’s care for him as we care for all others in the garden, so that he learns the sweetness of living in our hands. But in adolescence he will surely begin to realize that he’s capable of much more than other creatures and will become restless in our care. Shall we then lead him to the other tree in the garden, the Tree of Life?”

But another said:

“To lead Adam like a child to the Tree of Life before he had even begun to seek it for himself would deprive him of a great undertaking by which he may gain an important wisdom and prove his mettle to himself. As we would give him the care he needs as a child, let’s give him the quest he needs as an adolescent. Let’s make the quest for the Tree of Life the occupation of his adolescence. In this way he’ll discover for himself how he may have life for the lifetime of this planet.”

The others agreed with this plan, but one said:

“We should take note that this might well be a long and baffling quest for Adam. Youth is impatient, and after a few thousand years of searching, he might despair of finding the Tree of Life. If this should happen, he might be tempted to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil instead.”

The others replied:

“Nonsense! You know very well that the fruit of this tree nourishes only the gods. It can no more nourish Adam than the grasses of the oxen. He might take it into his mouth and swallow it, but it would pass through his body without benefit. Surely you don’t imagine that he might actually gain our knowledge by eating of this tree?”

The other replied:

“Of course not. The danger is not that he would gain our knowledge but rather that he might imagine that he’d gained it. Having tasted the fruit of this tree, he might say to himself, ‘I have eaten at the gods’ own tree of knowledge and therefore know as well as they how to rule the world. I may do as I will do.’”

Said the other gods:

“This is absurd. How could Adam ever be so foolish as to imagine he had the knowledge that enables us to govern the world and to do what we will do? None of our creatures will ever be master of the knowledge of who shall live and who shall die. This knowledge is ours alone, and if Adam should grow in

wisdom till the very eclipse of the universe, it would be as far beyond him as it is right now.”

But the other was not disconcerted by this argument:

“If Adam should eat of our tree, there’s no telling how he might deceive himself. Not knowing the truth, he might say to himself, ‘Whatever I can justify doing is good and whatever I cannot justify doing is evil.’”

But the others scoffed at this:

“This is not the knowledge of good and evil.”

The other replied:

“Of course it’s not, but how would Adam know this?”

The others shrugged.

“Perhaps in childhood Adam might believe he was wise enough to rule the world, but what of it? Such arrogant foolishness would pass with maturity.”

Replied the other:

“Ah, but possessed of this arrogant foolishness, would Adam survive into maturity? Believing himself our equal, he would be capable of anything. In his arrogance, he might look around the garden and say to himself, ‘This is all wrong. Why should I have to share the fire of life with all these creatures? Look here, the lions and the wolves and the foxes take the game I would have for myself. This is evil. I will kill all these creatures, and this will be good. And look here, the rabbits and the grasshoppers and the sparrows take the fruits of the land that I would have for myself. This is evil. I will kill all these creatures, and this will be good. And look here, the gods have set a limit on my growth just as they’ve set a limit on the growth of all others. This is evil. I will grow without limit, taking all the fire of life that flows through this garden into myself, and that will be good.’ Tell me—if this should happen, how long would Adam live before he had devoured the entire world?”

The others said:

“If this should happen, Adam would devour the world in a single day, and at the end of that day he would devour himself.”

The other replied:

“Just so, unless he managed to escape from this world. Then he would devour the entire universe as he had devoured the world. But even so he would inevitably end by devouring himself, as anything must that grows without limit.”

Another said:

“This would indeed be a terrible end for Adam. But might he not come to the same end even without having eaten at the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Might he not be tempted by his yearning for growth to take the fire of life into his own hands even without deluding himself that this was good?”

The others replied:

“He might, but what would be the result? He would become a criminal, an outlaw, a thief of life, and a murderer of the creatures around him. Without the delusion that what he was doing was good—and therefore to be done at any cost—he would soon weary of the outlaw’s life. Indeed this is bound to happen during his quest for the Tree of Life. But if he should eat of the tree of our knowledge, then he will shrug off his weariness. He will say, ‘What does it matter that I’m weary of living as a murderer of all the life around me? I know good and evil, and this way of living is good. Therefore I must live this way even though I’m weary unto death, even though I destroy the world and even myself. The gods wrote in the world a law for all to follow, but it cannot apply to me because I’m their equal. Therefore I will live outside this law and grow without limit. To be limited is evil. I will steal the fire of life from the hands of the gods and heap it up for my growth, and that will be good. I will destroy those kinds that do not serve my growth, and that will be good. I will wrest the garden from the hands of the gods and order it anew so that it serves only my growth, and that will be good. And because these things are good, they must be done at any cost. It may be that I’ll destroy the garden and

make a ruin of it. It may be that my progeny will teem over the earth like locusts, stripping it bare, until they drown in their own filth and hate the very sight of one another and go mad. Still they must go on, because to grow without limit is good and to accept the limits of the law is evil. And if any say, "Let's put off the burdens of the criminal life and live in the hands of the gods once again," I will kill them, for what they say is evil. And if any say, "Let's turn aside from our misery and search for that other tree," I will kill them, for what they say is evil. And when at last all the garden has been subjugated to my use and all kinds that do not serve my growth have been cast aside and all the fire of life in the world flows through my progeny, still I must grow. And to the people of this land I will say, "Grow, for this is good," and they will grow. And to the people of the next land I will say, "Grow, for this is good," and they will grow. And when they can grow no more, the people of this land will fall upon the people of the next to murder them, so that they may grow still more. And if the groans of my progeny fill the air throughout the world, I will say to them, "Your sufferings must be borne, for you suffer in the cause of good. See how great we have become! Wielding the knowledge of good and evil, we have made ourselves the masters of the world, and the gods have no power over us. Though your groans fill the air, isn't it sweeter to live in our own hands than in the hands of the gods?" "

And when the gods heard all this, they saw that, of all the trees in the garden, only the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil could destroy Adam. And so they said to him:

"You may eat of every tree in the garden save the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day you eat of that tree you will certainly die."

Pick up some bibles—none of these will have any comment to make on why this tree should have been forbidden to Adam. Were you expecting them to?

The Takers write the notes, and this story has always been an impenetrable mystery to them. They've never been able to figure out why the knowledge of good and evil should have been forbidden to man. Don't you see why?

Because, to the Takers, this knowledge is the very best knowledge of all—the most beneficial for man to have. This being so, why would the gods forbid it to him?

The knowledge of good and evil is fundamentally the knowledge the rulers of the world must exercise, because every single thing they do is good for some but evil for others. This is what ruling is all about, isn't it?

And man was born to rule the world, wasn't he? According to Taker mythology at least. Then why would the gods withhold the very knowledge man needs to fulfill his destiny? From the Taker point of view, it makes no sense at all.

The disaster occurred when, ten-thousand years ago, the people of our culture said, 'We're as wise as the gods and can rule the world as well as they.' When they took into their own hands the power of life and death over the world, their doom was assured.

The gods ruled the world for billions of years, and it was doing just fine. After just a few thousand years of human rule, the world is at the point of death.

"True. But the Takers will never give it up."

Then they'll die. As predicted. The authors of this story knew what they were talking about.

"And you're saying this story was written from a Leaver point of view?"

That's right. If it had been written from the Taker point of view, the knowledge of good and evil wouldn't have been forbidden to Adam, it would have been thrust upon him. The gods would have hung around saying, 'Come on, Man, can't you see that you're nothing without this knowledge? Stop living off our bounty like a lion or a wombat. Here, have some of this fruit and you'll instantly realize that you're naked—as naked as any lion or wombat: naked to the world, powerless. Come on, have some of this fruit and become one of us. Then, lucky you, you can leave this garden and begin living by the sweat of your brow, the way humans are supposed to live.' And if people of your cultural persuasion had authored it, this event wouldn't be called the Fall, it would be called the Ascent or the Liberation.

A minute ago, you told me that the Takers will never give up their tyranny over the world, no matter how bad things get. How did they get to be this way?

They got to be this way because they've always believed that what they were doing was right—and therefore to be done at any cost whatever.

They've always believed that, like the gods, they know what is right to do and what is wrong to do, and what they're doing is right. Do you see how they've demonstrated what I'm saying?

They've demonstrated it by forcing everyone in the world to do what they do, to live the way they live. Everyone had to be forced to live like the Takers, because the Takers had the one right way.

Many peoples among the Leavers practiced agriculture, but they were never obsessed by the delusion that what they were doing was right, that everyone in the entire world had to practice agriculture, that every last square yard of the planet had to be devoted to it. They didn't say to the people around them, 'You may no longer live by hunting and gathering. This is wrong. This is evil, and we forbid it. Put your land under cultivation or we'll wipe you out.' What they said was, 'You want to be hunter-gatherers? That's fine with us. That's great. We want to be agriculturalists. You be hunter-gatherers and we'll be agriculturalists. We don't pretend to know which way is right. We just know which way we prefer.'

And if they got tired of being agriculturalists, if they found they didn't like where it was leading them in their particular adaptation, they were able to give it up. They didn't say to themselves, 'Well, we've got to keep going at this even if it kills us, because this is the right way to live.' For example, there was once a people who constructed a vast network of irrigation canals in order to farm the deserts of what is now southeastern Arizona. They maintained these canals for three-thousand years and built a fairly advanced civilization, but in the end they were free to say, 'This is a toilsome and unsatisfying way to live, so to hell with it.' They simply walked away from the whole thing and put it so totally out of mind that we don't even know what they called themselves. The only name we have for them is one the Pima Indians gave them: Hohokam—those who vanished.

But it's not going to be this easy for the Takers. It's going to be hard as hell for them to give it up, because what they're doing is right, and they have to go on doing it even if it means destroying the world and mankind with it.

Giving it up would mean that all along they'd been wrong. It would mean that they'd never known how to rule the world. It would mean relinquishing their pretensions to godhood. It would mean spitting out the fruit of that tree and giving the rule of the world back to the gods.

According to the authors of that story, the people living between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers had eaten at the gods' own tree of knowledge. Where do you suppose they got that idea? Whatever gave the authors of this story the idea that the people living in the Fertile Crescent had eaten at the gods' tree of knowledge? Do you suppose they saw it with their own

eyes? Do you suppose they were there when your agricultural revolution began?

If they'd been there to see it with their own eyes, who would they have been? They would have been the people of the Fall. They would have been the Takers. And if they'd been Takers, they would have told the story a different way.

So the authors of this story were not there to see it with their own eyes. How then did they know it had happened? How did they know that the Takers had usurped the role of the gods in the world? Who were the authors of this story?

Among the people known as the Hebrews, this was already an ancient story—and a mysterious story. The Hebrews stepped into history as Takers—and wanted nothing more than to be like their Taker neighbors. Indeed, that's why their prophets were always bawling them out. So, though they preserved the story, they no longer fully understood it. To find the people who understood it, we have to find its authors. And who were they?

“I'm afraid I have no idea.”

Look, I can't forbid you to say, 'I have no idea,' but I do insist that you spend a few seconds thinking before you say it. The ancient ancestors of the Hebrews were the Semites.

Picture a map of Europe and the Near East in 8500 BC. A blade like a hand sickle very nearly cuts the Arabian peninsula away from the rest. The words Incipient Agriculture make it clear that the sickle blade encloses the Fertile Crescent. A handful of dots indicate sites where early farming implements have been found.

This map, I feel, gives a false impression, though it was not an intended impression. It gives the impression that the agricultural revolution took place in an empty world.

This is why I prefer my own map. As you see, this shows the situation five-hundred years later. The agricultural revolution is well under way. The area in which farming is taking place is indicated by hen-scratches—the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates. This, of course, is the land between the rivers, the birthplace of the Takers. And what do you suppose all these dots represent?

“Leaver peoples?”

Exactly. They're not designed as a statement about population density. Nor are they intended to indicate that every available stretch of land was

inhabited by some Leaver people. What they indicate is that this was far from being an empty world. Do you see what I'm showing you?

The land of the Fall lay within the Fertile Crescent and was surrounded by non-agriculturalists. But I'm also pointing out that at this time, at the beginning of the agricultural revolution, these early Takers, the founders of our culture, were unknown, isolated, unimportant. The next map in your historical atlas is four-thousand years later. What would you expect to see on it?

"I'd expect to see that the Takers have expanded."

Correct. Here a printed oval, labeled Chalcolithic Cultures, with Mesopotamia at its center, encloses the whole of Asia Minor and all the land to the north and east as far as the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. The oval extends southward as far as the entrance to the Arabian peninsula, which is a cross-hatched area labeled Semites. Now, we have some witnesses.

The Semites were not eyewitnesses to the events described in chapter three of Genesis. Those events, cumulatively known as the Fall, took place here, hundreds of miles north of the Semites, among an entirely different people. Do you see who they were?

"According to the map, they were the Caucasians."

But now, in 4500 BC, the Semites are eyewitnesses to an event in their own front yard: the expansion of the Takers. In four-thousand years the agricultural revolution that began in the land between the rivers had spread across Asia Minor to the west and to the mountains in the north and east. And to the south it seems to have been blocked by what?

By the Semites. Why? Why were the Semites blocking it? What were the Semites? Were they agriculturalists?"

"No. The map makes it clear that they weren't a part of what was going on among the Takers. So I assume they were Leavers."

Leavers, yes, but no longer hunter-gatherers. They had evolved another adaptation that was to be traditional for Semitic peoples. They were pastoralists. Herders. So what was happening on the border between the Takers' Chalcolithic Culture and the Semites?

"I don't know."

Read the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis and then you'll know. What was happening along that border was that Cain was killing Abel. The tillers of the soil were watering their fields with the blood of Semitic herders.

What was happening there was what has always happened along the borders of Taker expansion: The Leavers were being killed off so that more land could be put under cultivation. Here at the border that separates tillers of the soil from Semitic herders, Cain and Abel confront each other."

"And biblical scholars don't understand this?"

I cannot say, of course, that not a single scholar has ever understood this. But most read the story as if it were set in a historical never-never land, like one of Aesop's fables. It would scarcely occur to them to understand it as a piece of Semitic war propaganda. But that's what it is, all right. I know it's always been a mystery as to why God accepted Abel and his offering and rejected Cain and his offering. This explains it. With this story, the Semites were telling their children, 'God is on our side. He loves us herders but hates those murderous tillers of the soil from the north.'

If you read it as a story that originated among your own cultural ancestors, it's incomprehensible. It only begins to make sense when you realize that it originated among the enemies of your cultural ancestors.

"If the tillers of the soil from the north were Caucasians, then the mark of Cain is my own fair, maggot-colored face."

It could be. Obviously we'll never know for sure what the authors of the story had in mind.

"But it makes sense this way. The mark was given to Cain as a warning to others: 'Leave this man alone. This is a dangerous man, one who exacts a sevenfold vengeance.' Certainly a lot of people all over the world have learned that it doesn't pay to mess with people with white faces."

What do you suppose happened to these Leaver peoples?

"I would have to say that either they were overrun and assimilated or they took up agriculture in imitation of the Takers."

Doubtless many of these peoples had their own tales to tell of this revolution, their own ways of explaining how these people from the Fertile

Crescent came to be the way they were, but only one of these tales survived—the one told by the Semites to their children about the Fall of Adam and the slaughter of Abel by his brother Cain. It survived because the Takers never managed to overrun the Semites, and the Semites refused to take up the agricultural life. Even their eventual Taker descendants, the Hebrews, who preserved the story without fully understanding it, couldn't work up any enthusiasm for the peasant life-style. And this is how it happened that, with the spread of Christianity and of the Old Testament, the Takers came to adopt as their own a story an enemy once told to denounce them.

So we come again to this question: Where did the Semites get the idea that the people of the Fertile Crescent had eaten at the gods' own tree of knowledge?

It was a sort of reconstruction. They looked at the people they were fighting and said, 'My God, how did they get this way? What's wrong with these people? What's wrong with our brothers from the north? Why are they doing this to us? They act like...'

Here's how it would look to the Semites, I think: 'What's going on here is something wholly new. These aren't raiding parties. These aren't people drawing a line and baring their teeth at us to make sure we know they're there. These guys are saying—Our brothers from the north are saying that we've got to die. They're saying Abel has to be wiped out. They're saying we're not to be allowed to live. Now that's something new, and we don't get it. Why can't they live up there and be farmers and let us live down here and be herders? Why do they have to murder us?'

'Something really weird must have happened up there to turn these people into murderers. What could it have been? Wait, a second... Look at the way these people live. Nobody has ever lived this way before. They're not just saying that we have to die. They're saying that everything has to die. They're not just killing us, they're killing everything. They're saying, "Okay, lions, you're dead. We've had it with you. You're out of here." They're saying, "Okay, wolves, we've had it with you too. You're out of here." They're saying, "Nobody eats but us. All this food belongs to us and no one else can have any without our permission." They're saying, "What we want to live lives and what we want to die dies."'

'That's it! They're acting as if they were the gods themselves. They're acting as if they eat at the gods' own tree of wisdom, as though they were as wise as the gods and could send life and death wherever they please. Yes, that's it. That's what must have happened up there. These people found the gods' own tree of wisdom and stole some of its fruit.'

'Aha! Right! These are an accursed people! You can see that right off the bat. When the gods found out what they'd done, they said, "Okay, you

wretched people, that's it for you! We're not taking care of you anymore. You're out. We banish you from the garden. From now on, instead of living on our bounty, you can wrest your food from the ground by the sweat of your brows." And that's how these accursed tillers of the soil came to be hunting us down and watering their fields with our blood.'

One of the clearest indications that these two stories were not authored by your cultural ancestors is the fact that agriculture is not portrayed as a desirable choice, freely made, but rather as a curse. It was literally inconceivable to the authors of these stories that anyone would prefer to live by the sweat of his brow. So the question they asked themselves was not, 'Why did these people adopt this toilsome life-style?' It was, 'What terrible misdeed did these people commit to deserve such a punishment? What have they done to make the gods withhold from them the bounty that enables the rest of us to live a carefree life?'

In our own cultural history, the adoption of agriculture was a prelude to ascent. In these stories, agriculture is the lot of the fallen.

"I have a question: Why did they describe Cain as Adam's firstborn and Abel as Adam's secondborn?"

The significance is mythological rather than chronological. I mean that you'll find this motif in folktales everywhere: When you have a father with two sons, one worthy and one unworthy, the unworthy son is almost always the cherished firstborn, while the worthy son is the secondborn—which is to say, the underdog in the story.

"Okay. But why would they think of themselves as descendants of Adam at all?"

You mustn't confuse metaphorical thinking with biological thinking. The Semites didn't think of Adam as their biological ancestor.

"How do you know that?"

Do you know what Adam means in Hebrew? We can't know the name the Semites gave him, but presumably it had the same meaning.

"It means man."

Of course. The human race. Do you suppose the Semites thought that the human race was their biological ancestor?

“No, of course not.”

I agree. The relationships in the story have to be understood metaphorically, not biologically. As they perceived it, the Fall divided the race of man into two—into bad guys and good guys, into tillers of the soil and herders, the former bent on murdering the latter.

“But I’m afraid I have another question.”

There’s no need to apologize for it. That’s what you’re here for.

“Okay. My question is, how does Eve figure in all this?”

Her name means what? Life. With this name, the authors of the story have made it clear that Adam’s temptation wasn’t sex or lust or uxoriousness. Adam was tempted by Life.

“I don’t get it.”

Consider: A hundred men and one woman does not spell a hundred babies, but one man and a hundred women does. I’m pointing out that, in terms of population expansion, men and women have markedly different roles. They’re by no means equal in this regard.

“Okay. But I still don’t get it.”

I’m trying to put you in the frame of mind of a non-agricultural people, a people for whom population control is always a critical problem. Let me put it baldly: A band of herders that consists of fifty men and one woman is in no danger of experiencing a population explosion, but a band that consists of one man and fifty women is in big trouble. People being people, that band of fifty-one herders is going to be a band of one-hundred in no time at all.

Let’s go back to the authors of this story, a herding people being pushed into the desert by agriculturalists from the north. Why were their brothers from the north pushing?

They wanted to put the herder’s land under cultivation. They were increasing food production to support an expanded population.

Now you’re ready to do some more reconstruction. You can see that these tillers of the soil have no sense of restraint when it comes to expansion. They don’t control their population; when there isn’t enough food to go

around, they just put some more land under cultivation. So: Whom did these people say yes to?

Think of it this way: The Semites, like most non-agricultural peoples, had to be wary of becoming overbalanced between the sexes. Having too many men didn't threaten the stability of their population, but having too many women definitely did. You see that?

But what the Semites observed in their brothers from the north was that it didn't matter to them. If their population got out of hand, they didn't worry, they just put more land under cultivation.

Or try it this way: Adam and Eve spent three-million years in the garden, living on the bounty of the gods, and their growth was very modest; in the Leaver life-style this is the way it has to be. Like Leavers everywhere, they had no need to exercise the gods' prerogative of deciding who shall live and who shall die. But when Eve presented Adam with this knowledge, he said, 'Yes, I see; with this, we no longer have to depend on the bounty of the gods. With the matter of who shall live and who shall die in our own hands, we can create a bounty that will exist for us alone, and this means I can say yes to Life, and grow without limit.' What you should understand is that saying yes to Life and accepting the knowledge of good and evil are merely different aspects of a single act, and this is the way the story is told in Genesis.

When Adam accepted the fruit of that tree, he succumbed to the temptation to live without limit—and so the person who offered him that fruit is named Life.

Whenever a Taker couple talk about how wonderful it would be to have a big family, they're reenacting this scene beside the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They're saying to themselves, 'Of course it's our right to apportion life on this planet as we please. Why stop at four kids or six? We can have fifteen if we like. All we have to do is plow under another few hundred acres of rain forest—and who cares if a dozen other species disappear as a result?'

Don't expect to be able to work it all out in terms of our present knowledge of the world. The Semites at this time were completely isolated on the Arabian peninsula, cut off in all directions either by the sea or by the people of Cain. For all they knew, they and their brothers to the north were literally the whole race of man, the only people on earth. Certainly that's the way they saw the story. They couldn't possibly have known that it was only in that little corner of the world that Adam had eaten at the gods' tree, couldn't possibly have known that the Fertile Crescent was only one of many places where agriculture had begun, couldn't possibly have known that there were still people all over the world living the way Adam

had lived before the Fall.

I think it's safe to say that the story of Adam's Fall is by far the best-known story in the world.

"At least in the West."

Oh, it's well known in the East as well, having been carried into every corner of the world by Christian missionaries. It has a powerful attraction for Takers everywhere. Why is that so?

"I guess because it purports to explain what went wrong here."

What did go wrong? How do people understand the story?

"Adam, the first man, ate the fruit of the forbidden tree."

And what is that understood to mean?

"Frankly, I don't know. I've never heard an explanation that made any sense."

And the knowledge of good and evil?

"Again, I've never heard an explanation that made any sense. I think the way most people understand it, the gods wanted to test Adam's obedience by forbidding him something, and it didn't much matter what it was. And that's what the Fall essentially was—an act of disobedience."

Nothing really to do with the knowledge of good and evil.

"No. But then I suppose there are people who think that the knowledge of good and evil is just a symbol of. . . I don't know exactly what. They think of the Fall as a fall from innocence."

Innocence in this context presumably being a synonym for 'blissful ignorance.'

If you read it from another point of view, the story does explain exactly what went wrong here, doesn't it? But the people of our culture have never been able to understand the explanation, because they've always assumed that it was formulated by people just like them—people who took it for granted that the world was made for man and man was made to conquer

and rule it, people for whom the sweetest knowledge in the world is the knowledge of good and evil, people who consider tilling the soil the only noble and human way to live. Reading the story as if it had been authored by someone with their own point of view, they didn't stand a chance of understanding it.

But when it's read another way, the explanation makes perfectly good sense: Man can never have the wisdom the gods use to rule the world, and if he tries to preempt that wisdom, the result won't be enlightenment, it will be death.

Adam wasn't the progenitor of our race, he was the progenitor of our culture. This is why he's always been a figure of such importance to us. Even though the story itself made no real sense to us, we could identify with Adam as its protagonist. From the beginning, we recognized him as one of our own.

Silicon Valley's Virgins

“I know from our sources deep inside those Silicon Valley institutions: they genuinely believe that they are going to produce artificial intelligences that are so powerful, relatively soon, that people will have their brains digitized, uploaded on these artificial intelligences, and live forever in a simulation—and therefore will have eternal life. It’s a religion for atheists. They’ll have eternal life, and given that you’re in a simulation, why not program the simulation to have endless drug and sex orgy parties all around you. It’s like the 72 virgins, but it’s like the Silicon Valley equivalent.”

Humanity will finally fulfill Descartes’s dreams of liberating the mind from the prison of the body. We will be software, not hardware and able to inhabit whatever hardware we like best. There will not be any difference between us and robots.

“What, after all, is the difference between a human who has upgraded her body and brain using new nanotechnology and computational technologies, and a robot who has gained an intelligence and sensuality surpassing her human creators?”

The world will then change quickly: Computers will complete every basic human task, which will permit lives of leisure; pain will disappear, as will death; technology will solve the basic condition of scarcity that has always haunted life on the planet. Even life under the sheets will be better:

“Virtual sex will provide sensations that are more intense and pleasurable than conventional sex.”

Humans can pretend like they have the power to alter this course, but they are fooling themselves:

“Anybody who is going to be resisting this progress forward is going to be resisting evolution. And fundamentally they will die out.”

“Robots will be our evolutionary heirs, our mind children, built in our image and our likeness, ourselves in more potent and efficient form. Like biological children of previous generations, they will embody humanity’s best chance for a long-term future. It behooves us to give them every advantage and to bow out when we can no longer contribute.”

Such rhetoric is so forceful that it pushes you to adopt defenses of positions you're not sure you hold.

“I was struck by the way in which absolute reason could serve as the faithful handmaiden of absolute lunacy. There are a lot of very clever people building something that, the way they are approaching it at present, will kill us all if they succeed.”

Writing in the wake of the Soviet launch of the first space satellite, Hannah Arendt reflected on the resulting sense of euphoria about escaping what one newspaper report called “men’s imprisonment to the earth.” This same yearning for escape, she wrote, manifested itself in the attempt to create superior humans from laboratory manipulations of germ plasm, to extend natural life spans far beyond their current limits.

“This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself.”

“Once technology enables us to re-engineer human minds, *Homo sapiens* will disappear, human history will come to an end and a completely new kind of process will begin, which people like you and me cannot comprehend. Many scholars try to predict how the world will look in the year 2100 or 2200. This is a waste of time. Any worthwhile prediction must take into account the ability to re-engineer human minds, and this is impossible. There are many wise answers to the question, ‘What would people with minds like ours do with biotechnology?’ Yet there are no good answers to the question, ‘What would beings with a different kind of mind do with biotechnology?’ All we can say is that people similar to us are likely to use biotechnology to re-engineer their own minds, and our present-day minds cannot grasp what might happen next. Though the details are therefore obscure, we can nevertheless be sure about the general direction of history.”

In the twenty-first century, the third big project of humankind will be to acquire for us divine powers of creation and destruction, and upgrade *Homo sapiens* into *Homo deus*. This third project obviously subsumes the first two projects, and is fueled by them. We want the ability to re-engineer our

bodies and minds in order, above all, to escape old age, death, and misery, but once we have it, who knows what else we might do with such ability? So we may well think of the new human agenda as consisting really of only one project (with many branches): attaining divinity.

Throughout history most gods were believed to enjoy not omnipotence but rather specific super-abilities such as the ability to design and create living beings; to transform their own bodies; to control the environment and the weather; to read minds and to communicate at a distance; to travel at very high speeds; and of course to escape death and live indefinitely. Humans are in the business of acquiring all these abilities, and then some. Certain traditional abilities that were considered divine for many millennia have today become so commonplace that we hardly think about them. The average person now moves and communicates across distances much more easily than the Greek, Hindu, or African gods of old.

For example, the Igbo people of Nigeria believe that the creator god Chukwu initially wanted to make people immortal. He sent a dog to tell humans that when someone dies, they should sprinkle ashes on the corpse, and the body will come back to life. Unfortunately, the dog was tired and he dallied on the way. The impatient Chukwu then sent a sheep, telling her to make haste with this important message. Alas, when the breathless sheep reached her destination, she garbled the instructions, and told the humans to bury their dead, thus making death permanent. This is why to this day we humans must die. If only Chukwu had a Twitter account instead of relying on laggard dogs and dim-witted sheep to deliver his messages!

The prediction that in the twenty-first century humankind is likely to aim for immortality, bliss, and divinity may anger, alienate, or frighten any number of people, so a few clarifications are in order. Firstly, this is not what most individuals will actually do in the twenty-first century. It is what humankind as a collective will do. Most people will probably play only a minor role, if any, in these projects. Even if famine, plague, and war become less prevalent, billions of humans in developing countries and seedy neighbourhoods will continue to deal with poverty, illness, and violence even as the elites are already reaching for eternal youth and godlike powers. This seems patently unjust.

One could argue that as long as there is a single child dying from malnutrition or a single adult killed in drug-lord warfare, humankind should focus all its efforts on combating these woes. Only once the last sword is beaten into a ploughshare should we turn our minds to the next big thing. But history doesn't work like that. Those living in palaces have always had different agendas to those living in shacks, and it is yet to be seen whether that will change in the twenty-first century. Even if we disregard

the fate of slum-dwellers, it is far from clear that we should be aiming at immortality, bliss, and divinity. Adopting these particular projects might be a big mistake. But history is full of big mistakes. Given our past record and our current values, we are likely to reach out for bliss, divinity, and immortality—even if it kills us.

But, reaching out is not the same as obtaining. History is often shaped by exaggerated hope. Such prediction is focused on what humankind will try to achieve in the twenty-first century—not what it will succeed in achieving. Our future economy, society, and politics will be shaped by the attempt to overcome death. It does not follow that in 2100 humans will be immortal.

Finally, and most importantly, such predictions are less of a prophecy and more a way of discussing our present choices. If the discussion makes us choose differently, so that the prediction is proven wrong, all the better. What's the point of making predictions if they cannot change anything? Some complex systems, such as the weather, are oblivious to our predictions. The process of human development, in contrast, reacts to them.

This is the paradox of historical knowledge. Knowledge that does not change behaviour is useless. But knowledge that changes behaviour quickly loses its relevance. The more data we have and the better we understand history, the faster history alters its course, and the faster our knowledge becomes outdated. Centuries ago human knowledge increased slowly, so politics and economics changed at a leisurely pace too. Today our knowledge is increasing at breakneck speed, and theoretically we should understand the world better and better. But the very opposite is happening. Our new-found knowledge leads to faster economic, social, and political changes; in an attempt to understand what is happening, we accelerate the accumulation of knowledge, which leads only to faster and greater upheavals. Consequently we are less and less able to make sense of the present or forecast the future. In 1020 it was relatively easy to predict how Europe would look in 1050. Sure, dynasties might fall, unknown raiders might invade, and natural disasters might strike; yet it was clear that in 1050 Europe would still be ruled by kings and priests, that it would be an agricultural society, that most of its inhabitants would be peasants, and that it would continue to suffer greatly from famines, plagues, and wars. In contrast, in 2020 we have no idea how Europe will look in 2050. We cannot say what kind of political system it will have, how its job market will be structured, or, some might argue, even what kind of bodies its inhabitants will possess.

All the predictions are no more than an attempt to discuss present-day dilemmas, and an invitation to change the future. Predicting that humankind will try to gain immortality, bliss, and divinity is much like predicting that people building a house will want a lawn in their front yard.

It sounds very likely. But once you say it out loud, you can begin to think about alternatives. People are taken aback by dreams of immortality and divinity not because they sound so foreign and unlikely, but because it is uncommon to be so blunt. Yet when they start thinking about it, most people realize that it actually makes a lot of sense. Despite the technological hubris of these dreams, ideologically they are old news. For 300 years the world has been dominated by humanism, which sanctifies the life, happiness, and power of *Homo sapiens*. The attempt to gain immortality, bliss, and divinity merely takes the long-standing humanist ideals to their logical conclusion. It places openly on the table what we have for a long time kept hidden under our napkin.

Humanism—the worship of humankind—has conquered the world. Yet the rise of humanism also contains the seeds of its downfall. While the attempt to upgrade humans into gods takes humanism to its logical conclusion, it simultaneously exposes humanism’s inherent flaws. If you start with a flawed ideal, you often appreciate its defects only when the ideal is close to realization.

Due to humanist beliefs, in the twenty-first century we are likely to push humankind as a whole beyond its limits. The same technologies that can upgrade humans into gods might also make humans irrelevant. For example, computers powerful enough to understand and overcome the mechanisms of aging and death will probably also be powerful enough to replace humans in any and all tasks. Hence the real agenda in the twenty-first century is going to be far more complicated than one might think. At present it might seem that immortality, bliss, and divinity occupy the top slots on our agenda. But once we come nearer to achieving these goals the resulting upheavals are likely to deflect us towards entirely different destinations. The future described is merely the future of the past—a future largely based on the ideas and hopes that dominated the world for the last 300 years. The real future—a future born of the new ideas and hopes of the twenty-first century—might be completely different.

For humanist true-believers, all this may sound very pessimistic and depressing. But it is best not to jump to conclusions. History has witnessed the rise and fall of many religions, empires, and cultures. Such upheavals are not necessarily bad. Humanism has dominated the world for 300 years, which is not such a long time. The pharaohs ruled Egypt for 3,000 years, and the popes dominated Europe for a millennium. If you told an Egyptian in the time of Ramses II that one day the pharaohs will be gone, he would probably have been aghast. ‘How can we live without a pharaoh? Who will ensure order, peace, and justice?’ If you told people in the Middle Ages that within a few centuries God will be dead, they would have been horrified.

'How can we live without God? Who will give life meaning and protect us from chaos?' Looking back, many think that the downfall of the pharaohs and the death of God were both positive developments. Maybe the collapse of humanism will also be beneficial. People are usually afraid of change because they fear the unknown. But the single greatest constant of history is that everything changes.

You cannot have a serious discussion about the nature and future of humankind without beginning with our fellow animals. *Homo sapiens* does its best to forget the fact, but it is an animal. And it is doubly important to remember our origins at a time when we seek to turn ourselves into gods. No investigation of our divine future can ignore our own animal past, or our relations with other animals—because the relationship between humans and animals is the best model we have for future relations between superhumans and humans. You want to know how super-intelligent cyborgs might treat ordinary flesh-and-blood humans? Better start by investigating how humans treat their less intelligent animal cousins. It's not a perfect analogy, of course, but it is the best archetype we can actually observe rather than just imagine.

With regard to other animals, humans have long since become gods. We don't like to reflect on this too deeply, because we have not been particularly just or merciful gods. If you watch the National Geographic channel, go to a Disney film, or read a book of fairy tales, you might easily get the impression that planet Earth is populated mainly by lions, wolves, and tigers who are an equal match for us humans. Simba the lion king holds sway over the forest animals; Little Red Riding Hood tries to evade the Big Bad Wolf; and little Mowgli bravely confronts Shere Khan the tiger. But in reality, they are no longer there. Our televisions, books, fantasies, and nightmares are still full of them, but the Simbas, Shere Khans and Big Bad Wolves of our planet are disappearing.

The world is populated mainly by humans and their domesticated animals. How many wolves live today in Germany, the land of the Grimm brothers, Little Red Riding Hood, and the Big Bad Wolf? Less than a hundred. And even these are mostly Polish wolves that crossed over the border in recent years. In contrast, Germany is home to 5 million domesticated dogs. Altogether about 200,000 wild wolves still roam the earth, but there are more than 400 million domesticated dogs. The world contains 40,000 lions compared to 600 million house cats; 900,000 African buffalo versus 1.5 billion domesticated cows; 50 million penguins and 20 billion chickens. Since 1970, despite growing ecological awareness, wildlife populations have halved (not that they were prospering in 1970). In 1980 there were 2 billion wild birds in Europe. In 2009 only 1.6 billion were left. In the same year, Europeans

raised 1.9 billion chickens for meat and eggs. At present, more than 90 percent of the large animals of the world (those weighing more than a few kilograms) are either humans or domesticated animals.

Alas, domesticated species paid for their unparalleled collective success with unprecedented individual suffering. Although the animal kingdom has known many types of pain and misery for millions of years, the Agricultural Revolution generated completely new kinds of suffering, that only became worse over time. To the casual observer domesticated animals may seem much better off than their wild cousins and ancestors. Wild boars spend their days searching for food, water, and shelter, and are constantly threatened by predators, parasites, and natural disasters. Domesticated pigs, in contrast, enjoy food, water, and shelter provided by humans, who also treat their diseases and protect them against predators and natural disasters. True, most pigs sooner or later find themselves in the slaughterhouse. Yet does that make their fate any worse than the fate of wild boars? Is it better to be devoured by a lion than slaughtered by a man? Are crocodile teeth less deadly than steel blades?

What makes the fate of domesticated farm animals particularly harsh is not just the way they die, but above all the way they live. Two competing factors have shaped the living conditions of farm animals from ancient times to the present day: human desires and animal needs. Thus humans raise pigs in order to get meat, but if they want a steady supply of meat, they must ensure the long-term survival and reproduction of the pigs. Theoretically this should have protected the animals from extreme forms of cruelty. If a farmer did not take good care of his pigs, they would soon die without offspring and the farmer would starve. Unfortunately, humans can cause tremendous suffering to farm animals in various ways, even while ensuring their survival and reproduction. The root of the problem is that domesticated animals have inherited from their wild ancestors many physical, emotional, and social needs that are redundant on human farms. Farmers routinely ignore these needs, without paying any economic penalty. They lock animals in tiny cages, mutilate their horns and tails, separate mothers from offspring and selectively breed monstrosities. The animals suffer greatly, yet they live on and multiply.

Doesn't that contradict the most basic principles of natural selection? The theory of evolution maintains that all instincts, drives, and emotions have evolved in the sole interest of survival and reproduction. If so, doesn't the continuous reproduction of farm animals prove that all their real needs are met? How can a pig have a 'need' that is not really needed for his survival and reproduction? It is certainly true that all instincts, drives, and emotions evolved in order to meet the evolutionary pressures of survival and

reproduction. However, if and when these pressures suddenly disappear, the instincts, drives, and emotions they had shaped do not disappear with them. At least not instantly. Even if they are no longer instrumental for survival and reproduction, these instincts, drives, and emotions continue to mold the subjective experiences of the animal. For animals and humans alike, agriculture changed selection pressures almost overnight, but it did not change their physical, emotional, and social drives. Of course evolution never stands still, and it has continued to modify humans and animals in the 12,000 years since the advent of farming. For example, humans in Europe and western Asia evolved the ability to digest cows' milk, while cows lost their fear of humans, and today produce far more milk than their wild ancestors. Yet these are superficial alterations. The deep sensory and emotional structures of cows, pigs, and humans alike haven't changed much since the Stone Age.

The human farmers take care of everything the sow needs in order to survive and reproduce. She is given enough food, vaccinated against diseases, protected against the elements, and artificially inseminated. From an objective perspective, the sow no longer needs to explore her surroundings, socialize with other pigs, bond with her piglets, or even walk. But from a subjective perspective, the sow still feels very strong urges to do all of these things, and if these urges are not fulfilled she suffers greatly. Sows locked in gestation crates typically display acute frustration alternating with extreme despair. These highly social and intelligent beings spend most of their lives in this condition, as if they were already sausages.

This is the basic lesson of evolutionary psychology: a need shaped thousands of generations ago continues to be felt subjectively even if it is no longer necessary for survival and reproduction in the present. Tragically, the Agricultural Revolution gave humans the power to ensure the survival and reproduction of domesticated animals while ignoring their subjective needs.

But how can we be sure that animals such as pigs actually have a subjective world of needs, sensations, and emotions? Aren't we guilty of humanizing animals—ascribing human qualities to non-human entities—like children believing that dolls feel love and anger? In fact, attributing emotions to pigs doesn't humanize them. It 'mammalizes' them. For emotions are not a uniquely human quality—they are common to all mammals (as well as to all birds and probably to some reptiles and even fish). All mammals evolved emotional abilities and needs, and from the fact that pigs are mammals we can safely deduce that they have emotions. The algorithms controlling vending machines work through mechanical gears and electric circuits. The algorithms controlling humans work through sensations, emotions, and

thoughts. And exactly the same kind of algorithms control pigs, baboons, otters, and chickens.

Consider, for example, the following survival problem: a baboon spots some bananas hanging on a tree, but also notices a lion lurking nearby. Should the baboon risk his life for those bananas? This boils down to a mathematical problem of calculating probabilities: the probability that the baboon will die of hunger if he does not eat the bananas, versus the probability that the lion will catch the baboon. In order to solve this problem the baboon needs to take into account a lot of data. How far am I from the bananas? How far away is the lion? How fast can I run? How fast can the lion run? Is the lion awake or asleep? Does the lion seem to be hungry or satiated? How many bananas are there? Are they big or small? Green or ripe? In addition to these external data, the baboon must also consider information about conditions within his own body. If he is starving, it makes sense to risk everything for those bananas, no matter the odds. In contrast, if he has just eaten, and the bananas are mere greed, why take any risks at all?

In order to weigh and balance all these variables and probabilities, the baboon requires far more complicated algorithms than the ones controlling automatic vending machines. The prize for making correct calculations is correspondingly greater. The prize is the very survival of the baboon. A timid baboon—one whose algorithms overestimate dangers—will starve to death, and the genes that shaped these cowardly algorithms will perish with him. A rash baboon—one whose algorithms underestimate dangers—will fall prey to the lion, and his reckless genes will also fail to make it to the next generation. These algorithms undergo constant quality control by natural selection. Only animals that calculate probabilities correctly leave offspring behind.

Yet this is all very abstract. How exactly does a baboon calculate probabilities? He certainly doesn't draw a pencil from behind his ear, a notebook from a back pocket, and start computing running speeds and energy levels with a calculator. Rather, the baboon's entire body is the calculator. What we call sensations and emotions are in fact algorithms. The baboon feels hunger, he feels fear and trembling at the sight of the lion, and he feels his mouth watering at the sight of the bananas. Within a split second, he experiences a storm of sensations, emotions, and desires, which is nothing but the process of calculation. The result will appear as a feeling: the baboon will suddenly feel his spirit rising, his hairs standing on end, his muscles tensing, his chest expanding, and he will inhale a big breath, and 'Forward! I can do it! To the bananas!' Alternatively, he may be overcome by fear, his shoulders will droop, his stomach will turn, his legs will give way,

and 'Mama! A lion! Help!' Sometimes the probabilities match so evenly that it is hard to decide. This too will manifest itself as a feeling. The baboon will feel confused and indecisive. 'Yes... No... Yes... No... Damn! I don't know what to do!'

Because these algorithms control the lives of all mammals and birds (and likely reptiles and fish), when humans, baboons, and pigs feel fear, similar neurological processes take place in similar brain areas. It is therefore likely that frightened humans, frightened baboons, and frightened pigs have similar experiences.

There are differences too, of course. Pigs don't seem to experience the extremes of compassion and cruelty that characterize *Homo sapiens*, nor the sense of wonder that overwhelms a human gazing up at the infinitude of a starry sky. It is likely that there are also opposite examples, of swinish emotions unfamiliar to humans, but I cannot name any, for obvious reasons. However, one core emotion is apparently shared by all mammals: the mother-infant bond. Indeed, it gives mammals their name. The word 'mammal' comes from the Latin *mamma*, meaning breast. Mammal mothers love their offspring so much that they allow them to suckle from their body. Mammal youngsters, on their side, feel an overwhelming desire to bond with their mothers and stay near them. In the wild, piglets, calves, and puppies that fail to bond with their mothers rarely survive for long. Until recently that was true of human children too. Conversely, a sow, cow, or bitch that due to some rare mutation does not care about her young may live a long and comfortable life, but her genes will not pass to the next generation. The same logic is true among giraffes, bats, whales, and porcupines. We can argue about other emotions, but since mammal youngsters cannot survive without motherly care, it is evident that motherly love and a strong mother-infant bond characterize all mammals.

Today we look back with incomprehension at early twentieth-century child-rearing advice. How could experts fail to appreciate that children have emotional needs, and that their mental and physical health depends as much on providing for these needs as on food, shelter, and medicines? Yet when it comes to other mammals we keep denying the obvious. Like John Watson and the Infant Care experts, farmers throughout history took care of the material needs of piglets, calves, and kids, but tended to ignore their emotional needs. Thus both the meat and dairy industries are based on breaking the most fundamental emotional bond in the mammal kingdom. Farmers get their breeding sows and dairy cows impregnated again and again. Yet the piglets and calves are separated from their mothers shortly after birth, and often pass their days without ever sucking at her teats or feeling the warm touch of her tongue and body. What Harry Harlow did to

a few hundred monkeys, the meat and dairy industries are doing to billions of animals every year.

Anthropological and archaeological evidence indicates that archaic hunter-gatherers were probably animists: they believed that there was no essential gap separating humans from other animals. The world—the local valley and the surrounding mountain chains—belonged to all its inhabitants, and everyone followed a common set of rules. These rules involved ceaseless negotiation between all concerned beings. People talked with animals, trees, and stones, as well as with fairies, demons, and ghosts. Out of this web of communications emerged the values and norms that were binding on humans, elephants, oak trees, and wraiths alike.

The animist worldview still guides some hunter-gatherer communities that have survived into the modern age. One of them is the Nayaka people, who live in the tropical forests of south India. When a Nayaka walking in the jungle encounters a dangerous animal such as a tiger, snake, or elephant, he or she might address the animal and say: ‘You live in the forest. I too live here in the forest. You came here to eat, and I too came here to gather roots and tubers. I didn’t come to hurt you.’ A Nayaka was once killed by a male elephant they called “the elephant who always walks alone.” The Nayakas refused to help officials from the Indian forestry department capture him. They explained that this elephant used to be very close to another male elephant, with whom he always roamed. One day the forestry department captured the second elephant, and since then ‘the elephant who always walks alone’ had become angry and violent.

“How would you have felt if your spouse had been taken away from you? This is exactly how this elephant felt. These two elephants sometimes separated at night, each walking its own path but in the morning they always came together again. On that day, the elephant saw his buddy falling, lying down. If two are always together and then you shoot one—how would the other feel?”

Such an animistic attitude strikes many industrialized people as alien. Most of us automatically see animals as essentially different and inferior. This is because even our most ancient traditions were created thousands of years after the end of the hunter-gatherer era. The Old Testament, for example, was written down in the first millennium BC, and its oldest stories reflect the realities of the second millennium BC. But in the Middle East the age of the hunter-gatherers ended more than 7,000 years earlier. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Bible rejects animistic beliefs and its only

animistic story appears right at the beginning, as a dire warning. The Bible is a long book, bursting with miracles, wonders, and marvels. Yet the only time an animal initiates a conversation with a human is when the serpent tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Of course, Bil'am's donkey also speaks a few words, but she is merely conveying to Bil'am a message from God.

The authors of the book of Genesis may have preserved a remnant of archaic animist beliefs in Eve's name, but they took great care to conceal all other traces. Genesis says that, instead of descending from snakes, humans were divinely created from inanimate matter. The snake is not our progenitor: he seduces us to rebel against our heavenly Father. While animists saw humans as just another kind of animal, the Bible argues that humans are a unique creation, and any attempt to acknowledge the animal within us denies God's power and authority. Indeed, when modern humans discovered that they actually evolved from reptiles, they rebelled against God and stopped listening to Him—or even believing in His existence.

Biblical Judaism, for instance, catered to peasants and shepherds. Most of its commandments dealt with farming and village life, and its major holidays were harvest festivals. People today imagine the ancient temple in Jerusalem as a kind of big synagogue where priests clad in snow-white robes welcomed devout pilgrims, melodious choirs sang psalms, and incense perfumed the air. In reality, it looked much more like a cross between a slaughterhouse and a barbecue joint than a modern synagogue. The pilgrims did not come empty-handed. They brought with them a never-ending stream of sheep, goats, chickens, and other animals, which were sacrificed at the god's altar and then cooked and eaten. The psalm-singing choirs could hardly be heard over the bellowing and bleating of calves and kids. Priests in bloodstained outfits cut the victims' throats, collected the gushing blood in jars, and spilled it over the altar. The perfume of incense mixed with the odours of congealed blood and roasted meat, while swarms of black flies buzzed just about everywhere. A modern Jewish family that celebrates a holiday by having a barbecue on their front lawn is much closer to the spirit of biblical times than an orthodox family that spends the time studying scriptures in a synagogue.

Theist religions, such as biblical Judaism, justified the agricultural economy through new cosmological myths. Animist religions had previously depicted the universe as a grand Chinese opera with a limitless cast of colourful actors. Elephants and oak trees, crocodiles and rivers, mountains and frogs, ghosts and fairies, angels and demons—each had a role in the cosmic opera. Theist religions rewrote the script, turning the universe into a bleak Ibsen drama with just two main characters: man and God. The angels

and demons somehow survived the transition, becoming the messengers and servants of the great gods. Yet the rest of the animist cast—all the animals, plants, and other natural phenomena—were transformed into silent decor. True, some animals were considered sacred to this or that god, and many gods had animal features: the Egyptian god Anubis had the head of a jackal, and even Jesus Christ was frequently depicted as a lamb. Yet ancient Egyptians could easily tell the difference between Anubis and an ordinary jackal sneaking into the village to hunt chickens, and no Christian butcher ever mistook the lamb under his knife for Jesus.

We normally think that theist religions sanctified the great gods. We tend to forget that they sanctified humans, too. Hitherto *Homo sapiens* had been just one actor in a cast of thousands. In the new theist drama, *Sapiens* became the central hero around whom the entire universe revolved. The gods, meanwhile, were given two related roles to play. Firstly, they explained what is so special about *Sapiens* and why humans should dominate and exploit all other organisms. Christianity, for example, maintained that humans hold sway over the rest of creation because the Creator charged them with that authority. Moreover, according to Christianity, God gave an eternal soul only to humans. Since the fate of this eternal soul is the point of the whole Christian cosmos, and since animals have no soul, they are mere extras. Humans thus became the apex of creation, while all other organisms were pushed to the sidelines.

Secondly, the gods had to mediate between humans and the ecosystem. In the animistic cosmos, everyone talked with everyone directly. If you needed something from the caribou, the fig trees, the clouds or the rocks, you addressed them yourself. In the theist cosmos, all non-human entities were silenced. Consequently you could no longer talk with trees and animals. What to do, then, when you wanted the trees to give more fruits, the cows to give more milk, the clouds to bring more rain and the locusts to stay away from your crops? That's where the gods entered the picture. They promised to supply rain, fertility, and protection, provided humans did something in return. This was the essence of the agricultural deal. The gods safeguarded and multiplied farm production, and in exchange humans had to share the produce with the gods. This deal served both parties, at the expense of the rest of the ecosystem.

The story of Noah and his ark became a founding myth of the agricultural world. It is possible of course to give it a modern environmentalist spin. The deluge could teach us that our actions can ruin the entire ecosystem, and humans are divinely charged with protecting the rest of creation. Yet traditional interpretations saw the deluge as proof of human supremacy and animal worthlessness. According to these interpretations, Noah was

instructed to save the whole ecosystem in order to protect the common interests of gods and humans rather than the interests of the animals. Non-human organisms have no intrinsic value, and exist solely for our sake. After all, when “the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become” He resolved to “wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them” (Genesis 6:7). The Bible thinks it is perfectly all right to destroy all animals as punishment for the crimes of *Homo sapiens*, as if the existence of giraffes, pelicans, and ladybirds has lost all purpose if humans misbehave. The Bible could not imagine a scenario in which God repents having created *Homo sapiens*, wipes this sinful ape off the face of the earth, and then spends eternity enjoying the antics of ostriches, kangaroos, and panda bears.

All agricultural religions—Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism included—found ways to justify human superiority and the exploitation of animals (if not for meat, then for milk and muscle power). They have all claimed that a natural hierarchy of beings entitles humans to control and use other animals, provided that the humans observe certain restrictions. Hinduism, for example, has sanctified cows and forbidden eating beef, but has also provided the ultimate justification for the dairy industry, alleging that cows are generous creatures, and positively yearn to share their milk with humankind.

Hunter-gatherers had not seen themselves as superior beings because they were seldom aware of their impact on the ecosystem. A typical band numbered in the dozens, it was surrounded by thousands of wild animals, and its survival depended on understanding and respecting the desires of these animals. Foragers had to constantly ask themselves what deer dream about, and what lions think. Otherwise, they could not hunt the deer, nor escape the lions. Farmers, in contrast, lived in a world controlled and shaped by human dreams and thoughts. Humans were still subject to formidable natural forces such as storms and earthquakes, but they were far less dependent on the wishes of other animals. A farm boy learned early on to ride a horse, harness a bull, whip a stubborn donkey, and lead the sheep to pasture. It was easy and tempting to believe that such everyday activities reflected either the natural order of things or the will of heaven.

During the Agricultural Revolution humankind silenced animals and plants, and turned the animist grand opera into a dialogue between man and gods. During the Scientific Revolution humankind silenced the gods too. The world was now a one-man show. Humankind stood alone on an empty stage, talking to itself, negotiating with no one and acquiring enormous powers without any obligations. Having deciphered the mute laws of physics,

chemistry, and biology, humankind now does with them as it pleases. When an archaic hunter went out to the savannah, he asked the help of the wild bull, and the bull demanded something of the hunter. When an ancient farmer wanted his cows to produce lots of milk, he asked some great heavenly god for help, and the god stipulated his conditions. When the white-coated staff in Nestlé's Research and Development department want to increase dairy production, they study genetics—and the genes don't ask for anything in return.

In recent years, as people began to rethink human-animal relations, such practices have come under increasing criticism. We are suddenly showing unprecedented interest in the fate of so-called lower life forms, perhaps because we are about to become one. If and when computer programs attain superhuman intelligence and unprecedented power, should we begin valuing these programs more than we value humans? Would it be okay, for example, for an artificial intelligence to exploit humans and even kill them to further its own needs and desires? If it should never be allowed to do that, despite its superior intelligence and power, why is it ethical for humans to exploit and kill pigs? Do humans have some magical spark, in addition to higher intelligence and greater power, which distinguishes them from pigs, chickens, chimpanzees, and computer programs alike? If yes, where did that spark come from, and why are we certain that an AI could never acquire it? If there is no such spark, would there be any reason to continue assigning special value to human life even after computers surpass humans in intelligence and power? Indeed, what exactly is it about humans that make us so intelligent and powerful in the first place, and how likely is it that non-human entities will ever rival and surpass us?

When we privilege human children over piglets, we want to believe that this reflects something deeper than the ecological balance of power. We want to believe that human lives really are superior in some fundamental way. We Sapiens love telling ourselves that we enjoy some magical quality that not only accounts for our immense power, but also gives moral justification for our privileged status. What is this unique human spark? The traditional monotheist answer is that only Sapiens have eternal souls. Whereas the body decays and rots, the soul journeys on towards salvation or damnation, and will experience either everlasting joy in paradise or an eternity of misery in hell. Since pigs and other animals have no soul, they don't take part in this cosmic drama. They live only for a few years, and then die and fade into nothingness. We should therefore care far more about eternal human souls than about ephemeral pigs.

This is no kindergarten fairy tale, but an extremely powerful myth that continues to shape the lives of billions of humans and animals in the early

twenty-first century. The belief that humans have eternal souls whereas animals are just evanescent bodies is a central pillar of our legal, political, and economic system. It explains why, for example, it is perfectly okay for humans to kill animals for food, or even just for the fun of it.

However, our latest scientific discoveries flatly contradict this monotheist myth. True, laboratory experiments confirm the accuracy of one part of the myth: just as monotheist religions say, animals have no souls. All the careful studies and painstaking examinations have failed to discover any trace of a soul in pigs, rats, or rhesus monkeys. Alas, the same laboratory experiments undermine the second and far more important part of the monotheist myth, namely, that humans do have a soul. Scientists have subjected *Homo sapiens* to tens of thousands of bizarre experiments, and looked into every nook in our hearts and every cranny in our brains. But they have so far discovered no magical spark. There is zero scientific evidence that in contrast to pigs, *Sapiens* have souls. If that were all, we could well argue that scientists just need to keep looking. If they haven't found the soul yet, it is because they haven't looked carefully enough. Yet the life sciences doubt the existence of soul not just due to lack of evidence, but rather because the very idea of soul contradicts the most fundamental principles of evolution. This contradiction is responsible for the unbridled hatred that the theory of evolution inspires among devout monotheists.

The theory of relativity makes nobody angry, because it doesn't contradict any of our cherished beliefs. Most people don't care an iota whether space and time are absolute or relative. If you think it is possible to bend space and time, well, be my guest. Go ahead and bend them. What do I care? In contrast, Darwin has deprived us of our souls. If you really understand the theory of evolution, you understand that there is no soul. This is a terrifying thought not only to devout Christians and Muslims, but also to many secular people who don't hold any clear religious dogma, but nevertheless want to believe that each human possesses an eternal individual essence that remains unchanged throughout life, and can survive even death intact.

Some scientists concede that consciousness is real and may actually have great moral and political value, but that it fulfills no biological function whatsoever. Consciousness is the biologically useless by-product of certain brain processes. Jet engines roar loudly, but the noise doesn't propel the aeroplane forward. Humans don't need carbon dioxide, but each and every breath fills the air with more of the stuff. Similarly, consciousness may be a kind of mental pollution produced by the firing of complex neural networks. It doesn't do anything. It is just there. If this is true, it implies that all the pain and pleasure experienced by billions of creatures for millions of years is

just mental pollution. This is certainly a thought worth thinking, even if it isn't true. But it is quite amazing to realize that as of 2020, this is the best theory of consciousness that contemporary science has to offer us.

Since we aren't familiar with any algorithm that requires consciousness, anything an animal does can be seen as the product of non-conscious algorithms rather than of conscious memories and plans. So the real question concerns the burden of proof. What is the most likely explanation for the behaviour? Should we assume that they are consciously planning for the future, and anyone who disagrees should provide some counter-evidence? Or is it more reasonable to think that a chimpanzee is driven by a non-conscious algorithm, and all he consciously feels is a mysterious urge to place stones under bales of straw? And even if the chimp doesn't remember the past and doesn't imagine the future, does it mean he lacks self-consciousness? After all, we ascribe self-consciousness to humans even when they are not busy remembering the past or dreaming about the future.

For example, when a human mother sees her toddler wandering onto a busy road, she doesn't stop to think about either past or future. Just like the mother elephant, she too just races to save her child. Why not say about her what we say about the elephant, namely that 'when the mother rushed to save her baby from the oncoming danger, she did it without any self-consciousness. She was merely driven by a momentary urge'? Similarly, consider a young couple kissing passionately on their first date, a soldier charging into heavy enemy fire to save a wounded comrade, or an artist drawing a masterpiece in a frenzy of brushstrokes. None of them stops to contemplate the past or the future. Does it mean they lack self-consciousness, and that their state of being is inferior to that of a politician giving an election speech about his past achievements and future plans?

But maybe the life sciences view the problem from the wrong angle. They believe that life is all about data processing, and that organisms are machines for making calculations and taking decisions. However, this analogy between organisms and algorithms might mislead us. In the nineteenth century, scientists described brains and minds as if they were steam engines. Why steam engines? Because that was the leading technology of the day, which powered trains, ships, and factories, so when humans tried to explain life, they assumed it must work according to analogous principles. Mind and body are made of pipes, cylinders, valves, and pistons that build and release pressure, thereby producing movements and actions. Such thinking had a deep influence even on Freudian psychology, which is why much of our psychological jargon is still replete with concepts borrowed from mechanical engineering.

Just as the water technologies of antiquity (pumps, fountains, water-

based clocks) gave rise to the Greek and Roman languages of *pneuma* and the humors; and just as the presiding metaphor for human life during the Renaissance was clockwork; and just as in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, with its steam engines and pressurized energies, Freud brought these forces to bear on our conception of the unconscious, there was now a vision of the minds of humans as devices for the storing and processing of data, as neural code running on the wetware of the central nervous system.

In the twenty-first century it sounds childish to compare the human psyche to a steam engine. Today we know of a far more sophisticated technology—the computer—so we explain the human psyche as if it were a computer processing data rather than a steam engine regulating pressure. But this new analogy may turn out to be just as naïve. After all, computers have no minds. They don't crave anything even when they have a bug, and the Internet doesn't feel pain even when authoritarian regimes sever entire countries from the Web. So why use computers as a model for understanding the mind?

The Turing Test is simply a replication of a mundane test every gay man had to undergo in 1950 Britain: can you pass for a straight man? Turing knew from personal experience that it didn't matter who you really were—it mattered only what others thought about you. According to Turing, in the future computers would be just like gay men in the 1950s. It won't matter whether computers will actually be conscious or not. It will matter only what people think about it.

Humans nowadays completely dominate the planet not because the individual human is far smarter and more nimble-fingered than the individual chimp or wolf, but because *Homo sapiens* is the only species on earth capable of cooperating flexibly in large numbers. Intelligence and tool-making were obviously very important as well. But if humans had not learned to cooperate flexibly in large numbers, our crafty brains and deft hands would still be splitting flint stones rather than uranium atoms.

If cooperation is the key, how come the ants and bees did not beat us to the nuclear bomb even though they learned to cooperate en masse millions of years before us? Because their cooperation lacks flexibility. Bees cooperate in very sophisticated ways, but they cannot reinvent their social system overnight. If a hive faces a new threat or a new opportunity, the bees cannot, for example, guillotine the queen and establish a republic. Social mammals such as elephants and chimpanzees cooperate far more flexibly than bees, but they do so only with small numbers of friends and family members. Their cooperation is based on personal acquaintance. If I am a chimpanzee and you are a chimpanzee and I want to cooperate with you, I must know you personally: what kind of chimp are you? Are you a nice chimp? Are

you an evil chimp? How can I cooperate with you if I don't know you? To the best of our knowledge, only Sapiens can cooperate in very flexible ways with countless numbers of strangers. This concrete capability—rather than an eternal soul or some unique kind of consciousness—explains our mastery of planet Earth.

History provides ample evidence for the crucial importance of large-scale cooperation. Victory almost invariably went to those who cooperated better—not only in struggles between Homo sapiens and other animals, but also in conflicts between different human groups. Thus Rome conquered Greece not because the Romans had larger brains or better tool-making techniques, but because they were able to cooperate more effectively. Throughout history, disciplined armies easily routed disorganized hordes, and unified elites dominated the disorderly masses. In 1914, for example, 3 million Russian noblemen, officials, and business people lorded it over 180 million peasants and workers. The Russian elite knew how to cooperate in defense of its common interests, whereas the 180 million commoners were incapable of effective mobilization. Indeed, much of the elite's efforts focused on ensuring that the 180 million people at the bottom would never learn to cooperate.

In order to mount a revolution, numbers are never enough. Revolutions are usually made by small networks of agitators rather than by the masses. If you want to launch a revolution, don't ask yourself, 'How many people support my ideas?' Instead, ask yourself, 'How many of my supporters are capable of effective collaboration?' The Russian Revolution finally erupted not when 180 million peasants rose against the tsar, but rather when a handful of communists placed themselves at the right place at the right time. In 1917, at a time when the Russian upper and middle classes numbered at least 3 million people, the Communist Party had just 23,000 members. The communists nevertheless gained control of the vast Russian Empire because they organized themselves well. When authority in Russia slipped from the decrepit hands of the tsar and the equally shaky hands of Kerensky's provisional government, the communists seized it with alacrity, gripping the reins of power like a bulldog locking its jaws on a bone.

If Sapiens rule the world because we alone can cooperate flexibly in large numbers, then this undermines our belief in the sacredness of human beings. We tend to think that we are special, and deserve all kinds of privileges. As proof, we point to the amazing achievements of our species: we built the pyramids and the Great Wall of China; we deciphered the structure of atoms and DNA molecules; we reached the South Pole and the moon. If these accomplishments resulted from some unique essence that each individual human has—an immortal soul, say—then it would make sense to sanctify human life. Yet since these triumphs actually result

from mass cooperation, it is far less clear why they should make us revere individual humans. A beehive has much greater power than an individual butterfly, yet that doesn't imply a bee is therefore more hallowed than a butterfly. The Romanian Communist Party successfully dominated the disorganized Romanian population. Does it follow that the life of a party member was more sacred than the life of an ordinary citizen? Humans know how to cooperate far more effectively than chimpanzees, which is why humans launch spaceships to the moon whereas chimpanzees throw stones at zoo visitors. Does it mean that humans are superior beings?

Research indicates that *Sapiens* just can't have intimate relations—whether hostile or amorous—with more than 150 individuals. Whatever enables humans to organize mass-cooperation networks, it isn't intimate relations. This is bad news for psychologists, sociologists, economists, and others who try to decipher human society through laboratory experiments. For both organizational and financial reasons, the vast majority of experiments are conducted either on individuals or on small groups of participants. Yet it is risky to extrapolate from small-group behaviour to the dynamics of mass societies. A nation of 100 million people functions in a fundamentally different way to a band of a hundred individuals.

Many believe that primates have a natural morality, and that equality is a universal and timeless value. People are egalitarian by nature, and unequal societies can never function well due to resentment and dissatisfaction. But is that really so? These theories may work well on chimpanzees, capuchin monkeys and small hunter-gatherer bands. They also work well in the lab, where you test them on small groups of people. Yet once you observe the behaviour of human masses you discover a completely different reality. Most human kingdoms and empires were extremely unequal, yet many of them were surprisingly stable and efficient. In ancient Egypt, the pharaoh sprawled on comfortable cushions inside a cool and sumptuous palace, wearing golden sandals and gem-studded tunics, while beautiful maids popped sweet grapes into his mouth. Through the open window he could see the peasants in the fields, toiling in dirty rags under a merciless sun, and blessed was the peasant who had a cucumber to eat at the end of the day. Yet the peasants rarely revolted.

Why did the Egyptian peasants and Prussian soldiers act so differently than we would have expected on the basis of the Ultimatum Game and primate studies? Because large numbers of people behave in a fundamentally different way than do small numbers. What would scientists see if they conducted the Ultimatum Game experiment on two groups of 1 million people each, who had to share \$100 billion? They would probably have witnessed strange and fascinating dynamics. For example, since 1 million

people cannot make decisions collectively, each group might sprout a small ruling elite. What if one elite offers the other \$10 billion, keeping \$90 billion? The leaders of the second group might well accept this unfair offer, siphon most of the \$10 billion into their Swiss bank accounts, while preventing rebellion among their followers with a combination of sticks and carrots. The leadership might threaten to severely punish dissidents forthwith, while promising the meek and patient everlasting rewards in the afterlife. This is what happened in ancient Egypt and eighteenth-century Prussia, and this is how things still work out in numerous countries around the world.

Such threats and promises often succeed in creating stable human hierarchies and mass-cooperation networks, as long as people believe that they reflect the inevitable laws of nature or the divine commands of God, rather than just human whims. All large-scale human cooperation is ultimately based on our belief in imagined orders. These are sets of rules that, despite existing only in our imagination, we believe to be as real and inviolable as gravity. ‘If you sacrifice ten bulls to the sky god, the rain will come; if you honour your parents, you will go to heaven; and if you don’t believe what I am telling you—you’ll go to hell.’ As long as all Sapiens living in a particular locality believe in the same stories, they all follow the same rules, making it easy to predict the behaviour of strangers and to organize mass-cooperation networks. Sapiens often use visual marks such as a turban, a beard, or a business suit to signal ‘you can trust me, I believe in the same story as you.’ Our chimpanzee cousins cannot invent and spread such stories, which is why they cannot cooperate in large numbers.

The Price of Fictions

People find it difficult to understand the idea of ‘imagined orders’ because they assume that there are only two types of realities: objective realities and subjective realities. In objective reality, things exist independently of our beliefs and feelings. Gravity, for example, is an objective reality. It existed long before Newton, and it affects people who don’t believe in it just as much as it affects those who do. Subjective reality, in contrast, depends on my personal beliefs and feelings. Thus, suppose I feel a sharp pain in my head and go to the doctor. The doctor checks me thoroughly, but finds nothing wrong. So she sends me for a blood test, urine test, DNA test, X-ray, electrocardiogram, fMRI scan, and a plethora of other procedures. When the results come in she announces that I am perfectly healthy, and I can go home. Yet I still feel a sharp pain in my head. Even though every objective test has found nothing wrong with me, and even though nobody except me feels the pain, for me the pain is 100 percent real. Most people presume that reality is either objective or subjective, and that there is no third option. Hence once they satisfy themselves that something isn’t just their own subjective feeling, they jump to the conclusion it must be objective. If lots of people believe in God; if money makes the world go round; and if nationalism starts wars and builds empires—then these things aren’t just a subjective belief of mine. God, money, and nations must therefore be objective realities.

However, there is a third level of reality: the intersubjective level. Intersubjective entities depend on communication among many humans rather than on the beliefs and feelings of individual humans. Many of the most important agents in history are intersubjective. Money, for example, has no objective value. You cannot eat, drink, or wear a dollar bill. Yet as long as billions of people believe in its value, you can use it to buy food, beverages, and clothing. If the baker suddenly loses his faith in the dollar bill and refuses to give me a loaf of bread for this green piece of paper, it doesn’t matter much. I can just go down a few blocks to the nearby supermarket. However, if the supermarket cashiers also refuse to accept this piece of paper, along with the hawkers in the market and the salespeople in the mall, then the dollar will lose its value. The green pieces of paper will go on existing, of course, but they will be worthless.

It is relatively easy to accept that money is an intersubjective reality. Most people are also happy to acknowledge that ancient Greek gods, evil empires, and the values of alien cultures exist only in the imagination. Yet we don’t want to accept that our God, our nation, or our values are mere

fictions, because these are the things that give meaning to our lives. We want to believe that our lives have some objective meaning, and that our sacrifices matter to something beyond the stories in our head. Yet in truth the lives of most people have meaning only within the network of stories they tell one another.

Meaning is created when many people weave together a common network of stories. Why does a particular action—such as getting married in church, fasting on Ramadan or voting on election day—seem meaningful to me? Because my parents also think it is meaningful, as do my brothers, my neighbours, people in nearby cities and even the residents of far-off countries. And why do all these people think it is meaningful? Because their friends and neighbours also share the same view. People constantly reinforce each other's beliefs in a self-perpetuating loop. Each round of mutual confirmation tightens the web of meaning further, until you have little choice but to believe what everyone else believes.

That's how history unfolds. People weave a web of meaning, believe in it with all their heart, but sooner or later the web unravels, and when we look back we cannot understand how anybody could have taken it seriously. With hindsight, going on crusade in the hope of reaching Paradise sounds like utter madness. With hindsight, the Cold War seems even madder. How come thirty years ago people were willing to risk nuclear holocaust because of their belief in a communist paradise or their fanatical faith in the market? A hundred years hence, our belief in democracy and human rights might look equally incomprehensible to our descendants.

Whereas cats and other animals seem to be confined to the objective realm and use their communication systems merely to describe reality, Sapiens use language to create completely new realities. During the last 70,000 years the intersubjective realities that Sapiens invented became ever more powerful, so that today they dominate the world. Will the chimpanzees, the elephants, the Amazon rainforests, and the Arctic glaciers survive the twenty-first century? This depends on the wishes and decisions of intersubjective entities such as the European Union and the World Bank; entities that exist only in our shared imagination.

During the twenty-first century the border between history and biology is likely to blur not because we will discover biological explanations for historical events, but rather because ideological fictions will rewrite DNA strands; political and economic interests will redesign the climate; and the geography of mountains and rivers will give way to cyberspace. As human fictions are translated into genetic and electronic codes, the intersubjective reality will swallow up the objective reality and biology will merge with history. In the twenty-first century fiction might thereby become the most potent force on

earth, surpassing even wayward asteroids and natural selection. Hence if we want to understand our future, cracking genomes and crunching numbers is hardly enough. We must also decipher the fictions that give meaning to the world.

Animals such as wolves and chimpanzees live in a dual reality. On the one hand, they are familiar with objective entities outside them, such as trees, rocks, and rivers. On the other hand, they are aware of subjective experiences within them, such as fear, joy, and desire. Sapiens, in contrast, live in triple-layered reality. In addition to trees, rivers, fears, and desires, the Sapiens world also contains stories about money, gods, nations, and corporations. As history unfolded, the impact of gods, nations, and corporations grew at the expense of rivers, fears, and desires. There are still many rivers in the world, and people are still motivated by their fears and wishes, but Jesus Christ, the French Republic, and Apple Inc. have dammed and harnessed the rivers, and have learned to shape our deepest anxieties and yearnings.

When the Nazis overran France in the spring of 1940, much of its Jewish population tried to escape the country. In order to cross the border south, they needed visas to Spain and Portugal, and tens of thousands of Jews, along with many other refugees, besieged the Portuguese consulate in Bordeaux in a desperate attempt to get the life-saving piece of paper. The Portuguese government forbade its consuls in France to issue visas without prior approval from the Foreign Ministry, but the consul in Bordeaux, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, decided to disregard the order, throwing to the wind a thirty-year diplomatic career. As Nazi tanks were closing in on Bordeaux, Sousa Mendes and his team worked around the clock for ten days and nights, barely stopping to sleep, just issuing visas and stamping pieces of paper. Sousa Mendes issued thousands of visas before collapsing from exhaustion. The Portuguese government—which had little desire to accept any of these refugees—sent agents to escort the disobedient consul back home, and fired him from the foreign office. Yet officials who cared little for the plight of human beings nevertheless had deep respect for documents, and the visas Sousa Mendes issued against orders were respected by French, Spanish, and Portuguese bureaucrats alike, spiriting up to 30,000 people out of the Nazi death trap. Sousa Mendes, armed with little more than a rubber stamp, was responsible for the largest rescue operation by a single individual during the Holocaust.

Written language may have been conceived as a modest way of describing reality, but it gradually became a powerful way to reshape reality. When official reports collided with objective reality, it was often reality that had to give way. Anyone who has ever dealt with the tax authorities, the educational system, or any other complex bureaucracy knows that the truth

hardly matters. What's written on your form is far more important.

In theory, if some holy book misrepresented reality, its disciples would sooner or later find it out, and the text would lose its authority. Abraham Lincoln said you cannot deceive everybody all the time. Well, that's wishful thinking. In practice, the power of human cooperation networks rests on a delicate balance between truth and fiction. If you distort reality too much, it will weaken you, and you will not be able to compete against more clear-sighted rivals. On the other hand, you cannot organize masses of people effectively without relying on some fictional myths. So if you stick to pure reality, without mixing any fiction with it, few people would follow you.

If you used a time machine to send a modern scientist to ancient Egypt, she would not be able to seize power by exposing the fictions of the local priests and lecturing the peasants on evolution, relativity, and quantum physics. Of course, if our scientist could use her knowledge in order to produce a few rifles and artillery pieces, she could gain a huge advantage over pharaoh and the crocodile god Sobek. Yet in order to mine iron, build furnaces, and manufacture gunpowder the scientist would need a lot of hard-working peasants. Do you really think she could inspire them by explaining that energy divided by mass equals the speed of light squared? If you happen to think so, you are welcome to travel to Afghanistan or Somalia and try your luck.

Really powerful human organizations—such as pharaonic Egypt, communist China, the European empires, and the modern school system—are not necessarily clear-sighted. Much of their power rests on their ability to force their fictional beliefs on a submissive reality.

In the mass educational systems of the industrial age, schools began using precise marks on a regular basis. Since both factories and government ministries became accustomed to thinking in the language of numbers, schools followed suit. They started to gauge the worth of each student according to his or her average mark, whereas the worth of each teacher and principal was judged according to the school's overall average. Once bureaucrats adopted this yardstick, reality was transformed. Originally, schools were supposed to focus on enlightening and educating students, and marks were merely a means of measuring success. But naturally enough, schools soon began focusing on getting high marks. As every child, teacher, and inspector knows, the skills required to get high marks in an exam are not the same as a true understanding of literature, biology, or mathematics. Every child, teacher, and inspector also knows that when forced to choose between the two, most schools will go for the marks.

The same thing happens when the educational system declares that ma-

trication exams are the best method to evaluate students. The system has enough authority to influence acceptance conditions to colleges, government offices and private-sector jobs. Students therefore invest all their efforts in getting good marks. Coveted positions are manned by people with high marks, who naturally support the system that brought them there. The fact that the educational system controls the critical exams gives it more power, and increases its influence over colleges, government offices, and the job market. If somebody protests that ‘The degree certificate is just a piece of paper!’ and behaves accordingly, he is unlikely to get very far in life.

Holy scriptures work this way too. The religious establishment proclaims that the holy book contains the answers to all our questions. It simultaneously forces courts, governments, and businesses to behave according to what the holy book says. When a wise person reads scriptures and then looks at the world, he sees that there is indeed a good match. ‘Scriptures say that you must pay tithes to God—and look, everybody pays. Scriptures say that women are inferior to men, and cannot serve as judges or even give testimony in court—and look, there are indeed no women judges and the courts reject their testimony. Scriptures say that whoever studies the word of God will succeed in life—and look, all the good jobs are indeed held by people who know the holy book by heart.’ Such a wise person will naturally begin to study the holy book, and because he is wise, he will become a scriptural pundit. He will consequently be appointed a judge. When he becomes a judge, he will not allow women to bear witness in court, and when he chooses his successor, he will obviously pick somebody who knows the holy book well. If someone protests that ‘This book is just paper!’ and behaves accordingly, such a heretic will not get very far in life. Even when scriptures mislead people about the true nature of reality, they can nevertheless retain their authority for thousands of years. For instance, the biblical perception of history is fundamentally flawed, yet it managed to spread throughout the world, and billions still believe in it.

Such self-absorption characterizes all humans in their childhood. Children of all religions and cultures think they are the center of the world, and therefore show little genuine interest in the conditions and feelings of other people. That’s why divorce is so traumatic for children. A five-year-old cannot understand that something important is happening for reasons unrelated to him. No matter how many times you tell him that mummy and daddy are independent people with their own problems and wishes, and that they didn’t divorce because of him—the child cannot absorb that. He is convinced that everything happens because of him. Most people grow out of this infantile delusion. Monotheists hold on to it till the day they die. Like a child thinking that his parents are fighting because of him, the monotheist

is convinced that the Persians are fighting the Babylonians because of him.

But no matter how mistaken the biblical world view was, it provided a better basis for large-scale human cooperation. Fictions enable us to cooperate better. The price we pay is that the same fictions also determine the goals of our cooperation. So we may have very elaborate systems of cooperation, which are harnessed to serve fictional aims and interests. Consequently the system may seem to be working well, but only if we adopt the system's own criteria.

Suppose you were given a choice between the following two vacation packages:

Stone Age Package: On day one we will hike for ten hours in a pristine forest, setting camp for the night in a clearing by a river. On day two we will canoe down the river for ten hours, camping on the shores of a small lake. On day three we will learn from the native people how to fish in the lake and how to find mushrooms in the nearby woods.

Modern Proletarian Package: On day one we will work for ten hours in a polluted textile factory, passing the night in a cramped apartment block. On day two we will work for ten hours as cashiers in the local department store, going back to sleep in the same apartment block. On day three we will learn from the native people how to open a bank account and fill out mortgage forms.

Which package would you choose? Hence when we come to evaluate human cooperation networks, it all depends on the yardsticks and viewpoint we adopt. Are we judging pharaonic Egypt in terms of production, nutrition, or perhaps social harmony? Do we focus on the aristocracy, the simple peasants, or the pigs and crocodiles? History isn't a single narrative, but thousands of alternative narratives. Whenever we choose to tell one, we are also choosing to silence others.

When examining the history of any human network, it is therefore advisable to stop from time to time and look at things from the perspective of some real entity. How do you know if an entity is real? Very simple—just ask yourself, 'Can it suffer?' When people burn down the temple of Zeus, Zeus doesn't suffer. When the euro loses its value, the euro doesn't suffer. When a bank goes bankrupt, the bank doesn't suffer. When a country suffers a defeat in war, the country doesn't really suffer. It's just a metaphor. In contrast, when a soldier is wounded in battle, he really does suffer. When a famished peasant has nothing to eat, she suffers. When a cow is separated from her newborn calf, she suffers. This is reality. Of course suffering might well be caused by our belief in fictions. For example, belief in national and

religious myths might cause the outbreak of war, in which millions lose their homes, their limbs and even their lives. The cause of war is fictional, but the suffering is 100 percent real. This is exactly why we should strive to distinguish fiction from reality.

Fiction isn't bad. It is vital. Without commonly accepted stories about things like money, states, or corporations, no complex human society can function. We can't play football unless everyone believes in the same made-up rules, and we can't enjoy the benefits of markets and courts without similar make-believe stories. But the stories are just tools. They should not become our goals or our yardsticks. When we forget that they are mere fiction, we lose touch with reality. Then we begin entire wars 'to make a lot of money for the corporation' or 'to protect the national interest.' Corporations, money, and nations exist only in our imagination. We invented them to serve us; how come we find ourselves sacrificing our lives in their service?

Stories serve as the foundations and pillars of human societies. As history unfolded, stories about gods, nations, and corporations grew so powerful that they began to dominate objective reality. Believing in the great god Sobek, the Mandate of Heaven, or the Bible enabled people to build Lake Fayum, the Great Wall of China, and Chartres Cathedral. Unfortunately, blind faith in these stories meant that human efforts frequently focused on increasing the glory of fictional entities such as gods and nations, instead of bettering the lives of real sentient beings.

Modern science certainly changed the rules of the game, but it did not simply replace myths with facts. Myths continue to dominate humankind. Science only makes these myths stronger. Instead of destroying the intersubjective reality, science will enable it to control the objective and subjective realities more completely than ever before. Thanks to computers and bio-engineering, the difference between fiction and reality will blur, as people reshape reality to match their pet fictions. The priests of Sobek imagined the existence of divine crocodiles, while pharaoh dreamt about immortality. In reality, the sacred crocodile was a very ordinary swamp reptile dressed in golden fineries, and pharaoh was as mortal as the simplest of peasants. After death, his corpse was mummified using preservative balms and scented perfumes, but it was as lifeless as one can get. In contrast, twenty-first-century scientists might be able to really engineer super-crocodiles, and to provide the human elite with eternal youth here on earth. Consequently the rise of science will make at least some myths and religions mightier than ever.

Defining religion as 'belief in gods' is also problematic. We tend to say that a devout Christian is religious because she believes in God, whereas a fervent communist isn't religious, because communism has no gods. However,

religion is created by humans rather than by gods, and it is defined by its social function rather than by the existence of deities. Religion is anything that confers superhuman legitimacy on human social structures. It legitimizes human norms and values by arguing that they reflect superhuman laws. Religion asserts that we humans are subject to a system of moral laws that we did not invent and that we cannot change. A devout Jew would say that this is the system of moral laws created by God and revealed in the Bible. A Hindu would say that Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva created the laws, which were revealed to us humans in the Vedas. Other religions, from Buddhism and Taoism to Nazism, communism, and liberalism, argue that the superhuman laws are natural laws, and not the creation of this or that god. Of course, each believes in a different set of natural laws discovered and revealed by different seers and prophets, from Buddha and Laozi to Hitler and Lenin.

Liberals, communists, and followers of other modern creeds dislike describing their own system as a 'religion,' because they identify religion with superstitions and supernatural powers. If you tell communists or liberals that they are religious, they think you accuse them of blindly believing in groundless pipe dreams. In fact, it means only that they believe in some system of moral laws that wasn't invented by humans, but which humans must nevertheless obey. As far as we know, all human societies believe in this. Every society tells its members that they must obey some superhuman moral law, and that breaking this law will result in catastrophe.

Modern communism, like many other religious systems, dislikes rich people, but it threatens them with class conflict here and now, rather than with burning sulphur after death. The communist laws of history are similar to the commandments of the Christian God, inasmuch as they are superhuman forces that humans cannot change at will. People can decide tomorrow morning to cancel the offside rule in football, because we invented that law, and we are free to change it. However, at least according to Marx, we cannot change the laws of history. No matter what the capitalists do, as long as they continue to accumulate private property they are bound to create class conflict and they are destined to be defeated by the rising proletariat. If you happen to be a communist yourself you might argue that communism and Christianity are nevertheless very different, because communism is right, whereas Christianity is wrong. Class conflict really is inherent in the capitalist system, whereas rich people don't suffer eternal tortures in hell after they die. Yet even if that's the case, it doesn't mean communism is not a religion. Rather, it means that communism is the one true religion. Followers of every religion are convinced that theirs alone is true. Perhaps the followers of one religion are right.

Just as the gap between religion and science is smaller than we commonly think, so the gap between religion and spirituality is much bigger. Religion is a deal, whereas spirituality is a journey. Religion gives a complete description of the world, and offers us a well-defined contract with predetermined goals. ‘God exists. He told us to behave in certain ways. If you obey God, you’ll be admitted to heaven. If you disobey Him, you’ll burn in hell.’ The very clarity of this deal allows society to define common norms and values that regulate human behaviour.

Spiritual journeys are nothing like that. They usually take people in mysterious ways towards unknown destinations. The quest usually begins with some big question, such as who am I? What is the meaning of life? What is good? Whereas many people just accept the ready-made answers provided by the powers that be, spiritual seekers are not so easily satisfied. They are determined to follow the big question wherever it leads, and not just to places you know well or wish to visit. Thus for most people, academic studies are a deal rather than a spiritual journey, because they take us to a predetermined goal approved by our elders, governments, and banks. ‘I’ll study for three years, pass the exams, get my BA certificate and secure a well-paid job.’ Academic studies might be transformed into a spiritual journey if the big questions you encounter on the way deflect you towards unexpected destinations, of which you could hardly even conceive at first. For example, a student might begin to study economics in order to secure a job in Wall Street. However, if what she learns somehow causes her to end up in a Hindu ashram or helping HIV patients in Zimbabwe, then we might call that a spiritual journey.

Religions seek to cement the worldly order whereas spirituality seeks to escape it. Often enough, the most important demand from spiritual wanderers is to challenge the beliefs and conventions of dominant religions. In Zen Buddhism it is said that “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.” Which means that if while walking on the spiritual path you encounter the rigid ideas and fixed laws of institutionalized Buddhism, you must free yourself from them too.

For religions, spirituality is a dangerous threat. Religions typically strive to rein in the spiritual quests of their followers, and many religious systems were challenged not by laypeople preoccupied with food, sex, and power, but rather by spiritual truth-seekers who wanted more than platitudes. Thus the Protestant revolt against the authority of the Catholic Church was ignited not by hedonistic atheists but rather by a devout and ascetic monk, Martin Luther. Luther wanted answers to the existential questions of life, and refused to settle for the rites, rituals, and deals offered by the Church.

Science always needs religious assistance in order to create viable human

institutions. Scientists study how the world functions, but there is no scientific method for determining how humans ought to behave. Science tells us that humans cannot survive without oxygen. However, is it okay to execute criminals by asphyxiation? Science doesn't know how to answer such a question. Only religions provide us with the necessary guidance. Hence every practical project scientists undertake also relies on religious insights.

Take, for example, the building of the Three Gorges Dam over the Yangtze River. When the Chinese government decided to build the dam in 1992, physicists could calculate what pressures the dam would have to withstand, economists could forecast how much money it would probably cost, while electrical engineers could predict how much electricity it would produce. However, the government needed to take additional factors into account. Building the dam flooded huge territories containing many villages and towns, thousands of archaeological sites, and unique landscapes and habitats. More than 1 million people were displaced and hundreds of species were endangered. It seems that the dam directly caused the extinction of the Chinese river dolphin. No matter what you personally think about the Three Gorges Dam, it is clear that building it was an ethical rather than a purely scientific issue. No physics experiment, no economic model, and no mathematical equation can determine whether generating thousands of megawatts and making billions of yuan is more valuable than saving an ancient pagoda or the Chinese river dolphin. Consequently, China cannot function on the basis of scientific theories alone. It requires some religion or ideology too.

Ethical judgments often hide within them factual statements that people don't bother to mention, because they think they have been proven beyond doubt. Thus the ethical judgment 'human life is sacred' (which science cannot test) may shroud the factual statement 'every human has an eternal soul' (which is open for scientific debate). Similarly, when American nationalists proclaim that 'the American nation is sacred,' this seemingly ethical judgment is in fact predicated on factual statements such as 'the USA has spearheaded most of the moral, scientific, and economic advances of the last few centuries.' Whereas it is impossible to scientifically scrutinize the claim that the American nation is sacred, once we unpack this judgment we may well examine scientifically whether the USA has indeed been responsible for a disproportionate share of moral, scientific, and economic breakthroughs.

Some might argue that Islamists, liberals, and nationalists have no ethical dispute; they have a factual disagreement about how best to realize their common goal. Yet even if they are right, and even if all humans cherish happiness, in practice it would be extremely difficult to use this insight to

decide ethical disputes, particularly because we have no scientific definition or measurement of happiness. Consider again the Three Gorges Dam. Even if we agree that the ultimate aim of the project is to make the world a happier place, how can we tell whether generating cheap electricity contributes more to global happiness than protecting traditional lifestyles or saving the rare Chinese river dolphin? As long as we haven't deciphered the mysteries of consciousness, we cannot develop a universal measurement for happiness and suffering, and we don't know how to compare the happiness and suffering of different individuals, let alone different species. How many units of happiness are generated when a billion Chinese enjoy cheaper electricity? How many units of misery are produced when an entire dolphin species becomes extinct? Indeed, are happiness and misery mathematical entities that can be added or subtracted in the first place? Eating ice cream is enjoyable. Finding true love is more enjoyable. Do you think that if you just eat enough ice cream, the accumulated pleasure could ever equal the rapture of true love?

Religion provides the ethical justification for scientific research, and in exchange gets to influence the scientific agenda and the uses of scientific discoveries. Hence you cannot understand the history of science without taking religious beliefs into account. Scientists seldom dwell on this fact, but the Scientific Revolution itself began in one of the most dogmatic, intolerant, and religious societies in history.

It is customary to tell the history of modernity as a struggle between science and religion. In theory, both science and religion are interested above all in the truth, and because each upholds a different truth, they are doomed to clash. In fact, neither science nor religion cares that much about the truth, hence they can easily compromise, coexist, and even cooperate. Religion is interested above all in order. It aims to create and maintain the social structure. Science is interested above all in power. It aims to acquire the power to cure diseases, fight wars and produce food. As individuals, scientists, and priests may give immense importance to the truth; but as collective institutions, science and religion prefer order and power over truth. They can therefore make good bedfellows. The uncompromising quest for truth is a spiritual journey, which can seldom remain within the confines of either religious or scientific establishments.

It would accordingly be far more correct to view modern history as the process of formulating a deal between science and one particular religion—namely, humanism. Modern society believes in humanist dogmas, and uses science not in order to question these dogmas, but rather in order to implement them.

Modernity is a surprisingly simple deal. The entire contract can be summarized in a single phrase: humans agree to give up meaning in exchange

for power.

The modern deal thus offers humans an enormous temptation, coupled with a colossal threat. Omnipotence is in front of us, almost within our reach, but below us yawns the abyss of complete nothingness. On the practical level, modern life consists of a constant pursuit of power within a universe devoid of meaning. Modern culture is the most powerful in history, and it is ceaselessly researching, inventing, discovering, and growing. At the same time, it is plagued by more existential angst than any previous culture.

Evolutionary pressures have accustomed humans to see the world as a static pie. If somebody gets a bigger slice of the pie, somebody else inevitably gets a smaller slice. A particular family or city may prosper, but humankind as a whole is not going to produce more than it produces today. Accordingly, traditional religions such as Christianity and Islam sought ways to solve humanity's problems with the help of current resources, either by redistributing the existing pie, or by promising us a pie in the sky. Modernity, in contrast, is based on the firm belief that economic growth is not only possible but is absolutely essential. Prayers, good deeds, and meditation can be comforting and inspiring, but problems such as famine, plague, and war can only be solved through growth. This fundamental dogma can be summarized in one simple idea: 'If you have a problem, you probably need more stuff, and in order to have more stuff, you must produce more of it.'

Modern politicians and economists insist that growth is vital for three principal reasons. Firstly, when we produce more, we can consume more, raise our standard of living and allegedly enjoy a happier life. Secondly, as long as humankind multiplies, economic growth is needed merely to stay where we are. For example, in India the annual population growth rate is 1.2 percent. That means that unless the Indian economy grows each year by at least 1.2 percent, unemployment will rise, salaries will fall and the average standard of living will decline. Thirdly, even if Indians stop multiplying, and even if the Indian "middle class" can be satisfied with its present standard of living, what should India do about its hundreds of millions of poverty-stricken citizens? If the economy doesn't grow, and the pie therefore remains the same size, you can give more to the poor only by taking something from the rich. That will force you to make some very hard choices, and will probably cause a lot of resentment and even violence. If you wish to avoid hard choices, resentment, and violence, you need a bigger pie.

If only countries such as Pakistan and Egypt could keep a healthy growth rate, their citizens would come to enjoy the benefits of private cars and bulging refrigerators, and they would take the path of earthly prosperity

instead of following the Islamic pied piper. Similarly, economic growth in countries such as Congo and Myanmar would produce a prosperous “middle class” which is the supposed bedrock of liberal democracy. And in the case of the disgruntled couple, their marriage will be saved if they just buy a bigger house (so they don’t have to share a cramped office), purchase a dishwasher (so that they stop arguing whose turn it is to do the dishes), and go to expensive therapy sessions twice a week.

Economic growth has thus become the crucial juncture where almost all modern religions, ideologies, and movements meet. The Soviet Union, with its Five Year Plans, was as obsessed with growth as the most cut-throat American robber baron. Just as Christians and Muslims both believed in heaven, and disagreed only about how to get there, so during the Cold War both capitalists and communists believed in creating heaven on earth through economic growth, and wrangled only about the exact method.

In China the Communist Party still pays lip service to traditional Marxist-Leninist ideals, but in practice it is guided by Deng Xiaoping’s famous maxims that “development is the only hard truth” and that “it doesn’t matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice.” Which means, in plain language: do anything it takes to promote economic growth, even if Marx and Lenin wouldn’t have been happy with it.

The credo of “more stuff” accordingly urges individuals, firms, and governments to discount anything that might hamper economic growth, such as preserving social equality, ensuring ecological harmony, or honouring your parents. In the Soviet Union, when people thought that state-controlled communism was the fastest way to grow, anything that stood in the way of collectivization was bulldozed, including millions of kulaks, the freedom of expression, and the Aral Sea. Nowadays it is generally accepted that some version of free-market capitalism is a much more efficient way of ensuring long-term growth, hence rich farmers and freedom of expression are protected, but ecological habitats, social structures, and traditional values that stand in the way of free-market capitalism are destroyed and dismantled.

Take, for example, a software engineer making \$250 per hour working for some high-tech start-up. One day her elderly father has a stroke. He now needs help with shopping, cooking, and even showering. She could move her father to her own house, leave home later in the morning, come back earlier in the evening and take care of her father personally. Both her income and the start-up’s productivity would suffer, but her father would enjoy the care of a respectful and loving daughter. Alternatively, the engineer could hire a Mexican carer who, for \$25 per hour, would live with the father and provide for all his needs. That would mean business as usual for the engineer and

her start-up, and even the carer and the Mexican economy would benefit. What should the engineer do? Free-market capitalism has a firm answer. If economic growth demands that we loosen family bonds, encourage people to live away from their parents, and import carers from the other side of the world—so be it. This answer, however, involves an ethical judgment rather than a factual statement. No doubt, when some people specialize in software engineering while others spend their time taking care of the elderly, we can produce more software and give old people more professional care. Yet is economic growth more important than family bonds? By daring to make such ethical judgments, free-market capitalism has crossed the border from the land of science to that of religion.

Most capitalists would probably dislike the title of religion, but as religions go, capitalism can at least hold its head high. Unlike other religions that promise us a pie in the sky, capitalism promises miracles here on earth—and sometimes even provides them.

We will never reach a moment when capitalism says: ‘That’s it. You have grown enough. You can now take it easy.’ If you want to know why the capitalist wheel is unlikely ever to stop, talk for an hour with someone who has just earned \$100,000 and wonders what to do with it. ‘The banks offer such low interest rates,’ he would complain. ‘I don’t want to put my money in a savings account that pays hardly 0.5% a year. You can make perhaps 2% in government bonds. My cousin Richie bought a flat in Seattle last year, and he has already made 20% on his investment! Maybe I should go into real estate too; but everybody is saying there’s a new real-estate bubble. So what do you think about the stock exchange? A friend told me the best deal these days is to buy an ETF that follows emerging economies, like Brazil or China.’ As he stops for a moment to breathe, you ask, ‘Well, why not just be satisfied with your \$100,000?’ He will explain to you better than I can why capitalism will never stop.

In order to provide every person in the world with the same standard of living as affluent Americans, we would need a few more planets—but we only have this one. If progress and growth do end up destroying the ecosystem, the cost will be dear not merely to vampire bats, foxes, and rabbits, but also to Sapiens. An ecological meltdown will cause economic ruin, political turmoil, a fall in human standards of living, and it might threaten the very existence of human civilization. We could lessen the danger by slowing down the pace of progress and growth. If this year investors expect to get a six percent return on their portfolios, in ten years they will be satisfied with a three percent return, in twenty years only one percent, and in thirty years the economy will stop growing and we’ll be happy with what we’ve already got. Yet the creed of growth firmly objects to such a heretical idea.

Instead, it suggests we should run even faster. If our discoveries destabilize the ecosystem and threaten humanity, then we should discover something to protect ourselves. If the ozone layer dwindles and exposes us to skin cancer, we should invent better sunscreen and better cancer treatments, thereby also promoting the growth of new sunscreen factories and cancer centres. If all the new industries pollute the atmosphere and the oceans, causing global warming and mass extinctions, then we should build for ourselves virtual worlds and high-tech sanctuaries that will provide us with all the good things in life even if the planet is hot, dreary, and polluted as hell.

We should of course be concerned that an ecological apocalypse might have different consequences for different human castes. There is no justice in history. When disaster strikes, the poor almost always suffer far more than the rich, even if the rich caused the tragedy in the first place. Global warming is already affecting the lives of poor people in arid African countries more than the lives of affluent Westerners. Paradoxically, the very power of science may increase the danger, because it makes the rich complacent.

Too many politicians and voters believe that as long as the economy grows, scientists and engineers could always save us from doomsday. When it comes to climate change, many growth true-believers do not just hope for miracles—they take it for granted that the miracles will happen.

How rational is it to risk the future of humankind on the assumption that future scientists will make some unknown discoveries? Most of the presidents, ministers, and CEOs who run the world are very rational people. Why are they willing to take such a gamble? Maybe because they don't think they are gambling on their own personal future. Even if bad comes to worse and science cannot hold off the deluge, engineers could still build a high-tech Noah's Ark for the upper caste, while leaving billions of others to drown. The belief in this high-tech Ark is currently one of the biggest threats to the future of humankind and of the entire ecosystem. People who believe in the high-tech Ark should not be put in charge of the global ecology, for the same reason that people who believe in a heavenly afterlife should not be given nuclear weapons.

And what about the poor? Why aren't they protesting? If and when the deluge comes, they will bear the full cost of it. However, they will also be the first to bear the cost of economic stagnation. In a capitalist world, the lives of the poor improve only when the economy grows. Hence they are unlikely to support any steps to reduce future ecological threats that are based on slowing down present-day economic growth. Protecting the environment is a very nice idea, but those who cannot pay their rent are worried about their overdraft far more than about melting ice caps.

For millennia, societies strove to curb individual desires and bring them

into some kind of balance. It was well known that people wanted more and more for themselves, but when the pie was of a fixed size, social harmony depended on restraint. Avarice was bad. Modernity turned the world upside down. It convinced human collectives that equilibrium is far more frightening than chaos, and because avarice fuels growth, it is a force for good. Modernity accordingly inspired people to want more, and dismantled the age-old disciplines that curbed greed. The resulting anxieties were assuaged to a large extent by free-market capitalism, which is one reason why this particular ideology has become so popular. Capitalist thinkers repeatedly calm us: ‘Don’t worry, it will be okay. Provided the economy grows, the invisible hand of the market will take care of everything else.’ Capitalism has thus sanctified a voracious and chaotic system that grows by leaps and bounds, without anyone understanding what is happening and where we are rushing.

The humanist religion worships humanity, and expects humanity to play the part that God played in Christianity and Islam, and that the laws of nature played in Buddhism and Taoism. Whereas traditionally the great cosmic plan gave meaning to the life of humans, humanism reverses the roles, and expects the experiences of humans to give meaning to the great cosmos. According to humanism, humans must draw from within their inner experiences not only the meaning of their own lives, but also the meaning of the entire universe. This is the primary commandment humanism has given us: create meaning for a meaningless world.

Meaning and authority always go hand in hand. Whoever determines the meaning of our actions—whether they are good or evil, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly—also gains the authority to tell us what to think and how to behave.

Humanist Aesthetics: Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.

Humanist Economics: The customer is always right.

Humanist Education: Think for yourself!

Humanist Ethics: If it feels good—do it!

Humanist Politics: The voter knows best.

It doesn’t matter if all the university professors and all the priests and mullahs cry out from every pulpit that this is a wonderful car—if the customers reject it, it is a bad car. Nobody has the authority to tell customers that they are wrong, and heaven forbid that a government would try to force

citizens to buy a particular car against their will. What's true of cars is true of all other products. Listen, for example, to Professor Leif Andersson from the University of Uppsala. He specializes in the genetic enhancement of farm animals, in order to create faster-growing pigs, dairy cows that produce more milk, and chickens with extra meat on their bones. In an interview he was confronted with the fact that such genetic manipulations might cause much suffering to the animals. Already today "enhanced" dairy cows have such heavy udders that they can barely walk, while "upgraded" chickens cannot even stand up. And I'm sure you recall the masturbation of turkeys who can't fuck. Professor Andersson had a firm answer:

"Everything comes back to the individual customer, to the question how much the customer is willing to pay for meat. We must remember that it would be impossible to maintain current levels of global meat consumption without the enhanced modern chicken. If customers ask us only for the cheapest meat possible—that's what the customers will get. Customers need to decide what is most important to them—price, or something else."

Professor Andersson can go to sleep at night with a clean conscience. The fact that customers are buying his enhanced animal products implies that he is meeting their needs and desires and is therefore doing good.

By the same logic, if some multinational corporation wants to know whether it lives up to its "Don't be evil" motto, it need only take a look at its bottom line. If it makes loads of money, it means that millions of people like its products, which implies that it is a force for good. If someone objects and says that people might make the wrong choice, they will be quickly reminded that the customer is always right, and that human feelings are the source of all meaning and authority. If millions of people freely choose to buy the company's products, who are you to tell them that they are wrong?

"If I believe in God at all, it is my choice to believe. If my inner self tells me to believe in God—then I believe. I believe because I feel God's presence, and my heart tells me He is there. But if I no longer feel God's presence, and if my heart suddenly tells me that there is no God—I will cease believing. Either way, the real source of authority is my own feelings. So even while saying that I believe in God, the truth is I have a much stronger belief in my own inner voice."

In medieval Europe, the chief formula for knowledge was:

$$\textit{Knowledge} = \textit{Scriptures} \times \textit{Logic}$$

The formula takes a multiplication symbol because the elements work one on the other. At least according to medieval scholastics, you cannot understand the Bible without logic. If your logic value is zero, then even if you read every page of the Bible, the sum of your knowledge would still be zero. Conversely, if your scripture value is zero, then no amount of logic can help you. If the formula used the addition symbol, the implication would be that somebody with lots of logic and no scriptures would still have a lot of knowledge—which you and I may find reasonable, but medieval scholastics did not.

If we want to know the answer to some important question, we should read scriptures, and use our logic to understand the exact meaning of the text. For example, scholars who wished to know the shape of the earth scanned the Bible looking for relevant references. One pointed out that in Job 38:13, it says that God can “take hold of the edges of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it.” This implies—reasoned the pundit—that because the earth has ‘edges’ of which we can ‘take hold,’ it must be a flat square. Another sage rejected this interpretation, calling attention to Isaiah 40:22, where it says that God “sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.” Isn’t that proof that the earth is round? In practice, that meant that scholars sought knowledge by spending years in schools and libraries, reading more and more texts, and sharpening their logic so they could understand the texts correctly.

The Scientific Revolution proposed a very different formula for knowledge:

$$\textit{Knowledge} = \textit{EmpiricalData} \times \textit{Mathematics}$$

If we want to know the answer to some question, we need to gather relevant empirical data, and then use mathematical tools to analyze the data. For example, in order to gauge the true shape of the earth, we can observe the sun, the moon, and the planets from various locations across the world. Once we have amassed enough observations, we can use trigonometry to deduce not only the shape of the earth, but also the structure of the entire solar system. In practice, that means that scientists seek knowledge by spending years in observatories, laboratories, and research expeditions, gathering more and more empirical data, and sharpening their mathematical tools so they could interpret the data correctly.

However, humanism offered an alternative. As humans gained confidence in themselves, a new formula for attaining ethical knowledge appeared:

$$\textit{Knowledge} = \textit{Experiences} \times \textit{Sensitivity}$$

If we wish to know the answer to any ethical question, we need to connect to our inner experiences, and observe them with the utmost sensitivity. In practice, that means that we seek knowledge by spending years collecting experiences, and sharpening our sensitivity so we could understand these experiences correctly. But what exactly are ‘experiences’? They are not empirical data. An experience is not made of atoms, molecules, proteins, or numbers. Rather, an experience is a subjective phenomenon that includes three main ingredients: sensations, emotions, and thoughts. At any particular moment my experience comprises everything I sense (heat, pleasure, tension, et cetera), every emotion I feel (love, fear, anger, et cetera) and whatever thoughts arise in my mind. And what is ‘sensitivity’? It means two things. Firstly, paying attention to my sensations, emotions, and thoughts. Secondly, allowing these sensations, emotions, and thoughts to influence me. Granted, I shouldn’t allow every passing breeze to sweep me away. Yet I should be open to new experiences, and permit them to change my views, my behaviour and even my personality.

Experiences and sensitivity build up one another in a never-ending cycle. I cannot experience anything if I have no sensitivity, and I cannot develop sensitivity unless I undergo a variety of experiences. Sensitivity is not an abstract aptitude that can be developed by reading books or listening to lectures. It is a practical skill that can ripen and mature only by applying it in practice. Take tea, for example. I start by drinking very sweet ordinary tea while reading the morning paper. The tea is little more than an excuse for a sugar rush. One day I realize that between the sugar and the newspaper, I hardly taste the tea at all. So I reduce the amount of sugar, put the paper aside, close my eyes and focus on the tea itself. I begin to register its unique aroma and flavour. Soon I find myself experimenting with different teas, black and green, comparing their exquisite tangs and delicate bouquets. Within a few months, I drop the supermarket labels and buy my tea at Harrods. I develop a particular liking for ‘Panda Dung tea’ from the mountains of Ya’an in Sichuan province, made from leaves of tea trees fertilized by the dung of panda bears. That’s how, one cup at a time, I hone my tea sensitivity and become a tea connoisseur. If in my early tea-drinking days you had served me Panda Dung tea in a Ming Dynasty porcelain goblet, I would not have appreciated it much more than builder’s tea in a paper cup. You cannot experience something if you don’t have the necessary sensitivity, and you cannot develop your sensitivity except by undergoing a long string of experiences.

What’s true of tea is true of all other aesthetic and ethical knowledge. We aren’t born with a ready-made conscience. As we pass through life, we hurt people and people hurt us, we act compassionately and others show

compassion to us. If we pay attention, our moral sensitivity sharpens, and these experiences become a source of valuable ethical knowledge about what is good, what is right, and who I really am.

In the early nineteenth century, Wilhelm von Humboldt—one of the chief architects of the modern education system—said that the aim of existence is “a distillation of the widest possible experience of life into wisdom.” He also wrote that “there is only one summit in life—to have taken the measure in feeling of everything human.” This could well be the humanist motto.

Whereas liberalism turns my gaze inwards, emphasizing my uniqueness and the uniqueness of my nation, socialism demands that I stop obsessing about me and my feelings and instead focus on what others are feeling and about how my actions influence their experiences. Global peace will be achieved not by celebrating the distinctiveness of each nation, but by unifying all the workers of the world; and social harmony won't be achieved by each person narcissistically exploring their own inner depths, but rather by each person prioritizing the needs and experiences of others over their own desires. A liberal may reply that by exploring her own inner world she develops her compassion and her understanding of others, but such reasoning would have cut little ice with Lenin or Mao.

They would have explained that individual self-exploration is a bourgeois indulgent vice, and that when I try to get in touch with my inner self, I am all too likely to fall into one or another capitalist trap. My current political views, my likes and dislikes, and my hobbies and ambitions do not reflect my authentic self. Rather, they reflect my upbringing and social surrounding. They depend on my class, and are shaped by my neighbourhood and my school. Rich and poor alike are brainwashed from birth. The rich are taught to disregard the poor, while the poor are taught to disregard their true interests. No amount of self-reflection or psychotherapy will help, because the psychotherapists are also working for the capitalist system. Indeed, self-reflection is likely only to distance me even further from understanding the truth about myself, because it gives too much credit to personal decisions and too little credit to social conditions. If I am rich, I am likely to conclude that it is because I made wise choices. If I suffer from poverty, I must have made some mistakes. If I am depressed, a liberal therapist is likely to blame my parents, and to encourage me to set some new aims in life. If I suggest that perhaps I am depressed because I am being exploited by capitalists, and because under the prevailing social system I have no chance of realizing my aims, the therapist may well say that I am projecting onto ‘the social system’ my own inner difficulties, and I am projecting onto ‘the capitalists’ unresolved issues with my mother.

According to socialism, instead of spending years talking about my

mother, my emotions and my complexes, I should ask myself: who owns the means of production in my country? What are its main exports and imports? What's the connection between the ruling politicians and international banking? Only by understanding the surrounding socioeconomic system and taking into account the experiences of all other people could I truly understand what I feel, and only by common action can we change the system. Yet what person can take into account the experiences of all human beings, and weigh them one against the other in a fair way? That's why many authoritarian socialists discourage self-exploration, and advocate the establishment of strong collective institutions—such as socialist parties and trade unions—that aim to decipher the world for us. Whereas in liberal politics the voter knows best, and in liberal economics the customer is always right, in authoritarian socialist politics the party knows best, and in authoritarian socialist economics the trade union is always right. Authority and meaning still come from human experience—both the party and the trade union are composed of people and work to alleviate human misery—yet individuals must listen to the party and the trade union rather than to their personal feelings.

Evolutionary humanism has a different solution to the problem of conflicting human experiences. Rooting itself in the firm ground of Darwinian evolutionary theory, it says that conflict is something to applaud rather than lament. Conflict is the raw material of natural selection, which pushes evolution forward. Some humans are simply superior to others, and when human experiences collide, the fittest humans should steamroll everyone else. The same logic that drives humankind to exterminate wild wolves and to ruthlessly exploit domesticated sheep also mandates the oppression of inferior humans by their superiors. It's a good thing that Europeans conquer Africans and that shrewd businessmen drive the dim-witted to bankruptcy. If we follow this evolutionary logic, humankind will gradually become stronger and fitter, eventually giving rise to superhumans. Evolution didn't stop with *Homo sapiens*—there is still a long way to go. However, if in the name of human rights or human equality we emasculate the fittest humans, it will prevent the rise of the superman, and may even cause the degeneration and extinction of *Homo sapiens*.

Who exactly are these superior humans who herald the coming of the superman? They might be entire races, particular tribes, or exceptional individual geniuses. In any case, what makes them superior is that they have better abilities, manifested in the creation of new knowledge, more advanced technology, more prosperous societies, or more beautiful art. The experience of an Einstein or a Beethoven is far more valuable than that of a drunken good-for-nothing, and it is ludicrous to treat them as if they have

equal merit. Similarly, if a particular nation has consistently spearheaded human progress, we should rightly consider it superior to other nations that contributed little or nothing to the evolution of humankind.

Evolutionary humanism thinks that the human experience of war is valuable and even essential. The movie *The Third Man* takes place in Vienna immediately after the end of the Second World War. Reflecting on the recent conflict, the character Harry Lime says:

“After all, it’s not that awful. . . In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.”

Lime gets almost all his facts wrong—Switzerland was probably the most bloodthirsty corner of early modern Europe (its main export was mercenary soldiers), and the cuckoo clock was actually invented by the Germans—but the facts are of lesser importance than Lime’s idea, namely that the experience of war pushes humankind to new achievements. War allows natural selection free rein at last. It exterminates the weak and rewards the fierce and the ambitious. War exposes the truth about life, and awakens the will for power, for glory and for conquest. Nietzsche summed it up by saying that war is “the school of life” and that “what does not kill me makes me stronger.”

It should be remembered, though, that Hitler and the Nazis represent only one extreme version of evolutionary humanism. Just as Stalin’s gulags do not automatically nullify every socialist idea and argument, so too the horrors of Nazism should not blind us to whatever insights evolutionary humanism might offer. Auschwitz should serve as a blood-red warning sign rather than as a black curtain that hides entire sections of the human horizon. Evolutionary humanism played an important part in the shaping of modern culture, and it is likely to play an even greater role in the shaping of the twenty-first century.

Whereas liberals tiptoe around the minefield of cultural comparisons, fearful of committing some politically incorrect faux pas, and whereas authoritarian socialists leave it to the party to find the right path through the minefield, evolutionary humanists gleefully jump right in, setting off all the mines and relishing the mayhem. They may start by pointing out that both liberals and socialists draw the line at other animals, and have no trouble admitting that humans are superior to wolves, and that consequently

human music is far more valuable than wolf howls. Yet humankind itself is not exempt from the forces of evolution. Just as humans are superior to wolves, so some human cultures are more advanced than others. There is an unambiguous hierarchy of human experiences, and we shouldn't be apologetic about it. The Taj Mahal is more beautiful than a straw hut, Michelangelo's David is superior to my five-year-old niece's latest clay figurine, and Beethoven composed far better music than Chuck Berry or the Congolese pygmies. There, we've said it! According to evolutionary humanists, anyone arguing that all human experiences are equally valuable is either an imbecile or a coward. Such vulgarity and timidity will lead only to the degeneration and extinction of humankind, as human progress is impeded in the name of cultural relativism or social equality. If liberals or socialists had lived in the Stone Age, they would probably have seen little merit in the murals of Lascaux and Altamira, and would have insisted that they are in no way superior to Neanderthal doodles.

Socialists argued that liberalism is in fact a fig leaf for a ruthless, exploitative, and racist system. For vaunted 'liberty,' read 'property.' The defense of the individual's right to do what feels good amounts in most cases to safeguarding the property and privileges of the middle and upper classes. What good is the liberty to live where you want, when you cannot pay the rent; to study what interests you, when you cannot afford the tuition fees; and to travel where you fancy, when you cannot buy a car? Under liberalism, went a famous quip, everyone is free to starve. Even worse, by encouraging people to view themselves as isolated individuals, liberalism separates them from their other class members, and prevents them from uniting against the system that oppresses them. Liberalism thereby perpetuates inequality, condemning the masses to poverty and the elite to alienation.

Racists and fascists blamed both liberalism and socialism for subverting natural selection and causing the degeneration of humankind. They warned that if all humans were given equal value and equal breeding opportunities, natural selection would cease to function. The fittest humans would be submerged in an ocean of mediocrity, and instead of evolving into superman, humankind would become extinct.

As decades passed after World War II liberal democracy increasingly looked like an exclusive club for aging white imperialists, who had little to offer the rest of the world, or even their own youth. Washington presented itself as the leader of the free world, but most of its allies were either authoritarian kings (such as King Khaled of Saudi Arabia, King Hassan of Morocco, and the Persian shah) or military dictators (such as the Greek colonels, General Pinochet in Chile, General Franco in Spain, General Park in South Korea, General Geisel in Brazil, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-

shek in Taiwan). Despite the support of all these colonels and generals, militarily the Warsaw Pact had a huge numerical superiority over NATO. In order to reach parity in conventional armament, Western countries would probably have had to scrap liberal democracy and the free market, and become totalitarian states on a permanent war footing. Liberal democracy was saved only by nuclear weapons. NATO adopted the doctrine of MAD (mutual assured destruction), according to which even conventional Soviet attacks would be answered by an all-out nuclear strike. ‘If you attack us,’ threatened the liberals, ‘we will make sure nobody comes out of it alive.’ Behind this monstrous shield, liberal democracy and the free market managed to hold out in their last bastions, and Westerners could enjoy sex, drugs, and rock and roll, as well as washing machines, refrigerators, and televisions. Without nukes, there would have been no Woodstock, no Beatles, and no overflowing supermarkets. But in the mid-1970s it seemed that nuclear weapons notwithstanding, the future belonged to socialism.

If a liberal had fallen asleep in June 1914 and woken up in June 2014, he or she would have felt very much at home. Once again people believe that if you just give individuals more freedom, the world will enjoy peace and prosperity. The entire twentieth century looks like a big mistake. Humankind was speeding on the liberal highway back in the summer of 1914, when it took a wrong turn and entered a cul-de-sac. It then needed eight decades and three horrendous global wars to find its way back to the highway. Of course, these decades were not a total waste, as they did give us antibiotics, nuclear energy, and computers, as well as feminism, de-colonialism, and free sex. In addition, liberalism itself smarted from the experience, and is less conceited than it was a century ago. It has adopted various ideas and institutions from its socialist and fascist rivals, in particular a commitment to provide the general public with education, health, and welfare services. Yet the core liberal package has changed surprisingly little. Liberalism still sanctifies individual liberties above all, and still has a firm belief in the voter and the customer. In the early twenty-first century, this is the only show in town.

There is no serious alternative to the liberal package of individualism, human rights, democracy, and a free market. The social protests that swept the Western world in 2011—such as Occupy Wall Street and the Spanish 15-M movement—have absolutely nothing against democracy, individualism, and human rights, or even against the basic principles of free-market economics. Just the opposite—they take governments to task for not living up to these liberal ideals. They demand that the market be really free, instead of being controlled and manipulated by corporations and banks “too big to fail.” They call for truly representative democratic institutions,

which will serve the interests of ordinary citizens rather than of moneyed lobbyists and powerful interest groups. Even those blasting stock exchanges and parliaments with the harshest criticism don't have a viable alternative model for running the world. While it is a favourite pastime of Western academics and activists to find fault with the liberal package, they have so far failed to come up with anything better.

Whereas the Chinese don't know what they believe, religious fundamentalists know it only too well. More than a century after Nietzsche pronounced Him dead, God seems to be making a comeback. But this is a mirage. God is dead—it just takes a while to get rid of the body. Radical Islam poses no serious threat to the liberal package, because for all their fervour, the zealots don't really understand the world of the twenty-first century, and have nothing relevant to say about the novel dangers and opportunities that new technologies are generating all around us. Religions that lose touch with the technological realities of the day lose their ability even to understand the questions being asked.

Why did Marx and Lenin succeed where Hong and the Mahdi failed? Not because socialist humanism was philosophically more sophisticated than Islamic and Christian theology, but rather because Marx and Lenin devoted more attention to understanding the technological and economic realities of their time than to perusing ancient texts and prophetic dreams. Steam engines, railroads, telegraphs, and electricity created unheard-of problems as well as unprecedented opportunities. The experiences, needs, and hopes of the new class of urban proletariats were simply too different from those of biblical peasants. To answer these needs and hopes, Marx and Lenin studied how a steam engine functions, how a coal mine operates, how railroads shape the economy, and how electricity influences politics. Lenin was once asked to define communism in a single sentence:

“Communism is power to worker councils plus electrification of the whole country.”

There can be no communism without electricity, without railroads, without radio. You couldn't establish a communist regime in sixteenth-century Russia, because communism necessitates the concentration of information and resources in one hub. “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” only works when produce can easily be collected and distributed across vast distances, and when activities can be monitored and coordinated over entire countries.

Marx and his followers understood the new technological realities and the new human experiences, so they had relevant answers to the new problems

of industrial society, as well as original ideas about how to benefit from the unprecedented opportunities. The socialists created a brave new religion for a brave new world. They promised salvation through technology and economics, thus establishing the first techno-religion in history, and changing the foundations of ideological discourse. Before Marx, people defined and divided themselves according to their views about God, not about production methods. Since Marx, questions of technology and economic structure became far more important and divisive than debates about the soul and the afterlife. In the second half of the twentieth century, humankind almost obliterated itself in an argument about production methods. Even the harshest critics of Marx and Lenin adopted their basic attitude towards history and society, and began thinking about technology and production much more carefully than about God and heaven.

Socialism, which was very up to date a hundred years ago, failed to keep up with the new technology. Leonid Brezhnev and Fidel Castro held on to ideas that Marx and Lenin formulated in the age of steam, and did not understand the power of computers and biotechnology. Liberals, in contrast, adapted far better to the information age. This partly explains why Khrushchev's 1956 prediction never materialized, and why it was the liberal capitalists who eventually buried the Marxists. If Marx came back to life today, he would probably urge his few remaining disciples to devote less time to reading *Das Kapital* and more time to studying the Internet and the human genome.

Islam, Christianity, and other traditional religions are still important players in the world. Yet their role is now largely reactive. In the past, they were a creative force. Christianity, for example, spread the hitherto heretical idea that all humans are equal before God, thereby changing human political structures, social hierarchies, and even gender relations. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus went further, insisting that the meek and oppressed are God's favourite people, thus turning the pyramid of power on its head, and providing ammunition for generations of revolutionaries. In addition to social and ethical reforms, Christianity was responsible for important economic and technological innovations. The Catholic Church established medieval Europe's most sophisticated administrative system, and pioneered the use of archives, catalogues, timetables, and other techniques of data processing. The Vatican was the closest thing twelfth-century Europe had to Silicon Valley. The Church established Europe's first economic corporations—the monasteries—which for 1,000 years spearheaded the European economy and introduced advanced agricultural and administrative methods. Monasteries were the first institutions to use clocks, and for centuries they and the cathedral schools were the most important learning centres of Europe, helping

to found many of Europe's first universities, such as Bologna, Oxford, and Salamanca.

Today the Catholic Church continues to enjoy the loyalties and tithes of hundreds of millions of followers—and the mouths, hands, and anuses of a few altar boys. Yet it and the other theist religions have long since turned from a creative into a reactive force. They are busy with rearguard holding operations more than with pioneering novel technologies, innovative economic methods, or groundbreaking social ideas. They now mostly agonize over the technologies, methods, and ideas propagated by other movements. Biologists invent the contraceptive pill—and the Pope doesn't know what to do about it. Computer scientists develop the Internet—and rabbis argue whether orthodox Jews should be allowed to surf it. Feminist thinkers call upon women to take possession of their bodies—and learned muftis debate how to confront such incendiary ideas.

Billions of people, including many scientists, continue to use religious scriptures as a source of authority, but these texts are no longer a source of creativity. Think, for example, about the acceptance of gay marriage or female clergy by the more progressive branches of Christianity. Where did this acceptance originate? Not from reading the Bible, St. Augustine, or Martin Luther. Rather, it came from reading texts like Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* or Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto." Yet Christian true-believers—however progressive—cannot admit to drawing their ethics from Foucault and Haraway. So they go back to the Bible, to St. Augustine, and to Martin Luther, and make a very thorough search. They read page after page and story after story with the utmost attention, until they find what they need: some maxim, parable, or ruling that if interpreted creatively enough means that God blesses gay marriages and that women can be ordained to the priesthood. They then pretend the idea originated in the Bible, when in fact it originated with Foucault. The Bible is kept as a source of authority, even though it is no longer a true source of inspiration. That's why traditional religions offer no real alternative to liberalism. Their scriptures don't have anything to say about genetic engineering or artificial intelligence, and most priests, rabbis, and muftis don't understand the latest breakthroughs in biology and computer science. For if you want to understand these breakthroughs, you don't have much choice—you need to spend time reading scientific articles and conducting lab experiments instead of memorizing and debating ancient texts.

The humanist belief in feelings has enabled us to benefit from the fruits of the modern covenant without paying its price. We don't need any gods to limit our power and give us meaning—the free choices of customers and voters supply us with all the meaning we require. What, then, will happen

once we realize that customers and voters never make free choices, and once we have the technology to calculate, design, or outsmart their feelings? If the whole universe is pegged to the human experience, what will happen once the human experience becomes just another designable product, no different in essence from any other item in the supermarket?

Free will can take us far but it cannot carry us infinitely beyond our genetic limits. Bill Gates is never going to be Bill Clinton, no matter how he polishes his social skills, and Bill Clinton can never be Bill Gates, no matter how much time he spends alone with a computer. We might call this the ‘rubber band theory’ of personality. We are like rubber bands at rest. We are elastic and can stretch ourselves, but only so much.

Just as evolution cannot be squared with eternal souls, neither can it swallow the idea of free will. For if humans are free, how could natural selection have shaped them? According to the theory of evolution, all the choices animals make—whether of residence, food, or mates—reflect their genetic code. If, thanks to its fit genes, an animal chooses to eat a nutritious mushroom and copulate with healthy and fertile mates, these genes pass on to the next generation. If, because of unfit genes, an animal chooses poisonous mushrooms and anemic mates, these genes become extinct. However, if an animal freely chooses what to eat and with whom to mate, then natural selection is left with nothing to work on. When confronted with such scientific explanations, people often brush them aside, pointing out that they feel free, and that they act according to their own wishes and decisions. This is true. Humans act according to their desires. If by ‘free will’ you mean the ability to act according to your desires—then yes, humans have free will, and so do chimpanzees, dogs, and parrots. When Polly wants a cracker, Polly eats a cracker.

But the million dollar question is not whether parrots and humans can act out their inner desires—the question is whether they can choose their desires in the first place. Why does Polly want a cracker rather than a cucumber? Why do I decide to kill my annoying neighbour instead of turning the other cheek? Why do I want to buy the red car rather than the black? Why do I prefer voting for the Conservatives rather than the Labour Party? I don’t choose any of these wishes. I feel a particular wish welling up within me because this is the feeling created by the biochemical processes in my brain. These processes might be deterministic or random, but not free. You might reply that at least in the case of major decisions such as murdering a neighbour or electing a government, my choice does not reflect a momentary feeling, but a long and reasoned contemplation of weighty arguments. However, there are many possible trains of arguments I could follow, some of which will cause me to vote Conservative, others to vote

Labour, and still others to vote UKIP or just stay at home. What makes me board one train of reasoning rather than another? In the Paddington of my brain, I may be compelled to get on a particular train of reasoning by deterministic processes, or I may embark at random. But I don't freely choose to think those thoughts that will make me vote Conservative.

Today we can use brain scanners to predict people's desires and decisions well before they are aware of them. In one kind of experiment, people are placed within a huge brain scanner, holding a switch in each hand. They are asked to press one of the two switches whenever they feel like it. Scientists observing neural activity in the brain can predict which switch the person will press well before the person actually does so. The decision to press either the right or left switch certainly reflected the person's choice. Yet it wasn't a free choice. In fact, our belief in free will results from faulty logic. When a biochemical chain reaction makes me desire to press the right switch, I feel that I really want to press the right switch. And this is true. I really want to press it. Yet people erroneously jump to the conclusion that if I want to press it, I choose to want to. This is of course false. I don't choose my desires. I only feel them, and act accordingly.

Once we accept that there is no soul, and that humans have no inner essence called 'the self,' it no longer makes sense to ask, 'How does the self choose its desires?' It's like asking a bachelor, 'How does your wife choose her clothes?' In reality, there is only a stream of consciousness, and desires arise and pass within this stream, but there is no permanent self who owns the desires, hence it is meaningless to ask whether I choose my desires deterministically, randomly, or freely. It may sound extremely complicated, but it is surprisingly easy to test this idea. Next time a thought pops up in your mind, stop and ask yourself: 'Why did I think this particular thought? Did I decide a minute ago to think this thought, and only then did I think it? Or did it just arise in my mind, without my permission or instruction? If I am indeed the master of my thoughts and decisions, can I decide not to think about anything at all for the next sixty seconds?' Just try, and see what happens.

If organisms indeed lack free will, it implies we could manipulate and even control their desires using drugs, genetic engineering, or direct brain stimulation. If you want to see philosophy in action, pay a visit to a robo-rat laboratory. A robo-rat is a run-of-the-mill rat with a twist: ~~scientists~~ socially-accepted animal abusers have implanted electrodes into the sensory and reward areas in the rat's brain. This enables the assholes to maneuver the rat by remote control. After short training sessions, researchers have managed not only to make the rats turn left or right, but also to climb ladders, sniff around garbage piles, and do things that rats normally dislike,

such as jumping from great heights. Armies and corporations show keen interest in the robo-rats, hoping they could prove useful in many tasks and situations. For example, robo-rats could help detect survivors trapped under collapsed buildings, locate bombs and booby traps, and map underground tunnels and caves.

Animal-welfare activists have voiced concern about the suffering such experiments inflict on the rats. One of the leading robo-rat researchers, has dismissed these concerns, arguing that the rats actually enjoy the experiments. After all, the rats “work for pleasure” and when the electrodes stimulate the reward centre in their brain, “the rat feels Nirvana.” To the best of our understanding, the rat doesn’t feel that somebody else controls her, and she doesn’t feel that she is being coerced to do something against her will. When the button is pressed, the rat wants to move to the left, which is why she moves to the left. When another switch is pressed, the rat wants to climb a ladder, which is why she climbs the ladder. After all, the rat’s desires are nothing but a pattern of firing neurons. What does it matter whether the neurons are firing because they are stimulated by other neurons, or because they are stimulated by transplanted electrodes connected to a remote control? If you asked the rat about it, she might well have told you, ‘Sure I have free will! Look, I want to turn left—and I turn left. I want to climb a ladder—and I climb a ladder. Doesn’t that prove that I have free will?’

A less invasive, similar technology does exist. It is called transcranial stimulation. A journalist was allowed to visit a training facility for snipers and test the effects of transcranial stimulation herself. At first, she entered a battlefield simulator without wearing the transcranial helmet. She describes how fear swept over her as she saw twenty masked men, strapped with suicide bombs and armed with rifles, charge straight towards her.

“For every one I manage to shoot dead, three new assailants pop up from nowhere. I’m clearly not shooting fast enough, and panic and incompetence are making me continually jam my rifle.”

Luckily for her, the assailants were just video images, projected on huge screens all around her. Still, she was so disappointed with her poor performance that she felt like putting down the rifle and leaving the simulator. Then they wired her up to the helmet. She reports feeling nothing unusual, except a slight tingle and a strange metallic taste in her mouth. Yet she began picking off the terrorists one by one, as coolly and methodically as if she were Rambo or Clint Eastwood.

“As twenty of them run at me brandishing their guns, I calmly line up my rifle, take a moment to breathe deeply, and pick off the closest one, before tranquilly assessing my next target. In what seems like next to no time, I hear a voice call out, ‘Okay, that’s it.’ The lights come up in the simulation room. In the sudden quiet amid the bodies around me, I was really expecting more assailants, and I’m a bit disappointed when the team begins to remove my electrodes. I look up and wonder if someone wound the clocks forward. Inexplicably, twenty minutes have just passed. ‘How many did I get?’ I ask the assistant. She looks at me quizzically. ‘All of them.’”

The experiment changed her life. In the following days she described what she had been through:

“It was a near-spiritual experience. What defined the experience was not feeling smarter or learning faster: the thing that made the earth drop out from under my feet was that for the first time in my life, everything in my head finally shut up. My brain without self-doubt was a revelation. There was suddenly this incredible silence in my head. I hope you can sympathize with me when I tell you that the thing I wanted most acutely for the weeks following my experience was to go back and strap on those electrodes. I also started to have a lot of questions. Who was I apart from the angry bitter gnomes that populate my mind and drive me to failure because I’m too scared to try? And where did those voices come from?”

Some of those voices repeat society’s prejudices, some echo our personal history, and some articulate our genetic legacy. All of them together create an invisible story that shapes our conscious decisions in ways we seldom grasp. What would happen if we could rewrite our inner monologues, or even silence them completely on occasion?

Many breakthroughs in understanding the relations between the two hemispheres of the brain were based on the study of epilepsy patients. In severe cases of epilepsy, electrical storms begin in one part of the brain but quickly spread to other parts, causing a very acute seizure. During such seizures patients lose control of their body, and frequent seizures consequently prevent patients from holding a job or leading a normal lifestyle. In the mid-twentieth century, when all other treatments failed, doctors alleviated the problem by cutting the thick neural cable connecting the two hemispheres, so that electrical storms beginning in one hemisphere could not spill over to

the other. For brain scientists these patients were a gold-mine of astounding data.

Some of the most notable studies on these split-brain patients were conducted by Roger Wolcott Sperry, who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine for his groundbreaking discoveries, and by his student, Michael S. Gazzaniga. One study was conducted on a teenage boy. The boy was asked what he would like to do when he grew up. The boy answered that he wanted to be a draughtsman. This answer was provided by the left hemisphere, which plays a crucial part in logical reasoning as well as in speech. Yet the boy had another active speech centre in his right hemisphere, which could not control vocal language, but could spell words using Scrabble tiles. The researchers were keen to know what the right hemisphere would say. So they spread Scrabble tiles on the table, and then took a piece of paper and wrote on it: “What would you like to do when you grow up?” They placed the paper at the edge of the boy’s left visual field. Data from the left visual field is processed in the right hemisphere. Since the right hemisphere could not use vocal language, the boy said nothing. But his left hand began moving rapidly across the table, collecting tiles from here and there. It spelled out: “automobile race.” Equally eerie behaviour was displayed by patient WJ, a Second World War veteran. WJ’s hands were each controlled by a different hemisphere. Since the two hemispheres were out of touch with one another, it sometimes happened that his right hand would reach out to open a door, and then his left hand would intervene and try to slam the door shut.

In another experiment, Gazzaniga and his team flashed a picture of a chicken claw to the left-half brain—the side responsible for speech—and simultaneously flashed a picture of a snowy landscape to the right brain. When asked what they saw, patients invariably answered “a chicken claw.” Gazzaniga then presented one patient, PS, with a series of picture cards and asked him to point to the one that best matched what he had seen. The patient’s right hand (controlled by his left brain) pointed to a picture of a chicken, but simultaneously his left hand shot out and pointed to a snow shovel. Gazzaniga then asked PS the million dollar question:

“Why did you point both to the chicken and to the shovel?”

PS replied:

“Oh, the chicken claw goes with the chicken, and you need a shovel to clean out the chicken shed.”

What happened here? The left brain, which controls speech, had no data about the snow scene, and therefore did not really know why the left

hand pointed to the shovel. So it just invented something credible. After repeating this experiment many times, Gazzaniga concluded that the left hemisphere of the brain is the seat not only of our verbal abilities, but also of an internal interpreter that constantly tries to make sense of our life, using partial clues in order to concoct plausible stories.

It's as if the CIA conducts a drone strike in Pakistan, unbeknownst to the US State Department. When a journalist grills State Department officials about it, they make up some plausible explanation. In reality, the spin doctors don't have a clue why the strike was ordered, so they just invent something. A similar mechanism is employed by all human beings, not just by split-brain patients. Again and again my own private CIA does things without the approval or knowledge of my State Department, and then my State Department cooks up a story that presents me in the best possible light. Often enough, the State Department itself becomes convinced of the pure fantasies it has invented.

In one experiment, researchers asked a group of volunteers to join a three-part experiment. In the "short" part of the experiment, the volunteers inserted one hand into a container filled with water at 14°C for one minute, which is unpleasant, bordering on painful. After sixty seconds, they were told to take their hand out. In the "long" part of the experiment, volunteers placed their other hand in another water container. The temperature there was also 14°C, but after sixty seconds, hot water was secretly added into the container, bringing the temperature up to 15°C. Thirty seconds later, they were told to pull out their hand. Some volunteers did the 'short' part first, while others began with the 'long' part. In either case, exactly seven minutes after both parts were over came the third and most important part of the experiment. The volunteers were told they must repeat one of the two parts, and it was up to them to choose which; 80 percent preferred to repeat the 'long' experiment, remembering it as less painful.

The cold-water experiment is so simple, yet its implications shake the core of the liberal world view. It exposes the existence of at least two different selves within us: the experiencing self and the narrating self. The experiencing self is our moment-to-moment consciousness. For the experiencing self, it's obvious that the 'long' part of the cold-water experiment was worse. First you experience water at 14°C for sixty seconds, which is every bit as bad as what you experience in the 'short' part, and then you must endure another thirty seconds of water at 15°C, which is not quite as bad, but still far from pleasant. For the experiencing self, it is impossible that adding a slightly unpleasant experience to a very unpleasant experience will make the entire episode more appealing. However, the experiencing self remembers nothing. It tells no stories, and is seldom consulted when it

comes to big decisions.

Retrieving memories, telling stories and making big decisions are all the monopoly of a very different entity inside us: the narrating self. The narrating self is akin to Gazzaniga's left-brain interpreter. It is forever busy spinning yarns about the past and making plans for the future. Like every journalist, poet, and politician, the narrating self takes many short cuts. It doesn't narrate everything, and usually weaves the story only from peak moments and end results. The value of the whole experience is determined by averaging peaks with ends. For example, in the short part of the cold-water experiment, the narrating self finds the average between the worst part (the water was very cold) and the last moment (the water was still very cold) and concludes that 'the water was very cold.' The narrating self does the same thing with the long part of the experiment. It finds the average between the worst part (the water was very cold) and the last moment (the water was not so cold) and concludes that 'the water was somewhat warmer'. Crucially, the narrating self is duration-blind, giving no importance to the differing lengths of the two parts. So when it has a choice between the two, it prefers to repeat the long part, the one in which 'the water was somewhat warmer'.

Every time the narrating self evaluates our experiences, it discounts their duration, and adopts the peak-end rule—it remembers only the peak moment and the end moment, and evaluates the whole experience according to their average. This has far-reaching impact on all our practical decisions.

Pediatricians know this trick well. So do vets. Many keep in their clinics jars full of treats, and hand a few to the kids (or dogs) after giving them a painful injection or an unpleasant medical examination. When the narrating self remembers the visit to the doctor, ten seconds of pleasure at the end of the visit will erase many minutes of anxiety and pain. Evolution discovered this trick eons before the pediatricians. Given the unbearable torments women undergo at childbirth, you might think that after going through it once, no sane woman would ever agree to do it again. However, at the end of labour and in the following days the hormonal system secretes cortisol and beta-endorphins, which reduce the pain and create a feeling of relief and sometimes even of elation. Moreover, the growing love towards the baby, and the acclaim from friends, family members, religious dogmas, and nationalist propaganda, conspire to turn childbirth from a terrible trauma into a positive memory.

Most of our critical life choices—of partners, careers, residences, and holidays—are taken by our narrating self. Suppose you can choose between two potential holidays. You can go to Jamestown, Virginia, and visit the historic colonial town where the first English settlement on mainland North

America was founded in 1607. Alternatively, you can realize your number one dream vacation, whether it is trekking in Alaska, sunbathing in Florida, or having an unbridled bacchanalia of sex, drugs, and gambling in Las Vegas. But there is a caveat: if you choose your dream vacation, then just before you board the plane home, you must take a pill which will wipe out all your memories of that vacation. What happened in Vegas will forever remain in Vegas. Which holiday would you choose?

Most people would opt for colonial Jamestown, because most people give their credit card to the narrating self, which cares only about stories and has zero interest in even the most mind-blowing experiences if it cannot remember them. Truth be told, the experiencing self and the narrating self are not completely separate entities but are closely intertwined. The narrating self uses our experiences as important (but not exclusive) raw materials for its stories. These stories, in turn, shape what the experiencing self actually feels. We experience hunger differently when we fast on Ramadan, when we fast in preparation for a medical examination, and when we don't eat because we have no money. The different meanings ascribed to our hunger by the narrating self create very different actual experiences. Furthermore, the experiencing self is often strong enough to sabotage the best-laid plans of the narrating self. For example, I can make a New Year resolution to start a diet and go to the gym every day. Such grand decisions are the monopoly of the narrating self. But the following week when it's gym time, the experiencing self takes over. I don't feel like going to the gym, and instead I order pizza, sit on the sofa, and turn on the TV.

Nevertheless, most people identify with their narrating self. When they say 'I' they mean the story in their head, not the stream of experiences they undergo. We identify with the inner system that takes the crazy chaos of life and spins out of it seemingly logical and consistent yarns. It doesn't matter that the plot is full of lies and gaps, and that it is rewritten again and again, so that today's story flatly contradicts yesterday's; the important thing is that we always retain the feeling that we have a single unchanging identity from birth to death (and perhaps even beyond the grave). This gives rise to the questionable liberal belief that I am an individual, and that I possess a consistent and clear inner voice, which provides meaning for the entire universe.

The narrating self is the star of Jorge Luis Borges's story "A Problem." The story deals with Don Quixote, the eponymous hero of Miguel Cervantes's famous novel. Don Quixote creates for himself an imaginary world in which he is a legendary champion going forth to fight giants and save Lady Dulcinea del Toboso. In reality, Don Quixote is Alonso Quixano, an elderly country gentleman; the noble Dulcinea is an uncouth farm girl from a nearby village;

and the giants are windmills. What would happen, wonders Borges, if out of his belief in these fantasies, Don Quixote attacks and kills a real person? Borges asks a fundamental question about the human condition: what happens when the yarns spun by our narrating self cause great harm to ourselves or those around us?

There are three main possibilities, says Borges. One option is that nothing much happens. Don Quixote will not be bothered at all by killing a real man. His delusions are so overpowering that he could not tell the difference between this incident and his imaginary duel with the windmill giants. Another option is that once he takes a real life, Don Quixote will be so horrified that he will be shaken out of his delusions. This is akin to a young recruit who goes to war believing that it is good to die for one's country, only to be completely disillusioned by the realities of warfare. And there is a third option, much more complex and profound. As long as he fought imaginary giants, Don Quixote was just play-acting, but once he actually kills somebody, he will cling to his fantasies for all he is worth, because they are the only thing giving meaning to his terrible crime. Paradoxically, the more sacrifices we make for an imaginary story, the stronger the story becomes, because we desperately want to give meaning to these sacrifices and to the suffering we have caused.

While it's hard for a politician to tell parents that their son died for no good reason, it is far more difficult for parents to say this to themselves—and it is even harder for the victims. A crippled soldier who lost his legs would rather tell himself, 'I sacrificed myself for the glory of the eternal Italian nation!' than 'I lost my legs because I was stupid enough to believe self-serving politicians.' It is much easier to live with the fantasy, because the fantasy gives meaning to the suffering. Priests discovered this principle thousands of years ago. It underlies numerous religious ceremonies and commandments. If you want to make people believe in imaginary entities such as gods and nations, you should make them sacrifice something valuable. The more painful the sacrifice, the more convinced people are of the existence of the imaginary recipient. A poor peasant sacrificing a priceless bull to Jupiter will become convinced that Jupiter really exists, otherwise how can he excuse his stupidity? The peasant will sacrifice another bull, and another, and another, just so he won't have to admit that all the previous bulls were wasted. For exactly the same reason, if I have sacrificed a child to the glory of the Italian nation, or my legs to the communist revolution, it's enough to turn me into a zealous Italian nationalist or an enthusiastic communist. For if Italian national myths or communist propaganda are a lie, then I will be forced to admit that my child's death or my own paralysis have been completely pointless. Few people have the stomach to admit such a thing.

The narrating self would much prefer to go on suffering in the future, just so it won't have to admit that our past suffering was devoid of all meaning. Eventually, if we want to come clean about past mistakes, our narrating self must invent some twist in the plot that will infuse these mistakes with meaning. For example, a pacifist war veteran may tell himself, 'Yes, I've lost my legs because of a mistake. But thanks to this mistake, I understand that war is hell, and from now onwards I will dedicate my life to fight for peace. So my injury did have some positive meaning: it taught me to value peace.'

We see, then, that the self too is an imaginary story, just like nations, gods, and money. Each of us has a sophisticated system that throws away most of our experiences, keeps only a few choice samples, mixes them up with bits from movies we saw, novels we read, speeches we heard, and from our own daydreams, and weaves out of all that jumble a seemingly coherent story about who I am, where I came from and where I am going. This story tells me what to love, whom to hate, and what to do with myself. This story may even cause me to sacrifice my life, if that's what the plot requires. We all have our genre. Some people live a tragedy, others inhabit a never-ending religious drama, some approach life as if it were an action film, and not a few act as if in a comedy. But in the end, they are all just stories.

Ayn Rand's Digital Dreamworld

Medieval crusaders believed that God and heaven provided their lives with meaning. Modern liberals believe that individual free choices provide life with meaning. They are all equally delusional.

Liberals uphold free markets and democratic elections because they believe that every human is a uniquely valuable individual, whose free choices are the ultimate source of authority. In the twenty-first century three practical developments might make this belief obsolete:

1. Humans will lose their economic and military usefulness, hence the economic and political system will stop attaching much value to them.
2. The system will still find value in humans collectively, but not in unique individuals.
3. The system will still find value in some unique individuals, but these will be a new elite of upgraded superhumans rather than the mass of the population.

In 1793 the royal houses of Europe sent their armies to strangle the French Revolution in its cradle. The firebrands in Paris reacted by proclaiming the *levée en masse* and unleashing the first total war. On August 23rd, the National Convention decreed:

“From this moment until such time as its enemies shall have been driven from the soil of the Republic, all Frenchmen are in permanent requisition for the services of the armies. The young men shall fight; the married men shall forge arms and transport provisions; the women shall make tents and clothes and shall serve in the hospitals; the children shall turn old lint into linen; and the old men shall betake themselves to the public squares in order to arouse the courage of the warriors and preach hatred of kings and the unity of the Republic.”

If in 2093 the decrepit European Union sends its drones and cyborgs to snuff out a new French Revolution, the Paris Commune might press into service every available hacker, computer, and smartphone, but it will likely have little use for most humans, except perhaps as human shields. It is telling that already today in many asymmetrical conflicts the majority of citizens are reduced to serving as human shields for advanced armaments.

If we think in term of months, we had probably focus on immediate problems such as the turmoil in the Middle East, the refugee crisis in Europe

and the slowing of the Chinese economy. If we think in terms of decades, then global warming, growing inequality and the disruption of the job market loom large. Yet if we take the really grand view of life, all other problems and developments are overshadowed by three interlinked processes:

1. Science is converging on an all-encompassing dogma, which says that organisms are algorithms, and life is data processing.
2. Intelligence is decoupling from consciousness.
3. Non-conscious but highly intelligent algorithms may soon know us better than we know ourselves.

These three processes raise three key questions:

1. Are organisms really just algorithms, and is life really just data processing?
2. What's more valuable—intelligence or consciousness?
3. What will happen to society, politics, and daily life when non-conscious but highly intelligent algorithms know us better than we know ourselves?

Some people argue that even if an algorithm could outperform doctors and pharmacists in the technical aspects of their professions, it could never replace their human touch. If your CT indicates you have cancer, would you like to receive the news from a caring and empathetic human doctor, or from a machine? Well, how about receiving the news from a caring and empathetic machine that tailors its words to your personality type? Remember that organisms are algorithms, and Watson could detect your emotional state with the same accuracy that it detects your tumours. This idea has already been implemented by some customer-services departments, such as those pioneered by the Chicago-based Mattersight Corporation. Mattersight publishes its wares with the following advert:

“Have you ever spoken with someone and felt as though you just clicked? The magical feeling you get is the result of a personality connection. Mattersight creates that feeling every day, in call centers around the world.”

When you call customer services with a request or complaint, it usually takes a few seconds to route your call to a representative. In Mattersight systems, your call is routed by a clever algorithm. You first state the

reason for your call. The algorithm listens to your request, analyses the words you have chosen and your tone of voice, and deduces not only your present emotional state but also your personality type—whether you are introverted, extroverted, rebellious, or dependent. Based on this information, the algorithm links you to the representative that best matches your mood and personality. The algorithm knows whether you need an empathetic person to patiently listen to your complaints, or you prefer a no-nonsense rational type who will give you the quickest technical solution. A good match means both happier customers and less time and money wasted by the customer-service department.

The idea that humans will always have a unique ability beyond the reach of non-conscious algorithms is just wishful thinking. The current scientific answer to this pipe dream can be summarized in three simple principles:

1. Organisms are algorithms. Every animal—including *Homo sapiens*—is an assemblage of organic algorithms shaped by natural selection over millions of years of evolution.
2. Algorithmic calculations are not affected by the materials from which you build the calculator. Whether you build an abacus from wood, iron, or plastic, two beads plus two beads equals four beads.
3. Hence there is no reason to think that organic algorithms can do things that non-organic algorithms will never be able to replicate or surpass. As long as the calculations remain valid, what does it matter whether the algorithms are manifested in carbon or silicon?

In fact, as time goes by, it becomes easier and easier to replace humans with computer algorithms, not merely because the algorithms are getting smarter, but also because humans are professionalizing. Ancient hunter-gatherers mastered a very wide variety of skills in order to survive, which is why it would be immensely difficult to design a robotic hunter-gatherer. Such a robot would have to know how to prepare spear points from flint stones, how to find edible mushrooms in a forest, how to use medicinal herbs to bandage a wound, how to track down a mammoth and how to coordinate a charge with a dozen other hunters. However, over the last few thousand years we humans have been specializing. A taxi driver or a cardiologist specializes in a much narrower niche than a hunter-gatherer, which makes it easier to replace them with AI.

As algorithms push humans out of the job market, wealth might become concentrated in the hands of the tiny elite that owns the all-powerful algorithms, creating unprecedented social inequality. Alternatively, the

algorithms might not only manage businesses, but actually come to own them. At present, human law already recognizes intersubjective entities like corporations and nations as “legal persons.” Though Toyota or Argentina has neither a body nor a mind, they are subject to international laws, they can own land and money, and they can sue and be sued in court. We might soon grant similar status to algorithms. An algorithm could then own a venture-capital fund without having to obey the wishes of any human master. If the algorithm makes the right decisions, it could accumulate a fortune, which it could then invest as it sees fit, perhaps buying your house and becoming your landlord. If you infringe on the algorithm’s legal rights—say, by not paying rent—the algorithm could hire lawyers and sue you in court. If such algorithms consistently outperform human fund managers, we might end up with an algorithmic upper class owning most of our planet. This may sound impossible, but before dismissing the idea, remember that most of our planet is already legally owned by non-human inter-subjective entities, namely nations and corporations. Indeed, 5,000 years ago much of Sumer was owned by imaginary gods such as Enki and Inanna. If gods can possess land and employ people, why not algorithms?

Some experts and thinkers warn that humankind is unlikely to suffer this degradation, because once artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence, it might simply exterminate humankind. The AI is likely to do so either for fear that humankind would turn against it and try to pull its plug, or in pursuit of some unfathomable goal of its own. For it would be extremely difficult for humans to control the motivation of a system smarter than themselves. Even preprogramming the system with seemingly benign goals might backfire horribly. One popular scenario imagines a corporation designing the first artificial super-intelligence, and giving it an innocent test such as calculating pi. Before anyone realizes what is happening, the AI takes over the planet, eliminates the human race, launches a conquest campaign to the ends of the galaxy, and transforms the entire known universe into a giant super-computer that for billions upon billions of years calculates pi ever more accurately. After all, this is the divine mission its Creator gave it.

The liberal belief in individualism is founded on the three important assumptions:

1. I am an individual—I have a single essence which cannot be divided into any parts or subsystems. True, this inner core is wrapped in many outer layers. But if I make the effort to peel these external crusts, I will find deep within myself a clear and single inner voice, which is my authentic self.

2. My authentic self is completely free.
3. It follows from the first two assumptions that I can know things about myself nobody else can discover. For only I have access to my inner space of freedom, and only I can hear the whispers of my authentic self.

This is why liberalism grants the individual so much authority. I cannot trust anyone else to make choices for me, because no one else can know who I really am, how I feel, and what I want. This is why the voter knows best, why the customer is always right, and why beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

However, the life sciences challenge all three assumptions. According to the life sciences:

1. Organisms are algorithms, and humans are not individuals—they are ‘dividuals’—humans are an assemblage of many different algorithms lacking a single inner voice or a single self.
2. The algorithms constituting a human are not free. They are shaped by genes and environmental pressures, and take decisions either deterministically or randomly—but not freely.
3. It follows that an external algorithm could theoretically know me much better than I can ever know myself.

An algorithm that monitors each of the systems that comprise my body and my brain could know exactly who I am, how I feel, and what I want. Once developed, such an algorithm could replace the voter, the customer, and the beholder. Then the algorithm will know best, the algorithm will always be right, and beauty will be in the calculations of the algorithm.

Don’t worry, there’s an app for that. Some people use these apps without thinking too deeply about it, but for others this is already an ideology, if not a religion. The Quantified Self movement argues that the self is nothing but mathematical patterns. These patterns are so complex that the human mind has no chance of understanding them. So if you wish to obey the old adage and know thyself, you should not waste your time on philosophy, meditation, or psychoanalysis, but rather you should systematically collect biometric data and allow algorithms to analyze them for you and tell you who you are and what you should do. The movement’s motto is:

“Self-knowledge through numbers”

People who experience themselves through the unrelenting mediation of such devices may begin to see themselves as a collection of biochemical systems more than as individuals, and their decisions will increasingly reflect the conflicting demands of the various systems. Suppose you have two free hours a week, and you are unsure whether to use them in order to play chess or tennis. A good friend may ask: 'What does your heart tell you?' 'Well,' you answer, 'as far as my heart is concerned, it's obvious tennis is better. It's also better for my cholesterol level and blood pressure. But my fMRI scans indicate I should strengthen my left prefrontal cortex. In my family, dementia is quite common, and my uncle had it at a very early age. The latest studies indicate that a weekly game of chess can help delay the onset of dementia.'

Or, consider AI personal assistants. Users will be encouraged to allow the assistant access to all their files, emails, and applications, so that it will get to know them, and can offer its advice on myriad matters, as well as becoming a virtual agent representing the user's interests. The AI assistant could remind you to buy something for your wife's birthday, select the present, reserve a table at the restaurant, and prompt you to take your medicine an hour before dinner. It could alert you that if you don't stop reading now, you will be late for an important business meeting. As you are about to enter the meeting, your personalized assistant will warn that your blood pressure is too high and your dopamine level too low, and based on past statistics, you tend to make serious business mistakes in such circumstances. So you had better keep things tentative and avoid committing yourself or signing any deals.

Once these AIs evolve from oracles to agents, they might start speaking directly with one another, on their masters' behalf. It can begin innocently enough, with my assistant contacting your assistant to agree on a place and time for a meeting. Next thing I know, a potential employer tells me not to bother sending a CV, but simply allow his AI to grill my AI. Or my assistant may be approached by the assistant of a potential lover, and the two will compare notes to decide whether it's a good match—completely unbeknownst to their human owners. As these types of AI gain authority, they may begin manipulating each other to further the interests of their masters, so that success in the job market or the marriage market may increasingly depend on the quality of your assistant's software. Rich people owning the most up-to-date AIs will have a decisive advantage over poor people with their older versions.

But the murkiest issue of all concerns the identity of your assistant's master. As we have seen, humans are not individuals, and they don't have a single unified self. Whose interests, then, should the AI serve? Suppose

my narrating self makes a New Year resolution to start a diet and go to the gym every day. A week later, when it is time to go to the gym, the experiencing self asks to turn on the TV and order pizza. What should the AI do? Should it obey the experiencing self, or the resolution taken a week ago by the narrating self? You may well ask whether such assistants are really different from an alarm clock, which the narrating self sets in the evening, in order to wake the experiencing self in time for work. But these AIs will have far more power over me than an alarm clock. The experiencing self can silence the alarm clock by pressing a button. In contrast, the AI will know me so well that it will know exactly what inner buttons to push in order to make me follow its advice.

The new technologies of the twenty-first century may thus reverse the humanist revolution, stripping humans of their authority, and empowering non-human algorithms instead. If you are horrified by this direction, don't blame the computer geeks. The responsibility actually lies with the biologists. It is crucial to realize that this entire trend is fueled by biological insights more than by computer science. It is the life sciences that have concluded that organisms are algorithms. If this is not the case—if organisms function in an inherently different way to algorithms—then computers may work wonders in other fields, but they will not be able to understand us and direct our life, and they will certainly be incapable of merging with us. Yet once biologists concluded that organisms are algorithms, they dismantled the wall between the organic and inorganic, turned the computer revolution from a purely mechanical affair into a biological cataclysm, and shifted authority from individual humans to networked algorithms. Some people are indeed horrified by this development, but the fact is that millions willingly embrace it. Already today many of us give up our privacy and our individuality, record our every action, conduct our lives online and become hysterical if connection to the net is interrupted even for a few minutes. The shifting of authority from humans to algorithms is happening all around us, not as a result of some momentous governmental decision, but due to a flood of mundane choices.

Splitting humankind into biological castes will destroy the foundations of liberal ideology. Liberalism can coexist with socioeconomic gaps. Indeed, since it favours liberty over equality, it takes such gaps for granted. However, liberalism still presupposes that all human beings have equal value and authority. From a liberal perspective, it is perfectly all right that one person is a billionaire living in a sumptuous chateau, whereas another is a poor peasant living in a straw hut. For according to liberalism, the peasant's unique experiences are still just as valuable as the billionaire's. That's why liberal authors write long novels about the experiences of poor peasants—and

why even billionaires read such books avidly. If you go to see *Les Misérables* on Broadway, you will find that good seats can cost hundreds of dollars, and the audience's combined wealth probably runs into the billions, yet they still sympathize with Jean Valjean who served nineteen years in jail for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his starving nephews. The same logic operates on election day, when the vote of the poor peasant counts for exactly the same as the billionaire's. The liberal solution for social inequality is to give equal value to different human experiences, instead of trying to create the same experiences for everyone. However, what will be the fate of this solution once rich and poor are separated not merely by wealth, but also by real biological gaps?

The cost of DNA testing is likely to go down with time, but expensive new procedures are constantly being pioneered. So while old treatments will gradually come within reach of the masses, the elites will always remain a couple of steps ahead. Throughout history the rich enjoyed many social and political advantages, but there was never a huge biological gap separating them from the poor. Medieval aristocrats claimed that superior blue blood was flowing through their veins, and Hindu Brahmins insisted that they were naturally smarter than everyone else, but this was pure fiction. In the future, however, we may see real gaps in physical and cognitive abilities opening between an upgraded upper class and the rest of society. When scientists are confronted with this scenario, their standard reply is that in the twentieth century many medical breakthroughs began with the rich, but eventually benefited the whole population and helped to narrow rather than widen the social gaps. For example, vaccines and antibiotics at first profited mainly the upper classes in Western countries, but today they improve the lives of all humans everywhere.

However, the expectation that this process will be repeated in the twenty-first century may be just wishful thinking, for two important reasons. First, medicine is undergoing a tremendous conceptual revolution. Twentieth-century medicine aimed to heal the sick. Twenty-first-century medicine is increasingly aiming to upgrade the healthy. Healing the sick was an egalitarian project, because it assumed that there is a normative standard of physical and mental health that everyone can and should enjoy. If someone fell below the norm, it was the job of doctors to fix the problem and help him or her 'be like everyone.' In contrast, upgrading the healthy is an elitist project, because it rejects the idea of a universal standard applicable to all, and seeks to give some individuals an edge over others. People want superior memories, above-average intelligence, and first-class sexual abilities. If some form of upgrade becomes so cheap and common that everyone enjoys it, it will simply be considered the new baseline, which the next generation of

treatments will strive to surpass.

Second, twentieth-century medicine benefited the masses because the twentieth century was the age of the masses. Twentieth-century armies needed millions of healthy soldiers, and the economy needed millions of healthy workers. Consequently, states established public health services to ensure the health and vigour of everyone. Our greatest medical achievements were the provision of mass-hygiene facilities, the campaigns of mass vaccinations, and the overcoming of mass epidemics. The Japanese elite in 1914 had a vested interest in vaccinating the poor and building hospitals and sewage systems in the slums, because if they wanted Japan to be a strong nation with a strong army and a strong economy, they needed many millions of healthy soldiers and workers. But the age of the masses may be over, and with it the age of mass medicine. As human soldiers and workers give way to algorithms, at least some elites may conclude that there is no point in providing improved or even standard conditions of health for masses of useless poor people, and it is far more sensible to focus on upgrading a handful of superhumans beyond the norm.

Already today, the birth rate is falling in technologically advanced countries such as Japan and South Korea, where prodigious efforts are invested in the upbringing and education of fewer and fewer children—from whom more and more is expected. How could huge developing countries like India, Brazil, or Nigeria hope to compete with Japan? These countries resemble a long train. The elites in the first-class carriages enjoy health care, education, and income levels on a par with the most developed nations in the world. However, the hundreds of millions of ordinary citizens who crowd the third-class carriages still suffer from widespread diseases, ignorance, and poverty. What would the Indian, Brazilian, or Nigerian elites prefer to do in the coming century? Invest in fixing the problems of hundreds of millions of poor, or in upgrading a few million rich? Unlike in the twentieth century, when the elite had a stake in fixing the problems of the poor because they were militarily and economically vital, in the twenty-first century the most efficient (albeit ruthless) strategy may be to let go of the useless third-class carriages, and dash forward with the first class only. In order to compete with Japan, Brazil might need a handful of upgraded superhumans far more than millions of healthy ordinary workers.

The great human projects of the twentieth century—overcoming famine, plague, and war—aimed to safeguard a universal norm of abundance, health, and peace for all people without exception. The new projects of the twenty-first century—gaining immortality, bliss, and divinity—also hope to serve the whole of humankind. However, because these projects aim at surpassing rather than safeguarding the norm, they may well result in the creation of a

new superhuman caste that will abandon its liberal roots and treat normal humans no better than nineteenth-century Europeans treated Africans.

“In the twentieth century we have almost doubled life expectancy from forty to seventy, so in the twenty-first century we should at least be able to double it again to 150. Though falling far short of immortality, this would still revolutionize human society.”

Coming back to the realm of reality, it is far from certain whether Kurzweil's and de Grey's prophecies will come true by 2050 or 2100. My own view is that the hopes of eternal youth in the twenty-first century are premature, and whoever takes them too seriously is in for a bitter disappointment. It is not easy to live knowing that you are going to die, but it is even harder to believe in immortality and be proven wrong. Although average life expectancy has doubled over the last hundred years, it is unwarranted to extrapolate and conclude that we can double it again to 150 in the coming century. In 1900 global life expectancy was no higher than forty because many people died young from malnutrition, infectious diseases, and violence. Yet those who escaped famine, plague, and war could live well into their seventies and eighties, which is the natural life span of *Homo sapiens*. Contrary to common notions, seventy-year-olds weren't considered rare freaks of nature in previous centuries. Galileo Galilei died at seventy-seven, Isaac Newton at eighty-four, and Michelangelo lived to the ripe age of eighty-eight, without any help from antibiotics, vaccinations, or organ transplants. Indeed, even chimpanzees in the jungle sometimes live into their sixties.

In truth, so far modern medicine hasn't extended our natural life span by a single year. Its great achievement has been to save us from premature death, and allow us to enjoy the full measure of our years. Even if we now overcome cancer, diabetes, and the other major killers, it would mean only that almost everyone will get to live to ninety—but it will not be enough to reach 150, let alone 500. For that, medicine will need to re-engineer the most fundamental structures and processes of the human body, and discover how to regenerate organs and tissues. It is by no means clear that we can do that by 2100.

Microorganisms may have four-billion years of cumulative experience fighting organic enemies, but they have exactly zero experience fighting bionic predators, and would therefore find it doubly difficult to evolve effective defenses. So while we cannot be certain that some new Ebola outbreak or an unknown flu strain won't sweep across the globe and kill millions, we

will not regard it as an inevitable natural calamity. Rather, we will see it as an inexcusable human failure and demand the heads of those responsible. When in late summer 2014 it seemed for a few terrifying weeks that Ebola was gaining the upper hand over the global health authorities, investigative committees were hastily set up. An initial report published on October 18, 2014 criticized the World Health Organization for its unsatisfactory reaction to the outbreak, blaming the epidemic on corruption and inefficiency in the WHO's African branch. Further criticism was leveled at the international community as a whole for not responding quickly and forcefully enough. Such criticism assumes that humankind has the knowledge and tools to prevent plagues, and if an epidemic nevertheless gets out of control, it is due to human incompetence rather than divine anger.

So in the struggle against natural calamities such as AIDS and Ebola, some argue the scales are tipping in humanity's favour. But what about the dangers inherent in human nature itself? Biotechnology enables us to defeat bacteria and viruses, but it simultaneously turns humans themselves into an unprecedented threat. The same tools that enable doctors to quickly identify and cure new illnesses may also enable armies and terrorists to engineer even more terrible diseases and doomsday pathogens. It is therefore likely that major epidemics will continue to endanger humankind in the future only if humankind itself creates them, in the service of some ruthless ideology.

“The era when humankind stood helpless before natural epidemics is probably over.”

If so, we may come to miss it.

Despite all the talk of radical Islam and Christian fundamentalism, the most interesting place in the world from a religious perspective is not the Islamic State or the Bible Belt, but Silicon Valley. That's where high-tech gurus are brewing for us brave new religions that have little to do with God, and everything to do with technology. They promise all the old prizes—happiness, peace, prosperity, and even eternal life—but here on earth with the help of technology, rather than after death with the help of celestial beings. These new techno-religions can be divided into two main types:

Data Religion: argues that humans have completed their cosmic task, and they should now pass the torch on to entirely new kinds of entities.

Techno-Humanism: agrees that *Homo sapiens* as we know it has run its historical course and will no longer be relevant in the future, but concludes that we should therefore use technology in order to create *Homo deus*—a much superior human model. *Homo deus* will retain

some essential human features, but will also enjoy upgraded physical and mental abilities that will enable it to hold its own even against the most sophisticated non-conscious algorithms. Since intelligence is decoupling from consciousness, and since non-conscious intelligence is developing at breakneck speed, humans must actively upgrade their minds if they want to stay in the game.

Most scientific research about the human mind and the human experience has been conducted on people from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies, who do not constitute a representative sample of humanity. The study of the human mind has so far assumed that *Homo sapiens* is Homer Simpson. A 2010 study systematically surveyed all the papers published between 2003 and 2007 in leading scientific journals belonging to six different subfields of psychology. The study found that though the papers often make broad claims about the human mind, most of them base their findings on exclusively WEIRD samples. For example, in papers published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*—arguably the most important journal in the subfield of social psychology—96 percent of the sampled individuals were WEIRD, and 68 percent were Americans. Moreover, 67 percent of American subjects and 80 percent of non-American subjects were psychology students! In other words, more than two-thirds of the individuals sampled for papers published in this prestigious journal were psychology students in Western universities. The study's authors half-jokingly suggested that the journal change its name to the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology of American Psychology Students*.

Psychology students star in many of the studies because their professors oblige them to take part in experiments. If I am a psychology professor at Harvard it is much easier for me to conduct experiments on my own students than on the residents of a crime-ridden New York slum—not to mention traveling to Namibia and conducting experiments on hunter-gatherers in the Kalahari Desert. However, it may well be that New York slum-dwellers and Kalahari hunter-gatherers experience mental states which we will never discover by forcing Harvard psychology students to answer long questionnaires or stick their heads into fMRI scanners. Even if we travel all over the globe and study each and every community, we would still cover only a limited part of our mental spectrum. Nowadays, all humans have been touched by modernity, and we are all members of a single global village. Though Kalahari foragers are somewhat less modern than Harvard psychology students, they are not a time capsule from our distant past. They too have been influenced by Christian missionaries, European traders,

wealthy eco-tourists, and inquisitive anthropologists—the joke is that in the Kalahari Desert, the typical hunter-gatherer band consists of twenty hunters, twenty gatherers and fifty anthropologists.

Before the emergence of the global village, the planet was a galaxy of isolated human cultures, which might have fostered mental states that are now extinct. Different socioeconomic realities and daily routines nurtured different states of consciousness. Who could gauge the minds of Stone Age mammoth-hunters, Neolithic farmers, or Kamakura samurais? Moreover, many pre-modern cultures believed in the existence of superior states of consciousness, which people might access using meditation, drugs, or rituals. Shamans, monks, and ascetics systematically explored the mysterious lands of mind, and came back laden with breathtaking stories. They told of unfamiliar states of supreme tranquility, extreme sharpness, and matchless sensitivity. They told of the mind expanding to infinity or dissolving into emptiness. The humanist revolution caused modern Western culture to lose faith and interest in superior mental states, and to sanctify the mundane experiences of the average Joe. Modern Western culture is therefore unique in lacking a special class of people who seek to experience extraordinary mental states. It believes anyone attempting to do so is a drug addict, mental patient, or charlatan. Consequently, though we have a detailed map of the mental landscape of Harvard psychology students, we know far less about the mental landscapes of Native American shamans, Buddhist monks, or Sufi mystics.

Consider the “attention helmet” discussed earlier that turned the reporter into Rambo. Of course sometimes—on the battlefield, for instance—people need to take firm decisions quickly. But there is more to life than that. If we start using the attention helmet in more and more situations, we may end up losing our ability to tolerate confusion, doubts, and contradictions, just as we have lost our ability to smell, dream, and pay attention. The system may push us in that direction, because it usually rewards us for the decisions we make rather than for our doubts. Yet a life of resolute decisions and quick fixes may be poorer and shallower than one of doubts and contradictions. When you mix a practical ability to engineer minds with our ignorance of the mental spectrum and with the narrow interests of governments, armies, and corporations, you get a recipe for trouble. We may successfully upgrade our bodies and our brains, while losing our minds in the process. Indeed, techno-humanism may end up downgrading humans. The system may prefer downgraded humans not because they would possess any superhuman knacks, but because they would lack some really disturbing human qualities that hamper the system and slow it down. As any farmer knows, it’s usually the brightest goat in the herd that stirs up the greatest trouble, which is why

the Agricultural Revolution involved trying to downgrade animal mental abilities. The second cognitive revolution dreamed up by techno-humanists might do the same to us.

According to humanism, only human desires imbue the world with meaning. Yet if we could choose our desires, on what basis could we possibly make such choices? Suppose Romeo and Juliet opened with Romeo having to decide with whom to fall in love. And suppose even after making a decision, Romeo could always retract and make a different choice instead. What kind of play would it have been? Well, that's the play technological progress is trying to produce for us. When our desires make us uncomfortable, technology promises to bail us out. When the nail on which the entire universe hangs is pegged in a problematic spot, technology would pull it out and stick it somewhere else. But where exactly? If I could peg that nail anywhere in the cosmos, where should I peg it, and why there of all places? Humanist dramas unfold when people have uncomfortable desires. For example, it is extremely uncomfortable when Romeo of the house of Montague falls in love with Juliet of the house of Capulet, because the Montagues and Capulets are bitter enemies. The technological solution to such dramas is to make sure we never have uncomfortable desires. How much pain and sorrow would have been avoided if instead of drinking poison, Romeo and Juliet could just take a pill or wear a helmet that would have redirected their star-crossed love towards other people.

Dataism says that the universe consists of data flows, and the value of any phenomenon or entity is determined by its contribution to data processing. This may strike you as some eccentric fringe notion, but in fact it has already conquered most of the scientific establishment. Dataism was born from the explosive confluence of two scientific tidal waves. In the 150 years since Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, the life sciences have come to see organisms as biochemical algorithms. Simultaneously, in the eight decades since Alan Turing formulated the idea of a Turing Machine, computer scientists have learned to engineer increasingly sophisticated electronic algorithms. Dataism puts the two together, pointing out that exactly the same mathematical laws apply to both biochemical and electronic algorithms. Dataism thereby collapses the barrier between animals and machines, and expects electronic algorithms to eventually decipher and outperform biochemical algorithms.

For politicians, business people and ordinary consumers, Dataism offers groundbreaking technologies and immense new powers. For scholars and intellectuals it also promises to provide the scientific holy grail that has eluded us for centuries: a single overarching theory that unifies all the scientific disciplines from literature and musicology to economics and biology.

According to Dataism, King Lear and the flu virus are just two patterns of data flow that can be analyzed using the same basic concepts and tools. This idea is extremely attractive. It gives all scientists a common language, builds bridges over academic rifts, and easily exports insights across disciplinary borders. Musicologists, political scientists, and cell biologists can finally understand each other. In the process, Dataism inverts the traditional pyramid of learning. Hitherto, data was seen as only the first step in a long chain of intellectual activity. Humans were supposed to distill data into information, information into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom. However, Dataists believe that humans can no longer cope with the immense flows of data, hence they cannot distill data into information, let alone into knowledge or wisdom. The work of processing data should therefore be entrusted to electronic algorithms, whose capacity far exceeds that of the human brain. In practice, this means that Dataists are skeptical about human knowledge and wisdom, and prefer to put their trust in Big Data and computer algorithms.

It was the biological embracement of Dataism that turned a limited breakthrough in computer science into a world-shattering cataclysm that may completely transform the very nature of life. You may not agree with the idea that organisms are algorithms, and that giraffes, tomatoes, and human beings are just different methods for processing data. But you should know that this is current scientific dogma, and that it is changing our world beyond recognition.

Laypeople believe that the economy consists of peasants growing wheat, workers manufacturing clothes, and customers buying bread and underpants. Yet experts see the economy as a mechanism for gathering data about desires and abilities, and turning this data into decisions. According to this view, free-market capitalism and state-controlled communism aren't competing ideologies, ethical creeds, or political institutions. At bottom, they are competing data-processing systems. Capitalism uses distributed processing, whereas communism relies on centralized processing. Capitalism processes data by directly connecting all producers and consumers to one another, and allowing them to exchange information freely and make decisions independently. For example, how do you determine the price of bread in a free market? Well, every bakery may produce as much bread as it likes, and charge for it as much as it wants. The customers are equally free to buy as much bread as they can afford, or take their business to the competitor. It isn't illegal to charge \$1,000 for a baguette, but nobody is likely to buy it. On a much grander scale, if investors predict increased demand for bread, they will buy shares of biotech firms that genetically engineer more prolific wheat strains. The inflow of capital will enable the firms to speed up their

research, thereby providing more wheat faster, and averting bread shortages. Even if one biotech giant adopts a flawed theory and reaches an impasse, its more successful competitors will achieve the hoped-for breakthrough. Free-market capitalism thus distributes the work of analyzing data and making decisions between many independent but interconnected processors.

“In a system in which the knowledge of the relevant facts is dispersed among many people, prices can act to coordinate the separate actions of different people.”

Capitalism did not defeat communism because capitalism was more ethical, because individual liberties are sacred, or because God was angry with the heathen communists. Rather, capitalism won the Cold War because distributed data processing works better than centralized data processing, at least in periods of accelerating technological changes. The central committee of the Communist Party just could not deal with the rapidly changing world of the late twentieth century. When all data is accumulated in one secret bunker, and all important decisions are taken by a group of elderly apparatchiks, you can produce nuclear bombs by the cartload, but you won't get an Apple or a Wikipedia.

There is a story—probably apocryphal, like most good stories—that when Mikhail Gorbachev tried to resuscitate the moribund Soviet economy, he sent one of his chief aides to London to find out what Thatcherism was all about, and how a capitalist system actually functioned. The hosts took their Soviet visitor on a tour of the City, of the London stock exchange and of the London School of Economics, where he had lengthy talks with bank managers, entrepreneurs, and professors. After a few hours, the Soviet expert burst out: “Just one moment, please. Forget about all these complicated economic theories. We have been going back and forth across London for a whole day now, and there's one thing I cannot understand. Back in Moscow, our finest minds are working on the bread supply system, and yet there are such long queues in every bakery and grocery store. Here in London live millions of people, and we have passed today in front of many shops and supermarkets, yet I haven't seen a single bread queue. Please take me to meet the person in charge of supplying bread to London. I must learn his secret.” The hosts scratched their heads, thought for a moment, and said: “Nobody is in charge of supplying bread to London.”

That's the capitalist secret of success. No central processing unit monopolizes all the data on the London bread supply. The information flows freely between millions of consumers and producers, bakers and tycoons, farmers and scientists. Market forces determine the price of bread, the number

of loaves baked each day and the research-and-development priorities. If market forces make the wrong decision, they soon correct themselves, or so capitalists believe. For our current purposes, it doesn't matter whether the theory is correct. The crucial thing is that the theory understands economics in terms of data processing.

We often imagine that democracy and the free market won because they were 'good.' In truth, they won because they improved the global data-processing system.

In the late twentieth century democracies usually outperformed dictatorships because democracies were better at data-processing. Democracy diffuses the power to process information and make decisions among many people and institutions, whereas dictatorship concentrates information and power in one place. Given twentieth-century technology, it was inefficient to concentrate too much information and power in one place. Nobody had the ability to process all the information fast enough and make the right decisions. Some argue AI or even our current processing capabilities make this no longer true.

At the highest levels of authority, we will probably retain human figureheads, who will give us the illusion that the algorithms are only advisors, and that ultimate authority is still in human hands. We will not appoint an AI to be the chancellor of Germany or the CEO of Google. However, the decisions taken by the chancellor and the CEO will be shaped by AI. The chancellor could still choose between several different options, but all these options will be the outcome of Big Data analysis, and they will reflect the way AI views the world more than the way humans view it. To take an analogous example, today politicians all over the world can choose between several different economic policies, but in almost all cases the various policies on offer reflect a capitalist outlook on economics. The politicians have an illusion of choice, but the really important decisions have already been made much earlier by the economists, bankers, and business people who shaped the different options in the menu. Within a couple of decades, politicians might find themselves choosing from a menu written by AI.

Some people believe that there is somebody in charge after all. Not democratic politicians or autocratic despots, but rather a small coterie of billionaires who secretly run the world. But such conspiracy theories never work, because they underestimate the complexity of the system. A few billionaires smoking cigars and drinking Scotch in some back room cannot possibly understand everything happening on the globe, let alone control it. Ruthless billionaires and small interest groups flourish in today's chaotic world not because they read the map better than anyone else, but because they have very narrow aims. In a chaotic system, tunnel vision has its

advantages, and the billionaires' power is strictly proportional to their goals. If the world's richest man would like to make another billion dollars he could easily game the system in order to achieve his goal. In contrast, if he would like to reduce global inequality or stop global warming, even he won't be able to do it, because the system is far too complex.

A critical examination of the Dataist dogma is likely to be not only the greatest scientific challenge of the twenty-first century, but also the most urgent political and economic project. Scholars in the life sciences and social sciences should ask themselves whether we miss anything when we understand life as data processing and decision-making. Is there perhaps something in the universe that cannot be reduced to data? Suppose non-conscious algorithms could eventually outperform conscious intelligence in all known data-processing tasks—what, if anything, would be lost by replacing conscious intelligence with superior non-conscious algorithms?

Of course, even if Dataism is wrong and organisms aren't just algorithms, it won't necessarily prevent Dataism from taking over the world. Many previous religions gained enormous popularity and power despite their factual mistakes. If Christianity could do it, why not Dataism? Dataism has especially good prospects, because it is currently spreading across all scientific disciplines. A unified scientific paradigm may easily become an unassailable dogma. It is very difficult to contest a scientific paradigm, but up till now, no single paradigm was adopted by the entire scientific establishment. Hence scholars in one field could always import heretical views from outside. But if everyone from musicologists to biologists uses the same Dataist paradigm, interdisciplinary excursions will serve only to strengthen the paradigm further. Consequently even if the paradigm is flawed, it would be extremely difficult to resist it.

“We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

So said Thomas Paine many years ago, neatly summarizing the dream of escaping the past that is at the heart of both the colonial project and the American Dream. The truth, however, is that we do not have this godlike power of reinvention, nor did we ever. We must live with the messes and mistakes we have made, as well as within the limits of what our planet can sustain.

For every conceivable problem, there is a plan, and it's always the same plan: Someone in the future will invent something to solve it.

As much as I'd like to laugh off each and every wild prediction made by the Singularitans, I'm obliged instead to concede that seemingly impossible new technologies will no doubt emerge—either despite the urgent political

and environmental crises facing the world, or in response to them. The scary thing is that some inventions, once unleashed, cannot realistically be controlled. This is why decisions regarding the distribution and development of world-changing technologies cannot be left to the exclusive discretion of a few overconfident rich guys with Stanford pedigrees and a shocking disregard for history, politics, language, and culture, to say nothing of the struggles of the poor. It is no wonder the Singularitan fantasies have captured the imaginations of the world's most zealously self-interested business-people: these visions promise ultimate, permanent power. The stated ambitions of America's tech oligarchs are almost comically solipsistic—endless lifespans, superhuman powers, personal hyperspeed transport. They truly imagine themselves as a superior race. And while it is unlikely that they will attain everything they imagine, it is unfortunately true that this hyper-elite class will reap the benefits of any new technologies society develops, while the costs will fall, as ever, on the rest of us. This will not be a situation without precedent. It's exactly how things were with the rotten kings of yore. But if history teaches us one thing, it's that complex problems often have simple solutions: Off with their heads.

In the twentieth century, industrial civilization depended on the 'barbarians' for cheap labour, raw materials and markets. Therefore it conquered and absorbed them. But in the twenty-first century, a post-industrial civilization relying on AI, bioengineering, and nanotechnology might be far more self-contained and self-sustaining.

If so, Ayn Rand's paradise will have been created while we bickered over scraps and pronouns.

Part V
It's a Trap!

Many's the hour I've lain by my window
And thought of the people who've carried the burdens
Who marched in the strange fields in search of an answer
And ended their journeys an unwilling hero

So, here's a song to those who are gone with never a reason why
And a toast of the wine at the end of the line
And a toll of the bell for the next one to die

Back in the coal fields of old Harlan county
Some talked of a union, some talked of good wages
And they lined them up in the dark of the forests
And shot them down without asking no questions

So, here's a song to those who are gone with never a reason why
And a toast of the wine to the end of the line
And a toll of the bell for the next one to die

And over the ocean, to the red Spanish soil
Came the Lincoln brigade with their dreams of a victory
But they fell in the fire of Germany's bombings
And they fell 'cause nobody would hear their sad warning

So, here's a song to those who are gone with never a reason why
And a toast of the wine at the end of the line
And a toll of the bell for the next one to die

In old Alabama, in old Mississippi
Two states of the union so often found guilty
They came on the buses, they came on the marches
And they lay in the jails or they fell by the highways

So, here's a song to those who are gone with never a reason why
And a toast of the wine at the end of the line
And a toll of the bell for the next one to die

The state it was Texas, the town it was Dallas
In the flash of a rifle a life was soon over
And nobody thought of the past million murders
And the long list of ironies had found a new champion

So, here's a song to those who are gone with never a reason why
And a toast of the wine at the end of the line
And a toll of the bell for the next one to die

Chapter Forty-five

Divide & Conquer

Which Noun Are You?

“I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, that they will be forced to deal with pain.”

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.

Wherever you go
My love is close beside you
Wherever I go
You're with me
Whoever we are
We're never far apart
Cause we're so much a part of each other

“You think you're so clever and classless and free but you're still fucking peasants as far as I can see”

Socially Liberal, Fiscally Conservative: Those who have internalized the social values of the sixties counterculture, but have come to view the economy with the eyes of investors.

I am somehow less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops.

I'm not a pawn in some shithead's game of Risk.

Ever since the French Revolution, people throughout the world have gradually come to see both equality and individual freedom as fundamental values. Yet the two values contradict each other. Equality can be ensured only by curtailing the freedoms of those who are better off. Guaranteeing that every individual will be free to do as he wishes inevitably short-changes equality. The entire political history of the world since 1789 can be seen as a series of attempts to reconcile this contradiction.

“There is no unqualified ‘we’ at a demonstration nor anywhere else. To uncritically use ‘we’ without thinking about how different the people present truly are is to level or flatten the real differences that exist between ‘us,’ and produce a group that can only be unified on the basis of its most common features (being human, being present at that demonstration). This erases experiences and over-simplifies the problems that brought people out in the first place. This ‘we’ is not a concrete or already existing group, it is an operation performed each time it is said that erases our differences to give the impression of unity in a group.”

To get groups to form in a population of people, you need only three elements. The first is the opportunity for kindness or cruelty, situations in which two people can interact either nicely or nastily. The second is reciprocity, the technical term for paying people back. Reciprocity is when you are friendly to people who treat you nicely and unfriendly to people who treat you nastily. Over time reciprocity can make for best friends or mortal enemies. Imagine that the first time you meet someone, they compliment your clothes. This leads to a feedback cycle in which you compliment them and the two of you talk about your common interests, grab coffee, see movies together, and become lifelong friends. Conversely, imagine that the first time you meet someone, they insult your clothes. This starts a very different feedback cycle in which you insult their clothes and the two of you spread vicious rumors about each other, vandalize each other's homes, and seduce each other's spouses.

To move beyond individual friends and enemies to groups of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ we need the third element, transitivity. Transitivity means sharing your friends’ opinion of others—liking your friends’ friends and disliking your friends’ enemies. Transitivity is typically established via gossip, in which two people discuss the deeds of mutual acquaintances and align their perceptions accordingly. ‘Did you hear about Becky?’ ‘She’s so sneaky.’ ‘I hate her!’ ‘Me too!’ When transitivity doesn’t hold, awkwardness results—just try making fun of your best friend’s spouse or your spouse’s best friend.

A computer simulation in which mindless, identity-less agents interacted with reciprocity and transitivity resulted in these simple agents robustly clustered into stable groups characterized by in-group cooperation and out-group cruelty. Of course, the agents in our computer simulations are far less sophisticated than real people, but that’s the point. If simple computer agents inevitably cluster into groups, there is no doubt that real humans—with entrenched identities, races, and religions—will also form groups. There seems to be no avoiding ‘us’ and ‘them,’ but some group landscapes encourage more ruthlessness than others. Competition for resources is the catalyst that turns ‘them’ into ‘enemies’ and transforms dislike into cruelty. In the land of plenty there is no need to fight, but when resources are tight, competition becomes a matter of survival—and it’s easier to win if you have a group backing you up.

The link between resource competition and intergroup hostility is neatly demonstrated by comparing chimpanzees with bonobos. Both primates are evolutionary cousins of humans, but they have very different temperaments and social structures. Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) have a male-dominated society, are quick to aggress, and form gangs that mercilessly eliminate enemies. If a male stumbles alone into enemy territory, rival chimpanzees will attack with overwhelming force, often ripping off his face and testicles (so he won’t have any vengeful heirs). Chimpanzees will also cannibalize the babies of rivals and have been known to bite off the fingers of humans who study them.

In contrast to the male-dominated chimpanzees, bonobos (*Pan paniscus*) are female dominated and solve problems with sex instead of violence. In fact, they have sex all the time, not only standard female-with-male but also other combinations. Female-with-female genital-on-genital rubbing is a popular way to cement power alliances and demonstrate bonds of friendship and is certainly more exciting than meeting for coffee. Of course, bonobos still have conflicts and will sometimes act violently, but much less so than chimpanzees; they’d much rather scissor.

The difference between these two species lies in resource competition across evolutionary history. Chimps live on the north side of the Congo

River, a territory shared with gorillas, which eat much of the same food. Bonobos live on the south side of the Congo River, without gorillas and therefore with less competition for food. The perennial dearth of food on the north side compels chimpanzees to band together in ruthless gangs, fighting for the meager remaining resources. The abundance of food on the south side allows bonobos to instead spend their days indulging their insatiable nymphomania.

Societies are finite games, games that introduce goals, rules, constraints on behavior, and provide a scoring system. They are among the games we engage in so completely that we forget participation is optional, and the rules arbitrary. Most fully formed societies attach their rules to six instinctively used pillars of ethical behavior, each a thematic set of constraints that participants in the society must follow (or flaunt). Durable societies use these constraints to reinforce boundaries between societal insiders and outsiders.

Regarding the question: ‘What works?’ we might reply: For whom? To what end? On the basis of which guiding principles?

The Davos man idea is that they are just applying natural law, or science, or something similar, so if you oppose them you are against physics, or math, or geology instead of disagreeing with rules made by humans. And the funny thing about the rules of humans is that the rules almost always benefit the humans making the rules while those rule-makers claim they benefit all humans.

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man or woman whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him or her. Will he or she gain anything by it? Will it restore a control over his or her own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to aid and autonomy for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away.

Some of the most viscerally anti-Sanders, pro-Establishment, Hamilton-loving types I’ve argued with lately aren’t doing so well. They’re IT support workers; low level administrators; dropouts from various lowly ranked PhD programmes. But they love anti-socialist progressivism with a desperate passion, even though it’s doing nothing to serve their interests.

Instead of the front row kid, I’d like to posit the category of the ‘B+ average graduate.’ Now, anyone familiar with a marking grid knows that you award top marks to students who demonstrate some degree of independent thought, who go beyond the course material and lecture notes to produce something original and unasked for. They realize intuitively that what’s

being offered to them is only one interpretation. They know they're playing with arbitrary language games and they bend them, play with them, see beyond them to other possibilities. These are—in an ideal world—the students you'd want to see coming through into graduate programmes. They're few and far between.

The B+ student, though, sees none of these outside possibilities. For her, the rules of the game laid down by the professor constitute the full set of rules for the entire physical universe. She is quite good at applying them in a formulaic kind of way, but she never asks herself why, or if there might be a better set of rules out there somewhere. No, the lessons of college—and that particular set of courses at that particular college—are universal, simply “reality.” The B+ average student is loyal, passionate, and hardworking, but lacks any sense of perspective or context. She is formal; idealistic in the worst sense of the term.

But she *loves* school. A PhD and an academic career are her dream, her passion. She cannot understand why her professors are distant and lukewarm towards her. She applies the rules so well! So she signs up for some second-tier grad school and ultimately drops out—for impeccable reasons, of course. She finds a non-academic university job. IT support maybe, or booking seminar rooms and organizing events for other, “luckier” people. She is still living the life of the mind, isn't she? In the evenings, on the Internet, she deploys the language and the rules she learned during those, the best years of her life. It's so easy to diagnose people as white supremacists, racists, and transphobes from what they say on Twitter. Close reading! Critique! We learned it in college! Here's my hot take on your 114 characters based on my misunderstanding of Foucault!

These, I fear, are some of the most committed. They're credentialed, sure, but those credentials aren't doing anything for them. Despite having been screwed over, they *love* and are devoted to the institutions that issued them. They cannot understand why their tepid and unoriginal critiques do not win them universal praise and overwhelming political victory. Was it not the case that they applied the rules of the game impeccably? What else could they possibly have done?

There is a belief that a person of a particular identity is necessarily an unquestioned authority on issues pertaining to that identity. I don't think that principle can be held consistently though, because of what we might call the ‘Meghan McCain problem’: If I can't have an argument with Meghan McCain on what's good for women, then left principles cease to exist and we must solely defer to the opinions of those with particular identities, even if those opinions are reactionary or bizarre. There's a sensible compromise position here, though, which is that you should listen empathetically to

people about what it's like to be a member of their identity group, but identity is not a trump card that can override principled concerns.

Why couldn't somebody who is black know what it is like to be white and vice versa? Or someone who is homosexual know what it is like to be heterosexual and vice versa? If you are of a particular identity you may be more motivated to inform yourself about what it is like to be that identity than somebody who isn't, but that is not inevitably the case. And motivation alone doesn't guarantee achievement. If you are of a particular identity, it may give you access to knowledge that a person who is not of that identity would find it more difficult to obtain, but access to knowledge—even experiential knowledge—relevant to a particular identity is by no means restricted to people of that identity. Then there the question of how you make use of that knowledge. Once a truth claim has been constructed, it stands or falls on its own merits, irrespective of the person making it. If I were to put together an argument about some aspect of man-ness and pass it on to a woman to deliver on my behalf it would make no difference to the strength or weakness of my case. The identity of the person making the argument doesn't add some magical extra ingredient.

It is hard to see how having a particular identity confers special legitimacy and authority over the truth claims a person may make on matters relevant to that identity. It certainly can't be used as a basis to claim a veto over the voices of others. Personally, I have no idea what it's like to be a man, as strange as that may sound. Is it that I look down at my dick and don't go 'Ewww, gross'? Do I need to look down and go, 'Damn! That's one fine-looking meat-stick'? Do I have to name it Reginald?

Hell, I'm not even certain I know what it's like to be me.

So practical politics, which has led to such marginal gains while allowing the already privileged people—along with a few Tokens—to continue accumulating vast amounts of wealth, continuing to oppress others, is the one that cares about the black experience? You know there's black people not in the USA, right? Lots of other shades too. And your practical politics blows them up, lets them starve, cripples their countries' economies.

But obviously I just believe the above because I'm an ignorant light-skinned person. Yep, identity politics doesn't make us split into small warring tribes, nosir.

Capitalism encourages turning things into money. Black bodies are things—white bodies too—whether they're making profit on a plantation or a prison. Capitalism encourages the destruction of communities, further hindering the effort to claw oneself out of hardship or even see others as equals. Also basically covers “free trade,” banking issues, and corporate power under its umbrella.

And, your precious Supreme Court has a bit of a dark history when it comes to standing up for black people, you may want to look into that. Also has some dark history for the poor in general, but of course some of those poor would be white, so I imagine that's not as important.

You are correct that comfortable, privileged people are often reluctant to sacrifice privilege so that others may have more. That is the problem, not some outlandish claim that one cannot "know" enough of another's experience.

Evolution has made *Homo sapiens*, like other social mammals, a xenophobic creature. *Sapiens* instinctively divide humanity into two parts, 'we' and 'they.' We are people like you and me, who share our language, religion, and customs. We are all responsible for each other, but not responsible for them. We were always distinct from them, and owe them nothing. We don't want to see any of them in our territory, and we don't care an iota what happens in their territory. They are barely even human.

"The power of the racial epithets is in this 'othering,' and the reason they are used freely within the group is because there is pride and solidarity in being a special 'othered' group. It is affirming to talk about your special nature. It strengthens the team bonds. It is dangerous to allow others to talk of it, in their mouths it is the permission slip they will use to kill you and yours."

Tribalism is the root of nearly all racism, nepotism, ethnic violence, and societal division. Loyalty to some is betrayal to all. I don't identify myself with any group, especially one so large that I could never hope to meet even 0.1% of its members. If some people choose to arbitrarily self-identify themselves into a predefined clan claiming insurmountable cultural and racial differences to others then they deserve scorn from every rational person who choose rather to measure people by their character and actions, not by superstitious traditions and nebulous ancestry.

The idea that identity politics is part of traditional left-wing thought is promoted by the right who seek to demonize left-wing movements; liberals who seek to infiltrate, backstab, and destroy said left-wing movements; and misguided young radicals who know nothing about political theory and have neither the patience nor discipline to learn. The last group seek a cheap thrill that makes them feel as if they have shaken the foundations of the establishment when in reality they strengthen it.

On the campaign trail, Clinton mocked her opponent's "Trumped-up trickle-down economics," but her own philosophy was what we might call

‘trickle-down identity politics’—tweak the system just enough to change the genders, colors, and sexual orientation of some of the people at the top, and wait for the justice to trickle down to everyone else. And it turns out that trickle-down works about as well in the identity sphere as it does in the economic one.

Even Goldman Sachs is hopping on the woke wagon with requirements of one “diverse” person on the board before they’ll underwrite IPOs—don’t worry folks, it goes up to two in 2021! The prospect of having to change a few pronouns and getting a handful of women and minorities on the board and on television poses no real threat to the guiding profit-making principles of Wall Street. The real guilt of political correctness, identity politics, is not its supposed intolerance or rigidity, but that it is not political enough—that it is impersonating political struggle.

“The political left is technological society’s first line of defense against revolution. In fact, the left today serves as a kind of fire extinguisher that douses and quenches any nascent revolutionary movement. What do I mean by ‘the left’? If you think that racism, sexism, gay rights, animal rights, indigenous people’s rights, and ‘social justice’ in general are among the most important issues that the world currently faces, then you are a leftist as I use that term. If you don’t like this application of the word ‘leftist,’ then you are free to designate the people I’m referring to by some other term. But, whatever you call them, the people who extinguish revolutionary movements are the people who are drawn indiscriminately to causes: racism, sexism, gay rights, animal rights, the environment, poverty, sweatshops, neocolonialism it’s all the same to them. These people constitute a subculture that has been labeled ‘the adversary culture.’ Whenever a movement of resistance begins to emerge, these leftists (or whatever you choose to call them) come swarming to it like flies to honey until they outnumber the original members of the movement, take it over, and turn it into just another leftist faction, thereby emasculating it. The history of ‘Earth First!’ provides an elegant example of this process.”

—Theodore J. Kaczynski

Opportunities to rise are no substitute for a general diffusion of the means of civilization, of the dignity and culture that are needed by all whether they rise or not. Social mobility does not undermine the influence of elites; if anything, it helps to solidify their influence by supporting the

illusion that it rests solely on merit. It merely strengthens the likelihood that elites will exercise power irresponsibly, precisely because they recognize so few obligations to their predecessors or to the communities they profess to lead. Their lack of gratitude disqualifies meritocratic elites from the burden of leadership, and in any case, they are less interested in leadership than in escaping from the common lot—the very definition of meritocratic success.

The new managerial and professional elites have a heavy investment in the notion of social mobility—the only kind of equality they understand. They would like to believe that Americans have always equated opportunity with upward mobility, that the opportunity for social mobility for everyone is the very fabric of the “American Dream.” But a careful look at the historical record shows that the promise of American life came to be identified with social mobility only when more hopeful interpretations of opportunity had begun to fade, that the concept of social mobility embodies a fairly recent and sadly impoverished understanding of the “American Dream,” and that its ascendancy, in our own time, measures the recession of the dream and not its fulfillment.

Gay rights benefited in many ways from market forces. There was a highly educated and increasingly vocal gay and lesbian talent pool that companies were eager to engage. So they optimized their models to attract them. But they did this with the focus on the bottom line. Fairness, in most cases, was a byproduct. At the same time, businesses across the country were starting to zero in on wealthy LGB consumers, offering cruises, happy hours, and gay-themed TV shows. While inclusiveness no doubt caused grumbling in some pockets of intolerance, it also paid rich dividends.

Dave Chappelle used the analogy of a car trip shared by passengers G, L, T, and B. The Gs are driving, with the Ls in the passenger seat. The Ts are in the back. “Everyone in the car resents the Ts,” Chappelle says. “The Ts are making the trip take longer.” Trans comedians and activists, who’ve become accustomed to pride of place in the intersectionalist hierarchy, were up in arms. But Chappelle made it abundantly clear that he had no animus toward anyone in the LGB and transgender community: The target of his satire was not any one group, but the increasingly ridiculous conceit that all of these “alphabet people” are happy fellow travelers. LGB rights and T activism have been revealed to be unnatural bedfellows, and it’s inevitable that, as is happening in Britain, they will go their separate ways.

Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals all have something obvious in common: same-sex attraction. This is an alternative sexual orientation that, to some extent at least, shapes their experiences and alters their life outcomes. They typically identify with their biological sex—and in fact, sometimes have spent many years feeling trapped by it. To be gay is to understand that

sex is set at birth. Their sexual attraction, likewise, is based on hard-wired factors beyond their control.

Transgenderism is a separate concept. While homosexuality leads to obvious differences in real-life behavior, transgenderism offers a categorical redefinition of what it means to be a man or a woman. A “gender identity” is a quasi-spiritual concept—almost like a soul—that is something between an internal essence, knowable only to its possessor, and stereotypically masculine or feminine appearance and behavior.

Gay rights activists simply want society to accept their different ways of living and loving—since gay men and lesbians pursue romantic interests and build families in ways that are at odds with conventional heterosexual expectations. Followers of radical gender theory, on the other hand, demand that we all reject our basic understanding of biological sex in favor of a recently conceptualized abstract notion of human identity.

Of course, the idea of transgenderism per se isn’t new—nor is the (perfectly valid and just) demand that people with gender dysphoria be treated with decency and respect. But the original form of this demand was based on the far more reasonable idea that gender is a social construct distinct from biological sex. It was not disputed that a transgender woman is a biologically male human who identifies with the social norms traditionally associated with woman. But in recent years, transgender activists have demanded that sex and gender be conflated, and that the very idea of innate biological differences be pushed into the background. At the most absurd extreme, there are now athletes and scholars who seriously suggest that being male offers no competitive physical advantages over being female, a proposition that even small children know to be unhinged.

One of the unsettling elements embedded within this advocacy is the demand that women—lesbians, more specifically—make themselves sexually available to trans women, on the far-fetched theory that gender identity, not sex, is the real source of human attraction.

“Did you see what happened there? Same-sex attraction has become same-gender attraction. This might seem academic. But take a moment to reflect on what it means in the context of Stonewall’s affirmation of gender identity. Stonewall is asserting that lesbians are attracted to anyone with a female gender identity, whether that person is biologically male or female. This turns gay and lesbian desire into transphobia. I’m a gay man—I’m attracted to male bodies—not people performing male gender roles. And, yes, that means I like male genitalia. (I really like it). Trans activists argue that my sex-focused homosexuality is trans-

phobic. I've seen trans activists compare non-trans-inclusive gay desire to racism and describe gay sexuality as 'genital hang-ups.'"

What moral does identity politics offer?

It is a class politics, the politics of the left-wing of neoliberalism. It is the expression and active agency of a political order and moral economy in which capitalist market forces are treated as unassailable nature. An integral element of that moral economy is displacement of the critique of the discriminatory outcomes produced by capitalist class power onto categories of identity that sort us into groups supposedly defined by what we essentially are rather than what we do. Within that moral economy a society in which 1% of the population controlled 90% of the resources could be just, provided that roughly 12% of the 1% were black, 12% were Latino, 50% were women, and whatever the appropriate proportions were LGB and T people. It would be tough to imagine a normative ideal that expresses more unambiguously the social position of people who consider themselves candidates for inclusion in—or at least significant staff positions in service to—the ruling class.

This perspective may help explain why, the more aggressively and openly capitalist class power destroys and marketizes every shred of social protection working people of all races, genders, and sexual orientations have fought for and won over the last century, the louder and more insistent are the demands from the identitarian left that we focus our attention on statistical disparities and episodic outrages that “prove” that the crucial injustices in the society should be understood in the language of identity.

Representative democracy is designed not to care about individual rights but to care about what noun each person can identify with and how strong is the lobby group associated with that noun. Representative democracy is divisive, ineffectual, and based on impossible principles.

If an individual represents a group we must ask who will have the right to represent the group? What will they be allowed to say? What will the wording be? If any member of the group disagrees, if any word is not approved, then the person speaking for the group is no longer representing the group. That person is now speaking as an individual with words unfairly weighted by group affiliation. The individuals in the represented group who allowed this are equally guilty of misrepresenting themselves as being part of a voice they failed to approve. An individual speaking for a group is a dishonest mask for an unfairly weighted individual voice in almost every circumstance.

Representative democracy is the most dishonest oligarchy of all as it insists on the falsehood that the voice of its oligarchs is the voice of the people and the subsequent falsehood that their rule is rule by the people.

Democracies have not eradicated oligarchy, they have driven it to secrecy, a state of affairs ironically most abhorrent in a democracy. Instead of confronting the problems inherent in an oligarchy, democracy denies it exists while practicing it openly. Oligarchy is not necessary, but it can only be overcome in a completely open and transparent system which allows the most widespread participation by all and knowledge for all and recognizes and accommodates expertise and greater levels of knowledge.

Communist states have failed for the same reasons, by denying and pretending to eradicate elitism instead of acknowledging it and using it to the advantage of society.

If we compare the natural duties of a Father with those of a King, we find them to be all one, with no difference at all except in their latitude or extent. As the Father over one family, so the King, as Father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct, and defend the whole commonwealth.

Lately it has become common to equate patriarchy with oppression of women by men. Patriarchy is simply oppression—of women and men—by a class structure that infantilizes those at the bottom and burdens those at the top. It was not women who overthrew the patriarchy in Europe, it was men. While women fought alongside men, it was men who designed the future structure of society, summed up in the cry for ‘Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!’ The cry for liberty was a cry for freedom of men, both freedom from subjection by a patriarchal ruler and freedom from responsibility for all of society.

The responsibility and isolation of men in a patriarchal society was frequently empty and unrewarding. The call for fraternity was a call for brotherhood, for a society of equals who would meet without demanding anything of each other. Since that call, libertarian men have fought for their independence from responsibility to society and insisted that the principle of equality means all are equally able to care for themselves.

Most industrialized communities are no longer patriarchal. They are nearly all fraternal. The fraternity denies responsibility to society and in return receives no approval from society. Approval from others is the life force for humanity, our single greatest motivator. Life without approval is an empty shell.

“I think every strong woman in history has had to walk down a similar path, and I think it’s the strength that causes the confusion and the fear. Why is she strong? Where does she get it from? Where is she taking it? Where is she going to use it? Why do the public still support her?”

In JRR Tolkien's Middle Earth, elves are an immortal race of staggering beauty, deep wisdom, rich culture, and advanced magical propensity. The elves often find themselves at odds with the orcs, a hideous race who live for violence and destruction. In Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, it is revealed that orcs were actually the creation of an evil lord named Melkor, later known as Morgoth, who captured a group of elves and imprisoned them. The elves, "by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes."

I always think of this when I see trends in our society which began as healthy and good impulses, but which over time became twisted and warped by egotism and manipulation. Something springs up in human consciousness out of inspiration and natural compassion, quickly gains public support because truth is attractive, and then is eventually hijacked and perverted as power finds a way to twist that energy in a way it can use and exploit. It becomes 'orc-ified.'

You can see examples of this orcification spring up everywhere in real time. You can watch it in yourself as your own ego tries to hijack your own healthy impulses to aggrandize and masturbate itself, and you can watch them in society at large as well. A recent and extremely blatant example would be when the enthusiastic grassroots populism of the Bernie Sanders campaign was twisted by the Democratic establishment into the #Resistance movement after the 2016 election. Now many of the progressives who once were sincerely pushing away from oligarchy and endless war can be seen smearing Julian Assange and cheerleading for new cold war escalations with their support for the CIA/CNN Russia narrative.

Other examples abound. America's brilliant civil rights activism has been largely co-opted by the good cop/bad cop game of partisan dynamics which now sees Black Americans supporting a party that does absolutely nothing to protect them from police brutality, economic hardship, a depraved legal system, for no other reason than that the Republicans are even crueler to them than the Democrats are. On the other side of the aisle, healthy impulses to minimize government intrusiveness and corruption have been used by manipulators like the Kochs—one down, one to go—under the banner of libertarianism to strip corporations of their regulations without ever diminishing government size or corporatist influence upon it, effectively leaving only end-stage neoliberalism and rush-upward economics. The healthy impulse toward truth is orcified to manufacture support for internet censorship under the pretense of protecting the public from "fake news" and "Russian propaganda," the healthy impulse to protect and defend is orcified into support for "humanitarian" war and "public health protection

measures,” and the healthy impulse to become a better person is orificed into religions and philosophies which have been popularized by the powerful in the service of the powerful.

Anywhere you see a healthy impulse arising in society, you will see attempts to twist it into the service of power, and this is very much the case with feminism.

Very recently in the grand scheme of things, a healthy impulse emerged among women to cease being second-class citizens, and to instead stand as equals with their brothers.

In response, after much whining and foot-dragging, the few men who ran things said in effect, ‘Right. Okay. You want equality? Fine. The jobs we invented are over there, the capitol building for the government we invented is over there, the bank for the economic system we invented is across the street, the Department of War is two blocks that way, and the Church of the Patriarchal God is around the corner. Welcome to equality!’ And some rich guys standing by watching leaned in and whispered to each other, ‘Sweet, double the workforce! We can halve their wages!’

And that natural, healthy impulse toward true equality became quickly orificed. ‘Equality’ now looks like women working full time to keep their heads above water in an economic system designed by monsters and fools while still being expected to raise healthy children, and ‘feminism’ looks like fighting men for a few more scraps from the oligarchic table while voting to elect women to the oppressive, elite-serving government. It is an energetic funnel into a system which was not built with any interest in non-wealthy men or women’s struggles.

True feminism is about picking apart that entire system. Fake feminism is about bolstering and feeding into it. True feminism values motherhood and care-giving roles, not just with empty ‘Gosh, yeah, hardest job in the world’ words and a pat on the back now and then, but with the same valuing system which rewards industriousness and other “masculine” accomplishments; in the current system that would mean receiving an equal amount of money for that work instead of having to rely on the hopefully charitable inclinations of a husband. Fake feminism encourages women to take on jobs that are valued by the elite mindset and perform the full-time task of mothering in their spare time—for free, because the herculean job of motherhood “is its own reward.”

True feminism questions the very nature of the governmental systems which were designed hundreds of years ago by men who owned wives and others as functional property, and takes seriously the goal of removing all toxic dynamics from within them. Fake feminism endorses those governmental systems and teaches that the most feminist thing anyone can do is elect

women like Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Warren, Tulsi Gabbard, who have clawed their way to the top by their facilitation of war, crony capitalism, and rape culture.

True feminism aggressively attacks the cultural mind viruses which say that ‘no’ sometimes means ‘yes,’ that a wife must perform sexually for her husband, that it’s okay to manipulate or guilt a woman into sex, that women ought to be subservient and humble, that it’s okay to harm a woman if she steps out of line. Fake feminism only touches on those things when it is politically advantageous and can be used as a weapon to attack rival ideological factions.

True feminism works to untangle all the toxic, pernicious knots in social consciousness one by one, leaving no norm unquestioned and no default assumption untested, since the reality of oppression is interwoven throughout every single aspect of society without exception. Fake feminism leaves all the default settings in place, then adds on a few cosmetic accessories like equal pay for equal wage slave work.

True feminism is as deeply revolutionary as anything can be, since its realization necessarily means a complete revision of society from the ground up in order to allow all to be truly heard in our culture. Fake feminism gives you a pussy hat, a twenty-three cent raise, and an ‘I Voted’ sticker.

“Yes, Ludlow was guilty—though not of what the university charged him with. His crime was thinking that women over the age of consent have sexual agency, which has lately become a heretical view, despite once being a crucial feminist position. Of course the community had to expel him. That’s what you do with heretics. Still, the history of purification rituals is a pretty squalid one. Heading down this path once again requires a lot of historical amnesia from everyone involved. That college campuses should be where history goes to be forgotten is depressing on all levels, not least when it comes to the future of higher education—and freedoms of every stripe.”

Since roughly 1992–93 other violent crime rates have plummeted, and there is zero reason to suspect that rape or sexual assault on campus would be different than what we see with other types of violence. There is also no evidence that rates of non-reporting have gone up over time. Someone might argue that violence that happens primarily to women follows a different pattern but intimate partner violence (also committed primarily against women) has followed the same pattern of decline since the early 1990s. The question becomes whether, as with off-campus crime, sexual assault as

traditionally defined may have actually gone down, while what counts as sexual assault keeps expanding.

Acclimating to these new realities sometimes feels like being a twenty-first-century Gulliver, that is, if Gulliver had awoken to find himself shipwrecked on an atoll of sanctimony where bureaucracy had supplanted education, and slogans have replaced thinking.

The injustice is in the word ‘assaulting.’ The term ‘sexual assault’ is so vague and slippery that it facilitates accusation inflation: taking claims that someone did X and leading people to think of it as Y, which is much worse than X. In many jurisdictions, sexual assault has grown to include unwanted groping and unwanted kissing:

Nunavut, Canada: “Sexual assault is a crime. It includes unwanted touching, kissing, grabbing, and rape.”

Canada: “Sexual assault is an act of violence committed by a person in order to feel power over another person. It can come in different forms such as sexual touching of any kind that is unwanted or coerced, including kissing or groping.”

Australia: “Sexual assault may or may not begin with sexual harassment. It involves unwanted physical contact such as kissing, touching, fondling, and grabbing and at its worst, culminates in rape, either digital or genital.”

In the United States feminists are continuously pushing for a definition of sexual assault that includes kissing. The chief public affairs officer at National Sexual Violence Resource Centre, explains that any type of unwanted groping, touching, or kissing is certainly in the definition of sexual assault:

“It is absolutely on the continuum of sexual violence. There are a lot of different ways that people can be sexually violated and exploited that don’t need to require any physical contact, let alone sexual penetration. Sexually violent acts fall along a continuum that go from no contact to very brutal physical violations such as rape or sexual homicides. And we absolutely include any unwanted touching, kissing, and groping on that continuum.”

Words can certainly change meaning, no one is arguing that. But with these particular issues, it is quite obvious that this is being used to further agendas, to conjure heavily emotional images in one’s mind.

And it helps almost no one.

“As anthropologists have observed in cultures around the world, people who think themselves bewitched are vulnerable to all manner of mischance. They blunder into ‘accidents’; they lose their effectiveness in work and social relations; at least occasionally they sicken and die.”

My question is the extent to which this sense of vulnerability is learned on campus. The new campus codes don’t just enforce disabling myths and fantasies about power, they also produce a new host of pathologies around power. A student trying to get a professor fired over a joke or some other passing offense is someone who utterly and callously misunderstands the consequences of leaving someone else (often with dependents to support) jobless; and someone who has, in fact, seized power while hiding behind the fiction of powerlessness.

Every culture has its whirlpools of callousness, of cruelty. A description of the Saudi legal system:

“Justice is often situational; the law is what a person in a position of power decides it is.”

It sounds uncomfortably close to life on American campuses at the moment.

Sure, there have always been ideologues on campuses, but the old ideologues were at least expected to argue the validity of their ideas. The new brand are ideologues of feelings, and feelings can’t be argued. I just don’t believe that experience or identity credentialize you intellectually. In fact, it’s usually the opposite: overvaluing subjectivity has a way of stunting intellectual growth, especially when it comes to ideas that threaten your self-coherence, which the best ideas often do. The latest demands for intellectual conformity may come in progressive packaging, but feminists and leftists should be flinging these pieties away like lumps of dung, not kowtowing to the virtue parade.

To expect a drunken college guy to have more self-coherence than you’re willing to have yourself, in the face of all prior evidence to the contrary, is to treat yourself rather nonchalantly. Not that we don’t all want the world to be different from how it is! No one’s saying women get assaulted because they pass out in dicey locales: I fully believe that women should be able to pass out wherever they want—naked, even—and be inviolable. One hopes such social conditions someday arrive. The issue is that acting as if things were different from how they are isn’t, thus far, working out.

Alcohol is an intensifier; it intensifies acting out. Increased male aggressiveness when drinking is inarguably a factor in what's known as rape culture. Men drink and act out stereotypical versions of masculinity, especially men in groups—namely, frat guys and athletes. Men drink because, as one student puts it:

“What you do when you're drunk isn't really you.”

You don't have to take responsibility for it: 'It was the booze, not me.' And of course guys like to drink because the more alcohol you've drunk, the more into you girls seem. Translation: it helps them combat their insecurities about sex. And what about the other side of the gender divide? Is it possible that it's not men alone for whom “gender progress” has been a little superficial? Drinking may be a way of shedding inhibitions, but if we can't also talk about the ways that drinking increases tendencies for stereotypical female behavior, too—namely, female passivity—then we're being gender hypocrites. The pattern, in other words, when it comes to heterosexual sex, is college-age men and women getting bombed and acting out the respective gender extremes: men as aggressors, as predators; women as passive, as objects—because what's more passive than a woman in a drunken stupor or unconscious on the bathroom floor?

Men coercing sex from women may be standard procedure on the normal heterosexuality spectrum, but so is the tendency for women to overvalue men and male attention in ways that make them stupid and self-abnegating. And I don't believe for a second that the supposed sexual equity of campus hookup culture has changed anything on this front, despite the window dressing of mutuality. My point is this: Heterosexual arrangements are a pact that includes men and women both—male and female desires, male and female pathologies. Gender is a system: male aggression and female passivity are both social pathologies that are, to varying degrees, normalized. Changing any element (including reducing female passivity) is going to alter the dynamics of the system. Yes, aggressively disposed men forcing sex on passively inclined women is routine in our culture. But if women can't be taught to protect themselves against such normalcy because men should stop assaulting women, and because learning to defend yourself means capitulating to rape culture—well, here you begin to see the two-way nature of the current social pathology.

Women want to have sexual adventures and make mistakes, but there's a growing tendency, at the moment, to offload the responsibility, to make other people pay for those mistakes—namely, guys. Women don't drink; men get them drunk. Women don't have sex; sex is done to them. This

isn't feminism, it's a return to the most traditional conceptions of female sexuality. What dimwitted sort of feminism wants to shelter women from the richness of their own mistakes? Their own ambivalences? How do such protections prepare students to deal with the sexual messiness and boorish badlands of life post-graduation, when code-wielding bureaucrats aren't on standby?

Male lions can be monsters, murderous and focused. Toxic, if you will. Given the opportunity, male lions will kill the kittens in a pride over which they have gained control. They commit infanticide, which brings the new mothers, freshly childless, back into estrous. The females are quickly impregnated. This, we can all agree, is disturbing behavior, and may make some people feel rather less pleased with lions. Given the opportunity, the vast majority of modern human males would do no such thing.

Those who argue that men are inherently toxic are, ironically, making arguments that are biologically essentialist. And they are making them badly, at that. Evolution built humans, as it did lions. But humans have longer childhoods and greater generational overlap, share more ideas with greater complexity, and usually live in more stable social groups than do lions. In humans, evolution has given us the capacity to shape personality during development to a greater degree than in any other species. As such, and because few human cultures would tolerate such behavior, the vast majority of men would not and could not kill babies, nor rape their grieving mothers for the same reasons lions do.

Over 30 years ago, I came of age as a female in Los Angeles. Being a young woman in LA means being watched—watched for deviations from the norm, for indications of future fame, for signs of weakness. Watched simply for how one looks. There are, unfortunately, many examples, recent and not, that point to LA's most famous industry being a place where young women need to be on guard. I never aspired to the industry, but even just living in LA, the culture is omnipresent.

Two anecdotes should suffice. Walking alone in my sun-kissed west LA neighborhood one summer, I was approached by a man looking for extras for a beach scene in a movie. Before I had said a word, he told me where to go, how much I would be paid per day, and what would be expected of me: that I stand around in a bikini, among others similarly clad. I told him I was going to college. He literally looked me up and down, adopted a frown, and assured me that I did not need to go to college. Beach scenes were my future, and from there—who can say? Better beach scenes, presumably.

Second anecdote: One of my many part-time jobs in high school, along with scooping ice cream and renting out VHS tapes, was staffing high end catering events. Dressed in classic, tailored black and white, I carried platters

of hors d'oeuvres around during cocktail hour, and ferried plated entrees during table service. At indoor events, male attendees would often stop me to engage in small talk, and ask for my number. I wished that they wouldn't, but I felt no risk. One night, though, I worked an event on the backlot of Universal Studios. A group unaffiliated with Hollywood had booked it for a no-expenses-spared fete, and I was to do the usual, except that I would have to cover more ground. The kitchen was further away, the guests more spread out, with no walls to contain them. Before table service, my co-workers and I made the rounds with our platters of bruschetta and cured meats. On this Hollywood backlot, though, the lack of walls proved dangerous. A young man—older than me but younger than 30—maneuvered me away from the crowd. There were many shadows, and he stood too close. He looked at me with predatory eyes. He backed me into a hedge, rubbed up against me. And I got away from him before it went any further.

That was toxic masculinity, before the phrase existed.

Yes, toxic masculinity exists. But the use of the term has been weaponized. It is being hurled without care at every man. When it emerged, its use seemed merely imprecise—in many groups of people, there's some guy waiting for an opportunity to fondle a woman's ass without her consent, put his hand where he shouldn't, right? That's who was being outed as toxic. Those men—and far, far worse—do exist. Obviously. But wait—does every human assemblage contain such men? It does not. This term, toxic masculinity, is being wielded indiscriminately, and with force. We are not talking imprecision now, we are talking thoroughgoing inaccuracy.

Most men are not toxic. Their maleness does not make them toxic, any more than one's 'whiteness' makes one racist. Assume for the moment that we could agree on terms: Is maleness more highly correlated with toxic masculinity than is femaleness? Yes. *Ipsa facto*—the term is about maleness, so men will display more of it than will women. The logical leap is then concluding that all men are toxic. The very communities where 'toxic masculinity' is being discussed most are the communities where the men are, in my experience, compassionate, egalitarian, and not at all toxic.

Calling good men toxic does everyone a deep disservice. Everyone except those who seek empowerment through victim narratives. For the record: I am not suggesting that actual victims do not exist, nor that they do not deserve full emotional, physical, legal, medical, and other support. I also do not want to minimize the fact that most women, perhaps even all, have experienced unpleasantness from a subset of men. But not all women are victims. And even among those women who have truly suffered at the hands of men, many—most, I would hazard to guess—do not want their status in the world to be 'victim.'

All of which leads us directly to a topic not much discussed: toxic femininity. Sex and gender roles have been formed over hundreds of thousands of years in human evolution, indeed, over hundreds of millions of years in our animal lineage. Aspects of those roles are in rapid flux, but ancient truths still exist. Historical appetites and desires persist. Straight men will look at beautiful women, especially if those women are young, hot, and actively displaying. Display invites attention.

Hotness-amplifying femininity puts on a full display, advertising fertility and urgent sexuality. It invites male attention by, for instance, revealing flesh, or by painting on signals of sexual receptivity. This, I would argue, is inviting trouble. No, I did not just say that she was asking for it. I did, however, just say that she was displaying herself, and of course she was going to get looked at. The amplification of hotness is not, in and of itself, toxic, although personally, I don't respect it, and never have. Hotness fades, wisdom grows—wise young women will invest accordingly. Femininity becomes toxic when it cries foul, chastising men for responding to a provocative display.

Where we set our boundaries is a question about which reasonable people might disagree, but two bright-lines are widely agreed upon: Every woman has the right not to be touched if she does not wish to be; and coercive quid pro quo, in which sexual favors are demanded for the possibility of career advancement, getting out of a ticket, et cetera, is unacceptable. But when women doll themselves up in clothes that highlight sexually-selected anatomy, and put on make-up that hints at impending orgasm, it is toxic—yes, toxic—to demand that men do not look, do not approach, do not query.

Young women have vast sexual power. Everyone who is being honest with themselves knows this: Women in their sexual prime who are anywhere near the beauty-norms for their culture have a kind of power that nobody else has. They are also all but certain to lack the wisdom to manage it. Toxic femininity is an abuse of that power, in which hotness is maximized, and victim status is then claimed when straight men don't treat them as peers.

Creating hunger in men by actively inviting the male gaze, then demanding that men have no such hunger—that is toxic femininity. Subjugating men, emasculating them when they display strength—physical, intellectual, or other—that is toxic femininity. Insisting that men, simply by virtue of being men, are toxic, and then acting surprised as relationships between men and women become more strained—that is toxic femininity. It is a game, the benefits of which go to a few while the costs are shared by all of us.

I had a student on one of my study abroad trips who had a perennial problem with clothing. She was never wearing enough of it. She was smart, athletic, and beautiful, but also intent on advertising hotness at all moments. At a field station in a jungle in Latin America, she approached me to complain that the local men were looking at her. The rest of us were wearing field gear—a distinctly unrevealing and unsexy garb. She was in a swimsuit. “Put on more clothes,” I told her. She was aghast. She wanted me to change the men, to talk to them about where to point their eyes. Here in their home, where we were visitors, and one of the gringos had shown up nearly naked, she wanted the men to change.

For a spell before that, my job was to trek around tropical forests studying poison frogs. I was interested in their sex lives, in figuring out how they choose their mates and their territories, in how they parent, and in what that meant about the evolution of sociality more generally. My research revealed, in part, how many different ways there are to be territorial, and to be successful, in male frogs. In Madagascan poison frogs, there are multiple routes to success, both naturally and sexually selected—males can succeed, evolutionarily, by holding high-quality territories, and they can also succeed by having no territories at all (but by being rather more sneaky). Wide variance in strategy, and shifting strategies under different conditions, is well studied in animal behavior and game theory.

Given that we know this to be true in non-human animals, why would we imagine that humans are less, rather than even more, flexible? There are many ways to be female, and many ways to be male, and some of each are bad news for everyone but the individual employing them. As a social species that has become the dominant ecological force on our planet, we can and should aspire to behave in ways that are not merely selfish, not merely competitive, but also collaborative. Toxic masculinity, and toxic femininity, are inherently selfish modes, and those not employing them should be interested in seeing them eradicated.

The movement that has popularized the term ‘toxic masculinity’ shares tools and conclusions with those who see signs of ‘white supremacy’ everywhere they look. Intersectionalists have in common with one another a particular rhetorical trick: Any claim made by a member of a historically oppressed group is unquestionably true. Questioning claims is, itself, an act of oppression. This opens the door for anyone who is willing to lie to obtain power. If you cannot question claims, any claim can be made.

Thus: Racism is ubiquitous. And all men are toxic. I object—but objection is not allowed. Everyone who understands game theory knows how this game ends: Innocent people being vilified with false claims, and exposed to witch hunts. Sexual assault is real, but that does not mean that

all claims of sexual assault are honest.

It is shocking that this bears saying, but there is a world of men who are smart and compassionate and eager to have vibrant, surprising conversations with other people, both men and women. The sex-specific toxicity that I have seen, when it has been obvious, has mostly been in the other court. All men are toxic and all women victims? No. Not in my name.

“We’re all free to change our minds about whether we did or did not love a previous paramour, but when you use an institutional apparatus and federal mandates to enforce your change of mind, we’ve left the realm of the private. Now it’s a matter of public concern.”

If there are still those who deny that the Holocaust occurred, will they be persuaded by imprisoning people who express that view? On the contrary, they will be more likely to think that people are being imprisoned for expressing views that cannot be refuted by evidence and argument alone. In his classic defense of freedom of speech in *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill wrote that if a view is not “fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed,” it will become “a dead dogma, not a living truth.”

Freedom of speech is essential to democratic regimes, and it must include the freedom to say what everyone else believes to be false, and even what many people find offensive. We must be free to deny the existence of God, and to criticize the teachings of Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, and Buddha, as reported in texts that millions of people regard as sacred. Without that freedom, human progress will always run up against a basic roadblock.

If there is in fact a question about whether a microaggression really happened, why isn’t it called a “potential” or “alleged” microaggression? By the same token, can one be a recipient of something, the existence of which is, in any given encounter, open to question?

There seems to be a deep nostalgia, not of course for the overt brutality and dehumanization inflicted by Jim Crow and the likes of Bull Connor, but for the moral certainty those evils retrospectively allow for. In some respects, people of color may find an overt and obvious racist act easier to handle so the mind obligingly develops a crude alchemy for transmuting the ambiguous into the obvious. This alchemy is little more than a way of behaving that masquerades as a way of knowing: Act as if ambiguities were certainties, and as if vague feelings were reliable registers of fact. Act, in other words, as if complex interracial encounters—which admit of both mistakes and misunderstandings—are conscious or unconscious acts of racism exercised by a “White perpetrator.” That will indeed make things easier to handle.

But such ease of handling is the product of presumption and simplification. It would be as if a marriage counselor approached every new couple having decided in advance that the complaints or suspicions of the shorter partner, or the male partner, or the minority partner, were necessarily legitimate, and that the other spouse's objections, prejudged as 'defensive,' were evidence of guilt. Moreover, because these objections would—in the pseudo-technical jargon so favored by these folks—"invalidate" the "experiential reality" of the other partner (offer a different point of view), they would constitute yet another offense. Would anyone expect marital relations to improve under the counselor's supervision? Would anyone even hire such a counselor?

By exalting "experiential reality" and "impact," administrators portray students as pure receptors whose reactions are unmediated by expectation, projection, or choice. Hence the language of triggering, which converts students into objects for the sake of rendering their reactions "objective," and by extension valid: a student's triggered response is no more to be questioned than an apple's falling downward or a spark's flying upward.

Administrators talk not just about social justice "training" but also about social justice "literacy." What does that mean? It was explained in an article from 2009. Formatted like a textbook, the article contains highlight boxes and sidebars which detail the terminology of "social-justice studies" with the crisp confidence one would expect from a handbook on Windows 10 or residential wiring. Racism is defined as "white racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination." Black people can be prejudiced, but they lack the "institutional power" that "transforms it into racism." Reverse racism does not exist owing to "power relations that are historic and embedded."

Whatever the merits of those propositions, splicing them into the meaning of words is the lexical equivalent of splicing herbicide resistance into the genes of tobacco plants: It's an attempt to immunize ideas from criticism, such that the student who mentions 'reverse racism' in a discussion of affirmative action might as well have mentioned a unicorn in a discussion of endangered species. If she then drops the qualifier 'reverse' and simply calls it 'racism,' she's again confounded, since racism is something of which only white people can be guilty. As with Newspeak in Orwell's 1984, the aim is to construct a vocabulary in which the expression of unorthodox opinions is near impossible.

Even raising questions is an offense against this version of social justice. Being an "ally" of oppressed groups, we are told, requires:

"Validating and supporting people who are socially or institutionally positioned below yourself, regardless of whether you understand or agree with where they are coming from."

And a sure symptom of having “internalized” one’s own sense of “dominance”?

“Feeling authorized to debate or explain away the experiences of target groups.”

It’s hard to know what’s worse: the condescending implication that oppressed groups require unconditional support and validation (in the way that a child requires unconditional love), or the idea that “feeling authorized” to debate signals one’s racist hauteur rather than one’s democratic citizenship. To say nothing of the assumption that the range of opinion and experience among “target groups” is so narrow and homogenous that one could “validate” one person’s experience without running the risk of invalidating another’s.

The single greatest tool for making moral people commit atrocities is group affiliation. The single greatest tool for promoting global human rights and equality is to end group affiliation.

The faults of personality driven systems have been called by many names, racism, sexism, ageism, nationalism, and more, but all of those -isms mean the same thing. People are being judged as nouns instead of verbs. If instead of supporting nouns, we supported ideas and actions, it would be far easier to follow our chosen principles in all cases.

The true measurement of a person’s worth isn’t what they say they believe in, but what they do in defense of those beliefs. If you’re not acting on your beliefs, then they you probably do not fully understand them; are ignorant of the consequences of your actions; or perhaps you do not actually believe them.

People who struggle with their own prejudices are somehow equal in prejudice to those who never took the trouble to make the struggle. Imperfect effort at being just is no different than perfect indifference to it. A good man who plays footsie for an evening under the table with a single bad idea becomes the equal of a man who spends a lifetime sharing a slovenly bed with an evil ideology.

Virtue Signaling: the conspicuous expression of moral values by an individual done primarily with the intent of enhancing that person’s standing within a social group; the practice of publicly expressing opinions or sentiments intended to demonstrate one’s good character or the moral correctness of one’s position on a particular issue; saying you love or hate something to show off what a virtuous person you are, instead of actually trying to fix the problem.

Virtue-signaling expresses two other key characteristics of an empire in terminal decline: complacency and intellectual sclerosis. There is no room at all, in these ways of thinking, for the novel situations which have now arisen, a situation which needs solutions as radical as itself. The status quo attitude is a complacent acceptance of things as they are, without a single new idea. This acceptance is accompanied by greatly excessive optimism about the present and future

This blind adherence to the ideas of the past ranks high among the principal causes of the downfall of Rome. If you were sufficiently lulled by these traditional fictions, there was no call to take any practical first-aid measures at all.

Some of the cultural and political realities of American life are themselves racially insensitive and elitist and offensive and unfair, and pussyfooting around these realities with euphemistic doublespeak is not only hypocritical but toxic to the project of ever really changing them. Today's most powerful influence on the norms of public English is actually a stern and exacting form of liberal Prescriptivism. I refer here to Politically Correct English (PCE), under whose conventions failing students become 'high-potential' students and poor people 'economically disadvantaged' and people in wheelchairs 'differently abled' and a sentence like 'White English and Black English are different, and you better learn White English or you're not going to get good grades' is not blunt but 'insensitive.' Although it's common to make jokes about PCE—referring to ugly people as 'aesthetically challenged' and so on—be advised that Politically Correct English's various pre- and proscriptions are taken very seriously indeed by colleges and corporations and government agencies, whose institutional dialects now evolve under the beady scrutiny of a whole new kind of Language Police.

Prescriptive PCE is not just silly but ideologically confused and harmful to its own cause. Here is my argument for that opinion. Usage is always political, but it's complexly political. With respect, for instance, to political change, usage conventions can function in two ways: on the one hand they can be a reflection of political change, and on the other they can be an instrument of political change. What's important is that these two functions are different and have to be kept straight. Confusing them—in particular, mistaking for political efficacy what is really just a language's political symbolism—enables the bizarre conviction that America ceases to be elitist or unfair simply because Americans stop using certain vocabulary that is historically associated with elitism and unfairness. This is PCE's core fallacy—that a society's mode of expression is productive of its attitudes rather than a product of those attitudes. A pithier way to put this is that politeness is not the same as fairness.

There's a grosser irony about Politically Correct English. This is that PCE purports to be the dialect of progressive reform but is in fact—in its Orwellian substitution of the euphemisms of social equality for social equality itself—of vastly more help to conservatives and the US status quo than traditional SNOOT prescriptions ever were. Were I, for instance, a political conservative who opposed using taxation as a means of redistributing national wealth, I would be delighted to watch PC progressives spend their time and energy arguing over whether a poor person should be described as 'low-income' or 'economically disadvantaged' or 'pre-prosperous' rather than constructing effective public arguments for redistributive legislation or higher marginal tax rates. Not to mention that strict codes of egalitarian euphemism serve to suppress the sorts of painful, unpretty, and sometimes offensive discourse that in a pluralistic democracy lead to actual political change rather than symbolic political change. In other words, PCE acts as a form of censorship, and censorship always serves the status quo.

As a practical matter, I strongly doubt whether a guy who has four small kids and makes \$12,000 a year feels more empowered or less ill-used by a society that carefully refers to him as 'economically disadvantaged' rather than 'poor.' Were I he, in fact, I'd probably find the PCE term insulting—not just because it's patronizing (which it is) but because it's hypocritical and self-serving in a way that oft-patronized people tend to have really good subliminal antennae for. The basic hypocrisy about usages like 'economically disadvantaged' and 'differently abled' is that PCE advocates believe the beneficiaries of these terms' compassion and generosity to be poor people and people in wheelchairs, which again omits something that everyone knows but nobody ever mentions—that part of any speaker's motive for using a certain vocabulary is always the desire to communicate stuff about himself. PCE functions primarily to signal and congratulate certain virtues in the speaker—scrupulous egalitarianism, concern for the dignity of all people, sophistication about the political implications of language—and so serves the self-regarding interests of the PC far more groups renamed.

The unpleasant truth is that the same self-serving hypocrisy that informs PCE tends to infect and undermine the US Left's rhetoric in almost every debate over social policy. Take the ideological battle over wealth—redistribution via taxes, quotas, welfare, enterprise zones, AFDC/TANF, UBI/JG, you name it. As long as redistribution is conceived as a form of charity or compassion—and the Bleeding Left appears to buy this conception every bit as much as the Heartless Right—then the whole debate centers on utility—'Does welfare help poor people get on their feet or does it foster passive dependence?' 'Is government's bloated social-services bureaucracy an effective way to dispense charity?' and so on—and both camps have their

arguments and preferred statistics, and the whole thing goes around and around.

Opinion: The mistake here lies in both sides' assumption that the real motives for redistributing wealth are charitable or unselfish. The conservatives' mistake (if it is a mistake) is wholly conceptual, but for the Left the assumption is also a serious tactical error. Progressive liberals seem incapable of stating the obvious truth: that we who are well off should be willing to share more of what we have with poor people not for the poor people's sake but for our own; i.e., we should share what we have in order to become less narrow and frightened and lonely and self-centered people. No one ever seems willing to acknowledge aloud the thoroughgoing self-interest that underlies all impulses toward economic equality—especially not US progressives, who seem so invested in an image of themselves as Uniquely Generous and Compassionate and Not Like Those Selfish Conservatives Over There that they allow the conservatives to frame the debate in terms of charity and utility, terms under which redistribution seems far less obviously a good thing.

The type of leftist vanity that informs PCE is actually inimical to the Left's own causes. For in refusing to abandon the idea of themselves as uniquely generous and compassionate (i.e., as morally superior), progressives lose the chance to frame their redistributive arguments in terms that are both realistic and realpolitikal. One such argument would involve a complex, sophisticated analysis of what we really mean by self-interest, particularly the distinctions between short-term financial self-interest and longer-term moral or social self-interest. As it is, though, liberals' vanity tends to grant conservatives a monopoly on appeals to self-interest, enabling the conservatives to depict progressives as pie-in-the-sky idealists and themselves as real-world back-pocket pragmatists. In short, leftists' big mistake here is not conceptual or ideological but spiritual and rhetorical—their narcissistic attachment to assumptions that maximize their own appearance of virtue tends to cost them both the theater and the war.

Class Warfare

The human races were invented by anthropologists like Johann Friedrich Blumenbach back in the eighteenth century in an attempt to categorize new groups of people being encountered and exploited as part of an ever expanding European colonialism.

From the very beginning, the arbitrary and subjective nature of race categories was widely acknowledged. Most of the time races were justified on the grounds of cultural or language differences between groups of people rather than biological ones. This is ethnicity, *not* race.

Their existence was taken as a given right up until the twentieth century when anthropologists were busy writing about races as a biological explanation for differences in psychology, including intelligence, and educational and socioeconomic outcomes between groups of people.

Race is entirely made up and has no biologic underpinnings. Ethnicity is at best analogous to dog breeds and has no real place in public policy other than perhaps the medical field where certain diseases or conditions may be more prevalent.

If race is an artificial human construct—and it is—then do those who use it as a guide for “reparations” simply help support the foundations of racist ideology? Does doing anything but refusing to acknowledge the labels, while acknowledging their general acceptance in the past and the harms caused by this, actually help oppressed individuals?

National Socialist ideology involves a hierarchy of race, an explicit elite group, and the dehumanization of other groups. It is an example of a flawed ideology. When societies are unjust, for example, in the distribution of wealth, we can expect the emergence of flawed ideologies. The flawed ideologies allow for effective propaganda. In a society that is unjust, due to unjust distinctions between persons, ways of rationalizing undeserved privilege become ossified into rigid and unchangeable belief. These beliefs are the barriers to rational thought and empathy that propaganda exploits. Group identities are the coral reefs of cognition; much of the beauty of the production of human intellect is due to their existence. But certain group identities are democratically problematic; the Teutonic identity constructed by National Socialism is an obvious example. Such identities channel rational and affective streams in specific ways, creating obstacles to self-knowledge, as well as to the free flow of deliberation required in a healthy democracy.

Flawed ideology is an obstacle to realizing one’s goals. On the one hand, those benefiting from large material inequalities will tend to adopt flawed ideologies in the form of false legitimation narratives. These false

legitimation narratives will blind them to injustice, and hence from realizing their ethical goals. On the other hand, those suffering materially from large inequalities, via lack of land, access to high-status positions, or other obstacles to equality of opportunity and attainment, will be led to adopt a flawed ideology of their own inferiority. This will prevent them from realizing their material interests.

All human categories are essentially artificial, but we must ask which are useful, which do harm. Race is a useless, harmful category, ethnicity is possibly useful but certainly harmful. We cannot use these categories to achieve justice, equality. We cannot use them to right past wrongs. We must destroy them, wholly, anything less is to leave intact the frameworks required for future individuals to reinstate such injustices.

And therein lies the harm that the ‘middle class’ myth inflicts—it conjures illusions of division where there are none in reality. The belief—the fantasy—that a person is a part of a middle class leads less-poor workers to think their interests differ from the class-interests of the working class at large and ultimately to act against their own interests. Believing they are middle class leads the less-poor to imagine there is some fundamental difference between themselves and folks who cannot feed their families without government benefits. There isn’t. There are two classes—one of them is big and the other is small. One needs to toil daily for food, housing, and other necessities and the other does not. One must work and the other is why.

In the end, it is the divisions gouged by the material fact of class society itself that limit the fullest development of our humanity. One too many classes exist already and it’d be best not to complicate matters with imaginary ones.

Class consciousness is always double: it involves a simultaneous knowledge of the way in which class frames and shapes all experience, and a knowledge of the particular position that we occupy in the class structure. It must be remembered that the aim of our struggle is not recognition by the bourgeoisie, nor even the destruction of the bourgeoisie itself. It is the class structure—a structure that wounds everyone, even those who materially profit from it—that must be destroyed. The interests of the working class are the interests of all; the interests of the bourgeoisie are the interests of capital, which are the interests of no-one. Our struggle must be towards the construction of a new and surprising world, not the preservation of identities shaped and distorted by capital.

Class conflict takes many forms. If police break the bones of the poor to guard the assets of the 1% and private security bloodies workers who join a union, class conflict is violent. If currency speculators short an entire economy to siphon the wealth of all, class conflict is economic. If workers

must accept lower wages or lose their jobs and dining franchises leverage our guilt to subsidize their payrolls by voluntary tipping, class conflict is coercive & psychological. If Big Oil spends millions to elect politicians who golf with their investors and the food industry uses patent law to crush family farms, class conflict is political & judicial. If public space is flooded by advertisers and state-propaganda while news-shows hide the people who die in their name, class conflict is ideological & cultural & moral.

“Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.”

People who analyze the world on race, gender, sexuality without first looking at economic discrimination are either fools or conspirators. The net outcome of all discrimination is economic deprivation. All the identity -isms play out in the economic crippling of the discriminated class. Privilege isn't about whiteness, maleness, or heterosexuality, it's about money.

The Obamas, for example, are much more similar to privileged whites than they are to poor black families, or poor white families for that matter. They may face some racial exclusion, in theory, at the upper layers of society, but given their wealth and connections their blackness is a relatively minor discriminatory burden for them directly.

In terms of suffering, poor whites in economically barren locales have it much worse, so how is it fair to give the Obamas the additional sympathy and not the impoverished white family being eaten alive by a broken economy? Why do wealthy homosexuals and trans people deserve equal sympathy to poor homosexuals and trans people?

To ignore economic class when economic class is the real privilege token is intellectually bankrupt.

The heart of the problem isn't 'civil rights.' In every socialist or democratic socialist movement or progressive movement since Marx equality of rights is a given, as in there is no argument. But what they all recognize to be as obvious and self-evident as those rights, is the completely indefensible nature of a political economy that consistently fails to produce justice precisely because it embodies a different, hostile principle: that any individual is entitled to accumulate however much money and power as his/her ability and character can deliver—meritocracy or some similar term. The minute you make climbing a ladder made out of other people the legitimate goal, all of the other stuff fails. It's just absurd to be talking about 'civil rights' when the top-eight richest people in the US have more wealth than the bottom half.

The Democrats are utter hypocrites for even pretending they care about protecting minorities from forms of discrimination when they have simply refused to engage or even acknowledge their own overwhelming commitment to a grotesquely unjust order, not to mention personal addictions to the finer things in life that corruption delivers up to those willing to sell.

Mutual care, generated more by survival needs and self interest than by altruism, is the basis of support in the tribe. Of course there's nothing uniquely human about this. Wherever you find animals joined in foraging bands, you'll find them sharing food—not altruistically but in their own individual best interest. On the other hand, I'm sure there have been tribal societies that have departed from this way of handling hunger, societies in which the rule was 'If food is scarce, don't share it, hoard it.' But none in fact are seen. I'm sure you know why. Because where a rule like that was followed, the tribe would fall apart. Tribes survive by sticking together at all costs, and when it's every man for himself, the tribe ceases to be a tribe.

In our world, this support has been supplanted by services, mainly professional services working within a service system. Service, in fact, is simply the attempt to meet needs outside the context of community. Just as we do not use the word 'service' to label the care we provide within our families, likewise there is no equivalent concept of 'service' among tribal people. For individuals with an especially caring disposition, the service system provides the only available outlet, other than the care provider's own family. The weakening nuclear family, however, like the extended family, clan, village, and tribe before it, has increasingly surrendered its support function to professional services. Following this trend, we could all soon find ourselves supported by service providers alone.

Touch is healing. There's quite a bit of science to back that up. Modern human society has siloed how, when, and why humans get to touch each other in ways that are very detrimental to human physical and mental health.

We are social animals. We need to physically interact with one another to be happy. The fact that this innate drive has been channeled by imperial cultures into men only getting to touch other men when they're fighting or competing, and with women in power-imbalanced, transactional sexual encounters fuels so much destructive behavior. There's all this need to nurture and touch that gets channeled into creatures one can control.

Mass culture is a combination of radical ingratitude with an unquestioned belief in limitless possibility. The mass man takes for granted the benefits conferred by civilization and demands them as if they were natural rights. Heir of all the ages, he is blissfully unconscious of his debt to the past. Though he enjoys advantages brought about by the general rise in the

historic level, he feels no obligation either to his progenitors or to his progeny. He recognizes no authority outside himself, conducting himself as if he were lord of his own existence. His incredible ignorance of history makes it possible for him to think of the present moment as far superior to the civilizations of the past and to forget, moreover, that contemporary civilization is itself the product of centuries of historical development, not the unique achievement of an age that had discovered the secret of progress by turning its back on the past.

In her writings, which have become foundational for libertarian theology, author Ayn Rand suggested that the only purpose of government should be to prevent oppression by force. What she neglected to consider was all the force inherent in nature. If you are hungry, there is the force of biology. If you're homeless, you confront the force of wind and storms, ice and snow. If you're sick, you confront the ravages and force of disease. These were the forces that provoked the first governments; the first communities, clans, and tribes; the first nation-states. It's easy for libertarian elitists, such as multimillionaire TV talking heads or college kids reading *Atlas Shrugged*, to talk about how there should be "no government beyond police, the army, and courts." They all have enough resources that they don't need to deal with the forces of raw nature. And that explains why billionaires would bankroll libertarian-leaning think tanks that will, when the crash comes with its full force, tell us it was "caused" by "big government." However, in the real world, humans must confront both nature and other humans. Which is why we create governments, and why we create economies.

But what the average Tea Partier or MAGA Minion doesn't understand, and what the millionaires and billionaires who fund the movement do understand, is that nature abhors a vacuum. So when Tea Partiers or MAGA Minions clamor for smaller government—or in some cases, no government at all—something must fill the void. And what's always filled the void in the past, from the Gilded Age, to the Roaring Twenties, to Reagan's America, is corporate power and aggregated wealth. So fast-forward to 240 years after the Boston Tea Party, and today's Tea Party is rallying on behalf of some of the very biggest transnational corporations in the world—our own East India Companies.

One community in Tennessee learned a lesson about the wrong way to finance firefighting in September 2010. A teenager burning trash in a barrel was not attentive and the flames spread. First his grandfather's shed caught fire; pretty soon the house was ablaze. But the firefighters in nearby South Fulton, Tennessee, would not put out the blaze because homeowner Gene Cranick had not sent in his \$675 annual fee. Cranick insisted he had always paid and that this nonpayment was just an error of omission, but

the firefighters stood by and watched his house burn, killing a dog inside.

This is simple stuff, but the lesson is important: By holding firm together, by refusing to act on individual self-interest alone, we end up better off. And it's why unions hate scabs so much: The scab who crosses a picket line is like the prisoner who betrays—they ruin the possibility of achieving the outcome most beneficial to the working class as a whole. They do not see that a world in which other people acted the same way would yield the worst set of outcomes.

The 'tragedy of the commons,' then, is not really about the commons: The tragedy in Hardin's scenario is that his herdsmen think 'rationality' means 'trying to maximize your own gains even at the expense of other people.' If, on the other hand, the herdsmen have a cooperative ethic, and refuse to do anything that would harm the interests of others, the commons are preservable indefinitely. 'Ah' the economist replies, 'but what about free riders? If the commons are available to all, even if 99 percent of users act responsibly, if one person comes along and decides not to obey the norm, and takes an unsustainable amount, they can ruin it for everyone else.'

This is true, but note what it means: The moment a libertarian shows up, with their amoral disinterest in the welfare of others, a perfectly good cooperative arrangement will be destroyed. All it implies is that no society that wants to achieve optimal outcomes for all should tolerate libertarians in its midst. They should be banished to their floating sea-cities where they can backstab and betray one another at their leisure.

In its most extreme form, our constitutional rights are reducible to the right not to have to love our neighbor. The irony is that the more energetically we pursue our individual, socially isolated right to "life liberty and the pursuit of happiness," the deader the social and natural worlds become.

Popular fantasies are hardly the whole problem: one-against-all survival has also engaged scholars. Scholars have imagined survival as the advancement of individual interests—whether "individuals" are species, populations, organisms, or genes—human or otherwise. Consider the twin master sciences of the twentieth century, neoclassical economics and population genetics. Each of these disciplines came to power in the early twentieth century with formulations bold enough to redefine modern knowledge. Population genetics stimulated the "modern synthesis" in biology, uniting evolutionary theory and genetics. Neoclassical economics reshaped economic policy, creating the modern economy of its imagination.

While practitioners of each have had little to do with each other, the twins set up similar frames. At the heart of each is the self-contained individual actor, out to maximize personal interests, whether for reproduction or wealth.

Richard Dawkins's "selfish gene" gets across the idea, useful at many life scales: It is the ability of genes (or organisms, or populations) to look out for their own interests that fuels evolution. Similarly, the life of *Homo economicus*, economic man, is a series of choices to follow his best interests. The assumption of self-containment made an explosion of new knowledge possible. Thinking through self-containment and thus the self-interest of individuals (at whatever scale) made it possible to ignore contamination, that is, transformation through encounter. Self-contained individuals are not transformed by encounter. Maximizing their interests, they use encounters—but remain unchanged in them. Noticing is unnecessary to track these unchanging individuals. A "standard" individual can stand in for all as a unit of analysis. It becomes possible to organize knowledge through logic alone. Without the possibility of transformative encounters, mathematics can replace natural history and ethnography. It was the productiveness of this simplification that made the twins so powerful, and the obvious falsity of the original premise was increasingly forgotten. Economy and ecology thus each became sites for algorithms of progress-as-expansion.

The problem of precarious survival helps us see what is wrong. Precarity is a state of acknowledgment of our vulnerability to others. In order to survive, we need help, and help is always the service of another, with or without intent. When I sprain my ankle, a stout stick may help me walk, and I enlist its assistance. I am now an encounter in motion, a human-and-stick. It is hard for me to think of any challenge I might face without soliciting the assistance of others, human and not human. It is un-self-conscious privilege that allows us to fantasize—counter-factually—that we each survive alone.

Contaminated diversity is everywhere. If such stories are so widespread and so well known, the question becomes: Why don't we use these stories in how we know the world? One reason is that contaminated diversity is complicated, often ugly, and humbling. Contaminated diversity implicates survivors in histories of greed, violence, and environmental destruction. The tangled landscape grown up from corporate logging reminds us of the irreplaceable graceful giants that came before. The survivors of war remind us of the bodies they climbed over—or shot—to get to us. We don't know whether to love or hate these survivors. Simple moral judgments don't come to hand.

Worse yet, contaminated diversity is recalcitrant to the kind of "summing up" that has become the hallmark of modern knowledge. Contaminated diversity is not only particular and historical, ever changing, but also relational. It has no self-contained units; its units are encounter-based collaborations. Without self-contained units, it is impossible to compute costs and benefits, or functionality, to any "one" involved. No self-contained individuals

or groups assure their self-interests oblivious to the encounter. Without algorithms based on self-containment, scholars and policymakers might have to learn something about the cultural and natural histories at stake. That takes time, and too much time, perhaps, for those who dream of grasping the whole in an equation. But who put them in charge? If a rush of troubled stories is the best way to tell about contaminated diversity, then it's time to make that rush part of our knowledge practices. Perhaps, like the war survivors themselves, we need to tell and tell until all our stories of death and near-death and gratuitous life are standing with us to face the challenges of the present. It is in listening to that cacophony of troubled stories that we might encounter our best hopes for precarious survival.

Tolerance does not always survive periods of social turbulence. Violent hatred bubbles just under the surface in society.

Certain deep-seated personality traits make potentially fascistic individuals particularly susceptible to antidemocratic propaganda. The crucial traits—tested for by the so-called ‘F-scale’—of the “authoritarian personality” are:

- Rigid adherence to conventional values
- Submissiveness to authority figures
- Aggressiveness toward out-groups
- Opposition to introspection, reflection, and creativity
- A tendency to superstition and stereotyping
- Preoccupation with power and “toughness”
- Destructiveness and cynicism
- Projectivity (the disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outward of unconscious emotional impulses)
- An exaggerated concern with sexuality

The antidemocratic individual harbors strong underlying aggressive impulses and fascist movements allow him to project this aggression through sanctioned violence against ideologically targeted out-groups.

It is a natural human instinct to turn our fears into symbols, and destroy the symbols, in the hope that it will destroy the fear.

A population alienated and beset by despair and hopelessness finds empowerment and pleasure in an orgy of annihilation that soon morphs into self-annihilation. It has no interest in nurturing a world that has betrayed it and thwarted its dreams. It seeks to eradicate this world and replace it with a mythical landscape. It turns against institutions, as well as ethnic and religious groups, that are scapegoated for its misery. It plunders diminishing natural resources with abandon. It is seduced by the fantastic promises of demagogues and the magical solutions characteristic of the Christian right or what anthropologists call “crisis cults.”

Extremist religious groups—of all faiths, and definitely not only belonging to the Muslim religion—are being groomed by the Western neoliberal ideologues and strategists, then dispersed to all corners of the globe: South Asia, the Middle East, China, Latin America, Africa, and even Oceania.

It is a total disgrace, what imperialism has managed to reduce our humanity to. It is being constantly derailed, attacked, and tormented by the brutal monstrous and merciless hydra—the Western expansionism and its culture of nihilism, greed, cynicism, and slavery. It is so obvious where we are going as a human race.

We want to fly, we want freedom and optimism and beauty to govern our lives. We want to dream and to create something deep, meaningful, happy, and kind. But there are those horrible weights hanging from our feet. There are chains restraining our actions. There is constant fear, which is making us betray all our ideals, as well as each other, again and again; fear that makes us, humans, act like shameless cowards and egoists. As a result we are not flying, we are only crawling, and not even forward, but in bizarre, irrational ellipses and circles.

The old symbols and the old slogans have indeed disappeared, to be replaced by new ones; but the structure of the basic fantasies seems to have changed scarcely at all.

These movements offer a coherent social myth which is capable of taking entire possession of those who believe in it. It explains their suffering, it promises them recompense, it holds their anxieties at bay, it gives them an illusion of security—even while it drives them, held together by a common enthusiasm, on a quest which is always vain and often suicidal.

So it came about that multitudes of people acted out with fierce energy a shared fantasy which, though delusional, brought them such intense emotional relief that they could live only through it and were perfectly willing to die for it. It is a phenomenon which was to recur many times between the eleventh century and the sixteenth century, now in one area, now in another, and which, despite the obvious differences in cultural context and in scale, is not irrelevant to the growth of totalitarian movements, with

their messianic leaders, their millennial mirages, and their demon-scapegoats, in the present century.

It is the amnesia here that is the trouble. A question—What is X?—rings in the air, but they answer it both defiantly and like no one has asked. This is what identity politics looks like when it has gone a little senile. You will jealously guard the clearly defined borders around what an atheist is, or a feminist, or a white person, or a Turk, or an asexual, even as you find yourself forgetting, for a moment or for a generation, exactly how those borders first got thrown up.

Patriots are among the worst offenders. Germany would not be Germany without the French because in order to create a German identity, first a French identity had to be built. The French had to be cosmopolitans, with aggressive rationalism and individualism—“the promised land of steel, of chemical dyes, of method, of efficiency”—for the Germans to be a simple people, spiritual and communal. The French had *Zivilisation*, but the Germans had *Kultur*.

Still, by the twentieth century, most Germans were telling a different tale. It may have been that as the world started to modernize through the spread of the Enlightenment and industrialization, traditional ways of understanding who one was and the meaning of one's existence disappeared. Families and communities may have been split apart as cities became the economic centers, traditions may have been discarded or forgotten, religious beliefs may have been dismissed as superstition, and gender and class roles may have begun to shift. Nations that were able to keep up with this process, like France, may have benefited from modernization, more or less. Nations that lagged behind, like Germany, may not have. But at a certain point, who cared? All that remained of this complex history was a simmering resentment and frustration on the part of many Germans, which they proceeded to brandish like a gun.

Personal struggles to adjust to a daunting modern world, which usually ended in failure, confusion, and drift, deepened the yearning for an uncomplicated belief. Unable to reintegrate or demodernize itself, Germany conjured up a new identity out of folk tales, an artificial sense of authenticity, and memory-effacing legends. One day, these were just fanciful stories that had the cheek to overwrite history. The next, they were excuses for Germans to tell themselves that theirs was the superior way of being, the purest form of life.

Nothing makes self conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-self. Nothing can weld peoples into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe. Hatred separates as well as unites. Now that we've seen how this identity-building routine tends to go, we should probably

add a warning label: May induce memory loss.

One way or another, we all mistake our own history for universal history. The stories we tell about ourselves and our nations so easily become the only ones we want to listen to, which is why male historians tend to see masculine activities like exploration and war as the sum total of the history of the world, or why Americans hopped up on the false notion of progress see the future not only as an inevitable and evolutionary march toward increased freedom, but also as an unalloyed good.

Fascist movements build their base not from the politically active but the politically inactive, the losers who feel—often correctly—they have no voice or role to play in the political establishment. When political debate no longer speaks to us, people become responsive instead to slogans, symbols, and sensation. To some admirers of Trump, for example, facts and arguments appear irrelevant. But then again, the case is equally true of admirers of Establishment Democrats, and even of those “Feeling the Bern”—though I suspect it’s more of a ‘sting’ these days.

What they don’t see is that the strong neoliberal state and weak community ties is what’s ripping their society apart, not evil people—immigrants, muslims, white men, et cetera—with superpowers.

Militant anti-fascists believe, with good reason through long experience, that the state is not a reliable proxy for anti-fascism. That is the task of the organized working class, through direct action, something which the liberals who would “reason” with the Nazis balk at. They balk because for them the whole thing is an intellectual exercise, and they remain divorced from the reality of struggle against fascism.

It must be said, before moving on, that one element of that struggle is propaganda. Militant advocates of No Platform don’t “refuse to engage” with fascist ideas but in fact do so in a way that others never would. By arguing against fascism on a class basis, on working class estates, and with the very people the far-right sees as their core recruits.

Because this is a material reality that makes taking of fascism through pure reason nigh-on impossible—class. The far-right—whether in more openly violent form or having traded boots for suits—preys upon the alienation and disenfranchisement of the white working class. We are alienated and disenfranchised because of capitalism, of course, as our communities are torn apart, our jobs go and we struggle to scrape by.

But the system itself uses racism and migration to both divide the class and distract from the real culprits behind our misery, whilst the left is nowhere to be seen. Pretty hard for reason to win out when those offering the wrong answers are the only ones offering answers. Militant anti-fascists do engage and challenge this situation, but it is an uphill struggle we face.

The other side of the coin, in terms of why anti-fascism cannot be boiled down to a battle of ideas is that fascism is an ideology rooted in violence. It is hard to reason with those kicking your head in or gunning you down as you run for your life, or those who have forced you into binding arbitration, or those whose lobbyists have allowed them to poison you and your children and even your dog. And of course those advocating freedom of speech for fascists are those least likely to be on the receiving end of such attacks.

Obviously, anarchists should not organize against free speech. But the stranglehold of the state on the discourse of free speech seems to set the terms of the debate: either we condone censorship, or we condone state protection of our enemies and their right to organize against us and others. This results in paradoxes, such as radicals being accused of opposing freedom for shutting down a fascist speaker.

In contrast to state protection of KKK rallies and the like, there are models of free expression that neither depend upon the enforcement of rights from above nor sanction oppressive behavior. Anarchists might judge speech not as something fundamentally different from action, but as a form of action: when it harms others, when it reinforces hierarchies and injustices, we confront it the same way we would confront any other kind of abuse or oppression. This is simply self-defense.

When a xenophobic politician comes to speak at a public university, his honorarium is paid with tax money extorted from workers and given to universities so it will continue to circulate among the rich and powerful. Regardless of right-wing whining about the marginalization of conservative opinions, the fact that he is powerful enough to secure lucrative speaking engagements indicates that his views are hardly suppressed. As a wealthy citizen and public figure, his opportunity to express himself can't reasonably be compared to the opportunity of, say, the immigrants he scapegoats. If their voices and agency actually held equal weight, the politician could say whatever he wanted, but would be powerless to subject others to his schemes.

When we confront him directly rather than politely disagreeing, we're not attacking his right to express his opinions. We're confronting the special advantages he is accorded: taxpayer money, police protection, an exclusive soapbox. We're confronting the power he wields over our lives through institutions built on violence, a power he means to extend by using speaking events to gain wealth, legitimacy, and recruits to his racist endeavors. Confronting him is a political practice that does not reduce freedom to rights, but challenges the privileges of the state; that makes no false dichotomy between speech and action, but judges both by the same standards; that does not enable the state to frame itself as the defender

of free speech, but asserts that we are the only ones who can defend and extend our own freedom.

“Have you ever thought that maybe I don’t want to unify or be friends with these people anymore? I don’t want to give them a chance to speak, I want to crush them and make sure they never rise to power again. These people advocate for banning entire religions, many of them want to kill me, many of them would want millions of people deported, they want extreme things, and I don’t want to reason with them, I want to defeat them, because they cannot be reasoned with no matter how hard we try.”

Even Hitler himself said the only way you can defeat the far right is by crushing it right at its nucleus, at the very start. Debate, communication, and education does not work, and in fact can even make them more emboldened.

“Stopping fascists from speaking makes you just as bad as them.”

You could just as easily say that not stopping fascists from speaking makes you as bad as them, because it gives them the opportunity to organize to impose their agenda on the rest of us. If you care about freedom, don’t stand idly by while people mobilize to take it away.

“Shouldn’t we just ignore them? They want attention, and if we give it to them we’re letting them win.”

Actually, fascists usually don’t want to draw attention to their organizing; they do most of it in secret for fear that an outraged public will shut them down. They only organize public events to show potential recruits that they have power, and to try to legitimize their views as part of the political spectrum. By publicly opposing fascists, we make it clear to them—and more importantly, to anyone else interested in joining them—that they will not be able to consolidate power without a fight. Ignoring fascists only allows them to organize unhindered, and history shows that this can be very dangerous. Better we shut them down once and for all.

“The best way to defeat fascism is to let them express their views so that everyone can see how ignorant they are. We can refute them more effectively with ideas than force.”

People don't become fascists because they find their ideas persuasive; they become fascists for the same reason others become police officers or politicians: to wield power over other people. It's up to us to show that fascist organizing will not enable them to obtain this power, but will only result in public humiliation. That is the only way to cut off their source of potential recruits.

History has shown over and over that fascism is not defeated by ideas alone, but by popular self-defense. We're told that if all ideas are debated openly, the best one will win out, but this fails to account for the reality of unequal power. Fascists can be very useful to those with power and privilege, who often supply them with copious resources; if they can secure more airtime and visibility for their ideas than we can, we would be fools to limit ourselves to that playing field. We can debate their ideas all day long, but if we don't prevent them from building the capacity to make them reality, it won't matter.

“Neo-Nazis are irrelevant; institutionalized racism poses the real threat today, not the extremists at the fringe.”

The bulk of racism takes place in subtle, everyday forms. But fascist visibility enables other right-wing groups to frame themselves as moderates, helping to legitimize the racist and xenophobic assumptions underlying their positions and the systems of power and privilege they defend. Taking a stand against fascists is an essential step toward discrediting the structures and values at the root of institutionalized racism.

Here and worldwide, fascists still terrorize and murder people because of racial, religious, and sexual difference. It's both naïve and disrespectful to their victims to gloss over the past and present realities of fascist violence. Because fascists believe in acting directly to carry out their agenda rather than limiting themselves to the Rube Goldberg machine of representative democracy, they can be more dangerous proportionate to their numbers than other bigots. This makes it an especially high priority to deal with them swiftly.

“Free speech means protecting everyone's right to speak, including people you don't agree with. How would you like it if you had an unpopular opinion and other people were trying to silence you?”

We oppose fascists because of what they do, not what they say. We're not opposed to free speech; we're opposed to the fact that they advance an

agenda of hate and terror. We have no power to censor them, nor should we. But we will not let them come into our communities to build the power they need to enact their hatred.

The government and the police have never protected everyone's free speech equally, and never will. It is in their self-interest to repress views and actions that challenge existing power inequalities. They will spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on riot police, helicopters, and sharpshooters to defend a KKK rally, but if there's an anarchist rally the same police will be there to stop it, not to protect it.

Anarchists don't like being silenced by the state—but we don't want the state to define and manage our freedom, either. We support self-defense and self-determination above all. What's the purpose of free speech, if not to foster a world free from oppression? Fascists oppose this vision; thus we oppose fascism by any means necessary.

“If fascists don't have a platform to express their views peacefully, it will drive them to increasingly violent means of expression.”

Fascists are only attempting to express their views “peacefully” in order to lay the groundwork for violent activity. Because fascists require a veneer of social legitimacy to be able to carry out their program, giving them a platform to speak opens the door to their being able to do physical harm to people. Public speech promoting ideologies of hate, whether or not you consider it violent on its own, always complements and correlates with violent actions. By affiliating themselves with movements and ideologies based on oppression and genocide, fascists show their intention to carry on these legacies of violence—but only if they can develop a base of support.

No one has the right to organize violence against our community. Likewise, we reject the “right” of the government and police—who have more in common with fascists than they do with us—to decide for us when fascists have crossed the line from expressing themselves into posing an immediate threat. We will not abdicate our freedom to judge when and how to defend ourselves.

Colonizers study the histories of oppressed peoples to identify with and eventually become—or more securely remain—their oppressors.

It's just like when you've got some coffee that's too black, which means it's too strong. What you do? You integrate it with cream; you make it weak. If you pour too much cream in, you won't even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool. It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake you up, now it'll put you to sleep. This is what they

did with the march on Washington. They joined it. They didn't integrate it; they infiltrated it. They joined it, became a part of it, took it over. And as they took it over, it lost its militancy. They ceased to be angry. They ceased to be hot. They ceased to be uncompromising. Why, it even ceased to be a march. It became a picnic, a circus. Nothing but a circus, with clowns and all.

Democracy is not some meek and mild creed, but a fierce and jealous god that recognizes no higher authority other than its historical obligation to defend, extend, and deepen its rule. People not only have a right to resist, but a moral duty.

If we're going to be exact about it, in fact, the billionaires who still dominate the political donor class mainly reside in the top tenth of a percent. Even in the most conservative possible interpretation of economic data, a general picture of haves and have-nots in the voting population would still be something like 20/80—20% of Americans own 89% of privately held wealth, while the bottom 80% owns just 11%.

The danger implicit in these numbers to the 'broadly satisfied with the status quo' types is obvious. If 80 percent of Americans ever realized their shared economic situation, they could and probably should take over government. Of course, they wouldn't just be taking power for themselves, they'd be taking it from the big-dollar donors who own such a disproportionately huge share of wealth in our society.

Such people of course have many very good reasons to embrace the status quo. The problem is, they're not terribly numerous as a group, which unfortunately for them still matters in a democracy. It's one of the unpleasant paradoxes of exclusive wealth. If you live in a democracy, you're continually forced to manufacture the appearance of broad support for the regressive policies underpinning your awesome lifestyle.

The United States is not a semi-peripheral country like Russia in 1917, but the ruler of history's first global empire. Since World War II, it has been busily remaking the world in its image as it carefully nurtured neo-federal institutions like NATO, the EU, and the European Court of Justice. While the US empire is first and foremost a military and economic alliance, it's also a legal construct based on the concept of an untouchable constitution, a reduction of democracy to a few liberal formulas, and judicial review.

It is a structure that neatly suits the needs of capital. Neoliberalism and US-style constitutionalism go hand in hand because they share a common adherence to a "small government" worldview, a commitment to an expansive conceptualization of the private sphere, and an uneasy attitude—even hostility—toward the less than predictable political sphere.

The goal is to place private ownership and other economic freedoms

beyond the reach of majoritarian politics and state regulation, thereby promoting a minimalist conception of democracy in which the essence of democracy is relegated to the existence of some sort of electoral routine, controlled to a large extent by those who have greater access to and influence on the public agenda.

March the people to the polls, in other words, so they can vote for one of two corporate-controlled candidates, and then march them back home again. Teach them that a two-century-old constitution represents the absolute summit of political thought so they will never be tempted to tamper with the political structure on their own. Tie the people down, Gulliver-style, with innumerable laws and treaties so that capital can be set free.

It's a formula that has only worked as long as the economy continued to grow, wages remained strong, and imperial power was expanding. Now that that is no longer the case, many are beginning to recognize they've been residing in a giant prison and must somehow find a way out.

The liberal bourgeoisie grant reforms with one hand, and with the other always take them back, reduce them to naught, use them to enslave the workers, to divide them into separate groups and perpetuate wage-slavery. For that reason reformism, even when quite sincere, in practice becomes a weapon by means of which the bourgeoisie corrupt and weaken the workers. The experience of all countries shows that the workers who put their trust in the reformists are always fooled.

And conversely, workers who have realized the inevitability of wage-slavery so long as capitalist rule remains, will not be fooled by any bourgeois reforms. Understanding that where capitalism continues to exist reforms cannot be either enduring or far-reaching, the workers fight for better conditions and use them to intensify the fight against wage-slavery. The reformists try to divide and deceive the workers, to divert them from the class struggle by petty concessions. But the workers, having seen through the falsity of reformism, utilize reforms to develop and broaden their class struggle.

There seems to be a growing divide, perhaps not as visible as say, the 0.1%, but a still growing divide between the 10% and the 90%. I think that we need a manifesto too about the 10%. The wealthiest ten percent are living in a different world than the rest of us.

- Their wages seem to have done a much better job of keeping up with living costs.
- They seem to be able to afford expensive housing in many of the most expensive cities.

- Costs such as rising food, insurance, et cetera are not really a problem for them. They are sheltered from the consequences of globalization and in many cases profit from it. The decline in domestic manufacturing has not hit their interests really hard either.
- While costs such as private school and university are a concern, the fact that they will send their kids to a good university is unquestioned. They may also be able to use their personal network to get their kids connections and a good job after.
- After their expenses, they probably have a lot left over to save and invest, and so benefit from the rapid appreciation of stocks since 2008.
- They may work long hours, but they are not struggling to survive and can afford the “finer” things in life, although not to the same extent as the 0.1%.
- Many seem to be completely ignorant—some willfully so—about how tough things are for the less well off. They have more in common with the very wealthy in this regard. Their life expectancy is up, perhaps not far from the very rich, while the working class’s is going down.

I could go on, but the point is that we seem to have a ten-percent problem too. Social mobility in the US and UK are very poor compared to the rest of the Western world as well. That means that the glass ceiling is not so much gender as much as it is class.

They seem satisfied with the status quo and, worse, are helping the very wealthy screw over the less well off citizens. Indeed they aspire to join the ranks of the very rich.

While doctors, lawyers, and accountants don’t pull down the same money as corporate CEOs or the Bill-Gates-types, their success is hugely important in sustaining the conservative nanny state. If the only people doing well in the current economy were a tiny strata of super-rich corporate heads and high-tech entrepreneurs, there would be little political support for sustaining the system. Since the list of winners also includes the most educated segment of society, it creates a much more sustainable system. In addition to being a much broader segment of the population—5–10 percent as opposed to 0.5 percent—this group of highly educated workers includes the people who write news stories and editorial columns, teach college classes, and shape much of what passes for political debate in the country. The fact that these people benefit from the conservative nanny state vastly strengthens its hold.

Every private wish fulfilled contains a danger that one will be oblivious to full impartial truth.

The .1% is comprised of a very few actual people; obviously, even fewer occupy the .01%. Despite their over-sized financial positions, they could not exert the power they do over hundreds of millions of Americans and many more globally without the cooperation of the 10–20% directly below them.

These are the news personalities who spin destructive policies favorably or ignore them altogether, the lawyers who defend the indefensible and judges who look the other way, the advertising execs who sell any product regardless of what it is or whom it hurts, and the politicians and government agency bigwigs who do the bidding of their owners in return for campaign contributions and permanent positions in government, to name a few.

They don't scour the toilets or shine the shoes of the .1%, but they work for them all the same—just for much better pay.

And they convince themselves that their financial success is evidence of their competence, brilliance, righteousness, and “integrity.” Looking the other way pays really, really well. Maybe you'd prefer to call them the ‘enabler class’ instead of the ten-percent, but any way you slice it, they are deserving of a large dose of contempt. Particularly the ones who only get \$105,000 a year to sell out.

In part what we have here is a listening problem. Americans have trouble telling the difference between a social critique and a personal insult. Thus, a writer points to a broad social problem with complex origins, and the reader responds with, “What, you want to punish me for my success?”

In part, too, we're seeing some garden-variety self-centeredness, enabled by the usual cognitive biases. Human beings are very good at keeping track of their own struggles; they are less likely to know that individuals on the other side of town are working two minimum-wage jobs to stay afloat, not getting high and watching Simpsons reruns all day. Human beings have a simple explanation for their victories: ‘I did it.’ They easily forget the people who handed them the crayon and set them up for success. Human beings of the 9.9 percent variety also routinely conflate the stress of status competition with the stress of survival. No, failing to get your kid into Stanford is not a life-altering calamity.

You are never going to get the enabler class to admit that their lifestyles are not possible without the underlying immoral economic conditions. All you have to do is look at Massachusetts and see what liberalism has become there to understand this. The NIMBYism is rampant, and the isolation of minorities and people of other classes is so obvious that no one can deny that it happens. Most of the employment is so dependent on rent seeking—Education, Biotech and Pharma, Technology, Medical—that there is no way that they could be convinced of another course.

It's probably true that only when those middle class professionals them-

selves start to feel economic pain that we will see more enthusiasm for leveling and social cohesion. A crash in the stock market might do it or—god forbid—riots and chaos but it doesn't seem like there's a painless way out.

As I was growing up in England in the latter half of the twentieth century, the concept of intelligence loomed large. It was aspired to, debated and—most important of all—measured.

The idea that intelligence could be quantified, like blood pressure or shoe size, was barely a century old when I took the test that would decide my place in the world. But the notion that intelligence could determine one's station in life was already much older. It runs like a red thread through Western thought, from the philosophy of Plato to the policies of former UK prime minister Theresa May. To say that someone is or is not intelligent has never been merely a comment on their mental faculties. It is always also a judgment on what they are permitted to do. Intelligence, in other words, is political.

Sometimes, this sort of ranking is sensible: we want doctors, engineers, and rulers who are not stupid. But it has a dark side. As well as determining what a person can do, their intelligence—or putative lack of it—has been used to decide what others can do to them. Throughout Western history, those deemed less intelligent have, as a consequence of that judgment, been colonized, enslaved, sterilized, and murdered—and indeed eaten, if we include non-human animals in our reckoning.

In a ground-breaking study in 1936, an anthropologist suggested that it is not what we learn that matters, but the way in which we learn, and that this was something that would be determined by the culture that we grow up in. He had been living with the Iatmul tribe in New Guinea, observing how the men in the tribe sought to know, or possess, extraordinary numbers of ancestral names (as many as twenty-thousand) and the myths connected to them. Different clans in the tribe would challenge each other over such knowledge in open debate, asking questions over specific details, but at the same time never revealing an entire story, since to do so would put their possession of the ancestral names at risk. These curious circumstances, the anthropologist observed, had obliged Iatmul men to develop a kind of learning that was “directly opposed to rote remembering” of the kind used in the West. It was an extremely sophisticated system that affected their cognitive skills in general and the way in which they went about appropriating new knowledge in other spheres of life. The fact that different cultures developed different ways of learning, he thought, might explain why one ethnic group might suppose another was less intelligent; each had different cognitive skills developed in different ways.

Psychologists call this “The Ultimate Attribution Error,” and it plagues us all. When we see good behavior in our in-group (a group we’re a part of), we typically attribute it to innate characteristics of our group members. When we see bad behavior in our in-group, we typically attribute it to other influences or circumstances. For an out-group (a group outside our own), we attribute behaviors the opposite way. It’s easy to see how this tendency fools our minds and reinforces unfounded prejudices.

So at the dawn of Western philosophy, we have intelligence identified with the European, educated, male human. It becomes an argument for his right to dominate women, the lower classes, uncivilized peoples and non-human animals. While Plato argued for the supremacy of reason and placed it within a rather ungainly utopia, only one generation later, Aristotle presents the rule of the thinking man as obvious and natural.

Needless to say, more than 2,000 years later, the train of thought that these men set in motion has yet to be derailed. The giants of Greek philosophy set up a series of linked dualisms that continue to inform our thought. Opposing categories such as intelligent/stupid, rational/emotional, and mind/body are linked, implicitly or explicitly, to others such as male/female, civilized/primitive, and human/animal. These dualisms aren’t value-neutral, but fall within a broader dualism, as Aristotle makes clear: that of dominant/subordinate or master/slave. Together, they make relationships of domination, such as patriarchy or slavery, appear to be part of the natural order of things.

But it was also clear that an all-round increase in wealth threatened the destruction—indeed, in some sense was the destruction—of a hierarchical society. In a world in which everyone worked short hours, had enough to eat, lived in a house with a bathroom and a refrigerator, and possessed a motor-car or even an aeroplane, the most obvious and perhaps the most important form of inequality would already have disappeared. If it once became general, wealth would confer no distinction. It was possible, no doubt, to imagine a society in which wealth, in the sense of personal possessions and luxuries, should be evenly distributed, while power remained in the hands of a small privileged caste. But in practice such a society could not long remain stable. For if leisure and security were enjoyed by all alike, the great mass of human beings who are normally stupefied by poverty would become literate and would learn to think for themselves; and when once they had done this, they would sooner or later realize that the privileged minority had no function, and they would sweep it away. In the long-run, a hierarchical society is only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance.

Distinctions—between free persons and slaves, between whites and blacks, between rich and poor, between men and women—are rooted in fictions.

Yet it is an iron rule of history that every imagined hierarchy disavows its fictional origins and claims to be natural and inevitable.

Most sociopolitical hierarchies lack a logical or biological basis—they are nothing but the perpetuation of chance events supported by myths. That is one good reason to study history.

Hierarchies aren't natural phenomena within the human race. Outside of parenting, human beings aren't born with the inclination to be ruled, controlled, managed, and supervised by other human beings. Hierarchies are artificial constructs designed to serve a purpose.

How can we distinguish what is biologically determined from what people merely try to justify through biological myths? A good rule of thumb is 'Biology enables, Culture forbids.' Biology is willing to tolerate a very wide spectrum of possibilities. It's culture that obliges people to realize some possibilities while forbidding others. Biology enables women to have children—some cultures oblige women to realize this possibility. Biology enables men to enjoy sex with one another—some cultures forbid them to realize this possibility.

Culture tends to argue that it forbids only that which is unnatural. But from a biological perspective, nothing is unnatural. Whatever is possible is by definition also natural. A truly unnatural behaviour, one that goes against the laws of nature, simply cannot exist, so it would need no prohibition.

Unfortunately, complex human societies seem to require imagined hierarchies and unjust discrimination. Of course not all hierarchies are morally identical, and some societies suffered from more extreme types of discrimination than others, yet scholars know of no large society that has been able to dispense with discrimination altogether. They are absolutely a necessity within any society that boasts high degrees of wealth and power inequities. They are a necessity for maintaining these inequities and ensuring they are not challenged from below.

To widen the Gap between the rich and you, the rich need your participation in their game. The rich need you to believe and defend that Gap-widening is necessary and beneficial and natural.

The rich need you to believe and defend the idea that federal benefits are unaffordable, inflationary, and undeserved. The rich need you to believe and defend the idea that it is only right and logical for their lives to be better than yours.

The rich need you to believe that you must pay FICA so that Social Security and Medicare can exist. And that your healthcare must be unaffordable. And that education either is unaffordable or must put you deeply into debt. And that the government cannot survive without tax dollars. And that you deserve to struggle to feed, clothe, and house your family.

The rich need you to believe that inflation—especially hyper-inflation—is the inevitable result of federal deficit spending on benefits to you, though the rich have been saying this for more than 75 years without evidence, and a monetarily sovereign government has absolute control over the value of its sovereign money.

The rich need you to believe that those “below” you on the totem pole of life, are congenitally inferior and both intellectually and morally deserve their lowly status.

The rich need you to believe this so that you will believe you yourself deserve your inferior status compared with the rich.

The rich need you to believe these things because the rich fear that if ever you discover the truth, you will demand more from the federal government and more equality from the rich.

When a politician spends a lot of time with the people who give him money, he tends to absorb their views. What’s stranger is when the views trickle down to the bottom tiers of power and wealth.

High inequality threatens a country’s political stability because more people are dissatisfied with their economic status, which makes it harder to reach political consensus among population groups with higher and lower incomes.

Almost all social welfare statistics track economic inequality, not absolute access to goods. People are happy, or sick, or whatever, based on how unequal their society is, and almost nothing else, provided the society is beyond the bare subsistence level. Inequality matters, it drives almost everything. People who feel unequal are unhappy, stressed, and sick.

So it doesn’t matter if Thelma has a TV and a smartphone, what matters is that she’s scared all the time because if she loses her job she’s screwed, and as a result she has to do whatever her boss says. She has little real freedom, save the right to become homeless. And that fear is constantly there, even if it is subconscious.

For decades people put up with decline, but now the youngsters, some of whom are in their early 30s, have never known anything but a failed system and a bad economy. This political world has never worked for them, ever: they have no emotional investment in it, no habit of supporting it.

The powerful are in a radically different position of responsibility from the powerless; almost needless to say, Trump supporters—generally victims of propaganda in a system that offers few valid choices (Clinton was hardly a good alternative)—bear considerably less moral responsibility than Trump and the staffers of his thuggish regime. In politics, we should always fire our moral weaponry at the powerful; the powerless, rather like bystanders of armed conflict, should be left to infer the implications of associating closely

with parties rightly under moral assault. Creating shame by proxy, without the resentment provoked by personal blame, is the needed moral tactic.

What keeps a person passive and compliant is fear of repercussions, but once you let go of your attachment to things that don't ultimately matter—money, career, physical safety—you can overcome that fear. Freeing oneself of attachments is always empowering.

The elites should worry about the day when the mob turns from destructive introspection, to directed agency at an external foe. That foe being the rent-seekers and economic manipulators of injustice. Propaganda and monopoly violence don't last forever, and the hysterical response of the establishment to this possibility is what we are witnessing.

We need a new term or word for the class of people dedicated to the spread of inequality. The terms 'bourgeoisie,' 'corporatists,' 'capitalists,' and 'fascists' have been rendered ineffectual in raising the consciousness of working people to their plight. Occupy brought 'the 1%' into consciousness, but there still is a lingering faith that somehow the business community can provide the necessities for a good life, if only "something" can be done to "free" their creative potential. My take on the Fake News phenomenon is that it is yet another phase to keep the working population even more confused and misdirected. It is a strategy to double down on propaganda. Propaganda questioning the validity of propaganda.

In America, the psychic health of the nation is coming into question. Leadership that can provide a vestige of calm amid the rising storm brought about by economic uncertainty will easily gain followers. The crisis of leadership is daily becoming more acute.

Maybe a better strategy would be to come up with a new term for the 80% ruthlessly exploited by the current system. A new term is needed because all others have been corrupted into impotence.

We are confused, in denial, projecting furiously. All this fake news has begun to undermine our vision of ourselves as "the exceptional nation." Our mental pictures of soldiers handing out candy bars to starving child refugees have morphed into drone operators taking out toddlers at wedding parties.

We have elders preaching the American virtues of 'self reliance,' 'personal responsibility,' and the dangers of being coddled by an inefficient nanny state, while enjoying the benefits of a guaranteed monthly social security check deposited into their bank accounts, and having their hip replacements and open heart surgeries paid for by Medicare.

We are still entranced by our national narrative of 'go west, young man,' with acres of fertile prairie and lush coastal valleys ours for the taking; all we need to follow is our sacred work ethic and success will be ours. Well, all the land is posted 'Private' and the water is in the process of being purchased

by faceless corporate entities. And the native Americans, whose land we stole, are pissed and getting organized.

We need new words, a new national narrative, a new vision of where we are, what crimes we committed to get here, how we have managed to bring the planet to the brink of destruction and, finally, how we can salvage what remains and forge a new identity, a better and more sustainable story.

Until then, the next few years (decades?) will be messy. But filled with promise.

The American working classes are uninterested in taking up the world-historical role that Marxist theory assigns to them. All they want is plenty of full time jobs at a living wage. Give them that, and revolutionary activists can bellow themselves hoarse without getting the least flicker of interest out of them.

Every so often, the affluent classes lose track of this, and try to force the working classes to put up with extensive joblessness and low pay, so that affluent Americans can pocket the proceeds. This never ends well. After an interval, the working classes pick up whatever implement is handy—Andrew Jackson, the Grange, the Populist movement, the New Deal, Donald Trump—and beat the affluent classes about the head and shoulders with it until the latter finally get a clue.

This might seem promising for Marxist revolutionaries, but it isn't, because the Marxist revolutionaries inevitably rush in saying, in effect, 'No, no, you shouldn't settle for plenty of full time jobs at a living wage, you should die by the tens of thousands in an orgy of revolutionary violence so that we can seize power in your name.' My readers are welcome to imagine the response of the American working class to this sort of rhetoric.

“Sorry, but I don't have the genetic predisposition to throw myself into a fire for the good of society. In fact, I would go so far as to say that any society that forces its productive members to destroy themselves is pretty close to imploding in any event, so patriotic and righteous self-sacrifice for the whole won't even accomplish anything anyway.”

But, one works at least 50 hours a week, including commute or cumulative small amounts of time thinking about work related shit, or time spent getting ready for work. We make constant sacrifices, but the wrong ones. Our sacrifices are funneled in such a way as to both increase the entrenchment of the status quo and sap our resources for attempting to overturn the existing order. We are clearly willing to sacrifice, even if we may not realize it. Our

freedom and futures depend on us redirecting those sacrifices to where they are needed most, where they can be the most effective agents for change.

Millennials and working classes at-large have no reason not to fight the 1% tooth-and-nail, using every means they can—electoral politics, direct action, and revolutionary struggle. We have nothing to lose—no wealth, status, or bright economic future in this system—and everything to gain.

When we tolerate what we know to be wrong—when we close our eyes and ears to the corrupt because we are too busy, or too frightened; when we fail to speak up and speak out—we strike a blow against freedom and decency and justice.

Should things not improve, should we not quickly gain momentum, we will need to send many more through the meatgrinder.

More and more of the world's people are nobodies: nobody's children, owners of nothing. Not human beings, but human resources who do not have names, but numbers.

There was a girl, and her uncle sold her. Put like that it seems so simple. No man, proclaimed Donne, is an Island, and he was wrong. If we were not islands, we would be lost, drowned in each other's tragedies. We are insulated—a word that means, literally, remember, made into an island—from the tragedy of others, by our island nature, and by the repetitive shape and form of the stories. The shape does not change: there was a human being who was born, lived, and then, by some means or another, died. There. You may fill in the details from your own experience. As unoriginal as any other tale, as unique as any other life. Lives are snowflakes—forming patterns we have seen before, as like one another as peas in a pod, but still unique. Without individuals we see only numbers: a thousand dead, a hundred-thousand dead, 'casualties may rise to a million.' With individual stories, the statistics become people—but even that is a lie, for the people continue to suffer in numbers that themselves are numbing and meaningless. Look, see the child's swollen, swollen belly, and the flies that crawl at the corners of his eyes, his skeletal limbs: will it make it easier for you to know his name, his age, his dreams, his fears? To see him from the inside? And if it does, are we not doing a disservice to his sister, who lies in the searing dust beside him, a distorted, distended caricature of a human child? And there, if we feel for them, are they now more important to us than a thousand other children touched by the same famine, a thousand other young lives who will soon be food for the flies' own myriad squirming children? We draw our lines around these moments of pain, and remain upon our islands, and they cannot hurt us.

I hate it when shit that should never happen in a civilized society gets turned into a feel-good story.

For progressives, best articulated in the Green Party, their strategy remains the same as what was attempted during the 2016 election: to build a third party that can run in local and national elections. But with the push to defeat Trump going to be even greater in 2020, there will most likely be even less of an impetus to build something like the Green Party, and even still, the Green Party got less than 1% of the vote in 2016 at a time when many expected that it was “more safe” than ever to vote for a third option.

In the end, it didn’t matter. The DNC crushed Sanders, the electoral college played its role, and nothing was done about millions of voters who were kicked off the rolls by the Republican CrossCheck program. You want a third party? Great. You just have to figure out how you’re going to move forward in this democracy. If we even had the mass upsurge needed to put a third party into place, let alone protect it from attacks by the ruling elite that would shut it down, we wouldn’t even need to bother with parties to begin with.

“This may be the beginning of a great civil war in this country, between labor and capital. The laboring people, who mostly constitute the militia, will not take up arms to put down their brethren. Even if so-called law and order should beat them down in blood we would, at least, have our revenge on the men who coined our sweat and muscles into millions for themselves.”

David Brooks concludes from his fieldwork in *Red America* that the standard notion of class is flawed. Thinking about class in terms of a hierarchy, where some people occupy more exalted positions than others, he writes, is “Marxist” and presumably illegitimate. The correct model, he suggests, is a high school cafeteria, segmented into self-chosen taste clusters like “nerds, jocks, punks, bikers, techies, druggies, God Squadders,” and so on. “The jocks knew there would always be nerds, and the nerds knew there would always be jocks,” he writes. “That’s just the way life is.” We choose where we want to sit and whom we want to mimic and what class we want to belong to the same way we choose hairstyles or TV shows or extracurricular activities. We’re all free agents in this noncoercive class system, and Brooks eventually concludes that worrying about the problems faced by workers is yet another deluded affectation of the blue-state rich.

Brooks’s inventive explanation for the red-staters’ complete comfort with free-market capitalism is that they don’t know need or envy. “Where they live,” he writes, “they can afford just about anything that is for sale.” On the other hand, blue-state people are reminded constantly that there are people higher than they on the social ladder, simply because of the spatial dynamics

of the city. Evidently, there are no other grounds for disgruntlement at all, which leads to the clear conclusion that no one would ever complain about free-market capitalism—that many of the revolutions and wars and social welfare schemes of the last century could have been avoided—if only the rich would hide themselves better.

This situation may be paradoxical, but it is also universal. For decades Americans have experienced a populist uprising that only benefits the people it is supposed to be targeting. In Kansas we merely see an extreme version of this mysterious situation. The angry workers, mighty in their numbers, are marching irresistibly against the arrogant. They are shaking their fists at the sons of privilege. They are laughing at the dainty affectations of the Leawood toffs. They are massing at the gates of Mission Hills, hoisting the black flag, and while the millionaires tremble in their mansions, they are bellowing out their terrifying demands. “We are here,” they scream, “to cut your taxes.”

“The small-timers in the seafood business... people make fun of them because they don’t know the answers to intelligent questions. Maybe they don’t know the name of the First Lady of the United States, but that’s not what they care about. What they care about is that their motor starts in the morning and that they go out, and go to work. And out there, they’re professionals that nobody can compete with; they’re scientists at their jobs.”

Class, conservatives insist, is not really about money or birth or even occupation. It is primarily a matter of authenticity, that most valuable cultural commodity. Class is about what one drives and where one shops and how one prays, and only secondarily about the work one does or the income one makes. What makes one a member of the noble proletariat is not work per se, but unpretentiousness, humility, and the rest of the qualities that our punditry claims to spy in the red states that voted for George W. Bush and Donald Trump. The nation’s producers don’t care about unemployment or a dead-end life or a boss who makes five-hundred times as much as they do. No. In red land both workers and their bosses are supposed to be united in disgust with those affected college boys at the next table, prattling on about French cheese and villas in Tuscany and the big ideas for running things that they read in books.

“That’s the whole point of being a liberal: to feel superior to people with less money,” seethes the inimitable Ann Coulter. Only when you appreciate the powerful driving force of snobbery in the liberals’ worldview do all their postposterous counter-intuitive arguments make sense. They promote

immoral destructive behavior because they are snobs, they embrace criminals because they are snobs, they oppose tax cuts because they are snobs, they adore the environment because they are snobs. Every pernicious idea to come down the pike is instantly embraced by liberals to show how powerful they are. Liberals hate society and want to bring it down to reinforce their sense of invincibility. Secure in the knowledge that their beachfront haciendas will still be standing when the smoke clears, they giddily fiddle with the little people's rules and morals. Coulter instantiates this thesis about the rich not by opening a copy of *Fortune* or *Cigar Aficionado* but by turning to what's on TV. See, there's all sorts of filth, put there by liberals. We know the liberal elite hate the common people because of what we see on TV, what we read in highbrow modern fiction, all of which can be laid at the doorstep of liberalism. On the other hand, we know that the GOP is the true party of the workers, since the hard-guy Republican is more likely to have a beer with a trucker than the wealthy Nancy Pelosi. We know it because the two social possibilities of American life are mimicking the liberal "beautiful people" of Hollywood or embracing "the working-class hillbillies who go to NASCAR races," that favorite litmus test of the populist right.

They have developed an elaborate theoretical system for generating the politicized anger that is so much in evidence these days and for diverting this resentment from its natural course. By separating class from economics, they have built a Republican-friendly alternative for the disgruntled blue-collar American.

"It is not that anyone thinks that incivility, promiscuity, drug use, and irresponsibility are good things. But we have become embarrassed to criticize them unless we can couch our objections in the legalistic terms of rights, the therapeutic language of self-realization, or the economic jargon of efficiency. The moral condition of the urban poor, romanticized in pop music and advertising, shames us but we dare not say a word. Our new explicitness about sex in television and film, and growing indifference to what we euphemistically call 'sexual preference,' scares the wits out of responsible parents, who see sexual confusion and fear in their children's eyes. But ever since the sixties they risk ridicule for raising objections that earlier would have seemed perfectly obvious to everyone."

The erasure of the economic is a necessary precondition for most of the basic backlash ideas. It is only possible to think that the news is slanted to the left, for example, if you don't take into account who owns the news

organizations and if you never turn your critical powers on that section of the media devoted to business news. The university campus can only be imagined as a place dominated by leftists if you never consider economics departments or business schools. You can believe that conservatives are powerless victims only if you exclude conservatism's basic historical constituency, the business community, from your analysis. Most important, it is possible to understand popular culture as the product of liberalism only if you have blinded yourself to the most fundamental of economic realities, namely, that the networks and movie studios and advertising agencies and publishing houses and record labels are, in fact, commercial enterprises. Indeed, the economic blindness of backlash conservatism is also a product, in large part, of those same commercial cultural enterprises. Conservatives are only able to ignore economics the way they do because they live in a civilization whose highest cultural expressions—movies, advertisements, and sitcoms—have for decades insisted on downplaying the world of work. Conservatives are only able to compartmentalize business as a realm totally separate from politics because the same news media whose “liberal bias” they love to deride has long accepted just such compartmentalization as a basic element of professional journalistic practice.

The truth is that the culture that surrounds us—and that persistently triggers new explosions of backlash outrage—is largely the product of business rationality. It is made by writers and actors, who answer to editors and directors and producers, who answer to senior vice presidents and chief executive officers, who answer to Wall Street bankers, who demand profits above all else. From the mega-mergers of the media giants to the commercial time-outs during the football game to the plots of the Hollywood movies, we live in a market world. The Supreme Court doesn't make American culture; neither does Planned Parenthood nor the ACLU. It is business that speaks to us over the TV set, always in the throbbing tones of cultural insurgency, forever shocking the squares, humiliating the pious, queering tradition, and crushing patriarchy. It is because of the market that our TV is such a sharp-tongued insulter of “family values” and such a zealous promoter of every species of social deviance. It is thanks to New Economy capitalism and its cult of novelty and creativity that our bankers glory in referring to themselves as “revolutionaries” and our discount brokerages tell us that owning stock will smash conformity and usher in the rock ‘n’ roll millennium. We are encouraged to consume Dr. Pepper because it will make us more of an individual; to consume Starbucks because it is somehow more authentic; to pierce our navels and ride souped-up Jet Skis and eat Jell-O because these are such “extreme” experiences. Well maybe the last one is if you were a woman doing it alone with Bill Cosby. Indeed,

counterculture is so commercial and so business-friendly today that a school of urban theorists thrives by instructing municipal authorities on the fine points of luring artists, hipsters, gays, and rock bands to their cities on the ground that where these groups go, corporate offices will follow.

For the aggrieved “Middle Americans,” the experience has been a bummer all around. All they have to show for their Republican loyalty are lower wages, more dangerous jobs, dirtier air, a new overlord class that comports itself like King Farouk—and, of course, a crap culture whose moral free fall continues without significant interference from the grandstanding Christers whom they send triumphantly back to Washington every couple of years. By all rights the charm of Republicanism should have worn off for this part of the conservative coalition long ago. After all, how can you lament the shabby state of American life while absolving business of any responsibility for it? How can you complain so bitterly about culture and yet neglect to mention the main factor making culture what it is? How can you reconcile the two clashing halves of the conservative mind?

By believing in bias, that’s how. Alone among the many, many businesses of the world, the backlash thinkers insist, the culture industry does not respond to market forces. It does the ugly things that it does because it is honeycombed with robotic, alien liberals, trying to drip their corrosive liberalism into our ears. Liberal bias exists because it must exist in order for the rest of contemporary conservatism to be true. As in Saint Anselm’s proof of the existence of God, which flummoxed generations of our ancestors, it simply cannot be any other way. Bias has to be; therefore it is.

Like many of the Conservatives, she gives the impression of intelligence, choosing and enunciating each word carefully, but she also seems oddly naïve, like a person who has sat down and worked out the world’s problems all on her own. She went out of her way to impress upon me their lack of means. But her thoughts on the issues seem all to have been drawn from the playbook of the nineteenth-century Vanderbilts and Fricks. Her solution to urban decline, for example, is school vouchers and the low-wage economy. First we unleash market forces to improve the schools, then “these better schools will produce good workers, that will become attractive to more businesses, that will move in to get these good workers, who will work for lower wages, because they’re from poverty. They aren’t expecting eighty-thousand a year. They’re content to work for six, eight, ten dollars an hour.” And then someday these obedient paupers will be granted the same shot at the good life as everybody else. At least, I hope that’s the plan.

What’s in it for her? Why would a person of limited means make such great sacrifices for a politics that can only leave people like her worse off?

What makes a person who is just scraping by want to help the CEO of Westar pile up the pelf? The answer seems to lie at least partially in the breathtaking beauty of the conservative worldview itself. Everything fits together here; everything has its place; everyone ought to be happy in their station. The god of the market may not have much to offer you personally, but that doesn't change its divinity or blur the awesome clarity of the conservative vision. Besides, there are different ways to serve. Her family themselves may not stand to gain much from, say, a cut in top marginal income tax rates, but there is still joy in doing what is right, in being part of a movement that is advancing so robustly toward its goals.

Although she says she does not oppose a woman's right to vote (obviously she votes all the time), she freely admits to holding old-fashioned views of relations between the sexes:

“I'm a happy captive of forty-three years, and I am obedient to my husband in all things moral. And the other half of it, for a Christian, is my husband has to love and care for me as Jesus loved and cared for the church. And Jesus died for his church, so my husband has to be willing to die for me. And if he's willing to die for me, the least I can do is be obedient in moral things, right?”

The conservatives, it seems to me, can be divided into two basic groups. On one side are the true believers, the average folks who have been driven into right-wing politics by what they see as the tyranny of the lawyers, the America-haters at Harvard, the professional politicians in Washington, or the eviction of God from public space. These kinds of conservative will throw themselves under the wheels of an abortion doctor's car; they will go door-to-door and spend their life savings for their causes; they will agitate, educate, and organize with a conviction that anyone who believes in democracy has to admire. On the other side are the opportunists: professional politicians and lawyers and Harvard men who have discovered in the great right-wing groundswell an easy shortcut to realizing their ambitions. Many of them once aspired to join—maybe even did join—the state's moderate Republican insider club. Rising up that way, however, would take years, maybe a lifetime, when by mouthing some easily memorized God-talk and changing their position on abortion—as many leading conservatives have done—they could instantly have a movement at their back, complete with super-dedicated campaign workers they wouldn't have to pay and a national network of pundits and think tanks and talk-show hosts ready to plug them in.

In rallying average people against those infernal PhDs with their blue-ribbon studies and their government agencies, Republicans have hijacked several legitimate, even honorable, anti-intellectual traditions. The first of these is Protestant evangelicalism, which values the individual's direct emotional contact with God while rejecting the need for a church hierarchy made up of professional clergymen. Critical thinking merely gets in the way of holiness, this tradition holds, and evangelicals have consistently favored charismatic individual preachers over any form of learned organization. Another tradition the backlash swipes is the powerful suspicion of professional expertise associated with the historical left. This attitude originally arose, of course, in opposition to the impositions of the business world, not as a way to get corporations off the hook. Nonviolent social control was the founding rationale for many of the American professions. The professional middle class sold itself as the group that would keep the workers in line, whether with efficiency studies, with public relations experts, or with the pseudoscience of corporate management. And workers responded to its claims, naturally, with skepticism and derision. For working-class people, relations with the middle class are usually a one-way dialogue. From above come commands, diagnoses, instructions, judgments, definitions—even, through the media, suggestions as to how to think, feel, spend money, and relax. Ideas seldom flow upward to the middle class, because there are simply no structures to channel the upward flow of thought from class to class.

Maybe what George Bernard Shaw once wrote is true:

“All professions are conspiracies against the laity.”

It is important when trying to understand the pro-life movement to keep in mind that, whatever else the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision might have been, it was also a monument to the power of the professions. In fact, almost the entire history of abortion law can be understood in the context of medical professionalization. Just as the nineteenth-century laws banning the procedure were passed at the behest of physicians just then establishing their own expertise, so the wave of reforms that unbanned the procedure in the sixties and seventies reflected the profession's changing views of itself. Abortion law remained tangled with medical professionalism right to the end: the list of groups that submitted amicus briefs to the Supreme Court in favor of abortion rights in 1973 reads like a veritable Who's Who of the nation's medical hierarchy. Furthermore, the justice who wrote the *Roe* decision, Harry Blackmun, had spent his legal career as the attorney for the Mayo Clinic, and, according to two journalists who have studied the controversy, it was the “rights of the physician” to treat his

patient “according to his best professional judgment” that was foremost in Blackmun’s mind in *Roe*, not the rights of the pregnant woman.

Roe v. Wade also demonstrated in no uncertain manner the power of the legal profession to override everyone from the church to the state legislature. The decision superseded laws in nearly every state. It unilaterally quashed the then-nascent debate over abortion, settling the issue by fiat and from the top down. And it cemented forever a stereotype of liberalism as a doctrine of a tiny clique of experts, an unholy combination of doctors and lawyers, of bureaucrats and professionals, securing their “reforms” by judicial command rather than by democratic consensus.

Ironically, the rise of professionalism among journalists is also one of the cultural factors that has made possible the right’s erasure of the economic. Professionalism’s emphasis on legitimacy and expertise has caused mainstream journalism to define news almost exclusively as the doings of the state, government officials, and rival politicians; the corporate world is not considered a legitimate subject for critical inquiry or the attention of the general public. This lack of true journalistic scrutiny is what made possible such costly debacles as the Enron and WorldCom bankruptcies, the 2008 collapse, and pandemic panics.

A while back the *Wall Street Journal* ran an essay about a place “where hatred trumps bread,” where a manipulative ruling class has for decades exploited an impoverished people while simultaneously fostering in them a culture of victimization that steers this people’s fury back persistently toward a shadowy, cosmopolitan Other. In this tragic land unassuageable cultural grievances are elevated inexplicably over solid material ones, and basic economic self-interest is eclipsed by juicy myths of national authenticity and righteousness wronged. The essay was supposed to be a description of the Arab states in their conflict with Israel, but when I read it I thought immediately of dear old Kansas and the role that locales like Shawnee play in conservatism’s populist myth.

Conservatism’s base constituent, the business community, is the party that has gained the most from the trends that have done such harm out here. But conservatism’s house intellectuals counter this by offering an irresistible alternative way of framing our victimhood. They invite us to take our place among a humble middle-American folk, virtuous and yet suffering under the rule of a snobbish elite who press their alien philosophy down on the heartland. Yes, the conservatives will acknowledge, things have gotten materially worse on the farms and in the small towns, but that’s just business, they tell us. That is just the forces of nature doing their thing. Politics is something different: Politics is about blasphemous art and crazy lawsuits filed by out-of-control trial lawyers and smart-talking pop stars

running down America. Politics is when the people in the small towns look around at what Walmart and ConAgra have wrought and decide to enlist in the crusade against Charles Darwin.

The backlash offers more than this ready-made class identity. It also gives people a general way of understanding the buzzing mass-cultural world we inhabit. Consider, for example, the stereotype of liberals that comes up so often in the backlash oeuvre: arrogant, rich, tasteful, fashionable, and all-powerful. In my real-world experience liberals are nothing of the kind. They are an assortment of complainers—for the most part impoverished complainers—who wield about as much influence over American politics as the cashier at Home Depot does over the company's business strategy. This is not a secret, either; read any issue of *The Nation* or *In These Times* or the magazine sent to members of the United Steelworkers, and you figure out pretty quickly that many liberals don't speak for the powerful or the wealthy. But when you flip through *People* magazine, you come away with a very different impression of what liberals are like. Here you read about movie stars who go to charity balls for causes like animal rights and the "underprivileged." Singers who were big in the seventies express their concern with neatly folded ribbons for this set of victims or that. Minor TV personalities instruct the world to stop saying mean things about the overweight or the handicapped. And beautiful people of every description don expensive transgressive fashions, buy expensive transgressive art, eat at expensive transgressive restaurants, and get edgy with an expensive punk sensibility or an expensive earth-friendly look.

Here liberalism is a matter of shallow appearances, of fatuous self-righteousness; it is arrogant and condescending, a politics in which the beautiful and the wellborn tell the unwashed and the beaten-down and the funny-looking how they ought to behave, how they should stop being racist or homophobic, how they should be better people. In an America where the chief sources of one's ideas about life's possibilities are TV and the movies, it's not hard to be convinced that we inhabit a liberal-dominated world: feminist cartoons for ten-year-olds are followed by commercials for nonconformist deodorants; entire families of movies are organized around some transcendent dick joke; even shows for toddlers have theme songs about keeping it real. Like any industry, though, the culture business exists primarily to advance its own fortunes, not those of the Democratic Party. Winning an audience of teenagers, for example, is the goal that has made the dick joke into a sort of gold standard, not winning elections for liberals. Encouraging demographic self-recognition and self-expression through products is, similarly, the bread and butter not of leftist ideology but of consumerism. These things are part of the culture industry's very

DNA. They are as subject to change by an offended American electorate as is the occupant of the Danish throne.

Never understanding this is a source of strength for the backlash. Its leaders rage against the liberalism of Hollywood. Its voters toss a few liberals out of office and are surprised to see that Hollywood doesn't care. They toss out more liberals and still nothing changes. They return an entire phalanx of pro-business blowhards to Washington, and still the culture industry goes on its merry way. But at least those backlash politicians that they elect are willing to do one thing differently: they stand there on the floor of the US Senate and shout no to it all. And this is the critical point: in a media world where what people shout overshadows what they actually do, the backlash sometimes appears to be the only dissenter out there, the only movement that has a place for the uncool and the funny-looking and the pious, for all the stock buffoons that our mainstream culture glories in lampooning. In this sense the backlash is becoming a perpetual alter-ego to the culture industry, a feature of American life as permanent and as strange as Hollywood itself.

The most important similarity between backlash and mainstream commercial culture is that both refuse to think about capitalism critically. Indeed, conservative populism's total erasure of the economic could only happen in a culture like ours where material politics have already been muted and where the economic has largely been replaced by those aforementioned pseudospiritual fulfillments. This is the basic lie of the backlash, the manipulative strategy that makes the whole senseless parade possible. In all of its rejecting and nay-saying, it resolutely refuses to consider that the assaults on its values, the insults, and the Hollywood sneers are all products of capitalism as surely as are McDonald's hamburgers and Boeing 737s.

The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the organization that produced such figures as Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama has long been pushing the party to forget blue-collar voters and concentrate instead on recruiting affluent, white-collar professionals who are liberal on social issues. The larger interests that the DLC wants desperately to court are corporations, capable of generating campaign contributions far outweighing anything raised by organized labor. The way to collect the votes and—more important—the money of these coveted constituencies, “New Democrats” think, is to stand rock-solid on, say, the pro-choice position while making endless concessions on economic issues, on welfare, free-trade, Social Security, labor law, privatization, deregulation, and the rest of it. Such Democrats explicitly rule out what they deride as “class warfare” and take great pains to emphasize their friendliness to business interests. Like the conservatives, they take economic issues off the table.

As for the working-class voters who were until recently the party's very backbone, the DLC figures they will have nowhere else to go; Democrats will always be marginally better on economic issues than Republicans. Besides, what politician in this success-worshipping country really wants to be the voice of poor people? Where's the soft money in that?

The larger result was that both parties became vehicles for upper-middle-class interests and the old class-based language of the left quickly disappeared from the universe of the respectable. The Republicans, meanwhile, were industriously fabricating their own class-based language of the right, and while they made their populist appeal to blue-collar voters, Democrats were giving those same voters—their traditional base—the big brush-off, ousting their representatives from positions within the party and consigning their issues, with a laugh and a sneer, to the dustbin of history. A more ruinous strategy for Democrats would have been difficult to invent. And the ruination just keeps on coming. However desperately they triangulate and accommodate, the losses keep mounting. Curiously enough, though, Democrats of the DLC variety aren't worried. They seem to look forward to a day when their party really is what David Brooks and Ann Coulter claim it to be now: a coming-together of the rich and the self-righteous. While Republicans trick out their poisonous stereotype of the liberal elite, Democrats seem determined to live up to the libel.

The problem is not that Democrats are monolithically pro-choice or anti-school prayer; it's that by dropping the class language that once distinguished them sharply from Republicans they have left themselves vulnerable to cultural wedge issues like guns and abortion and the rest whose hallucinatory appeal would ordinarily be far overshadowed by material concerns. We are in an environment where Republicans talk constantly about class—in a coded way, to be sure—but where Democrats are afraid to bring it up.

The gigantic error in all this is that people don't spontaneously understand their situation in the great sweep of things. They don't just automatically know the courses of action that are open to them, the organizations they might sign up with, or the measures they should be calling for. Liberalism isn't a force of karmic nature that pushes back when the corporate world goes too far; it is a man-made contrivance as subject to setbacks and defeats as any other. Consider our own social welfare apparatus, the system of taxes, regulations, and social insurance that is under sustained attack. Social Security, the FDA, and all the rest of it didn't spring out of the ground fully formed in response to the obvious excesses of a laissez-faire system; they were the result of decades of movement building, of bloody fights between strikers and state militias, of agitating, educating, and thankless organizing. More than forty years passed between the first

glimmerings of a left-wing reform movement in the 1890s and the actual tepid enactment of a few reforms in the 1930s. In the meantime scores of the most rapacious species of robber baron went to their reward untaxed, unregulated, and unquestioned.

As a social system, the backlash works. The two adversaries feed off of each other in a kind of inverted symbiosis: one mocks the other, and the other heaps even more power on the one. This arrangement should be the envy of every ruling class in the world. Not only can it be pushed much, much further, but it is fairly certain that it will be so pushed. All the incentives point that way, as do the never-examined cultural requirements of modern capitalism. Why shouldn't our culture just get worse and worse, if making it worse will only cause the people who worsen it to grow wealthier and wealthier?

The Nature of Identity

If we want to understand the nature of identity, we need to approach it by a different route; not in the timeless depths of our genes and brains, but in the flickering screen of the outside world, which acts as a constant mirror of identity.

That we have an eternal, unchanging self is extremely debatable; the fact that we turn to someone else in our search for it is, by contrast, extremely plausible. Our identity is not an immutable core hidden away in the depths of our being. It is, rather, a collection of ideas that the outside world has inscribed on our bodies. Identity is a construction, and that can be proved by something closely resembling a scientific experiment: adoption.

Take an Indian baby from the Rajasthan village of her birth, have her brought up in Amsterdam, and she will acquire the identity of an Amsterdammer. But if you entrust her instead to a couple from Paris, she will become a Parisienne. If, when she grows up, she goes in search of what she thinks of as her roots, she is going to be disillusioned: they simply don't exist, and in the country of her birth she's likely to find that she's just as alien as any other woman from Amsterdam or Paris. More alien, in fact, because her appearance (skin colour, hair) suggests a bond with the local people that isn't there. We must conclude from this that our psychological identity is shaped by our surroundings. If 'I' had grown up in a different culture with parents belonging to that culture, then 'I' would have been completely different.

Identity is always the temporary product of the interplay between merging and establishing a distance. The mirror that our environment holds up to us determines who we become.

As far as identity is concerned, the most important factor in the genetic hardware is, without doubt, language. We know that the ability to acquire language is innate, but interaction and imitation are crucial: children who grow up in isolation do not learn to speak. The language a child learns depends entirely on its environment. Moreover, the specific nature of that language (each having untranslatable concepts, from *Weltanschauung* to *joie de vivre*) and the way that language is used in the family in which

a child grows up will strongly colour its thinking, including the way the child thinks about itself. Take the fact that various non-Western languages have no equivalent for the word ‘individual’ or ‘personality’: this ensures a completely different context when growing up and acquiring an identity.

Is a baby indeed a blank page, a *tabula rasa* that can be entirely molded by its environment? Every parent knows this isn’t true. Anyone with experience of newborn babies knows that each child has something unique about it as soon as it is born. That ‘something’ is hard to define: an alert look, a sustained attentiveness, or a readiness to interact. It has much more to do with certain traits (introverted or extroverted) and tendencies (quick or slow, persevering or easily deterred) than with content. The mirroring that follows from parents—‘You’re so pigheaded, you’ll come to a sticky end!’ or ‘She’s a strong character just like my grandmother, she’ll go a long way!’—reinforces these tendencies, as do the stories that keep being repeated (‘Right after she was born, she looked at us and then round the whole room. She’s been curious about the world from day one!’). We can’t pin down those unique traits, though I don’t doubt their existence. At the same time, I’m convinced that they are molded by the environmental response to them.

When group cohesion diminishes, identity becomes weaker and more chaotic, and aggression within the group, against the same other, invariably increases. Politicians intuitively exploit this fact: when popular rebellion threatens, create an external enemy, a different other, and the ranks will close again. Ancient Jewish law prescribed that a goat—a scapegoat—be symbolically loaded with the sins of the community and sent into the desert on the Day of Atonement.

A society is deemed successful when it achieves a healthy balance between sameness and difference, diverting aggression into less-dangerous outlets. Football is indeed war, music does soothe the savage breast, Mardi Gras allows licensed misbehaviour, and sending ritual scapegoats into the desert isn’t such a bad idea. This insight needs to be cherished: every group, or, more broadly, every society, needs a safety valve to deal with inevitable aggression. Without that safety valve, every group sooner or later creates actual scapegoats, and sacrifices them on the altar of its anger—bullying is an example of such a practice.

Ideally, societies provide their members with a rich and varied store of narratives to draw on as a starting point for their own identities. A ‘full’ society has ample cultural resources for those seeking answers to existential questions. Its ‘empty’ counterpart has only an impoverished and scanty supply; the mirror it holds up reflects a stereotypical image. A society that heavily censors cultural expression and presents its members with a standard narrative produces stereotypical individuals. Taken to extremes, societies of

both types can induce characteristic identity disorders. In the case of the former, a society can be so full of itself that megalomania results. In the latter case, individuals mean nothing; people are nobodies. This gives rise to the symptoms typical of depression.

Open and closed societies have another significant feature. In an open society, different narratives are allowed to coexist, giving people more options to choose from. As a result, they tend to develop a more open mind. In closed societies, people must make do with a closed narrative, in which everything that is different is shunned as bad and threatening. When taken to extremes, open societies produce a hysterical personality that constantly has to adjust to the latest hype. Closed societies, by contrast, induce classic obsessional neuroses. Like people who are phobic about germs, its members try to keep the outside world at a distance and to have as little to do with it as possible.

Finally, a society can be stable or unstable. This largely depends on the power of the dominant narrative—the more robust it is, the more stable exchanges and thus identity-forming will be. Too much stability can lapse into authoritarian rigidity, with the risk of developing the authoritarian personality. Or, in the absence of a clear narrative, as in today's protean society, a kind of liquid identity has come into being. Beyond a certain point, this liquidity results in borderline personality disorder, when unstable identity causes a constant seesaw of emotions.

Identity is always a construct that derives from an interaction between the identity holder and the wider environment. Identity can be classified as full or empty, open or closed, stable or unstable. Its core is formed by a more-or-less coherent set of norms and values going back to notions and ideology shared by the group, or—to put it in professional jargon—the larger narrative of a particular culture. If that set of norms and values changes dramatically, the identities that are tied to it will invariably change, too, evolving in the direction of the new narrative with the new norms and values. Identity is all about ethics.

Our current conception of ethics, as an external system of rules that is often petty and always disruptive, derives from a particular social evolution. But ethics or morals indeed determine the distinction between good and evil—two words that nowadays immediately put people's backs up. And that's strange, because we've been asking questions about this distinction since human history began—questions that are effectively about the essence of human nature, and therefore also about who we are. They have produced two conflicting answers, along with two entirely different views about the development of identity. One school of thought regards humankind as essentially good, and sees it as society's task to ensure that our benevolent

disposition comes to the fore. The other believes humankind to be essentially bad, and wants society to act as a police officer, to curb our evil tendencies as much as possible. A society in which self-realization is central proceeds from the assumption that people are essentially good—so self-realization is a good idea. A society that takes the opposing view of human nature will be focused on self-denial, because it's all about keeping a check on evil impulses: regular monitoring is necessary, and a firm hand needed on the reins. This notion has dominated Western thought, taking its penultimate shape from Christian ethics.

Aristotle thought that a human is by nature a *zoön politikon*. This is usually translated as “political animal,” but that is not quite right. *Politikon* comes from *polis*, the city-state of antiquity, the precursor of Western democracy. A more accurate translation would be “community animal.” If a person develops optimally, and achieves his or her innate potential, the person will become a true member of the community, and that will in itself bring happiness. Self-realization of this kind within a community boils down to developing certain virtues or *arètai*, the seeds of which are in us all: wisdom, justice, moderation, and courage. This involves maintaining a balance, because if we have too little of a certain characteristic, we won't achieve optimal self-realization. Too much of a certain characteristic is equally bad, and in both cases the individual and the community pay a price. This balance is a product of self-knowledge, because self-knowledge leads to self-control. The better we know ourselves, the more we can control ourselves—*Gnothi seauton*.

The most excellent individual is the one who has the most self-knowledge, making him or her the best-qualified leader. The worst ethical fault that people can be guilty of is hubris—extreme overestimation of their own capabilities—which can cause not only their own downfall, but also bring ruin on those close to them, and even on the community. This theme recurs time and again in Greek tragedies. The opposite of hubris is *sophrosyne*, a virtue combining temperance and wisdom, which fosters self-control.

For Aristotle, as well as for the church, ethics had solid foundations. The former saw it as internal, of biological origin; the latter as external, of divine origin. In other words, ethical rules are not arbitrary. That is the main similarity between the classical interpretation of ethics and Christian morals; for the most part, they largely differ. I shall list some of the differences, as they continue, even now, to shape our thinking much more than we suspect.

The Christian view is that humanity is subject to the authority of the one true God, whose commands have to be obeyed on pain of damnation. Any attempt to escape His all-seeing eye is doomed to failure; sooner or later we will have to pay the price. Instead we must try to live as virtuously

as possible, with only one single aim: to attain eternal life in the next world. Life here on Earth is only significant in the light of the hereafter. Living a virtuous life is very difficult because humanity is, by nature, evil. That's because, according to Christian teaching, we are all tainted with original sin. If people are left to their own devices, they will murder and steal. Self-realization is a very bad idea; self-denial, a necessity. For Christians, ethics is about battling the inner tendency to evil that would otherwise run rampant. Seeking to acquire knowledge is also wicked because that's how the trouble started. Eve wanted to taste the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge—more precisely, knowledge of good and evil. That was why she and Adam were banished from the Garden of Eden. So seeking knowledge is a vain pursuit; mere mortals should leave that kind of thing to God and His earthly representatives, and concentrate on confession, penance, and self-chastisement.

The ancients regarded the man (and it was almost always a man) with the greatest self-knowledge as the most suited to lead the community—the *primus inter pares*, first among equals. Christians take a very different approach: the leader is called by God, and takes an intermediate position between the supreme being and the faithful. A clear pecking order is thus established, with God at the top, followed by his deputized leader. The community and the political leadership occupy an inferior position, and the laws of the land pale into insignificance next to those of the kingdom of God. The Roman emperors threw the Christians to the lions not so much because of their belief, but because they refused to obey the laws of the empire. The Romans were very tolerant when it came to religion, but they regarded civil disobedience as unacceptable.

In the classical world, ethics was rooted in immanence, the notion that everyone carries within them the seed of norms and values. By contrast, Christianity gave rise to the idea of transcendence, originally meaning to “climb beyond” or “surmount.” Everything that is good belongs to the domain of God, who stands above everything. We are created in His image and so we, in turn, stand above nature. The great chain of being, or *Scala Naturae* (Ladder of Nature), a concept that gained popularity in the early Middle Ages, arranged all matter and life in a strictly hierarchical structure. All of creation had its God-given spot on the ladder, and it was vital that everyone knew their allotted place. To study nature was to study that ladder and the creatures perched on its rungs, from the dust at the bottom right up to the seventh heaven at the top. The ladder is both complete and unchanging, given that God has created everything that could be created. Change is impossible, and anyone seeking to leave his or her place commits a cardinal sin: *superbia*, or haughtiness, the successor to the Greek *hubris*.

Even a cursory comparison with Graeco-Roman morality shows what major changes Christianity has wrought in the way we think about ourselves. Ancient ethics is all about habits, character, and self-realization. Man has an innate, inner goal: excellence, which is achieved through self-care leading to self-control. The best leader is the individual with the most self-knowledge. Pride invariably goes before a fall, and its negative consequences aren't confined to the individual, but extend to the community. Conversely, self-care benefits the community as well as the individual. From a Christian point of view, ethics is part of the relationship between a person and something that transcends him or her—that is, God. Human nature is even regarded as inherently evil, so that self-denial is necessary to do good, to approach the divine. In any case, the latter is only possible in the hereafter; life in this vale of tears is fleeting, and serves merely as a means of acquiring God's grace. Every mortal lives in constant fear, and must continually consult his or her conscience. The result is inner conflict, a never-ending battle with the self, often culminating in penitence and punishment, in which it is mainly the body that has to pay. There's no guarantee of salvation, even for those who persevere in their efforts through work and prayer (*ora et labora*); but there is a strong incentive, because on the Day of Judgment, accounts will have to be settled. Efforts of this kind are not made to benefit the community, because a believer's only obligation is towards God.

The double shift in thinking brought about by Christianity persists today and has now become part of our identity. First, we have come to perceive ethics and morality as outside ourselves, and as in conflict with our natural impulses—meaning, of course, that natural impulses are bad. Second, we are convinced that we are accountable to a higher being, an omnipotent agency that watches us all the time. As a result, we have to devise all kinds of escape routes, and we would actually prefer to eliminate that omnipotent agency altogether. At the same time, we have given a new twist to the conviction that humanity is inherently evil, replacing the concept of original sin with equally vague socio-biological notions of man as a wolf for his fellow man, selfish genes, et cetera. Thus, without realizing it, we are espousing the ancient Greek view that ethics is innate—albeit with the opposite conclusion: people are inherently bad and need to have this evil whipped out of them during their upbringing. No wonder that we see ethics and identity as two separate things; inasmuch as we question human nature, the answer tends to be pessimistic.

Christianity introduced yet another important change that is still part of our identity today, and that we may soon come to regret. God, as Supreme Being, is enthroned in Heaven. Beneath Him are the angels; on Earth, men are the closest to Him of all his creations. Consequently, men have dominion

over the rest of creation, starting with women. More importantly, God is above and therefore outside nature. The material universe, the world of the body, is deemed unimportant. Only the spiritual counts, the world of the soul. This is the aspect of transcendence to which I referred earlier. Two-thousand years of Christianity has imprinted this conviction so strongly that we are incapable of reasoning in terms of immanence, of seeing ourselves as part of the wider natural world. A transcendent religion gives believers *carte blanche* to exploit the natural world as they see fit: they are above and outside it, and, anyway, animals don't have a soul (or, in the more modern scientific gloss, aren't able to reason). Inanimate objects such as earth, air, and water are even less important. An immanent religion, by contrast, perceives both the divine and human not as 'above' but as 'in' things, as part of a larger whole. Which means that you should think twice before killing animals, felling forests, or polluting rivers.

Progress—if you ask where this idea comes from, people tend to frown. Surely, progress has always been a concept? We can scarcely conceive that until late into the Renaissance, the opposite—the unchanging nature of all things—was universally assumed to be the case. Even the father of modern botany, Carl Linnaeus, was convinced that all plants had always existed and would always continue to exist; his only task was to systematically chart God's work. Our thinking has undergone a sea change: nothing is fixed; everything is constantly evolving. The development that we go through individually—from little to big, from illiterate to educated—is reflected at the level of society ("primitive" versus "highly developed" societies). It's such a natural assumption that we hardly ever pause to consider it. Note that even the word 'pause' has become somewhat tainted: a lack of motion implies stagnation.

Evolution does not by definition mean progress, and 'fittest' is not the same thing as 'most successful.' Darwin discovered that the extent to which organisms are fitted to their surroundings determines the number of their progeny. A good match or 'fit' between a specific life form and a specific environment results from a combination of chance mutations and environmental changes. If we dub this 'success,' this says more about us than about biology. The most important lesson that evolutionary history teaches us is that the direction taken by evolution is random, unpredictable, and invariably temporary. Progress is a moral judgment by a creature that loves to regard itself in the mirror.

These days, the word 'science' conjures up images of banks of computers operated by white-coated boffins—men as hyper-rational as Mr Spock, albeit without the pointy ears. There is no room for passion; the official thinking is that science must be value-free and objective. Aristotle and

his contemporaries would have been amazed at such naïveté. Science is inherently value-laden because it involves looking for answers to fundamental questions about life. So it's no coincidence that Aristotle elaborated his views on knowledge in two treatises on ethics, because he saw knowledge as subservient to morality. There's no such thing as value-free knowledge, just as there's no such thing as passion-free science. Yet this has been increasingly strongly denied in recent decades, as conceptions of science have got narrower and narrower.

There is an overriding conviction that everything can and should be understood in scientific terms, using propositions that are universally applicable and unaffected by context. Research (which must, of course, be value-free) is based on actual measurements (everything being measurable), and produces data that can then be objectively processed. That such narrowing down can take place in the name of reason is odd, to say the very least. After all, Aristotle distinguished between different forms of knowledge on the basis of an extremely rational conclusion: universal, context-independent knowledge only has a very limited field of application. Indeed, truly important knowledge—in his view, the knowledge needed to administer the city-state—fell entirely outside that sphere, which was why he set greater store by other forms of knowledge. Nowadays, that wisdom has been lost, and the scientific view is that hard science can be applied across the board. More specifically, it can be applied as a rational, perfectly controllable, and predictable instrument, independent of context, in the form of evidence-based protocols. Translated into Aristotelian terms, those protocols will be valid at all times and in all situations, because they are based on generally accepted scientific knowledge.

Both religion and scientism instill in the individual a split identity that springs from a sense of deficiency. I am evil and sinful, or irrational and stupid. If I make enough effort, I can become good or rational, and those in power will help me by continually monitoring me and rewarding or punishing me. If large groups persist in their sinfulness (unbelievers) or stupidity (reactionaries), those in power have to take radical measures: mass conversion, re-education, or if need be, eradication. Even perfectibility has its limits. Both religion and scientism regard present-day humans as imperfect; true perfection will only be found in the hereafter or in a distant future when society is run according to truly scientific principles. In both cases, this requires considerable personal sacrifice. Believers must pray and work hard to attain God's mercy. The ignorant must study hard, and if necessary seek psychological counseling in order to attain reason through the proper insights. The post-modern scientific view is more pessimistic: we will have to wait for a genetic modification of the human race that will

fit us better for the post-industrial society that we have created.

This shift from group to individual is linked to a shift in responsibility. I can have everything I want as long as I come off best in the struggle for life—and that's my responsibility. Society must not hinder me; on the contrary, it must give everyone equal opportunities, and may the best man win. By the same reasoning, care for individuals that have not made it is an anomaly. After all, they only have themselves to blame for their failure, so why should we help them? Progress requires effort, and those who sit around on their backsides must bear the consequences. Adversity can be overcome, and there is no such thing as chance. To fail is to be guilty. People can perfect themselves if they try hard enough—perfection being measured in terms of success and power.

All too easily equated with economic success and financial power, these two factors combine to generate the new goal in life. An unexpected association then arises, with unexpected ethical implications. Rich people are rich by virtue of their own effort and dispositions. Ergo, they are strong characters and, ethically speaking, at the top of the ladder (closest to God, the maker of the ladder). Financial power is equated with moral authority. As a result, we look to bankers and captains of industry to act as leaders of society. Conversely, everyone who fails must be weak characters, if not downright parasites, with dubious norms and values. They are scum, in other words, who are too lazy or stupid to help themselves.

Contrast this with Aristotle's day, when the best leader was the individual with the greatest self-knowledge, which was used to place his or her *arètai*—that is, intellectual and moral virtues—at the disposal of the community. Later, when Christian morals prevailed, the leader was divinely appointed, and his or her task was to curb innate sinfulness to the greater glory of the Kingdom of God. Not so long ago, a press baron could determine the British prime ministership, just as financial lobbies in the US designate presidential candidates. And thus we have made a complete U-turn without noticing it. The Enlightenment assumed that society and ethics could be engineered; evolutionary theory proved that change is the rule. Social Darwinism, by contrast, argued that intervention was wrong, that nature should be allowed free rein: the innate good in man would cause the worthiest to rise to the top. The latest mutation of social Darwinism goes by the name of neoliberalism, and interprets nature to mean market forces. The underlying reasoning remains the same, being demonstrated, where possible, with ever more figures and tables.

Are we essentially good—meaning that if we do go wrong we can blame our environment (from unsuitable friends to too many additives in our baby food)? Or are we innately evil—meaning that only a strict upbringing can

keep us on the straight and narrow? Or are we simply innately ignorant and this ignorance results in actions and outcomes that we see as evil?

Humans are social animals, as Aristotle already knew, but those like Hobbes, Thatcher, and the originators of social-contract theories had apparently forgotten. These theories, which were developed in the eighteenth century, assumed that a person in his or her natural state—nature again!—would be both a solitary and a free being. Only reason could prompt all those solitary creatures to renounce their individual freedom and opt for the group, albeit under certain conditions. These would take the form of a contract (hence contract theory) in which individuals would see the clear benefits of social organization. Those who found the contract wanting could always terminate it. Such a view of humans is scientifically flawed because its premise is wrong. Biology shows that we are social animals; if a member of our species lives a solitary life, he or she is either diseased or has been ostracized. Being ousted from the group is still the earliest punishment in universal use ('Stand in the corner'), and banishment used to be tantamount to death. The concept of the noble savage, leading a solitary life in the wilderness, is no more than a romantic image. Primates live in hierarchically structured groups, in which social relationships very much determine survival and reproduction.

In addition to the importance of the group, primates share another prominent characteristic. In social relationships, the affective basis ("gut feeling") is infinitely more important than the rational and cognitive layers built on top of it. The same applies to humans. We often take crucial decisions in situations that allow little time for conscious thought, and it is mostly only after the event that we rationalize our largely automatic responses, driven by gut feeling. It's not for nothing that rationalization—a retroactive justification of something that we don't really understand and of which we are often ashamed—derives from the Latin word for reason. A system of ethics entirely based on reason, that bypasses gut feelings, only works on paper—like the paper used to draw up social-contract theories.

Sharing behaviour always focuses on a concrete object, ranging from food, to grooming each other for fleas, or scratching each other's back. Societies exist by virtue of the gift—otherwise there would simply be no community—and each culture can be typified, among other things, by the way in which exchanges take place. Identities are determined by the community in which they are formed and consequently by the method of exchange typical of that society. Primates mainly exchange food and sex, and our own economy can be traced back to this form of barter. Different economic systems determine different forms of exchange and, consequently, different identities within different social relationships.

If a society determines social relationships along with norms and values, then in addition to normal identity, society also determines disorders and deviations. Many readers will doubtless find this a dusty old Freudian approach, arguing that there is a medical explanation for such things. Surely psychiatric disorders are diseases originating in the genes and the brain? This notion dominates current thinking, but how much truth is there in it? The fact that genetic factors play a role in a limited number of psychiatric disorders has been more or less established. The rest is conjecture. Moreover, to define something as mentally abnormal is merely to say that it deviates from the norm—that is to say, the social norm. To this day, no single scientific study has succeeded in distinguishing between what is mentally normal and abnormal without using social criteria. To resort to professional jargon: there are no “biological markers.” The current hype surrounding neurobiology and the brain conceals this failure, and the general belief in neurobiology says much about our need for justification: ‘I can’t do anything about it—it’s in my genes; it’s in my brain.’ The need we clearly have for excuses of this kind shows the extent to which we feel accused. Since societies have different norms, they also define deviations differently. Which allows me to bring Freud back into the picture. Mental disorders are also, even primarily, moral disorders. “Patients” no longer comply with the dominant norms and values of their society, causing suffering to themselves and/or others.

A possible explanation for our sense of malaise traces the problem much further back in time—to the collapse of the Grand Narrative. For centuries, religion and ideology provided a source of common identity, centering on ethics and a shared sense of meaning; their loss has created a vacuum. Taking a similar line of reasoning, moral philosophers lay the blame at the door of the Enlightenment, and the soulless, instrumental rationality that it brought forth. Their conclusion is that modern man has nothing left to believe in, depriving us of anchoring points for identity. So it’s hardly surprising that so many problems have arisen. Their proposed solution is to construct a new grand narrative in which we can all believe and from which we can derive a new identity. The problem is that we don’t really know how we could devise, let alone impose, a load-bearing narrative of this kind.

If a great many people are extremely disenchanted with the identity of their fellow beings and want things to go back to how they were, this can only mean one thing: these days, a new identity is setting the tone. This, in turn, means that a new, dominant narrative has taken over, in which the new identity is mirroring itself. And the reason it’s hard to spot is because of its very dominance. An identity-conferring narrative only becomes visible as narrative when it ceases to be coercive. We recently experienced this in

the West in the case of religion: while the Christian narrative was coercive, narrative and reality coincided. Only when secularization took hold did it become visible as narrative, leaving some of the older generation feeling duped. As long as narrative and reality coincide, most people conflate the two. “Get real” means something like, ‘Adapt to the new norm of the new narrative, because that’s the reality.’

Throughout history, economies have always been embedded in religious, ethical, and social structures. This no longer applies in the case of neoliberalism. On the contrary, religion, ethics, and society are subservient to ‘the market.’ In that sense, neoliberalism is no longer an economic theory, but a much broader ideology. Many readers will be surprised to learn that neoliberalism is a progressive movement that, just like other progressive ideologies—such as communism, Nazism, et cetera—seeks to bring about rapid change by revolutionary measures, fully aware that this will entail the (often literal) sacrifice of a generation. This is what the Chicago Boys, the group of economists trained by Milton Friedman, have effectively done in Chile. The same story can be read in the neoliberal bible *Atlas Shrugged*, by Ayn Rand. The book ends as the main character triumphantly flies over the ruined landscape:

“‘The road is closed. We are going back to the world.’ He raised his hand and over the desolate earth he traced in space the sign of the dollar.”

The combination of those two notions, liberty and getting what you deserve, explains meritocracy’s universal attraction. Meanwhile, educational and economic meritocracy have merged, to the extent that intellectual achievements without economic added value are regarded as largely worthless. By way of illustration: the word ‘intellectual’ has now almost become a term of abuse, and many fail to see the irony in the title of the recent critical study “If You’re So Smart, Why Aren’t You Rich?” It is precisely this merger that has brought about a turning point, culminating in what can best be described as a neoliberal meritocracy. The significance of this turning point can be judged by its consequences. In no time, social mobility ground to a halt, the social divide became ever greater, and freedom made way for general paranoia. In other words, exactly the opposite of what was originally intended. There are two reasons for this. First, the notion that everyone starts off in the race of life with equal opportunities is illusory. Second, after a while, a meritocracy gives rise to a new elite, who carefully shut the door on those coming up behind them.

Yet at first sight a combined meritocracy (economic and educational) seems very appealing and easy to sell. Equal opportunities for all, the greatest

rewards for those who make the greatest effort—who could object to that? Experience shows, however, that discrepancies at the start strongly influence the final result. In the case of an educational meritocracy, such discrepancies can be partially offset by investment in primary education, though you can't do much about the intellectual and moral baggage that children get from the home environment. In the case of an economic meritocracy, it is downright impossible to ensure equal starting opportunities. We can't all be born into wealthy families. What's more, the two best starting positions often coincide: a wealthy background usually goes hand in hand with a good education. All in all, we don't have as much free choice as we think, and the idea of the free individual who enjoys unlimited freedom of choice thanks to his or her own efforts is one of the greatest fallacies of our time. Even if inequality could be minimized at the start, the impact of a neoliberal meritocracy will ultimately be very negative. But for that to be understood, it needs to be viewed in the long-term. In its initial stage, a meritocracy has an overwhelmingly positive impact, especially in a society or organization previously dominated by tradition, nepotism, and seniority. At last, people get what they deserve; at last, they can flourish on the basis of their own efforts. This initial period is followed by an interval of stability, after which the system has exactly the opposite effect to that intended.

Social Darwinism and neoliberal meritocracy create the impression that they favour the individual who is naturally the best. He or she would have made it anyway; we are just giving nature a helping hand to speed the fittest up the ladder. But the reality is somewhat different. Both social Darwinists and meritocratists themselves determine who is the fittest and, crucially, how that is to be measured. In practice, they create an increasingly narrow version of reality, while claiming that they promote natural winners. They then preserve that reality by systematically favouring those winners, thus keeping them on top. The fact that they remain there is advanced to prove the validity of this approach.

The supposedly scientific belief in the natural supremacy, first of men over women, and later of the white race (Europeans) and WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) over the rest of the world, is a classic illustration of this process. It led to women and non-whites being deprived of a decent education, to say nothing of decent jobs, on the grounds that such things were beyond their capacity. The position of boss was reserved for a few white men, creating the impression that women and non-whites were incapable of leadership, too. On top of that, they could be exploited shamelessly by virtue of their supposed inferiority. Maintaining systems like this creates static societies in which the upper echelons perpetuate their own position and privileges, ensuring above all that they are kept beyond the reach of

the underclass.

A meritocracy can only function through a centrally directed and rigidly planned system that measures “production” and individual contributions to it. The nature of the system limits the number of winners—only the best can be boss. So every appointment or promotion necessarily entails competition, with career growth being an option only for the few. A cut-throat contest ensues, which in turn causes the criteria for success to be tightened yet further.

An increase in top-down management is inherent to all neoliberal processes: a neoliberal organization invariably creates a non-productive top layer whose main task is to maintain its position by monitoring others, resulting in ever-proliferating rules and regulations. Performance measurement is fostered in the name of “transparency,” the idea being that the criteria are clear and apply equally to all. However, studies show that they only apply to those who do the actual work, not to those who do the measuring—that’s the difference between the worker ants and the manager queens. There is a good metaphor to challenge the so-called transparency of those measurements. The famous pane of glass on the work floor, through which everyone can supposedly see and thus monitor everyone else, is in fact much more like the one-way mirror used for covert observation. On one side, they are transparent; on the other, they are regular mirrors. The measuring voyeurs watch the workers from behind the mirror, themselves hidden from view. Meanwhile the workers themselves can only see, in the mirrors that surround them, their own misery multiplying.

Identity develops optimally in a stable environment where clear authority figures ensure secure bonding. In other words, a child flourishes when people take decisions on its behalf in a consistent way (‘First I’ll tell you a story, then it’s time for bed’), until such time as it can do so itself. Once this secure foundation is in place, content is transferred smoothly via the mirroring processes, the child develops confidence in itself and in others, and is able to distance itself and make its own choices. In this way, it gradually acquires a robust identity. The content of someone’s identity depends on the broader group in which they grew up, and particularly on dominant communal notions, the narrative shared by the group. Those notions are invariably moral in nature, consisting largely of norms and values that determine the way we view ourselves and others. They are reflected in mores or ethics and, by extension, laws. Up to two generations ago, these influences largely came from the family in which someone grew up and their own immediate social circle. The explanation is simple: people spent most of their time in their own small orbits; the impact of the outside world was fairly limited.

The way in which our identity develops has not changed: we still mirror

ourselves in the dominant narrative, with its embedded norms and values. But these days we mirror ourselves far less in our parents, and far more in the flat screens from which we cannot escape, now that they also pollute public spaces and our pockets. This is the millennial version of the constantly repeated hypnopaedic messages in *Brave New World*, and its efficacy exceeds even Huxley's worst nightmares. The advertising world and the media bring us glad tidings against which we have little defense. Their hidden, sophisticated strategy is to convince us that they have our own interests at heart. This usually involves us buying a particular product, 'Because you're worth it.'

The paradox of our era as follows: 'Never have we been so free. Never have we felt so powerless.' We are indeed freer than before, in the sense that we can slag off religion (though we have to be careful when it comes to Islam and Judaism—though lets be honest, mainly with the Jews), take advantage of the new laissez-faire attitude to sex, and support any political movement we like. We can do all these things because they no longer have any significance—freedom of this kind is prompted by indifference. Yet, on the other hand, our daily lives have become a constant battle against a bureaucracy that would make Kafka feel weak at the knees.

We feel this hidden yoke all the more when it comes to that second lie, perfectibility. Our presumed freedom is tied to one central condition: we must be successful—that is, make something of ourselves. Here, the Aristotelian notion of self-realization as the ethical cultivation of the seed of self gets an extremely contemporary interpretation. The freedom to choose another form of self-realization, outside the success narrative, is very limited. You don't need to look far for examples. A highly skilled individual who puts parenting before his or her career comes in for criticism. A person with a good job who turns down promotion to invest more time in other things is seen as crazy—unless those other things ensure success. A girl who wants to become a primary-school teacher is told by her parents that she should start off by getting a master's degree in economics—a primary-school teacher, whatever can she be thinking of!

Yes, we have been liberated from priests and the morality they imposed on us; but, no, this does not mean we are free. Quite the reverse. A new morality has arisen, with its own high priests, who force it upon us with Jesuitical fervour, arguing that it is scientific and therefore not to be questioned. Its commandment is "measurable effectiveness," which is also the mantra of the first modern high priest, the manager. The high priest's second-in-command, the father confessor, has now been replaced by the psychotherapist, whose mantra is "adaptation." To this end, psychotherapists have devised their own personal Rank and Yank system, veiled by a pseudo-

psychiatric diagnosis. Systematic effectiveness is nothing more than a moral fiction, a fable. Actually, it is a double fiction. On the one hand, it remains completely unclear whether neoliberal management is effective—and there are numerous economic proofs to the contrary. On the other hand, the term ‘effectiveness’ obscures the actual goal: greater short-term profit. The moral aspect is, if possible, even harder to spot, hidden away behind figures and statistics that may not be questioned, let alone subjected to moral debate, on the grounds that they provide objective proof. Meetings nowadays often start with a presentation of the latest stats, followed by an announcement of measures that the dictatorship of figures makes almost inevitable.

This is the large-scale manipulation of individuals. Not just manipulation of the way in which they organize their work, and thus their lives, but, more broadly, manipulation of the way they think about themselves and others. The main thrust of that thinking is clear. If success is the new moral standard, those who commit the sin of failure need to be referred by the high priest (manager) to the father confessor (psychotherapist) for further treatment. All this must be done as efficiently as possible, of course.

The contrast between a society that makes people ill and a healthy state of nature is misguided. All societies, without exception, induce illness, just as they induce well-being. The explanation is simple. Every community defines and shapes its own normality, in the same breath defining and shaping its abnormality. The mindset that dominates this process defines the practices that result. It makes quite a difference whether those practices are shaped by a religious mindset (so that someone who deviates is a sinner to be converted, a heretic, or a witch); a medical one (someone who deviates is a patient needing treatment); or an economic one (someone who deviates is a parasite). The only common element is exclusion. On this side of the line you have us, the normal ones; on the other, them, the abnormal ones. So a single individual can at one and the same time be a martyr (religious mindset), a dangerous lunatic (medical mindset), and a terrorist (economic mindset). The question, therefore, is not whether a society makes people ill or well. It is rather how a particular society defines deviations, and what consequences this has. When, as is quite conceivable, such definitions are ethically dubious, a society will find itself in conflict with its fundamental principles. In a word, it will destroy the very ties that hold it together. And this is happening now.

Our identity is shaped by two basic urges: the desire to merge with the other, and the desire for autonomy. Both need to be kept in balance. The first promotes sameness, and thus group forming and subjugation; the second fosters difference, and thus individualism and autonomy. If social-group formation is too weak, the need for the other is felt much more strongly.

People will seek affiliation with others on the basis of common characteristics, many of them debatable, from sharing the same illness label to bullying the same victim. If social-group formation is too strong, personal aspirations are stifled. People desperately try to escape the system in a bid to gain some control over their lives. The more totalitarian the state, the greater the urge for autonomy. Pressure to conform breeds defiance: girls forced to wear a school uniform will try to give it a personal touch.

Both urges also create their own brand of fear and aggression. Up to a few generations ago, Western life was dominated by a fixed, unchanging social order, resulting in a safe lethargy. That social order came to be seen as intrusive and overly controlling, sparking a desire for autonomy. Aggression was directed at central authority and its wish for uniformity. These days, society focuses on the individual. As a result, people feel less secure and more mistrustful of others. They are also much quicker to express aggression, against any “other” they perceive as potentially threatening. Yet at the same time the need for that other is universally felt. The fear of abandonment and, even worse, loneliness, is very great.

The death of public spiritedness and the rise of hyper-individualism can largely be attributed to the current economic model, which systematically pits people against each other, heightening feelings of disparity. If we want to restore the balance between sameness and difference, between public spirit and autonomy, we must transform today’s system of labour organization, and rethink the economy.

These days, the calls for more collective care, “more government,” are becoming increasingly vociferous. A growing group believes that our individual freedom has become far too great and the impact of the community far too small; it urgently wants this imbalance to be corrected. It is directly opposed by another group, which is equally vociferous in concluding the opposite, that we have too much State and too much interference from above. Call a halt, they say, and let people do their thing. Both views are wrong. Contrary to what the first group claims, we are not free at all as individuals, and there is in fact too much interference from above. Contrary to what the second group claims, we have too little State; the current political authorities have almost no say left in how things are run.

Neoliberalism is not an emancipatory regime that has made individuals autonomous by curbing external interference. The fact that the neoliberal economy has put politicians in its pockets has not resulted in fewer rules and greater freedom of choice. Quite the reverse. The proliferation in contracts, rules, and regulations is universally felt—and is an inevitable consequence of the way in which a neoliberal society functions. When you no longer have any symbolic, identifiable authority, and when a communal ethos has been

elbowed out by a view of humanity as competing individuals, the result is indeed the survival of the fittest. The vacuum left by authority is filled with ever more regulations. This is the first important paradox of the neoliberal free-market ideology: it invariably culminates in an excess of interference.

The second paradox concerns the so-called liberation of the individual. Anyone who buys into this claim is confusing individualization and loneliness with autonomy and free choice. The obligation to both succeed and enjoy has turned postmodern consumers into clones of each other's exclusiveness, without the advantage of mutual solidarity. Hence the strange combination of excessive individualism and a collective consumerism in which we all cherish the illusion that we are unique. The irony is that we end up flocking together at a "little place that nobody knows about," brandishing the latest "personal" computer and "exclusive" limited-edition handbag or pair of shoes, firmly convinced that we, and we alone, are free spirits who don't just blindly follow the herd. Individualism has indeed gone too far in this day and age. People have been reduced to consumers who live in the illusion that they are unique and make their own choices. In actual fact, they are being made to think and behave alike to an extent that is previously unparalleled. Self-care has fallen by the wayside, because consumerism sweeps away any notions of self-control and restraint. So wrangling about whether 'the government' or 'the individual' should be given a greater say is missing the point. There is no effective government anymore, just as there are no longer any autonomous individuals.

Seeking Connection

Just as we have shifted en masse from eating food to eating junk food, we have shifted from having meaningful values to having junk values. All this mass-produced fried chicken looks like food, and it appeals to the part of us that evolved to need food; yet it doesn't give us what we need from food—nutrition. Instead, it fills us with toxins. In the same way, all these materialistic values, telling us to spend our way to happiness, look like real values; they appeal to the part of us that has evolved to need some basic principles to guide us through life; yet they don't give us what we need from values—a path to a satisfying life. Instead, they fill us with psychological toxins. Junk food is distorting our bodies. Junk values are distorting our minds. Materialism is KFC for the soul.

In 1978, two Canadian social scientists got a bunch of four- and five-year-old kids and divided them into two groups. The first group was shown no commercials. The second group was shown two commercials for a particular toy. Then they offered these four- or five-year-old kids a choice. They told them: You have to choose, now, to play with one of these two boys here. You can play with this little boy who has the toy from the commercials—but we have to warn you, he's not a nice boy. He's mean. Or you can play with a boy who doesn't have the toy, but who is really nice.

If they had seen the commercial for the toy, the kids mostly chose to play with the mean boy with the toy. If they hadn't seen the commercial, they mostly chose to play with the nice boy who had no toys. In other words, the advertisements led them to choose an inferior human connection over a superior human connection—because they'd been primed to think that a lump of plastic is what really matters. Two commercials—just two—did that. Today, every person sees way more advertising messages than that in an average morning. More eighteen-month-olds can recognize the McDonald's 'M' than know their own surname. By the time an average child is thirty-six months old, she already knows a hundred brand logos.

A few years ago, an advertising agency head explained approvingly:

“Advertising at its best is making people feel that without

their product, you're a loser. Kids are very sensitive to that. You open up emotional vulnerabilities, and it's very easy to do with kids because they're the most emotionally vulnerable."

This sounds harsh, until you think through the logic. Imagine if you watched an ad and it told you: you're fine how you are. You look good. You smell good. You're likable. People want to be around you. You've got enough stuff now. You don't need any more. Enjoy life. That would—from the perspective of the advertising industry—be the worst ad in human history, because you wouldn't want to go out shopping, or lunge at your laptop to spend, or do any of the other things that feed our junk values. It would make you want to pursue your intrinsic values—which involve a whole lot less spending, and a whole lot more happiness.

When they talk among themselves, advertising people have been admitting since the 1920s that their job is to make people feel inadequate—and then offer their product as the solution to the sense of inadequacy they have created. Ads are the ultimate frenemy—they're always saying: 'Oh babe, I want you to look/smell/feel great; it makes me so sad that that at the moment you're ugly/stinking/miserable; here's this thing that will make you into the person you and I really want you to be. Oh, did I mention you have to pay a few bucks? I just want you to be the person you deserve to be. Isn't that worth a few dollars? You're worth it.' This logic radiates out through the culture, and we start to impose it on each other, even when ads aren't there. Why did I, as a child, crave Nike air-pumps, even though I was as likely to play basketball as I was to go to the moon? It was partly because of the ads—but mostly because the ads created a group dynamic among everyone I knew. It created a marker of status, that we then policed. As adults, we do the same, only in slightly more subtle ways.

This system trains us to feel there's never enough. When you're focused on money and status and possessions, consumer society is always telling you more, more, more, more. Capitalism is always telling you more, more, more. Your boss is telling you work more, work more, work more. You internalize that and you think: Oh, I got to work more, because my self depends on my status and my achievement. You internalize that. It's a kind of form of internalized oppression. It also explains why junk values lead to such an increase in anxiety. You're always thinking—Are they going to reward me? Does the person love me for who I am, or for my handbag? Am I going to be able to climb the ladder of success? You are hollow, and exist only in other people's reflections. That's going to be anxiety-provoking.

We are all vulnerable to this. The way I understand the intrinsic values is that they are a fundamental part of what we are as humans, but they're

fragile. It's easy to distract us from them. You give people social models of consumerism and they move in an extrinsic way. The desire to find meaningful intrinsic values is there, it's a powerful part of who we are, but it's not hard to distract us. And we have an economic system built around doing precisely that.

I kept thinking of a middle-class married couple who live in a nice semidetached house in the suburbs, where we grew up. They are close to me; I have known them all my life; I love them. If you peeked through their window, you'd think they have everything you need for happiness—each other, two kids, a good home, all the consumer goods we're told to buy. Both of them work really hard at jobs they have little interest in, so that they can earn money, and with the money they earn, they buy the things that we have learned from television will make us happy—clothes and cars, gadgets and status symbols. They display these things to people they know on social media, and they get lots of likes and comments like, “OMG—so jealous!” After the brief buzz that comes from displaying their goods, they usually find they become dissatisfied and down again. They are puzzled by this, and they often assume it's because they didn't buy the right thing. So they work harder, and they buy more goods, display them through their devices, feel the buzz, and then slump back to where they started.

They both seem to me to be depressed. They alternate between being blank, or angry, or engaging in compulsive behaviors. She had a drug problem for a long time, although not anymore; he gambles online at least two hours a day. They are furious a lot of the time, at each other, at their children, at their colleagues, and, diffusely, at the world—at anyone else on the road when they are driving, for example, who they scream and swear at. They have a sense of anxiety they can't shake off, and they often attach it to things outside them—she obsessively monitors where her teenage son is at any moment, and is afraid all the time that he will be a victim of crime or terrorism.

This couple has no vocabulary to understand why they feel so bad. They are doing what the culture has been priming them to do since we were infants—they are working hard and buying the right things, the expensive things. They are every advertising slogan made flesh. Like the kids in the sandbox, they have been primed to lunge for objects and ignore the prospect of interaction with the people around them. They aren't just suffering from the absence of something, such as meaningful work, or community. They are also suffering from the presence of something—an incorrect set of values telling them to seek happiness in all the wrong places, and to ignore the potential human connections that are right in front of them.

At some level I really believe that most people know that intrinsic values

are what's going to give them a good life. When you do surveys and ask people what's most important in life, they almost always name personal growth and relationships as the top two. But I think part of why people are depressed is that our society is not set up in order to help people live lifestyles, have jobs, participate in the economy, or participate in their neighborhoods in ways that support their intrinsic values.

The rise of the hollow brands—selling everything, owning next to nothing—happened over decades when the key institutions that used to provide individuals with a sense of community and shared identity were in sharp decline: tightly knit neighborhoods where people looked out for one another; large workplaces that held out the promise of a job for life; space and time for ordinary people to make their own art, not just consume it; organized religion; political movements and trade unions that were grounded in face-to-face relationships; public-interest media that strove to knit nations together in a common conversation. All these institutions and traditions were and are imperfect, often deeply so. They left many people out, and very often enforced an unhealthy conformity. But they did offer something we humans need for our well-being, and for which we never cease to long: community, connection, a sense of mission larger than our immediate atomized desires.

These two trends—the decline of communal institutions and the expansion of corporate brands in our culture—have had an inverse, seesaw-like relationship to one another over the decades: as the influence of those institutions that provided us with that essential sense of belonging went down, the power of commercial brands went up. I've always taken solace from this dynamic. It means that, while our branded world can exploit the unmet need to be part of something larger than ourselves, it can't fill it in any sustained way: you make a purchase to be part of a tribe, a big idea, a revolution, and it feels good for a moment, but the satisfaction wears off almost before you've thrown out the packaging for that new pair of sneakers, that latest model iPhone, or whatever the surrogate is. Then you have to find a way to fill the void again. It's the perfect formula for endless consumption and perpetual self-commodification through social media, and it's a disaster for the planet, which cannot sustain these levels of consumption.

It's always worth remembering: at the heart of this cycle is that very powerful force—the human longing for community and connection, which simply refuses to die. And that means there is still hope: if we rebuild our communities and begin to derive more meaning and a sense of the good life from them, many of us are going to be less susceptible to the siren song of mindless consumerism (and while we're at it, we might even spend less time producing and editing our personal brands on social media).

Internet obsession is a way of escaping anxiety, through distraction. Before the Internet addiction, they had felt lost and isolated in the world. Then the online world offered these young people things that they craved but that had vanished from the environment—such as a goal that matters to you, or a status, or a tribe. The highly popular games are the multiplayer games, where you get to be part of a guild—which is a team—and you get to earn your status in that guild. The positive side of that, these guys would say, is—‘I’m a team player. I know how to cooperate with my guys.’ It’s tribalism at its core. Once you have that you can immerse yourself in an alternate reality and completely lose track of where you are. You feel rewarded by the challenges of it, by the opportunity for cooperation, by the community that you’re in, and have status in—and you have much more control over it than the real world.

Not long before he died, a Native American named Chief Plenty Coups sat in his home on the flatlands of Montana and looked out across a landscape where once his people had roamed alongside the buffalo, and now there was nothing. He had been born in the last days when his people—the Crow—had lived as a nomadic hunting tribe. One day, a white cowboy arrived and said he wanted to tell the chief’s story—to faithfully record it, in the chief’s own words, for the ages. Many white men had stolen Native American stories and warped them, so it took a long time to build trust between these two men. But once it was there, Chief Plenty Coup began to tell this man a story. It was about the end of the world.

When he was young, he explained, his people had ranged across the Great Plains on horseback, and their lives had always been organized around two crucial activities. They hunted, and they prepared for the wars they fought against rival Native American tribal groups in their area. Everything they did was designed to prepare them for one of these two organizing poles of life. If you cooked a meal, it was in preparation for the hunt, or for the fight. If you conducted the ceremonial Sun Dance, it was to ask for strength in the hunt, or in the fight. Even your name—and the name of everyone you knew—was based on your role in the hunt, or in the fight. This was the world.

He described its many rules. For example, at the heart of the Crow worldview was the idea of planting something called a coupstick—a carved wooden spike. As you traveled across the plains, you would mark out your own tribe’s territory by planting a coupstick in the ground. The stick meant: anybody who passes beyond this point is an enemy and will be attacked. The most admirable thing you could do, in the Crow culture, was to plant and defend the coupsticks. These were at the core of their moral vision.

Chief Plenty Coups continued to describe the rules of his lost world in

great detail. He conjured his life, the spiritual values of his people, their relationship with the buffalo and with their rival tribes. It was a world as complex as the civilizations of Europe or China or India, and as structured with rules and meaning and metaphor. But the cowboy noticed there was something strange about this story. The chief was just a teenager when the white Europeans came, and the wild buffalo were all killed, and the Crow were killed, and the survivors were penned into reservations. But the chief's story always ended there. As for the rest of his life, the majority of it—he had no stories. He had nothing to say.

He would get to the point where the Crow were shut into reservations, and say:

“After this, nothing happened.”

Of course the cowboy knew—everyone knew—that the chief had done many more things in his life. A lot had happened. But in a very real sense, the world had ended, for him, and for his people. Sure, on the reservation, they could still plant coupsticks in the ground, but it made no sense. Who was going to cross them? How could they be defended? Sure, they could talk about courage, the value they most cherished—but how could they show courage in any way that made sense to them when there was no more hunting, no more fighting? Sure, they could still perform the Sun Dance, but why bother, when there were no hunts and no battles to ask for success in? How could you show ambition, or spirit, or bravery? Even everyday activities seemed pointless.

Before, meals had been preparation for the hunt or the fight. Obviously, the Crows continued to cook meals. And if asked, they could say what they were doing. And if asked further about it, they could say that they were trying to survive, trying to hold their family together from one day to the next. But there was no larger framework of significance into which it could fit.

I'd grown up in a Boston suburb where people's homes were set behind deep hedges or protected by huge yards and neighbors hardly knew each other. And they didn't need to: nothing ever happened in my town that required anything close to a collective effort. Anything bad that happened was taken care of by the police or the fire department, or at the very least the town maintenance crews. I worked for them one summer. I remember shoveling a little too hard one day and the foreman telling me to slow down because, as he said:

“Some of us have to get through a lifetime of this.”

The sheer predictability of life in an American suburb left me hoping—somewhat irresponsibly—for a hurricane or a tornado or something that would require us to all band together to survive. Something that would make us feel like a tribe. What I wanted wasn't destruction and mayhem but the opposite: solidarity. I wanted the chance to prove my worth to my community and my peers, but I lived in a time and a place where nothing dangerous ever really happened.

Robert Frost famously wrote that home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. The word 'tribe' is far harder to define, but a start might be the people you feel compelled to share the last of your food with.

Over the course of three centuries, America became a booming industrial society that was cleaved by class divisions and racial injustice but glued together by a body of law that, theoretically at least, saw all people as equal. The Indians, on the other hand, lived communally in mobile or semi-permanent encampments that were more or less run by consensus and broadly egalitarian. Individual authority was earned rather than seized and imposed only on people who were willing to accept it. Anyone who didn't like it was free to move somewhere else.

It's easy for people in modern society to romanticize Indian life. That impulse should be guarded against. Virtually all of the Indian tribes waged war against their neighbors and practiced deeply sickening forms of torture. Prisoners who weren't tomahawked on the spot could expect to be disemboweled and tied to a tree with their own intestines or blistered to death over a slow fire or simply hacked to pieces and fed alive to the dogs. If there is any conceivable defense for such cruelty, it might be that in Europe at the time, the Spanish Inquisition was also busy serving up just as much barbarism on behalf of the Catholic Church. Infidels were regularly burned alive, broken on the rack, sawn in half lengthwise, or impaled slowly on wooden stakes from the anus to the mouth. The Protestant Reformation changed a lot of things about Christianity but not its capacity for cruelty, and early Puritan leaders in New England were also renowned for their harsh justice. Cruelty, in other words, was very much the norm for that era, and the native tribes of North America were no exception.

The question for Western society isn't so much why tribal life might be so appealing—it seems obvious on the face of it—but why Western society is so unappealing. On a material level it is clearly more comfortable and protected from the hardships of the natural world. But as societies become more affluent they tend to require more, rather than less, time and commitment by the individual, and it's possible that many people feel that affluence and safety simply aren't a good trade for freedom. One study in the 1960s found

that nomadic !Kung people of the Kalahari Desert needed to work as little as twelve hours a week in order to survive—roughly one-quarter the hours of the average urban executive at the time.

“The ‘camp’ is an open aggregate of cooperating persons which changes in size and composition from day to day. The members move out each day to hunt and gather, and return in the evening to pool the collected foods in such a way that every person present receives an equitable share. Because of the strong emphasis on sharing, and the frequency of movement, surplus accumulation is kept to a minimum.”

The relatively relaxed pace of !Kung life—even during times of adversity—challenged long-standing ideas that modern society created a surplus of leisure time. It created exactly the opposite: a desperate cycle of work, financial obligation, and more work. The !Kung had far fewer belongings than Westerners, but their lives were under much greater personal control.

Among anthropologists, the !Kung are thought to present a fairly accurate picture of how our hominid ancestors lived for more than a million years before the advent of agriculture. Genetic adaptations take around 25,000 years to appear in humans, so the enormous changes that came with agriculture in the last 10,000 years have hardly begun to affect our gene pool. Early humans would most likely have lived in nomadic bands of around fifty people, much like the !Kung. They would have experienced high levels of accidental injuries and deaths. They would have countered domineering behavior by senior males by forming coalitions within the group. They would have been utterly intolerant of hoarding or selfishness. They would have occasionally endured episodes of hunger, violence, and hardship. They would have practiced extremely close and involved childcare. And they would have done almost everything in the company of others. They would have almost never been alone.

The Efe and Aka people of the Western Congo Basin and the !Kung San of the Kalahari desert—these hunter-gatherers are radical egalitarians, meaning they live in groups without hierarchy or socioeconomic stratification, as humans did for nearly all of our evolutionary prehistory. Among these tribes, no one owns anything and no one’s status is any higher or lower than anyone else’s. The notion of property is unknown. This state of affairs is reinforced by several mechanisms. One is object demands. It is common for one woman to walk up to another and demand her beads, for example, or for a child to approach an unrelated adult and demand a portion of his or her food, or for one man to demand and receive another’s spear tips

for hunting. Saying no is unheard of. These gift demands reinforce the notion that nobody owns anything. Self-effacement and downplaying one's own achievements and those of others is another way to ensure no sense of hierarchy develops. "We're not sure who killed the duiker we found under the acacia tree," someone announces after a successful hunt, knowing full well who did. "Maybe it was someone from another group. We will get it, all of us, and we will distribute it to everyone." The man supplying coveted meat cannot take or receive credit. Everyone and no one killed the duiker, and so everyone is and remains equal.

Forager egalitarianism is predicated on the deliberate rejection of attempts to dominate. This attitude serves as a crucial check to the natural human propensity to form hierarchies: active equalization is employed to maintain a level playing field. Numerous means of enforcing egalitarian values have been documented by anthropologists, graduated by severity. Begging, scrounging, and stealing help ensure a more equal distribution of resources. Sanctions against authoritarian behavior and self-aggrandizement range from gossip, criticism, ridicule, disobedience, to ostracism and even physical violence, including homicide. Leadership consequently tends to be subtle, dispersed among multiple group members, and transient; the least assertive have the best chances to influence others. This distinctive moral economy has been called "reverse dominance hierarchy"—operative among adult men (who commonly dominate women and children), it represents the ongoing and preemptive neutralization of authority.

Among the Hadza, a group of a few hundred hunter-gatherers in Tanzania, camp members forage individually and strongly prefer their own households in distributing the acquired food. At the same time, food sharing beyond one's own household is expected and common, especially when resources can readily be spotted by others. Hadza may try to conceal honey because it is easier to hide, but if found out, they are compelled to share. Scrounging is tolerated and widespread. Thus even though individuals clearly prefer to keep more for themselves and their immediate kin, norms interfere: sharing is common because the absence of domination makes sharing hard to resist. Large perishable items such as big game may even be shared beyond the camp group. Saving is not valued, to the extent that available resources tend to be consumed without delay and not even shared with people who happen to be absent at that moment. As a result, the Hadza have only minimal private possessions: jewelry, clothes, a digging stick, and sometimes a cooking pot for women; a bow and arrows, clothes and jewelry, and perhaps a few tools for men. Many of these goods are not particularly durable, and owners do not form strong attachments to them. Property beyond these basic items does not exist, and territory is not defended. The

lack or dispersion of authority makes it hard to arrive at group decisions, let alone enforce them. In all these respects, the Hadza are quite representative of extant foraging groups more generally.

Forager inequality is not nonexistent but merely very low compared to inequality in societies that rely on other modes of subsistence. We also need to allow for the possibility that contemporary hunter-gatherers may differ in important ways from our pre-agrarian ancestors. Surviving forager groups are utterly marginalized and confined to areas that are beyond the reach of, or of little interest to, farmers and herders, environments that are well suited to a lifestyle that eschews the accumulation of material resources and firm claims to territory. Prior to the domestication of plants and animals for food production, foragers were much more widely spread out across the globe and had access to more abundant natural resources. In some cases, moreover, contemporary foraging groups may respond to a dominant world of more hierarchical farmers and pastoralists, defining themselves in contradistinction to outside norms. Remaining foragers are not timeless or “living fossils,” and their practices need to be understood within specific historical contexts.

First agriculture, and then industry, changed two fundamental things about the human experience. The accumulation of personal property allowed people to make more and more individualistic choices about their lives, and those choices unavoidably diminished group efforts toward a common good. And as society modernized, people found themselves able to live independently from any communal group. A person living in a modern city or a suburb can, for the first time in history, go through an entire day—or an entire life—mostly encountering complete strangers. They can be surrounded by others and yet feel deeply, dangerously alone.

Social scientists have been asking a cross-section of US citizens a simple question for years: “How many confidants do you have?” They wanted to know how many people you could turn to in a crisis, or when something really good happens to you. When they started doing the study several decades ago, the average number of close friends an American had was three. By 2004, the most common answer was none. It’s worth pausing on that: there are now more Americans who have no close friends than any other option.

When we talk to each other, more often than not, we make each other secondary in the whole process. We serve as stand-ins, as proxies, for a conversation that isn’t really about or meant for us. Whether real or imagined, there’s always someone else in the room. They’re the real interlocutors. This performativeness is by no means a problem that begins in the digital age with the dawn of social media, but the latter has certainly made the problem

more visible. But only slightly, because it's become such a painfully obvious feature of our daily communicative interactions that it has practically faded from view altogether. So much of what we say to each other on social media posts, for instance, is said for other people, known or unknown, who may see it. The person whom we are supposedly addressing, the one to whom we are ostensibly responding, becomes a vehicle for our own self-validation, which drips like sugar-sweet morphine in the form of 'likes,' 'loves,' 'laughs,' 'shares,' 'retweets,' and so on.

And, again, this doesn't just happen online—we do it everywhere. At our jobs, at the grocery store, on the subway, at the gym, on the street, we use each other. And we grow accustomed to being used. On a daily basis, as the gross spectacle of capitalist life routinely encourages us to, we accept being each other's instruments in our respective, harried races to become ourselves, forsaking our need to see and be seen for who we are, squandering our human capacities for being together, for connecting through genuine bonds of care and cooperation and dignity and equality and duty to each other. We get used to being—and to making out of each other—the tools for living alone.

When researchers put lonely people into brain-scanning machines, they noticed something. Lonely people would spot potential threats within 150 milliseconds, while it took socially connected people twice as long, 300 milliseconds, to notice the same threat. What was happening? Protracted loneliness causes you to shut down socially, and to be more suspicious of any social contact. You become hypervigilant. You start to be more likely to take offense where none was intended, and to be afraid of strangers. You start to be afraid of the very thing you need most. Disconnection spirals into more disconnection. Lonely people are scanning for threats because they unconsciously know that nobody is looking out for them, so no one will help them if they are hurt.

This snowball effect can be reversed—but to help a depressed or severely anxious person out of it, they need more love, and more reassurance, than they would have needed in the first place. The tragedy is that many depressed and anxious people receive less love, as they become harder to be around. Indeed, they receive judgment, and criticism, and this accelerates their retreat from the world. They snowball into an ever colder place.

People must belong to a tribe. Just like a bee goes haywire if it loses its hive, a human will go haywire if she loses her connection to the group. We have become the first humans to ever dismantle our tribes. As a result, we have been left alone on a savanna we do not understand, puzzled by our own sadness.

Telling people their distress is due mostly or entirely to a biological

malfunction has several dangerous effects on them. The first thing that happens when you're told this is you leave the person disempowered, feeling they're not good enough—because their brain's not good enough. The second thing is that it pitches us against parts of ourselves. It says there is a war taking place in your head. On one side there are your feelings of distress, caused by the malfunctions in your brain or genes. On the other side there's the sane part of you. You can only hope to drug the enemy within into submission—forever. But it does something even more profound than that. It tells you that your distress has no meaning—it's just defective tissue.

But I think we're distressed for good reasons. This is the biggest division between the old story about depression and anxiety and the new story. The old story says our distress is fundamentally irrational, caused by faulty apparatus in our head. The new story says our distress is—however painful—in fact rational, and sane. You're not crazy to feel so distressed. You're not broken. You're not defective.

Picture a 1950s housewife living before modern feminism. She goes to her doctor to say there is something terribly wrong with her. She says something like:

“I have everything a woman could possibly want. I have a good husband who provides for me. I have a nice house with a picket fence. I have two healthy children. I have a car. I have nothing to be unhappy about. But look at me—I feel terrible. I must be broken inside. Please—can I have some Valium?”

The feminist classics talk a lot about women like this. There were millions of women saying things just like it. And the women meant what they said. They were sincere. Yet now, if we could go back in a time machine and talk to these women, what we'd say is: You had everything a woman could possibly want by the standards of the culture. You had nothing to be unhappy about by the standards of the culture. But we now know that the standards of the culture were wrong. Women need more than a house and a car and a husband and kids. They need equality, and meaningful work, and autonomy. You aren't broken, we'd tell them. The culture is.

And if the standards of the culture were wrong then, they can be wrong now. You can have everything a person could possibly need by the standards of our culture—but those standards can badly misjudge what a human actually needs in order to have a good or even a tolerable life. The culture can create a picture of what you need to be happy—through all the junk values we have been taught about—that doesn't fit with what you actually need.

When antidepressants had begun to be marketed in Cambodia for the very first time there was a problem for the companies trying to sell them. It turned out there was no obvious translation for the word ‘antidepressant’ into the Khmer language. It was an idea that seemed to puzzle them. When presented with the idea that depression is a profound sense of sadness that you can’t shake off some Cambodians thought about this carefully and said, yes, we do have some people like that. They gave an example: a farmer whose left leg was blown off by a land mine, who came to the doctors for medical help and got fitted with a new limb but didn’t recover. He felt constantly anxious about the future and was filled with despair. They then explained that they didn’t need these newfangled antidepressants, because they already had antidepressants for people like this in Cambodia.

When they realized this man was despondent, the doctors and his neighbors sat with him, and talked through his life and his troubles. They realized that even with his new artificial limb, his old job—working in the rice paddies—was just too difficult, and he was constantly stressed and in physical pain, and that was making him want to just stop living, and give up. So they had an idea. They believed that he would be perfectly capable of being a dairy farmer, and that would involve less painful walking on his false leg and fewer disturbing memories. So they bought him a cow. In the months and years that followed, his life changed. His depression—which had been profound—went away. You see the cow was an analgesic, and antidepressant. To them, an antidepressant wasn’t about changing your brain chemistry, an idea that seemed bizarre to their culture. It was about the community, together, empowering the depressed person to change his life.

According to a global survey by the World Health Organization, people in wealthy countries suffer depression at as much as eight times the rate they do in poor countries, and people in countries with large income disparities—like the United States—run a much higher lifelong risk of developing severe mood disorders. A 2006 study comparing depression rates in Nigeria to depression rates in North America found that across the board, women in rural areas were less likely to get depressed than their urban counterparts. And urban North American women—the most affluent demographic of the study—were the most likely to experience depression. The mechanism seems simple: poor people are forced to share their time and resources more than wealthy people are, and as a result they live in closer communities. Inter-reliant poverty comes with its own stresses—and certainly isn’t the American ideal—but it’s much closer to our evolutionary heritage than affluence. A wealthy person who has never had to rely on help and resources from his community is leading a privileged life that falls way outside more than a million years

of human experience. Financial independence can lead to isolation, and isolation can put people at a greatly increased risk of depression and suicide. This might be a fair trade for a generally wealthier society—but a trade it is.

Self-determination theory holds that human beings need three basic things in order to be content:

1. They need to feel competent at what they do
2. They need to feel authentic in their lives
3. They need to feel connected to others

These values are considered “intrinsic” to human happiness and far outweigh “extrinsic” values such as beauty, money, and status. Bluntly put, modern society seems to emphasize extrinsic values over intrinsic ones, and as a result, mental health issues refuse to decline with growing wealth. The more assimilated a person is into American society, the more likely they are to develop depression during the course of their lifetime, regardless of what ethnicity they are.

The economic and marketing forces of modern society have engineered an environment that maximizes consumption at the long-term cost of well-being. In effect, humans have dragged a body with a long hominid history into an overfed, malnourished, sedentary, sunlight-deficient, sleep-deprived, competitive, inequitable, and socially-isolating environment with dire consequences.

The alienating effects of wealth and modernity on the human experience start virtually at birth and never let up. Infants in hunter-gatherer societies are carried by their mothers as much as 90 percent of the time, which roughly corresponds to carrying rates among other primates. One can get an idea of how important this kind of touch is to primates from an infamous experiment conducted in the 1950s by rape rack enthusiast Harry Harlow. Baby rhesus monkeys were separated from their mothers and presented with the choice of two kinds of surrogates: a cuddly mother made out of terry cloth or an uninviting mother made out of wire mesh. The wire mesh mother, however, had a nipple that dispensed warm milk. The babies took their nourishment as quickly as possible and then rushed back to cling to the terry cloth mother, which had enough softness to provide the illusion of affection. Clearly, touch and closeness are vital to the health of baby primates—including humans.

In America during the 1970s, mothers maintained skin-to-skin contact with babies as little as 16 percent of the time, which is a level that traditional societies would probably consider a form of child abuse.

As modern society reduced the role of community, it simultaneously elevated the role of authority. The two are uneasy companions, and as one goes up, the other tends to go down. In 2007, an analysis of 154 foraging societies that were deemed to be representative of our ancestral past found that one of their most common traits was the absence of major wealth disparities between individuals. Another was the absence of arbitrary authority.

“Social life is politically egalitarian in that there is always a low tolerance by a group’s mature males for one of their number dominating, bossing, or denigrating the others. The human conscience evolved in the Middle to Late Pleistocene as a result of the hunting of large game. This required cooperative band-level sharing of meat.”

Because tribal foragers are highly mobile and can easily shift between different communities, authority is almost impossible to impose on the unwilling. And even without that option, males who try to take control of the group—or of the food supply—are often countered by coalitions of other males. This is clearly an ancient and adaptive behavior that tends to keep groups together and equitably cared for. In addition to murder and theft—one of the most commonly punished infractions was “failure to share.” Freeloading on the hard work of others and bullying were also high up on the list. Punishments included public ridicule, shunning, and, finally, assassination of the culprit by the entire group.

Much of the evolutionary basis for moral behavior stems from group pressure. Not only are bad actions punished, but good actions are rewarded. When a person does something for another person—a prosocial act, as it’s called—they are rewarded not only by group approval but also by an increase of dopamine and other pleasurable hormones in their blood. Group cooperation triggers higher levels of oxytocin, for example, which promotes everything from breast-feeding in women to higher levels of trust and group bonding in men. Both reactions impart a powerful sensation of well-being. Oxytocin creates a feedback loop of good-feeling and group loyalty that ultimately leads members to self-sacrifice to promote group welfare. Hominids that cooperated with one another—and punished those who didn’t—must have outfought, outhunted, and outbred everyone else. These are the hominids that modern humans are descended from.

It’s revealing, then, to look at modern society through the prism of more than a million years of human cooperation and resource sharing. Subsistence-level hunters aren’t necessarily more moral than other people; they just

can't get away with selfish behavior because they live in small groups where almost everything is open to scrutiny. Modern society, on the other hand, is a sprawling and anonymous mess where people can get away with incredible levels of dishonesty without getting caught. What tribal people would consider a profound betrayal of the group, modern society simply dismisses as fraud—or perhaps more often: as perfectly legal.

During the 1960s, senior executives in America typically made around twenty dollars for every dollar earned by a rank-and-file worker. Since then, that figure has climbed to 300-to-1 among S&P 500 companies, and in some cases it goes far higher than that. The US Chamber of Commerce managed to block all attempts to force disclosure of corporate pay ratios until 2015, when a weakened version of the rule was finally passed by the SEC in a strict party-line vote of three Democrats in favor and two Republicans opposed. In hunter-gatherer terms, these senior executives are claiming a disproportionate amount of food simply because they have the power to do so. A tribe like the !Kung would not permit that because it would represent a serious threat to group cohesion and survival, but that is not true for a wealthy country like the United States. There have been occasional demonstrations against economic disparity, like the Occupy Wall Street protest camp of 2011, but they were generally peaceful and ineffective. The riots and demonstrations against racial discrimination that later took place in Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland, led to changes—though certainly minor ones—in part because they attained a level of violence that threatened the civil order.

A deep and enduring economic crisis like the Great Depression of the 1930s, or a natural disaster that kills tens of thousands of the right kind of people, might change America's fundamental calculus about economic justice. Until then, the American public will probably continue to refrain from broadly challenging both male and female corporate leaders who compensate themselves far in excess of their value to society. That is ironic, because the political origins of the United States lay in confronting precisely this kind of resource seizure by people in power. King George III of England caused the English colonies in America to rebel by trying to tax them without allowing them a voice in government. In this sense, democratic revolutions are just a formalized version of the sort of group action that coalitions of senior males have used throughout the ages to confront greed and abuse.

Thomas Paine, one of the principal architects of American democracy, wrote a formal denunciation of civilization in a tract called "Agrarian Justice":

“Whether civilization has most promoted or most injured the general happiness of man is a question that may be strongly contested. Both the most affluent and the most miserable of the human race are to be found in the countries that are called civilized.”

There is no way to know the effect on Paine’s thought process of living next door to a communal Stone-Age society, but it might have been crucial. Paine acknowledged that these tribes lacked the advantages of the arts and science and manufacturing, and yet they lived in a society where personal poverty was unknown and the natural rights of man were actively promoted. In that sense, Paine claimed, the American Indian should serve as a model for how to eradicate poverty and bring natural rights back into civilized life.

The one thing that might be said for societal collapse is that—for a while at least—everyone is equal. In 1915, an earthquake killed 30,000 people in Avezzano, Italy, in less than a minute. The worst-hit areas had a mortality rate of 96 percent. The rich were killed along with the poor, and virtually everyone who survived was immediately thrust into the most basic struggle for survival: they needed food, they needed water, they needed shelter, and they needed to rescue the living and bury the dead. In that sense, plate tectonics under the town of Avezzano managed to re-create the communal conditions of our evolutionary past quite well. An earthquake achieves what the law promises but does not in practice maintain—the equality of all.

As Thomas Paine labored to articulate his goals for a free society, he could have easily taken his inspiration from earthquake survivors instead of from the American Indians. Communities that have been devastated by natural or man-made disasters almost never lapse into chaos and disorder; if anything, they become more just, more egalitarian, and more deliberately fair to individuals. The kinds of community-oriented behaviors that typically occur after a natural disaster are exactly the virtues that Paine was hoping to promote in his revolutionary tracts. For instance, despite erroneous news reports, New Orleans experienced a drop in crime rates after Hurricane Katrina, and much of the “looting” turned out to be people looking for food. And perhaps most importantly, many of the most extreme acts of violence were committed by agents of the state.

The Blitz, as bad as it was, paled in comparison to what the Allies did. Dresden lost more people in one night than London did during the entire war. Firestorms engulfed whole neighborhoods and used up so much oxygen that people who were untouched by the blasts reportedly died of asphyxiation instead. Fully a third of the German population was subjected to bombardment, and around one-million people were killed or wounded.

American analysts based in England monitored the effects of the bombing to see if any cracks began to appear in the German resolve, and to their surprise found exactly the opposite: the more the Allies bombed, the more defiant the German population became. Industrial production actually rose in Germany during the war. And the cities with the highest morale were the ones—like Dresden—that were bombed the hardest. According to German psychologists who compared notes with their American counterparts after the war, it was the untouched cities where civilian morale suffered the most. Thirty years later, an almost identical phenomenon would be documented in riot-torn Belfast.

After the war some turned their attention to natural disasters in the United States and formulated a broad theory about social resilience. There did not seem to be a single instance where communities that had been hit by catastrophic events lapsed into sustained panic, much less anything approaching anarchy. If anything, it seemed that social bonds were reinforced during disasters, and that people overwhelmingly devoted their energies toward the good of the community rather than just themselves. Modern society has gravely disrupted the social bonds that have always characterized the human experience, and disasters thrust people back into a more ancient, organic way of relating. Disasters create a community of sufferers that allows individuals to experience an immensely reassuring connection to others. As people come together to face an existential threat class differences are temporarily erased, income disparities become irrelevant, race is overlooked, and individuals are assessed simply by what they are willing to do for the group. It is a kind of fleeting social utopia that is enormously gratifying to the average person and downright therapeutic to people suffering from mental illness.

If there are phrases that characterize the life of our early ancestors, ‘community of sufferers’ and ‘brotherhood of pain’ surely must come close. Their lives were probably less labor-intensive than lives in modern society, as demonstrated by the !Kung, but the mortality rate of the young would have been much higher. The advantages of group cooperation would include far more effective hunting and defense, and groups that failed to function cooperatively must have gradually died out. Adaptive behavior tends to be reinforced hormonally, emotionally, and culturally, and one can see all three types of adaptation at work in people who act on behalf of others.

The coming-together that societies often experience during catastrophes is usually temporary, but sometimes the effect can last years or even decades. British historians have linked the hardships of the Blitz—and the social unity that followed—to a landslide vote that brought the Labour Party into power in 1945 and eventually gave the United Kingdom national health

care and a strong welfare state. The Blitz hit after years of poverty in England, and both experiences served to bind the society together in ways that rejected the primacy of business interests over the welfare of the people. That era didn't end until the wartime generation started to fade out and Margaret Thatcher was elected prime minister in 1979. In every upheaval we rediscover humanity and regain freedoms. We relearn some old truths about the connection between happiness, unselfishness, and the simplification of living. But then we fail to ensure these truths remain alive.

“Whatever I say about war, I still hate it. I do miss something from the war. But I also believe that the world we are living in—and the peace that we have—is very fucked up if somebody is missing war. And many people do.

I missed being that close to people, I missed being loved in that way. In Bosnia—as it is now—we don't trust each other anymore; we became really bad people. We didn't learn the lesson of the war, which is how important it is to share everything you have with human beings close to you. The best way to explain it is that the war makes you an animal. We were animals. It's insane—but that's the basic human instinct, to help another human being who is sitting or standing or lying close to you.”

American tribes varied widely in their cultures and economies and so had different relationships to war. The nomadic horse cultures of the Northern Plains, such as the Lakota and the Cheyenne, considered war to be a chance for young men to prove their honor and courage. The Apache avoided face-to-face combat in favor of raiding expeditions that relied on stealth and endurance. The sedentary Papago, whose economy was based largely on agriculture, considered war to be a form of insanity. Men who were forced into combat by attacks from other tribes had to undergo a sixteen-day purification ritual before they could reenter society. The entire community participated in these rituals because every person in the tribe was assumed to have been affected by the war. After the ceremony, the combatants were viewed as superior to their uninitiated peers because—as loathsome and crazy as war was—it was still thought to impart wisdom that nothing else could.

The Iroquois Nation presumably understood the transformative power of war when they developed parallel systems of government that protected civilians from warriors and vice versa. Peacetime leaders, called sachems, were often chosen by women and had complete authority over the civil affairs of the tribe until war broke out. At that point war leaders took over,

and their sole concern was the physical survival of the tribe. They were not concerned with justice or harmony or fairness, they were concerned only with defeating the enemy. If the enemy tried to negotiate an end to hostilities, however, it was the sachems, not the war leaders, who made the final decision. If the offer was accepted, the war leaders stepped down so that the sachems could resume leadership of the tribe. The Iroquois system reflected the radically divergent priorities that a society must have during peacetime and during war. Because modern society often fights wars far away from the civilian population, soldiers wind up being the only people who have to switch back and forth.

Except for sociopaths, one of the most traumatic events that a soldier can experience is witnessing harm to others—even to the enemy. In a survey carried out after the first Gulf War combat veterans reported that killing an enemy soldier, or even witnessing one getting killed, was more distressing than being wounded themselves. But the very worst experience, by far, was having a friend die. In war after war, army after army, losing a buddy is considered the most devastating thing that can possibly happen. It is far more disturbing than experiencing mortal danger oneself and often serves as a trigger for psychological breakdown on the battlefield or later in life.

“Everyone who has lived through something like that has lived through trauma, and you can never go back. You are seventeen or eighteen or nineteen and you just hit that wall. You become very old men.”

They are clearly in need of some way to vent their feelings to the wider community. Modern society rarely gives veterans—gives anyone—opportunities to do that. Fortunately, freedom of speech means that, among other things, veterans are entitled to stand on street corners with bullhorns and disturb the peace. More dignified might be to offer veterans all over the country the use of their town hall every Veterans Day to speak freely about their experience at war. Some will say that war was the best thing that ever happened to them. Others will be so angry that what they say will barely make sense. Still others will be crying so hard that they won't be able to speak at all. But a community ceremony like that would finally return the experience of war to our entire nation, rather than just leaving it to the people who fought. The bland phrase, ‘I support the troops,’ would then mean showing up at the town hall once a year to hear these people out.

Most primates, including humans, are intensely social, and there are very few instances of lone primates surviving in the wild. A modern soldier returning from combat—or a survivor of Sarajevo—goes from the kind of

close-knit group that humans evolved for, back into a society where most people work outside the home, children are educated by strangers, families are isolated from wider communities, and personal gain almost completely eclipses collective good. Even if he or she is part of a family, that is not the same as belonging to a group that shares resources and experiences almost everything collectively. Whatever the technological advances of modern society—and they're nearly miraculous—the individualized lifestyles that those technologies spawn seem to be deeply brutalizing to the human spirit.

“Touch can be especially confusing for men because for most men in our society, touch has been limited to violent and sexual encounters.”

We are not a good society—we are an anti-human society. We are not good to each other. Our tribalism is to an extremely narrow group of people: our children, our spouse, maybe our parents. Our society is alienating, technical, cold, and mystifying. Our fundamental desire, as human beings, is to be close to others, and our society does not allow for that.

Because modern society has almost completely eliminated trauma and violence from everyday life, anyone who does suffer those things is deemed to be extraordinarily unfortunate. This gives people access to sympathy and resources but also creates an identity of victimhood that can delay recovery.

Consider the case of Mende tribal combatants. Both during and after civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, international relief organizations introduced the idea of victimhood to combatants who until then had rarely, if ever, thought of themselves in those terms. The language of ‘I am a victim too’ did not originate from the combatants themselves. Aid organizations would come in and say, ‘This is how you’re supposed to be feeling and if you do, then you’ll have access to food supplies and training.’ In such a poor society, food donations and job training gave an enormous advantage to ex-combatants. The consequence was that ex-combatants were incentivized to see themselves as victims rather than as perpetrators. These people committed terrible acts of violence during their wars, and many of them felt enormously guilty about it, but they were never able to work through those feelings because their victim status eclipsed more accurate and meaningful understandings of violence. Mende combatants often described combat as something that makes the heart “heat up,” transforming a fighter to the point where he is thought to have literally become someone else. In that state he is capable of both great courage and great cruelty. Such a state of hyperarousal is familiar to many soldiers or athletes and has a firm basis

in the neurobiology of the brain. For the Mende, it means that the moral excesses of the battlefield don't necessarily have to be brought home.

During those wars the combatants who had a "hot heart" were unmistakable. They wore amulets and magical charms and acted as if they were possessed, deliberately running into gunfire and dancing while firing their weapons to prove how brave they were. Other people's lives didn't seem to matter to them because their own lives didn't seem to matter to them. They were true nihilists, and that makes them some of the most terrifying human beings ever encountered. Even highly traumatized ex-combatants such as these could have been reincorporated into Mende society if indigenous concepts like the 'hot heart' had been applied. Their classification as victims, however—with the attendant perks and benefits common to Western society—made their reintegration much harder.

Two of the behaviors that set early humans apart were the systematic sharing of food and altruistic group defense. Other primates did very little of either but, increasingly, hominids did, and those behaviors helped set them on an evolutionary path that produced the modern world. The earliest and most basic definition of community—of tribe—would be the group of people that you would both help feed and help defend. A society that doesn't offer its members the chance to act selflessly in these ways isn't a society in any tribal sense of the word; it's just a political entity that, lacking enemies, will probably fall apart on its own. Soldiers experience this tribal way of thinking at war, but when they come home they realize that the tribe they were actually fighting for wasn't their country, it was their unit. It makes absolutely no sense to make sacrifices for a group that, itself, isn't willing to make sacrifices for you. That is the position American soldiers have been in for the past two decades.

As great a sacrifice as soldiers make, American workers arguably make a greater one. Far more Americans lose their lives every year doing dangerous jobs than died during the entire Afghan War. In 2014, for example, 4,679 workers lost their lives on the job. More than 90 percent of those deaths were of young men working in industries that have a mortality rate equivalent to most units in the US military. Jobs that are dangerous and seemingly mundane, like construction, tend to be less respected and less well paid than jobs that are safe and made flashy, like real estate or finance. And yet it is exactly these dangerous and seemingly mundane jobs that provide society's immediate physical needs. Construction workers are more important to everyday life than stockbrokers and yet are far lower down the social and financial ladder.

Skinwalkers were almost always male and wore the pelt of a sacred animal so that they could subvert that animal's powers to kill people in the

community. They could travel impossibly fast across the desert and their eyes glowed like coals and they could supposedly paralyze you with a single look. They were thought to attack remote homesteads at night and kill people and sometimes eat their bodies. Virtually every culture in the world has its version of the skinwalker myth. In Europe, for example, they are called werewolves (literally “man-wolf” in Old English). The myth addresses a fundamental fear in human society: that you can defend against external enemies but still remain vulnerable to one lone madman in your midst.

Anglo-American culture doesn't recognize the skinwalker threat but has its own version. Starting in the early 1980s, the frequency of rampage shootings in the United States began to rise more and more rapidly until it doubled around 2006. Rampages are usually defined as attacks where people are randomly targeted and four or more are killed in one place, usually shot to death by a lone gunman. As such, those crimes conform almost exactly to the kind of threat that the Navajo seemed most to fear on the reservation: murder and mayhem committed by an individual who has rejected all social bonds and attacks people at their most vulnerable and unprepared. For modern society, that would mean not in their log hogans but in movie theaters, schools, shopping malls, places of worship, or simply walking down the street.

It's revealing to look at the kinds of communities where those crimes usually occur. A rampage shooting has never happened in an urban ghetto, for example; in fact, indiscriminate attacks at schools almost always occur in otherwise safe, predominantly white towns. Around half of rampage killings happen in affluent or upper-middle-class communities, and the rest tend to happen in rural towns that are majority-white, Christian, and low-crime. Nearly a thousand people have been killed by rampage shooters since the 1980s. Almost by definition, rampage killers are deeply disturbed sociopaths, but that just begs the question why sociopaths in high-crime urban neighborhoods don't turn their guns on other people the way they do in more affluent communities. Gang shootings—as indiscriminate as they often are—still don't have the nihilistic intent of rampages. Rather, they are rooted in an exceedingly strong sense of group loyalty and revenge, and bystanders sometimes get killed in the process.

The first time that the United States suffered a wave of rampage shootings was during the 1930s, when society had been severely stressed and fractured by the Great Depression. Profoundly disturbed, violent individuals might not have felt inhibited by the social bonds that restrained previous generations of potential killers. Rampage killings dropped significantly during World War II, then rose again in the 1980s and have been rising ever since. It may be worth considering whether middle-class American life—for all its

material good fortune—has lost some essential sense of unity that might otherwise discourage alienated men from turning apocalyptically violent.

It's hard to know how to live for a country that regularly tears itself apart along every possible ethnic and demographic boundary. The income gap between rich and poor continues to widen, many people live in racially segregated communities, the elderly are mostly sequestered from public life, and rampage shootings happen so regularly that they only remain in the news cycle for a day or two. To make matters worse, politicians occasionally accuse rivals of deliberately trying to harm their own country—a charge so destructive to group unity that most past societies would probably have just punished it as a form of treason. It's complete madness,

Coming back to America from a war zone is an illuminating experience. First there is a kind of shock at the level of comfort and affluence that we enjoy, but that is followed by the dismal realization that we live in a society that is basically at war with itself. People speak with incredible contempt about—depending on their views—the rich, the poor, the educated, the foreign-born, the president, or the entire US government. It's a level of contempt that is usually reserved for enemies in wartime, except that now it's applied to our fellow citizens. Unlike criticism, contempt is particularly toxic because it assumes a moral superiority in the speaker. Contempt is often directed at people who have been excluded from a group or declared unworthy of its benefits. Contempt is often used by governments to provide rhetorical cover for torture or abuse. Contempt is one of four behaviors that, statistically, can predict divorce in married couples. People who speak with contempt for one another will probably not remain united for long.

The United States is so powerful that the only country capable of destroying her might be the United States herself, which means that the ultimate terrorist strategy would be to just leave the country alone. That way, America's ugliest partisan tendencies could emerge unimpeded by the unifying effects of war. Of course, beware the death throes of a violent giant. . .

The collective outrage at Sergeant Bergdahl was based on very limited knowledge but provides a perfect example of the kind of tribal ethos that every group—or country—deploys in order to remain unified and committed to itself. If anything, though, the outrage in the United States may not be broad enough. Maybe Bergdahl put a huge number of people at risk and may have caused the deaths of up to six soldiers—though evidence seems to point to this being propaganda. But in purely objective terms, he caused his country far less harm than the financial collapse of 2008, when bankers gambled trillions of dollars on blatantly fraudulent mortgages. These crimes were committed while hundreds of thousands of Americans

were fighting and dying in wars overseas. Almost 9 million people lost their jobs during the financial crisis, 5 million families lost their homes, and the unemployment rate doubled to around 10 percent. For nearly a century, the national suicide rate has almost exactly mirrored the unemployment rate, and after the financial collapse, America's suicide rate increased by nearly five percent. In an article published in 2012 in *The Lancet*, epidemiologists who study suicide estimated that the recession cost almost 5,000 additional American lives during the first two years—disproportionately among middle-aged white men. That is close to the nation's losses in the Iraq and Afghan wars combined. If Sergeant Bergdahl betrayed his country then surely the bankers and traders who caused the financial collapse did as well. And yet they didn't provoke nearly the kind of outcry that Bergdahl did. Not a single high-level CEO has even been charged in connection with the financial collapse, much less been convicted and sent to prison, and most of them went on to receive huge year-end bonuses.

Thomas and Leacock went on a hunting trip. Deep in the bush they encountered two men, strangers, who had run out of food and were extremely hungry. Thomas gave them all his flour and lard, despite the fact that he would have to cut his own trip short as a result. Leacock probed Thomas as to why he did this, and he finally lost patience with her:

“Suppose, now, not to give them flour, lard. Just dead inside.”

“She lost her baby daughter, and she felt the deep sorrow that is natural and right when you have felt deep love and it has been taken from you. Yet she watched as grieving people were told—officially, by psychiatrists—that if their profound distress persisted after a short window, they were mentally ill and needed to be drugged.”

But grief is necessary. We grieve because we have loved. We grieve because the person we have lost mattered to us. To say that grief should disappear on a neat timetable is an insult to the love we have felt. Deep grief and depression have identical symptoms for a reason. Depression is itself a form of grief—for all the connections we need, but don't have. All over the world today, people's pain is being insulted. We need to start throwing that insult back in their faces—and demanding they engage with the real problems that need to be solved.

You have to turn now to all the other wounded people around you, and find a way to connect with them, and build a home with these people—a

place where you are bonded to one another and find meaning in your lives together. We have been tribeless and disconnected for so long now. It's time for us all to come home.

Major Myths

The Big Three

Three major myths—about race, aggression, and sex—have a negative impact on our society and inhibit an accurate understanding of what it means to be human. These myths create a false set of societally accepted truths that in turn cause a range of problems for us. The myth that humans are divided into biological races—that black, white, asian, et cetera are natural categories—helps generate and maintain intolerance and inequality, and leads to difficulties in creating and sustaining communities in our increasingly diverse society. The myth that removing the constraints of culture and civilization reveals the innate, violent beast within us—especially in men—restricts how we can relate to one another, encourages fear, and enables an acceptance of certain kinds of abuse and violence as natural or inevitable. The myth that men and women are dramatically different in behavior, desires, and perspectives due to natural differences in “internal wiring” facilitates poor intersexual relations, creates and maintains sexual inequality, and causes a range of problems for individual men and women laboring under a preconception about who and how they are supposed to be.

In our society most people rely on a set of assumptions about someone when they see them, or first meet them, based on which race they appear to be. It’s not that we are naturally inclined to be racist, or even racial, but rather that race means something in our society and we have a whole suite of myths about what to expect and understand about people and races. None of these reactions are necessarily conscious thoughts; rather, the myths are so pervasive that these responses often go on without any active consideration on our part. The myths provide explanations and contexts so that we don’t have to: they supply ready-made common sense. This does not mean that everything about our societal myths is untrue or that all such myths are false. There are many myths that have a lot of accuracy; however, the myths about race, aggression, and sex generally do not, or at

least not in the ways we tend to think they do.

We encounter a problem of conflating ‘natural’ and ‘right’ (or ‘is’ and ‘ought’) with the misperception that we can identify one true way to be human. This stance has been much debated and discussed by philosophers and scientists for centuries, and has been an especially hot topic over the last five decades. If there is a specific natural way to be a human, then one could rightfully argue that this is the way humans evolved (or were designed) to be. It then follows that if we have societal rules and expectations that contradict or inhibit these natural drives and behaviors, we might see problems as humans try to conform to societal rules and go against their natures. This view assumes that the behaviors and drives emerging from our nature are more correct, and set deeper, than behaviors emerging from externally influenced sources such as societal expectations. In other words, this is a position that can explain and accept human behavior, regardless of its implications, by invoking our inner nature as a justification.

To each his sufferings: all are men,
 Condemned alike to groan;
 The tender for another’s pain,
 The unfeeling for his own.
 Yet ah! why should they know their fate?
 Since sorrow never comes too late,
 And happiness too swiftly flies.
 Thought would destroy their paradise.
 No more; where ignorance is bliss,
 ‘Tis folly to be wise.

Written shortly after his graduation from Eton, the poem seems to be an ode to the happy times as a student and the potentially terrifying realities—knowledge, life, responsibilities—that await the graduate. Many of us hold some idealistic notions that we are happier at times when we do not really know the big picture and are able to live in our clamshells, insulated from the negatives of the larger world. As with Gray, this is often the case for those of us lucky enough to have gentle and protected upbringings, involving good schools and supportive environments. The concept that thought (knowledge) destroys paradise, that not knowing certain things is a blessing, can be a nice literary turn of phrase, but it is a dangerous tool when applied to ideas about human nature.

Should we listen to what scientists have to say? Yes and no. For example, James Watson, the Nobel-Prize-winning geneticist, former director of the Cold Springs Harbor Research Institute, and codiscoverer of the structure

of DNA, told a British audience in 2007 that he was “inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa” because “all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours—whereas all the testing says not really.” The knowledge that Watson helped produce regarding the structure of DNA remains one of the most well-tested and well-supported important contributions to modern genetics. However, his thoughts on race, Africa, and intelligence are opinions that contradict the well-tested scientific knowledge available about how race, geography, and genetics in humans actually work. Here is a case where the scientific knowledge is available, but the scientist is stating a personal opinion regardless of the available information. Conflating the thoughts and opinions of scientists with science itself is a source of much of the misinformation leading to myths about human nature.

Science is the production of convincing knowledge in modern society. By using production we acknowledge that science is not a passive experience. Scientific knowledge is a product—and as a product it is the result of some process. There is a subtler and more threatening point embedded in this recognition, however. If science is the active production of something—say, reliable information about the universe—then it is more than, or at least different from, mere discovery. Discovery is a passive operation: to a suitably primed observer, the fact merely reveals itself the production of scientific knowledge is highly context-specific, and it is the context, more than the particulars of the discovery, that are critical. Science is not a neutral investigation of reality. But it can produce real and important results.

Why should we try to integrate different types of knowledge in our attempts at understanding? The ability to really get to the heart of topics that deal with human behavior requires us to synthesize bits of information from many different sources. Even to understand the simple examples of the success of Airborne and the humor in the joke about men not asking for directions we need a bit of chemistry and engineering, some ideas about biology and health, some familiarity with human physiology and sex differences, and knowledge about the history of gender perspectives in our society. Unfortunately, our education system does not always do a good job of getting us the skills to integrate different types of information. In math classes we do math, in history class, history, and in biology class, biology. This is important when we are trying to get basic skills down, but as you get older and experience more and more in life you need to be able to integrate information from different subject areas to really get good pictures of what is going on.

“I would not have seen it if I hadn’t believed it.”

This reversal of the adage might describe how many researchers become steeped in specific perspectives about how primates—including humans—behave. Through reading only a selection of the available published reports and being trained by individuals strongly committed to a particular way of thinking about evolution and ecology and how it shapes primate behavior, researchers develop a set of expectations about what they are going into the field to observe. This set of expectations can influence the way they record and conceptualize what they see.

For example, in 1999 in Bali, Indonesia, two primatologists were watching a group of macaque monkeys when a series of interactions between a few adults and an infant took place. Standing side by side and having seen the same series of behaviors, they turned to one another and excitedly described two slightly different things. One's training and perspective influenced them to focus on the adults and their behavior toward one another, not considering the infant as a main player in the interactions. The colleague, trained in a different perspective, looked specifically at the actions of the adult males as they related to the infant, not focusing as much on the adult females. They each had a set of expectations about how things are that colored where they looked and how they described what they saw. They were exposed to the same set of information but perceived two different outcomes. They saw the same actions, but their beliefs about the world led them to actually experience different things.

A long time ago there was a king who had an ongoing disagreement with his chancellors and clerics. He was certain that English was the original language, while others in his court argued for Latin, Hebrew, or Aramaic. The discussion went round and round without any resolution. Finally, the king had an idea: he would discover what the original language was by keeping five newborn babies in silent isolation, never hearing a spoken word. Thus, when they finally spoke, in whatever language the babies uttered, their first words must be the original language of man. The king arranged to have five newborns taken from their mothers and set up in five towers isolated from towns, villages, and people. Each infant had a mute wet nurse who would feed them a few times a day and have no other interaction with them at all. The infants would have no interactions with any other people at all until they spoke, keeping them pristine for the experiment.

So what language, if any, did the babies speak? None, they all died.

If you isolate a human infant from human contact and society, you do not discover the innate and original nature of being human, you will just kill the infant. Or if by some miracle the child lives, you will have a very damaged individual—biologically, psychologically, and socially. Just ask Harry Harlow. While I am pretty certain that this story about the king and

his babies is not true, it does illustrate the common misconception that there is an innate core to humans that is altered, masked, or otherwise concealed by culture. This is the wrong way to envision the scenario of becoming human: humans need to be around each other for social, physiological, and psychological reasons, and becoming (and being) human is a process that is simultaneously biological and cultural. We need to grow up around one another to be fully human.

What we think of as normal, what we consider intuitive knowledge and common sense, rarely emerges from some inner biological core subconsciously telling us what is true. Rather it is more likely to be the result of the experiences we have had throughout the course of our lives and the way in which these events interact with and shape or influence our bodies and minds.

A cultural construct is a belief, or social ideology, about the world that originates within a particular society and is (generally) shared by its members. That is to say, it is not necessarily tied to a specific event or a quantifiable and universally shared observation, but rather emerges from a conflux of historical and social elements and becomes widespread within the shared belief system of a culture.

For example, the concept that the appropriate way to live as an adult is in a nuclear family (a married couple with children) in a separate residence from other such families, is a cultural construct common across much of American culture. This is not necessarily considered the preferred form of residence in all societies across the world (nor is it the most common form of residence or family unit); moreover, it is not based in some incontrovertible reality (biological or otherwise). However, the ubiquitousness of this construct in the United States sets up a set of goals and ideals for both youth and adults and its attainment is often used as a gauge of social success.

All too often people make the assumption that because a cultural construct is constructed within a society that it is not a real thing. This is akin to people confusing psychosomatic illness—‘it’s all in your head’—with fake illness. Whether your stomach hurts because of a bacterial infection or because of gastric disequilibrium due to stress from workplace tension, it still hurts. The mind can cause the body to react so as to create pain just as an infection can. The remedies might be different, but the pain can be the same. This is the case with cultural constructs; they are very real for those who hold them. In the example of the nuclear family and single-family residences, a failure to marry, have kids, and own a home can cause a wide range of problems socially and psychologically for individuals in the United States.

There are two common misconceptions about evolution: that it has an

end point and that humans are somehow less affected by evolution than other organisms.

A major misconception about evolution is that it is oriented toward progress and results in organisms fitting perfectly with their environment. The corollary to this is that if something works well we perceive it as having evolved for this particular purpose. This is incorrect. Life on Earth (and evolution) is messy and often haphazard. In some cases we do see amazing, almost perfect, relationships between organisms or an organism and its environment; for example, certain wasps and figs have coevolved and need each other to survive. However, in the vast majority of cases organisms work with each other and their environment in successful but much less than perfect ways. This misconception of perfect coevolution is critical because it leads to the assumption that if something is a certain way, and it is the product of evolution, then it came to be that way for a purpose.

Natural selection results in survival and reproduction of the sufficient or the good enough, not necessarily the best or most ferocious. The idea that nature is brutish and life is short owes more to philosophers such Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith than it does to Darwin. In fact, this concept is an important and powerful cultural construct that permeates our society.

Another erroneous idea about evolution is that it all happens by chance. Because evolution is not goal directed, not manipulated by an external creative force, many people veer to the exact opposite perspective and assume that all evolutionary change is by chance. This is also incorrect. Evolutionary change is constrained by the materials at hand. That is, the current form of an organism and its evolutionary history (the history of change its ancestors underwent) affect the ways in which it can change in the future. Humans are not about to evolve wings for flight and tortoises' legs will not evolve into wheels, no matter what chance mutations arise. The principle that evolutionary change is constrained by the structure, development, and history of organisms is important and will help us understand why some of the myths about human nature are wrong.

The final major misconception is that if something has evolved a certain way then that is the way it should be. This is the idea that the way things are has been selected for a particular purpose by evolutionary processes, or arisen by a sequence of chance events in nature, and thus must be the correct way (the "natural" way) for that thing to be. So, the beak of the hummingbird perfectly allows it to get nectar from flowers, the big brains of humans allow us to dominate the planet, and the eagle's feathers enable it to soar. However, none of these examples are decisive. There are many different kinds of nectar-feeding birds with an enormous array of beak shapes and sizes (although most are skinny and long); some other primates and many

cetaceans (whales and dolphins) have brains roughly the same size (or larger) relative to their body size than humans do, and birds' feathers initially show up in their ancestors as thermoregulatory (heat-control) structures before there were wings (later feathers were co-opted and modified for use in flight). So all is not what it seems, nor is the status quo always for the best. A trait that currently serves a function for an organism may or may not have been altered by evolutionary processes to perform that function.

So traits that arise from natural selection are called adaptations because they were shaped over time by the fit between what they do and the environments in which they exist. This is actually what is meant by "survival of the fittest," that those traits that become most common due to natural selection are those that fit best in a given environment. However, what makes for a good fit in one environment might not work in a different environment. We are not talking about survival in the sense of living, but rather in the sense of representation across generations in particular environments.

Some key things to keep in mind:

1. Culture helps give meaning to our experiences of the world.
2. Cultural constructs are real for those that share them.
3. Schemata (our worldview) vary depending of a range of elements in their social context—this explains why people in the same society might not see issues (reality) in the same way.
4. Some constructs are more pervasive than others, and thus more important to understand as they affect how we live and act and treat others.
5. Evolution is change over time. Specifically, it is change in genotype and phenotype across generations due to a variety of processes.
6. Mutation generates new genetic variation, gene flow and genetic drift move that variation around, and natural selection shapes the variation in response to environmental pressures.
7. Niche construction theory shows us that humans and their environments are mutually interactive participants in the evolutionary processes and helps us realize that ecological inheritance is important. Multiple inheritance theory illustrates that evolutionarily relevant inheritance can occur at the genetic, epigenetic, behavioral, and symbolic levels.

8. Our DNA alone does not determine who we are and how we behave, but it is a primary component in the development and maintenance of our bodies and behaviors. Genes contain the basic instructions for the building blocks (proteins) of biological systems. Genes and our phenotype are connected, but usually not in a one-to-one relationship; however, the relationship they do have is shaped and influenced by evolutionary processes.

Why are the big three myths so important to bust? The fallacy behind the race myth is that humans are divided into biological races (black, white, asian, et cetera) and that there are certain natural differences among these groups. If we believe this to be true, it shapes the way we act toward and perceive others, what we expect, and what we think we can achieve, as far as human equality, and whether or not we can build community in an increasingly diverse society.

The fallacy behind the myth of aggression is that nature and nurture are different, and that our animal (or evolutionary) core is that of a primitive beast. If this were true, then our nurture (cultural constraints) would manage an inner nature (a primitive, aggressive drive especially in men) that emerges whenever the grasp of civilization weakens. If we believe this then we will accept a wide range of interpersonal violence as inevitable, and we will see war, rape, and murder as just part of the nature of human beings. But if these are all part of our potential, and not our nature, then a much broader range of responses and ways of living together become possible.

Finally, the fallacy behind the myth of sex is that men and women are truly different in nature, and that this difference emerges in our behavior, desires, and internal wiring. The relationships between, and within, the sexes and genders are constrained by such a view, and the possible range of ways to be and become human and express our sexual and social selves is extremely limited. If differences in the sexes are present but less extreme and occur in different ways than we currently envision, the possibilities for human relations expand and, as in the two previous cases, our abilities to build communities and coexist in sustainable ways in our increasingly crowded, diverse, and complex world could become slightly improved.

The idea of 'race' represents one of the most dangerous myths of our time and one of the most tragic. Myths are most effective and dangerous when they remain unrecognized for what they are. The question of whether humans are divided into biological races is answered with a resounding academic 'no' by the American Association of Physical Anthropology's (AAPA) statement on the biological aspects of race:

“Humanity cannot be classified into discrete geographic categories with absolute boundaries. Partly as a result of gene flow, the hereditary characteristics of human populations are in a state of perpetual flux. Distinctive local populations are continually coming into and passing out of existence. Such populations do not correspond to breeds of domestic animals, which have been produced by artificial selection over many generations for specific human purposes. There is no necessary concordance between biological characteristics and culturally defined groups. On every continent, there are diverse populations that differ in language, economy, and culture. There is no national, religious, linguistic, or cultural group or economic class that constitutes a race, there is no causal linkage between these physical and behavioral traits, and therefore it is not justifiable to attribute cultural characteristics to genetic inheritance.”

To bust the myth of race we have to test the core assumptions and refute them.

ASSUMPTION: *Human races are biological units.*

TEST: Is there a set of biological characteristics that naturally divide up humans beings into races? If yes, then the assumption is supported; if no, then it is refuted.

ASSUMPTION: *We live in a (mostly) postracial society.*

TEST: Does our society still use race in assessment, definitions, and daily life? If no, then the assumption is supported; if yes, then it is refuted.

ASSUMPTION: *If race is not a biological category, then racism is not that powerful or important in shaping human lives.*

TEST: Can we demonstrate that racism, without the existence of biological races, is a significant factor affecting human health, well-being, and access to societal goods? If yes, then the assumption is refuted; if no, then it is supported.

ASSUMPTION: *If we can see consistent differences in sports, disease patterns, and other areas tied to physical features between races, these must reflect innate differences between these groups of people.*

TEST: Are these differences consistent over time? Are they due to biological or unique racial characteristics or are they better attributed to other causes? If yes, and they can be linked to biological patterns of human groups, then the assumption is supported; if no, then it is refuted.

If we can refute all four assumptions, the myth is busted.

In all of this scrutiny of human genetic variation there is an extremely important finding about the African continent that affects our understandings of genetics and race: there is nearly twice as much genetic variation among human populations in Africa than among all populations outside the African continent. There also is more DNA sequence variation within Africa than outside Africa. That is, all the genetic variation in the world is a subset of the variation found in populations on the African continent. This is because modern humans have been in Africa longer than anywhere else on the planet. Variation needs time to accumulate, thus the areas with the highest degree of variation will be the areas where humans have resided the longest. Species-wide human genetic variation does not support the concept of three overlapping races; rather, it demonstrates a single human race and the fact that we have a lot of gene flow and a recent shared ancestry in Africa. The patterns in our DNA do not support the concept of discrete races in humans.

When scientists set out to assemble the first complete human genome, which was a composite of several individuals, they deliberately gathered samples from people who self-identified as members of different races. In June 2000, when the results were announced at a White House ceremony, Craig Venter, a pioneer of DNA sequencing, observed:

“The concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis.”

Over the past few decades, genetic research has revealed two deep truths about people. The first is that all humans are closely related—more closely related than all chimps, even though there are many more humans around today. Everyone has the same collection of genes, but with the exception of identical twins, everyone has slightly different versions of some of them. Studies of this genetic diversity have allowed scientists to reconstruct a kind of family tree of human populations. That has revealed the second deep truth: In a very real sense, all people alive today are Africans.

By analyzing the genes of present-day Africans, researchers have concluded that the Khoe-San, who now live in southern Africa, represent one of the oldest branches of the human family tree. The Pygmies of central Africa also have a very long history as a distinct group. What this means is

that the deepest splits in the human family aren't between what are usually thought of as different races—whites, say, or blacks or Asians or Native Americans. They're between African populations such as the Khoe-San and the Pygmies, who spent tens of thousands of years separated from one another even before humans left Africa.

All non-Africans today, the genetics tells us, are descended from a few thousand humans who left Africa maybe 60,000 years ago. These migrants were most closely related to groups that today live in East Africa, including the Hadza of Tanzania. Because they were just a small subset of Africa's population, the migrants took with them only a fraction of its genetic diversity.

Today, generally, most people look around and say that blacks are better at physical sports, whites run companies, and Asians do really well on tests. But are these generalizations really accurate? And if they are, we know that race is not a biological unit, so an explanation for the differences has to be largely non-biological and thus social and historical.

There is no evidence that if you randomly select three men—one black, one white, and one Asian—in the United States that the black will be better at fullback or basketball, that the white will be a great quarterback, and that the Asian will not play sports. However, depending on where you select your young men from (city, suburb, rural town, West Coast, East Coast, Southeast, Midwest, et cetera), what age you select them at, what economic group you select them from, and their number of siblings, religion, health history, and place of birth of their parents, you are going to have varied results. The point is that the patterns we see today in professional sports are due to historical and social realities, residence patterns, socioeconomic access to sports facilities, and popular perceptions of race differences. It was not that long ago that nonwhites were not allowed to play in most professional sports, that there were no black quarterbacks, and that the majority of running backs were white. The role of race in sports is a social, economic, and historical reality that is neither static nor related to genetics. Instead, it is part of the ever-changing social structure of our society.

Some have suggested that we stop saying that race is a myth, and instead accept that parts of it are myths while other aspects are not. They are correct: the myth part about race is that in modern humans there are biological races. The non-myth part is that in our society the social categories of race are a reality that affects our lives. Thus, white, black, and Asian are not real biological, evolutionary, or natural categories nor do they reflect true divisions in human nature. However, white, black, and Asian are real categories in the United States, for historical, political, and social reasons. People get placed in these categories both by themselves

and by others. These social race divisions have real effects on the bodies and minds of the people in the United States. Race is not biology, but race affects biology, experience, and social context. Race is a social reality that can have lasting biological effects.

Race is simply not a valid way to talk about human biological variation.

1. There is substantial variation among individuals within populations.
2. Some biological variation is divided up between individuals in different populations and also among larger population groupings.
3. Patterns of within-group and between-group variation have been substantially shaped by culture, language, ecology, and geography.
4. Race is not an accurate or productive way to describe human biological variation.
5. Human variation research has important social, biomedical, and forensic implications.

In the United States people often confuse race and ethnicity. The two are not the same: ethnicity generally refers to a suite of shared historical, cultural, geographic, and linguistic features that are used to group peoples into clusters whereas race involves these characteristics but also has specific biological factors. The two terms are often used interchangeably, but technically this is an incorrect usage.

Ethnicity is a way of classifying people based on common histories, cultural patterns, social ties, language use, symbolic shared identities, and the like. It lays no claim to biology and is used both by those attempting to classify others and by those within the different ethnic groups as a symbol of social unity. Ethnicity is not a natural set of divisions in humanity; it is fluid, changing over time and space. The terms 'ethnicity' and 'race' are often used interchangeably, even in commercial ancestry testing; this is wrong.

This mistaken usage is a holdover from the patterns established by eugenicists trying to identify as biological groups the various national and ethnic groups who were living in, or entering, the United States in the early twentieth century. From that time on the notion of 'ethnic' has been used as a technique for establishing 'white' as normal and non-ethnic, in contrast to the 'other.' Check out the shampoos and hair care products at your neighborhood drugstore: most places will have an aisle or section marked 'hair care' and another marked 'ethnic products' or 'ethnic hair care.' This is shorthand for black, or frizzy, hair care products. Think about the common

phrase “ethnic food.” Does this refer to what is considered to be typical US (or white) food like hamburgers, hotdogs, or meatloaf? No, it means all the other types of foods associated with nonwhite groups or with subdivisions of southern or eastern European origin, those not considered white in the early parts of the twentieth century, like Jewish, Italian, and Slavic.

If, as a society, we can move beyond the myth of race as describing natural and biological units, then we can better address the inequalities that the race myth—and its concomitant, the social practices of racism—have created. The myth is strong, even in the face of resounding evidence against it. However, education and information (and access to them) are the main tools of myth busting. We will not move completely past this myth in this generation, or maybe not even in the next, but it is a possibility for the future of our society. As more and more of the myth-busting information discussed here becomes part of our social context, as children develop their schemata in the context of an accurate, information-rich social network, the effect on our cultural constructs and societal perceptions can be substantial. Some of these changes are already under way, but the forces maintaining the myth of race are many and massive, especially the current pattern of inertia, or maintenance of the status quo, in adults. We may find it very difficult to change our own views, or once changed, we may find it uncomfortable to speak up against this myth in many situations.

It was the loveliest party that I've ever attended
If anything was broken I'm sure it could be mended
My head can't tolerate this bobbing and pretending
Listen to some bullet-head and the madness that he's saying

This is where the party ends
I'll just sit here wondering how you
Can stand by your racist friend
I know politics bore you
But I feel like a hypocrite talking to you
You and your racist friend

In order to move forward we all have to be active in the discussion about the reality of racism in the United States. We need to confront our racist friends, family, and society. Go seek out, create, and spread more in-depth analyses of the myth of race and all the details that refute it. Many of our social norms and cultural constructs stand in our way; they support the inertia and patterns that maintain the myth or at least make it very difficult to challenge it publicly. However, once we have read this kind of information, we cannot be hypocrites, we must be myth busters.

That humans (especially males) are naturally aggressive is a prominent myth about human nature. To bust this myth we have to test the core assumptions and refute them.

ASSUMPTION: *Human aggression (especially in males) is an evolutionary adaptation; we evolved to be aggressive, big-brained apes.*

TEST: Is aggression a trait that can be selected via evolutionary pressures? Is there evidence that humans, and our closest relatives, are evolved to be aggressive? That is, do aggressive behaviors and violence appear as central parts of our (and our closest relatives') evolutionary history, especially in males? If the answer to these questions is yes, the assumption is supported; if no then it is refuted.

ASSUMPTION: *The nature of human aggression is in our genes.*

TEST: Are there biologically identifiable and measurable factors that clearly demonstrate that aggression and violence are rooted in specific genetic or biological characteristics of humankind? If there are, then the assumption is supported; if not, then it is refuted.

ASSUMPTION: *Aggression results in "survival of the fittest." In an evolutionary sense being aggressive and violent, especially if you are a male, gets you more benefits.*

TEST: Do more aggressive, more violent, or more warlike males do better both in human society and in our closest relatives? If they do, then the assumption can be supported; if not, then the assumption can be refuted.

ASSUMPTION: *Humans, at their core, rely on aggression and violence more than cooperation and mutualistic interactions; everyone is aggressively just out for themselves.*

TEST: If studies show that humans are more successful when being selfish, aggressive, or violent in dealing with challenges and each other, then the assumption is supported. However, if cooperation or mutualistic interactions and non-selfish actions are more pervasive than aggression, then the assumption is refuted.

It is empirically obvious and universally accepted that aggression is not a unitary phenomenon and that there is more than one type of aggression. These types include:

Fear-Induced Aggression: When an animal is prevented from escaping attacks or capture

Maternal Aggression: When mothers defend offspring

Intermale Aggression: A male in conflict with another male of the same species

Irritable Aggression: From exposure to a threatening or irritating item or event

Sex-Related Aggression: Where the sexual act includes aggressive actions

Predatory Aggression: When an attack response is triggered by the presence of a prey item

Territorial Aggression: When an intruder enters into another animal's defended territory

However, most researchers also agree that these types are not exclusive and that any single aggressive interaction can potentially have multiple types of aggression in it. The aggressive behaviors can fall at different places along the continuum of mild to severe. Many researchers also note a specific difference between the behaviors involved in predation (hunting and eating another species) and the types of aggression that occur between members of the same species.

It is good to keep in mind that in the context of normal aggression there are many positive social outcomes. For example, consider the mild aggression used by parents (in humans and in other primates) when socializing young or the aggression that individuals within a group use when breaking up fights or policing and resolving conflicts between group members.

The human emotion of anger comes from an evolutionary ancient interaction of the brain, hormones, and behavior—often called the fight or flight response system—thus linking human aggression in some ways to the more generalized animal aggression. While anger is typically associated with aggression, similar circumstances can elicit both anger and fear, which can result in different types of aggression (reactive and proactive). In animals there is usually a clear separation in the brain-behavior pathway between anger-induced and fear-induced aggression, with actual physical aggression being more restrained in anger-based behavior than in fear-based behavior. However, in humans (relative to other animals) there appears to be a wider range of ways in which aggression can be expressed and the distinction

between anger-induced and fear-induced aggression is not always so clear cut.

The way aggression is displayed depends primarily on the cognitive and experiential factors of the person displaying it. They suggest that the way in which humans perceive and interpret the environment and other persons in it, their assumptions and expectations of their situation, how they believe others will respond to events, and how much they believe in their own abilities to respond to an event, all affect how aggression will be displayed in any given situation. Basically the concept is that how people “see” and experience the world shapes how they perceive events, objects, people, and social interactions as relevant or irrelevant to aggression.

So an act of aggression itself results from the basic capacity for exhibiting these types of behaviors—which are physiological responses related to our evolutionary history and biological present—combined with the convergence of an individual’s experience, history, perceptions, and a given particular situation. Given what we have reviewed here, we can safely say that aggression, as humans exhibit it, is not a single, unitary trait, or even an easily described physical or behavioral system, that can be shaped by evolutionary pressures in the same way as a trait such as a tooth or a femur (leg bone).

The basic behaviors used in aggression have their origin in the fight or flight response. This is a physiological system common in all animals, and developed in a specific way in mammals. When something potentially dangerous happens to a mammal its body responds very quickly with certain hormonal, heart rate, and behavioral actions. For example, say you are a zebra eating grass on a savannah and you look up to see a lion running at you. Your eyes and brain immediately send a series of signals to your heart, muscles, and adrenal glands whose actions then allow you to turn and run, extremely quickly and effectively, without thinking about it. This same scenario, in a slightly different situation, can also result in fighting. Say a zebra is cornered by a pack of wild dogs against a cliff face. The same system of brain, heart, and adrenal glands will act, but in this case the zebra will use the energy and muscle power to fight the dogs instead of fleeing.

The bottom line is that in animals we know where responsive aggressive behavior comes from. It turns out that the bodily systems involved in proactive aggression are basically the same as in responsive aggression; however they are stimulated by, and used in, different situations. In complex social mammals (primates, wolves, whales, dolphins, et cetera) proactive aggression can be especially important in social contexts.

While fighting, having sex, and grooming are very important to primate societies, such social interactions, especially aggressive ones, are not at all

common. Most primates actually spend the vast majority of their time looking for food, eating, and resting. Even the most socially active of primates (macaque and baboon monkeys and chimpanzees) rarely spend more than 20 percent of their time in social interactions. Across the primate order the average total time spent in social interactions ranges from five to ten percent of total active time. Humans are by far the most socially active primates. However, this does not mean that social interactions are not important; they are the glue that hold primate societies together and make up some of the most interesting and central aspects of primate lives. If we look at how social interactions break down we see something very interesting: primates spend most of their time in prosocial behavior; aggression, especially severe aggression, is very rare. A broad overview of the primatological literature, including hundreds of species and tens of thousands of observation hours, demonstrates that intraspecies violence resulting in death is extremely rare, and decidedly not wide scale, in primates.

This does not mean that aggression is not important. It is. Positive social relationships are so central to primate societies that the possibility of aggression, even rare aggression, can elicit a whole suite of behavioral patterns that have evolved to ameliorate, or fix, the damage done by aggression between members of a group. This pattern is called the valuable relationships hypothesis and is strongly supported by a range of research projects.

This is of course very debatable in modern warfare where bombs, missiles, unmanned drones, and robots can carry out many of the actual lethal attacks and face-to-face killing is less common. Thus the action of pushing a button or giving a verbal command far away from the battlefield might not require any aggression at all.

These are the minimal set of points we need to consider when engaging in a discussion about the role of war as it relates to understanding human aggression:

- Our species is not biologically destined for war.
- War is not an inescapable part of social existence.
- Understanding war involves a nested hierarchy of constraints.
- War expresses both pan-human practicalities and culturally specific values.
- War shapes society to its own ends.
- War exists in multiple contexts.

- Opponents are constructed in conflict.
- War is a continuation of domestic politics by other means.
- Leaders favor war because war favors leaders.
- Peace is more than the absence of war.

In most studies of dominance relations, males use a variety of means to move up (and down) the dominance hierarchy. For example, in a five-year study of long-tailed macaque monkeys in Bali, Indonesia, researchers watched three adult males become dominant in their respective groups. Interestingly, each did so via a distinct pathway. One male followed what would be considered the aggression path. He was aggressive to all the females and males in his group, constantly picking fights (and winning them) and physically harassing other group members such that they gave way whenever he was around.

The second male tended to fight when attacked, but almost never started fights. Rather, he spent nearly all of his time approaching all the females in the group and having sex with them, whether they were capable of getting pregnant or not. Over time the females started to support him when other males attacked him. One other male joined forces with him, and the two of them became the favorite partners of the females, always receiving their support in group conflicts. This is the way he ended up as the dominant male in the group.

Finally, the third male spent nearly all of his time grooming and in friendly behavior with males, females, and especially the young members of the group. When fights would break out he (along with a group of young males that hung around him) would almost always go over and break up the fights. This is the way he became the alpha male in his group. However, over the entire time he was the dominant male, females frequently came up to him requesting sex and he almost never acquiesced (researchers only saw him mate a few times over many years). Similar variation in dominance styles, with and without a major role for aggression, is reported for a majority of primate species.

The case for cooperation as central to human success has been made for human ancestors, modern humans in simple foraging societies, agriculturalists, and modern nation states. There is copious fossil and material evidence that from early on in our evolutionary history the ways in which we worked together as opposed to selfish and individually based behaviors is what enabled humans to spread far and wide across the planet. There is also a large body of evidence that demonstrates that agriculture, village

and city structures, large-scale religious interactions and political systems, and trade and market economies all rely on a substantial infrastructure of human cooperation for their success. This does not mean that competition and conflict are not also common, just that these are not the basis for our success. Aggression can emerge out of cooperation, or the breakdown of cooperation, but nearly every study conducted on human social behavior indicates higher frequencies and greater emphasis on cooperation than any other single behavioral pattern. This prevalence of cooperation does not mean that individuals do not act selfishly on occasion or that some might use aggression to take from others. It means, contrary to some perspectives, that a primarily selfish orientation (sometimes referred to as *Homo economicus*) is not characteristic of most people in most societies.

This basic notion of *Homo economicus* is that humans as individuals will make decisions based on what is best for themselves. This turns out not really to be the case. In a study of fifteen societies, researchers demonstrated unequivocally that the central axiom of *Homo economicus* (humans will behave selfishly in economic situations) is refuted. In fact, selfishness as a primary pattern was not found in any of the societies studied. Rather, patterns of cooperation and social reciprocity were dominant, with much variation in details across societies, based on integration into world markets as well as demographic and other social variables. This does not mean that humans are all egalitarian or that we are selfless. It simply reflects the reality that human societies are based on extensive and extremely complex systems of cooperation and mutual inter-reliance on one another, such that a consistently selfish behavioral strategy will not be sustainable in human groups.

“If we weigh the totality of the evidence, we arrive at a new conclusion: Humans are not really so nasty after all.”

“We will never understand violence by looking only at the genes or brains of violent people. Violence is a social and political problem, not just a biological and psychological one.”

Are humans predisposed to behave violently?

“Well, to talk about inherent aggression in us sets off alarm bells for some people because it sounds biologically determinist, it sounds pessimistic. So, I wouldn’t want to quite put it in that term. But, I do think that there’s all sorts of evidence that humans have got a predisposition to behave with violence in certain contexts.”

Most researchers see that context and variability are central to any sincere attempt to understand human violence. Over three-hundred years ago the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes proposed that social order (cooperative society) is not intrinsic to human nature, but is installed by a social contract that constrains and pacifies the natural violent state of humankind and the solitary individual's brutish natural tendencies. Hobbes's assumption, that humans have an inherent violent nature which must be modified by society, is reflected in many of the perspectives discussed here. However, even when there is attention given to context and variability there is resiliency to the popular myth about human nature and human beings' predisposition to aggression.

Such a perspective is incomplete and paints too simplistic a picture of how and why human beings behave aggressively. Sure, certain things spur aggressive actions, but the common notions about our inner, natural, aggressive tendencies (especially in males) ignores the complexity of human biology, psychology, history, and society. It downplays the myriad ways in which aggression is initiated and maintained, and oversimplifies what we can mean by, and understand about, human aggressive behavior. And, most dangerously, it enables a kind of inevitability in our communal sense of aggression and society, especially as it relates to males. This need not be the case.

It is essential that we not base our image of ourselves on false foundations. What is involved here is not simply the understanding of the nature of humanity, but also the image of humanity that grows out of that understanding. Humans are not naturally aggressive, but they do have a great potential for aggression and violence. If we believe we are aggressive at our base, that males stripped of social constraints will resort to a brutish nature, then we will expect and accept certain types of violence as inevitable. This means that instead of really trying to understand and rectify the horrific and complex realities of rape, genocide, civil war, and torture, we will chalk at least a part of these events up to human nature. This is a dangerous state of mind that traps us in a vicious cycle of inaction and futility when it comes to moving forward as societies invested in understanding and managing violence.

Understanding humanity is neither simple nor linear; as humans we are neither violent nor peaceful at heart. We can be aggressive and violent and peaceful and cooperative all at the same time; arguing for a natural state of peace or a natural state of aggression is missing the boat. However, the myth of a natural aggression does not hold up in light of available evidence. What can we make of this? If we are not naturally aggressive how do we explain and understand human aggression and violence today? We do so

by opening our minds to the vast amount of research across the social and biological sciences, to histories and critical assessments of social patterns and lives. We also commit ourselves not to accept simplistic assertions about who we are and what we are capable of. We strive to use this information to make educated and socially involved decisions about aggression and violence. In the end, we try to keep an open mind and cooperate with one another to understand and resolve the impacts of aggression and conflict.

Sex and sexuality are very complicated and they mean a lot for our daily lives. What we really know about men and women and the nature of sex in humans challenges the extent of these differences and any simplistic take on this topic. To bust this myth we have to test the core assumptions and refute them.

ASSUMPTION: *Males and females are biologically very different from one another.*

TEST: Are male and female biologies totally different, sufficiently different, or just versions of the same biological theme? If there is a clearly distinct biological patterning between males and females that mandates radical differences in behavior and function then the assumption is supported; if males and females are basically variations on a theme, and not that different, then it is refuted.

ASSUMPTION: *Behavioral differences between males and females are evolutionary; they are hardwired.*

TEST: If the differences in behavior between males and females are more biologically based (sex) than culturally based (gender) and are best explained as evolutionary adaptations, the assumption is supported. If, however, the differences are complicated, less clear, and mostly related to patterned social differences between genders, not primarily to evolved differences, then this assumption is refuted.

ASSUMPTION: *Males and females are different because they are complementary to one another, resulting in the monogamous pair bond and the nuclear family as a natural state for humans. This means that it is a natural human goal to obtain a unique and powerful sexually monogamous romantic relationship.*

TEST: This has a multipart test: first, are humans monogamous sexually? If yes, then supported; if no, then refuted. Second, are pair bonds and marriage (or at least romantic relationships) the same thing? If yes, then supported; if no, then refuted. Finally, do humans “naturally”

live in nuclear families where the strongest bonds are between husband and wife and children? If yes, then supported; if no, then refuted.

ASSUMPTION: *Men and women are really different when it comes to sexuality: men want sex and women want relationships (and less sex than men).*

TEST: Do men want more sex than women? Are men more sexually focused than women? Do the sexes differ dramatically in how, when, and how much they have sex? If yes, then supported; if no or if it is much more complicated than these simplistic assumptions, then refuted.

For anthropologists, the major distinction between sex and gender is one of societal context. Sex refers to the biological differences between men and women and gender refers to the overall differences in perception and actions. Just as we are acculturated into the society in which we grow up, we are also engendered (literally “to become a gender”). When we talk about sex differences we are referring to differences in biology and when we talk about gender differences we are referring to behavioral patterns and perceptions.

When we talk about differences we tend to think of a point on a line or single figures, not the entire range of variation that actually occurs.

The gender similarities hypothesis holds that males and females are similar on most, but not all, psychological variables. That is, men and women, as well as boys and girls, are more alike than they are different. Results from a review of 46 meta-analyses support the gender similarities hypothesis. Gender differences can vary substantially in magnitude at different ages and depend on the context in which measurement occurs. The question of the magnitude of psychological gender differences is more than just an academic concern. There are serious costs of overinflated claims of gender differences. These costs occur in many areas, including work, parenting, and relationships.

Humans have been cooperative breeders for a long time. At an early stage in our evolutionary history multiple individuals (females and males) were involved in raising and caring for children. The idea that it is natural for one human female to raise her offspring alone, or with just a single male, is a very recent one indeed, and one that is biologically not supported.

The notion that male and female behavioral differences are largely explained by the differences in their reproductive biology is absurdly oversimplified. There is a wide range of recent reviews and refutations of this notion, suggesting that a real understanding of reproductive systems and patterns of investment, aspects of sexual selection, the division of labor, and the wide

array of human ecological, social, and historical contexts better explain male and female reproductive relationships than over-hyped differences in their respective reproductive investments.

Male and female bodies have many differences, but they overlap extensively in structure and function. Looking at average differences blinds us to the important system-wide view, the normative range of variation, and how bodies actually function. When we look at the biology of males and females we are constantly reminded of one major point: we are all *Homo sapiens*. One can easily focus on the clothing, the hairstyles, the cultural behavior, the social history, and the modern-day ideas about gender and being masculine or feminine and see substantial differences between men and women, but very few of those elements match the actual biological patterns in our species. Males are often larger and more muscular than females, and aspects of our skeletons are variations on a theme. This size difference and the slight difference in the way we walk mean a lot to us socially, but biologically these are extremely minor differences.

The strong similarities in male and female bodies and behavior do not mean that gender differences are not very real and very important. Just like the concept of socially constructed races, the perception and expectation of gender differences are part of all cultures and impact individuals and society. We all experience these patterns of gender difference—and they can fool us into thinking that men and women are so very different by nature. Different cultures do it in different ways, but certain patterns are relatively consistent. Males tend to control economic and political resources, not because they are evolved to do so or that women are less capable of doing so, but because of the social and historical paths that have favored patriarchy. Women are associated with the domestic sphere and children due to their giving birth and lactating, not due to any inability of males generally to care for offspring. There is no biological mandate that only females care for young and only males care for economics and politics. In fact, it is highly likely that it is the cooperation between parents and other people in the raising of young that enabled humans to be as successful as we are today.

If this is all true (and it is), then why do so many people—researchers and the public alike—make such strong claims about the nature of human sexual difference? For two reasons: first, they focus only on the differences, ignoring the similarities; and second, they forget, or do not realize, that they are seeing everything around them through their own schemata (their all-encompassing worldviews).

We are all products of our own societies. We are who we meet and grow up with. If we are told from day one that little boys like trucks and little girls like dolls, that women are emotional and nurturing, and that men are

assertive and controlling, we will grow up seeing those behaviors around us. Researchers, especially those looking for evolutionary origins of why we do what we do, have to be extremely careful that they do not overlook the structures of modern human societies and our schemata in their quest to understand the big picture. They must be careful not to already know how the world looks and simply seek an explanation as to why the world is this way without first asking the most basic scientific question: is the world really this way?

Gender: The social, cultural, and psychological constructions that are imposed on the biological differences of sex.

Gender Roles: People of each sex are expected to have psychological characteristics that equip them for the tasks that their sex typically performs.

In general most people, and many researchers, use the words ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ interchangeably. The two are related, entangled even, but not the same thing. Anthropologists have long held that gender is best seen as the culturally influenced perception of what the sexes are and the roles they are expected to play. Sex is a biological definition (XX or XY... more or less, settle down ultrawokers) and gender is how the social worlds, and expectations, of the sexes play out. Gender is best conceived of as a continuum, not a dichotomy. Remember, even biological sex is really more of a continuum than an either/or dichotomy. At one extreme end we have total femininity and at the other end total masculinity, with most people falling in between those points.

In our society, we expect sex-females to fall largely toward the behaviorally feminine side and sex-males to be mostly toward the masculine side. That is, behaviors we culturally associate with masculinity, like assertiveness, aggression, intense interest in athletics, are seen as being normal for the male sex. So when women exhibit these behaviors we see them as behaving like men on the gender spectrum. The same is true for men who exhibit socially feminine behavior such as heightened displays of emotion, subservience to others, intense interest in Broadway musicals or daytime soap operas; we see them as being like women. These examples are very stereotypical, and there are many, many exceptions to this pattern, but I choose them for a reason: everyone reading this book has a social context of gender that enables them to understand these specific examples. More specifically, everyone from the United States, as gender roles and expectations vary from culture to culture and even across time in the same culture. Gender works because it is a core

part of the social fabric in which we develop our schemata, the way we see and interpret the world.

A cross-cultural perspective makes it clear that there are many different—although probably not unlimited—ways that societies can organize their thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality.

We are nature-nurtured, so making a clear distinction between biology and culture is very difficult in many cases. It does not help for us to think of sex as biologically fixed and gender as culturally contingent, like a flexible behavioral cloak thrown over biology. Using such a dichotomy ignores the integration of biology and culture in human life, experience, and behavior. Some opt for the term ‘sex/gender’ to best describe what we are actually talking about. The two are perpetually intertwined, just not always in the ways we think. So it is best to think of sex/gender as a dynamic system of interaction rather than one physical part (biological sex) and one cultural part (gender); you can’t have one without the other.

There is a basic story told by many evolution-minded folks interested in human relationships: the body is wired to find mates. Once the best biological mate is found the brain and hormones kick in to create a particular kind of attachment drive: romantic love. This leads to the monogamous pair bond (which may or may not last), offspring, and the natural family unit—a man, a woman, and their children. When you meet the right person for you the evolved chemical cascade will lead you toward a pair bond relationship. The non-evolutionary version (whether religious or secular) is pretty much the same: just remove the chemical part and replace ideal biological mate with spiritual or soul mate. Underlying both of these scenarios is the assumption shared by many evolutionary psychologists as well as the Judeo-Christian-Muslim religions and most people in the United States, that the bonded male-female pair (with offspring) is the evolved, or natural, unit of the human family; that marriage is part of human nature; and that there is a specific pair bond partner out there for everyone. Whether one sees this as the culmination of an evolutionary history or as a spiritual reality, this vision acts to justify the role of marriage and the nuclear family as primary to human nature.

There is no real anthropological, biological, or psychological support for the notion that there is a perfect (or reasonably perfect) match for everyone, or for anyone. But there is still widespread belief that there are specific biological matches for people and that this mated, romantic pair bond is what humans are evolved to seek. There is substantial evolutionary evidence that humans do seek pair bonds (socially and physiologically), but these bonds do not necessarily involve sex, marriage, exclusivity, or even heterosexuality. Marriage is not equal to evolutionary or physiological pair

bonds, the nuclear family is not the basic unit of human social organization, and social expectations for the quality and structure of life after attaining these two things can lead to an array of social and psychological problems for people.

There are three parts to this section of the myth:

1. The unit consisting of bonded male-female + kids is the basic unit of humanity.
2. Humans are naturally monogamous and that marriage is a reflection of evolutionary origins.
3. Individuals are attracted to a single, specific mate (pair bond mate or soul mate), with whom they are evolved to have sex, marriage, and exclusivity.

These assumptions are not really accurate. We already know that a suite of hormones and neurotransmitters—including oxytocin, vasopressin, prolactin, testosterone, dopamine, et cetera—are involved in developing and maintaining physiological bonds between mothers and infants and fathers and infants. This system also functions in the same way between adults. Physical touch, spending intense social time in contact or near one another, and positive social interactions can trigger it. There is an evolved system in humans that uses social and physical interactions, hormones, and the brain to prime the body to feel closer and more attached to another individual. Some anthropologists call this affect hunger. They argue that the basic system that acts to bond mammalian mothers to their infants has been expanded and co-opted in the human species to act as a social and physiological bonding system between individuals of all ages and sexes. This drive of affect hunger enables humans to form and experience types of social bonds that are not found (to the same extent) in other animals, even in other primates. They also argue that it is these bonds which have enabled humans to do better than almost any other organism on the planet. So the answer to ‘what is love’ in this context is that it is the biology underlying affect hunger, the ability to form multiple, strong social bonds, and part of the human adaptive niche—the evolutionary history that has made us so successful as a species.

It is not human nature to seek marriage and a specific sexually monogamous romantic relationship, but it is in our nature to pair bond and in our culture to seek marriage

So what now? How does this information, the busting of the myth of extreme differences between men and women, impact our daily lives? First,

we need to discard dualisms. Thinking of males and females as opposites is incorrect biologically and socially, so it will not get us good answers to questions. Looking only at culture and social histories or only at biology and evolutionary patterns is also a false dichotomy and will hamper our abilities to ask and answer important questions. We need to be especially careful when using aspects of gendered behavior as reflections of human nature and we need to be aware of our biases, and the biases in our datasets, at all times. We are not blank slates, but we are also not pink and blue notepads. Our brains are not made 'male' or 'female' but develop via interactions between the external world and our own sensory apparatus, our bodily systems have important differences but are more similar than they are different, and gendered behavior and gender relations change over time as our social and structural contexts shift and our schemata change accordingly.

If we discard the myth that men and women are so different then we can see the range of individuals more clearly. If we accept that there are many ways to be male and female and that many of these ways overlap, we can be more accepting of a wider range of masculinity and femininity within and between individuals. A nine-year-old male who picks up a baseball for the first time and throws it ineptly is not 'throwing like a girl' as his teammates might say. He is throwing the ball like a human who has not been trained to throw a small round ball with accuracy and speed. When a nine-year-old girl plays baseball well, sliding hard, getting dirty, and running out every time she is at bat she is called a tomboy or is described with masculine adjectives. She is being a good athlete, not being like a boy. These are simplistic examples, but the idea has significant impact across all aspects of our lives. Taking this perspective can help reduce conflict for individuals, and their families and friends, who feel that they fall outside of the social expectations for their gender. It can also create a more level playing field when we look at the abilities and behavior of others, not thinking they will perform one way or another because of assumed limitations of their sex. Again this does not mean people do not vary in occasionally predictable ways. However, if we broaden our categories we might just be pleasantly surprised.

Another way these ideas might help is with the expectations for love and romance and marriage that permeate our society. There is no evidence that there is a specific chemical/biological and social match for each individual on the planet. There is also no guarantee that any individual will successfully initiate and maintain one or more strong pair bonds socially and sexually across the life span, although many of us probably do desire such relationships. Marriage is not necessarily one of those pair bonds. It might coexist with one, but getting married and having children does not automatically initiate

a pair bond. People need to realize this because spending enormous amounts of time and effort with one other individual is very difficult, and if there is not a pair bond it is probably even more difficult. Romance and marriage are not evolutionary adaptations, they are part of our cultural expectations and patterns, which change over time.

Pair bonds are not necessarily lifelong (in fact most are not) nor are they always the same across the duration of the relationship. Humans can have many pair bonds across their lifetimes and, frequently, multiple ones at the same time. Social and sexual pair bonds can be very similar biologically but their social and cultural impacts can be quite different. Being in a pair bond (social and/or sexual) does not mean that either individual ceases to be sexually attracted to (or active with) other individuals. Monogamy in humans is a social contract, not a biological reality. We can be monogamous, but our bodies and minds are not specifically designed for it.

Men and women do not really want different things from life; in the end we are all humans. However, some biological patterns combined with specific cultural contexts can create different desires, expectations, and patterns of behavior. We must realize that each individual may or may not match the appropriate ideas society has for sex/gender but that such variation is normal for humanity. Understanding how we are similar and different and the range of human variation gives us a broader notion of what is natural for humans. There is no evolved battle of the sexes in humans, nor are gender differences and similarities unimportant, but understanding both how we do and do not vary can help us move forward toward a better society.

Busting Myths

Some key points:

1. **Humans are simultaneously biological and cultural; we are nature and culture creatures with a fascinating evolutionary past and present.** We have complex biology (our bodies) and culture (our schemata) that create and shape, and are shaped by, our perceptions and philosophies. We have not evolved to have one specific way of being, and thus there are a number of potential outcomes to being human. However, our bodies, schemata, and cultural inheritance constrain the ways in which we can envision, construct, and experience those potential paths. We are born into a world of existing social and physical ecologies, patterns, and contexts that immediately become entangled with our biological structures and become a central part of our process of biocultural development. It is abundantly clear that simple explanations for who we are and why we do what we do are usually wrong.
2. **Culture matters.** Our culture is a large part of what makes us unique. We can think of culture as a dynamic web of significance at the core of our becoming and being human. Culture is both a product of human action and something that influences that action; it is the context that helps give meaning to our experiences of the world. This means that cultural constructs are real for those that share them. Some constructs are more pervasive than others, and thus more important to understand because they affect how we live and act and treat others.
3. **Evolution matters.** Evolution is largely misunderstood and misused when thinking about human behavior. Generally, evolution is change over time. Specifically, it is change in genotype and phenotype across generations due to a variety of processes. These processes create, move, and shape biological variation in multiple ways. It is not all about fighting and survival, it is about interactions between organisms and environments and organisms and each other over time. Niche construction theory shows us that humans and their environments are mutually interactive in evolutionary processes, and helps us realize that social and ecological inheritance is very important. Multiple inheritance theory illustrates that evolutionarily relevant inheritance can be genetic, epigenetic, behavioral, and symbolic. Evolution is not goal oriented nor does it produce endpoints: evolution is ongoing.

4. **Genes do not equal human nature.** Our DNA alone does not determine who we are and how we behave, but it is a primary component in the development and maintenance of our bodies and behaviors. Genes contain the basic instructions for the building blocks (proteins) of biological systems. Genes and our phenotype (our bodies and behavior) are connected, but not usually in a one-to-one relationship; however, the relationship they do have is shaped and influenced by evolutionary processes, ecological and social contexts, and histories.
5. **Race is not what we think it is.** The construct of human races is not a biological reality. There is substantial variation among individuals within populations and some biological variation is divided up between different populations and also among larger population groupings. Patterns of variation both within and between groups have been substantially shaped by culture, language, ecology, history, and geography. Race is not an accurate or productive way to describe modern human biological variation, but human variation research does have important social, biomedical, and forensic implications. Race is a cultural construct that can affect our social realities. Racial inequality (racism) is a social reality and can affect individuals' biology. Ethnicity is a valid way to ask questions about social histories and social and symbolic identification, but it is not biology and it is not race.
6. **Humans are not aggressive by nature.** Humans have great potential for aggression and violence. There is variation in conflict styles and aggression across individuals, sexes, genders, societies, and time frames. Aggression itself is not a uniformly or consistently discrete trait, so aggression per se cannot be favored by evolutionary pressures. War is common in the human experience today, but it is not part of our evolutionary heritage. Human aggression, especially in males, is not an evolutionary adaptation: we are not aggressive, big-brained apes. Males and females differ in some facets of aggression, and many of those differences have to do with physical size and the social and experiential contexts in which the genders find themselves. Genes do not control or determine the normative expression of aggression, but abnormal biological function can influence aggressive behavior. Humans are hyper-cooperators and not "naturally" selfish. As a species we do not rely on aggression and violence more than cooperation and there is no pattern of evidence to support a notion that humanity is aggressive and selfish by nature. Aggression is an important part of being human, but it is not who we are at our core.

7. **Men and women are not as different as you may think.** There are important biological differences between the sexes and there are also important similarities; however, there is a greater range of overlap in male and female bodies than most people realize. Behaviorally males and females also overlap extensively. Humans, regardless of sex, seek to form pair bonds of both social and sexual sorts, but pair bonds and marriage are not the same thing. Males and females, given the opportunity, will engage in sex across their lifespan in more or less the same rates and manners. These strong similarities in male and female bodies and behavior do not mean that gender differences are not real and important. Gender is a powerful cultural construct and the perception and expectation of gender differences impacts individuals and society. Males tend to control economic and political resources and women are heavily involved with child rearing because they give birth and lactate, but males and females have the same behavioral ability to care for offspring. There is no biological or evolutionary mandate that only females care for young and only males care for economics and politics. These patterns of gender difference and the strength of the cultural assumptions about sex fool us into thinking that men and women are different by nature.

8. **Busting myths about human nature requires critical thinking and a lot of work.** Myths matter in our daily lives and make sense to our shared schemata, which is why they are tough to challenge. The information to bust most myths about humanity is largely available, but it exists across a range of academic disciplines, books, journals, media sources, and people. To tackle any of the myths about human nature one must compile a variety of information from different sources. Any single approach is not going to get you a sufficient set of information to achieve quality answers nor will it enable you to integrate the kinds of datasets needed to truly bust powerful stories about why we are the way that we are. Myth busting can alter the way we think about ourselves and the society around us; changing our minds is always a difficult and sometimes scary thing to do, but it is important.

Schemata, inertia, historical precedence, and ignorance are very powerful: it is often difficult to challenge the status quo.

Because the basic concepts in these myths are acquired and shared by most members of our society, they act to reproduce themselves at a subconscious level. They offer a common set of knowledge that can be

exploited by advertisers, politicians, and other groups to reach a maximal audience. Reinforcing these myths acts as a self-fulfilling feedback loop, making them more robust. Examine the next ten television commercials you watch and see how many of them have a specific reference to, or a reliance on, some aspect of the myths of sex/gender and aggression; I bet it will be a majority of them.

Another important reason why misinformation, and even overt lies, remain prominent in the public mind is simplicity versus complexity in explanations. To counter what we think of, and experience, as everyday reality requires deconstruction of the assumptions, assessment of the assumptions, and then refutation of the assumptions—whereas supporting popular myths simply relies on reinforcing what you already “know,” thanks to your schemata. Think about how many words you’ve read or have yet to read in this book, yet it barely skims the surface of all the data and information available on the subjects! Because of their powerful place in our culture these myths and others take much fewer words and ideas to be supported. Supporters of these myths can simply refer to common knowledge, to the world you see every day, and to many of the social experiences you yourself have had. They can ignore contradictory data, disregard variation, and focus on averages and cultural constructs, simply by ignoring the actual details of the issues involved. This works because of what we know about human biocultural development and the power of social context. These myths of human nature are promulgated so thoroughly, and successfully, in our society in large part because it is easier to accept the world as we perceive it is than to question and investigate whether the world might be a bit different than we think.

Finally, a core reason that these myths are so resilient is because few of us have the opportunity, the time, or the training to assemble the diverse array of information needed to effectively bust them. However, if we continue with our horrendously skewed and willfully ignorant interpretations of history, we will find ourselves with a generation that’s woefully misinformed and it will be completely our fault.

So, you want to bust some popular myths? To effectively bust myths you need curiosity, perseverance, and the ability to collect and assess copious amounts of information. You have to be ready to read a lot, to think critically about what you read, and to be vigilant about popular assertions, whether you agree with them or not. Today it is also critical to have a computer and access to the Internet. The following are a two tips to think about as you consider trying to figure out what the world is actually like.

Challenge Common Sense: Do not passively accept what you are told.

If something strikes you as incorrect, or even if you just want to know if it is right or wrong, you need to do a little legwork to figure out how to assess the assertion. The easiest way to try this is to ask yourself the following questions about something you believe. Why do you believe it? Experience? School? Read it somewhere? Heard it from parents, a friend, a co-worker? First figure out where information comes from, then ask yourself why it feels right or wrong. Sometimes your gut feeling reflects your schemata, telling you that all is as it should be. But sometimes you might, even subconsciously, have picked up on some of the variation, patterns, or inconsistencies that make you feel differently about this particular topic (whatever it is). This feeling might make you question some assertion of reality that seems clear and correct to others.

How do you figure out how to effectively question the assertion? Clarifying what is actually being said and who is saying it is a good place to start. The assertion that boys play rougher than girls—it is probably going to sound right, but how does anyone actually know this? If the person making the assertion does not study this then they must have heard it or read it somewhere and are simply repeating it. Or maybe the person making the assertion is going solely on their own life experience. Whatever the case, you need to figure out where the original information comes from (or at least where that person heard it) and start there.

Do a little research in libraries or on the Web, ask people, see where this path of inquiry takes you. In the end you might reaffirm your beliefs or maybe they might be challenged. In this effort it is absolutely necessary that you are not afraid to admit you do not understand. We humans have very large and complex brains and one of their major functions is to help us identify when things just do not make sense to us. Being confused or not following a line of argument is a normal part of brain function, especially when it involves thinking about something that contradicts our normative expectations. Our society makes it difficult to admit we do not understand, but it is a critical first step in learning and in busting myths.

Lots of Data: To integrate information across different areas of knowledge requires two steps. First, how do you get the information, and second, once you have it how can you tell what is most worthwhile and relevant? This can be broken down into three parts: Where do we find the information? How do we select the right information from the

vast amount out there? How do we understand details of information in fields/areas that we know little or nothing about?

Where do we find the information? Most people know the answer to this question. Libraries, books, journals, print and visual media, the Internet, real discussions with real people, and professional scientific organizations are a good start. This involves what many folks in the field of education like to call life-long learning, which is the idea that the basic skills of searching for and acquiring information that you learn in school can be applied throughout life to keep enhancing and expanding your knowledge set.

It takes time to brush up on a topic, but in most cases with a bit of serious time and attention our big brains can pick up enormous amounts of information.

“The most dangerous ideas are those that are true. Read the literature, but don’t read too much of it. Read a bit to notice something that everybody is doing wrong. Something that just doesn’t feel right. Read enough to develop your intuitions, and then trust your intuitions. Don’t be too worried if everybody else says it’s nonsense. But, there is one thing. If you think it is a really good idea, and other people tell you it’s *COMPLETE NONSENSE*. Then you are really onto something.”

The Wrong Quantity of Melanin

“As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races.”

There are five different genes involved in skin pigmentation that show signals of selection in Europeans. This helps to explain why Europeans have lighter skin than Africans; this trait appears to have been selected for relatively recently in the European population, consistent with what anthropologists had long argued: that humans evolved originally in Africa with dark skin. It was only as we moved out of the tropics and into higher latitudes, with their lower levels of ultraviolet light, that we had to lose some of our dark pigmentation in order to allow the deeper layers of our skin to synthesize enough vitamin D—something they only do when exposed to enough UV light. The reason Europeans have pale skin—and part of the reason some of them have fair hair—is that their ancient ancestors needed to make enough vitamin D for their bones to survive the rigors of northern life thousands of years ago.

That white people are inherently afraid of black people, and particularly black men, has been established by countless scientific studies, ranging from the prosaic (police officers shoot black suspects more quickly than whites in video simulations) to the bizarre (white people are more likely to ascribe superhuman or paranormal powers to black people than to other white people).

Jesse Jackson once described walking through a dangerous neighborhood and whirling around in fear when he heard footsteps behind him. It was a white man, though, not a young black man, and Jackson said that his sense of relief was one of the most painful things in his life.

The Nation of Islam was founded in 1930 by a Detroit clothing salesman named Wallace D. Fard, who preached that blacks had ruled the earth six-thousand years ago, until their destruction by a renegade black wizard named Yakub, who then created the white man—the “white devil,” in the Nation’s mythos; blacks, Fard prophesied, would destroy the white devil in a future apocalypse. Until his disappearance and presumed death in 1934, Fard imbued his disciples with a message of racial pride, economic equality, and personal discipline.

A mosque typically featured a blackboard Islamic flag with the words **FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND EQUALITY** beneath, alongside an American flag with the words **CHRISTIANITY, SLAVERY, SUFFERING, AND DEATH**.

Technically McGee’s death was not a lynching, it was an execution. In the decades following the Civil War, more than four-thousand black men were lynched in the former Confederate states, but later public lynchings had mostly given way to quasi-legal death sentences. One notable exception happened in Oxford in 1935, when a mob broke into the city jail and lynched a black man named Elwood Higginbotham. He was killed while a jury was still debating his case in the courthouse across the street. Between 1930 and 1964, 455 men were executed for rape in the United States. Most of them were black, and most of them were accused of raping white women. A black man accused of rape was a stand-in for his entire race, and he was lynched—or executed by the state—because a gradual mingling of the races had started to occur that racist whites were powerless to stop. Ultimately the purpose of lynching was not to dispense justice but to control the black population. Since lynching was primarily an instrument of terror, it mattered little whether the accused were guilty or not—in some ways killing an innocent man made even more of an impression than killing a guilty one—and the more gruesome the killing, the more terror it spread.

Variations on that phrase—“persons, party, or parties unknown”—haunt the accounts of lynchings throughout American history generally, and in the deep South in particular. Again and again, reports of lynchings in black publications like the *Chicago Defender* and catalogs of lynchings in the NAACP’s annual reports described coroners’ inquests that concluded the murders were committed “at the hands of persons unknown.” For more than a century, coroners and the juries they convened across the country seem to have had an extraordinarily difficult time identifying members of the white mobs who murdered black people, even when the identities of the people who perpetrated such killings were well known in the community, or even when there were photographs of them carrying out the lynching—even when those photographs were published on the front pages of local newspapers. The problem was especially egregious in the first half of the

twentieth century, when lynchings were often a public spectacle, and the identities of participants weren't just well known, they were celebrated.

Lynchings were often organized—even planned—performances. Local newspapers sometimes posted the time and location. They were frequently witnessed by dozens, some by hundreds, of spectators, with the events then reported on and publicized the following day. The killings were purposeful assertions of white supremacy, a terroristic tool to keep black people docile and subservient. The intended victim wasn't just limited to the doomed soul at the end of the rope, but every black man, woman, and child close enough to be affected by the violence. Publicity was therefore often welcome. In some cases, vendors sold gruesome photos and postcards of lynchings, or pieces of the rope used for the hanging.

In October 1911 in Anderson County, South Carolina, a mob strung up a man named Willis Jackson on a telephone pole and shot him to death. Reporters from the local paper witnessed the entire murder. When the coroner cut Jackson's body down the next day, the paper reported:

“His fingers had been removed as souvenirs. Onlookers took home pieces of the rope that strung him up, too.”

The paper presumably got the scoop on the killing because its editor, Victor B. Cheshire, was part of the mob. So was state representative Joshua W. Ashley. The paper reported that its editor “went out to see the fun, with not the least objection to being a party to help lynch the brute.” Even with the names of the lynch mob published in the local paper, the coroner's jury concluded that Willis Jackson died “at the hands of parties unknown.”

As white power in the South gradually waned after the Civil War, lynchings inevitably attained a savagery that may have shocked even some of the perpetrators. In an 1899 case that became infamous throughout the South, a young black man named Sam Hose was burned alive in front of several thousand people, many of them Christians who had left their church services early to enjoy the spectacle. The ringleaders chained Hose to a tree, cut off his ears, poured kerosene on him, and then lit a match. When he finally stopped writhing, the crowd rushed forward and cut pieces from his smoldering body. When that was gone, they chopped up the tree he was chained to, and when that was gone, they attacked the chain itself. Later that day, spectators were spotted walking through town waving pieces of bone and charred flesh. Hose's knuckles turned up at a local grocery store.

The South's relationship with public torture culminated in 1937, when two black men were accused of murdering a white store owner in the town of Duck Hill, Mississippi. The men were abducted by a mob on the courthouse

steps and taken to some woods outside town where a crowd of several hundred men, women, and children had gathered. The accused would not confess to the crime—there was absolutely no evidence they'd had anything to do with it—so they were whipped with chains and then tortured with a blowtorch. Unable to withstand the pain, one of the men finally admitted to the killing and was quickly rewarded by being shot to death. His companion held out until his eyes were gouged out with a pickax and then he, too, confessed. He was finally doused with gasoline and burned alive.

A fisherman found the bloated, disfigured corpse of Emmett Till in the muddy Tallahatchie River. The fourteen-year-old boy's body had been weighted down with a cotton gin fan that had been tied to his neck with barbed wire.

Today, the general details of Till's murder are well known, and his story is remembered as a touchstone moment in the story of civil rights in America. But less well known is the role the county coroner and Mississippi's death investigation system played in covering for the men who murdered him.

On August 24, 1955, Till and some neighborhood friends visited the Bryant Grocery and Meat Market. Till, from Chicago, was visiting family in and around the town of Money, Mississippi. Till bought some gum and chatted briefly with Carolyn Bryant, the white wife of the store's proprietor. By some accounts, as he and his friends departed, Till allegedly told the woman, "Bye, baby," and waved. By other accounts, he may have "wolf-whistled." According to Bryant, Till grabbed her and made sexually suggestive remarks.

Of course, even if Bryant's worst account of Till's actions had been true, it amounted at most to harassment or minor assault. But by stepping out of his place, by disrespecting a white woman, Till had broken Southern code. Bryant left the store to retrieve a gun from her car. Till and his friends piled into a car and sped off.

Three days later, Bryant's husband, Roy, and his half brother, J. W. Milam, broke into the home where Till was staying and abducted him at gunpoint. They'd later tell *Look* magazine that they beat Till, shot him in the head, and dumped his body in the Tallahatchie River. The fisherman found Till's body four days later, early in the morning of August 31.

What happened next would later help a jury set Till's killers free. Local authorities knew the teen had been missing for days, so once his body was found, both Tallahatchie County Sheriff Clarence Strider and Leflore County Sheriff George Smith had good reason to suspect the corpse was Till's. Law enforcement summoned the boy's uncle, Mose Wright, to the riverside to identify the body. Wright would later testify that as he approached the body, he could immediately tell it was his nephew. He also saw officials

remove from Till's hand a ring that had been carved with the initials of Till's father. Strider called an undertaker to pick up Till's body and take it to a funeral home in Greenwood. The undertaker would later find that the ring had been inscribed with the initials "LT"—Till's father was named Louis Till. He had been executed in Italy when he was stationed there with the US Army. The ring was included in the personal effects the army returned to his wife, Mamie, in Chicago. She had given it to Emmett.

Initially, local officials appeared to be outraged by Till's murder. In the days immediately following the abduction, witnesses identified Bryant and Milam as the men who took Till from his uncle's home. Sheriff Strider told the *New York Post* that a coroner's inquest had been scheduled, and that once the inquest determined Till was murdered in Tallahatchie County, "we're going to charge those men with murder."

Yet according to the Leflore County justice of the peace, the ensuing death investigation was "not exactly an inquest" but "more of a post-mortem." No one ever requested an autopsy. In fact, Till wouldn't be autopsied until decades later. Local officials made only the sparsest effort to preserve the evidence that would confirm that the body was Till's. C. A. Strickland, a twelve-year veteran of the Greenwood, Mississippi, police department's "collision department," used a low-end field camera to take some snapshots of the body as it lay on a table at the Century Burial Funeral Home. The only physician to examine Till's body was a local doctor named Luther Otken. He was not a forensic pathologist and had no training in postmortem examinations. At trial, Otken was asked whether he had examined Till's body. He answered that he was only asked to "view" it. After describing in some detail the body's condition—"badly swollen, badly bloated" and putting off a "terrific" odor—he testified that the body was "in an advanced state of decomposition."

Within hours of the discovery of Till's body, Sheriff Strider made arrangements to have the young boy buried in Mississippi. Till's mother, Mamie Till Bradley, was still in Chicago. By the time she learned that her son's body had been found, his corpse was already headed to the cemetery. She quickly contacted an uncle in the town of Sumner and asked him to put a stop to the burial. When the uncle arrived at the cemetery, they had already dug Till's grave.

The family had Till's body moved to a black-owned funeral home in the town of Tutwiler. The boarded-up, run-down remains of that funeral home still stand today, along with a sign memorializing the fact that Till's body had been prepared there. After preparation, the body was shipped from the depot across the street to Chicago by train.

Till's murder sparked anger and outrage all over the country. NAACP

chief Roy Wilkins issued a public statement declaring that “the state of Mississippi has decided to maintain white supremacy by murdering black children.” The black activist T. R. M. Howard declared that there would be “hell to pay.” Editorial boards across the country condemned not only the killing but the entire state of Mississippi. Such blanket condemnations were understandable, and in many ways justified, but they also provoked a defensive reaction. While Bryant and Milam were initially scorned by local white residents, the criticism from outsiders sparked a backlash. Disgust at Till’s murder morphed into resentment of Northerners and integrationists. J. J. Breland, a local lawyer and leader of one of the Citizens’ Councils, was initially shocked by the killing and declined a request to represent Bryant and Milam. But as the denunciation of Mississippi mounted, he changed his mind. He began to see the case as a front-line battle in the war against integration.

“They’re peckerwoods, but, hell, we’ve got to have our Milams to fight our wars and keep our niggahs in line. There ain’t gonna be no integration. There ain’t gonna be no nigger votin’. And the sooner everybody in this country realizes it the better. If any more pressure is put on us, the Tallahatchie won’t hold all the niggers that’ll be thrown into it.”

Led by Sheriff Strider—the same man who had vowed that Till’s killers would be brought to justice—local authorities backtracked and began to publicly question what had previously been a slam-dunk murder prosecution. Strider and the local coroner had locked Till’s coffin with the seal of the state of Mississippi and made Till’s uncle sign a form promising never to open it. Mamie Till Bradley broke that promise. When she opened the coffin, she discovered that her son’s body had been packed with lime, a chemical commonly thought at the time to hasten the process of decomposition. It was a clue of what was to come: local authorities were preparing a defense for Till’s killers.

Outraged not only at her son’s murder but at the way his body had been handled, Mamie Till Bradley followed the lead of George Lee’s widow and insisted on an open-casket funeral. Photos of Emmett Till’s corpse ran in *Jet* magazine, sparking more national outrage.

On the day of the funeral, Strider gave Till’s killers a gift. He publicly claimed he was never certain that the body recovered from the river was Till’s. It was a baffling thing to say. Strider was the official who released the body to Till’s family. If he had doubts about the identity of the corpse, he not only may have sent Till’s relatives the wrong body, but he would have likely prevented the investigation of a separate murder.

But Strider's comments achieved their intended effect. They set off a host of conspiracy theories, including claims that Till had never been killed at all, but had been secretly sent back to Chicago or was being hidden by his family—all part of a vast conspiracy among Northern agitators to force integration on Mississippi. The local white residents who initially shunned Bryant and Milam later raised over \$10,000 for the two men's defense—about \$90,000 today.

The trial began on September 19, twenty-two days after the murder. The state's failure to perform an autopsy was a critical part of the defense. Breland seized on that fact, using it to argue to the jury the theory that Sheriff Strider had already advanced in public—that the body recovered from the river was someone other than Emmett Till.

The only doctor to look at Till's body played along. "From the condition that you saw the body in, in your opinion, could anybody have identified any particular person as being that body?" Breland asked Dr. Otken.

"I don't think you could," he responded.

"Now suppose it had been another person's brother, could he have identified it in your opinion?"

"I doubt it."

"Or if it had been a person's son, could a mother have identified that body, in your opinion?"

"I doubt it."

Breland continued to press. "Doctor, from your experience and study and your familiarity with the medical authorities, what, in your opinion, had been the length of time that the body had been dead, if it had been in the open air?"

"I would say eight to ten days."

Till had only been missing for three. The defense also argued that the state's strongest piece of physical evidence—the ring—could have been planted. After instilling in the all-white, all-male jury sufficient doubt about Till's body, Breland closed with an appeal to racial solidarity. "I'm sure that every last Anglo-Saxon one of you has the courage to free these men in the face of that [outside] pressure," he said.

And they did. The jury took just a little over an hour to acquit. One juror later reportedly said, "If we hadn't stopped to drink pop, it wouldn't have taken that long."

The following year, safe from state prosecution by the Constitution's prohibition on double jeopardy, Bryant and Milam admitted to killing Emmett Till in an interview with *Look* magazine. They were paid \$4,000 for their story.

On June 1, 2005, fifty years after Emmett Till was first pulled from the Tallahatchie, he was exhumed from his grave in Chicago. Surrounded by squad cars, Till's body was taken to the office of the Cook County, Illinois, medical examiner. The remains were in nearly pristine condition, protected over the years by a glass partition that had been put into place after his mother's demand for an open-casket funeral. The following day, his body was autopsied for the first time. Doctors also conducted a CT scan. The results of the scan showed metal fragments inside Till's cranium, indicating that the boy had been shot. DNA testing then confirmed what had been obvious from the beginning—this was the body of Emmett Till. In 2017, more than sixty years after the fact, Carolyn Bryant admitted that her account of the precipitating incident—that Till had grabbed her and made crude remarks to her—was not true.

Again and again, black Mississippians disappeared, were abducted and never again seen alive, were murdered in the dead of night, or were struck down in broad daylight. And again and again, the state's compromised death investigation system responded with a cascade of failures—or didn't respond at all. Between 1956 and 1959 alone, at least ten black men were killed by white men in Mississippi in racially motivated attacks. None resulted in a conviction. In other cases, while racism was the likely motivation, it's difficult to say for certain because the local coroner didn't bother to investigate. And those are merely the deaths that were in some way recorded.

1958—Two black boys, aged seven and nine, had participated in a schoolyard kissing game in which a white Monroe girl gave one of the boys a peck on the cheek; the boys were arrested for molestation, jailed, beaten, and sent to a reform school. The defense effort eventually included Eleanor Roosevelt and, after a British newspaper exposé, demonstrations in Paris, Rome, and Vienna; in Rotterdam the US embassy was stoned. Soon after, the boys were released.

Over the past few decades, we have developed euphemisms to help us forget how we, as a nation, have segregated African American citizens. We have become embarrassed about saying ghetto, a word that accurately describes a neighborhood where government has not only concentrated a minority but established barriers to its exit. We don't hesitate to acknowledge that Jews in Eastern Europe were forced to live in ghettos where opportunity was limited and leaving was difficult or impossible. Yet when we encounter similar neighborhoods in this country, we now delicately refer to them as the inner city, yet everyone knows what we mean. When affluent whites gentrify the same geographic areas, we don't characterize those whites as inner city families. Before we became ashamed to admit that the country had circumscribed African Americans in ghettos, analysts of race relations,

both African American and white, consistently and accurately used ghetto to describe low-income African American neighborhoods, created by public policy, with a shortage of opportunity, and with barriers to exit. No other term succinctly describes this combination of characteristics.

Racism has gone underground—racism without racists. We are seeing a new way of maintaining white domination in places like Ferguson, Missouri. The main problem nowadays is not the folks with the hoods, but the folks dressed in suits. The more we assume that the problem of racism is limited to the Klan, the alt-right, the Tea Party, or to the Republican Party, the less we understand that racial dominance is a collective process and we are all in this game.

We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it. What has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language we use to justify it. In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color 'criminals' and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans.

Mass incarceration in the United States is a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow. People who have been incarcerated rarely have difficulty identifying the parallels between these systems of social control. Once they are released, they are often denied the right to vote, excluded from juries, and relegated to a racially segregated and subordinated existence. Through a web of laws, regulations, and informal rules, all of which are powerfully reinforced by social stigma, they are confined to the margins of mainstream society and denied access to the mainstream economy. They are legally denied the ability to obtain employment, housing, and public benefits—much as African Americans were once forced into a segregated, second-class citizenship in the Jim Crow era.

To cite one specific example, while the conspiracy theories were initially dismissed as far-fetched, if not downright loony, the word on the street turned out to be right, at least to a point, about the CIA's involvement with drug smuggling. The CIA admitted in 1998 that guerrilla armies it actively supported in Nicaragua were smuggling illegal drugs into the United States—drugs that were making their way onto the streets of inner-city black neighborhoods in the form of crack cocaine. The CIA also admitted that, in the midst of the War on Drugs, it blocked law enforcement efforts

to investigate illegal drug networks that were helping to fund its covert war in Nicaragua.

Conspiracy theorists surely must be forgiven for their bold accusation of genocide, in light of the devastation wrought by crack cocaine and the drug war, and the odd coincidence that an illegal drug crisis suddenly appeared in the black community after—not before—a drug war had been declared. In fact, the War on Drugs began at a time when illegal drug use was on the decline. During this same time period, however, a war was declared, causing arrests and convictions for drug offenses to skyrocket, especially among people of color. The impact of the drug war has been astounding. In less than thirty years, the U.S. penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than 2 million, with drug or drug-related convictions accounting for the majority of the increase.

The attention of civil rights advocates has been largely devoted to other issues, such as affirmative action. During the past twenty years, virtually every progressive, national civil rights organization in the country has mobilized and rallied in defense of affirmative action. The struggle to preserve affirmative action in higher education, and thus maintain diversity in the nation's most elite colleges and universities, has consumed much of the attention and resources of the civil rights community and dominated racial justice discourse in the mainstream media, leading the general public to believe that affirmative action is the main battlefield in US race relations—even as our prisons fill with black and brown men.

It may be helpful, in attempting to understand the basic nature of the new caste system, to think of the criminal justice system—the entire collection of institutions and practices that comprise it—not as an independent system but rather as a gateway into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization. This larger system, referred to here as mass incarceration, is a system that locks people not only behind actual bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls—walls that are invisible to the naked eye but function nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship. The term 'mass incarceration' refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison. Once released, former prisoners enter a hidden underworld of legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion. They are members of America's new undercaste.

Conversations about class are resisted in part because there is a tendency to imagine that one's class reflects upon one's character. What is key to America's understanding of class is the persistent belief—despite all evidence to the contrary—that anyone, with the proper discipline and drive, can

move from a lower class to a higher class. We recognize that mobility may be difficult, but the key to our collective self-image is the assumption that mobility is always possible, so failure to move up reflects on one's character. By extension, the failure of a race or ethnic group to move up reflects very poorly on the group as a whole.

Many will wonder how a nation that recently elected its first black president could possibly have a racial caste system. It's a fair question given the bounds on reality set by the status quo. But there is no inconsistency whatsoever between the election of Barack Obama to the highest office in the land and the existence of a racial caste system in the era of colorblindness. The current system of control depends on black exceptionalism; it is not disproved or undermined by it.

Others may wonder how a racial caste system could exist when most Americans—of all colors—oppose race discrimination and endorse colorblindness. But racial caste systems do not require racial hostility or overt bigotry to thrive. They need only indifference, as Martin Luther King Jr. warned more than forty-five years ago.

Now that America has officially embraced Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream—by reducing it to the platitude “that we should be judged by the content of our character, not the color of our skin”—the mass incarceration of people of color can be justified only to the extent that the plight of those locked up and locked out is understood to be their choice, not their birthright. In short, mass incarceration is predicated on the notion that an extraordinary number of African Americans (but not all) have freely chosen a life of crime and thus belong behind bars. A belief that all blacks belong in jail would be incompatible with the social consensus that we have “moved beyond” race and that race is no longer relevant. But a widespread belief that a majority of black and brown men unfortunately belong in jail is compatible with the new American creed, provided that their imprisonment can be interpreted as their own fault. If the prison label imposed on them can be blamed on their culture, poor work ethic, or even their families, then society is absolved of responsibility to do anything about their condition.

This is where black exceptionalism comes in. Highly visible examples of black success are critical to the maintenance of a racial caste system in the era of colorblindness. Black success stories lend credence to the notion that anyone, no matter how poor or how black you may be, can make it to the top, if only you try hard enough. These stories “prove” that race is no longer relevant. Whereas black success stories undermined the logic of Jim Crow, they actually reinforce the system of mass incarceration. Mass incarceration depends for its legitimacy on the widespread belief that all those who appear trapped at the bottom actually chose their fate. Viewed from this

perspective, affirmative action no longer appears entirely progressive. So long as some readily identifiable African Americans are doing well, the system is largely immunized from racial critique. People like Barack Obama who are truly exceptional by any standards, along with others who have been granted exceptional opportunities, legitimate a system that remains fraught with racial bias—especially when they fail to challenge, or even acknowledge, the prevailing racial order. In the current era, white Americans are often eager to embrace token or exceptional African Americans, particularly when they go out of their way not to talk about race or racial inequality.

Affirmative action may be counterproductive in yet another sense: it lends credence to a trickle-down theory of racial justice. The notion that giving a relatively small number of people of color access to key positions or institutions will inevitably redound to the benefit of the larger group is belied by the evidence. It also seems to disregard Martin Luther King Jr.'s stern warnings that racial justice requires the complete transformation of social institutions and a dramatic restructuring of our economy, not superficial changes that can be purchased on the cheap. King argued in 1968:

“The changes [that have occurred to date] are basically in the social and political areas; the problems we now face—providing jobs, better housing and better education for the poor throughout the country—will require money for their solution, a fact that makes those solutions all the more difficult.”

He emphasized that “most of the gains of the past decade were obtained at bargain prices,” for the desegregation of public facilities and the election and appointment of a few black officials cost close to nothing.

“White America must recognize that justice for black people cannot be achieved without radical changes in the structure of our society. The comfortable, the entrenched, the privileged cannot continue to tremble at the prospect of change in the status quo.”

Conventional strategies for social change proceed as though a change in who administers power fundamentally affects the structure of power itself. This narrow approach to social change is reflected in the justifications offered for affirmative action, most notably the claim that previous outsiders, once given a chance, will exercise power differently. The reality, however, is that the existing hierarchy disciplines newcomers, requiring them to exercise power in the same old ways and play by the same old rules in order to

survive. The newcomers are easily co-opted, as they have much to lose but little to gain by challenging the rules of the game. See: “The Squad.”

People of color, because of the history of racial subjugation and exclusion, often experience success and failure vicariously through the few who achieve positions of power, fame, and fortune. As a result, cosmetic diversity, which focuses on providing opportunities to individual members of under-represented groups, both diminishes the possibility that unfair rules will be challenged and legitimates the entire system.

Have we unwittingly exaggerated the importance of individuals succeeding within preexisting structures of power, and thereby undermined King’s call for a “complete restructuring” of our society? Have we contributed to the disempowerment and passivity of the black community, not only by letting the lawyers take over, but also by communicating the message that the best path—perhaps the only path—to the promised land is infiltrating elite institutions and seizing power at the top, so racial justice can trickle down?

Strategists on both the left and right, despite their differences, converge on the individual as the unit of power. Conservatives challenge the legitimacy of group rights or race consciousness and argue that the best empowerment strategy is entrepreneurship and individual initiative. Civil rights advocates argue that individual group members “represent” the race and that hierarchies of power that lack diversity are illegitimate. The theory is, when black individuals achieve power for themselves, black people as a group benefit, as does society as a whole. Here we see both liberals and conservatives endorsing the same meta-narrative of American individualism: When individuals get ahead, the group triumphs. When individuals succeed, American democracy prevails.

The absence of a thoroughgoing structural critique of the prevailing racial order explains why so many civil rights advocates responded to Barack Obama’s election with glee, combined with hasty reminders that “we still have a long way to go.” The predictable response from the casual observer is: well, how much further? A black man was just elected president. How much further do black people want to go? If a black person can be elected president, can’t a black person do just about anything now?

According to the 1950 census, among Southerners in their late twenties, the state-by-state percentages of functional illiterates (people with less than five years of schooling) for whites on farms overlapped with those for blacks in the cities. The majority of Southern whites were better off than Southern blacks, but they were not affluent or well educated by any means; they were semiliterate (with less than twelve years of schooling). Only a tiny minority of whites were affluent and well educated. They stood far apart from the

rest of the whites and virtually all blacks. What lower-class whites did have was what W.E.B. Du Bois described as “the public and psychological wage” paid to white workers, who depended on their status and privileges as whites to compensate for low pay and harsh working conditions.

Given that poor and working-class whites (not white elites) were the ones who had their world rocked by desegregation, it does not take a great leap of empathy to see why affirmative action could be experienced as salt in a wound. Du Bois once observed that the psychological wage of whiteness put “an indelible black face to failure.” Yet with the advent of affirmative action, suddenly African Americans were leapfrogging over poor and working-class whites on their way to Harvard and Yale and taking jobs in police departments and fire departments that had once been reserved for whites. Civil rights advocates offered no balm for the wound, publicly resisting calls for class-based affirmative action and dismissing claims of unfairness on the grounds that whites had been enjoying racial preferences for hundreds of years. Resentment, frustration, and anger expressed by poor and working-class whites was chalked up to racism, leading to a subterranean discourse about race and to implicitly racial political appeals, but little honest dialogue. Perhaps the time has come to give up the racial bribes and begin an honest conversation about race in America.

If we continue to tell ourselves the popular myths about race or, worse yet, if we say to ourselves that the problem of mass incarceration is just too big, too daunting for us to do anything about and that we should instead direct our energies to battles that might be more easily won, history will judge us harshly. A human rights nightmare is occurring on our watch.

“The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”

This process, though difficult to recognize at any given moment, is easier to see in retrospect. Since the nation’s founding, African Americans repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appear to die, but then are reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time. There is a certain pattern to this cycle. Following the collapse of each system of control, there has been a period of confusion—transition—in which those who are most committed to racial hierarchy search for new means to achieve their goals within the rules of the game as currently defined. It is during this period of uncertainty that the backlash intensifies and a new form of racialized social control begins to take hold. The adoption of the new system of control is never inevitable, but to date it has never been avoided. The most ardent

proponents of racial hierarchy have consistently succeeded in implementing new racial caste systems by triggering a collapse of resistance across the political spectrum. This feat has been achieved largely by appealing to the racism and vulnerability of lower-class whites, a group of people who are understandably eager to ensure that they never find themselves trapped at the bottom of the American hierarchy.

Skeptics will often claim that mass incarceration cannot be understood as a racial caste system because many “get tough on crime” policies are supported by African Americans. Many of these claims are no more persuasive today than arguments made a hundred years ago by blacks and whites who claimed that racial segregation simply reflected “reality,” not racial animus, and that African Americans would be better off not challenging the Jim Crow system but should focus instead on improving themselves within it. Throughout our history, there have been African Americans who, for a variety of reasons, have defended or been complicit with the prevailing system of control.

The answer lies in the system’s design. Every system of control depends for its survival on the tangible and intangible benefits that are provided to those who are responsible for the system’s maintenance and administration. This system is no exception.

If the movement that emerges to challenge mass incarceration fails to confront squarely the critical role of race in the basic structure of our society, and if it fails to cultivate an ethic of genuine care, compassion, and concern for every human being—of every class, race, and nationality—within our nation’s borders (including poor whites, who are often pitted against poor people of color), the collapse of mass incarceration will not mean the death of racial caste in America. Inevitably a new system of racialized social control will emerge—one that we cannot foresee, just as the current system of mass incarceration was not predicted by anyone thirty years ago. No task is more urgent for justice advocates today than ensuring that America’s current caste system is its last.

The concept of race is a relatively recent development. Only in the past few centuries, owing largely to European imperialism, have the world’s people been classified along racial lines. Here, in America, the idea of race emerged as a means of reconciling chattel slavery—as well as the extermination of American Indians—with the ideals of freedom preached by whites in the new colonies.

It may be impossible to overstate the significance of race in defining the basic structure of American society. The structure and content of the original Constitution was based largely on the effort to preserve a racial caste system—slavery—while at the same time affording political and economic rights to

whites, especially propertied whites. The southern slaveholding colonies would agree to form a union only on the condition that the federal government would not be able to interfere with the right to own slaves. Northern white elites were sympathetic to the demand for their “property rights” to be respected, as they, too, wanted the Constitution to protect their property interests. As James Madison put it, the nation ought to be constituted “to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority.” Consequently, the Constitution was designed so the federal government would be weak, not only in its relationship to private property, but also in relationship to the rights of states to conduct their own affairs. The language of the Constitution itself was deliberately colorblind—the words slave or Negro were never used—but the document was built upon a compromise regarding the prevailing racial caste system. Federalism—the division of power between the states and the federal government—was the device employed to protect the institution of slavery and the political power of slaveholding states. Even the method for determining proportional representation in Congress and identifying the winner of a presidential election (the electoral college) were specifically developed with the interest of slaveholders in mind. Under the terms of our country’s founding document, slaves were defined as three-fifths of a man, not a real, whole human being. Upon this racist fiction rests the entire structure of American democracy.

Racial division was a consequence, not a precondition of slavery, but once it was instituted it became detached from its initial function and acquired a social potency all its own.

The radicals of the late nineteenth century, who later formed the Populist Party, viewed the privileged classes as conspiring to keep poor whites and blacks locked into a subordinate political and economic position. For many African American voters, the Populist approach was preferable to the paternalism of liberals. Populists preached an “equalitarianism of want and poverty, the kinship of a common grievance, and a common oppressor.” As described by Tom Watson, a prominent Populist leader, in a speech advocating a union between black and white farmers:

“You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism that enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.”

A new race-neutral language was developed for appealing to old racist sentiments, a language accompanied by a political movement that succeeded

in putting the vast majority of blacks back in their place. Proponents of racial hierarchy found they could install a new racial caste system without violating the law or the new limits of acceptable political discourse, by demanding “law and order” rather than “segregation forever.”

For more than a decade—from the mid-1950s until the late 1960s—conservatives systematically and strategically linked opposition to civil rights legislation to calls for law and order, arguing that Martin Luther King Jr.’s philosophy of civil disobedience was a leading cause of crime. Civil rights protests were frequently depicted as criminal rather than political in nature, and federal courts were accused of excessive “lenience” toward lawlessness, thereby contributing to the spread of crime. In the words of then-Vice President Richard Nixon, the increasing crime rate “can be traced directly to the spread of the corrosive doctrine that every citizen possesses an inherent right to decide for himself which laws to obey and when to disobey them.” Civil rights activists who argued that the uprisings were directly related to widespread police harassment and abuse were dismissed by conservatives out of hand. “If blacks conduct themselves in an orderly way, they will not have to worry about police brutality,” argued West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd.

A disproportionate share of the costs of integration and racial equality had been borne by lower-class whites, who were suddenly forced to compete on equal terms with blacks for jobs and status and who lived in neighborhoods adjoining black ghettos. Their children—not the children of wealthy whites—attended schools most likely to fall under busing orders. The affluent white liberals who were pressing the legal claims of blacks and other minorities were often sheltered, in their private lives, and largely immune to the costs of implementing minority claims. This reality made it possible for conservatives to characterize the “liberal Democratic establishment” as being out of touch with ordinary working people—thus resolving one of the central problems facing conservatives: how to persuade poor and working-class voters to join in alliance with corporate interests and the conservative elite. By 1968, 81 percent of those responding to a Gallup Poll agreed with the statement that “law and order has broken down in this country,” and the majority blamed “Negroes who start riots” and “Communists.”

Race had become, yet again, a powerful wedge, breaking up what had been a solid liberal coalition based on economic interests of the poor and the working and lower-middle classes. In the 1968 election, race eclipsed class as the organizing principle of American politics, and by 1972, attitudes on racial issues rather than socioeconomic status were the primary determinant of voters’ political self-identification. The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the dramatic erosion in the belief among working-class whites that the

condition of the poor, or those who fail to prosper, was the result of a faulty economic system that needed to be challenged. The pitting of whites and blacks at the low end of the income distribution against each other intensified the view among many whites that the condition of life for the disadvantaged—particularly for disadvantaged blacks—is the responsibility of those afflicted, and not the responsibility of the larger society. Just as race had been used at the turn of the century by Southern elites to rupture class solidarity at the bottom of the income ladder, race as a national issue had broken up the Democratic New Deal “bottom-up” coalition—a coalition dependent on substantial support from all voters, white and black, at or below the median income.

One of Reagan’s favorite and most-often-repeated anecdotes was the story of a Chicago “welfare queen” with “80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards,” whose “tax-free income alone is over \$150,000.” The term ‘welfare queen’ became a not-so-subtle code for a lazy, greedy, black ghetto mother. The food stamp program, in turn, was a vehicle to let “some fellow ahead of you buy a T-bone steak,” while “you were standing in a checkout line with your package of hamburger.”

The War on Drugs, cloaked in race-neutral language, also offered whites opposed to racial reform a unique opportunity to express their hostility toward blacks and black progress, without being exposed to the charge of racism.

In 1992, presidential candidate Bill Clinton vowed that he would never permit any Republican to be perceived as tougher on crime than he. True to his word, just weeks before the critical New Hampshire primary, Clinton chose to fly home to Arkansas to oversee the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a mentally impaired black man who had so little conception of what was about to happen to him that he asked for the dessert from his last meal to be saved for him until the morning. After the execution, Clinton remarked:

“I can be nicked a lot, but no one can say I’m soft on crime.”

Once elected, far from resisting the emergence of the new caste system, Clinton escalated the drug war beyond what conservatives had imagined possible a decade earlier—a recurring theme throughout history. The Clinton Administration’s ‘tough on crime’ policies resulted in the largest increases in federal and state prison inmates of any president in American history.

Clinton once boasted that the COPS program, which put tens of thousands of officers on the streets, was responsible for the dramatic fifteen-year drop in violent crime that began in the 1990s. Recent studies, however, have shown that is not the case. A 2005 report by the Government Accountabil-

ity Office concluded the program may have contributed to a one percent reduction in crime—at a cost of \$8 billion.

Place yourself in the shoes of Clifford Runoalds, an African American victim of a drug bust. You returned home to Bryan, Texas, to attend the funeral of your eighteen-month-old daughter. Before the funeral services begin, the police show up and handcuff you. You beg the officers to let you take one last look at your daughter before she is buried. The police refuse. You are told by prosecutors that you are needed to testify against one of the defendants in a recent drug bust. You deny witnessing any drug transaction; you don't know what they are talking about. Because of your refusal to cooperate, you are indicted on felony charges. After a month of being held in jail, the charges against you are dropped. You are technically free, but as a result of your arrest and period of incarceration, you lose your job, your apartment, your furniture, and your car. Not to mention the chance to say good-bye to your baby girl.

In every state across our nation, African Americans—particularly in the poorest neighborhoods—are subjected to tactics and practices that would result in public outrage and scandal if committed in middle-class white neighborhoods. In the drug war, the enemy is racially defined. It's a lot easier to go out to the 'hood, so to speak, and pick somebody than to put your resources in an undercover operation in a community where there are potentially politically powerful people.

Nonracial explanations and excuses for the systematic mass incarceration of people of color are plentiful. It is the genius of the new system of control that it can always be defended on nonracial grounds, given the rarity of a noose or a racial slur in connection with any particular criminal case. Moreover, because blacks and whites are almost never similarly situated (given extreme racial segregation in housing and disparate life experiences), trying to “control for race” in an effort to evaluate whether the mass incarceration of people of color is really about race or something else—anything else—is difficult. But it is not impossible.

How exactly does a formally colorblind criminal justice system achieve such racially discriminatory results? Rather easily, it turns out. The process occurs in two stages. The first step is to grant law enforcement officials extraordinary discretion regarding whom to stop, search, arrest, and charge for drug offenses, thus ensuring that conscious and unconscious racial beliefs and stereotypes will be given free reign. Unbridled discretion inevitably creates huge racial disparities. Then, the damning step: Close the courthouse doors to all claims by defendants and private litigants that the criminal justice system operates in racially discriminatory fashion. Demand that anyone who wants to challenge racial bias in the system offer, in advance,

clear proof that the racial disparities are the product of intentional racial discrimination—i.e., the work of a bigot. This evidence will almost never be available in the era of colorblindness, because everyone knows—but does not say—that the enemy in the War on Drugs can be identified by race. This simple design has helped to produce one of the most extraordinary systems of racialized social control the world has ever seen.

Not long after the drug war was ramped up in the media and political discourse, almost no one imagined that drug criminals could be anything other than black. A survey was conducted in 1995 asking the following question: “Would you close your eyes for a second, envision a drug user, and describe that person to me?” Ninety-five percent of respondents pictured a black drug user, while only five percent imagined other racial groups.

Decades of cognitive bias research demonstrates that both unconscious and conscious biases lead to discriminatory actions, even when an individual does not want to discriminate. The quotation commonly attributed to Nietzsche, that “there is no immaculate perception,” perfectly captures how cognitive schemas—thought structures—influence what we notice and how the things we notice get interpreted. Studies have shown that racial schemas operate not only as part of conscious, rational deliberations, but also automatically—without conscious awareness or intent. One study, for example, involved a video game that placed photographs of white and black individuals holding either a gun or other object (such as a wallet, soda can, or cell phone) into various photographic backgrounds. Participants were told to decide as quickly as possible whether to shoot the target. Consistent with earlier studies, participants were more likely to mistake a black target as armed when he was not, and mistake a white target as unarmed, when in fact he was armed. This pattern of discrimination reflected automatic, unconscious thought processes, not careful deliberations. Most striking, perhaps, is the overwhelming evidence that implicit bias measures are disassociated from explicit bias measures. In other words, the fact that you may honestly believe that you are not biased against African Americans, and that you may even have black friends or relatives, does not mean that you are free from unconscious bias. Implicit bias tests may still show that you hold negative attitudes and stereotypes about blacks, even though you do not believe you do and do not want to.

A lawsuit may seem like the best remedy. The purpose of our Constitution—especially the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal-protection guarantee—is to protect minority rights even when, or especially when, they are unpopular. So shouldn’t African American defendants be able to file a successful lawsuit demanding an end to these discriminatory practices or challenge their drug arrests on the grounds that these law enforcement

practices are unlawfully tainted by race? The answer is yes, they should, but no, they probably can't. The Court has imposed nearly insurmountable barriers to persons challenging race discrimination at all stages of the criminal justice system. The barriers are so high that few lawsuits are even filed, notwithstanding shocking and indefensible racial disparities. Procedural hurdles, such as the "standing requirement," have made it virtually impossible to seek reform of law enforcement agencies through the judicial process, even when the policies or practices at issue are illegal or plainly discriminatory.

Adolph Lyons's attempt to ban the use of lethal chokeholds by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is a good example. Lyons, a twenty-four-year-old black man, was driving his car in Los Angeles one morning when he was pulled over by four police officers for a burnt-out taillight. With guns drawn, police ordered Lyons out of his car. He obeyed. The officers told him to face the car, spread his legs, and put his hands on his head. Again, Lyons did as he was told. After the officers completed a pat-down, Lyons dropped his hands, prompting an officer to slam Lyons's hands back on his head. When Lyons complained that the car keys he was holding were causing him pain, the officer forced Lyons into a chokehold. He lost consciousness and collapsed. When he awoke, "he was spitting up blood and dirt, had urinated and defecated, and had suffered permanent damage to his larynx." The officers issued a traffic ticket for the burnt-out taillight and released him.

Lyons sued the City of Los Angeles for violation of his constitutional rights and sought, as a remedy, a ban against future use of the chokeholds. By the time his case reached the Supreme Court, sixteen people had been killed by police use of the chokehold, twelve of them black men. The Supreme Court dismissed the case, however, ruling that Lyons lacked "standing" to seek an injunction against the deadly practice. In order to have standing, the Court reasoned, Lyons would have to show that he was highly likely to be subject to a chokehold again. Lyons argued that, as a black man, he had good reason to fear he would be stopped by the police for a minor traffic violation and subjected to a chokehold again. He had done nothing to provoke the chokehold; to the contrary, he had obeyed instructions and cooperated fully. Why wouldn't he believe he was at risk of being stopped and choked again? The Court, however, ruled that in order to have standing Lyons would have had not only to allege that he would have another encounter with the police but also to make the incredible assertion either (1) that all police officers in Los Angeles always choke any citizen with whom they have an encounter, whether for the purpose of arrest, issuing a citation or for questioning, or (2) that the City ordered or authorized the police to act in such a manner.

The Court's ruling in *Lyons* makes it extremely difficult to challenge systemic race discrimination in law enforcement and obtain meaningful policy reform. For example, African Americans in Seattle who hope to end the Seattle police department's discriminatory tactics through litigation would be required to prove that they plan to violate drug laws and that they will almost certainly face race discrimination by Seattle police officers engaged in drug-law enforcement, in order to have standing to seek reform—i.e., just to get in the courthouse door. It is worthy of note that the *Lyons* standard does not apply to suits for damages. But any suggestion that litigants need not worry about policy reform because they can always sue for damages would be disingenuous—particularly as applied to race discrimination cases. Why? Neither the state nor the state police can be sued for damages. In a series of cases, the Supreme Court has ruled that the state and its offices are immune from federal suits for damages under the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution (unless they consent), and the state can't be sued for damages for constitutional violations in state court either.

The litigation that swept the nation in the 1990s challenging racial profiling practices has nearly vanished. The news stories about people being stopped and searched on their way to church or work or school had, until recently, faded from the evening news. This was not because the problem has been solved or because the experience of being of being stopped, interrogated, and searched on the basis of race has become less humiliating, alienating, or demoralizing as time has gone by. The lawsuits have disappeared because, in a little noticed case called *Alexander v. Sandoval*, decided in 2001, the Supreme Court eliminated the last remaining avenue available for challenging racial bias in the criminal justice system. So long as officers refrain from uttering racial epithets and so long as they show the good sense not to say “the only reason I stopped him was ‘cause he's black,” courts generally turn a blind eye to patterns of discrimination by the police.

The risk that African Americans would be unfairly targeted should have been of special concern to the US Supreme Court—the one branch of government charged with the responsibility of protecting “discrete and insular minorities” from the excesses of majoritarian democracy, and guaranteeing constitutional rights for groups deemed unpopular or subject to prejudice. Yet when the time came for the Supreme Court to devise the legal rules that would govern the War on Drugs, the Court adopted rules that would maximize—not minimize—the amount of racial discrimination that would likely occur. It then closed the courthouse doors to claims of racial bias.

Not only did the Court reject the central claim—that using traffic stops as a pretext for drug investigations is unconstitutional—it ruled that claims of racial bias could not be brought under the Fourth Amendment. In other

words, the Court barred any victim of race discrimination by the police from even alleging a claim of racial bias under the Fourth Amendment. According to the Court, whether or not police discriminate on the basis of race when making traffic stops is irrelevant to a consideration of whether their conduct is “reasonable” under the Fourth Amendment. The Court did offer one caveat, however. It indicated that victims of race discrimination could still state a claim under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees “equal treatment under the laws.” This suggestion may have been reassuring to those unfamiliar with the Court’s equal protection jurisprudence. But for those who have actually tried to prove race discrimination under the Fourteenth Amendment, the Court’s remark amounted to cruel irony. The Supreme Court has made it virtually impossible to challenge racial bias in the criminal justice system under the Fourteenth Amendment, and it has barred litigation of such claims under federal civil rights laws as well.

The Supreme Court ruled in *McCleskey v. Kemp* that racial bias in sentencing, even if shown through credible statistical evidence, could not be challenged under the Fourteenth Amendment in the absence of clear evidence of conscious, discriminatory intent. On its face, the case appeared to be a straightforward challenge to Georgia’s death penalty scheme. Once the Court’s opinion was released, however, it became clear the case was about much more than the death penalty. The real issue at hand was whether—and to what extent—the Supreme Court would tolerate racial bias in the criminal justice system as a whole. The Court’s answer was that racial bias would be tolerated—virtually to any degree—so long as no one admitted it.

In erecting this high standard, the Court knew full well that the standard could not be met absent an admission that a prosecutor or judge acted because of racial bias. The majority opinion openly acknowledged that longstanding rules generally bar litigants from obtaining discovery from the prosecution regarding charging patterns and motives, and that similar rules forbid introduction of evidence of jury deliberations even when a juror has chosen to make deliberations public. The very evidence that the Court demanded in *McCleskey*—evidence of deliberate bias in his individual case—would almost always be unavailable and/or inadmissible due to procedural rules that shield jurors and prosecutors from scrutiny. This dilemma was of little concern to the Court. It closed the courthouse doors to claims of racial bias in sentencing.

There is good reason to believe that, despite appearances, the *McCleskey* decision was not really about the death penalty at all; rather, the Court’s opinion was driven by a desire to immunize the entire criminal justice system

from claims of racial bias. The best evidence in support of this view can be found at the end of the majority opinion where the Court states that discretion plays a necessary role in the implementation of the criminal justice system, and that discrimination is an inevitable by-product of discretion. Racial discrimination, the Court seemed to suggest, was something that simply must be tolerated in the criminal justice system, provided no one admits to racial bias. The majority observed that significant racial disparities had been found in other criminal settings beyond the death penalty, and that McCleskey's case implicitly calls into question the integrity of the entire system. In the Court's words:

“Taken to its logical conclusion, [Warren McCleskey's claim] throws into serious question the principles that underlie our criminal justice system. [I]f we accepted McCleskey's claim that racial bias has impermissibly tainted the capital sentencing decision, we could soon be faced with similar claims as to other types of penalty.”

The Court openly worried that other actors in the criminal justice system might also face scrutiny for allegedly biased decision-making if similar claims of racial bias in the system were allowed to proceed. Driven by these concerns, the Court rejected McCleskey's claim that Georgia's death penalty system violates the Eighth Amendment's ban on arbitrary punishment, framing the critical question as whether the Baldus study demonstrated a “constitutionally unacceptable risk” of discrimination. Its answer was no. The Court deemed the risk of racial bias in Georgia's capital sentencing scheme “constitutionally acceptable.” Justice Brennan pointedly noted in his dissent that the Court's opinion “seems to suggest a fear of too much justice.”

These are just more proof that the Supreme Court only uses precedent when they align with the current justices' ideological beliefs. In a case called *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, the Supreme Court had recognized that racially selective enforcement violates equal protection of the laws. In that case, decided in 1886, the Court unanimously overturned convictions of two Chinese men who were operating laundries without a license. San Francisco had denied licenses to all Chinese applicants, but granted licenses to all but one of the non-Chinese laundry operators who applied. Law enforcement arrested more than a hundred people for operating laundries without licenses, and every one of the arrestees was Chinese. Overturning *Yick Wo's* conviction, the Supreme Court declared in a widely quoted passage:

“Though the law itself be fair on its face, and impartial in appearance, yet, if it is applied and administered by public authority with an evil eye and an unequal hand, so as practically to make unjust and illegal discriminations, between persons in similar circumstances. . . the denial of equal justice is still within the prohibition of the Constitution.”

Prosecutors are well aware that the exercise of their discretion is unchecked, provided no explicitly racist remarks are made, as it is next to impossible for defendants to prove racial bias. It is difficult to imagine a system better designed to ensure that racial biases and stereotypes are given free reign—while at the same time appearing on the surface to be colorblind—than the one devised by the US Supreme Court.

For example, achieving an all-white jury, or nearly all-white jury, is easy in most jurisdictions, because relatively few racial minorities are included in the jury pool. Potential jurors are typically called for service based on the list of registered voters or Department of Motor Vehicle lists—sources that contain disproportionately fewer people of color, because people of color are significantly less likely to own cars or register to vote. Making matters worse, thirty-one states and the federal government subscribe to the practice of lifetime felon exclusion from juries. As a result, about 30 percent of black men are automatically banned from jury service for life.

“If prosecutors exist who cannot create a ‘racially neutral’ reason for discriminating on the basis of race, bar exams are too easy.”

A law professor at the University of Chicago reports that his students frequently express shock and dismay when they venture into those communities for the first time and witness the distance between abstract legal principles and actual practice. One student reported, following her ride-along with Chicago police:

“Each time we drove into a public housing project and stopped the car, every young black man in the area would almost reflexively place his hands up against the car and spread his legs to be searched. And the officers would search them. The officers would then get back in the car and stop in another project, and this would happen again. This repeated itself throughout the entire day. I couldn’t believe it. This was nothing like we learned in law school. But it just seemed so normal—for the police and the young men.”

Civil rights advocacy has not always looked the way it does today. Throughout most of our nation's history—from the days of the abolitionist movement through the Civil Rights Movement—racial justice advocacy has generally revolved around grassroots organizing and the strategic mobilization of public opinion. In recent years, however, a bit of mythology has sprung up regarding the centrality of litigation to racial justice struggles. The success of the brilliant legal crusade that led to *Brown v. Board of Education* has created a widespread perception that civil rights lawyers are the most important players in racial justice advocacy. This image was enhanced following the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1965, when civil rights lawyers became embroiled in highly visible and controversial efforts to end hiring discrimination, create affirmative action plans, and enforce school desegregation orders. As public attention shifted from the streets to the courtroom, the extraordinary grassroots movement that made civil rights legislation possible faded from public view. The lawyers took over. With all deliberate speed, civil rights organizations became professionalized and increasingly disconnected from the communities they claimed to represent.

They channeled a passion for change into legal negotiations and lawsuits. They defined the issues in terms of developing legal doctrine and establishing legal precedent; their clients became important but secondary players in a formal arena that required lawyers to translate lay claims into technical speech. They then disembodied plaintiffs' claims in judicially manageable or judicially enforceable terms, unenforceable without more lawyers. Simultaneously, the movement's center of gravity shifted to Washington, D.C. As lawyers and national pundits became more prominent than clients and citizens, they isolated themselves from the people who were their anchor and on whose behalf they had previously labored. They not only left people behind; they also lost touch with the moral force at the heart of the movement itself. Lawyers have a tendency to identify and concentrate on problems they know how to solve—i.e., problems that can be solved through litigation. The mass incarceration of people of color is not that kind of problem.

Advocates have found they are most successful when they draw attention to certain types of black people—those who are easily understood by mainstream whites as 'good' and 'respectable'—and tell certain types of stories about them. Since the days when abolitionists struggled to eradicate slavery, racial justice advocates have gone to great lengths to identify black people who defy racial stereotypes, and they have exercised considerable message discipline, telling only those stories of racial injustice that will evoke sympathy among whites. A prime example is the Rosa Parks story.

Rosa Parks was not the first person to refuse to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Civil rights advocates considered

and rejected two other black women as plaintiffs when planning a test case challenging segregation practices: Claudette Colvin and Mary Louise Smith. Both of them were arrested for refusing to give up their seats on Montgomery's segregated buses, just months before Rosa Parks refused to budge. Colvin was fifteen years old when she defied segregation laws. Her case attracted national attention, but civil rights advocates declined to use her as a plaintiff because she got pregnant by an older man shortly after her arrest. Advocates worried that her "immoral" conduct would detract from or undermine their efforts to show that blacks were entitled to (and worthy of) equal treatment. Likewise, they decided not to use Mary Louise Smith as a plaintiff because her father was rumored to be an alcoholic.

It was understood that, in any effort to challenge racial discrimination, the litigant—and even the litigant's family—had to be above reproach and free from every negative trait that could be used as a justification for unequal treatment. Rosa Parks, in this regard, was a dream come true. She was, in the words of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson (another key figure in the Montgomery Bus Boycott), a "medium-sized, cultured mulatto woman; a civic and religious worker; quiet, unassuming, and pleasant in manner and appearance; dignified and reserved; of high morals and strong character." No one doubted that Parks was the perfect symbol for the movement to integrate public transportation in Montgomery. Martin Luther King Jr. recalled in his memoir that "Mrs. Parks was ideal for the role assigned to her by history," largely because "her character was impeccable" and she was "one of the most respected people in the Negro community."

Affirmative action, particularly when it is justified on the grounds of diversity rather than equity (or remedy), masks the severity of racial inequality in America, leading to greatly exaggerated claims of racial progress and overly optimistic assessments of the future for African Americans. Seeing black people graduate from Harvard and Yale and become CEOs or corporate lawyers—not to mention president of the United States—causes us all to marvel at what a long way we have come. As recent data shows, however, much of black progress is a myth. Although some African Americans are doing very well—enrolling in universities and graduate schools at record rates thanks to affirmative action—as a group, African Americans are doing no better than they were when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and riots swept inner cities across America. Nearly one-fourth of African Americans live below the poverty line today, approximately the same as in 1968. The child poverty rate is actually higher today than it was then. Unemployment rates in black communities rival those in Third World countries. And that is with affirmative action!

Civil rights activists have created a national movement to save affirmative

action, complete with the marches, organizing, and media campaigns, as well as incessant strategy meetings, conferences, and litigation. Where is the movement to end mass incarceration? For that matter, where is the movement for educational equity? Part of the answer is that it is far easier to create a movement when there is a sense of being under attack. It is also easier when a single policy is at issue, rather than something as enormous (and seemingly intractable) as educational inequity or mass incarceration. Those are decent explanations, but they are no excuse. Try telling a sixteen-year-old black youth in Louisiana who is facing a decade in adult prison and a lifetime of social, political, and economic exclusion that your civil rights organization is not doing much to end the War on Drugs—but would he like to hear about all the great things that are being done to save affirmative action? There is a fundamental disconnect today between the world of civil rights advocacy and the reality facing those trapped in the new racial undercaste.

In response to critics they argue: Shouldn't we direct scarce resources to battles that are more easily won, such as affirmative action? Shouldn't we focus the public's attention on the so-called root causes of mass incarceration, such as educational inequity?

We can continue along this road—it is a road well traveled—but we must admit the strategy has not made much of a difference. African Americans, as a group, are no better off than they were in 1968 in many respects. In fact, to some extent, they are worse off. When the incarcerated population is counted in unemployment and poverty rates, the best of times for the rest of America have been among the worst of times for African Americans, particularly black men. The notion that the 1990s—the Clinton years—were good times for African Americans, and that a rising tide lifts all boats, is pure fiction. As unemployment rates sank to historically low levels in the late 1990s for the general population, jobless rates among non-college black men in their twenties rose to their highest levels ever, propelled by skyrocketing incarceration rates.

Civil rights organizations—like all institutions—are comprised of fallible human beings. The prevailing public consensus affects everyone, including civil rights advocates. Those in the civil rights community are not immune to the racial stereotypes that pervade media imagery and political rhetoric; nor do they operate outside of the political context. Like most people, they tend to resist believing that they might be part of the problem. One day, civil rights organizations may be embarrassed by how long it took them to move out of denial and do the hard work necessary to end mass incarceration.

In June 2001, there were nearly 20,000 more black men in the Illinois state prison system than enrolled in the state's public universities. In fact, there

were more black men in the state's correctional facilities that year just on drug charges than the total number of black men enrolled in undergraduate degree programs in state universities.

The fact that Barack Obama can give a speech on Father's Day dedicated to the subject of fathers who are "AWOL" without ever acknowledging that the majority of young black men in large urban areas are currently under the control of the criminal justice system is disturbing, to say the least. What is more problematic, though, is that hardly anyone in the mainstream media noticed the oversight. Hundreds of thousands of black men are unable to be good fathers for their children, not because of a lack of commitment or desire but because they are warehoused in prisons, locked in cages. They did not walk out on their families voluntarily; they were taken away in handcuffs, often due to a massive federal program known as the War on Drugs. More African Americans are under correctional control today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began.

The launching of the War on Drugs and the initial construction of the new system required the expenditure of tremendous political initiative and resources. Media campaigns were waged; politicians blasted "soft" judges and enacted harsh sentencing laws; poor people of color were vilified. The system now, however, requires very little maintenance or justification. In fact, if you are white and middle class, you might not even realize the drug war is still going on. Most high school and college students today have no recollection of the political and media frenzy surrounding the drug war in the early years. When the war was declared they were not even born yet. Crack is out; terrorism is in. Today, the political fanfare and the vehement, racialized rhetoric regarding crime and drugs are no longer necessary. Mass incarceration has been normalized, and all of the racial stereotypes and assumptions that gave rise to the system are now embraced (or at least internalized) by people of all colors, from all walks of life, and in every major political party. We may wonder aloud 'where have the black men gone?' but deep down we already know. It is simply taken for granted that, in cities like Baltimore and Chicago, the vast majority of young black men are currently under the control of the criminal justice system or branded criminals for life. This extraordinary circumstance—unheard of in the rest of the world—is treated here in America as a basic fact of life, as normal as separate water fountains were just a half century ago.

A nation is a choice. We could choose to be a nation that extends care, compassion, and concern to those who are locked up and locked out or headed for prison before they are old enough to vote. We could seek for them the same opportunities we seek for our own children; we could treat

them like one of ‘us.’ We could do that. Or we can choose to be a nation that shames and blames its most vulnerable, affixes badges of dishonor upon them at young ages, and then relegates them to a permanent second-class status for life. That is the path we have chosen, and it leads to a familiar place.

For black youth, the experience of being “made black” often begins with the first police stop, interrogation, search, or arrest. The experience carries social meaning—this is what it means to be black. The story of one’s “first time” may be repeated to family or friends, but for ghetto youth, almost no one imagines that the first time will be the last. The experience is understood to define the terms of one’s relationship not only to the state but to society at large. Random and degrading stops and searches tell kids that they are pariahs, that no matter how hard they study, they will remain potential suspects.

“We can be perfect, perfect, doing everything right and still they treat us like dogs. No, worse than dogs, because criminals are treated worse than dogs. How can you tell us we can be anything when they treat us like we’re nothing?”

Are we willing to cast ourselves as a society that creates crimogenic conditions for some of its members, and then acts-out rituals of punishment against them as if engaged in some awful form of human sacrifice? A similar question can be posed with respect to shaming those trapped in ghettos: are we willing to demonize a population, declare a war against them, and then stand back and heap shame and contempt upon them for failing to behave like model citizens while under attack?

“My grandma keeps asking me about when I’m gonna get arrested again. She thinks just ‘cause I went in before, I will go in again. At my school my teachers talk about calling the cops again to take me away. The cop keeps checking up on me. He’s always at the park making sure I don’t get into trouble again. My P.O. is always knocking on my door talking shit to me. Even at the BYA the staff treat me like I’m a fuck up.

Shit don’t change. It doesn’t matter where I go, I’m seen as a criminal. I just say, if you are going to treat me as a criminal then I’m gonna treat you like I am one, you feel me? I’m gonna make you shake so that you can say that there is a reason for calling me a criminal. I grew up knowing that I had to show these fools that I wasn’t going to take their shit. I started to act

like a thug even if I wasn't one. Part of it was me trying to be hard, the other part was them treating me like a criminal."

Should we be shocked when they turn to gangs or fellow inmates for support when no viable family support structure exists? After all, in many respects, they are simply doing what black people did during the Jim Crow era—they are turning to each other for support and solace in a society that despises them. Yet when these young people do what all severely stigmatized groups do—try to cope by turning to each other and embracing their stigma in a desperate effort to regain some measure of self esteem—we, as a society, heap more shame and contempt upon them. We tell them their friends are "no good," that they will "amount to nothing," that they are "wasting their lives," and that "they're nothing but criminals." We condemn their baggy pants (a fashion trend that mimics prison-issue pants) and the music that glorifies a life many feel they cannot avoid. When we are done shaming them, we throw up our hands and then turn our backs as they are carted off to jail.

In the Los Angeles gangland, tribal rivalries have reasserted themselves. In the most extensive city on earth (now half the size of Belgium), many small tribal territories have been established, each confined to a fixed, carefully labeled locality. Here the primeval tribal nature of our species has dramatically resurfaced in the midst of the decaying center of the urban sprawl. The ancient cave paintings and rock art of prehistoric times have been replaced by modern graffiti; the tribal spears by automatic handguns; the ritual skin scarification by modern tattoos; the feathered headdresses by stylized T-shirts. All the tribal trappings and group loyalties have reappeared as the vast network of the city is carved up, once again, into clearly identifiable local communities. For some this is seen as the destruction of the city centers, but for those living there it is a matter of survival—a refusal to be turned into faceless human termites in a huge, teeming human termite-hill.

There is little reason to doubt the prevailing "common sense" that black and brown men have been locked up en masse merely in response to crime rates when one's sources of information are mainstream media outlets. In many respects, the reality of mass incarceration is easier to avoid knowing than the injustices and sufferings associated with slavery or Jim Crow. Those confined to prisons are out of sight and out of mind; once released, they are typically confined in ghettos. Most Americans only come to "know" about the people cycling in and out of prisons through fictional police dramas, music videos, gangsta rap, and "true" accounts of ghetto experience on the evening news. These racialized narratives tend to confirm

and reinforce the prevailing public consensus that we need not care about “those people”—they deserve what they get.

It is useful to put the commodification of gangsta culture in proper perspective. The worst of gangsta rap and other forms of blaxploitation (such as VH1’s *Flavor of Love*) is best understood as a modern-day minstrel show, only this time televised around the clock for a worldwide audience. It is a for-profit display of the worst racial stereotypes and images associated with the era of mass incarceration—an era in which black people are criminalized and portrayed as out-of-control, shameless, violent, oversexed, and generally undeserving. Like the minstrel shows of the slavery and Jim Crow eras, today’s displays are generally designed for white audiences. The majority of consumers of gangsta rap are white, suburban teenagers. VH1 had its best ratings ever for the first season of *Flavor of Love*—ratings driven by large white audiences. MTV expanded its offerings of black-themed reality shows in the hopes of attracting the same crowd. The profits to be made from racial stigma are considerable, and the fact that blacks—as well as whites—treat racial oppression as a commodity for consumption is not surprising. It is a familiar form of black complicity with racialized systems of control.

Many people are unaware that, although minstrel shows were plainly designed to pander to white racism and to make whites feel comfortable with—indeed, entertained by—racial oppression, African Americans formed a large part of the black minstrels’ audience. In fact, their numbers were so great in some areas that theater owners had to relax rules segregating black patrons and restricting them to certain areas of the theater. Historians have long debated why blacks would attend minstrel shows when the images and content were so blatantly racist. Minstrels projected a greatly romanticized and exaggerated image of black life on plantations with cheerful, simple, grinning slaves always ready to sing, dance, and please their masters. Some have suggested that perhaps blacks felt in on the joke, laughing at the over-the-top characters from a sense of in-group recognition. It has also been argued that perhaps they felt some connection to elements of African culture that had been suppressed and condemned for so long but were suddenly visible on stage, albeit in racist, exaggerated form. Undeniably, though, one major draw for black audiences was simply seeing fellow African Americans on stage. Black minstrels were largely viewed as celebrities, earning more money and achieving more fame than African Americans ever had before. Black minstrelsy was the first large-scale opportunity for African Americans to enter show business. To some degree, then, black minstrelsy—as degrading as it was—represented success. It seems likely that historians will one day look back on the images of black men in gangsta rap videos with a similar curiosity.

Another example of a difference that is less significant than it may initially appear is the “fact” that Jim Crow was explicitly race-based, whereas mass incarceration is not. This statement initially appears self-evident, but it is partially mistaken. Although it is common to think of Jim Crow as an explicitly race-based system, in fact a number of the key policies were officially colorblind. Poll taxes, literacy tests, and felon disenfranchisement laws were all formally race-neutral practices that were employed in order to avoid the prohibition on race discrimination in voting contained in the Fifteenth Amendment. These laws operated to create an all-white electorate because they excluded African Americans from the franchise but were not generally applied to whites. Poll workers had the discretion to charge a poll tax or administer a literacy test, or not, and they exercised their discretion in a racially discriminatory manner. Laws that said nothing about race operated to discriminate because those charged with enforcement were granted tremendous discretion, and they exercised that discretion in a highly discriminatory manner.

“Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”

The notion that racial caste systems are necessarily predicated on a desire to harm other racial groups, and that racial hostility is the essence of racism, is fundamentally misguided. Even slavery does not conform to this limited understanding of racism and racial caste. Most plantation owners supported the institution of black slavery not because of a sadistic desire to harm blacks but instead because they wanted to get rich, and black slavery was the most efficient means to that end. By and large, plantation owners were indifferent to the suffering caused by slavery; they were motivated by greed. Preoccupation with the role of racial hostility in earlier caste systems can blind us to the ways in which every caste system, including mass incarceration, has been supported by racial indifference—a lack of caring and compassion for people deemed to be another race.

The widespread and mistaken belief that racial animus is necessary for the creation and maintenance of racialized systems of social control is the most important reason that we, as a nation, have remained in deep denial. The misunderstanding is not surprising. As a society, our collective understanding of racism has been powerfully influenced by the shocking images of the Jim Crow era and the struggle for civil rights. When we think of racism we think of Governor Wallace of Alabama blocking the schoolhouse door; we think of water hoses, lynchings, racial epithets, and “whites only” signs. These images make it easy to forget that many wonderful, good-hearted

white people who were generous to others, respectful of their neighbors, and even kind to their black maids, gardeners, or shoe shiners—and wished them well—nevertheless went to the polls and voted for racial segregation. Many whites who supported Jim Crow justified it on paternalist grounds, actually believing they were doing blacks a favor or believing the time was not yet right for equality. The disturbing images from the Jim Crow era also make it easy to forget that many African Americans were complicit in the Jim Crow system, profiting from it directly or indirectly or keeping their objections quiet out of fear of the repercussions. Our understanding of racism is therefore shaped by the most extreme expressions of individual bigotry, not by the way in which it functions naturally, almost invisibly (and sometimes with genuinely benign intent), when it is embedded in the structure of a social system.

Consider a birdcage. If one thinks about racism by examining only one wire of the cage, or one form of disadvantage, it is difficult to understand how and why the bird is trapped. Only a large number of wires arranged in a specific way, and connected to one another, serve to enclose the bird and to ensure that it cannot escape. What is particularly important to keep in mind is that any given wire of the cage may or may not be specifically developed for the purpose of trapping the bird, yet it still operates, together with the other wires, to restrict its freedom.

Even prisons—the actual buildings—are a rare sight for many Americans, as they are often located far from population centers. Although rural counties contain only 20 percent of the US population, 60 percent of new prison construction occurs there. Prisoners are thus hidden from public view—out of sight, out of mind. In a sense, incarceration is a far more extreme form of physical and residential segregation than Jim Crow segregation. Rather than merely shunting black people to the other side of town or corralling them in ghettos, mass incarceration locks them in cages. Bars and walls keep hundreds of thousands of black and brown people away from mainstream society—a form of apartheid unlike any the world has ever seen.

Under the usual-residence rule, the Census Bureau counts imprisoned individuals as residents of the jurisdiction in which they are incarcerated. Because most new prison construction occurs in predominately white, rural areas, white communities benefit from inflated population totals at the expense of the urban, overwhelmingly minority communities from which the prisoners come. This has enormous consequences for the redistricting process. White rural communities that house prisons wind up with more people in state legislatures representing them, while poor communities of color lose representatives because it appears their population has declined. This policy is disturbingly reminiscent of the three-fifths clause in the

original Constitution, which enhanced the political clout of slave-holding states by including 60 percent of slaves in the population base for calculating Congressional seats and electoral votes, even though they could not vote.

Studies have shown that joblessness—not race or black culture—explains the high rates of violent crime in poor black communities. When researchers have controlled for joblessness, differences in violent crime rates between young black and white men disappear. We declared a war on people residing in racially segregated ghettos—just at the moment their economies had collapsed—rather than providing community investment, quality education, and job training when work disappeared.

The reality for poor blacks trapped in ghettos remains the same: they must live in a state of perpetual insecurity and fear. It is perfectly understandable, then, that some African Americans would be complicit with the system of mass incarceration, even if they oppose, as a matter of social policy, the creation of racially isolated ghettos and the subsequent transfer of black youth from underfunded, crumbling schools to brand-new, high-tech prisons. In the era of mass incarceration, poor African Americans are not given the option of great schools, community investment, and job training. Instead, they are offered police and prisons. If the only choice that is offered blacks is rampant crime or more prisons, the predictable (and understandable) answer will be ‘more prisons.’ The predicament African Americans find themselves in today is not altogether different from the situation they faced during Jim Crow. Jim Crow, as oppressive as it was, offered a measure of security for blacks who were willing to play by its rules. Those who flouted the rules or resisted them risked the terror of the Klan. Cooperation with the Jim Crow system often seemed far more likely to increase or maintain one’s security than any alternative.

That reality helps to explain why African American leaders such as Booker T. Washington urged blacks to focus on improving themselves rather than on challenging racial discrimination. It is also why the Civil Rights Movement initially met significant resistance among some African Americans in the South. Civil rights advocates strenuously argued that it was the mentality and ideology that gave rise to Jim Crow that was the real source of the danger experienced by blacks. Of course they were right. But it is understandable why some blacks believed their immediate safety and security could best be protected by cooperation with the prevailing caste system. The fact that black people during Jim Crow were often complicit with the system of control did not mean they supported racial oppression.

It is fair to say that we have witnessed an evolution in the United States from a racial caste system based entirely on exploitation (slavery), to one based largely on subordination (Jim Crow), to one defined by marginalization

(mass incarceration). While marginalization may sound far preferable to exploitation, it may prove to be even more dangerous. Extreme marginalization, as we have seen throughout world history, poses the risk of extermination. Tragedies such as the Holocaust in Germany or ethnic cleansing in Bosnia are traceable to the extreme marginalization and stigmatization of racial and ethnic groups. It's actually better to be exploited than marginalized, in some respects, because if you're exploited presumably you're still needed.

No task is more urgent for racial justice advocates today than ensuring that America's current racial caste system is its last. Given what is at stake at this moment in history, bolder, more inspired action is required than we have seen to date. Piecemeal, top-down policy reform on criminal justice issues, combined with token exceptionalism will not get us out of our nation's racial quagmire. We must flip the script. Taking our cue from the courageous civil rights advocates who brazenly refused to defend themselves, marching unarmed past white mobs that threatened to kill them, we too must be the change we hope to create. If we want to do more than just end mass incarceration—if we want to put an end to the history of racial caste in America—we must lay down our racial bribes, join hands with people of all colors who are not content to wait for change to trickle down, and say to those who would stand in our way: Accept all of us or none.

That is the basic message that Martin Luther King Jr. aimed to deliver through the Poor People's Movement back in 1968. He argued then that the time had come for racial justice advocates to shift from a civil rights to a human rights paradigm, and that the real work of movement building had only just begun. A human rights approach, he believed, would offer far greater hope for those of us determined to create a thriving, multiracial, multi-ethnic democracy free from racial hierarchy than the civil rights model had provided to date. It would offer a positive vision of what we can strive for—a society in which all human beings are treated with dignity, and have the right to food, shelter, health care, education, and security. This expansive vision could open the door to meaningful alliances between poor and working-class people of all colors, who could begin to see their interests as aligned, rather than in conflict—no longer in competition for scarce resources in a zero-sum game.

A human rights movement, King believed, held revolutionary potential. Speaking at a Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff retreat in May 1967, he told SCLC staff, who were concerned that the Civil Rights Movement had lost its steam and its direction:

“It is necessary for us to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights.”

Political reform efforts were no longer adequate to the task at hand:

“For the last 12 years, we have been in a reform movement. [But] after Selma and the voting rights bill, we moved into a new era, which must be an era of revolution. We must see the great distinction between a reform movement and a revolutionary movement. We are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society.”

Fifty years later, civil rights advocacy is stuck in a model of advocacy King was determined to leave behind. Rather than challenging the basic structure of society and doing the hard work of movement building—the work to which King was still committed at the end of his life—we have been tempted too often by the opportunity for people of color to be included within the political and economic structure as-is, even if it means alienating those who are necessary allies. We have allowed ourselves to be willfully blind to the emergence of a new caste system—a system of social excommunication that has denied millions of African Americans basic human dignity. The significance of this cannot be overstated, for the failure to acknowledge the humanity and dignity of all persons has lurked at the root of every racial caste system. This common thread explains why, in the 1780s, the British Society for the Abolition of Slavery adopted as its official seal a woodcut of a kneeling slave above a banner that read:

AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER?

That symbol was followed more than a hundred years later by signs worn around the necks of black sanitation workers during the Poor People’s Campaign answering the slave’s question with the simple statement:

I AM A MAN

Egos, competing agendas, career goals, and inertia may get in the way. It may be that traditional civil rights organizations simply cannot, or will not, change. To this it can only be said: adapt or die. If Martin Luther King Jr. is right that the arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice, a new movement will arise; and if civil rights organizations fail to keep up with the times, they will be pushed to the side as another generation of advocates comes to the fore. Hopefully the new generation will be led by those who know best the brutality of the new caste system—a group with greater vision, courage, and determination than the old guard can muster, trapped as they may be in an outdated paradigm. This new generation of activists should not avoid disrespecting their elders or disparaging their

so-called contributions or achievements; to the contrary, they should quite clearly and openly criticize their failures, their complicity, their inability to complete the task we face, the blood of others that drips from their hands because they were unwilling to spill their own or other's. They should march right past them, emboldened, as King once said, by the fierce urgency of now.

Those who hope to be their allies should not be surprised, if and when this day comes, that when those who have been locked up and locked out finally have the chance to speak and truly be heard, what they speak is rage. The rage may frighten; it may recall images of riots, uprisings, and buildings aflame. Many may be tempted to control it, or douse it with buckets of doubt, dismay, and disbelief. But they should do no such thing. Instead, when a young man who was born in the ghetto and who knows little of life beyond the walls of his prison cell and the invisible cage that has become his life, turns to you in bewilderment and rage, you should do nothing more than look him in the eye and tell him the truth. You should tell him the same truth the great African American writer James Baldwin told his nephew in a letter published in 1962. With great passion and searing conviction, Baldwin had this to say to his young nephew:

“This is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. It is their innocence which constitutes the crime. This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity.

You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention; and, by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp on reality. But these men are your brothers—your lost, younger brothers. And if the word ‘integration’ means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will

again, and we can make America what it must become. It will be hard, but you come from sturdy, peasant stock, men who picked cotton and dammed rivers and built railroads, and, in the teeth of the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity. You come from a long line of great poets since Homer. One of them said, The very time I thought I was lost, My dungeon shook and my chains fell off. We cannot be free until they are free. God bless you, and Godspeed.”

Tearing Ourselves Apart

The Least Important Thing

When the first Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619, there were no white people there; nor according to colonial records would there be for another sixty years. Oh, yes, there were English and Irish, but nowhere in the colonial record is there evidence that law or society granted special privileges to people based on European origin. The white race and white identity were invented, by the ruling elite of Virginia, in order to divide laboring people in the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion of 1676. The white race was constructed and used as a political instrument to divide and conquer. How did this come to be?

By 1620 or so, a system of unfree labor became the dominant labor system in Virginia. The system was essentially slavery, some "bond-laborers" had time-limited contracts, but most servitude was open to interpretation by custom. A majority of these bond-laborers were Europeans. The archival evidence is clear, as well, that the role of African and African Americans was "indeterminate." From 1619 to the years following Bacon's Rebellion, the status of black people was contested in the courts and in the fields. Africans held a variety of social and economic positions: some were limited-term slaves, some free, some endured lifetime bondage, while others were property holders, even including a few slave owners. It was not until after Bacon's Rebellion, or the second phase of Bacon's Rebellion to be precise, that law and society created a new custom of racism, and for that to happen, the white race had to be invented. What was the trigger?

"In Virginia, 128 years before William Lloyd Garrison was born, laboring class African-Americans and European-Americans fought side by side for the abolition of slavery. In so doing, they provided the supreme proof that the white race did not then exist."

The Rebellion occupied the capital of Jamestown and pointed the way toward freedom for everyone, by contesting the rule of the oligarchs who had grown rich on slave labor and land stolen from the natives. After the rebellion was suppressed, law and custom began to shift. Europeans were increasingly designated as ‘white’ in the historical record, and given privileges that conferred a “presumption of liberty” while blacks were increasingly subjected to legal and cultural limits to their freedoms. Whites were encouraged to view blacks with contempt and see their inferior social positions as proof of innate inferiority.

All authorities agree that the conditions of the masses of white industrial and agricultural workers, North and South, were abominable in the decades before the Civil War. Still they had their white-skin privileges: The white worker was an actual or potential citizen, with citizen’s rights; the black had no rights. The white, as possessor—if not immediately, then within a definite time—of his own person, had legal freedom of movement; the black did not own himself. The white, if bound by indenture, debtor apprenticeship, or in some other manner, might still succeed in escaping into the free-moving white world much more easily than the black worker. As possessor of himself, the white workers could—even though not always immediately—take a better job, if he could find one; the black had no such chance. The white worker, if opportunity afforded, could learn to read and then study as a means of improving his lot; the black worker was forbidden by law even to learn to read. The white worker could aspire to become a farmer, a merchant or an industrialist; the black had only flight, revolt, revenge to dream of. At this point, the white skin privilege of the white worker was simply the right to be free.

The white race, white supremacy, and black subordination were all products of the same historical period in which the slave system was recreated as a racist system to prevent the threat of united action by the people. Today the new oligarchy still relies on their ability to divide and conquer. Racism is historical, it is the product of human activity. If it was then, it is now. Racism was founded on a system of privileges designed to win working class white people’s support for slavery. And so it is to white privilege that we must look if we want to free ourselves from being the tools and fools of the rich and powerful. We must be pawns no more.

The sickness of racism is gripping substantial sections of the upper-middle-class and dominant sections of the political establishment, academia, and official cultural commentary. The top ten percent of society, immensely jealous of the vast wealth piled up by the financial oligarchy yet fearful of the masses, sees in racial and identity politics a way of pursuing its social interests not only against those above, but, more importantly, against those

below.

This culture of victimhood, identity politics, and social justice activism promotes a simplistic worldview of noble victims and malevolent victimizers. The same is true of other sincere but terribly misguided cognitive traps promoted by social justice activists: the insistence that people's feelings constitute the ultimate authority on truth, that "power" is always bad, and that the powerless always know best. Victimhood culture often mistakes expertise and responsibility for power. Thus, doctors, parents, and teachers are "powerful" and bad, and patients, children, and students are "powerless" and good. Never mind that in this age of rampant individualism and customer satisfaction, children routinely bully parents and teachers, professors are terrified of their students, and doctors live in fear of litigation.

What we have is a contradiction—a working-class movement that has done incalculable harm to working-class people.

If what you want is to preserve your identity, things like continuing to speak your native language will be crucial to you; the resistance of indigenous peoples to globalization is understood from this standpoint as their struggle for the recognition of their cultural identity. But if what you want is to promote socialism, you won't much care what language gets spoken; what you'll want is to find a new economic model to replace the neoliberal insistence on the primacy of the private sector.

Books like *The Great Gatsby* (and there have been a great many of them) give us a vision of our society divided into races rather than into economic classes. And this vision has proven to be extraordinarily attractive. Indeed, it's been so attractive that the vision has survived even though what we used to think were the races have not. In the 1920s, racial science was in its heyday; now very few scientists believe that there are any such things as races. But many of those who are quick to remind us that there are no biological entities called races are even quicker to remind us that races have not disappeared; they should just be understood as social entities instead. And these social entities have turned out to be remarkably tenacious, both in ways we know are bad and in ways we have come to think of as good. The bad ways involve racism, the inability or refusal to accept people who are different from us. The good ways involve just the opposite: embracing difference, celebrating what we have come to call 'diversity.'

The commitment to diversity has become deeply associated with the struggle against racism. Indeed, the goal of overcoming racism, which had sometimes been identified as the goal of creating a "color-blind" society, is now reconceived as the goal of creating a diverse, that is, a color-conscious, society. Instead of trying to treat people as if their race didn't matter, we would not only recognize but celebrate racial identity. Indeed, race

has turned out to be a gateway drug for all kinds of identities, cultural, religious, sexual, even medical. To take what may seem like an extreme case, advocates for the disabled now urge us to stop thinking of disability as a condition to be cured or eliminated and to start thinking of it instead on the model of race: we don't think black people should want to stop being black; why do we assume the deaf want to hear?

The general principle here is that our commitment to diversity has redefined the opposition to discrimination as the appreciation (rather than the elimination) of difference. So with respect to race, the idea is not just that racism is a bad thing (which of course it is) but that race itself is a good thing. Indeed, we have become so committed to the attractions of race that our enthusiasm for racial identity has been utterly undiminished by scientific skepticism about whether there is any such thing. Once students have taken a course in human genetics, they just stop talking about black and white and Asian races and start talking about black and European and Asian cultures instead. We love race, and we love the identities to which it has given birth.

For those who take religion seriously, belief is a burden, not a self-righteous claim to some privileged moral status. Self-righteousness, indeed, may well be more prevalent among skeptics than among believers. The spiritual discipline against self-righteousness is the very essence of religion. Because a secular society does not grasp the need for such a discipline, it misunderstands the nature of religion: to console but, first of all, to challenge and confront. From a secular point of view, the overriding spiritual preoccupation is not self-righteousness but self-esteem. Most of our spiritual energy is devoted precisely to a campaign against shame and guilt, the object of which is to make people "feel good about themselves." The churches themselves have enlisted in this therapeutic exercise, the chief beneficiaries of which, in theory at least, are the victimized minorities that have been systematically deprived of self-esteem by a vicious history of oppression.

What these groups need, according to the prevailing consensus, is the spiritual consolation provided by the dogmatic assertion of their collective identity. They are encouraged to recover their ancestral heritage, to revive discarded rituals, and to celebrate a mythical past in the name of history. Whether or not this bracing account of their distinctive past actually meets accepted standards of historical interpretation is a secondary consideration; what matters is whether it contributes to the positive self-image that allegedly makes for "empowerment." The same benefits misleadingly associated with religion—security, spiritual comfort, dogmatic relief from doubt—are thought to flow from a therapeutic politics of identity. In effect, identity politics has come to serve as a substitute for religion—or at least for the feeling

of self-righteousness that is so commonly confused with religion. These developments shed further light on the decline of democratic debate.

‘Diversity’—a slogan that looks attractive on the face of it—has come to mean the opposite of what it appears to mean. In practice, diversity turns out to legitimize a new dogmatism, in which rival minorities take shelter behind a set of beliefs impervious to rational discussion. The physical segregation of the population in self-enclosed, racially homogeneous enclaves has its counterpart in the balkanization of opinion. Each group tries to barricade itself behind its own dogmas. We have become a nation of minorities; only their official recognition as such is lacking to complete the process. This parody of ‘community’—a term much in favor but not very clearly understood—carries with it the insidious assumption that all members of a given group can be expected to think alike. Opinion thus becomes a function of racial or ethnic identity, of gender or sexual preference. Self-selected minority “spokespersons” enforce this conformity by ostracizing those who stray from the party line—black people, for instance, who “think white.” How much longer can the spirit of free inquiry and open debate survive under these conditions?

The argument, in its simplest form, is that we love race, we love identity, because we don’t love class. We love thinking that the differences that divide us are not the differences between those of us who have money and those who don’t but are instead the differences between those of us who are black and those who are white or Asian or Latino or whatever. A world where some of us don’t have enough money is a world where the differences between us present a problem: the need to get rid of inequality or to justify it. A world where some of us are black and some of us are white—or biracial or Native American or transgendered—is a world where the differences between us present a solution: appreciating our diversity. So we like to talk about the differences we can appreciate, and we don’t like to talk about the ones we can’t.

Indeed, we don’t even like to acknowledge that they exist. As survey after survey has shown, Americans are very reluctant to identify themselves as belonging to the lower class and even more reluctant to identify themselves as belonging to the upper class. The class we like is the middle class. But the fact that we all like to think of ourselves as belonging to the same class doesn’t, of course, mean that we actually do belong to the same class. In reality, we obviously and increasingly don’t. The last few decades have seen a huge increase in inequality in America. The rich are different from you and me, and one of the ways they’re different is that they’re getting richer and we’re not.

And while it’s not surprising that most of the rich and their apologists

on the intellectual right are unperturbed by this development, it is at least a little surprising that the intellectual left has managed to remain almost equally unperturbed. Giving priority to issues like affirmative action and committing itself to the celebration of difference, the intellectual left has responded to the increase in economic inequality by insisting on the importance of cultural identity. So for thirty years, while the gap between the rich and the poor has grown larger, we've been urged to respect people's identities—as if the problem of poverty would be solved if we just appreciated the poor. From the economic standpoint, however, what poor people want is not to contribute to diversity but to minimize their contribution to it—they want to stop being poor. Celebrating the diversity of American life has become the American left's way of accepting their poverty, of accepting inequality.

Americans like stories in which the big problem is whether or not you fit in. It's as if being born poor and managing to become middle-class were like being born light-skinned into a dark-skinned family—too white to be black, too black to be white. Or like being the child of immigrants, with a loyalty to two different cultures. But classes are not like races and cultures, and treating them as if they were like races or cultures—different but equal—is one of our strategies for managing inequality rather than minimizing or eliminating it. White is not better than black, but rich is definitely better than poor. Poor people are an endangered species in elite universities not because the universities put quotas on them—as they did with Jews in the old days—and not even because they can't afford to go to them—Harvard will lend you or even give you the money you need to go there—but because they can't get into them.

Hence the irrelevance of most of the proposed solutions to the systematic exclusion of poor people (it's actually the systematic exclusion of three quarters of the population) from elite universities, which involve ideas like increased financial aid for students who can't afford the high tuition, support systems for the few poor students who manage to end up there anyway and, in general, an effort to increase the “cultural capital” of the poor.

“The rich don't exploit the poor, they just out-compete them.”

And if out-competing people means tying their ankles together and loading them down with extra weight while hiring yourself the most expensive coaches and the best practice facilities, he's right. The entire US school system, from pre-K up, is structured from the very start to enable the rich to outcompete the poor, which is to say, the race is fixed. And the kinds

of solutions that might actually make a difference—financing every school district equally, abolishing private schools, making high-quality child care available to every family—are treated as if they were positively un-American.

But it's the response to Hurricane Katrina that is most illuminating for our purposes, especially the response from the left, not from the right:

“Let's be honest, we live in one of the bleakest moments in the history of black people in this nation. Look at the Super Dome—it's a living hell for black people. It's not a big move from the hull of the slave ship to the living hell of the Super Dome.”

This is what we might call the ‘George Bush doesn't care about black people’ interpretation of the government's failed response to the catastrophe. But nobody doubts that George Bush cares about Condoleezza Rice, who is very much a black person and who is fond of pointing out that she's been black since birth. And there are, of course, lots of other black people—like Clarence Thomas and Thomas Sowell and Janice Rogers Brown, and of course Michelle Obama and her fucking candies—for whom George Bush almost certainly has warm feelings. But what American liberals want is for our conservatives to be racists. We want the black people George Bush cares about to be “some of my best friends are black” tokens. We want a fictional George Bush who doesn't care about black people rather than the George Bush we've actually got, one who doesn't care about poor people.

Celebrating diversity shouldn't be an acceptable alternative to seeking economic equality. In an ideal universe we wouldn't be celebrating diversity at all—we wouldn't even be encouraging it—because in an ideal universe the question of who you wanted to sleep with would be a matter of concern only to you and to your loved (or unloved) ones. As would your skin color; some people might like it, some people might not, but it would have no political significance whatsoever. Diversity of skin color is something we should happily take for granted, the way we do diversity of hair color. When you go to school or to work—just like when you go to vote or run for office—the question of whether you're black or white, straight or gay, a man or a woman shouldn't matter any more than the question of whether you are blond or brunette. An important issue of social justice hangs on not discriminating against people because of their hair color or their skin color or their sexuality. No issue of social justice hangs on appreciating hair color diversity; no issue of social justice hangs on appreciating racial or cultural diversity.

If you're worried about the growing economic inequality in American life, if you suspect that there may be something unjust as well as unpleasant in

the spectacle of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, no cause is less worth supporting, no battle is less worth fighting than the ones we fight for diversity. While some cultural conservatives may wish that everyone should be assimilated to their fantasy of one truly American culture, and while the supposed radicals of the “tenured left” continue to struggle for what they hope will finally become a truly inclusive multiculturalism, the really radical idea of redistributing wealth becomes almost literally unthinkable.

In the early 1930s, Senator Huey Long of Louisiana proposed a law making it illegal for anyone to earn more than a million dollars a year and for anyone to inherit more than five-million dollars. Imagine the response if—even adjusted for inflation—any senator were to propose such a law today, cutting off incomes at, say, \$15 million a year and inheritances at \$75 million. It’s not just the numbers that wouldn’t fly; it’s the whole concept. Such a restriction today would seem as outrageous and unnatural as interracial—not to mention gay—marriage seemed or would have seemed then. But we don’t need to purchase our progress in civil rights at the expense of a commitment to economic justice. More fundamentally still, we should not allow—or we should not continue to allow—the phantasm of respect for difference to take the place of that commitment to economic justice. In short, this is an effort to move beyond diversity—to make it clear that the commitment to diversity is at best a distraction and at worst an essentially reactionary position—and to help put equality back on the national agenda.

“Races are like angels. Many people believe in them, devoutly. They can even tell you what properties they have. But the closer you try to examine them to discover their real nature, the more elusive they become.”

Why, if races don’t exist and the cultures we have attempted to replace them with cannot be said to exist either, are we so determined to hang on to the idea that they do? Perhaps we like the idea of cultural equality better than we like the idea of economic equality (and we like the idea of culture wars much better than we like the idea of class wars). Anti-racism plays an essentially conservative role in American politics today and the universities—as something like the diversity avant-garde—play an equally conservative role. People like David Horowitz are always complaining that universities are hotbeds of liberalism in which conservatives can’t get a job, much less a fair hearing. Even if Horowitz and his friends are right, true conservatives needn’t worry; from their affirmative-action admissions procedures to their multicultural graduation requirements, American universities are propaganda

machines that might as well have been designed to ensure that the class structure of American society remains unchallenged. The commitment to diversity has turned liberalism into a program for making rich people of different skin colors and sexual orientations more “comfortable” while leaving intact the thing that makes them most comfortable of all: their wealth.

The least important thing about us—our identity—is the thing we have become most committed to talking about, and this commitment is, especially from the standpoint of a left politics, a profound mistake. The political left—increasingly committed to the celebration of diversity and the redress of historical grievance—has converted itself into the accomplice rather than the opponent of the right. The old Socialist leader Eugene Debs used to be criticized for being unwilling to interest himself in any social reform that didn’t involve the attack on economic inequality. The situation now is almost exactly the opposite; the left today obsessively interests itself in issues that have nothing to do with economic inequality. And, not content with pretending that our real problem is cultural difference rather than economic difference, we have also started to treat economic difference as if it were cultural difference.

So now we’re urged to be more respectful of poor people and to stop thinking of them as victims, since to treat them as victims is condescending—it denies them their “agency.” And if we can stop thinking of the poor as people who have too little money and start thinking of them instead as people who have too little respect, then it’s our attitude toward the poor, not their poverty, that becomes the problem to be solved, and we can focus our efforts of reform not on getting rid of classes but on getting rid of what we like to call classism. The trick, in other words, is to stop thinking of poverty as a disadvantage, and once you stop thinking of it as a disadvantage then, of course, you no longer need to worry about getting rid of it. More generally, the trick is to think of inequality as a consequence of our prejudices rather than as a consequence of our social system and thus to turn the project of creating a more egalitarian society into the project of getting people—ourselves and, especially, others—to stop being racist, sexist, classist homophobes. This book is an attack on that trick.

Here are two stories, one from the end of the nineteenth century, the other from the end of the twentieth. First, the nineteenth-century one. In 1892, a young man gets on a train going from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana. Because Louisiana trains have recently been segregated, he can enter either a coach reserved for whites or one marked COLORED. Despite the fact that he is very light-skinned (he is only one-eighth black, and his lawyer would later claim “the mixture of colored blood” was not “discernible”), when he enters the one for whites, he is identified as black and the conductor asks

him to leave. When he refuses, he's arrested. Since his goal is to get the practice of separating the races declared illegal, he immediately petitions for a hearing before the Louisiana Supreme Court, and then, after he loses there, he takes his case to the US Supreme Court, where his lawyer argues that the state has no right to "label one citizen as white and another as colored" and that the conductor's decision to label him black was "arbitrary."

But he loses again. There are "physical differences" between white people and black people, the Court says, and they have different "racial instincts," and these differences justify the state of Louisiana in requiring whites and blacks to ride in different coaches. So, despite Justice John Harlan's famous dissent—"Our Constitution is color-blind"—the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* officially inaugurates more than a half century of Jim Crow, of separate schools, separate hospitals, separate water coolers, separate everything.

Now the twentieth-century story. In 1977, a New Orleans woman named Susie Guillory Phipps applies for a passport and goes to the Bureau of Vital Records to get a copy of her birth certificate. In 1977, things are a lot different than they were in 1896. Segregation is now against the law. No one, not even the Louisiana court that will in 1985 have to decide whether she's black or white, believes in Susie Phipps's "racial instincts"—in fact, the court will call the whole idea of racial classification for individuals "scientifically insupportable." And the "physical differences" that had already begun to look a little tenuous in *Plessy* (remember, Homer Plessy's "colored blood" was "not discernible") are in this case ludicrously invisible. The fair-skinned and fair-haired Phipps has lived for forty-three years as a white woman. Not until the birth certificate produced by the Bureau of Vital Records said she was "colored" had anybody ever told her different, and when the Bureau of Vital Records refuses to change her birth certificate, she, like Homer Plessy, goes to court. And, like Homer Plessy, she loses.

The reason that Phipps isn't as famous as *Plessy*, of course, is that an entire social system—Jim Crow—wasn't riding on her case. But the point of telling both these stories is that something important was: not the persistence of segregation by race but the persistence of race itself, the conviction that we can sort different kinds of humans out by assigning them to races. Homer Plessy looked like the other people on the whites-only coach, but he was nonetheless identified—indeed, in order to get himself arrested and get the constitutional challenge to the new law started, he must have identified himself—as a black man. How else could the conductor know to arrest him? Susie Phipps wasn't identified by anybody—including herself—as a black woman, and yet she turned out to be black too. Why is Phipps black? What is race if you get to belong to one without looking like

you do, without feeling like you do, and without even knowing that you do?

In an officially racist society like the one Homer Plessy lived in, this question was obviously important; you can't exclude the black people unless you know which ones they are. In our society, where the commitment is not to disrespecting but to respecting racial difference, it's just as important; you can't celebrate people's blackness unless you can define it. The recent history of the science of race, however, has raised doubts about whether you can define it, and has turned the question raised by people like Plessy and Phipps—why do they belong to the black race?—into the more general question: are there such things as races? And while this question is potentially awkward—since if there aren't any races, what differences are we respecting—there are important ways in which the difficulty of pinning race down has worked to keep it central. As race has turned from a biological into a social fact, racial diversity has morphed into cultural diversity, and a world of cultural—rather than economic or political or even religious—differences has proven to be a very attractive one for many. From this perspective, we might even say that the more amorphous our concept of race has become, the more applicable it has become as a model for treating all difference.

Today we don't talk so much about blood anymore, we talk about genes, and we are able to trace people's ancestry with a specificity that would have amazed even the most passionate nineteenth-century aficionados of physical difference and racial instincts. But it would also have disappointed them, because it has turned out that the more we know about genetic heritage, the more skeptical most scientists have become about the idea of race. In fact, the dominant scientific view now is that race is a myth, and that as a biological rather than a social construct, race has ceased to be seen as a fundamental reality characterizing the human species.

The reason for this is not, of course, that there aren't any physical differences between people. People clearly do have different skin colors and different textures of hair, and we all have ancestors who came from different places or who came out of Africa at different times. The problem is that genetic variation within populations belonging to what we call the same race is often greater than genetic variation between races. So a person from the Congo and a person from Mali are more likely to be genetically different from each other than either is from a person from Belgium. Hence it doesn't make genetic sense to think of people from Mali and the Congo as belonging to the same race and of Belgians as belonging to a different race. On the one hand, then, there are people whose ancestors came from Belgium and people whose ancestors came from Mali and people whose ancestors came from Thailand. But, on the other hand, there isn't—at least from the scientific standpoint—any white or black or Asian race. So it's not that there aren't

“physical differences” (in this sense the Court in *Plessy* had it right); it’s just that there aren’t physical differences between races.

This point is nicely illustrated by recent discoveries about the apparent link between disease and race. For many years, at least in the United States, sickle cell anemia has been a disease—and, of course, a disease of the blood—customarily identified with black people. But it turns out that we can’t really distinguish between black people and white people (between black blood and white blood) by invoking a genetic association with sickle cell. For one thing, not all of the people we call black actually have such an association, since it is characteristic among people whose ancestors were at one point centered in parts of West and Central Africa and isn’t at all associated with black people whose ancestry is elsewhere in Africa. And, for another, there are people we think of as white (i.e., certain parts of the Greek population) with whom the trait is associated. The unifying factor is apparently descent from people who lived where malaria was a problem, since the sickle cell trait is a variant of traits that protect against malaria. Thus in a country composed largely of white people from the Mediterranean and of black people from southern Africa, sickle cell would be thought of as a white disease.

The same point can be made, from the opposite angle, for other groups. Tay-Sachs is supposedly a Jewish disease, but, among Jews, it’s only the Ashkenazi (from eastern Europe) who are frequent carriers, and frequent carriers include non-Jewish populations like French Canadians from the area near the St. Lawrence River. In a country where the population consisted of French Canadians and Sephardic instead of Ashkenazi Jews, Tay-Sachs would be most accurately describable not as a disease Jews get but as a disease Jews don’t get. More striking still, if we imagined a country composed of Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and French Canadians, and we used the statistical probability of being a carrier for the Tay-Sachs gene as a marker of racial difference in our imaginary country, the question of what race you belonged to would have nothing to do with the question of whether you were Jewish. The people formerly known as Jews would belong to both races.

“What joins me to other blacks and other blacks to one another, is not a set of shared physical characteristics, for there is none that all blacks share. Rather it is the shared experience of being visually or cognitively identified as black.”

And once you get identified as black—or Jewish or Asian—there’s no point in telling the person who’s identified you that the physical characteris-

tics are irrelevant, that the genetic differences between you and some other blacks are greater than the genetic differences between you and some other non-blacks, and so calling you black (or Jewish or Asian) doesn't establish any further connection with some biological group (i.e., a race), but just tells you where (some of) your ancestors came from.

The Office of Management and Budget's guidelines for collecting census data about racial identity emphasize, just as the Louisiana court did, that "racial and ethnic data categories are social-political constructs and that they should not be interpreted as being genetic, biological, or anthropological in nature."

But what are you perceiving when you perceive yourself as white? Remember, the only reason that anyone—the courts, the federal government—is interested in your perception of race in the first place is that they're all agreed that there is no biological fact of the matter about what race you belong to. That's why the OMB says that race is not like, say, age, and why it allows census recorders to correct the information when, for example, someone born on January 1, 1950, says on January 1, 2000, that he's thirty years old. Being fifty years old is not a social construction; you aren't fifty because people perceive you as being fifty or because you perceive yourself as being fifty. You're fifty because, however people perceive you—he looks old, he looks young, she dresses as if she thinks she's still thirty—there is some fact of the matter independent of the perception. So when the OMB asks you how old you are, it isn't asking you how old you feel. But when it asks you what race you are, that's exactly what it is asking you.

The idea of race as a social construction was meant to register the fact that even if we don't any longer believe in race as a biological entity, we still treat people as if they belonged to races. Indeed, we routinely—both officially (the government does it) and unofficially (we all do it)—organize the world racially. Susie Phipps's mother would have a lot more choices filling out her birth certificate today, from **WHITE** and **BLACK** to **AMERICAN INDIAN** to **FILIPINO** to **OTHER ASIAN (SPECIFY)** to just plain **OTHER**. And she would be allowed to check as many boxes as she wanted. When you're born American, you're also born black or white or Guamanian or Chamorro.

But we shouldn't think that just because we keep on treating people as if they belonged to races, they somehow do, or that our treating people as if they belonged to races is its own justification. Treating race as a social fact amounts to nothing more than acknowledging that we were mistaken to think of it as a biological fact and then insisting that we ought to keep making the mistake. Maybe instead we ought to stop making the mistake.

But apparently no one wants to stop making it. Often we continue to talk about races as if we knew what they were. Even more often, when

race begins to seem to us a little crude, we redescribe it as culture, taking remarks like “black people are good at basketball because they can jump higher” and turning them into remarks like “basketball plays an important role in black culture.” Thus we don’t hear much in the United States about multiracialism (as opposed to, say, in Singapore where it’s an official policy and is heavily promoted on occasions like Racial Harmony Day), but we hear a great deal about multiculturalism. And if we don’t yet, like Canada, have our very own Multiculturalism Day, we do have an increasing number of Diversity Days, sponsored by individual schools and organizations, where people celebrate their different cultures.

People today may not be entirely comfortable talking about their racial identities, but they’ve already had a lot of practice talking about their cultural identities and about the importance both of cultural memory (don’t forget the Holocaust) and of heritage (don’t forget the Middle Passage). They’re not likely to say, for example, that they’re proud of their race—that’s what those evil white supremacists or radical Black Panthers do—but they are very proud of their culture and they think other people should be proud of their cultures too. To some extent, then, culture is now being used as a virtual synonym for racial identity (the ‘multi’ in multiculturalism has nothing to do with some people liking Mozart and other people liking the Strokes), and to some extent it’s also being used as a replacement for racial identity.

An immediate objection to this way of thinking about culture instead of race is that it just takes the old practice of racial stereotyping and renovates it in the form of cultural stereotyping. Most reasonable observers would agree that, in general, blacks are distinguished from non-blacks by some distinctive cultural practices, but remember that lots of supposedly black cultural traits—from eating soul food to wearing your hair in cornrows—not only are practiced by some whites but are not practiced by most blacks.

If we ask the question what is it that makes gay people gay—what is it that constitutes their being gay, not what causes it—we have an answer. We’re not stereotyping gay people by saying that they all want to sleep with people of the same sex; we’re defining them. So what’s the behavior that makes black people black? There is no equivalent answer. You can be black and not like Jay-Z and not wear your hair in cornrows and not eat soul food and not do any or all of the things currently or historically associated with black culture. And, conversely, there’s nothing you can do that will make you black in the same way that same-sex desire makes gay people gay. If, starting tomorrow, the only people who listened to or performed hip-hop were white (we’re already halfway there), hip-hop would be a part of white culture, and if every black kid in the country were into emo, emo would be

a part of black culture. It's not the blackness of the culture that makes the people black; it's the blackness of the people that makes the culture black.

Two things make the notion of culture look like an attractive alternative to race. One is that culture is learned rather than inherited (it's on the nurture side of nature/nurture); the other is that culture is a looser concept than race; not all black people have to love *The Black Album* in order for it to be a part of black culture (and some white people can love it too). The problem is that the minute we call black culture black, both these advantages disappear since in order for a sentence like 'Some white people are really into black culture' to make sense, we have to have a definition of white and black people that is completely independent of their culture. Culture cannot replace our concept of race as a biological entity. Learning how to rap doesn't make you a black person; it just makes you a rapper. The problem with culture, then, is that it's utterly dependent on race. We can only say what counts as white or black or Jewish culture if we already know who the whites and blacks and Jews are.

The situation is exactly the same for the notions of heritage and memory that go along with the idea of cultural identity. Suppose, for example, that in an American literature class, I teach both Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Suppose further that sitting in the front row are a black student and a white one. Neither of them has ever read either of these books. Here's one way we could describe what's about to happen. Each student is about to be given the opportunity to do two things: learn about her own heritage and learn about someone else's heritage as well. When we read the Emerson, the white student will be learning about her heritage; when we read the Douglass, she'll learning about someone else's. And the black student will be doing the same thing in reverse. But why should this be?

Why is it that some books we've never read are supposed to count as part of our cultural heritage while other books we've also never read count as part of someone else's heritage (even though they've never read them either)? And what about if they have read them? We can imagine a black student raised by ex-hippie parents, forced as a child to listen to the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead and read to sleep with Thoreau and Emerson (which sent her right off). It can't really make sense to say that when she reads Emerson in class, she's learning about someone else's heritage. To think that, we'd have to think that your cultural heritage has nothing to do with the books you actually read and has only to do instead with books that are somehow imagined as genetically appropriate for you to read. But, as successful as the Human Genome Project has been, nobody has yet located—nobody is even bothering to look for—the Emerson gene.

Furthermore, even if there were an Emerson gene, it wouldn't make sense of our concept of cultural heritage, since it would of course be reproduction not instruction that kept *Nature* in the canon. The things we do have genes for—like sickle cell anemia and Tay-Sachs disease—are part of our genetic heritage, not our cultural heritage, and our genetic heritage is not the sort of thing it makes sense to be proud of or ashamed of, not the sort of thing we can be true to or give up. When people worry about losing their culture, they aren't worrying about the gene pool. In Quebec, for example, French speakers are worried that their language and their culture more generally will disappear, that French-speaking Canada will be utterly assimilated to English-speaking Canada. Hence their demand that public life in Quebec be carried on in French, and that the use of English be minimized; it provides an incentive for their children to keep speaking French instead of (or at least in addition to) English. But if there were a biological link between the French language and their children, their worry would make no sense. We don't worry, for example, that a child whose genetic heritage has destined him to be tall will, surrounded by short people, be assimilated into shortness. And, to turn the example around, we wouldn't think that if a child genetically slated for shortness managed—by eating the right foods or taking growth hormones—to get tall, he had betrayed his shortness. The dramas of assimilation—the demand that we be loyal to our heritage, the fear that we will fall away from it—depend precisely upon it not being biological.

Even those (the vast majority) who are critical of racism and who do not believe in the biology of racial identity have continued to insist that race is a central and even desirable factor in American life. Thus in what is certainly the most influential academic text on the social construction of race (*Racial Formation in the United States*), the authors write that there are two “temptations” to be avoided in thinking about race. The first is the temptation to think of it as something “fixed, concrete, and objective,” that is, a physical fact. The second is the temptation to think of it as a “mere illusion,” which “an ideal social order would eliminate.” “Race,” they say, “will always be at the center of the American experience,” and it's a good thing too because “without a racial identity, one is in danger of having no identity.”

We've seen some of the ways in which people have gone about trying to make sure that this prediction comes true and to guarantee that even if people can't belong to concrete and objective races, they can still have (social or cultural) racial identities. And what we've also begun to see is how our commitment to diversity is deeply tied to keeping race alive, partly because diversity is itself understood as racial and partly because our

commitment to diversity even with nonracialized groups depends on treating them as if they were races—different but equal, worthy of our respect. What we haven't seen is why. Why are we so eager to keep race at the center of the American experience? Why does racial difference remain so important to us when the racism it was used to justify is so widely condemned and when the basic idea about race that gave it its power—the idea that there are fundamental physical or cultural differences between people that line up with our division of them into black, white, et cetera—has been discredited? Why are we so desperate to have identities that we continue to care about them even when they get reduced to nothing more than the proud boast that you belong to a population with a 1 in 27 chance of being a carrier for the Tay-Sachs gene?

Distracting From Class

It's not so surprising that the relatively recent emergence of the Holocaust as an event in American history has produced a certain exasperation among African Americans, memorably expressed by the notorious black racist Khalid Muhammad when, in the wake of a visit to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, he told an audience at Howard University in April 1994:

“The black holocaust was 100 times worse than the so-called Jew Holocaust. You say you lost 6 million, we question that, but we lost 600 million. Schindler's List is really a swindler's list.”

The force of these remarks consists not in the absurd Holocaust denial but in the point—made precisely by his visit to the Holocaust Museum—that commemoration of the Nazi murder of the Jews on the Mall was in fact another kind of Holocaust denial, or, more precisely, the denial of another Holocaust. Why should what the Germans did to the Jews be treated as a crucial event in American history, especially when—given the absence of any commemoration of American racism on the Mall—what Americans did to black people is not?

It tells a story that—embodied in the martyrdom of Leo Frank and in the construction of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum—many of us treat as if it were true. It's believable because we think of antisemitism as a significant factor in American history and of the success of Jews in American life as a tribute to the ways in which Jews and America itself overcame that antisemitism. But this is false. Compared to Negrophobia, antisemitism was never a very significant factor in American life. The fact that Jews were white was almost always more important than the fact that they were Jewish, and Jewish success in America today is less an effect of the triumph over racism than it is an effect of the triumph of racism.

If we look at the history of American apartheid, we will remember that money didn't always function as an alternative to race; sometimes it was a way of insisting on race. The poll tax, for example, was one of several devices used in the South for precisely the purpose of drawing the color line where it was no longer legal to do so. The Fourteenth Amendment had made it unconstitutional to keep black people from voting because they were black, but it did not (and would not until the passage of the Twenty-fourth Amendment in 1964) make it illegal to charge a fee for voting. The poll tax could thus be used to deny most black people the right to vote not because they were black but (ostensibly) because they were poor. And if, in theory, the law applied to poor whites too, the infamous “grandfather” clause set

that right. You were exempt from paying the tax if you could prove your grandfather had voted, a test that the children and grandchildren of slaves could never pass.

So the supposedly race-neutral poll tax was in fact one of the first in over a century's worth of color-blind efforts to draw the color line. And as the civil rights movement not only undid the apparatus of state-sponsored discrimination but made serious inroads into the technologies of private discrimination as well, charging people a lot of money (for your food, your school, your golf course and tennis courts) would be a handy way of enforcing the racialized hierarchies of American life. The reason you can't get in here is not that your skin is the wrong color; it's that your bank account is too small. **OUR PRICES DISCRIMINATE BECAUSE WE CAN'T**, reads the sign at what an old episode of *The Simpsons* calls "the rich people's mall." What the state now refuses to do, the market will do for it. Part of the joke in *The Simpsons*, then, is the way the banner tells the truth about racism: high prices can achieve what the law forbids.

But the real joke is the way in which the banner tells a quite different truth, not so much about racism as about the new irrelevance of racism. After all, it's the rich people's mall, not the white people's mall, and the monetarization of the technology of discrimination involves not just a new way of keeping the wrong people out but a new description of who the wrong people are—not the blacks, not the Jews, but the poor. It's as if the poll tax were being applied but without the grandfather clause. And when the point is put this way, we can go one step farther and see that the whole idea of the wrong people has become irrelevant. High prices aren't a clever way of keeping out the poor. The purpose of charging high prices is not to find an indirect way of excluding those whom the law no longer allows you to exclude. People who can't afford to ride in first class, people who shop at (not to mention work at) Walmart instead of at the rich people's mall, are the victims of poverty, not of prejudice. No one even needs to draw the money line; it draws itself.

Although, at the beginning of the twentieth century, segregation wasn't a problem for most Americans or for the Supreme Court, interference with freedom of contract was. In a famous case of 1905, for example, the Court struck down a New York state law that prohibited employees in bakeries from being "required or permitted" to work more than ten hours a day or sixty hours a week. Joseph Lochner, the owner of Lochner's Home Bakery, had been fined for overworking an employee, and on appeal the Court overturned his conviction, declaring that the Bakeshop Act infringed upon "the right of the individual to labor for such time as he may choose" and thereby violated both employer's and employee's "liberty of contract." When

Chesnutt protests against the infringement on his doctor's ability to ride in the first-class car, he is just asking that black doctors be guaranteed the same freedoms as white bakers.

By contrast, no one's liberty of contract is violated when poor people don't shop at the rich people's mall. Rather, the poor people who decline to shop there are like bakers who decide not to work for Lochner. They're just exercising their freedom of contract—in this case, by refusing to enter into one. If you don't like the hours, you don't have to take the job; if you don't like the price, you don't have to buy the product. The injustice in Chesnutt, then, is that racism and the drawing of the color line interfere with the market. If you're forced to ride with the malodorous farm laborers because you're poor, that's unfortunate but not unfair. If you're forced to ride with them because you're black, that's another story. So the poor are not victims of discrimination; they are the unfortunate by-products of an essentially just mechanism—the market. Poverty, in other words, is not a civil rights issue. The government kept black people from voting, and eventually the government made it possible for black people to start voting. The government kept women from voting, and it eventually allowed them to vote too. But you don't need the government to keep poor people from shopping at the rich people's mall. And you can't get the government to enable poor people to start shopping there.

The exemplary instance of victimization in modern American political life remains the victim of discrimination. It's the violation of people's rights as citizens—the failure of the liberal state to live up to its liberalism—that we prefer to deplore. The problem in Chesnutt is not that the farm laborers can't afford to ride in the clean comfortable car; it's that some people who can afford to (like Dr. Miller) aren't allowed to. And Leo Frank—"the Jew they lynched in Georgia because of that little factory girl"—is a version of Dr. Miller, a man whose class can't save him from his race. Indeed, part of the attraction of the Leo Frank story may be the way in which it testifies to the triumph of racial prejudice over class privilege, which is to say, the way in which it demonstrates the irrelevance of wealth and (from the standpoint of the racist) turns class warfare into white supremacy while (from the standpoint of the antiracist) turning class warfare into bigotry.

If you're a racist, it shows you that racism is the solution; if you're an antiracist, it shows you that racism is the problem. Either way, antisemitism is a kind of gift since it makes over the rational anger of the poor as the irrational anger of the racist and enables everyone to agree that the real issue here is not money but race. So if racism makes economic issues irrelevant by asserting that what really matters is the difference between races, antiracism does exactly the same thing. The difference is just that one condemns what

the other celebrates. For both, the fundamental conflicts are between races; antiracism, just as reliably as racism, turns the hostility between rich and poor into the hostility between black and white, Christian and Jew.

When, for example, we look today at old photographs of lynchings, we're shocked not only by the events themselves but by the participants' lack of shame, by the way in which they not only seem happy to be photographed but actually look proud of what they're doing. It's one thing, after all, to be racist; almost all of us are prepared to acknowledge that we each have a little bit of racism hidden away somewhere inside. But it's another thing altogether to be proud of one's racism. Which the lynchers were. Indeed, part of the attraction of lynching was precisely its publicness, its status as an expression of the will of the people. Thus although lynching was always against the law (that's what made it lynching) and often disapproved of, lynchers themselves tended to feel not only that they were doing the right thing but also that they were representing the community. They were doing what everyone knew was right, even if the law was on the other side.

And there was a great deal of public support for their view; none of the more than two-hundred bills condemning lynching managed to get through the US Congress, and it was not until 2005 that the Senate took any action, in the form of an apology for its earlier failure to act. But the fact that the Senate in the twenty-first century was extremely (indeed, unanimously) happy to apologize for its failures in the twentieth century has its own significance. For one thing, by 2005, lynching had become more a figure of speech than an actual event, describing people who were (or who claimed to be) treated unfairly (e.g. Clarence Thomas) rather than people who were hanged from a tree or burned at the stake. And, for another, even the fictional representations of lynchings had moved out of the mainstream.

It's true that the white supremacists in what is probably the most important racist novel of the recent past, Andrew Macdonald's *The Turner Diaries*, are just as proud as and even more ambitious than Dixon's; they lynch not only black rapists but any black men who sleep with white women, and then they lynch the white women too, adorning their corpses with placards that say: I DEFILED MY RACE. But the audience just isn't there. Where *The Clansman* was published by Doubleday and sold at fine bookstores everywhere, *The Turner Diaries* was published by a white supremacist organization called the National Alliance and was (and is) sold mainly at gun shows. That's where Timothy McVeigh got his copy. And if *The Clansman* is best known today as the racist bestseller that inspired an equally racist blockbuster movie—D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (personally endorsed by President Woodrow Wilson)—*The Turner Diaries* is best known today as the inspiration for the bombing of the federal

building in Oklahoma City. Woodrow Wilson famously took one of the last things in American society left unsegregated—the federal civil service—and segregated it. His racism was central to American life, a fundamental part of what then was mainstream American political thought. Now, a century later, the racism of *The Turner Diaries* and of Timothy McVeigh has been pushed to the margins.

Antihate rallies are obviously different from other kinds of events, such as antiwar rallies; there could be and sometimes are pro-war rallies, but there aren't any pro-hate rallies. Even people who do, in fact, hate don't think it's appropriate to have rallies supporting hate, any more than people who steal things think it's appropriate to have rallies supporting theft. The antihate demonstration, then, is mobilized not in response to the pro-hate position but in response to the expression of what the FBI, in its definition of hate crimes, calls bias. There are a lot of antihate rallies in reaction against people using racial slurs or painting swastikas on dorm walls, and nearly everyone will agree that racial slurs and swastikas on dorm walls are a bad thing. Indeed, it's precisely everyone's agreement that makes antihate rallies so powerful: they express a consensus.

But it's also everyone's agreement that makes them a little puzzling. Why are we so committed to combating a position that no one actually holds? Why, in a world where most of us are not racist (where, on the humanities faculties at our universities, we might more plausibly say not that racism is rare but that it is extinct), do we take so much pleasure in reading attacks on racism? Why do we like it so much that not only do we read books that attack a racism that no longer exists—Plessy was overruled a half century ago, and it's been a long time since Wilson was president—but we also make bestsellers out of books that attack a racism that never existed (Lindbergh never was president). What—to put the question in its most general form—is the meaning of antiracism today?

One way to begin to answer this question might be to suggest that antiracism activates a certain nostalgia. There is a nostalgia for Jim Crow among some black intellectuals. What they're nostalgic for is black culture. They're nostalgic, in other words, not exactly for racism but for the distinctive social practices—cultural armor—that the resistance to racism helped create. On the one hand, Jim Crow impoverished and disempowered an entire community; on the other, it solidified that community's identity as a community. The creation of a distinctive African American culture was thus both a consequence of racism and a kind of compensation for it. But African American political life begins to look very different when the terms of the inequality that produced it begin to change, and this produces a certain awkwardness, especially for successful black intellectuals.

Chesnutt's Dr. Miller looks problematic because he doesn't want to ride Jim Crow with the other black people. But he has to. He can't get people to recognize that his class is more important than his race. Today's Dr. Millers look problematic because even when they're riding in what amounts to their very own super-deluxe coach, they think of themselves and want to be thought of by others as riding Jim Crow. They want their race to matter more than their class. And they are nostalgic for Jim Crow because racial segregation created a genuine bond between them and other, poorer—much poorer—black people while the end of segregation placed them in an attractive but difficult position, making possible their great success but only by threatening the bond. Dr. Miller thought that belonging to the black race was not enough to establish community between people of very different classes; some black intellectuals hope that belonging to black culture is.

But antiracism serves another more important and more properly political purpose. As we've seen, the central debates about race in America today are no longer debates between racism and antiracism. Rather, the debate today is between two kinds of antiracism. One, identified with multiculturalism and the left, urges us to respect and preserve the differences between blacks and whites and Native Americans and Jews and whoever. It gives poor people identities and, turning them into black people or Latinx or women, insists on regarding their problems as effects of discrimination and intolerance. The other, identified with the right, regards the respect for racial difference as itself a form of discrimination and insists that the only identity that matters (the one we should be respecting) is "American identity." Where contemporary liberalism's antiracism argues that we can solve our problems by respecting racial difference, contemporary conservatism's antiracism maintains we can solve our problems only by eliminating or ignoring it.

The problem with this debate—or, looked at another way, the virtue of this debate—is that, from the standpoint of economic inequality, it doesn't matter which side you're on and it doesn't matter who wins. Either way, economic inequality is absolutely untouched. The dream of a world free of prejudice, the dream of a world where identities—whether American or hyphenated-American—are not discriminated against, is as foundational to the right as it is to the left. And this dream is completely compatible with—is, actually, essential to—the dream of a truly free and efficient market. Here's where the concept of neoliberalism—the idea of the free market as the essential mechanism of social justice—is genuinely clarifying. A society free not only of racism but of sexism and of heterosexism is a neoliberal utopia where all the irrelevant grounds for inequality have been eliminated and whatever inequalities are left are therefore legitimated.

Thus, when it comes to antiracism, the left is more like a police force for,

than an alternative to, the right. Its commitment to rooting out the residual prejudices that too many of us no doubt continue to harbor deep inside is a tacit commitment to the efficiency of the market. And its commitment to the idea that the victims of social injustice today are the victims of racism, sexism, and heterosexism—the victims of discrimination rather than exploitation, of intolerance rather than oppression, or of oppression in the form of intolerance—is a commitment to the essential justice of the market. The preferred crimes of neoliberalism are always hate crimes; when our favorite victims are the victims of prejudice, we are all neoliberals.

The US Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in 1993; the National Museum of the American Indian opened on the Mall in 2004 and if Khalid Muhammad had only lived a little longer, he might have died happy since the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution has now approved plans for a National Museum of African-American History and Culture near the Washington Monument. Old-style racists like Jesse Helms were against it, but new-style antiracists like Dick Cheney and John Roberts and Bill Frist and Thad Cochran (a senator from Mississippi who doesn't make racist remarks) are all for it.

It goes without saying, however, that there won't—and that there shouldn't—be a National Museum of Lower-Income Americans on the Mall. It's hard to see what good it would be to poor people to start celebrating their culture, much less their survival as a group. We don't worry that poor people run the risk of assimilation to wealth, which is to say, we don't seek to preserve the distinctive things—the bad educations, the inadequate health care—that make poor people who they are. We do think of at least some poor people as inheriting their poverty, but we don't think of their poverty as their heritage; so, for example, where it makes sense to say of some people that they are 'part Jewish' or 'part black,' we don't think it makes sense to say of anyone that he or she is 'part poor' or 'part rich.' There may be people of mixed race, but there are no people of mixed income; we don't even have the concept of mixed income. Above all, we don't, whether or not we are ourselves poor, think that poverty is just as good as wealth, even if—especially if—we think that poor people are just as good as rich people.

The meaning of antiracism today is thus that it gives us an ideal—the ideal of a society without prejudice—that we can all sign on to at the very moment when the inadequacy of that ideal should be entirely obvious. The gap between the rich and the poor may be growing on a daily basis, but when it comes to difference, we prefer fighting racism to fighting poverty. And the distinction between our conservatives and our liberals is just that our conservatives think we've already won that fight while our liberals think we've only just begun. Another way to put this is to say that our

conservatives and our liberals more or less agree about what a just society would be. That's why mainstream commentators like David Brooks can confidently insist that even though the country seems to be "polarized," "this isn't an ideological moment, liberal or conservative." Of course, no moment ever seems like an ideological moment to Brooks, but he's not alone in this and he's not mistaken.

The quarrel between people who think we don't have enough diversity and people who think we have just the right amount is a quarrel over management techniques, not over political ideology. With respect to economic inequality, there is no quarrel; what we might call the neoliberal consensus prevails. The only inequalities we're prepared to do anything about are the ones that interfere with the free market. Chesnutt, insisting that segregation (and especially the law against miscegenation) violated "liberty of contract," was an early adopter. There was no injustice, he thought, in the fact that many people couldn't afford to ride in the first-class car on the train; the injustice was to the people who could afford to ride in that car but weren't allowed to. The injustice was intolerance of racial difference, not acceptance of economic difference.

And this scenario is what gives the fantasy of the rich people's mall its force. The fantasy part, of course, is not that there are such things as rich people's malls. The fantasy is the idea that the injustice in not being able to shop there is the injustice of being discriminated against. Or, to turn the point around, that rich people's malls are fine as long as they're diverse, as long as the black and brown rich people get to buy expensive stuff alongside the white ones. How else can we explain the flurry of disapproval surrounding Hermès's refusal to unlock its doors for some after-hours shopping by Oprah Winfrey? "After-hours shopping is a favor," noted the *Washington Post*. "There's nothing wrong with a store saying not tonight, madame, as long as the reason doesn't have anything to do with skin color." In this universe, social justice means that Oprah Winfrey (like Dr. Miller) ought to be able to spend her money in the same ways the white celebrities (or white doctors) do.

"The problem of the twentieth century," W. E. B. Du Bois observed at its beginning, will be "the problem of the color line." It looks like the twenty-first century will also be fond of that problem. The difference is that the work that used to be done by racism—the work of obscuring class difference—is now done by antiracism. The controversy over the government's response to the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina is a case in point. It's like an inverted version of the question about the "rich Jew" Leo Frank: was he lynched because he was Jewish or because he was rich? Is the relevant thing about all those people abandoned in New Orleans the fact that they are black

or the fact that they are poor? We like blaming racism, but the truth is there weren't too many rich black people left behind when everybody who could get out of New Orleans did so. The Republican party policies that left the poor behind were not racist, and the economic inequality in American society has grown under Democratic presidents as well as Republicans. This doesn't mean, of course, that racism didn't play a role in New Orleans. It just means that in a society without any racial discrimination, there would still have been poor people who couldn't find their way out of New Orleans. Whereas in a society without poor people (even a racist society without poor people), there wouldn't have been.

Racism requires a commitment to the inequality of the races; antiracism requires a commitment to their equality. And here obviously is one key to the attraction of cultural diversity. It gives us a vision of difference without inequality. For our core conception of culture involves the idea that cultures are essentially and in principle equal, and so it makes no sense to think of a society organized into cultures as hierarchical. When we imagine, in other words, that we live in a world divided into different cultures, what we're imagining is that the political commitment to equality involves not creating it (by, say, redistributing wealth) but just insisting that it's already there. The problem, in this account, is that people have for various reasons (e.g. racism) failed to recognize their essential equality; the solution is to get them to recognize it. The great advantage of culture, then, is that it gives us a model of differences we can love, like those between Asian Americans and Caucasians rather than differences (like the ones between smart people and stupid people or, more to the point, rich people and poor people) that are not so obviously appealing. And the enthusiasm for the lovable differences is widespread.

For college students, after all, your ethnicity is something you can be proud of in a way that your poverty or even your wealth (since it's your parents' wealth) is not. But the greatest value of diversity is not primarily in the contribution it makes to students' self-esteem. Its real value, as the widespread acceptance of affirmative action shows, is in the contribution it makes to the collective fantasy that institutions like Harvard and UIC are—internally and in relation to each other—meritocracies. For if the students at Harvard are appropriately diverse, we know that no student is being kept from Harvard because of his or her race or culture. Every institution, in an ideal affirmative-action world, has the right cultural mix. How, then, do some students end up at Harvard and some at UIC? Since the differences between them that produce this divergence are not—indeed cannot be—cultural (remember, cultures are equal), they are attributed instead to the merit of the individual. As long as we think of people as

belonging to cultures and we think of cultures as equal, we are enabled also to think of the inequalities between people (their test scores, for example) as individual.

This helps explain the popularity on campus (especially among students at the most elite campuses) of affirmative action; it is a powerful tool for legitimizing their sense of their individual merit. Affirmative action guarantees that all cultures will be represented on campus, that no one will be penalized unjustly for belonging to a culture, and therefore that the white students on campus can understand themselves to be there on merit because they didn't get there at the expense of any black people. The problem with affirmative action is not (as is often said) that it violates the principles of meritocracy; the problem is that it produces the illusion that we actually have a meritocracy. We are often reminded of how white our classrooms would look if we did away with affirmative action. But imagine what that Harvard classroom would look like if instead we replaced race-based affirmative action with a genuinely class-based affirmative action.

The median family income in the United States today is a little over \$54,000 per year; almost 90 percent of Harvard students come from families with more than that, so at least half of them would have to go. And almost 75 percent of Harvard students come from families with incomes over \$100,000 per year, although only a little over 20 percent of American families have incomes that high. So most of them would have to go too. If the income distribution at Harvard were made to look like the income distribution of the United States, over half the people in that room would be gone and a great many of the disappeared would be rich and white. It's no wonder that rich white kids and their parents aren't complaining about diversity. Race-based affirmative action, from this standpoint, is a kind of collective bribe rich people pay themselves for ignoring economic inequality. The fact—and it is a fact—that it doesn't help to be white to get into Harvard replaces the much more fundamental fact that it does help to be rich and that it's virtually essential not to be poor.

Hence the irrelevance of Harvard's 2004 announcement that it wouldn't ask parents who earn less than \$40,000 a year to help pay for their children's education, an irrelevance that has only been increased by the fact that it has already (starting in 2006) raised the income ceiling to \$60,000. While this is no doubt great news to those financially pressed students who have gone to top high schools, taken college-prep courses and scored well on their SATs, it's bound to seem a little beside the point to the great majority of the poor, since what's keeping them out of elite universities is not their inability to pay the bill but their inability to qualify for admission in the first place. Even if elite schools followed what is meant to be the radical

advice of those who urge Harvard to send an even more powerful message by eliminating tuition altogether, it wouldn't be of much use to the poor, since by far the largest beneficiaries would be the rich and upper-middle-class students whose parents have paid for private schools or bought houses in expensive neighborhoods, thereby subsidizing the best public schools with their property taxes. Finally, after spending all that money (private schools in New York can now run over \$30,000 a year; the "platinum package" at a "college preparation service" like IvyWise costs another \$30,000; the houses in the really good suburbs cost millions), they would catch a break—free Harvard!

Harvard is not likely to eliminate tuition, but the major trend in American education certainly has been toward rewarding the wealthy when it comes time to pay for college. This is obvious at public universities, where the number of students coming from rich families has risen sharply. At schools like the University of Michigan and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 40 percent of the freshmen in 2004 came from families making over \$100,000 a year. And it's even more obvious with respect to the widespread replacement of need-based with merit-based scholarships.

Researchers make this point sharply in their assessment of the effect of the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship Program, funded by tobacco lawsuit settlement funds and designed "to increase access to post-secondary education." They show that at a school like Grosse Ile High, where 64 percent of the students qualified for the merit scholarships, 94 percent of the graduating seniors were already heading to college before the program was established. At Hamtramck High School, by contrast, the college participation rate is only 30 percent and only 14 percent of the students qualified for the award. So these scholarships don't increase access to college; they mainly provide extra funds for kids who were already going. Furthermore, the kids who are already going are the ones who least need the scholarships in the first place. The median family income in Grosse Ile is \$96,226 a year. The median family income in Hamtramck is \$30,496 a year.

One way you can put it is that where need-based scholarships give money to the poor, merit-based scholarships give money to the deserving. Another way you can put it is that where need-based scholarships give money to the poor, merit-based scholarships give money to the rich.

The function of the (very few) poor people at Harvard is to reassure the (very many) rich people at Harvard that you can't just buy your way in.

While it no doubt matters to your self-esteem if you go to one of the really prestigious elite schools instead of to one of the not-so-prestigious ones, it doesn't much matter to your economic position; the graduates of Trinity are also being ushered out of upper-middle-class adolescence into

upper-middle-class adulthood. The difference between the people who go to Trinity and the ones who go to Harvard is a difference in status, not class. Status usually refers to where a person stands in a social hierarchy, but it's crucially not reducible to where a person stands economically. Rather, the inequalities of status presume a certain equality of wealth. The happy senior who's been admitted to Brown has a higher status than the bitter one who's going to Trinity only insofar as whatever economic difference there may be between them doesn't count.

Indeed, inequalities of status are never more powerful than when they're utterly disconnected from inequalities of class. If we can't imagine that we competed on a level playing field, how can we take any pleasure in winning? Because status is not reducible to money, you can think of your high status as having nothing to do with your wealth. And just as the rewards of status presume the irrelevance of material inequality, so do its defeats. When you think your real problem is not that people have more money than you but that the people who have more money condescend to you, your problem is status. And when the solution to your problem is mutual respect across the boundaries of inequality (i.e., no more condescending), you have the imaginative world of neoliberalism, the world where it's OK for a few people to be rich and a lot of people to be poor but where it's definitely not OK to make anyone feel bad about being poor, where it's important above all to remember that there's nothing wrong with being poor and where being rich doesn't make you a better person. The message that there's nothing wrong with being richer than everyone else (hey, you earned it!) as long as you don't act like being rich makes you better than everyone else is conveyed not just in novels but at every level of American life, from electoral politics—even Bernie Sanders gets defensive if you question his right to a million bucks—to reality TV.

A truly brilliant episode of the otherwise undistinguished show *Wife Swap* makes the point effectively. The wives who get swapped are rich Jodi (who has not only inherited money but married a man who makes a lot of it) and poor (or at best working-class) Lynn. Where Jodi spends most of her time working out and shopping ("me time"), with an hour or so a day for her kids (the four nannies do the heavy lifting), Lynn drives a schoolbus, chops wood, cleans her run-down house and spends every remaining moment with her kids. What do they learn when they trade lives for a couple of weeks? Rich Jodi learns that she ought to spend more time with her children: When she goes home, she'll have dinner with them a lot more often. Poor Lynn learns that she's better off where she is than on the Upper East Side:

"Money can't buy what I have."

And poor Lynn's husband, with no one around to do the housework, learns what a treasure his wife is. The only one who doesn't learn anything is Jodi's rich husband, Stephen, the villain of the piece, condemned not only by Lynn but by every critic who reviewed the show because he starts and ends the two weeks a "snob." In contrast to his rich spoiled wife, who has realized:

"I have a little bit of prejudice in me against people who come from different worlds and live different lives"

She can't quite bring herself to say "poor people." Stephen on the other hand openly "looks down," as Lynn puts it, on poor people at the beginning of the show, and, although he unconvincingly claims "It had nothing to do with finances," he is still looking down on them at the end. He doesn't like Lynn's taste in food, in clothes or in decorating the house.

So if the first point of the show is that moms should spend more time with their children, a point that every participant and every critic got (although a few left-behind feminists complained about the unfairness of requiring it to be the mom), the second point—received with unanimous approval—is that the rich shouldn't look down on the poor, that the poor deserve to be treated, as Lynn says, with "respect." At no time, apparently, did it occur to the makers of the show, the people in it or the people reviewing it, that what the show really demonstrates is how much better it is to be rich than to be poor. Or perhaps one should say not that the show ignores this point but that it is devoted to denying it, and that it succeeds so completely—this is its brilliance—that we find ourselves believing that run-down shacks in the woods are just as nice as Park Avenue apartments, especially if your husband remembers to thank you for chopping the wood when you get home from driving the bus.

The idea the show likes is that the problem with being poor is not having less money than rich people but having rich people "look down" on you. And the rich husband is bad because he does indeed look down on the poor people, whereas the rich wife—the one who has never done a day's work in her life and who begins the show by celebrating her "me time"—turns out to be good because she comes to appreciate the poor and even to realize that she can learn from them. The fault here is not in being rich but in thinking that you have better taste—more generally, in thinking that you are a better person.

American egalitarianism—or antielitism—thus takes two contradictory but surprisingly complementary forms. The first consists in thinking not that you're better because you're rich (that would be snobbery) but instead

that you got rich because you're better. That's what got you into Harvard! That's what got you all the money! In this form of egalitarianism, we pretend that everybody had an equal chance. The second kind of egalitarianism consists in thinking that it doesn't matter what colleges people go to, that it doesn't matter how much money they have—no one's better than anyone else. Here we insist that there are no advantages to being rich and that people who went to good colleges are in no way superior to people who didn't. And if the contradiction is obvious (I got to go to Harvard because I'm better than you; just because I went to Harvard, that doesn't make me better than you), the complementarity is even more obvious (there's nothing better about being rich; there's nothing worse about being poor).

As David Brooks puts it:

“In America, nobody is better, nobody is worse.”

Thus his famous comparison of the differences in American life to those in a high school cafeteria, divided into nerds, geeks, jocks, et cetera—they're not classes, they're “cliques.” Sure the jocks have a higher status, but they're not really better than the nerds, and just as the jocks shouldn't be boastful, the nerds shouldn't be resentful. The jocks shouldn't be bullies; the nerds shouldn't bring their AR-15s to school. On this model, then, class is turned into clique, and once the advantages of class are redescribed as the advantages of status, we get the recipe for what we might call right-wing egalitarianism: respect the poor. Which is also, as it turns out, a major ingredient in left-wing egalitarianism. Where the neoliberal right likes status instead of class, the neoliberal left likes culture, and the diversity version of respect the poor is respect the Other. The Other is different from you and me, but neither better nor worse. That's why multiculturalism could go from proclaiming itself a subversive politics to taking up its position as a corporate management tool—try getting your MBA without taking a course like *Managing Diversity* or *Managing a Multicultural Workforce*—in about ten minutes and without having to make the slightest adjustment. Indeed, from this perspective, respecting the Other can't help but be attractive to corporate managers, whatever their politics might be. What CEO doesn't find it easier to respect his employees' culture than to pay them a decent wage?

Diversity, like gout, is a rich people's problem. And it is also a rich people's solution, as attractive to rich people on the left as it is (or ought to be) to rich people on the right. For as long as we're committed to thinking of difference as something that should be respected, we don't have to worry about it as something that should be eliminated. As long as we think that

our best universities are fair if they are appropriately diverse, we don't have to worry that most people can't go to them and that the people who do get to go to them do so because they've had the good luck to be born into relatively wealthy families. As long, in other words, as the left continues to worry about diversity, the right won't have to worry about inequality.

The second point is that when economic inequality does nevertheless manage to rear its ugly head, the left has provided the right a useful technology for learning to love it. Ungrateful conservatives often complain about the political correctness of liberals, but the liberalism that strives to achieve equality by celebrating diversity is a liberalism that every conservative should love and that the opponents of the liberal elite have put to good use. What the commitment to diversity seeks is not a society in which there are no poor people but one in which there's nothing wrong with being poor, a society in which poor people—like blacks and Jews and Asians—are respected. And in the effort to create such a world, liberalism has ended up playing a useful if no doubt unintended role, the role of supplying the right with just the kind of left it wants. What the right wants is culture wars instead of class wars because as long as the wars are about identity instead of money, it doesn't matter who wins. And the left gives it what it wants.

Why should we care about the diversity of the Harvard faculty? Who are the victims of the lack of diversity? Suppose that neither sex has a biological math advantage. It's just that for socially stereotypical reasons men go (are pushed) into math and women (are pushed) into law. Well, here we do have some victims. We have people who are ending up in professions that, absent any social pressure, they might not have chosen. We have lawyers who would rather have been math professors and mathematicians who would rather have been lawyers. Or maybe some other choice entirely. But it's a little hard to think of this as a crucial issue in American life, one that can plausibly separate liberals from conservatives. Because, of course, the real victims in the American system of education are not people who feel social pressure to become lawyers instead of mathematicians. When, for example, a physics teacher at the preparatory school run by the University of Chicago tells the *Chicago Tribune* that the "dirty little secret in physics is that there aren't enough women in it—which is like locking up half the talent pool," he is mistaken. Way more than half the talent pool has been locked up—the huge majority that never sees the inside of a place like the Lab School—and unlocking the women of the upper middle class won't make much of a dent in that. Indeed, although bestowing on the women of the upper middle class all the privileges already held by the men of the upper middle class would make a more just society, it would only do so, obviously, for the members of the upper middle class. It would do no good at all for the people most

conspicuously absent in elite science departments, the people who come from the bottom (or even the bottom half) of American society.

When we recast the issue of faculty diversity from the standpoint of the problem of economic inequality, we can see immediately both why the issue is such a popular one at universities and why it is utterly empty as a way of distinguishing between the right and the left. Or, rather, why it marks the degree to which the supposed left has turned into something like the human resources department of the right, concerned to make sure that the women of the upper middle class have the same privileges as the men. The reason is that it involves no redistribution of wealth whatsoever. And when feminist issues do get raised with respect to money, they tend to be equally irrelevant to the goal of economic equality.

In a much-noted sexual discrimination case in 2004, for example, the banking firm Morgan Stanley settled before going to court with the lead plaintiff, its former employee Allison Schieffelin. Schieffelin had worked at Morgan Stanley for fourteen years but had been fired, she alleged, after complaining to the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission about discriminatory behavior that had led to her making less money than the men she worked with. For example, they were able to take the male clients on certain kinds of “men’s only outings” while telling her, “explicitly or implicitly,” to “go home.” When Schieffelin got \$12 million, and a number of other women received substantial settlements as part of the agreement, and the brokerage house also agreed to spend \$2 million on new “diversity programs,” it certainly was a victory for diversity. But it was no victory for equality—unless you think the fact that Schieffelin was only making a little over \$1 million per year selling bonds before she filed her suit and will now be a lot better off, while the company that discriminated against her will be a little worse off (its projected quarterly profit of something like \$1 billion will be a bit down), counts as a blow for equality. “Diversity is always enhanceable,” remarked the lead lawyer for Morgan Stanley, declining to admit that her client had been indifferent to diversity but suggesting that it was eager to do even better.

And why shouldn’t it be? The commitment to diversity doesn’t threaten its profits; the feminism that demands that the women who sell bonds be treated as well as the men who sell bonds doesn’t either. So there’s no bad faith when the chairman of Morgan Stanley can announce that the company is “proud of our commitment to diversity” and when Schieffelin can praise the settlement as a “great” one “that’s good for everybody.” The \$2 million going to the new diversity programs will be money well spent, making sure that men who make \$1.5 million a year learn how to treat women who make \$1.3 million a year in a manner that guarantees them too the opportunity

to earn \$1.5 million. Now, if you're working for Morgan Stanley, you learn not to dump her in a cab while you and your "male coworkers" take "the client to a strip club."

The point here is not that it's OK for bond salesmen to make more than bond saleswomen or to behave badly to bond saleswomen. The point instead is that nothing about this victory for diversity, this "watershed in safeguarding and promoting the rights of women," has any connection to the liberal goal of creating a more economically equal society. Or, to put it another way, insofar as winning this bias suit counts as a victory for liberalism, it's only because liberalism has itself given up the goal of creating a more economically equal society. Redistributing wealth is one thing; making sure that the women of the upper class are paid just as well as the men of the upper class is another.

The idea here is not, of course, that feminism is intrinsically bad, any more than my critique of antiracism was meant to count as a defense of racism. The idea is rather that our efforts to solve the problem of discrimination—indeed, our formulation of the problem as a problem of discrimination—is not so much a contribution to justice as it is a way of accepting injustice. Compare the mistreated bond saleswomen with the women of Walmart. The average hourly salary of a full-time Walmart employee (according to the CEO of Walmart) is about ten dollars. So if you work a forty-hour week, you make \$400 a week, almost \$21,000 a year. The women who are victims of discrimination are making a little less, the men a little more; the difference between them, according to the statistician who ran the numbers for a discrimination suit, is (for hourly workers) \$1,100 a year. So let's say the Walmart women are making about \$20,500. It would take them sixty years to make what the Wall Street woman—also the victim of discrimination—makes in one year. Of course, the Walmart men—the beneficiaries of that discrimination, they're making \$21,600—do better; it would only take them about fifty-seven years to catch up with Wall Street.

At Walmart, in other words, you've got women struggling for a fair slice of a pie so small that it won't feed them even if they get it. It's ludicrous to think of them as standing shoulder to shoulder with their sisters at Morgan Stanley and at Harvard. It's ludicrous to think of their problem as a problem about gender. The men can't live on their salaries either! Laws against discrimination by gender are what you go for when you've given up on—or turned against—the idea of a strong labor movement. Feminism is what you appeal to when you want to make it sound as if the women of Wall Street and the women of Walmart are both victims of sexism. Which is to say, when you want to disguise the fact that the women of Wall Street are not victims at all.

And just as rich people's problems can be given a certain respectability if they're redescribed as women's problems, gender can also be invoked as a way of concealing or misdescribing the reality of poor people's problems. The literature on domestic abuse, for example, regularly reminds us that this crime occurs at every level of American society, and there is a sense in which this is true, or at least about as true as the claim that there are rich people and poor people at Harvard. Rich women are sometimes abused, and poor children sometimes find their way into the Ivy League. But even though domestic violence claims victims in all races and socioeconomic classes, some women are more likely to be victims of abuse than others. In particular, women in the lowest income households have seven times the abuse rates of those in the highest income household. So the insistence that women of every class are the victims of domestic abuse masks the fact that the great majority of victims are poor and that partner abuse is above all a crime of poverty.

What's happening here is a kind of inversion of the rich-and-poor-at-Harvard effect, since the goal is not to make poor people more visible than they really are but to make them less visible, to mobilize middle- and upper-middle-class action against domestic violence by identifying it as a significant problem for the middle- and upper-middle-classes. Thus the idea that domestic violence is "confined" to lower-income families is regularly denounced as a "myth."

"In reality victims of domestic violence come from all walks of life."

But this, as we have seen, is only technically true. It's not a myth that the vast majority of domestic abuse victims are in lower-income families, and the effects of insisting that it is are often counterproductive. For example, one of the main findings of a study on the issue is that facilities to help the victims of domestic violence are disproportionately located in wealthier areas; that in fact there's an almost inverse relationship between the location of such facilities and the location of the population that needs them.

But there is, of course, a deeper difficulty as well. By disconnecting the problem of domestic violence from the question of social class, we find ourselves misunderstanding and misrepresenting the problem itself. We fail to see that the problem of domestic violence is importantly a function of the problem of economic inequality; we fail to see that in a society with less poverty there would be less domestic violence. In other words, we take a problem that significantly involves people's economic status and pretend instead that it's a problem about the relations between the sexes. The social

message of the campaign against domestic violence is thus that economic inequality is irrelevant; it becomes another way of convincing ourselves that the fundamental problems of American society have nothing to do with the injustices of capitalism and everything to do with the injustices (in this case) of sexism.

So domestic abuse is essentially a poor people's problem, like bad schooling and inadequate health care. Rich people's problems involve things like having to work very long hours and having to move every few years to keep climbing the corporate ladder. One of the featured couples in the New York Times series *Class Matters* "complains of stress and anomie," and the demands not just on the husband's time but also on the wife's. Beyond volunteering at the children's school, taking them to soccer, fund-raising for cheerleading, and so forth, Mrs. Link attends a Bible study group ("two hours on Tuesday mornings") and plays in "three or four tennis leagues." At least politics doesn't take up too much time. In Alpharetta, Georgia, the suburb the Times selected to represent the hundreds of others just like it:

"Republican candidates are shoo-ins. Few Alpharetta lawns sprouted campaign signs in November because the area's four contenders for the state legislature were all Republicans and ran unopposed."

The stress and anomie are at least partially compensated for by all the things salaries like Mr. Link's \$200,000 a year can buy: the big houses (the Links' is five-thousand square feet), the good schools, the country club, the soccer league, the piano lessons and special tutoring for the kids, the tennis for Mrs. Link, in general, the comfort.

"The good thing about Alpharetta is that it is a very comfortable neighborhood to live in. The bad thing is that we're never challenged to learn much about other economic groups. When you talk about tennis, guess what? Everybody you play against looks and acts and generally feels like you. You don't get much of a perspective."

The problem here is economic segregation: the Links live with and socialize with people who belong to their own "economic group," and the lack of nearby housing affordable for poorer people means that they have no social relations with such people. Of course, they still have some relation to poorer people; it's the poorer people who clean their houses and take care of their gardens and work at their supermarkets. But the kids don't go to schools with poor people; the parents don't play tennis with poor

people; there are no weekend barbecues with poor people. This truly is a rich people's problem; the rich people would like a broader experience of life, but they can't get it without having some poor people around.

Since economic diversity is just another name for economic inequality, it's hard to see why we would want to promote it. We ought to want to get rid of it or at least to minimize it.

Apologies for past injustice have become increasingly popular in the last few years, and there is no reason to doubt that when companies declare themselves, as Wachovia did, "deeply saddened" by the discovery of slavery in their corporate heritage, they mean it. Indeed, apologizing for something you didn't do to people to whom you didn't do it (in fact, to people to whom it wasn't done) is something of a growth industry.

The real point is that, since none of the people apologizing for slavery actually owned slaves and since none of the people to whom they're apologizing (black or white) actually were slaves, the apology functions as a general statement of disapproval. And as long as progressive politics consists of disapproving of bad things that happened a long time ago, it isn't all that hard for corporations like Wachovia and JPMorgan to be just as PC as the city councils—not only in Chicago but in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Berkeley, among others—with whom they're doing business. But, of course, the Berkeley and Chicago laws that require disclosure also embody a financial hope. They have been generated as part of the reparations movement, and the hope is that they will lead to a victory for diversity more along the lines of Allison Schieffelin's, one that has some money attached to it.

When History Associates found evidence of JPMorgan's involvement in the slave trade, Morgan produced \$5 million for minority scholarships. Due to the hard work of six-figure-salary men like Mr. Link, Wachovia's after-tax profits in 2004 were more than \$5 billion; it wouldn't be unreasonable to hope that this company too might come up with a little something. More ambitious hopes for corporate retributions, however—at least in the United States and for slavery—have failed, defeated above all by the argument, already suggested above, that the presumed plaintiffs (African Americans today) have no standing (since they weren't the ones enslaved) and that the targets of the suits (today's corporate officers and shareholders) cannot be held financially responsible (since they weren't the ones doing the enslaving). But, as a moment's thought will suggest, the argument for holding corporations like Wachovia (or, for that matter, the US government) financially responsible doesn't really depend on their current officers and shareholders either being or feeling guilty. In fact, the argument for making them pay is much stronger than the argument for making them apologize.

Suppose your parents owned a valuable painting and/or deposited money in a secret savings account. Suppose the painting was stolen and your parents murdered by the thief; suppose the money in the secret account was kept by the bank. Suppose further that no one tried to do anything about this for, say, half a century, so not only have your parents (the victims) been dead for a long time, so has their murderer. The bank has been using the money; the painting's been sold and is now hanging in an art museum. Just like the slaveholders, the people who did the bad things can't be punished. But their descendants can give back the money they should never have had. Apologies are irrelevant, but restitution is not. Apologies are irrelevant because people can't feel too sorry about things they didn't do; restitution is relevant because they can give back money they should never have had.

This is a distinction—between being guilty of committing the crime and being responsible for returning the property—that conservatives complaining about the assumption of collective guilt completely miss. But the museums that, finding themselves in possession of paintings stolen by the Nazis from Holocaust victims, have begun returning them to the victims' heirs, understand it. As do the Swiss banks that once refused to identify, much less release, the deposits of Holocaust victims but are now making a settlement of \$1.25 billion, “the bulk of which,” as one of the victims' lawyers claims, “will go to the heirs of the original depositors.” If you support reparations not just to the victims of the Nazis but also to their heirs, there are no coherent grounds for opposing reparations to the heirs of slavery's victims.

As Germany and other interests that profited owed reparations to Jews, America and other interests that profited owe reparations to blacks. Of course, what was stolen from the slaves and from those who lived under Jim Crow is less concrete than bank accounts or works of art; it was more like first the right, and then the opportunity, to acquire those things. Slaves couldn't own property; the victims of Jim Crow were denied the opportunity to acquire it. But although rights and opportunities are not quite as tangible as paintings, it's hard to deny the socioeconomic gap between the races derives from the social depredations of slavery. Even if we agree that African Americans today are not themselves the victims of that slavery and racism, we can't plausibly deny that the economic circumstances of African Americans today are importantly a consequence of slavery and past racism. We can't plausibly deny, that is, that the economic disadvantages under which slaves labored were passed on to their children and that the new economic disadvantages (those produced as well as maintained by Jim Crow) under which the slaves' children labored have been passed on to their children.

Indeed, even if we think—with right-wing polemicists like Dinesh

D'Souza—that the problems of African Americans today derive not from racism but from the “pathology” of their culture, where are we to believe the culture came from? Imagine the case of a little girl falling farther and farther behind in school because her mother is too poor and too overworked to provide her with the support the other kids get or because (as the school sees it) her mother doesn't care enough about the child's progress in school, misses appointments with the teachers and doesn't read to her at home. Some would blame the society; the school (like D'Souza) blames the mother. But we don't have to choose between them to realize that, whoever's fault it is, it's not the girl's. Whether we blame her failure on her poverty or on the pathology of her culture, we can't possibly blame it on her. She didn't make herself poor; she didn't create her culture. Her situation is the effect of a cause, the product of a history that ended before she was ever born.

It is this history—the history of slavery, Jim Crow and their aftermath—that produced the yawning economic gap between whites and blacks in this country, and the purpose of reparations is to undo the consequences of these events. Hence one of the standard objections to reparations—we didn't hold slaves; we're not racists—is completely irrelevant. The whole idea of reparations assumes that the girl's problem is not continuing racial discrimination—if it were, the proper response would be just to stop the discrimination—but is instead the effect of past discrimination. The point is rather to undo as far as possible the consequences of the past; reparations are a technology for trying to create a world that comes as close as possible to the world we would have had if neither slavery nor Jim Crow had happened.

What if we actually got such a technology? Imagine a Martian comes down to Earth and we show him our problem. African Americans today constitute about 13% of the American population. But they currently make up a disproportionately large segment (around 32%) of the poorest quintile of the population. And they make up a disproportionately small segment (1.7%) of the households in the top 5%. The Martian uses his powers, and we make the economic effects of slavery and Jim Crow, the disproportion in American wealth, disappear. Now, just as 13% of America's population is black, 13% of America's poor people are black, and 13% of America's rich people are black. We wave good-bye to the Martian and thank him. . . but for what? It's not as though America has been magically transformed into a more economically equal society; post-reparations America is exactly as unequal as pre-reparations America. Our Martian changed the skin color of many of America's poor and some of its rich, but he didn't change the division of wealth. So all we're thanking him for is eliminating racial inequality in the division of wealth. The economic gap between rich and poor remains, but the economic gap between black and white is gone. Is

this a good thing?

Well, the obvious objection is that leaving the economic inequalities of American society intact while rearranging the skin color of those who suffer from and those who benefit from those inequalities doesn't exactly count as progress. And certainly not if what we are seeking is economic equality. But the problem the movement sets out to solve has nothing to do with economic inequality. Reparations are compensatory; they give you back what you lost. The primary concern, then, is neither with equality nor even with the mere fact of poverty but with the poverty produced by slavery. Reparations would return to the descendants of the slaves at least some of what is rightfully theirs. The injustice they set out to correct is that people had their property taken from them; the justice they hope to provide is giving it back to them.

“Lamentably there will always be poverty.”

But because the poverty that survives will not be the consequence of some past injustice, it will not in itself be unjust.

This is a familiar position, if not necessarily a familiar position of the left. In fact, insofar as it relies on the idea that in a just society we owe the girl the property to which she has a right, the property that would be hers if it hadn't been stolen from her ancestors, it's a conservative position, one with no connection to the goals of alleviating either poverty or inequality. When we're returning stolen property, we don't care whether the stolen painting belonged to a rich person or a poor person; your claim to the painting is based neither on your poverty nor on your wealth. No one today is more committed to property rights than the reparations movement, and conservatives who share that commitment ought to be its most outspoken defenders. They could even appeal to remarks by the most influential conservative philosopher of the last half century, Robert Nozick, who suggested that the “descendants” of “victims” of “the most serious injustice” would be “owed compensation” by “those who benefited from the injustice.”

The principle here is that injustices ought to be rectified, and the fact that they happened in the past does not alter that principle. It's a conservative principle because it relies on the appeal to the restoration of stolen property, whether it's the labor of slaves or the possessions of murdered Jews. And its application need not be so narrow. It isn't just African Americans and Jews who are the descendants of injustice. What about Native Americans? What about Appalachian coal miners and poor white sharecroppers? Once you start looking for past injustice, you don't have a hard time finding it. And, by the same token, you may well find it where you don't really feel

you need it. Critics of reparations for slavery sometimes complain that the rich descendants of former slaves would benefit from reparations as much as the poor ones would. But rich people are just as entitled to the restoration of their property as poor people are; anyone prepared to give the equivalent of forty acres and a mule to the homeless man across the street ought to be just as happy to give it to Tiger Woods. Nevertheless, because the Tiger Woodses of this world are statistically a very small group, it makes sense for those who are interested in a more equal distribution of wealth to support reparations. A lot more of the money would go to poor people than to rich people. But it's more important to recognize that there is nothing egalitarian about the principle of reparations and to see that the injustice done to little girls has nothing to do with them being descended from the victims of past injustice. Indeed, it has nothing to do with the past at all.

Suppose, for example, that I am the little girl's white friend. My father wasn't a slave but was instead a slaveholder. Suppose that, when slavery was abolished, the Radical Republican plans to divide the plantations among the slaves who had worked on them had been put into effect and my slaveholding father lost not only all his slaves but all his land too. Suppose, left destitute, he turned to drink and abandoned my pregnant mother, who was left to raise me without the ability either to support me (since she'd never worked a day in her life) or to care for me (since slaves had done the child rearing in her family). Suppose now, at nine years old, I'm not doing so well in school. My work habits are bad; my mother's too depressed to read with me; my reading proficiency scores are plummeting. Do I deserve reparations?

Obviously not. What would they be reparations for? My ancestors weren't kidnapped and enslaved; just the opposite—they were the ones who did the kidnapping and enslaving. The advocates of reparations describe what they would call the little girl's history (i.e., the history of her ancestors) as a mixture of suffering and nobility; my equivalent is a mixture of exploitation and rapacity. So with respect to the historical claims of the reparations movement, I'm completely different from her. But I am no more responsible for my poverty than she is. I don't deserve compensation, but does that mean I deserve my poverty?

There are two ways in which we can understand our responsibility to children like her. One is to say that in a just society we owe her the property she ought to have had. The other is to say that in a just society we owe her an opportunity as equal as we can make it to the opportunities of all the other children. And if equality of opportunity is our idea of justice, the history of how you came to be born poor may be of interest to you and your loved ones and the other members of your family, but it has nothing to do with the relevant fact about you: the fact that you are not yourself

responsible for your poverty. And our responsibility to you has nothing to do with that history either. Indeed, the idea of equal opportunity, if it were taken seriously, would make all the histories of victimization and the subsequent demands for compensation irrelevant, just as—again, if it were taken seriously—it would make the histories of accumulation irrelevant. Rich children are no more responsible for their advantages than poor ones are for their disadvantages. We've already had occasion to question the current obsession with history, and here's another one: it's powerfully tied to the idea of people getting what they deserve when what they deserve is identified with inherited property rather than with equal opportunity.

But if we do take seriously not just the commitment to private property that reparations relies on but also our commitment to equality of opportunity, a commitment that virtually every American is eager to endorse, things change. The whole point of the commitment to equal opportunity is to make sure not only that people have a right to their property but also that they have a fair chance to earn that property. Only if everybody has a chance to get rich can the people who don't get rich, the people who stay poor, be said to deserve their poverty. And only if everybody has a chance to get rich can the people who do succeed be said to deserve their wealth.

It's often said—both in defense and in criticism—that equality of opportunity is the weakest form of egalitarianism. The strongest form would be equality of outcome. And it's obviously true that a world in which everyone was required to finish the race at the same time would be very different from a world in which everyone was required to start it at the same time. To justify equality of outcome, we have to think that there should be no reward for hard work or ability. Whereas in fact what most of us think is that there should be some such reward. Indeed, we defend equality of opportunity precisely because we believe that if people don't begin with equal opportunities to succeed, hard work and ability won't be rewarded. If, for example, Felicity Huffman's wealth enables her daughter to be tracked from birth into an elite college while your daughter is tracked from birth into a community college or no college at all, Felicity's wealth—and her education, and her connections, and all the other things that we generally use to measure socioeconomic status—is doing at least part of the job that my daughter's hard work and ability ought to be doing. So our commitment to equal opportunity requires us to refuse equality of economic outcome (because that doesn't reward hard work and ability), and it also requires us to refuse the generational transfer of economic inequality—for the very same reason (it doesn't reward hard work and ability).

When the point is put that way, we can also see that the commitment to equality of opportunity is not really a weaker form of the commitment

to equality of outcome; rather, it's a commitment to something altogether different, to the importance of hard work and ability. And we can also see that, genuinely implemented, it's not so weak. For example, a society that really was as committed to equal opportunity as we say we are would not allow the quality of local schools to be dependent on local real estate taxes. If the schools are better where the rich people live, the unearned advantage their children have starts at pre-K. And, of course, it's precisely to provide that unearned advantage that people like the constantly relocating Links make the quality of the schools the "number one" criterion whenever they move.

There's nothing surprising or irrational or immoral about this. Almost any parent, given unequal schools and given the ability (i.e., the money) to choose between them, will choose the good one for his or her children. In fact the immorality, if there is any, seems to be on the other side. How, if you have the opportunity to send your children to the good school, can you justify sending them to the bad one? This is the kind of dilemma that public figures, especially in major cities, frequently confront. But to think of this as an ethical decision for individual parents is to miss the point of the problem, which, if all school districts were funded equally (and if there were no private schools), would begin to look very different. If no school were better or worse than any other, it wouldn't matter which one your children went to. So if we really are committed to equality of opportunity, the relevant choice we make as parents is not between schools but between ways of funding them. If we are committed to equality of opportunity, we should be funding all school districts equally and abolishing private schools, thus removing the temptation for rich parents to buy their children an unfair advantage. But we don't do this, and we can't even imagine it on a ballot.

There are, of course, even more blatant violations of the commitment to equal opportunity. Polls show the majority of Americans, for instance, think there should be no inheritance tax, that is, they think that hard work and ability should make no difference whatsoever when it comes to distributing the billions of dollars that change hands from one generation to another. And another 20 percent think that only estates above \$3.5 million should be taxed. How do we explain this? How do we explain the simultaneous commitment to the importance of hard work and ability (making your money) and to the irrelevance of hard work and ability (inheriting it)? People who are opposed to the inheritance tax are not being hypocritical, choosing their pocketbooks over their principles. Almost none of the 50 percent of the population that opposes the inheritance tax no matter how big the estate is will ever see a dime's worth of taxable inheritance. On the contrary, the vast majority of people who oppose inheritance taxes are taking positions of pure principle,

advocating that people with advantages they themselves never had (like going to the best schools and to elite universities) not only reap the rewards of those advantages but reap them again when their parents die. These people are acting against their own economic interests and on behalf of what seems to them fair: the principle that people should be allowed to do what they like with their money, including passing it on untaxed to their children.

But that notion of fairness completely contradicts the principle of equal opportunity. When it comes to choosing between a world in which people can do whatever they want with their money and a world of equal opportunity, when it comes to choosing between a world in which hard work and ability matter less than inheritance and a world in which they matter more, we seem to be choosing inheritance. So maybe we have to conclude that we Americans just aren't all that committed to equal opportunity after all. But this is a conclusion that's hard to accept. For what is there to justify our respect for other people's property (and our laws protecting that property) if we don't believe that hard work and ability played a central role in earning it?

“Equality of opportunity is a demanding standard and an important one, since people must believe that our system is generally fair for it to remain vital. If this belief no longer exists, if people no longer perceive the rules of the game to be fair, the political repercussions could be significant.”

If you want a more just society, don't accept that you're a competitor in a rat race.

Jeremy Corbyn's announcement that a Labour government would replace social mobility with social justice as a policy benchmark raised more than a few eyebrows. It goes against the received wisdom and bipartisan consensus that social mobility is a good thing. But Corbyn is right to insist that singling out the lucky few leaves the structures of inequality intact, and he is right to place the emphasis on further-reaching motions, such as revamping the education system, to achieve social justice. However, the real problem with social mobility is not that it doesn't go far enough in making society more just for everyone. It has, in fact, the very opposite effect—deepening and perpetuating social injustice.

Public discourse and media narratives are always reminding us that society is dynamic. No one stands still. Everyone is climbing up or down ladders, going from rags to riches and vice versa. Social mobility serves as both a promise and a threat: if we play our cards right we will accrue status and wealth, but we also stand to lose everything if we don't. Playing our cards

right means committing time and money to education, training, and social circles in that hope that they might help us secure better jobs. It means investing in property and financial products that might generate future capital or taking out pension and insurance policies for our long-term security. The idea of social mobility casts each of us as one among a multitude of individuals jockeying for positions that give us a better chance of seizing scarce material resources before others beat us to them.

Seen in this light, social mobility is nothing other than a capitalist version of the age-old strategy of divide and rule: consolidating power and reproducing exploitation by having the powerless duke it out among each other, instead of challenging the institutions that dominate them all. Most of us have to work for a living: we need full-time jobs to make ends meet and support our families. In the work that we spend most of our waking hours doing, others pocket part of the value that we produce. In this sense, we are both dominated and exploited by our work. This predicament intensifies the more devalued and precarious our work is. But the idea of social mobility encourages us to forget about this exploitation and focus, instead, on what each of us has in terms of property and human capital.

Notice the difference. However diverse our jobs and different our salaries, we have common cause to rally around should our exploitation as workers prove unbearable. No such commonality inheres in our possessions, which cast us as competitors. Downplaying the conditions of our work in favour of our pursuit of ownership means substituting what unites us with what divides us.

With only so many gainful employment opportunities, valuable property, public resources and revenue-generating securities to go around—per market forces of supply and demand—their value is higher, the scarcer they are (or in the case of securities, their underlying assets). Credentials have less pull in the job market once too many people possess them, neighborhoods become less lucrative when anyone can afford to move into them, safety nets grow threadbare when more people fall back on them. And so we have a powerful structural incentive to limit popular access to the things we own.

Our possessions are also stepping-stones to positions whose advantages rely on others being disadvantaged. For example, they help some of us charge the rents that others have to pay. In a competitive environment where risks abound and rewards are hard to come by, we see these possessions as necessary (and sometimes as necessary evils) for getting ahead in life rather than falling behind.

The mad rush for relative advantages compels us to work harder, invest more, and take on greater debt—more than would be required to meet our present needs. This holds true even when we have little notion of the future

value of our investments. The all-too-familiar reality of bubbles bursting and property values collapsing alert us to the fact that we invest for uncertain and sporadic returns. And still, we keep investing and taking on debt for the sake of ownership. We do so out of fear that we will be less protected or have fewer chances of advancing if we don't. We convince ourselves that if we have more stuff, skills, or connections than our peers, we will fare better than they will. We further imagine that in dire straights, those with fewer possessions will probably fall first, cushioning us if we follow them.

Social mobility limits our perspective, in this way, to our peers and their fortunes or misfortunes. So transfixed are we by the image of everyone accruing or losing wealth and status, that we fail to question the social, economic, and political forces that determine their value in the first place. The living costs, salary and currency fluctuations affected by property market upheavals, financial crises, and geopolitical power struggles reach us in obscure and roundabout ways. But our individual efforts and their outcomes appear to have more direct consequences.

The connections we draw between our investments (or lack thereof) and their outcomes convince us that if we're poor or struggling in other ways, we have no one to blame but ourselves. We must not have tried hard enough or invested with enough savvy. And conversely, we take pride in our accomplishments as if they were generated by our efforts and investments alone. Despite our lack of control over the circumstances of our jobs and the value of our possessions, social mobility encourages us to think of ourselves as self-determining individuals.

This perspective undermines possibilities of organizing broad and enduring movements for social change. The alliances we are more likely to forge are contingent and opportunistic: we unite with others who possess the same things as we do, in order to limit access to them. We fear that such access might reduce their value and negate the efforts we'd made to attain them. Exclusionary zoning laws that keep lower-income people—disproportionately people of colour—out of more affluent neighbourhoods is one example. The same is true of entry requirements for education, of credit scoring, of insurance-policy criteria, and of policies, like benefit caps, that withhold our public resources from people whose contributions might fall short of what they get out of them.

Social mobility, in sum, serves as an incentive to work harder and expend more, as a distraction from domination and exploitation, and as a barrier to forming durable political movements for social change. Maintaining a certain amount of social mobility is therefore a useful tool in the hands of the agents of accumulation. A great deal of capital is generated by our incessant efforts to advance socially and hedge against decline. Those who pocket this

capital have nothing to worry about so long as we cast a wary eye on our peers and competitors alone. By dint of social mobility, capital can continue being amassed globally and distantly and at our expense, leaving us vying for relative advantages in the throes of our common domination.

Mainstream political thought in America is not the slightest bit anti-Semitic, and you will definitely not find anybody on the Sunday morning talk shows calling for a few “real men, White men” to get out on the streets and start lynching race-mixers. What you will find them worrying about, however, is the “clash of civilizations.” The basic idea—the idea that difference in identity now matters more than difference in belief—is pretty much the same in the center as it is on the margins. The fall of the Soviet Union produced a world in which the ideological conflict between socialism and liberal capitalism (the Cold War) has been replaced by conflict between civilizations. The fundamental source of conflict in this new world is not primarily ideological but is instead cultural. In ideological conflicts, the key question is ‘Which side are you on?’ and people can and do choose sides and change sides. You can, for example, be born into a communist society and become convinced of the virtues of capitalism. But cultural conflict is very different. In conflicts between civilizations the question is ‘What are you,’ not which side are you on, and what you are is a given that can’t be changed. And even if it does somehow get altered, what’s being changed is not your mind but something more fundamental, your self.

Think, for example, of the difference between being convinced (by someone else’s argument) and being assimilated (into someone else’s culture). None of the pathos that attaches to the loss of a culture attaches to the change in beliefs that’s involved in losing an argument. How could it? Since the phenomenon of changing one’s beliefs irreducibly involves the sense that the new beliefs are better than the old ones—after all, the new beliefs are ones that now seem to you right and the old ones seem wrong; that’s why you changed them—it makes no logical and not much emotional sense to mourn the passing of the old beliefs. No one sits around wishing that we still thought human sacrifice was an effective way of appeasing the gods or that bad air caused malaria. But culture and cultural identity seem to us very different. Because we don’t think of cultures as right or wrong, we don’t necessarily experience the passage from one to another as progress. Another way to put this would be to say that people who hold different beliefs disagree; people who belong to different cultures differ without disagreeing.

Indeed, just as the very idea of culture takes us away from the question of ideology (what we believe), so does the idea of cultural diversity. The alternative to diversity is sameness. So where beliefs are relevantly divided not into yours or mine but into right or wrong, the relevant axis of evaluation

for cultures is not right or wrong but same or different. We can be plausibly urged to appreciate and even celebrate difference, but no one thinks we should appreciate mistakenness. Differences in belief, like differences in wealth, are not differences we can love. But we can love the differences between cultures because cultures (and the identities they give us) make no claim to being either better or worse. They're just ours or not ours.

“We don't have to believe that our values are absolutely better than the next fellow's or the next country's, but we have no doubt that they are better for us and that they are worth living and dying for.”

Here multiculturalism and its opponents converge. The identity they want us to love is national; the ones multiculturalists want us to love are racial and ethnic. The basic idea, however, is the same: we love our own not because it's better but because it's “better for us,” because it's ours. This results in arguments for preserving those “qualities” that make America “different.”

“America cannot become the world and still be America. Other peoples cannot become American and still be themselves.”

What they want for Americans is what the titles of journals like *Cultural Survival* suggest the Aymara Indians want for themselves: to preserve their (and our) identities.

So what is it we want to preserve when we want to preserve our identities? Racists have an easy answer to this question: they want to defend the purity of their “genetic heritage” against “mongrelization.” But most of the people defending identity today are not racists. The values they want to preserve are the values they think of as “better for them.” After all, that's what it means to want to preserve your identity, to want to preserve the “distinctive” character of your culture. People who are committed to an ideology instead of an identity don't want to preserve difference; communists, for example, thought the abolition of private property was right and they wanted everyone to give it up. But the *Mati Ke* don't think that their language is either right or wrong, and they don't care if anyone else speaks it; they just want to be able to speak it themselves. Furthermore, they also don't care if American brothers and sisters do or don't talk to each other after puberty. They don't think it's wrong for all brothers and sisters to talk to each other after puberty; they just think it's wrong for them, for the members of *Mati Ke* culture.

But here's where the problem comes in. We don't ordinarily accept the idea that identifying some practice as a part of your culture counts in itself as a defense of your right to continue doing it, much less as support for the idea that you should be able to make your children keep doing it. Of course, not being allowed to talk to your sibling after puberty may not seem really awful to us; it's just a little unfair. But what if we tease it out a little? Because you can't talk to your brother, you can't go to the school he goes to or you can't attend the public meetings where he and the other men debate important issues. Or what if we replace not talking to your sister with some of the social arrangements of different cultures, like not allowing the black people and the white people to sit next to each other on the bus or in the movie theater or in school?

What if American segregationists had described themselves as participating in a culture of segregation and had said (which, sometimes, they did) that they didn't, of course, claim that segregation was good for everyone but they did claim it was good for them and that their culture had a right to survive? We wouldn't for a second accept that argument. We don't think that just re-describing people who believe in segregation as people whose culture is segregationist grants their beliefs a right to recognition and survival. Suppose someone says:

“Look, I'm not claiming that segregation [or clitoridectomy or infanticide or, if you feel strongly about it, not talking to your brother] is absolutely better than other social practices; I'm just saying it's better for us, raised as we have been, with our traditions, et cetera.”

We don't think that statement counts as a defense of the practice in question. So even if we accept the idea that the big ideological differences don't matter anymore, and that what matters instead is identity, we don't accept the idea that all parts of a cultural identity are equally worthy of respect.

The basic idea of the commitment to linguistic diversity is that linguistic diversity is a form of—really the primary form of—cultural diversity and that we should protect cultural diversity because to do so is to respect the cultural identity of others by treating them as we would wish to be treated ourselves.

“If we're concerned with identity then what is more legitimate than one's aspiration that it never be lost?”

Actually, however, the things that we don't want to lose are the things that have nothing to do with our identity. We don't, for example, want

to lose great works of art—not because they're part of our culture but because they're great. If we just thought that Shakespeare was good for us, we would naturally want his plays around as long as we were around, but we wouldn't care if subsequent generations preferred, say, David Mamet. It's only because, rightly or wrongly, we think Shakespeare is good for everyone—regardless of identity—that we want his plays to survive. And we think works of art are different from languages precisely because, unlike languages, they can be better or worse.

If we really thought that every work of art (like every language) was just as good as every other work of art, it would indeed be hard to defend the idea that the works of art we happened to be familiar with should survive; there's no loss worth mourning if the things we love die with us and are just replaced by the things our descendants love instead. And this is even more obviously true of other things we may value. If we live in liberal democracies and if we value the institutions that make those democracies possible, we can't help but wish for those institutions to survive. But we do so, of course, because we believe that those institutions are superior to others, which is to say, we believe, for example, that liberal capitalism is superior to socialism. Our desire, then (if it is our desire), is for liberal capitalism to survive because it seems to us good. It's a desire that can be understood only inasmuch as its object is not a culture, not an identity. This is why I argue that if the important thing about my culture is that it's mine, I can't really care if it survives. And this is also why we should get rid of the idea that the clash of cultures and the preservation of identities is what matters.

For one thing, the clash of cultures not only looks but is disingenuous; when we clash with others it's usually because we think we're right, not because we're defending our identity. When the International Monetary Fund tries to get Bolivia to privatize water rights, it's not an identity it's trying to impose, it's capitalism; the Bolivians are welcome to keep on speaking Aymara. And for another thing, insofar as culture really does work the way language does, identity politics are absolutely inconsequential. The advantage of culture over ideology is that we do not need to find reasons to defend our culture. The fact that it's ours is all that matters; the disadvantage is that once we describe the things we believe as expressions of our identity, we can't logically care whether anyone else does or will believe them. Once we turn the clash of ideologies into the clash of civilizations, we can no longer care who will win; we have no reason to want any particular civilization, including our own, to survive.

Theorists who defend cultural identity think of themselves as defending the right of cultures to survive. But if there really are such things as cultural

identities, no one, not even the theorists who defend them, can possibly—or maybe I should say, coherently—care whether they survive. I say coherently instead of possibly because it's obvious that people do feel quite strongly about the survival (and even the revival) of cultures even though, according to me, they shouldn't. Indeed, the end of the Cold War and what's now described as globalization—the penetration of capitalism into every part of the world—seem to be going hand in hand with an increasingly passionate commitment to culture. Greater indifference to inequality and ideology is happily accompanied by greater attachment to identity. In fact, this is what the commitment to diversity is all about, since a world of people who are different from us looks a lot more appealing than a world of people who are poorer than us or a world of people who think our fundamental beliefs are deeply mistaken. We might even say that this insistence on organizing the world around who we are rather than around what we have or what we believe is one of the defining features of globalization, of a post-Cold War world in which people who used to think of themselves as having an ideology—either capitalist or socialist—now think of themselves above all as having an identity: national, ethnic, cultural, whatever.

It's pretty obvious, then, that when it comes to globalization, there's a big difference between dealing with indigenous peoples who want to protect their culture and socialists who want to nationalize your industry. Nevertheless, the protection of cultures often gets represented as if it were somehow a kind of resistance to globalization. Not, of course, an economic resistance. It is a revolt against the forces of cultural uniformity, and at conferences like "Identities versus Globalization," the basic concern is with the protection of local cultures from homogenization.

Neither tribalism nor nationalism is any obstacle to globalization; indeed, they are both fully compatible with modernization and may even be understood as two of its most successful products. New forms of "ancient" identities are being invented every day. And the function of all of them is to provide people with ways of thinking about themselves that have as little as possible to do with either their material circumstances or their political ideals.

Ethnic, cultural, and linguistic resistance is not tired old political or economic resistance. No need to worry about socialism here or the redistribution of wealth. It's the culture, stupid—when the problem is inequality, the solution is identity. Culture thus does the same kind of work internationally that it does nationally, both economically and ideologically. Economically, it re-describes the material difference between people (I have more, you have less, too bad for you) as cultural difference (I have mine, you have yours, it's all good). It allows us—actually, encourages us—to think that as long

as people get to keep on speaking their own languages—and enjoying their own music, not to mention their characteristic foods—there’s no reason for alarm. But to see how implausible this is, we have only to imagine ourselves for a second on the losing side of globalization.

Imagine the United States fifty years from now—we’re so poor that China and India are outsourcing production to the desperate, and hence very hardworking, masses of Michigan and Ohio. We (the desperate masses) have no unions so we work cheap; we have no health plans so we work sick; we have no retirement plans so we work as long as we possibly can, which, see “no health plans” above, isn’t all that long—but that’s OK because we don’t live as long as we used to (or as the Indians now do). Are we supposed to feel better because no one’s making us speak Mandarin or Hindi? Are we supposed to feel good because, sure we’re broke and sick, but at least we have our culture? Some tell us to fight the “global identity crisis” by remaining American. But when the crisis part actually involves putting us out of work, it’s hard to see how pride in our identity will do us any good. And it’s even harder to imagine that continuing—against all odds!—to speak English, we will somehow be resisting globalization.

Of course, the previous paragraph describes a situation that hasn’t yet and may never come about. Even Thomas Friedman, sounding the alarm about America’s potential loss of “power and influence” if we don’t learn to compete better in the global marketplace, doesn’t think we’re on the verge of losing our edge. But it’s not as if there aren’t costs to winning too, and it’s not as if identity—thinking of yourself as an American rather than, say, as a worker—doesn’t function to obscure them as well. Many American businesses cannot succeed, Friedman argues, without exploiting the “advantages” of manufacturing in China. The main advantage, of course, is that the average wage for a factory worker in China is \$1,800 a year. By contrast, the average wage of an American factory worker is about \$54,000 a year, which is not only 3,000 percent higher than the wage in China but is also 18 percent higher than the average US salary. In America, factory jobs are “good jobs.” And they’re also hard to get—factory workers make up only 11 percent of the American workforce.

Why? Well, one reason is that in order for America to compete in the global market, American companies need to do more of their manufacturing in China. So even when we’re winning, some of us (the ones who no longer work in factories) are losing. Thus, for example, someone like George Will could in 2006 accurately describe the American economy as “in the fifth year of a humming expansion,” while it’s also true that the poverty rate had risen during every year of that expansion. 12.7 percent for 2004—up to 37 million from the 35.9 million it was the year before. And of course we all

know now such expansion was positioned upon a bubble that would burst a few years later.

And it's not just poor people who have lagged:

“The average hourly wage of rank-and-file workers—a group that makes up 80 percent of the workforce—is slightly lower than it was four years ago.”

So instead of saying that some of us are losing, I should have said that most of us are losing. Still, as long we think of ourselves as Americans (beating the French, even beating the Chinese), we can be proud. Not only are we speaking English and hanging on to our traditional cultural practices, our economy is kicking butt. But, of course, the minute we stop thinking of ourselves as Americans—the minute, in other words, we start thinking that the ‘we’ means poor and middle-class people, not Americans, and that the relevant ‘they’ is rich people, not the French or Chinese—things look a little different. What the resisters think of as a struggle to preserve cultural identities and what the advocates think of as a competition between national identities has nothing to do with identities at all.

But we can get a sense of how attractive the idea of cultural equality has become and of how successfully it can function to obscure more consequential forms of inequality by recognizing that even in situations where the disappearance of the language would seem to be an unequivocally good thing, some people refuse to let go. Suppose the language you speak is not English but ASL, American Sign Language. You speak it because you're deaf. Like English and Hindi, ASL is neither better nor worse than any other language—you can use it to say everything you need to say—but, like *Mati Ke*, it may have a problematic future. You, for instance, if you are young enough, might be a good candidate for a cochlear implant and no longer need to speak ASL. Or you and everybody else might have access to a health-care system that radically reduces the chances of your children being born deaf. Indeed, it's precisely insofar as events like this seem to be taking place that some have become increasingly concerned about the possibility of sign's disappearance.

“Early implementation of mainstreamed education, free universal access to hearing aids for children under age 18 years, and a federally funded universal health care scheme that subsidizes most of the cost of an initial cochlear implant are producing a decline in the signing deaf community that will eventually lead to a loss of language and culture. It goes without saying, that this scenario gives me no joy.”

So even though he himself acknowledges that he may be sounding the alarm prematurely—after all, as he points out, there are still “millions of severely and profoundly deaf children and adults in the underdeveloped and developing world,” and, besides, “new and totally unexpected causes for deafness could appear tomorrow”—he can’t help but feel “deep sorrow” at what he regards as the eventual and “inevitable” “loss of language and culture.” The hope for ASL is that inadequate health care and some really catastrophic new diseases could keep it alive for a while longer; the fear is that the cochlear implant and genetic testing will eventually kill it. But why should anyone be made sorrowful if American and Australian and all the other sign languages disappear?

Well, obviously, the disappearance of sign languages would be a bad thing if the people who used them—deaf people—were left without a language. We don’t want to lose something useful. But of course the scenario he is predicting is not one in which deaf people are left high and dry while their language dies out; it’s one in which the language dies out because there are no more deaf people. So the real cause for sorrow is not the disappearance of a useful language; it’s the disappearance of the people who used the language. And at least some people do claim that if deaf people were to disappear, they would be sad.

“Deaf people have a language and they’ve got a culture. So what’s wrong with being deaf?”

If the commitment to diversity can make us think we’re supposed to be sad when the *Mati Ke* disappear, why shouldn’t we be sad if deaf people disappear too?

This question represents a certain triumph for what is called the “cultural model”—as opposed to the “medical” or “pathological model”—of deafness, and for the effort to get disability in general recognized as “a marker of identity” rather than as a “problem.” People who accept the medical model are inclined to think of the deaf as a group whose hearing loss interferes with the normal reception of speech. But people who go for the cultural model are inclined instead to think of them as a group of persons who share a common language (ASL) and a common culture. From the standpoint of the medical model, the invention of the cochlear implant gets celebrated as a potential cure for deafness; from the standpoint of the cultural model, it gets deplored as at worst a kind of cultural genocide and at best a kind of surgical assimilation. A few may be reminded of the satirical novel called *Black No More*, featuring a procedure—the black-no-more procedure—that solved the problem of antiblack prejudice by turning black people white. To

those who think of deafness as essentially a culture, the cochlear implant and genetic testing look like versions of the deaf-no-more procedure, more a symptom of the problem than a solution to it.

In 2004, the poverty rate overall was 12.7 percent. The rate for blacks was 24.7 percent, and for Hispanics, 21.9 percent; whites were at 8.6 percent and Asians at 9.8 percent. Presented in this form—racialized—these numbers are profoundly disturbing, and they are even more profoundly reassuring. They're disturbing because they remind us of the degree to which both the legacy of racism and racism itself are a problem. They're reassuring for what amounts to the same reason. They suggest that people are poor in America today mainly because they are the victims of discrimination, and they thus imply that if we could end discrimination, we could end poverty. But if you look at the statistics a slightly different way, you get a very different story. Of the 37 million poor people in 2004, almost 17 million (45.6 percent of the total) were white. Many of these people are not the victims of discrimination either past or present. And the fact that they aren't is the really disturbing part. We like to think of the American system as essentially fair but marred—as both the right and the left will agree—by racism. But in the case of white people's poverty, the reassurance of the right—that discrimination is a thing of the past—won't help them. And the promises of the left—that they're finally going to wipe discrimination out—won't help them either. Discrimination is not their problem. Diversity is not their solution.

The right tends to regard economic inequality less as a political issue than as something like a fact of nature—maybe temporary (when free markets triumph, it will go away), maybe permanent (if people make the wrong choices, they have to pay for them), and, either way, not that big a deal (today even poor people have TVs and smartphones; no one had those a hundred years ago). The left, as we have already had occasion to remark, insists on giving poor people identities; it turns them into black people or Latinx or women and treats them as victims of discrimination as if in a world without discrimination, inequality would disappear. The debate we might have about inequality thus becomes a debate instead about prejudice and respect, and—since no one's defending prejudice and no one's attacking respect—we end up having no debate at all. And when people do want to have the debate—when they want to talk about inequality instead of identity—they are criticized by the right as too ideological and by the left as insufficiently sensitive to the importance of race, sex, gender, et cetera—that is, as too ideological.

Hence another version of the trouble with diversity: it obscures political difference just as well as it does economic difference. It makes it hard not

only to solve the problem of inequality but even to argue about whether it is a problem and about what its solution should be. This obfuscation is what happens when political disagreement gets turned into “diversity of thought”: all thoughts are of equal value; none is better or worse than any other. In this way, political belief and affiliation are reconceived along the cultural model, that is, genuine disagreements are turned into mere differences in perspective. Indeed, cultural difference has made ideological conflict look like a thing of the Cold War. Ideology’s claims to truth have come to seem irrelevant. This process has been applied not only to politics but even more vividly to the area in which the importance of belief should be the most obvious, religion, and it is in this area that the cultural model is exposed at its most vacuous.

It’s one thing, for example, to promote the virtues of religious tolerance. But it’s a very different thing to celebrate religious diversity as if religion too could be transformed into an identity category along the lines of race and culture. Only someone who doesn’t believe in any religion can take the view that all religions may plausibly be considered equal and that their differences can be appreciated. From the standpoint of the religions themselves, those differences are a problem, as the claims of both Christianity and Islam to what Pope Benedict XVI called “universality” make clear. Defending the church against the charge that it is essentially a European institution whose missionary efforts in Africa and elsewhere are attempts to impose European culture, the pope distinguished between the “false claim to universality on the part of what is simply European” and the core “connection” between salvation and the truth that is “actually universal.” Jesus’s claim to be “the way, and the truth, and the life,” according to the pope, “expresses the basic claim of the Christian faith.” Christianity is universal because it is a religion for all peoples (not only Europeans), and it is a religion for all peoples because it tells the “truth.”

The big selling point of cultural identity—the selling point, really, of the very idea of identity—is that cultures are essentially equal. That’s what makes them different from classes, since classes are essentially unequal—they involve more or less money.

If Christianity tells the truth, all other religions must be false. If you believe that Jesus is the way and I don’t believe that Jesus is the way, one of us must be wrong. If the Christian view of human history is true, it is true for everybody, whether they know it or not. As is the Muslim view, the Marxist view, et cetera. Of course, insofar as they contradict each other, they can’t all be true; that’s what it means to say that there are fundamental disagreements between Christianity and Islam, and even between Catholicism and Protestantism. This is what the pope means

when he acknowledges the justice of a Protestant critique of ecumenism which argues that “although they claim to be based on the same Lord, Catholicism and Protestantism are two different ways of understanding and living Christianity,” and goes on to insist that “these different ways are not complementary but alternative.”

They are alternative instead of complementary because they involve doctrinal differences, differences of belief. Contradictory beliefs cannot be complementary; that’s what it means to call them contradictory. This view of religion understandably makes people of different religions (or no religion) nervous. When Pope Benedict insists on the “connection between salvation and truth” and when he maintains that the relevant truth is that “there is one God Christ Jesus,” he isn’t leaving much room for those of us who aren’t Christian. And he doesn’t mean to. In his old Cardinal Ratzinger days, Pope Benedict was known as “God’s rottweiler” because of his enthusiastic (and effective) defense of dogma. But his defense of dogma can’t be reduced to a mere matter of temperament. If you think that Christianity is a “universal” religion because “it is based on knowledge,” you have to think that the alternatives to Christianity are based on lack of knowledge. If you think that Christianity is true, you have to think that everything else isn’t. That’s why the problem with other Gods is not that they are foreign or malign or weaker but that they are “false.”

From the standpoint of the pope, and of all those who wish to bring religion back into the public square, it’s what people believe rather than how they feel or who they are that matters. Our beliefs are already essentially public in ways that our feelings are not, and they are intrinsically “normative,” that is, they have a relation to truth and thus inject us into the public sphere in ways that our identities cannot. If you think abortion is wrong, you think it’s wrong not just for you, or for Americans or even for Christians, but for everyone. The conflict between people who believe that abortion is justifiable and people who believe that it is murder is significant precisely because it’s not a conflict of identities, but of convictions. Clarence Thomas’s race was no doubt essential in getting him nominated to the Supreme Court, but it’s his beliefs, not his identity, that have produced his decisions. Indeed, his performance on the bench has been a constant and useful reminder that there is no connection between who you are and what you think; that there is no set of beliefs that goes with being black or white and that as a black (or white or whatever) man, you are not required to have some specific set of beliefs.

But, of course, this is completely untrue of religion. There are lots of things that, as a Christian or Muslim or Jew, you are required to believe, and if you don’t believe them you can’t count as a Christian, Muslim, or

Jew. And since politics to some degree involves your beliefs—you run for office in part by expressing and arguing for them; you govern more or less according to them—it can make no sense to say that religion should be kept out of the public square. If you're running for office and you think God means for you to liberate Iraq, now is the time to mention it.

For the same reason, it makes no sense to complain—as many do—of prejudice against fundamentalist Christians or to argue that the old hatred of Jews and blacks is being refocused as hatred of the growing evangelical Christian political movement. The hyperbole involved in describing newspaper attacks on evangelicals as reminiscent of “the lynch mobs we used to see back when black folks were accused of being too uppity” is of course immense. But the truly bizarre thing here is not so much the exaggeration as it is the redescription of people who have certain beliefs—that Jesus is their savior, that they themselves are born again, et cetera—as people who have a certain identity. Fundamentalist Christians are not an ethnic group or a culture. They are people who believe in things like the inerrancy of scripture, the sinfulness of homosexuality, the divinity of Jesus. And if they encounter people who think that all these beliefs are false, what they're encountering is not prejudice but disagreement.

Prejudice involves the unjustified assumption that your identity is somehow better than someone else's identity; disagreement involves the absolutely justified—indeed unavoidable—assumption that your belief is better than someone else's belief. If you didn't think yours was better, you'd give it up. So we think that Republicans are opposed to Democrats, not prejudiced against them; and libertarians aren't prejudiced against socialists, and people who believe in God aren't prejudiced against people who don't. If, as one of the Pew polls suggests, 66 percent of Americans have an “unfavorable” view of atheists, not only is there nothing surprising about that, there's nothing wrong with it. If you are devout, why shouldn't you have an unfavorable view of someone who seems to you profoundly mistaken about what you regard as one of the most fundamental issues of human life?

And the argument obviously works both ways. If you don't believe in God, how can you help but have an “unfavorable” view of all the deeply deluded people who do? That's why those who argue that just as Americans have become more sensitive to the inequalities of race and gender, they should extend the same sympathy to those who are different in the sincerity of their belief, are missing the point. They are mistaking an inappropriate response to people who seem to us different (prejudice) with an appropriate one to people who seem to us wrong (disagreement). The sympathy we extend to those who have been victimized by prejudice requires us to stop being prejudiced against them; the sympathy we might extend to those who

have different beliefs cannot possibly require us to stop thinking they're mistaken. So although it's no doubt true that we shouldn't hate anyone, treating Christians (or atheists) with contempt is not the same as treating black people with contempt; even if we hate Christians (or atheists), we hate them for what they believe, not for who they are.

When, in the run-up to John Roberts's confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court, a senator declared that we should be as "religious-blind" as we are "color-blind" in considering the qualifications of nominees, he got this exactly wrong. We should be color-blind because color has nothing to do with beliefs. But we shouldn't be religion-blind because religion has everything to do with beliefs. In the public square, the crucial thing about Christians, Muslims, Jews, et cetera, is not whether (like blacks and Asians and women) they're entitled to respect but whether they can convince us that their beliefs are true.

The problem, then, with thinking of religious diversity on the model of cultural diversity is that it turns what should be a debate about the validity of different religious beliefs into a consensus about their equal worth and thus obscures their relevance to public policy. It's precisely religion's claim to universality that makes religiously based public values matter in American political life. By public, I mean first that the religious component should not be privatized; we can't think of someone's faith the way Jefferson famously did when he remarked that:

"It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

If my neighbor's belief in God involves also, say, a belief that abortion is wrong, it does and it ought to affect me. It cannot be treated as a merely private fact about him, such as the fact that he likes Chinese food or opera. And by public, I also mean that the religious arguments made in the public or political sphere should themselves be based on public knowledge. Public decisions must be made by arguments that are public in character—not derived from sources of revelation or disposition that are essentially private and arbitrary. Identities can be private—it really does do me no injury if my neighbor is black. Identities are not subjective—the things that make me who I am need not make anybody else who she is. But beliefs are neither.

There is, however, a certain tension between these two senses of the public, between the requirement that we recognize the public claims of religious belief and the requirement that those claims not be "derived" from "private" sources like "revelation." The difficulty is in preserving the religious base of the values in question while meeting the criteria that enable them

to go public. Suppose we take two political issues—one had an undeniable public importance in the past and the other still does—that are often linked to religious convictions: abortion and gay marriage. What contribution does religion have to make to the debate over these issues? The argument against abortion is that it is murder, and you don't need to be a Christian or, for that matter, to have any religious convictions at all to think that murder is wrong. Indeed, almost all the people who support abortion, including atheists, oppose murder but deny that abortion is murder, insisting that the fetus does not yet count as a person (and thus cannot be murdered) or that the pregnant woman's refusal to accept the unchosen obligation to bear the child does not meet the legal definition of murder. So what the opponents of abortion need to do is show these people that they are mistaken, that the fetus does count as a person. How does religion help? Why, for example, should the fact that most Protestant evangelical churches and the Catholic Church oppose abortion count as a reason for people who don't oppose abortion to change their minds? How does telling people that God doesn't want them to do it make a difference if the people you're telling don't believe in God?

The problem here is that the specifically religious part of the argument is entirely private and arbitrary, dependent on revelation in a way that the conviction that we can't draw a sharp line between the fetus and a person is not. If I am trying to convince you that the fetus is a person, I can—to take a standard argument—point out that if you don't regard the fetus as a person, you won't be able to regard people in comas as persons either, since they are similarly unconscious, dependent on others, et cetera. And you may be led to reflect that the considerations that cause you to think it's wrong to pull the plug on people in comas (they may recover consciousness; they may once again come to function as persons) are applicable to the unborn child as well: if nurtured, it too will come to be a person. So you may decide that you were mistaken in distinguishing so sharply between the fetus and a person, and you may come to believe that abortion is wrong.

Or you may not. For our purposes here, it doesn't matter how we come out on the abortion debate; what matters is just that we recognize how limited is the role that religious conviction plays in that debate. For consider the alternative, the idea that in convincing you that abortion is wrong, I'm convincing you not simply to alter your values but somehow to take into account the importance of their being religiously based. What this means is that not only do I have to convince you; I have to convert you. I have to get you to believe not only that abortion is wrong but that it's wrong because God forbids it. Which is to say, I have to get you to believe in God, specifically my God. And here it's notoriously the case that arguments

of the sort that might conceivably prevail in the public square will be of very little use. How many people get argued into a belief in God? And why should people who don't believe in God, or don't believe in your God, be the slightest bit impressed by your insistence that (your) God forbids abortion? Or that your God is against gay marriage?

The gay marriage example is actually a sharper one because it's so different. The strength of the antiabortion argument is its appeal to our intuition that murder is wrong, an intuition we have no problem fleshing out with considerations involving our own desires not to be ourselves the victims of murder and not to have our loved ones be the victims of murder. But it's a lot harder to come up with equally plausible intuitions about homosexuality; it's a lot harder to see how anyone is victimized by homosexuality. No doubt, this is why being antigay often seems like a kind of prejudice—more like being anti-Semitic, say, than like being anti-Republican. If, however, you think that homosexuality is wrong, it's hard to see how you can be accused of prejudice against gays, just as it's hard to see how people who think that fundamentalists are wrong can be accused of being prejudiced against them. Disapproval of what people do doesn't count as prejudice any more than disagreement with what people believe. So the good news for homophobes is that they're not bigots; they believe that homosexuality is wrong, and they have their reasons. But the bad news is that their reasons are so weak.

Because while it's easy to see that homosexuality is bad if it goes against the laws of God, it's really hard to see much wrong with it if it doesn't go against the laws of God or if we don't believe there are any such things as the laws of God. So while the arguments against abortion don't rely on religious belief, the arguments against gay marriage seem to rely on almost nothing but religious belief. It says in Leviticus 18:22:

“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.”

Other things Leviticus tells you not to do include:

- Trimming the corners of your beard (21:5)
- Wearing clothes made of linen “mingled” with wool (19:19)
- Sleeping with your wife (much less anyone else's wife) while she's being “put apart for her uncleanness” (18:19)

When asked why certain attitudes or behavior is right or wrong, the great majority of Americans answer that the Bible or the church or religious teaching says it is so. But almost no Americans believe that trimming your

beard at the corners is wrong despite the fact that the Bible says it is. And if homosexuality is wrong only in the way that trimming the corners of your beard is wrong, why should Americans be against it?

But it's not the inconsistency that's the problem here. Even though the degree to which literalist readers of scripture feel free to pick and choose the bits they're obligated to obey and the bits they're not is pretty impressive, the real problem is the appeal to nothing but God's stated prohibition. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't be allowed to make the appeal. It doesn't mean that people who really do believe Leviticus can't cite it. It just means that it's hard to see why the rest of us should heed them.

“If we witness a son who routinely abuses his aged mother, we know that it is wrong, if we're asked to give our reasons, most Americans would likely invoke biblical injunctions about the honor due parents. But according to current doctrine, that reason is not publicly admissible.”

Well, it obviously is publicly admissible, but, depending on who the public is, it may not be very convincing. The force of examples like the ones from Leviticus is that many of us (even those of us who believe the Bible is divinely inspired) don't feel a moral obligation to do things just because the Bible tells us to. If we think the son abusing his aged mother is doing wrong, we have reasons in addition to or utterly separate from the fact that the Bible says it is.

People who think you shouldn't trim the corners of your beard have every right to try to convince others that they shouldn't either. They even have every right to try to pass laws forbidding the trimming. It's no doubt true that such laws would be unconstitutional, but the fact that something isn't constitutional doesn't in itself make it wrong. Slavery was constitutional but wrong, which was what Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall had in mind when in his famous speech on the bicentennial of the US Constitution, he described it as a document that was “defective from the start.” And the effort today to imagine that all the things we think are good should be at worst allowed by and at best actually mandated by the Constitution is, despite its popularity, implausible on its face. Some of the strategies for the enforcement of equal opportunity that I myself would like to see enacted in the United States (e.g. the abolition of private schools) are almost certainly not constitutional. In other words, this is not a point about the separation of church and state. It's a point about the limitations of the appeal to divine revelation as an argument: if the people you're arguing with already believe in the revelation, you don't need the argument; if they don't, the argument can't possibly convince them.

Because Christianity importantly (if not exclusively) consists in a set of beliefs about public issues, it must have a role to play on the public square. But because many of its beliefs seem so false to so many, we ought to seek to constrain that role—not by ruling the appeal to religion out of court but by objecting to the false things the religious may say. So if one reason we want to keep the Ten Commandments out of our courtrooms is to prevent the establishment of Christianity as a state religion, another reason is that many of us don't believe them. The point about the Ten Commandments is that they are commandments; They are not, as it has been said, Ten Suggestions or Ten Significant Moral Insights, to be more or less appreciated according to one's subjective disposition. What it means to be a believer in the Ten Commandments is to believe that it is in fact wrong to do the things they enjoin against, and that anybody who does not believe in the Ten Commandments is mistaken, and that anyone who does not follow them is behaving wrongly.

But it's for this very reason that unbelievers will find their presence in the courtroom obnoxious. They think the claim ("I am the Lord thy God") that authorizes the first one ("thou shalt not have other gods before me") is false and that therefore none of the first four commandments (no graven images, et cetera) needs to be followed. Number five—"Honor thy Father and Mother"—has a different kind of force, precisely, as we already noted, because it does not depend on believing in the Lord, our God, but we may or may not think it's a good idea and, more to the point, we may believe it's a bad one and act on our belief without breaking the laws of the state. Numbers six through nine are like number five in that our belief in them need not hinge on our feelings about the Lord, but they are stronger than five because they are not only things that Christians should and shouldn't do; they are things that, broadly speaking, no one should do. And number ten is kind of ambiguous, depending on what we think is meant by covet. So if you're an unbeliever, the problem with the Ten Commandments is that four of them are false.

And when I say they're false, I don't mean that they're not true for me or that they don't make an impact on me. Although the preferred target of people who argue for the importance of religion in our lives is relativism—the idea that there are different truths for different people—it should be obvious that the argument I am making here has nothing to do with this idea. The clarifying thing about religious disputes—the thing that distinguishes conflicts of belief from the conflicts of identity in which nationalists and multiculturalists have so much invested—is that the conflicts of belief are precisely not relativized. When I say that four of the ten commandments are not true, I mean that they're not true for me or for anyone else and that

the people who think they are true—who think that they are being told to, say, keep the Sabbath by the Lord their God—are mistaken. Those who defend the significance of religion in daily life are right to argue that even if one is not a believer, the divorce of public business from the moral vitalities of the society is not desirable. But the identification of “moral vitalities” with the belief in supernatural entities issuing instructions from above is not such a good idea either.

My main point here is not, however, that religious beliefs are mistaken. It is instead that disputes about religion—understood as the pope understands them, as disputes about what is universally true—are useful reminders that you can’t exactly be for diversity of beliefs in the way that you can be for diversity of identities. We encourage diversity of belief in the hope that having lots of different ideas will help us figure out which ones are true. So ideological diversity is valuable not in itself but instrumentally. But no one thinks the point of encouraging different identities is to help us decide which ones are the best. Just the opposite; they’re all good. When it comes to cultural identity, it’s the diversity itself, not the thing the diversity leads to, that we’re supposed to like. The trouble with diversity, from this perspective, is that it tries to imagine a world in which no one is a believer, as if even our belief in God (or our belief that there is no God) were just another aspect of our identity.

But belief is at the heart of both our religion and politics, and insofar as the displacement of ideology by identity has helped bring religious beliefs to the fore, it cannot possibly make sense to keep pretending that the best way to deal with them is by asserting that religion has no place in politics. It has a lot more place in politics than race and culture do. It is not so unthinkable that people should be willing to kill and be killed for religion. One reason it’s not so unthinkable is, of course, that it has often happened. The more important reason, however, is that fighting for your religion involves fighting for something you believe in, for something you think is better than what you’re fighting against. The point can be made more obvious by being made less melodramatic. Forget killing and being killed; go with arguing. You can’t even get the argument started unless you understand that the relevant difference between you and the other party is not the difference in identity but the difference in beliefs, and that what the argument is about is whose beliefs are better.

Michael teaches at the University of Illinois, Chicago. He makes \$175,000 a year. But he wants more; one of his motives for writing a book was the cash advance offered him by his publishers. Some readers will be tempted to see a discrepancy between these facts and the arguments against economic inequality made in his book. But they should remember that those

arguments are true (if they are true) even if Michael's motives are bad, and they would be false (if they were false) even if his motives were good. Not to put too fine a point on it, the validity of the arguments does not depend on the virtue of the person making them. Furthermore, the point of the book is not that people, including its author, should be virtuous.

During the summer in which most of his book was written, a homeless man lived in the railroad underpass Michael can see out his study window. A more virtuous person might have been at least tempted to go down and bring him some breakfast or maybe even invite him in for a shower and a meal. It never occurred to Michael to do either of these things. Mainly he wished the man would go away.

The fact that Michael makes \$175,000 a year puts him in the top five percent of the American population. The fact that his total household income is more like \$250,000 a year almost gets him into the top one percent. And maybe the money earned through a book will push him over the line—the top one percent! What this means is that he is not a member of the “middle class.” He is a member of the “upper middle class.” Comparatively few people are richer than he is. And, yet, he finds this very hard to believe. He does not feel rich. Why not?

Well, for one thing, he is confronted on a daily basis by the spectacle of people who are much richer than he is. For example, like many members of the upper middle class, he is a daily reader of the *New York Times*, and one of the primary functions the *Times* performs for its upper-middle-class readers is to make them feel poorer. It does this by publishing articles like “Is \$200,000 the New \$100,000?” or articles about the difference in status between people who have the nanny pick the children up after school and people who bring the nanny along with them when they themselves pick the children up. For the curious: If you send the nanny in your place, it shows you haven't got the time to do the job yourself but you do have the money to pay someone to do it for you; if you bring the nanny with you, it shows you have the time but you're so rich you're prepared to pay anyway—you win. Reading these stories, Michael experiences the standard mixture of envy and disapproval, but what he experiences above all is a deeply legitimating disidentification. He could never afford to do that! His household may be in the top five or so percent, but his \$250,000 a year puts him a lot closer to the median than to the people who bring the nanny or to the people who send her.

Why is this disidentification legitimating? Because it leads Michael to think of himself as not rich; it leads him to think that when he talks about the problem of economic inequality, he is not the problem, the super-rich are. And, of course, the super-rich are part of the problem. But, unfortunately,

he is too. Compared to the super-rich, he may feel poor, but feeling poor doesn't make you poor. And, even more to the point, feeling rich doesn't make you rich.

American Idol—once the most watched show among people twenty-five and younger—is a kind of emblem of our fantasies about success, and the popularity of the show and its countless knockoffs and derivatives is a function of its ability to portray us to ourselves. Although, as in any tournament, only one person will win, the system the show embodies is in a certain sense absolutely fair: every contestant has a chance to win, and to take your chance, all you have to do is try out. So there's a kind of formal equality of opportunity among the contestants. But that formal equality is not, from a statistical standpoint, very encouraging since, when there are over 100,000 people auditioning for the contest, your individual chance of winning looks very small. So this is where what one critic has called the “delusional self-confidence” of the participants kicks in. If you start factoring in your talent and your hard work and the intensity of your commitment to “following your dream”—a phrase that at this moment in American history appears to have almost talismanic power—you can find yourself thinking you've got a real shot. And sometimes it's not till you actually get yourself on TV that someone—the English guy—makes it clear that in fact you have no talent and no chance whatsoever. So what the show presents is both a vision of the world in which the truly talented will succeed, the American dream, and a vision of the high level of self-deception—I'm talented! I will succeed!—required to live happily in that world, the American delusion

As long as you think you're middle class, you are middle class; believing makes it so. Indeed, not only can poor people get richer by just believing, rich people can get poorer too. When a man making \$130,000 a year sums up his economic achievement by saying, ‘I'm in the middle and I'm happy,’ he is at best only half right. He's actually closer to the ninety-fifth percentile in income, nowhere near the middle. We know what he means, of course: he doesn't feel rich. He sees lots of people richer than he is, both in reality and in the newspapers and, especially, on TV. And just as the black kids on campus make the white kids feel better about themselves, so do the super-rich make the merely rich feel better.

In fact, the social construction of class is even more useful than the social construction of race, since the social construction of race just enables you to ignore the difference between the rich and the poor while the social construction of class makes it possible to eliminate it. If you really can convince yourself that people belong to whatever class they think they belong to and if you can get everybody (the rich and the poor) to think they belong to the middle class, then you've accomplished the magical trick of

redistributing wealth without actually transferring any money. Marx used to describe religion as the opium of the people because it promised them in heaven what they couldn't get on earth. The American dream of being middle class is more effective; it assures us that we don't have to wait for the afterlife. The poor already have what they haven't got, and the rich don't really have what they do. Everybody's happy.

The right thinks university English departments (and humanities departments more generally) are radical because they castigate dead white males and foreground the roles of the nonwhite, of women, and of the gay, the lesbian and the transgendered. And the English departments themselves, understanding perfectly well that this is a caricature, nevertheless try to push the envelope even farther, adding, say, the disabled to the identity categories above and thinking of themselves as more truly radical for doing so. But they are both wrong. There is nothing politically radical about insisting on and even celebrating diversity; on the contrary, celebrating diversity is now our way of accepting inequality. This is why it's a mistake to believe that the humanities departments of our universities are hotbeds of leftism, even though both the supposedly left-wing professors and their right-wing critics love to believe it. In fact, they're more like the research and development division of neoliberalism. The more kinds of difference they can come up with to appreciate—not just many races but mixed races, not just gay and lesbian but gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, cisgendered, questioning, heteronormative, queer, pansexual—the more invisible becomes the difference that a truly left politics would want to eliminate: class difference.

If you are committed to equality, that commitment is—must be—based on the idea that those who have been denied equality have been deprived. And the commitment to the poor is based precisely on the sense that they are deprived, that they are victims. But once we start insisting that working-class literature has its own value and that, as literary critics, we have done the poor an injustice by failing to appreciate their literature—you commit yourself not only to ignoring but to erasing the inequality, not by removing the deprivation but by denying that it is deprivation. My point here is not that working class or poor people can't produce great literature but that they do so only by overcoming an obstacle, the obstacle of being working class or poor. Denying that poverty is an obstacle—treating working-class literature on the model of, say, French literature—denies the relevance of class inequality. From this perspective, the idea that teachers of literature should be committed to what one critic calls “valuing working-class cultures” is fundamentally reactionary. Indeed, the minute you start reading literature by poor people in the same way you read ethnic literatures, you've arrived in

something like inequality heaven. Where you used to just distract yourself from economic difference by focusing on cultural difference, now you can celebrate economic difference by pretending that it is cultural difference.

Immigration continues apace, and it's supported not just by liberals who see opposition to it as a form of racism but by many conservatives who see opposition to it as a threat to profits. From the late nineteenth century, when Italian immigrants fresh off the boat were used as scabs against (mainly white) striking Pennsylvania coal miners, to the early twenty-first century, when Mexican immigrants have been brought in to displace (mainly black) farmworkers in the Vidalia, Georgia onion fields, American employers have understood the value of cheap labor. The nineteenth-century miners expressed their skepticism about workforce diversity by fighting a pitched battle against the immigrants and killing seven of them; the more law-abiding twenty-first-century farm workers went to court, alleging they'd been "fired because of their race and national origin." To which their employers replied that they had nothing against black, white, or American workers; it's just that:

"When José gets on the bus to come here from Mexico he is committed to the work. He leaves his family at home. The work is hard, but he's ready. A domestic (born in America) wants to know: What's the pay? What are the conditions? In these communities, I am sorry to say, there are no fathers at home, no role models for hard work. They want rewards without input."

By which they meant that domestics are not satisfied with the forty cents they get for each five-pound bucket of onions they pick. Of course the farmers' complaint that Americans don't work hard enough because they were brought up without fathers is a little hard to swallow—is "José" at home with his kids in Mexico?—but the relevant point is that the employers' commitment to diversity and to cheap labor are indistinguishable. Which is why both liberal and conservative economists have almost always supported lots of legal immigration and why some of them even speak approvingly of illegal immigration (because it responds fastest to market forces; illegals come when there's the possibility of jobs; they leave when those jobs dry up). The advantage of the immigrants is that, unlike the domestics, they're too desperate to ask:

"What's the pay? What are the conditions?"

And that's good for employers because, unsurprisingly, as diversity has flourished, the pay and the conditions have only gotten worse. Since the

Great Recession (2007–2009), it's no longer exactly true that we ignore economic inequality, and the Occupy movement certainly drew our attention to the difference between the 1% and the 99%. But neither Occupy nor anyone else has managed to do anything about reducing that difference. Since 2005, the poor have gotten poorer. In 2005, if you were in the twentieth percentile, you were making \$21,668; in 2013, you were making \$20,885. The rich have gotten richer: the ninetieth percentile went from \$142,288 to \$150,000. And the very rich are much richer; in fact, in recent years, while the average income of the bottom 99% has fallen (by 0.4%), the average of the 1 percent rose by 36.8% (to \$1,303,198).

Furthermore, as economic inequality rises, so does the enthusiasm for addressing every other, non-economic kind of inequality. Everyone knows that the whole point of working on Wall Street is to make lots of money: in 2014, while the median salary for US workers was about \$53,000, the average bonus on Wall Street was \$172,860. And that's just the bonus; the average base pay was \$355,900. But probably not everyone realizes just how committed Wall Street is to diversity. Goldman Sachs, for example, has (among many other honors) been named a Stonewall Star Performer (for consistently demonstrating exemplary practices to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual staff), a Best Company for Multicultural Women and the Overall Best Employer for Asian Pacific Americas Professionals. And when it comes to sexual reassignment (as opposed to income redistribution), Wall Street and what's left of Occupy Wall Street—essentially a Web site and a twitter feed—share values that run at least as deep as their differences: Occupy celebrates Carrie Davis becoming the first transgender person to win a “Woman of Distinction” Award from the state of New York, while Citigroup, Credit Suisse and, of course, Goldman win plaudits for offering their employees insurance that will help pay for treatments and procedures “related to gender transition or sex reassignment.”

But it's not just Wall Street that embraces both inequality and diversity. Gary Becker, the conservative Not-a-Nobel Prize-winning economist, disapproved of what he thought of as the bad inequality produced by discrimination just as fervently as he approved of the good kind produced by markets. The “inequality in earnings” that labor markets produced was “mainly the good kind,” rewarding hard work and ability, while the inequality produced by racism, is not only morally wrong but also bad for capitalism, and especially for capitalists. Why? In competitive markets employers can't afford to indulge what he called the “taste” for discrimination, a preference for one racial group over another—they need to be able to get people who will work as hard as possible for as little as possible. Which is why those Georgia onion farmers want to hire Mexicans. If they could afford to indulge

their real racial “taste,” they might want to hire white people like themselves. But if they want to keep the costs of labor as low as possible, even the most racist employers can’t afford their racism, they can’t afford arbitrarily to constrict their labor pool. So as fathers and husbands, even as voters and taxpayers, they may well be prejudiced against both Mexicans and blacks but, as employers, they’re extremely eager to hire the cheapest and most frightened.

Over half of Harvard’s students come from families making more than \$125,000 a year and almost a third from families making more than \$250,000 a year. Only four percent come from the bottom quintile. The number of minority students, in other words, is about ten times the number of poor students, a fact that, repeated in less-extreme form at elite colleges around the country, has led to widespread calls to supplement or even replace race-based affirmative action with class-based affirmative action. Unfortunately, class-based affirmative action has its own problems. For one thing, the whole idea of affirmative action is based on proportionate representation and if poor and middle-class people were proportionately represented in elite colleges, the first thing that would happen is that most of the current students would need to leave. At Harvard today only 17 percent come from the bottom 60 percent of the population; at a Harvard that had achieved not only racial but economic diversity, 60 percent of the students would come from the bottom 60 percent of the population. That leaves out a lot of outraged rich people.

And the second thing that would happen is that most of the colleges would go broke. The newly enrolled bottom 60 percent would consist entirely of people from households making less than \$65,000 a year (which is almost exactly what a year’s tuition and room and board costs) and while it’s no doubt true that a few super-rich schools like Harvard could afford to subsidize their newly impoverished student body, the vast majority of the merely wealthy ones would sink like stones. So when people talk about class-based affirmative action, what they’re really talking about is adding a few more poor kids to the mix. Which is why people who really care about everyone having a chance to succeed are increasingly committed to making at least some or maybe even all public higher education free to everyone.

From this standpoint, the unfairness of the current system is pretty obvious. The students coming into college are from economically advantaged families; the students coming out of college perpetuate that advantage. So the way to make the system fairer is to make it possible for everyone to go to college, giving everyone a chance at those rapidly growing jobs that require a postsecondary education. But the problem with this scenario is even more fundamental than the problem with economic diversity, and it’s a problem

with the jobs, not the universities. On the Bureau of Labor Statistics's list of the fastest-growing occupations, number one is industrial-organizational psychologists. Even after reading their job description—"Apply principles of psychology to human resources, management, sales, and marketing problems, work with management to improve worker productivity"—I admit I'm still not totally sure what they do. But they get paid well for doing it: their median salary is \$83,580 a year, well worth the required four years of college and several years of postgraduate work. The only downside is that there are only about 1,100 industrial-organizational psychologists right now and even at the rate demand is growing, ten years from now, only 2,000 will be needed.

So let's go the second-fastest-growing job, personal care aides. The good news here is that there are a lot of these jobs and there will be a lot more, the bad news is these jobs don't require a college degree (or even a high school degree), and the pay sucks. The median salary is \$19,910 a year, and it isn't getting better. In fact, it's getting worse. A recent report says that since 2009, low-wage jobs have been becoming even-lower-wage jobs and that "wage declines" have been especially pronounced for janitors and cleaners, personal care aides, home health aides and maids and housekeeping cleaners. All these jobs are growing; they don't pay well and they don't require a college degree. Indeed, in 2012, only a little over 20 percent of jobs required a Bachelor of Arts degree: in 2022, that number will be virtually unchanged.

So the reason to get a college degree is not to prepare for the jobs of the future; most of them won't require one. It's to have a shot at the good jobs of the future, and it's no doubt true that making a four-year college education available to everyone who wanted one would probably give more people a real shot at those good jobs. Right now, the people who end up as personal and home care aides are predominantly women of color from poor families. They never had the chance to go to college to better themselves. But if college were free, they would have that chance, and some of them would be doctors and lawyers and nurses and organizational psychologists. Some of them would even be CEOs. The health care industry pays its CEOs very well—their median income is \$13.6 million a year. Right now, there probably isn't even one black woman in the health care industry making that kind of money. If everyone had an equal opportunity to qualify themselves for those jobs, there'd be a bunch of them, around 6.5 percent of the total.

But of course, the vast majority of people working in health care—black women, white women, white men, Latinx—would not be earning \$13.6 million a year. They'd be earning \$9.38 an hour. Making equality of opportunity real would diversify both the bosses and the workers but it

wouldn't reduce the gap between them; the workers would still be paid so badly that more than half of them would have to rely on some sort of public assistance to make ends meet. And the high pay of the bosses would be directly related to the low pay of the workers. One of the central challenges facing health care employers today is "finding people to work for you at a wage where you can be profitable." In other words, the reason your boss gets paid so much is as a reward for getting you to work so cheap. It's because you only make one six-hundredth of what she does that she has met her challenge. The word for this challenge is not discrimination, it's exploitation: the fact that the work you're doing is worth more than what you're being paid to do it. And you can't solve the problem of exploitation by giving everyone a fair chance to become an exploiter.

Thus the trouble with education and the trouble with diversity are the same trouble. The White House says a good education is the "pathway to the middle class," and it wants to make that path wider. But with an economy that produces many more low-wage jobs than high-wage ones (48 percent of the new jobs generated in 2013 paid \$15 an hour or less) making the path wider doesn't produce more rich people, it just produces better-educated poor people. A bartender with a PhD gets paid bartender wages, not the wages of a professor. And these days, many of the PhD holders who are professors are also making bartender wages. If the college class you're in is a class for first-year students, your professor may well be a PhD working on a one-year contract and making less than \$35,000 a year. She not only went to college, she was a really good student—ask her how well that's working out.

Education is essentially a sorting system. It's a very unfair sorting system—since it mainly functions to make sure that the wealthy children of wealthy parents stay wealthy—but even if we managed to make it perfectly fair, it would still do nothing but put a small minority on the road to good jobs and a big majority on the road to bad ones. Similarly, the only thing diversity does is try to make sure that the ones who do get the good jobs aren't all white men and the ones who get the bad jobs aren't mainly women of color, which it isn't very successful at doing. But even a successful commitment to diversity would (like everyone going to college) be of absolutely no use to everybody of all races and genders who ended up serving fast food, taking care of old people, selling clothes to young people in malls, et cetera. What the commitment to education and the commitment to diversity have in common, in other words, is that their goal is not to minimize inequality but to legitimate it, not to make sure that no one is stuck in poverty but to make sure that no one is stuck in poverty because of their race or their gender or the fact that they couldn't go to college.

So if education and diversity are just different ways of trying to make inequality seem fair, what are some ways of trying instead to diminish it? What should we do if we're more committed to eliminating poverty than to figuring out who deserves to be poor? Maybe, instead of emphasizing ways to avoid the bad jobs we should start thinking about ways to make the bad jobs better. From 1948 until 1973, productivity and pay were growing in sync; since then, productivity has continued to rise while pay has flat-lined. Where has the income generated by those workers gone? It hasn't disappeared; it has just been redistributed. Instead of going to typical workers, it has gone either to bosses or to owners. That's what rising inequality is: the increasing gap between what the work is worth and what, on the one hand, the many workers get and, on the other hand, the few bosses and owners get.

If, during this period, you've been worried about the glass ceiling, about the forms of discrimination that make it difficult for women or minorities to become bosses and owners of capital, you haven't been concerned about economic inequality at all. Not to put too fine a point on it, what you've actually been worrying about is the fact that not enough women and people of color have been afforded the opportunity to extract profits from—rip off, exploit, plunder—the vast majority of workers. And while it's easy to see how the bosses and owners might start feeling better about themselves if they weren't all white males—'see, everybody has the chance to rise to the top!'—it's very hard to see why this should matter to anyone else since, in fact, almost no one actually will rise to the top.

Now, this last claim—almost no one will rise to the top—might seem a little unfair, at least to the 64 percent of Americans who still believe that upward social mobility is a live option. But the most recent data suggests that those 64 percent are wrong, that the United States is, as the authors of the 2015 report *Economic Mobility in the United States* put it, "very immobile." And even if there were more mobility, the percentage of people who could benefit from it would be tiny. That's why health-care workers; fast-food workers; sales people; shuttle drivers for Facebook, Apple, and eBay; writers for Web sites; and adjunct faculty for universities like Tufts, Georgetown, the University of Oregon or the University of Illinois at Chicago, do not need the false promise that they can somehow get different and better jobs. These are the jobs they have, and these are the jobs that exist. What we need is to make these jobs better.

"A lot could be said about why so many people celebrated Jenner declaring she was transgender while almost no one was prepared to accept Dolezal as transracial."

Every year in America—and increasingly every year in every country whose economy looks like ours—is a year in which we obsess over identity. In part, this is a good thing. If obsessing about what gender people identify as can get us to stop punishing them for identifications some of us may disapprove of, that’s a step in the right direction. But insofar as—in a world where the gap between the rich and the poor keeps on getting worse—the obsession with identity distracts us from that gap or, worse still, tells us a false but comforting story about it, identity becomes part of the problem not the solution. What we like to think is that racism (or, racism plus sexism, plus homophobia, et cetera) is primarily responsible for American inequality. And the reason we like it, the reason it’s comforting, is because we can all disapprove of racism, and even if it’s proving very difficult to actually get rid of it, we can all—rich and poor—agree that it would be a good thing if we did. Just look around your classroom, or your office, or your living room—see if anyone raises their hand to defend white supremacy.

But racism doesn’t create the world in which the people who actually take care of your sick grandmother make so much less than the people who run and own the company they work for. Capitalism does. Sexism hasn’t created the (small) class of people who can send their children to elite colleges. Capitalism has. And, unlike white supremacy, capitalism has its defenders. Any serious conversation about how to make the US a more equal society has to start by talking about the real causes of our inequality. The biggest trouble with diversity is that it keeps us from talking about the trouble with capitalism.

Chapter Fifty-one

Workers of the World

When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run,
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun;
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one,
But the union makes us strong.

Chorus:

Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
For the union makes us strong.

Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite,
Who would lash us into serfdom and would crush us with his might?
Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight?
For the union makes us strong.

Chorus:

Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
For the union makes us strong.

It is we who plowed the prairies; built the cities where they trade;
Dug the mines and built the workshops, endless miles of railroad laid;
Now we stand outcast and starving midst the wonders we have made;
But the union makes us strong.

Chorus:

Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
For the union makes us strong.

All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone.
 We have laid the wide foundations; built it skyward stone by stone.
 It is ours, not to slave in, but to master and to own.
 While the union makes us strong.

Chorus:

Solidarity forever,
 Solidarity forever,
 Solidarity forever,
 For the union makes us strong.

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn,
 But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn.
 We can break their haughty power, gain our freedom when we learn
 That the union makes us strong.

Chorus:

Solidarity forever,
 Solidarity forever,
 Solidarity forever,
 For the union makes us strong.

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold,
 Greater than the might of armies, multiplied a thousand-fold.
 We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old
 For the union makes us strong.

As a socialist, I actually have no doubt that free market types are right when they say employers try to make up for the increased minimum wage by firing a bunch of people and just sucking more labor out of the remaining workers. Because employers are profit-maximizing sociopaths, they will always try to cause the workers and the consumers to bear the burden rather than themselves. Free market types think that this proves minimum wage increases can be bad. I think it proves that capitalists are amoral monsters and worker ownership is essential. If it is true that minimum wage increases hurt workers, that is because employers would rather hurt workers than take any less of a portion for themselves. And any attempt to blame consumer choices for such outcomes ignores the fact that the consumers in other instances are underpaid exploited workers—a vicious cycle to the bottom.

“Humans were still not only the cheapest robots around,
 but also, for many tasks, the only robots that could do the job.

They were self-reproducing robots too. They showed up and worked generation after generation; give them 3000 calories a day and a few amenities, a little time off, and a strong jolt of fear, and you could work them at almost anything. Give them some ameliorative drugs and you had a working class, reified and coglike.”

Soon winter will come. Routine layoffs will start at the seasonal jobs. The nomads will pack up camp and return to their real home—the road—moving like blood cells through the veins of the country. They’ll set out in search of friends and family, or just a place that’s warm. Some will journey clear across the continent. All will count the miles, which unspool like a filmstrip of America. Fast-food joints and shopping malls. Fields dormant under frost. Auto dealerships, megachurches, and all-night diners. Featureless plains. Feedlots, dead factories, subdivisions, and big-box stores. Snow-capped peaks. The roadside reels past, through the day and into darkness, until fatigue sets in. Bleary-eyed, they find places to pull off the road and rest. In Walmart parking lots. On quiet suburban streets. At truck stops, amid the lullaby of idling engines. Then in the early morning hours—before anyone notices—they’re back on the highway. Driving on, they’re secure in this knowledge: The last free place in America is a parking spot.

When the deep mines were working years ago, Floyd County had a lot of jobs. A man would work down in the mines for twenty years, pay into his disability—a federal program known as Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)—and be out of the mines with black lung by age forty-five with a monthly check large enough to support a family. That became a life strategy in Eastern Kentucky.

How ridiculous that the answer to our economic problems is seen as wasting more of our most important asset—people.

It is the secret scandal of capitalism that at no point has it been organized primarily around free labor.

Workers of the world awaken. Break your chains, demand your rights.

All the wealth you make is taken, by exploiting parasites.
Shall you kneel in deep submission from your cradle to your grave?

Is the height of your ambition to be a good and willing slave?

Change happens when these people stop marching and start striking. At that point they are taking a real risk. Corporations are the gods of

the nation—superhuman, immortal, unbound by law, without shame or conscience, motivated by every human desire and afflicted by the worst human failings. Striking is the only thing that hurts them, and will be the only thing that brings about change. That is why striking is absent from the American political discourse: it is figuratively blasphemous.

Under President Reagan the NLRB went in the opposite direction. In addition to being far friendlier toward management in its decisions, it also became woefully understaffed, leading to long backlogs for cases to be heard. This backlog mattered for organizing drives because one of the main powers of the NLRB is its ability to reinstate workers who are illegally fired for union organizing. If an employer is able to fire all the key workers in an organizing drive and it takes two years for them to have their cases heard, the drive is likely to be over by the time the workers are reinstated.

Another big factor undermining the strength of unions has been the use of replacement workers as substitutes for strikers, thereby costing the strikers their jobs. While hiring replacement workers to replace striking workers was always legal, a set of norms had developed around labor-management relations in the three decades following World War II in which this was rarely done. The standard practice was that companies either shut down entirely during a strike or maintained some operations with skeletal staff of management personnel. This practice changed completely in the 1980s after President Reagan fired striking air traffic controllers and replaced them with controllers from the military. While Reagan had the legal authority to fire the controllers—federal law prohibited strikes by federal employees—up until that time strikes by public employees at both the federal and state levels had generally been resolved without mass dismissals. But soon many private employers took their cue from President Reagan. In the years immediately following the air traffic controllers' strike, several major corporations, such as Eastern Airlines and the Greyhound Bus Company, hired replacements for striking workers.

With the threat of termination heightened, the strike became a less effective weapon for unions. Going on strike meant not only that workers might miss a few days or weeks of pay, it meant that they could permanently lose their jobs. As a result, unions were far more hesitant to strike, which meant they had less ability to press their demands against management. This not only directly hurt workers who were already unionized, it made unions appear much weaker to non-members. The benefits of joining a union became much less apparent in a context where unions were repeatedly forced to make concessions in contracts. Union leadership corruption certainly doesn't help either.

Another way the nanny state hampers efforts by less-skilled workers

to push up their wages is by outlawing many types of union activity. For example, secondary strikes are illegal. This means that one group of workers can't stage a strike in support of a second group of workers (e.g. truck drivers can't refuse to deliver food to a restaurant where the workers are on strike). In the case of a secondary strike, the conservative nanny state will fine or even imprison workers for being too aggressive in pushing for higher wages. Apparently, employers are too weak to be able to bargain with workers without help from the government.

The Knights of Labor rallied women and African Americans together with white male workers under the cry that "an injury to one is the concern of all." Moreover, unlike the trade unions with their rigid segmentation of the workforce, the Knights welcomed men and women from all occupations together under the same banner.

Proletarian culture is inherently subversive. It is funny. It reveres equality and camaraderie; everything else, as a matter of principle, must be subject to question and open to ridicule. It insists that, no matter how serious and prestigious capitalism appears, and how silly and frivolous socialism appears, capitalism has no right to prevail; socialism must win, not because it is serious, but because it is moral and correct and inevitable.

The really critical thing isn't who is sitting in the White House, but who is sitting in—in the streets, in the cafeterias, in the halls of government, in the factories. Who is protesting, who is occupying offices and demonstrating and disrupting. Those are the things that determine what happens.

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.

Power itself is not the problem. It never has been and never will be. Power is a constant and will not disappear within any society whether capitalist, socialist, communist, or anarchist. There will always be a power, a controlling force of some nature. Even anarchism is subjected to the power of those within such a system to decide that such society will be anarchist. For if someone decided they wished to live within a communist society or a capitalist society, the power of the prevailing anarchist society would deny such change that the person wished.

Power will not cease. Individual theologies of the moral uprightness of eschewing power does not negate the fact that power itself will exist. Eschewing power—whether individual or group—simply means that some other person or group will wield power. And again, power itself is not the problem.

Historically, power has been wielded by the propertied classes and those with access to money and finance. Indeed, it has been the struggle for power

between classes that has propelled history—for class struggle is history. It is too simplistic to say that a ruling class, by nature, is the enemy. Rather, it is the ruling class within a capitalist state and society that is the enemy, for this specific ruling class is the one that wields an oppressive power against the masses. Indeed though, even oppressive power is not by nature a negative force as it depends on what class is the oppressor and what class is being oppressed. It is without compunction that I say it is a material good for the working class to have power. It is a material good for the working class to have oppressive power when that oppressive power is used to oppress the structures of the capitalist system that subjugates the masses.

It is inherently just for the ills of the capitalist system—nay, the capitalist system itself—to not only be rejected by vitriolic words and defensive measures, but for the working class to engage in active suppression and, subsequently, at the point at which the working class becomes the ruling class, to engage in active oppression of those who would seek to reverse the power of the working class which has now become the ruling class. Without initial suppression and later oppression of reactionary capitalists, the human rights of the working class would once more be trampled under the foot of the capitalist.

No amount of liberal electoral democracy will guarantee the rights of the masses to be secure in the face of reactionary capitalist reversal. It takes one electoral cycle for the capitalist to legally come to power and legally reverse the democratic gains of the working class. One electoral cycle—bought and stolen by the capitalist class—to bring the capitalist elite back into power legally. For electoral democracy in the bourgeois capitalist stage simply means that the capitalist ruling class can legally be elected and legally legislate and legally adjudicate that their legislation is licit and thus legally oppress the working class since bourgeois capitalist democracy provides the “liberal freedom” to change any law—especially those that respect the working class—it sees fit to change. So it is that the working class is forever kept under the heel—legally and liberally—of the capitalist ruling class that wields its power in such a manner.

Power must not be eschewed by the working class. The working class must struggle for power. The working class must struggle to become the ruling class. The current pyramidal structure in which the capitalist ruling class elite sits on top of the masses must be inverted. The working class, which permeates the majority of the pyramid, must invert the pyramid so that the masses at the bottom will now occupy the highest level and the capitalist class, previously alone in its perch, will now be at the bottom, to not merely be sat upon by the masses, but to be driven into the ground by the weight of the masses—the new ruling class.

Do not reject the idea of a ruling class.

Become the ruling class!

Do not reject power.

Seize power!

Consciousness is key. We must understand that there are millions of us in this same boat. That our individual sense of helplessness, if we have it, is real. We cannot fight the one percent on our own. But together we can accomplish anything. We have allies all around us, but allow artificial barriers to prevent us from seeking them out. Those barriers are: race, religion, sexual preference, education, age, employment status, nationality, and more. Only one thing matters. We are *all* victims of the one percent and their lackeys. Our seemingly individual struggles all trace back to one source, the unelected, illegitimate ruling class. Once we understand this, solidarity with our brothers and sisters in struggle will be a natural outcome.

Any accommodation with members of the capitalist class is futile and self-defeating. They are the enemy. They will degrade and destroy everything, including the ecosystem, to get richer. They are not capable of reform. To strive for decent lives in the Anthropocene therefore means freeing ourselves from repressive institutions, from alienating domination. It can be an extraordinary emancipatory experience. There comes a time in human affairs when we must stare the situation squarely in the face.

It seems that the socialist focus on party above all may be required in absence of instant global communication system. And while this is often criticized as a form of authoritarianism or dictatorship, the same critiques are not leveled against capitalist corporations who often do not even offer the illusion of working to benefit the people. However, with universal access to education and information, it would seem that one can rely on the people directly for a much broader set of decisions than in the past.

The economy is a game. This game should be about nonessential things (motorcycles, jet skis, televisions). A person feeding their family, staying alive, having shelter is not a game—these should not be subject to an economy.

Labor unions are on the wane today, as everyone knows, down to 9% of the private-sector workforce from a high water mark of 38% in the fifties. Their decline goes largely unchecked by a Democratic Party anxious to demonstrate its fealty to corporate America, and unmourned by a therapeutic left that never liked those Archie Bunker types in the first place. Among the broader population, accustomed to thinking of organizations as though they were consumer products, it is simply assumed that unions are declining because nobody wants to join them anymore, the same way the public has lost its taste for the music of the Bay City Rollers. And in the offices of the union-

busting specialists and the Wall Street brokers and the retail executives, the news is understood the same way aristocrats across Europe greeted the defeat of Napoléon in 1815: as a monumental victory in a war to the death.

Part VI

The Puppetmasters

Meet the king of cowboys, he rides a pale pony
He fights the bad boys, brings them to their knees
He patrols the highways from the air
He keeps the country safe from long hair
I am the masculine American man
I kill therefore I am

I don't like the black man, for he does not know his place
Take the back of my hand or I'll spray you with my mace
I'm as brave as any man can be
I find my courage through chemistry
I am the masculine American man
I kill therefore I am

I don't like the students now, they don't have no respect
They don't like to work now, I think I'll wring their necks
They call me pig, although I'm underpaid
I'll show those faggots that I'm not afraid
I am the masculine American man
I kill therefore I am

Farewell to the gangsters we don't need them anymore
We've got the police force, they're the ones who break the law
He's got a gun and he's a hater
He shoots first, he shoots later
I am the masculine American man
I kill therefore I am

Violent Systems of Social Control

The Ongoing War

There has been little film criticism of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, a childhood favorite and now a staple of American popular culture. But *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is more than a holiday favorite. It is an allegory of capitalist modernity. The 1993 stop-motion animated movie is based on Tim Burton's original poem of the same title, which centers on an all-powerful leader seeking to re-enchant his realm with the spirit of Christmas. And it happens to be a story that tells us something about life under capitalism.

The Nightmare Before Christmas begins in Halloweentown, a place inhabited by witches, vampires, ghosts, and other fiendish (though mostly friendly) creatures, but which otherwise contains virtually no magic. It runs and operates like any other town, with a diverse population, an urbanized downtown, an ineffectual and two-faced mayor, and research and development offices run by the creepy Dr. Finkelstein. However, it is Jack Skellington who wields the real power, represented by Burton as a Steve Jobs-style CEO, rather than a feudal-lord.

Jack is seen as a visionary by the townsfolk, a creative politician who wants to make the very state he controls into its own unique work of art. This figure of the friendly captain of industry mirrors others from Burton's films, such as Willy Wonka from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Burton as a director seems obsessed with the dictatorial powers of these entrepreneurs.

But while Jack is praised for his "brilliant leadership" in organizing each year's Halloween—for making "walls ooze," "flesh crawl," and the "very mountains crack"—Jack is soon bored of the whole scary affair. His life doesn't excite him anymore, and after another successful Halloween is over, he sings his famous lament in a graveyard. The civilization that Jack has built seems exhausted, and Jack cannot justify its existence anymore. As he puts it, this Halloween was "just like last year and the year before that and the year before that."

After Jack sings his Weberian lament of disenchantment, he wanders with his trusted ghost-dog Zero into the woods. He falls asleep, and in the morning wakes, encountering a circle of holiday trees. Each represents a portal into another dimension. At first, he sees a Valentine's tree, then a shamrock tree, an Easter egg tree, and a Thanksgiving turkey tree. But the tree that catches his attention is the Xmas tree. As he turns the knob on the Christmas tree, he is sucked into the world of Christmastown.

Jack is astonished: in the midst of the polar landscape is a little town of vibrant red and green, warm colors that contrast with the orange and black of Jack's land. In contrast to Jack's dead and undead citizens, the elf workers are alive, jolly, and lovingly cared for by Santa Claus. Santa appears to Jack as a strange towering red monster, who is happy and full of laughter. Jack is absolutely in love with this idyllic paradise, the living antithesis of the urbanized nightmare-scape of Halloweentown.

Jack returns to Halloweentown in awe of Christmas, and he undertakes a scientific research program in order to better understand the source of its enchantment. He contacts Dr. Finkelstein for lab equipment, and with the artifacts he gathered from Christmastown, he starts to cut, dissect, and even grind up these Christmas trinkets in order to understand.

But while Jack understands the forms and appearances of Christmas, he cannot understand its special something—its content and soul. Conducting his research in isolation from the townsfolk, Jack is a parody of instrumental reason: he dissects in order to understand, but such blinkered rationality cannot account for what is unique about Christmastown. The scientific enterprise is destined to fail.

Eventually, he resolves that Halloweentown will do Christmas this year, and Jack embarks on the new project with all the energy of a corporate takeover, even transforming himself into Santa Claus after an abduction of the real Father Christmas.

Jack cannot rely on mere legality to pressure Christmastown, so he hires "Halloween's finest trick or treaters," Lock, Shock, and Barrel, to kidnap Santa. Jack realizes that they are his enemy Oogie-boogie's henchmen, the most infamous gangster of Halloweentown, but Jack needs Oogie's mercenaries to carry out this crime. Jack does not want complications, so he asks the trick-or-treaters to keep this mission a secret and to ensure that "no good Oogie-boogie" stays out of it. But the evil trick-or-treaters lie to Jack, and drag the kidnapped Santa Claus to Oogie's lair, where Oogie tortures him.

Meanwhile, Jack ignores what his friend Sally tells him: that she has had visions of this plan ending in disaster and death. Instead of heeding Sally's warnings, he conscripts her to make his Santa Claus outfit.

Jack redesigns the whole concept of Christmas to fit in with Halloweentown. To fulfill his grandiose vision, he enlists the townspeople as helpers, exploiting his labor force in an effort to speed up production and circulation of the Halloween commodities he now repackages as Christmas gifts.

With strong Elon Musk vibes, Jack wants to reengineer Christmas, to make it more tech-savvy: instead of real reindeer, he builds mechanized deer-like robots; instead of simple children's toys he manufactures sleek (but terrifying) creations. Instead of grasping the spirit of Christmas, Jack kills it, turning it into a corporate monstrosity.

Jack descends on the houses of a sleepy and unsuspecting suburbia as the new Santa. But people are shocked by this version of Christmas. Families run in horror from a re-imagined Santa Claus that now takes the form of a dead skeleton. Children are frightened by the gruesome Halloween-themed toys. Eventually, Jack is gunned down by the military, and his mechanized reindeer and sleigh are shot out of the sky.

Jack gives up his ambition to take over Christmas. He endeavors to restore order in Halloweentown and seeks to return the real Santa Claus to his rightful home. The movie ends on a Thanksgiving-like theme (the holiday that is between Halloween and Christmas), and the nations of Halloweentown and Christmastown agree to a *status quo ante bellum*.

At one level, Jack's attempt at overcoming his malaise through exoticism leads to the brutal accumulation and expropriation of another country. But the violence Jack represents is also that of generalized commodity production, of knocking down the walls of the sleepy dreamland of Christmastown. In Jack's hands, all that was sacred about Christmas is profaned. Jack's narcissism is the narcissism of the bourgeoisie, as he tries to create a world after his own image.

In appropriating Christmas for himself, Jack destroys its religious, sentimental, and feudal character. Jack's project conjures Marx's famous description of capitalism: like capitalism, Jack has "drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation." In substituting Santa's toys with his own "improved" creations, the children are confronted with the monstrosities of a market that is "shameless and direct" as Marx puts it.

But if Jack ultimately puts an end to his hybrid experiment, the film's resolution only serves to mask the problematic social relations between Santa and his exploited worker elves. In keeping this realm magical, Jack helps to reify Santa's exploitation as a wonderful thing.

Jack consistently exoticizes Christmastown throughout the movie, first as a new and enticing commodity, and then as something precious to be

protected at all costs. But what remains is this othering; of not seeing Santa's elves as workers, but as exotic fixtures in a faraway world. Jack starts the movie as a plundering neoconservative, trying to refashion the other for profit. He ends up as a sentimental paleoconservative, hoping to stave off the globalizing forces of his own city.

The very antinomy between Halloweentown and Christmastown presupposes other basic contradictions of capitalism that Marx said will fester "until its blessed end." This is the contradiction between reason and values, or between instrumental rationality and what has intrinsic worth. Marx argues in the *Grundrisse* that it is the limited forms of bourgeois reason, or positivism, that give birth to its own romantic antithesis. Within the limits of the market, one cannot see beyond the contradictions of capitalism. The hollowed-out forms of reason that we see in liberalism, from Mill to Habermas, cannot provide bourgeois society with its own purpose and meaning. With such gnawing spiritual emptiness, bourgeois society must latch onto an external and extralogical kind of faith to keep it going, and this is why Marx saw clearly the link between positivist rationality and romanticism that looks back to the past.

Jack's quest to appropriate the mystical aura of Christmastown is the same dialectic of a hollowed-out reason looking for justification. In attempting to re-enchant his world, he fails. All he can do is preserve the dualism between reason and faith, since if he attempts to cross these streams, it will end in destruction. Reason and faith must be seen as nonoverlapping magisteria, and everyone must know their place in this world. If reason does not know its limits, then it will try to actualize itself in history, and all such attempts to "immanentize the eschaton" (as conservatives will tell us) will end in totalitarianism.

The limitations of Jack's reason are the same as bourgeois society writ large. Jack's yearning for some mysterious other is itself a flight from the problems he faces in modern Halloweentown. An archaic magical realm such as Christmastown will not solve Jack's problems. Jack is looking for his Holy Family in Christmas while ignoring his own Earthly Family back home.

Jack's dilemma is twofold: he is looking for something beyond reason to sustain his existence and he is also looking for something beyond the mass society of Halloweentown. The people of Halloweentown had to be convinced by Jack to go along with his Christmas plans, but they were already quite happy with practicing the holiday as a mass festival. Yes, they do praise Jack as their king, but they do not see any problem with the holiday. They do not see their world the way Jack does, as dreary and disenchanting. Halloween for them is self-justifying as a form of entertainment, and it does not need a

supernatural supplement from Christmastown to make it better.

This may be seen as too commercialized, but the masses here have the right idea compared to Jack. They have accepted Halloween on secular terms, as most people do: a holiday that can sublimate all our primordial terrors and fears as forms of entertainment. What is wrong with Halloweentown are not its festivals and entertainment, but Jack's attempt to commodify them, in order to better subject consumption to exchange. Jack's pessimistic view that his world and its citizens are not good enough is the excuse he needs to exploit them.

“The big problem is that the government is at the jugular of businessmen. The worker will have to decide: less rights and employment or all the rights and unemployment.”

If we judge from history, the desire to relegate one group of society to the task of manual labor is a powerful feature of human social psychology. The justification for such a division of labor is typically based on differential attributions of the human capacity for theoretical reflection. Some groups, it is said, are best equipped for practical tasks and others for theoretical tasks, a view that has traditionally been at the basis of the justification of slavery. But almost every society, whether or not it has a practice of slavery, endorses some version of it.

It takes only two things to keep people in chains: The ignorance of the oppressed and the treachery of their leaders. To rule a people requires the cooperation of the people being ruled.

Democracy has never been and never can be so durable as aristocracy or monarchy. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.

Democracy only exists as a collective dream—a dream that, by definition, can never reach a state of complete realization. As soon as people become convinced that the dream has been attained, democracy is already dead. What takes its place is a profound form of anti-democratic paranoia, a marrow-level dread turned against any groups that are perceived as trying to take it away. The repression of these groups is then given tacit or explicit support by the very people who believe they are “protecting” themselves by doing so. American “democracy” becomes a bizarre form of psychosis. It becomes the celebration of a reality that exists most purely in the form of existential fiction, and all matters of democracy are viewed through a purely existential lens. It is the thing you have, the thing you are, the history you embody just by living in it now. It is not the J20 protesters or the NoDAPL

protesters or the citizens of Flint or any other elements who exist on the margins of the already-achieved democratic project.

If the citizens neglect their Duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made, not for the public good so much as for selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the Laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizen will be violated or disregarded.

Anyone who has ever lived or worked in a corrupt dictatorship knows what happens. When the system is rigged, when ordinary citizens are powerless, and when whistleblowers are pariahs at best, three things happen. First, the worst people rise to the top. They behave appallingly, and they wreak havoc. Second, people who could make productive contributions to society are incentivized to become destructive, because corruption is far more lucrative than honest work. And third, everyone else pays, both economically and emotionally; people become cynical, selfish, fatalistic. Often they go along with the system, but they hate themselves for it. They play the game to survive and feed their families, but both they and society suffer.

Elites—that is, the political and corporate ruling classes, and the professional classes who do much of those rulers' thinking for them—hate to listen to people.

“I know I personally get very frustrated because I'm in several disadvantaged groups, and the decisions of politics directly impact my everyday life, and have since the day I was born. I often find the people who disagree with me are people who came from good or at least middle class families and have often never had to apply for Welfare, wait hours at methadone clinics for their parents because of ridiculous laws, find ways to get from one side of town to the other so your parent won't go to jail because they missed this one appointment.

I mean, most people in America legitimately do not understand what it is like to live truly poor and at the subject of arbitrary, often very difficult to follow rules that politicians like to tack on to the end of bills or laws or help that's supposed to prevent you from being homeless. So I get passionate about it, and I get angry, because I feel they aren't listening to me or even taking a moment to consider how they would feel if they were in those situations, how lucky they are to have been randomly birthed in their family rather than mine. It's hard to

stay impartial sometimes dealing with people who have so much and never once know it.”

Our society constantly proclaims that anyone can make it if they just try hard enough, all the while reinforcing privilege and putting increasing pressure on its overstretched and exhausted citizens. An increasing number of people fail, feeling humiliated, guilty, ashamed. We are forever told that we are freer to choose the course of our lives than ever before, but the freedom to choose outside the success narrative is limited. Furthermore, those who fail are deemed to be losers or scroungers, taking advantage of our social security system.

America is the wealthiest nation on Earth, but its people are mainly poor, and poor Americans are urged to hate themselves. It ain't no disgrace to be poor, but it might as well be.

It is in fact a crime for an American to be poor, even though America is a nation of poor. Every other nation has folk traditions of men who were poor but extremely wise and virtuous, and therefore more estimable than anyone with power and gold. No such tales are told by the American poor. They mock themselves and glorify their betters. The meanest eating or drinking establishment, owned by a man who is himself poor, is very likely to have a sign on its wall asking this cruel question: ‘If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?’ There will also be an American flag no larger than a child's hand—glued to a lollipop stick and flying from the cash register.

Americans, like human beings everywhere, believe many things that are obviously untrue. Our most destructive untruth is that it is very easy for any American to make money. We will not acknowledge how hard money is to come by, and, therefore, those who have no money blame and blame and blame themselves. This inward blame has been a treasure for the rich and powerful, who have had to do less for their poor, publicly and privately, than any other ruling class since, say, Napoleonic times.

Many novelties have come from America. The most startling of these, a thing without precedent, is a mass of undignified poor. They do not love one another because they do not love themselves.

Popular morality blames victims for going into debt—not only individuals, but also national governments. The trick in this ideological war is to convince debtors to imagine that general prosperity depends on paying bankers and making bondholders rich—a veritable Stockholm Syndrome in which debtors identify with their financial captors.

Utilitarianism isn't how people behave. One must not confuse prescription with depiction. Society behaves with brutal exploitation. It isn't the greatest happiness for the greatest number, but for the fewest number. So

the Elites are always on a knife edge, they fear to go to sleep, just like when they owned Southern plantations. Their slaves might make sure they never wake up. This is why the Elite must always hate the exploited, in any economic system. The Elite must treat the average person like Hell in order to get into or stay in the Elite. The price is blowback. So yes, better slaving technology to control blowback would help them superficially, but it doesn't get rid of the slavery. The wage and debt slavery of today, is merely the more sophisticated version of chattel slavery of the past. You can never fix things by only dealing with symptoms.

People of privilege will always risk their complete destruction rather than surrender any material part of their advantage. Intellectual myopia, often called stupidity, is no doubt a reason. But the privileged also feel that their privileges—however egregious they may seem to others—are a solemn, basic, God-given right. The sensitivity of the poor to injustice is a trivial thing compared with that of the rich.

“There is not an industrial company on earth, not an institution of any kind—not mine, not yours, not anyone's—that is sustainable. I stand convicted by me, myself alone, not by anyone else, as a plunderer of the earth. But not by our civilization's definition. By our civilization's definition, I'm a captain of industry and in the eyes of many, a kind of modern-day hero.”

Or here's what Dalio wrote about being a Wall Street hyena:

“When a pack of hyenas takes down a young wildebeest, is this good or bad? At face value, this seems terrible; the poor wildebeest suffers and dies. Some people might even say that the hyenas are evil. Yet this type of apparently evil behavior exists throughout nature through all species . . . like death itself, this behavior is integral to the enormously complex and efficient system that has worked for as long as there has been life. It is good for both the hyenas, who are operating in their self-interest, and the interests of the greater system, which includes the wildebeest, because killing and eating the wildebeest fosters evolution, i.e., the natural process of improvement. Like the hyenas attacking the wildebeest, successful people might not even know if or how their pursuit of self-interest helps evolution, but it typically does.

How much money people have earned is a rough measure of how much they gave society what it wanted.”

As it happens, the vast majority of Americans are unprofessional: they are the managed, not the managers. But people whose faith lies in “cream rising to the top” tend to disdain those at the bottom. Those who succeed, the doctrine of merit holds, are those who deserve to—who race to the top, who get accepted to good colleges and get graduate degrees in the right subjects. Those who don’t sort of deserve their fates.

“One of the challenges in our society is that the truth is kind of a disequalizer. One of the reasons that inequality has probably gone up in our society is that people are being treated closer to the way that they’re supposed to be treated.”

—Larry Summers

People are ‘worth’ what they’re paid in the market in the trivial sense that if the market rewards them a certain amount of money they must be. Some confuse this tautology for a moral claim that people deserve what they are paid. One of the most broadly held assumptions about the economy is that individuals are rewarded in direct proportion to their efforts and abilities—that our society is a meritocracy. But a moment’s thought reveals many factors other than individual merit that play a role in determining earnings—financial inheritance, personal connections, discrimination in favor of or against someone because of how they look, luck, marriage, and, perhaps most significantly, the society one inhabits. If we are very generous with ourselves I suppose we might claim that we earned as much as one-fifth of our income. The rest is the result of being a member of an enormously productive social system.

In portraying the concentration of money in society as a reasonable development—as a reward for successfully competing against other capitalists—the libertarian tradition completely dismisses the power of concentrated money. Hayek, for example, claims that in a “competitive society”—a meaningless abstraction, different kinds of societies can be ‘competitive’—nobody possesses excessive power, arguing, “so long as property is divided among many owners, none of them acting independently has exclusive power to determine the income and position of particular people.” Okay, fine, maybe not exclusive power, but to the degree that property is divided among fewer and fewer owners, these people can achieve overwhelming power to determine the income and position of others. Such as by acquiring greater “positive freedom” to dominate the state in their interests and against the interests of others, who thus proportionately lose positive freedom and possibly (again) even negative freedom; such as if the

wealthy can get laws passed that restrict dissidents' right to free speech or free assembly.

More generally, it goes without saying that positive freedom is proportional to how much money you have. It apparently doesn't bother most libertarians that if you're poor and unable to find an employer to rent yourself to—in the gloriously 'free, voluntary, and non-coercive' labor market—you won't be able to eat or have a minimally decent life. Hopefully private charities and compassionate individuals will come forward to help you; but if not, well, it's nothing that society as a whole should care about. Strictly speaking, there is no right to live—or to have shelter, food, health care, education—there is only a right not to be interfered with by others. What a magnificent moral vision.

In light of all these practices and policies that have emerged, directly or indirectly, out of the dynamics of the West's market economy, to argue that capitalism promotes human freedom is to be a hopeless intellectual fraud and amoral minion of power. If that judgment sounds harsh, consider this gem from Hayek, directed against measures to ensure worker security:

“It is essential that we should relearn frankly to face the fact that freedom can be had only at a price and that as individuals we must be prepared to make severe material sacrifices to preserve our liberty.”

More exactly, working-class individuals have to make severe sacrifices to preserve the liberty of the capitalist class.

If I could fly out to some other country, hire a driver, protection, et cetera, I could be a psychotic recluse much as I currently am, but it could all be done with variety and power.

It makes me realize why I hate capitalism so much. The people in power have so fucking much control that average people can't even comprehend that addiction. As much as I have to my benefit, I can't fly to some random location and buy a new home to escape. I can't buy humans for their high quality labor, meaning their lives through their time. When it gets down to it, what need is there for slavery when we can simply buy all the people we could ever need? The only problem with not having outright slavery is that we'd be empowering them, as they slave for us, away from their ties to our capital.

No one can possibly become wealthy unless they steal from someone. And we know that those who are wealthy have stolen from the majority of the population throughout history.

As a society we've convinced ourselves the only way to measure our own success or self-worth is by the number of people who die from being less fortunate than us.

It has always seemed strange to me the things we admire in people—kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling—are the recipes for failure in our system. And those traits we detest—sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism, and self-interest—are the traits of success. And while we admire the quality of the first, we love the products of the second.

The great merit of the capitalist system, it has been said, is that it succeeds in using the nastiest motives of nasty people for the ultimate benefit of society.

There are constant laments about the so-called loss of norms and values in our culture. Yet our norms and values make up an integral and essential part of our identity. So they cannot be lost, only changed. And that is precisely what has happened: a changed economy reflects changed ethics and brings about changed identity. The current economic system is bringing out the worst in us.

With the loss of an awareness of the common good, there is no stomach for sacrifice of any kind. Moral decay at the top quickly infects the entire social-order pyramid. Once injustice is institutionalized in unearned privileges, rentier skims and scams, systemic fraud, state-enforced rackets, a some-are-more-equal-than-others judicial system and a drug-war Gulag for the disenfranchised, the systemic injustices corrupt not just every institution but the culture that is internalized by every participant.

“All our things are right and wrong together. The wave of evil washes all our institutions alike.”

An economic system that rewards psychopathic personality traits has changed our ethics and our personalities. They're rich because they are ruthless and unprincipled, or were born rich, or both. The rich are rich because they are lucky and immoral.

Grabbing what you can get isn't any less wicked when you grab it with the power of your brains than with the power of your fists.

Instead of empires ripping out people's hearts to sacrifice to gods, we have people voluntarily selling their organs and blood to the powerful in order to survive, or being attacked by others who wish to sell their organs. Peter Thiel can buy the blood of the young legally. West African politicians can buy amulets made from the young with impunity. Those who thrived in the trade economy did not turn out to have any greater merit, only greater

proximity to power and less social obligations. Freedom to act without concern for social obligations created a system designed for the promotion of sociopaths.

Functional societies need algorithms which reward us for being of service to those who need it most. Instead we have algorithms which reward us for being of service to those who need it least.

Unfortunately trading ethics for comfort is par for the course in America. We can aspire to become conscious participants in the system. We can understand where our money is going before we give it out, and be aware of how our actions collude with economic oppression and exploitation. But I can't help feeling that more is required. What could stop the march of convenience? It's a question my generation may one day have to answer. But by then, will the luckier ones among us have become too comfortable to care?

Ah yes. The point where what's keeping you back is basic human empathy. You can succeed if you just get rid of that. It's a dead weight holding you down from profiting off complete commercialization of your marketable skills.

I honestly wonder how many honest people thought of the whole ride sharing idea and were in the process of trying to build their business the legitimate way before Uber broke laws and sailed right by them. It goes to show you: the people who get the biggest rewards in capitalism are the ones who play closest to the line of dishonesty without getting arrested.

The dominance of the ideology of competition has created a really toxic social environment in the West. Some people prefer to base their opinions of themselves not on who they can beat in any given competition, but rather on how they live up to their own expectations. Some people prefer not to compete with themselves or others, and are happy to just go about their own business. Having competition and competitiveness at the foundation of a dominant social ideology creates a dynamic in which those who are not inclined towards competitiveness will always have to compete with those who are more naturally inclined to it, often resulting in a descent to the lowest common denominator—the pursuit of wealth by any means and to the exclusion of all else—for the competitive and frustration or depression for those less inclined towards competitiveness.

That said, there's nothing wrong with competition and competitiveness per se, but it is a poor ideological foundation for a society to be built on, as things like love and kindness are much more important to the overall well-being and happiness of any given society. The very foundations of this culture are problematic.

“Problematic culture? Humans have a comparative sense of achievement. We’ve been around for 200,000 years and have been building more and better tools and toys, eating more, reproducing more, fucking the most attractive people we can, and just straight up competing the whole time. In fact we were doing it long before we were even what we consider to be modern humans!

We could have stopped at any time. Just sit around in shade and occasionally murder a gazelle, done. To put this on culture seems a little ridiculous. I mean hell, you can bow out of this shitshow whenever you want. A homeless person in a Western country is going to be more sheltered from the elements, more secure in their food source, have better access to clean drinking water, be safer from animals and disease, than pretty much any of our ancestors.

If not working long hours for tech companies, we’d be finding some other way to throw hours at triumphing over our fellow man. Tech companies are just the latest brand of competitive achievement. It’s always been around. It’s always been a primary motivator. It’s always made things suck for a large amount of people. And it’s always going to be here.

Shit, 300 years from now Basic Income Utopia—where everything we currently consider a job has been automated—is going to be full of people working 80+ hour weeks and others that are genuinely depressed at having to put in 50 to try to keep up. They’ll be putting that time in to having the perfect body, or writing poetry to seem artsy and creative, or practicing their conversational skills so they can be the wittiest person at the weekly pre-orgy drinking ceremony so they can be the one with the privilege to take a run at the prettiest girl before she’s sloppy with semen.

We were doomed to this bullshit by our own biology. Problematic culture it is not.”

A primate which has invented the concept of god and has gotten the vast majority of its kin to believe in some form of this god, cannot overcome urges that perhaps are rooted in some way in biology?

Profit, or money in general, is all these people live for, it’s their altar. That’s why they are successful in this world. It’s also why the world is doomed. Is there any chance I could persuade you to dwell on that for a few seconds? That, say, Bloomberg and Carney, and all they represent, are

the problem dressed up as the solution? That our definition of success is what dooms us?

It was to resist personal gain-seeking at the expense of the body politic and group solidarity that the world's major philosophies and religions for the past two-thousand years urged self-control, generosity, care for the weak and poor, and rules to limit the luxurious self-indulgence and anti-social egotism it bred in ruling elites. Excluding this intellectual legacy from the curriculum has paved the way for inverting today's moral attitude upholding creditor claims against the rest of society.

To help cover up this heist of the economy, an appealing intellectual gloss was needed. So public intellectuals were recruited and subsidized to turn "globalization," "neoliberalism," and "the Washington Consensus" into a theological belief system. The "dismal science of economics" became a miracle of faith. Wall Street glistened as the new promised land, while few noticed that those angels dancing on the head of a pin were really witch-doctors with MBAs brewing voodoo magic. The greed of the Gordon Gekkos—once considered a vice—was transformed into a virtue. One of the high priests of this faith, Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, looking in wonder on all that his company had wrought, pronounced it "God's work."

Having on more than one occasion suffered through management restructuring organized by MBA's which did nothing other than reduce productivity in favour of meaningless metrics and increase the power of managers who had no idea how to actually do the job, I'm increasingly coming to the conclusion that the MBA was a clever invention by an anarchist determined to create a virus to undermine capitalism from within. At least, that's the only possible theory that makes sense to me.

We are throwing more and more of our resources, including the cream of our youth, into financial activities remote from the production of goods and services.

"I'm a little surprised this discussion can be held without mention of the notion that swept the nation in the 1980s that 'greed is good.' Yes, I know I'm quoting Gordon Gekko, but he was our hero. He spoke the credo by which we lived our lives: each of us, individually, acting solely in our own selfish interest, improved conditions for everyone. Greed was the tide that would lift all all boats.

I was one of those young men who felt he had the world by the balls in the 1980s. I was a total unquestioning believer in 'Reaganomics,' the theory that society benefits most when wealth

is transferred from those at the bottom and middle economic tiers into the pockets of the already-rich, from which it would 'trickle-down' to the masses. We loved to identify to each other those who weren't contributing their 'fair share.' We loved to rag on them at the office. Reagan's notion of the 'welfare queen' gave us all moral cover for our attitude: 'I got mine; you're on your own, Buddy.'

And, largely within my own lifetime, the notion of 'you're on your own' replaced the traditional American belief of a family, a community, a nation. . . that 'we're all in this together.' But, then, I suffered the big twin—the two life-changing events that result in the large majority of American bankruptcies—a sudden loss of income (I was laid off from a high-tech job during the 'dot-com' bubble bust in 2002), and my wife had a life-threatening cancer. I realized quickly that I lived in a society with an inadequate safety net for its citizens. It's not a cruel society; it's a dispassionate one, it is a society in which an increasing number of people cannot feel basic empathy for others, not if they can identify some characteristic that turns those people into 'others.'

I simply chose not to be like that, in my personal life, and in my choice of a home in which to grow old and die. We immigrated to Canada in 2005, when I was 48 years old, already well past the point when most people make such a huge life change. Mine was a very personal choice and not one I feel I have the right to expect others to make. And that, in itself, was the major way in which I changed as a man: I stopped trying to make other people live up to my own expectations, and I stopped that incessant, sanctimonious, self-pitying whining, 'Everybody hates us, everyone wants to kill us, they envy us for our freedom because we're so good.' Oh, grow up.

What most Americans need most is a good hard dose of reality. I know I certainly did. I'm a better man for it, And if you're twenty-something today; I think you'll be better for it. Want to prosper? Help others. Make real friends, and value them. You want to live free and peacefully? Defend the freedom of others, who are often the victims of US aggression. Don't think 'more war means more jobs.' That's sick. And I was, in my youth, a very sick man."

Most of the problems in our society stem from the wealthy, the divide between them and the rest, and the things these people do to maintain their

positions of dominance over the rest.

In the FDR-liberal world, the function of government is to provide services to citizens and protection from predators in the private sector. In the neoliberal world, the function of government is to manage government services so the private sector is given the most profit opportunities possible. This is why the ACA, the brainchild of a neoliberal president and his party, is written the way it is. It provides a public service—health care coverage—in a way that supports and ensures the profits of the predatory health insurance industry. These cooperative agreements and policies, in which government serves up its citizens to private-sector profiteers, are often called “public-private partnerships.”

After the failure and abuses of privatization and contracting-out services from the 1980s, there has been renewed appreciation for the role of the state or government. Earlier promoters of privatization have taken a step backward, only to take two more forward to instead promote public-private partnerships (PPPs). PPPs are essentially long-term contracts, underwritten by government guarantees, with which the private sector builds (and sometimes runs) major infrastructure projects or services traditionally provided by the state, such as hospitals, schools, roads, railways, water, sanitation, and energy. PPPs are promoted by many governments associated with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and some multilateral development banks—especially the World Bank—as the solution to the financing shortfall needed to achieve development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Since the late 1990s, many countries have embraced PPPs in many areas ranging from healthcare and education to transport and infrastructure—with mixed consequences. They were less common in developing countries, but that is changing rapidly, with many countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa now introducing enabling legislation and initiating PPP projects. PPPs are now an increasingly popular means to finance mega-infrastructure projects, but dams, highways, large plantations, pipelines, and energy or transport infrastructure can ruin habitats, displace communities and devastate natural resources. Typically, social and environmental legislation is weakened or circumscribed to attract investors for PPPs. There are also a growing number of dirty energy PPPs, devastating the environment, undermining progressive environmental conservation efforts and exacerbating climate change. PPPs have also led to forced displacement, repression, and other abuses of local communities, indigenous peoples, displaced farmers, and labourers among others.

Experiences with PPPs have been largely, although not exclusively, negative, and very few PPPs have delivered results in the public interest.

There has been some supposed success with infrastructure PPPs, mainly due to financing arrangements. Generally, PPPs for hospitals and schools have much poorer records compared to infrastructure. One can have good financing arrangements, due to preferential interest rates, for a poor PPP project. Nevertheless, private finance all over the world still accounts for a small share of infrastructure financing. However, good financing arrangements will not make a bad PPP project any better.

PPPs typically involve public financing for developing countries to attract bids from influential private companies, often from abroad. “Blended finance,” export financing, and new supposed aid arrangements have become means for foreign governments to support powerful corporations bidding for PPP contracts abroad, especially in developing countries. Incredibly, such arrangements are increasingly counted as overseas development assistance, as North-South, South-South, or triangular development cooperation.

Like privatization, PPPs often increase fees or charges for users. PPP contracts often undermine the public interest in other ways, with generous host government incentives and other privileges, often compromising and undermining the state’s obligation to regulate in the public interest. PPPs can limit government capacity to enact new legislation and other policies—such as strengthened environmental or social regulations—that might adversely affect or constrain investor interests.

PPP contracts are typically complex. Negotiations are subject to commercial confidentiality, making it hard for civil society and parliamentarians to provide checks and balances in the public and national interest. Such limited transparency significantly increases the likelihood of corruption and undermines democratic accountability. It is important to establish the circumstances required to achieve efficiency gains and to recognize the longer-term fiscal implications of PPP-related contingent liabilities. Shifting public debt to government guaranteed debt does not really reduce government debt liabilities, but obscures accountability as it is taken off-budget and is no longer subject to parliamentary, let alone public scrutiny.

Hence, PPPs are more likely to be abused because they are typically “off balance sheet” so that they do not show up as government debt, giving the illusion of easy money or credit. Despite claims to the contrary, PPPs are typically riskier for governments than for the private companies involved, as the government may be required to step in to assume costs and liabilities if things go wrong. PPPs also undermine democracy and national sovereignty as such contracts tend not to be transparent and subject to unaccountable international adjudication—due to investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) commitments—rather than national or international courts. Under World Bank-proposed PPP contracts, for example, national governments can even

be liable for losses due to strikes by workers.

One alternative, of course, is government or public procurement. In many instances, PPPs have become the most expensive financing option and much less cost-effective than transparent competitive government procurement. They cost governments significantly more in the long-run than if the government procures on an open competitive basis, or if projects are directly financed by government. Generally, PPPs are much more expensive than government procurement despite government subsidized credit. However, with a competent government doing good work, government procurement can be efficient and low cost. With a competent government and accountable consultants, efficient government procurement has generally proved far more cost-effective than PPP alternatives. It is therefore important to establish when and why meaningful gains can be achieved through PPPs, and when these are unlikely.

In the FDR-liberal world, the function of government is called “promoting the general welfare.” In the neoliberal world, the function of government is called “wealth creation.” Another way to say it is this: In the neoliberal world, citizens are the product whose money is delivered to corporations in exchange for government services. It’s quite a lucrative scam.

As I see it, the system is an ongoing war. Regardless of my opinions, capitalists are infringing on our freedoms and trying more and more to cage and milk us for all our worth, from our labor directly, and through our consumption, as well. Hence the hatred of concrete abuses of demand by businesses like Comcast and concrete abuses of labor by jobs in fast food and at Walmart. Ignorance is what lets Comcast tack on fees for equipment we already returned, or for businesses like Walmart and fast food places to exploit our tax subsidies to their employees because they refuse to pay a living wage despite their profits.

My envy and greed is absolutely the thing I’m against, which is why I have to retain it. I’ve been shamed all my life for my potential greed. Unions have been undermined and demonized as greedy, yet the capitalist dictators are given full respect for their greed. How can balance form when only one side is allowed to be greedy? We’re talking about institutions versus individuals. Individual merit can never stand up against the greed of institutions that further link together to empower themselves through media propaganda and control of laws.

Media elites, by virtue of their position, adore the status quo. It rewards them, vests them with prestige and position; welcomes them into exclusive circles; allows them to be close to—if not themselves wielding—great power while traveling their country and the world; provides them with a platform; fills them with esteem and purpose. The same is true of academic elites,

and financial elites, and political elites. Elites love the status quo that has given them, and then protected, their elite position.

Remember: Journalism, by definition, is publishing something that somebody doesn't want to be published. Everything else is just PR.

A democracy requires an informed electorate. The media fought tooth and nail to keep the US electorate uninformed. Poorly educated white voters are essentially fooled into voting against their own economic interests in favor of partisan ideologies that reward the wealthy, usually by means of straw man arguments about ethnic and religious minorities.

This kind of voter alienation is a tactic. The demands political systems make of us—of constituting ourselves as subjects, of liberating ourselves, expressing ourselves at whatever cost, of voting, producing, deciding—are in their own way an exercise of power. In these conditions, resistance takes the form of the refusal to do so—the renunciation of the subject position and of meaning—precisely the practices of the masses.

The idea that politics resets itself every four years is a fiction that benefits only those who devote their lives to satisfying personal ambition through political power. In other words, exactly the people we should be criticizing, opposing, and fighting, not enabling or whitewashing in article after article, television sermon after television sermon.

“This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful is the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.”

Autonomy is only possible as a whole society and as we have no more societies we are farther than ever from autonomy. There is no diversity under one grey, global empire. The prevailing culture around the world—in fashion, in music, in architecture, in lifestyle—is mass produced corporate ugliness, not evolved from any regional culture. We are educated in the same way for the same jobs and coerced by the same news and celebrities. We are all under the same empire but we have no great collaborative projects or joint plans for the future. We have lost our tribal societies but instead of receiving protection from outside plunder, the current empire has convinced us to plunder ourselves, to destroy our own homes and poison our own children and walk willingly into lifelong slavery with no chains. The global elite have no basis of authority, but with no existing societies or system of collaboration that is not based on the trade economy, most feel helpless to change the underlying structure.

Economists have replaced philosophers, banks have replaced churches, searching for profit has replaced searching for knowledge. People have been

reduced to live, consume, die. The artisans have not won, or the athletes, the philosophers, the caregivers, the artists, or even the warriors. The parasites have won.

If you put the two trends together—increased individual income inequality and increased corporate savings—what we’re witnessing then is increasing private control over the social surplus. Wealthy individuals and large corporations are able to capture and decide on their own what to do with the surplus, with all the social ramifications associated with their decisions to invest where and when they want—or not to invest, and thus to accumulate cash, repay debt, and repurchase their own equity shares. Proposals to decrease tax rates for wealthy individuals and corporations will only increase that private control.

And here we come to the real meaning of the “freedom” that capitalists and their publicists so love to extol. ‘Freedom’ for industrialists and financiers is freedom to rule over, control and exploit others; ‘justice’ is the unfettered ability to enjoy this freedom, a justice reflected in legal structures. Working people are free to compete in a race to the bottom set up by capitalists. The world’s central banks have printed and spent trillions to buy bonds, mostly those issued by their own governments. Imagine what that spending could have done if that money had been given to people or used for productive social spending instead of a free lunch for financial speculators.

In Switzerland an often used expression to describe ‘the people’ is “the sovereign.” This is a very accurate description of the status of the people in a real democracy: they are sovereign in the sense that nobody rules over them. In that sense, the issue in the United States is one of sovereignty: as of today, the real sovereign of the US are the corporations, the deep state, the Neocons, the plutocracy, the financiers, the Israel Lobby—you name it, anybody but the people.

Our society runs on a simple ethic: nothing can be allowed to happen if someone important doesn’t get rich doing it.

I have always found it odd that people rail against government intervention as if it is a blight on our freedom, but ignore the governance of workplaces by capital, who seek every way possible to destroy our freedom and initiative unless it is serving to advance their bottom line. We ignore the benefits of collective goods and laws that protect us, but turn a blind eye to the ongoing, minute-by-minute, repression in the workplace.

Allowing private parties to own our major industries, managing them for private profit, is at odds with true democracy. It hands to a few individuals power over people’s jobs and lives, over wealth that should belong to us all, and over critical decisions that affect our destiny. Capitalism is incompatible with solving the climate crisis and addressing other injustices.

We are at a point where government and every way we have organized society are under great stress and the only organized structures left are corporations which attack any organized society as an impediment to their interests.

Small government and privatization always benefit the rich and punish the rest. When you hear a politician talk about small government and privatization, ask yourself just one question: Who is bribing this guy?

The privatization or marketization of public services such as energy, water, trains, health, education, roads, and prisons has enabled corporations to set up tollbooths in front of essential assets and charge rent, either to citizens or to government, for their use. Rent is another term for unearned income. When you pay an inflated price for a train ticket, only part of the fare compensates the operators for the money they spend on fuel, wages, rolling stock, and other outlays. The rest reflects the fact that they have you over a barrel.

Like rent, interest is unearned income that accrues without any effort. As the poor become poorer and the rich become richer, the rich acquire increasing control over another crucial asset: money. Interest payments, overwhelmingly, are a transfer of money from the poor to the rich. As property prices and the withdrawal of state funding load people with debt—think of the switch from student grants to student loans—the banks and their executives clean up.

We pay people for doing things, and we pay people for owning things. Increasingly, the latter.

The words used by neoliberalism often conceal more than they elucidate. ‘The market’ sounds like a natural system that might bear upon us equally, like gravity or atmospheric pressure. But it is fraught with power relations. What “the market wants” tends to mean what corporations and their bosses want. ‘Investment’ means two quite different things. One is the funding of productive and socially useful activities, the other is the purchase of existing assets to milk them for rent, interest, dividends, and capital gains. Using the same word for different activities camouflages the sources of wealth, leading us to confuse wealth extraction with wealth creation.

A century ago, the *nouveau riche* were disparaged by those who had inherited their money. Entrepreneurs sought social acceptance by passing themselves off as rentiers. Today, the relationship has been reversed: the rentiers and inheritors style themselves entrepreneurs. They claim to have earned their unearned income.

They differ from bandits only in that they wielded pens to steal with stock options instead of pointing pistols while demanding cash or jewelry. Their techniques were subtle and not overtly violent, but for society they

are worse than street robbery, for their actions undermine the legitimacy of society's rules in ways that bandits cannot.

That any American who forgoes wages today for the promise of a pension tomorrow is not paid in full is a scandal. He has been robbed as surely as if a burglar broke into his or her home.

A thousand years ago, if you were a marauding gang and you wanted to take over a country's land and its natural resources and public sector, you'd have to invade it with military troops. Now you use finance to take over countries. So it leads us into a realm where everything that the classical economists saw and argued for—public investment, bringing costs in line with the actual cost of production—that's all rejected in favor of a rentier class evolving into an oligarchy. Basically, financiers—the 1%—are going to pry away the public domain from the government. Pry away and privatize the public enterprises, land, natural resources, so that bondholders and privatizers get all of the revenue for themselves. It's all sucked up to the top of the pyramid, impoverishing the 99%.

The dismantling of society left lifegivers and caregivers isolated, overworked, despised, and exhausted. They were told that dissociation was there to help them. You don't have to look after dependents, they are better off in institutions, the authorities said. Dependency became a product for corporations to profit from and caregivers were given the freedom to be enslaved by corporations.

The central myth of the United States: *Private Enterprise can serve people better than government.*

But they cannot because the Government's objective is to serve people, and private enterprise's objective is to extract rent from people. Private enterprise's objective is to make a return on investment of over 40% a year—a payback period of under three years—using the commons provided by the Government: schools, education, roads, police, et cetera. Government's objective is to invest with a expected payback in 20 years, by investing and building the commons, schools, education, roads, police, et cetera. The taxes paid by business in no way at all have payback period under three years. For example: education is a 20 year investment by parents—taxes, schooling and university costs—with *no* expectation of return by the parents of the children.

This complete focus on profit is disgusting and dishonest, and was considered a mortal sin less than 300 years ago.

Hayek forgot that vital national services cannot be allowed to collapse, which means that competition cannot run its course. Business takes the profits, the state keeps the risk.

Nothing good can come of relinquishing that control for any society, ever. There's not a thing wrong with protecting your control of your own water and food and shelter, and these are indeed things that should never be traded or negotiated in global markets.

So claiming that 'do no harm' equals *not* protecting your basics is nothing but a self-serving and dangerous kind of baloney coming your way courtesy of those people whose plush seats and plusher bank accounts depend on your ongoing personal loss of control over what you need to survive.

The SEC is an agency that polices the broken windows on the street level and rarely goes to the penthouse floors. The oft-cited explanations—campaign contributions and the allure of private-sector jobs to low-paid government lawyers—have certainly played a role. But the driving force was something subtler. Over the course of three decades, the concept of the government as an active player had been tarnished in the minds of the public and the civil servants working inside the agency. Regulatory capture is a psychological process in which officials become increasingly gun shy in the face of criticism from their bosses, Congress, and the industry the agency is supposed to oversee. Leads aren't pursued. Cases are never opened. Wall Street executives are not forced to explain their actions.

Oppression is violent. Oppression is public. Oppression is barbaric. Tyrannical regimes rule by overt force or implied physical harm. These lies are part of our velvet cages. Your house, your child's healthcare, your car, even your dog, all no different than the prisoner's cell bars. They keep you contained. They restrain your actions. Responsibilities. Things to lose. Loved ones. Important tools for survival. These are what they tell you, what you believe, what you subconsciously absorbed.

We assume when the oppression comes it will be overt, brutal, obvious. But why. How do you control that many millions of disgruntled people? You cannot, any intelligent person knows this. So you provide them with velvet cages, the cost a mere pittance after you've extracted the labor and health from them and others around the world. And the plushness of the cage renders it essentially invisible once you've layered on an adequate supply of cultural propaganda. We fight to preserve our cages as they are.

You've worked so hard. You've come so far. You know these rules, the lines familiar. Other avenues are unknown. You understand and have come to terms with the dangers as they currently exist. You've mitigated these dangers. This is the only way.

Content in our cages, we watch. We ho, we hum, we move the fuck on. This is the only way.

Will future generations, if there are any, be able to look back and reflect, 'what were these people thinking?' There is no justification for the levels

of inequality and environmental destruction we are experiencing. We can all consider ourselves fools, even for entertaining debate of these issues much longer. We need to be discussing concrete actions, not theoretical justifications.

Everyone must face the randomness of the universe every day. The only certainty known is the one we create as human beings together. Why is it, do you think, that the elite never break ranks? They are creating their own certainty in an uncertain world. Heads I win, tails you lose; Too Big to Fail; Race to the bottom; The new normal; Political capture using the revolving door techniques.

Human civilization is racing toward a crisis point. Ending inequality and world conflict are at the focal point of this outcome. Leaders that continue to use the outdated modes of social control will either drive us over the cliff to destruction, or will lose the ability to control outcomes as their numbers dwindle. The day the revelation is made that the elite are full of shit, is the day change becomes possible.

It seems large social structures will always come crashing down. The weakness in human nature and flaws in our social structures lead to eventual failure. Greed and selfish action is seldom tolerated in smaller structures.

You see, when educated people with excellent credentials band together to advance their collective interest, it's all part of serving the public good by ensuring a high quality of service, establishing fair working conditions, and giving merit its due. That's why we do it through "associations," and with the assistance of fellow professionals wearing white shoes. When working-class people do it—through unions—it's a violation of the sacred principles of the free market. It's thuggish and anti-modern. Imagine if workers hired consultants and "compensation committees," consisting of their peers at other companies, to recommend how much they should be paid. The result would be—well, we know what it would be, because that's what CEOs do.

America is controlled by capitalist corporations. They control our food, our utilities, our medicine/healthcare, and most importantly our politicians, our news, and information. Power over information and thought is a very powerful tool for keeping the public ignorant. They like to tout a "fair and free" market, denounce regulation/government interference; yet when labor unions start up all of a sudden they aren't about fair and free anymore and call upon government muscle to be their bodyguards to bully them back to work.

There has been anti-union, anti-communist, anti-socialist rhetoric for our country's entire existence. If you care enough you could do some research on our country's violent history towards labor and unions. For a time we had literal slavery being the backbone of our economy.

When a country is controlled from head to toe by narcissism, greed, and corruption, they will of course use every trick in the book to trick workers into being against their own interests. Capitalist extremism is just as dangerous as authoritarian communism, but the century of anti-communist propaganda has made people believe that the exact opposite of communism is inherently good.

“Those things weren’t forced on the population, they were demanded by them.”

Marketing manufactures demand. We know the psychology of consumers very well, and we are bombarded with targeted marketing daily that predisposes us to consumer culture from a very young age. Most of it is deceptive, and all of it is knowingly exploiting well-researched cognitive biases and failings in the population in order to achieve the stated goal of maximizing profits and minimizing costs.

Edward Bernays and Henry Ford are in part the founders of modern business practices. Henry Ford dreamed of a laborer-consumer population which gave rise to the modern concept of low-end consumer luxury goods. Edward Bernays argued that propaganda itself was necessary to maintain democracy and public order. He is seen as the founder of modern public relations and consumer marketing. Read more about these two men and you will very clearly see that the population did not initially demand these things, but rather were coerced into believing that these things were wanted, and not just wanted, but beneficial.

This is exactly what America figured out after WWII. The government was afraid of mass riots and even possibly a revolution so they hired Bernays to help them control the masses. He told them all they have to do is keep people content and distracted and no one will ever feel the need to revolt. The government called it the “happiness bubble” and it’s one of the main reasons capitalism exploded in developed countries. Before WWII people pretty much only bought things they needed, only the rich had excessive possessions. So when the government realized that buying materialistic things makes people happy they created propaganda to encourage it. Nowadays, we refer to such propaganda as advertisements. Ever since then mass consumerism has taken over developed world. And because of it, it’s extremely unlikely the masses will ever truly stand up to their governments.

“If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing about it?”

Bernays's favorite means of accomplishing this was not to attempt to influence the masses directly but by the "engineering of consent," finding a key group of leaders involved in a certain issue, changing their opinions, and letting them do the rest of the work. Bernays famously conducted a survey of five-thousand doctors, who almost unanimously agreed that people should eat a "hearty breakfast." He then took the results to newspapers around the country, adding as an aside that bacon and eggs were just such a morning meal. His client was the pork industry.

The age of modern advertisement—think *Mad Men*—was kicked off by behavioral psychology professor John B. Watson who is most popularly known for the "Baby Albert" experiments. What is not widely known is that he was kicked out of John Hopkins for having an affair with his research assistant shortly after said experiments. Where did he take his talents? You guessed it: Advertising—where he popularized the notion of selling "sex appeal" rather than a product. In my opinion, the rest of the Western world's economic and political history, then, are all gaslighting footnotes to the recently discovered ability to psychologically manipulate people to create demand where there was none previously.

It is worth considering the impact media creating ideological demand where there was none before has had—on individuals, communities, organizations, nations.

"I have to challenge the notion that 'we,' taking 'we' to mean what Hillary called the 'deplorables,' that include soccer moms and cops and school teachers and the kinds of fellow citizens you can see on 'Jerry Springer' and all those YouTube videos where the punch line of the old joke about 'What's a redneck's last words? HOLD MAH BEER AN' WATCH THIS!' and working people generally, have 'allowed' the country—founded on looting and killing in the first place of course, and an imperial dream from the beginning—to become what 'it' is. A lot of very subtle people, with all kinds of Bernaysian tricks up their sleeves, have seduced us and much of the rest of the world, into a combusto-consumption political economy, where all transactions with any power in them are conducted in money.

And yes, the Rulers, who are 'ours' only by linguistic convention, are leading us, driving us, eating us like ants eat the aphids they 'herd' when they have a taste for some protein to go with the nectar they extract."

The reason why so many Americans are abstaining from voting, a cornerstone of democracy, is intrinsically related to the long-stemming pathologies of the American political culture, namely an individualistic and consumer-driven society where the great majority of people cannot name a single Supreme Court justice but trust the military to act in the public interest and act as a cheerleader for the US's militaristic adventures and wars, and a political system increasingly controlled by the wealthy and business.

The manufacturing of an individualistic, consumer-driven culture is intended to promote conformism, ignorance, and apathy about public affairs, but also a perverted sense of patriotism which targets critically oriented voices as being "anti-American," thereby opening up a political space for the rise of the likes of Trump, Bush, and Reagan. That is to say, authoritarian, anti-labour, neoliberal, and jingoist politicians who wish to roll back whatever economic and social progress average Americans have made since the 1960s and maintain the empire.

We've been conditioned over the last one-hundred years to conflate the two, so that when you hear the word 'Capitalist' you think of some industrious chap with a great idea for a good or a service, providing them to an eager, self-correcting market—so as to prevent monopoly or fraud—and earning a tidy profit from their endeavor. Everybody wins and they all live happily ever after in their little fairy tale world. What the Masters of the Universe don't want you to think is what Capitalism really is: Using the power of money, asymmetric knowledge, and fraud to create monopoly and extract rents, either through over-inflated prices or inadequate wages (or both).

Most of the time we never think about why we like what we like or think the way we think. I have a really hard time understanding how more people don't think about this. I mean I get it, because theory and philosophy are mired in dense rhetoric and jargon, but it drives me crazy to talk to people who refuse to consider that a large portion of their personality and worldview is taught by media stereotypes and corporate profiteers.

In democracies, laws supporting freedom of thought, expression, and debate once contrasted with the communist governments which put ideology and social stability ahead of diversity and individual thought. In practice, Western media and Hollywood were all powerful, allowing the Five Eyes and their corporations to use censorship by noise instead of Chinese-style censorship by blocking. Freedom of the western corporate press also aided the western empires in controlling the governance of foreign states through propaganda. Insisting on "press freedom" throughout their empires ensured their influence was impossible to counter. China's recent investment in media in Africa acknowledges that this is still the case in parts of the world.

Even where state government had power, it was easily controlled. Unlike monarchies, democracies had elections. It is no longer necessary to fight wars to remove rulers if they can just be removed in an election with no resistance from the people. Increasingly, it has cost money to be a political candidate anywhere and those with the money and the inclination to support political candidates are corporations and the rich. Merchants also own the most powerful media and drive the dialogue behind the main issues in elections. To people who see jobs as freedom, any suggestion that a candidate would lose jobs, hurt industry, or cause the almighty economy to falter is lethal.

There's always some opinion you're not socially allowed to hold, in every society, and there's always at least one taboo that has no basis in reality.

The problem is not that the third world and developing countries have too many children, though that certainly can play a part. The issue is that the so-called educated and advanced West, embraces an insane, unsustainable ideology. Through propaganda it is held up as a great way to live. By targeting ancient pleasure centers, existing before we did as a species, it feels good to the masses.

Many elsewhere see this and wish to emulate—even if it is a small portion of their peoples at first, it will grow. The worldwide dominance and continued colonial nature of the West helps ensure that. But this ideology is not the only way in which to live, others in these countries and the West see this, though it is often easier to see before the Western ideology becomes dominant.

It should not be up to the non-West to lead the sacrifice. They have both knowingly and unknowingly sacrificed enough already. The West must reduce its standard of living with regards to luxuries and excessively elaborate necessities. Since they are apparently so smart, innovative, and well educated it should be trivial for them to do so.

Our Republic was supposed to be a place where citizens could be proud of their representative government, which was directly accountable to them. The sad truth is that we are now much closer to being subjects of our ruling class, than we are to being citizens of a democratic republic.

The only power that the corporate power structure still allows, to average people, is a very limited amount of “consumer choice.” Coke or Pepsi; Democrat or Republican; crappy high-deductible plan A or B. ‘We set the menu. Your freedom consists in making a selection from it.’ Never have so many been so screwed over for the benefit of so few.

There is a dangerous trend toward government relying on tech companies to build massive dossiers on people using nothing but constitutionally protected speech.

The first problem with this arrives when one party achieves the right to determine what everybody else is allowed to discuss. Facebook has attained this position. By being the de facto default discussion forum, it has effectively limited public rights to Freedom of Speech to its own “community standards.”

This is no small nut to crack from a policymaking perspective. Freedom of speech always assumed that people were speaking in the public square, eye to eye. But when that speech happens on somebody else’s servers, we have so far accepted that the property rights of those servers supersede the freedoms of speech.

But what if speech practically only happens on such private platforms? On Facebook, Twitter, Instagram? What happens when the network effect practically forces you to publish an idea on these private platforms if you hope to reach anyone at all, and those companies have every right to cancel your posting according to their own policies?

We’ve arrived at a completely unanticipated point where Freedom of Speech—in practice—has come at odds with property rights. This is a very serious conflict from a liberty perspective, and we’re at a fork in that road. Whatever road is chosen, whether freedom of speech or property rights is given precedence for the future, we’re laying groundwork that will have repercussions for centuries ahead. More importantly, this is true whether we lay that groundwork through action or inaction.

It is there again when protesters are thrown out of shopping malls for handing out political leaflets, told by the security guards that although the edifice may have replaced the public square in their town, it is, in fact, private property. A decade ago, any attempt to connect the dots among this mess of trends would have seemed strange indeed: what does synergy have to do with the chain-store craze? What does copyright and trademark law have to do with personal fan culture? Or corporate consolidation with freedom of speech? But today, a clear pattern is emerging: as more and more companies seek to be the one overarching brand under which we consume, make art, even build our homes, the entire concept of public space is being redefined. And within these real and virtual branded edifices, options for unbranded alternatives, for open debate, criticism, and uncensored art—for real choice—are facing new and ominous restrictions.

When you tear out a man’s tongue, you are not proving him a liar, you’re only telling the world that you fear what he might say. The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voice you are throttling today.

Responsibility to your tribe is replaced by dependency on authority. Instead of duties that the entire tribe owes to each member, people are given

rights, which must be enforced by a higher authority. Instead of talking to the tribe to ask for help, people are told to pray. Society does not have to be responsible because God is. If God refuses to help, “offer it up” in the afterlife and God will add it to your salvation since humanity refused. If not the church, people are told to go to the union, the police, or the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, and in all cases wait in a child-like state for solutions to be doled out instead of creating their own. Dignified, autonomous nations are reduced to children forever sitting in the waiting rooms of the powerful.

Industrialization depends on standardization. That’s why since the nineteenth century there have been constant attempts to standardize the population, with those that lie too far from the standard marginalized and treated as broken in some way, requiring either exclusion from society or medical intervention to fix them and bring them closer to the standard.

Recall that since change does not and cannot come from the masses who conform and those who may initiate radical change are shunned by society, leadership of change is taken over by Great Men, demagogues who interpret the thoughts of radicals for their own benefit and steer society in the directions most suitable to them. Great Men are accepted by the majority as they are not actually radical or unusual. They are instead a glossy version of the average, just attractive and superior enough that they can lead but not so different that they would be unaccepted by the majority. Truly radical ideas cannot be directly accepted by the majority, they must be interpreted by knowledge bridges as must highly specialized innovation. Great Men have the education, understanding and access to appreciate and intercept new ideas and package them, or easily palatable pieces of them, in an attractive and widely accessible format. They also have the ability to suppress the ones dangerous to themselves.

“Failing to maintain infrastructure didn’t ‘just happen.’ Older generations who vote more chose not to maintain that after their parents sacrificed to build it. It’s going to last out their lifetimes more or less, and fuck anyone else.

And what’s probably the most important factor didn’t ‘just happen’ either. College subsidies and investment in K-12 education didn’t ‘just happen’ to disappear, leaving us with hundreds of thousands of K-12 teachers making under \$40,000 a year and even students who work full-time during in-state bachelor’s degrees leaving \$20,000 in debt. That didn’t ‘just happen.’

Baby boomers and their own spoiled kids voted for the lowest possible property and income taxes many, many, many times. We’re chock-full again of insane, selfish twits in the older gen-

erations spouting things like ‘all taxation is theft’ and talking about which cabinet branches of the federal government should be completely closed down.

This ‘happy accident’ theory of American success in the twentieth century is mostly bullshit. We benefited greatly from the way World War II turned out, but it wasn’t just some accident that we continued succeeding like no other country in history for 60 years afterward. We invested hundreds of trillions of dollars over those decades in infrastructure, education, and research. Now the oldest two or three generations consistently vote to spend nothing on any of that, or even cut what we spend.

It’s not stuff that ‘just happened’ when education, all manner of infrastructure, et cetera are falling down around us and despite the fact we know it’s happening and these people vote to do nothing about it.”

This is why the idea of the “democracy of the market” is nonsense. People will always have a tendency to gravitate towards cheapness and convenience and trust that our democratic system is eliminating injustice and exploitation at the source, even though we know that very often this is far from the case. Willful ignorance is all pervasive because in the back of our minds we know that taking the moral high ground will cost us and if we act alone, it’s all for nothing.

The problem lies in the economic and political climate; because corporations wield so much power they bend “our” representatives to their will to externalize pesky costs like job security, environmental protection, even wages. We can now buy—on our identical high streets: cheap burgers; caramel lattes; washing up liquid with added aloe vera; razors with not one, but five blades—all it has cost us is job security, a healthy long-term economy, a wage that is enough to live on, the environment, a democracy that serves the people and pretty much the entire global ecosystem. What a bargain.

As long as the neoliberal economic model is favored, the race to the bottom will continue.

Downward Mobility

Primitive accumulation says that in order for there to be capitalism, there must first be capital. Primitive accumulation is the process before capitalism that creates that capital. In other words, theft.

Yup, capitalism's dirty little secret of original sin. The real problem is that it never really stops. Oligarchs only get to be oligarchs because they manage to find a way to rob or sponge off of the state. Or—as in the case of the US—conquering a land by genocide and then accumulating wealth via slave labour. So yes, theft, and on a grand scale.

Bourgeois society is by its very nature matter-of-fact, sober and businesslike, peaceable and modest, methodical, calculating, and prudential—unromantic to the bone. Its true and only hero is the acquisitive individual writ large: the businessman as warrior. The larger-than-life financial titans, coal and steel barons, and railroad Napoleons who lit up the stage of Gilded Age industrialism were the heroes of middle-class society. As the architects of Progress, they absorbed into their otherwise unprepossessing lives all the honorariums that once attached to the soldier, the aristocrat, the knight errant, the conquistador, the adventurer, the explorer—the doers who turned a society's most cherished dream, its most valued value, into reality, a reality so grand and transformative it takes the breath away. Yet a question remains. If Progress was, as this account would have it, a benign outcome of indigenous talents and natural endowments, a perfect union of temperament, institutional genius, and felicitous political invention, then why all the deep misgivings and uproar it incited? Where was the devil hiding in the weeds that would dim for millions the infatuation with Progress?

The whole industrializing enterprise may be seen to rest on the systematic cannibalizing of various forms of pre-capitalist economies and the societies they supported. Capital accumulation at the expense of these “others”—a process that has been characterized as “primitive accumulation”—constitutes the underground history of Gilded Age Progress. It is what accounts for the gross inequalities of income and wealth that emerged alongside a rise in the standard of living for some. It is why it is possible to speak of those days as the best of times and the worst of times. More profoundly than that, primitive accumulation fostered an abiding sense of loss felt by all sorts of ordinary people. It inspired them to resist their own social extinction, to form counter-dreams to the official romance of Progress. Indeed, resisting what some chose to call, both at the time and in hindsight, ‘the inevitable’ did not seem that way to those living through the agonies of primitive accumulation back then.

Capitalism did not emerge *de novo* out of the ether. Native pastoralists and buffalo hunters, slaves and ex-slaves, artisans, homesteaders, European peasants and peddlers, small-town shopkeepers, Southern hillbillies, New England fishermen, prairie sodbusters, and subsistence agrarians were the raw material of the miracle of Progress. Wealth once embedded in these societies was absorbed by fair means and foul into the musculature of the new economy. The mechanisms included conquest, legerdemain, and theft. Slavery depended on all that and more, transforming the flesh and blood of whole African civilizations into the liquid capital of Atlantic commerce. Funds accumulated that way later became the foundation of industrial investment.

Export of factory-made goods swamped local, self-contained economies not involved in accumulating capital but rather in the reproduction of ancient ways of life. Cheaper goods drove under peasants, husbandmen, and handicraftsmen, detaching men and women from traditional occupations, “freeing” them to join the founding generations of wage labor. Banks built up their resources by similarly digesting alien life forms silently and most of the time lawfully. Farmers who might have been content to maintain the family homestead were inexorably caught up in the web of international commerce, making them ever more dependent on lines of credit to survive. Depending on creditors until they couldn’t bear the load anymore also afflicted handicraftsmen and local merchants, corroding away their independence until they too joined the new ranks of the proletariat. Something as homely as taxes could function as a kind of forced savings, extracted from people involved in small-scale farming or artisanal pursuits, the revenue then used to subsidize capitalist enterprises like railroads.

Nor did primitive accumulation entail strictly an economic uprooting, which ended once the ex-peasant, homesteader, artisan, slave, or shopkeeper walked through a factory gate or descended down some mine shaft or found herself picking strawberries on someone else’s plantation. Slavic or Italian immigrants stoking furnaces in Pittsburgh or threading a needle in a New York City sweatshop had not all of a sudden become acclimated to capitalism’s brave new world simply by virtue of pocketing a weekly paycheck. It would take decades, more than a single generation, before primitive accumulation as a social undertaking had extinguished the last vestiges of older ways of life.

Take Native Americans. They were subject to the whole repertoire of primitive accumulation. In a generation millions of bison that had supported communities for centuries—providing their food, clothing, shelter, and tools—were reduced to hundreds, their hides filling up the arteries of domestic and international trade. Buffalo skins morphed into leather belts for millions of

industrial machines so that the nomadic way of life became insupportable. Cross-country trains traveled the Great Plains, stopping to allow armed passengers to slaughter whole herds as part of a deliberate policy to coerce tribal resettlement on reservations. Even the Dawes Act of 1887, ostensibly designed to convert Native American communalists into private farmers and tradesmen, ended finishing off the bloodier story of mass Indian removal: under the act's allotment system, most tribes suffered catastrophic losses of land and resources that reduced their members to a state of woeful dependency.

Collateral damage up to and including social extinction had been the market price paid by native cultures even before the advent of industrialism, beginning with the first New England settlers. The Montauketts of eastern Long Island, for example, did not think of their lands as privately owned and alienable but rather as, like them, part of the natural order of things, to be used, not possessed in perpetuity. Europeans thought otherwise. They treated parcels as if they were commodities like any other, to be bought and sold whether or not the "owner" maintained any other active connection to that land.

"The expropriation of the direct producers was accomplished by means of the most merciless barbarianism, and under the stimulus of the most infamous, the most sordid, the most petty, and the most odious of passions."

Certainly the Montauketts could testify to that. But so too might John Locke, who called for children to be put to work at the age of three, or Jeremy Bentham, who preferred four-year-olds. About that and bearing on the miracle of American Progress, Marx noted that "a great deal of capital, which appears today in the US without any birth certificate, was yesterday in England, the capitalized blood of children."

"Capital must begin by planning for the systematic destruction and annihilation of the non-capitalist social units which obstruct its development so that it ransacks the whole world, all corners of the earth, seizing them, if necessary by force, from all levels of civilization and all forms of society."

Particularly galling was the way the Homestead Act was abused. Passed during the Civil War, it was supposed to make a reality out of Lincoln's version of the free labor, free soil dream. But fewer than half a million people actually set up viable farms over nearly half a century. Most public lands

were taken over by the railroads, thanks to the government's beneficent land-grant policy (another form of primitive accumulation); by land speculators backed by eastern bankers, who sometimes hired pretend homesteaders in acts of outright fraud; or by giant cattle ranches and timber companies and the like who worked hand in glove with government land agents. As early as 1862 two-thirds of Iowa (or ten-million acres) was owned by speculators. Railroads closed off one-third of Kansas to homesteading and that was the best land available.

Mushrooming cities back east became, in a kind of historical inversion, the safety valve for overpopulated areas in the west. At least the city held out the prospect of remunerative wage labor if no longer a life of propertied independence. Few city workers had the capital to migrate west anyway; when one Pennsylvania legislator suggested that the state subsidize such moves, he was denounced as "the Pennsylvania Communist" for his trouble. During the last land boom of the nineteenth century—from about 1883 to 1887—16 million acres underwent that conversion every year. Railroads doubled down by selling off or mortgaging portions of the public domain they had just been gifted to finance construction or to speculate with. But land-grant roads were built at costs 100 percent greater than warranted and badly built at that, needing to be rebuilt just fifteen years later. Cattle companies, often financed from abroad, used newly invented barbed wire to fence in millions of acres of land once depended on by small farmers and ranchers to water and graze their animals in common. This American version of the British enclosure acts of the seventeenth century—which turned British landlords into commercialized land barons and British yeomen into wayfaring, itinerant laborers—left in its wake dead cattle and bankrupted homesteads.

To survive this mercantile cyclone, farmers hooked themselves up to long lines of credit that stretched circuitously back to the financial centers of the east. These lifelines provided the wherewithal to buy the seeds and fertilizers and machines, to pay for storage and freight charges, to keep house and home together while the plants ripened and hogs fattened. When market day finally arrived, the farmer found out what all his backbreaking work was really worth. If the news was bad, then those life-support systems of credit were turned off and became the means of his own dispossession. Impoverished Southern tenants and sharecroppers turned to large planters or local "furnishing agents" to borrow what they needed for essentials—from seed to clothing to machinery—to get through the growing season. In such situations, no money changed hands, just a note scribbled in the agent's ledger, with payment due at "settling up" time. This granted the lender a lien, or title, to the crop, a lien that never went away. Their creditors charged

usurious rates of interest, ranging from 25 to 80 percent; such creditors in Louisiana were charging 60 percent in the late 1880s. Usury laws, which once existed in most states, were systematically attacked and often modified or eliminated entirely as “barbaric relics” to please investment institutions back east.

Debt: An ingenious substitute for the chain and whip of the slave-driver.

Making sure the supply of coerced workers was ample became a function of the South’s policing and judicial systems. Wholesale arrests among black men in Georgia and throughout the South for disobeying a boss, being impudent, gambling, partying, talking to white women, having lascivious sex, riding freight cars without a ticket, vagrancy, or even for just being out of work produced a robust supply of convict labor at harvest-time or when railroad track needed to be laid or phosphate mined. Some didn’t survive the ordeal, having been worked to death: 44 percent of the 285 convicts building the South Carolina Greenwood and Augusta Railroad died. The mortality rate among convict laborers in Alabama was 45 percent. At the Pratt mines in the Appalachian foothills of northern Alabama, among the largest in the South, the mortality rate was 18 percent. At Tennessee Coal and Iron, workers were shackled together in underground pits, lived in fetid, disease-ridden barracks, worked to exhaustion from sunup to sundown, were regularly whipped and sometimes tortured (water torture was commonly resorted to) for every imagined infraction, and were hunted down by dogs if daring enough to attempt escape. If they didn’t die of whipping, disease, near starvation, or a bullet in the brain, they committed suicide at alarming rates, their bodies tossed into unmarked roadside graves.

A rare government investigation in Alabama in 1882 concluded these prisons “were totally unfit for use, without ventilation, without water supplies, crowded to excess, filthy beyond description,” where the prisoners were “excessively and sometimes cruelly punished.” An equally rare ex-Confederate plantation owner appalled by what was going on described these prison mining operations as “nurseries of death.” Unlike slave masters of old, those overseeing the process in this way had no stake in, nor did they offer any paternal pretense about caring for, the health, well-being, or reproductive potential of their unfree workers. Those more candid among them admitted they thought of these peons as mere “clever mules.”

Moreover, the whole judicial system of the South, from the lowliest country sheriff and justice of the peace to the highest reaches of state capitals, conspired to replenish the supply of convict labor as a lucrative source of self-enrichment and government revenue. In effect the legal apparatus became a

mechanism of primitive accumulation by monetizing criminal behavior (if it could even be called that) of the most trivial or contrived nature through a web of debt. Labor in this arrangement became a kind of currency used to pay off judicial fines and accumulate capital in the private sector.

Most Dixie labor contracts—when they existed at all—contained all sorts of obligations coercing workers to stay put for a year or more (even sometimes including lifetime contracts). In Mississippi if you hadn't entered into a contract by January 1st, you were subject to arrest. In Alabama, North Carolina, and Florida it was a crime to change employers without permission. Together with all the other disabling features of post-Reconstruction life and labor, the network of debt peonage functioned to forestall or destroy independent farming and other forms of economic self-reliance, reducing a whole population to a state of abject dependency. At the turn of the twentieth century, a young black man in the South (and some poor whites as well) faced three options:

1. Free labor camps that functioned like prisons.
2. Cotton tenancy that equated to serfdom.
3. Prison mines filled with slaves.

Resistance, when it miraculously surfaced, was met with violence and, not infrequently, consignment to forced labor. And while young African American males languished in industrial and agricultural prison camps, black women—if they weren't also working in prisons, sometimes as unpaid prostitutes—once the helpmates of their husbands on small family plots, found work instead as wage earners in canning and tobacco factories, as domestics, in mechanized laundries and textile mills, and in the fields.

Debt-based capital formation, which may or may not be reinvested in industry, has been a classic mode of primitive accumulation around the world. Here in the United States, it was enforced by adherence to the gold standard, which offered debtors no relief, safeguarded creditors, and kept foreign investment capital—British funds especially—flowing into what was after all still a developing country and a risky one. Creditors and investors were reassured by the gold standard that they could always redeem their paper assets in a fixed amount of gold. For debtors, however, this meant their obligations became ever more onerous as prices for agricultural commodities and other goods declined. It was because so many independent proprietors, especially on the land, but also in small towns and cities, found themselves entangled in webs of credit and debt which threatened their social existence that Gilded Age politics often seemed obsessed with the money question,

with greenbacks and the gold standard, with cries for the free coinage of silver and fiat money.

Capitalist victory, however, emerged only gradually. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, farmers, handicraftsmen, and various tradespeople swept into the new textile or shoe factories or the farm women set to work out in the countryside spinning and weaving for merchant-capitalists still held on to some semblance of their old ways of life. They maintained vegetable gardens, continued to hunt and fish, and perhaps kept a few domestic animals. When the first commercial panics erupted and business came to a standstill, many could fall back on pre-capitalist ways of making a living, even if a bare one. When industrial capitalism exploded after the Civil War, unemployment suddenly became a chronic and frightening aspect of modern life affecting millions. Crushing helplessness in the face of unemployment was also a devastating new experience for those great waves of immigrants landing on American shores, many of them peasants accustomed to falling back on their own meager resources in fields and forests when times were bad.

Inexorably, or so it seemed, capital prevailed, and its triumph could assume a somber shape. During this formative phase of industrialization, 35,000 workers died each year in industrial accidents, many of them key skilled mechanics. In 1910, one-quarter of all workers in the iron and steel industries were injured at least once, partly because of management's failure to install safety devices or shorten the hours of work. Two-thousand coal miners died each year on the job. Every day, around that same time, there were one-hundred industrial accidents somewhere in the country.

Various skilled occupations, the railroads, for example, became a killing ground. Between 1890 and 1917, 158,000 mechanics and laborers were killed in railroad repair shops and roundhouses. In 1888–89 alone, of 704,000 railroad employees, 20,000 were injured and nearly 2,000 killed. On the Illinois Central between 1874 and 1884, one of every twenty trainmen died or was disabled; among brakemen—railroaders who did the most dangerous work—the ratio was one in seven; and among railroad switchmen, another skilled position, the number was almost as alarming.

Part of the reason for this appalling record of disfigurement and death was management's relentless drive to increase the workload; brakemen, for example, were required to brake four or five cars rather than the two or three that had been the custom earlier. The bones of thousands of workmen were encased in the concrete of dams and bridges, bodies interred by the thousands in underground caverns, limbs shattered and sheared off by gears, wheels, lathes, chains, pulleys, spindles, cables, and flywheels; mountains of fingers, forearms, legs, ears, and even heads made up the human geography

of industrial Progress.

High death, injury, and unemployment rates; precipitous deterioration in diet as well as in the size and comforts of home; abandoned backyard vegetable gardens; common hunting grounds and fisheries privatized; urban squalor; obsolescent skills and forsaken traditions; exhausting, high-speed work routines lasting twelve hours or more unlike anything experienced before; a daily life cycle consisting of work, punctuated by shorts bouts of eating and sleeping; chained to the inorganic respiration of machines and the befouled climate of “dark Satanic mills”; chronic insecurity and dread, of work, of no work, of the foreman, of the poorhouse; periodic or permanent excommunication as vagabonds and tramps; social disgrace, demoralization, dependency. Loss.

A typical coal mining family in Pennsylvania during the 1870s lived like this: in a two-room “black coated shack,” dining on potatoes, soda crackers, and water, forced to buy their paltry groceries with company scrip exchangeable only at a “truck store” (also known as “pluck me” stores) run by the mine. When one of their kids got sick, there was no way to pay a doctor. Nor was there any money to bury them when they died.

Downward mobility—more precisely, the descent into social oblivion—is the arc inscribed by primitive accumulation. It is the underground, invisible story of industrial Progress, the counterpoint to that widely celebrated tale of upward mobility at the heart of the American mythos. And it left its mark not only among the “lower orders”—struggling farmers, peasant immigrants, dispossessed, *déclassé* handicraftsmen—but also among middling merchants, storekeepers, and petty producers in towns and small cities across the nation. They succumbed to the relentless pressures of the giant corporation. Often enough, that corporation was erected on their remains, sometimes absorbing their facilities, their equipment, their personnel, or else leaving all that bankrupt and inert by the side of the road. Or just as frequently those small businessmen devoured one another or effectively committed suicide, driven to compete close to and then past the point of economic survival. Their death cleared the market, opened up the way for enormous industrial combines, raw materials producers, mass market distributors, nationwide transportation and communications corporations, the champions of consolidated capital accumulation and the integrated national marketplace—all the purveyors of Progress.

Eighty percent of Americans were self-employed in 1820; by 1940 that number had shrunk to twenty percent. Six-thousand firms went under in 1874 alone. Similarly, business activity plummeted by 25 percent in the downturn of the early 1880s, dragging down railroad revenues, pig iron and coal production, domestic cotton consumption, imports, and multitudes of petty busi-

It settled down among us, and never went away.
Whatever we kept from it seemed almost as bad as theft;
It watched us every minute and ruled us right and left.
The rust and blight were with us sometimes, and sometimes not;
The dark-browed, scowling mortgage was forever on the spot.
The weevil and the cut-worm, they went as well as came;
The mortgage staid forever, eating hearty all the same.
It nailed up every window—stood guard at every door—
And happiness and sunshine made their home with us no more.

By the midpoint of the Gilded Age about 4,000 families owned as much wealth as the remaining 11.6 million. Two-hundred-thousand individuals controlled 70–80% of the nation's property. The arithmetic of dispossession and of the descent into the new American proletariat went like this: while 87% of private wealth belonged to a privileged fifth of the population and 11% to the next luckiest fifth, the bottom 40% had none at all. Multimillionaires (another invention of the Gilded Age) accounted for 0.33% of the population but owned one-sixth of the country's wealth. The richest 1% owned 51% of all real and personal property, while the bottom 44% came away with 1.1%. Most workers earned less than \$800 annually, which wasn't enough to keep them out of poverty. And most of them had to toil for nearly sixty hours a week to make even that much.

Progress—that is, capital accumulation—had created a nation of haves and have-nots. Whether pleased with the result or not, all were astonished at its strangeness. The shock reverberated up and down the ranks of this new world, now pockmarked by a steep hierarchy once thought alien to the American experiment. Nor did the lower orders, those living on the edge of social if not physical extinction, think they'd ended up there by accident. On the contrary, they were convinced they had been driven down by an overweening aristocracy, presumptuous beyond measure, a noxious import from the Old World.

“The class struggles here in England, too, were more turbulent during the period of development of large-scale industry, and died down just in the period of England's undisputed industrial domination of the world and it will be no different probably in America. It is the revolutionizing of all traditional relations by industry as it develops that also revolutionizes people's minds.”

Melville's short story “Tartarus of Maids” is a chilling portrait of women slaving away in a paper mill in an isolated gulag high in the Berkshire

Mountains of Massachusetts. Young, virginal, and deathly white, wraith-like, nearly inanimate, subject to the despotism of machinery and male superintendents, these women stood like a barely living reproach to those early utopian hopes associated with the first textile mills farther east in Lowell and Waltham. There, back in the 1820s, young farm girls came to work and were treated like family by the proprietors, who showed concern for everything from their literary tastes to their housing; they were sheltered in well-kept dormitories, supplied with nourishing food, looked after by matronly housekeepers charged with maintaining a “tranquil scene of moral deportment and mutual good will.” A mere twenty years later Lowell had become Lawrence, the site of the New World’s own version of Blake’s “dark satanic mills,” staffed now not by American girls from the countryside, but by a despised class of Irish immigrant women.

Other Melville creations were populated by deeply angry, often inscrutable workingmen, burning with rage or stubborn impassivity or a sense of wounded dignity, as in *Bartleby’s* famous “I prefer not to” or Redburn’s mordant observation that “there are classes of men in the world who bear the same relation to society at large that the wheels do to a coach,” and that such men are “shunned by the better class of people and cut off from all access to respectable and improving society.” In this world, work maims, kills, ruins, and is fatal to desire. Yet it ought to be hallowed. Ishmael from *Moby Dick* celebrates the democratic dignity that regardless of rank “shines in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself. . . His omnipresence, our divine equality,” which, however, was being poisoned at its source by the shark-like competitiveness of the new commercial order, “mean and meager.”

Ideological defenders of Southern slavery were quick to zero in on the emerging new order of “free labor” as a hypocritical sham, far worse than their own labor system. However commercially active they actually were, Southern planters and their media denounced the mercenary mean-spiritedness of northern capitalism. Slave owners’ paternalism, their chivalry, their love of the land—the whole self-deluded romance that allowed the slaveocracy to look down their noses at northern self-seeking and moneygrubbing—would shield them against the commercial dark arts that lured people away from the “wholesome labors of the field and the enjoyment of modern independence.” It was a grand delusion, but a telling one. Profits north of the Mason-Dixon line were based on the “increased suffering of labourers and the hardworking mass.” Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, the South’s leading political defender, chastised the Whig Party for mortgaging the people’s inheritance to parasitic circles that “look to

debts, stocks, banks, distributions, and taxes as the choicest of blessings. The greater the debt—the more abundantly the Stock Market is supplied.”

For Southerners it was naturally tempting to condemn the new system outright: there was no escape from this charnel house. It bred demoralization and social insurrection, and was ultimately doomed. The “only check on its diffusion is the existence of slavery; for the institution, and the social system determined by it, have hitherto repelled its ravages, and even its extensive admission in the Southern States.” Southern spokesmen declaimed against abolition, arguing that emancipation would end only in the creation of a class of “white slaves,” people abandoned to the merciless ravages of the marketplace and lacking the paternal protections enjoyed by black bondsmen. Proletarians, unlike chattel to be protected and preserved, were instead to be used, then disposed of. What happened to them after hours was a matter of indifference to Yankee manufacturers and abolitionists alike.

The labor question was not confined to life in the coal mines, steel mills, railroads, and sweatshops of the industrial heartland. Instead it embraced multitudes, exposing the machinations of the new slavery here, there, and everywhere: in the countryside, where self-reliant farmers were being reduced to some form of debt peonage or migratory wage labor; in small towns and cities, where once independent businessmen were being driven into bankruptcy and down into the ranks of the property-less; in the ateliers of craftsmen compelled to surrender their cherished skills and work to the drone-like regimen of shoe and textile factories; in Southern lumber and turpentine camps, coal mines, iron forges, and cotton plantations, where convict laborers, overwhelmingly African American, descended into an invisible world of coerced labor hard to differentiate from legal slavery. Bondage had died at the hands of the sword. Long live the new slavery.

Language as strong as that seems overwrought to our ears. How could it not? It has been at least another three-quarters of a century since people regularly talked or thought about working for wages as a kind of slavery. The whole notion strikes us as odd. Yet for a long time references to wage slavery were a journalistic commonplace. That doesn't mean everyone back then agreed that working for wages entailed enslavement. Nor is it the case that most people in those days concurred that the money power was subverting the freedoms fought for in the Revolution—far from it. But it does mean that these claims, which now appear so alien, were once upon a time treated with great seriousness and hotly debated. A society that feels it may be living on the precipice of slavery is a society living on the precipice, on the edge of some final confrontation, pregnant with violent emotion. Violent language and the language of violence did indeed characterize this era to a degree hard to imagine today. Thoughts of this sort, moreover, emanated

from all quarters, not from oddball eccentrics and fringe elements.

When thousands of destitute unemployed, many of them homeless, including women and children, gathered in Tompkins Square Park in New York City in 1874, “Bread or Blood” is what they cried. They were demanding work or relief in what one labor activist called “a folk movement of primitive need.” Plans were to march on City Hall to ask the city to distribute food and funds, and to suspend evictions (some may have talked of marching on Wall Street as well; a similar gathering at the park had done that during the panic of 1857). Barricades were erected. Then the police, on horseback, dispersed the protesters in a spasm of brutality—the police commissioner later described the assault as “the most glorious sight I ever saw.”

The local press applauded, damning the protesters as “communards.” Wild claims were made that these “Communists” had smuggled diamonds and jewels stolen from the churches of Paris with which to buy ammunition and bombs. ‘Communards’ was a word needing little definition, since the Paris Commune three years earlier conjured up memories of barricades and blood in the streets, rioting and pillage, and primitive nightmares about “petroleuses”—Amazonian women, their hair streaming wantonly behind them in the wind, armed with the nineteenth century’s version of the Molotov cocktail, setting Paris aflame. Harper’s Weekly rejoiced at the mob’s suppression because it taught the lesson that “follies and ferocities of the Commune are alien to American thought and methods.” Glad that the “American Commune” had met its master, the Philadelphia Inquirer advised that in the future, should it rear its head again, public authority should “club it to death at the hands of the police or shoot it to death at the hands of the militia.”

Farther west, in St. Louis, the stakes were raised even higher when what began as a railroad strike became a citywide general strike; Toledo and Chicago came close to experiencing the same. A local Workingmen’s Party with a considerable following set up an executive committee to run the city, keep order, distribute food, and provide medical assistance. The very sight of men “who had hitherto been buried in the depths of obscurity, possessing neither social, financial, or political importance in the community” suddenly reigning “as princes” was to say the least shocking to the city’s establishment. It retaliated by setting up a committee of public safety equipped with a cavalry and artillery to put down the uprising. The city fathers of St. Louis—judges, politicians, army officers, police officials—mobilized private troops of white-collar clerks, tradespeople, and others to fight a local civil war. They likened the executive committee running the strike to “Robespierre and his brace of fellow conspirators,” who “sit in darkness and plot.” Some local newspapers scared the citizenry with headlines like “The Reign of the

Canaille” and “Glutted with Gore.” But others, just as bellicose, lined up on the other side; the *St. Louis Journal*, for one, declared:

“If the laboring men of this country must choose between revolution and abject submission to the heartless demands of capital, they will certainly not be condemned by the *Journal* if they prefer war to starvation.”

The country’s most celebrated clergyman, Henry Ward Beecher, offered up this bit of pious cruelty:

“God has intended the great to be great and the little to be little. I do not say that a dollar a day is enough to support a workingman, not if he insists on smoking and drinking beer. But the man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live.”

All the stigmata of class contempt were meticulously noted down by the press and the inquisitive guardians of law and order; every hat brim askew, dirty shirt, or missing collar was duly cited as a telltale sign of lower-class contempt for civility and good order. Today these fuckers have barely changed the script.

A mass strike is something akin to but much rarer than an ordinary strike and one that comes much closer to turning the world upside down. The relative frequency with which such events happened during the long nineteenth century is itself perhaps the best evidence of just how fragile and provisional the new order of things remained. What came to be known as the Great Upheaval, the movement for the eight-hour day, elicited a strange enthusiasm. The normal trade union strike is a finite event joining two parties contesting over limited if sometimes intractable issues. The mass strike in 1886 or before that in 1877—all the many localized mass strikes that erupted in towns and small industrial cities after the Civil War and through into the new century—was open-ended and ecumenical in reach. Its desires, however exalted, were always tethered to the needs of the most abused and exploited.

So, for example, in Baltimore when the skilled and better paid railroad brakemen on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad first struck in 1877 so too did less well off box-makers, sawyers, and can-makers, engaged in the shops and factories of that city, who abandoned their places and swarmed into the streets. This in turn stimulated the railroad men to commit bolder acts. When the governor of West Virginia sent out the Berkeley Light Guard and Infantry to confront the strikers at Martinsburg at the request of the railroad’s vice president, the militia retreated and the citizens of the town,

the disbanded militia, and the rural population of the surrounding country fraternized, encouraging the strikers. This centrifugal dynamic of the mass strike, widening the orbit of its influence and engagement so long as it was in the ascendancy, was characteristic of this extraordinary phenomenon.

By the third day in Martinsburg the strikers had been reinforced during the night at all points by accessions of working men engaged in other avocations than railroading, which, by the way, made it virtually impossible for federal troops by then on the scene to recruit scabs to run the trains. By the fourth day, mechanics, artisans, and laborers in every department of human industry began to show symptoms of restlessness and discontent. Seeping deeper and deeper into the subsoil of proletarian life, down below the “respectable” working class of miners and mechanics and canal boatmen, frightened observers reported a “mighty current of passion and hate” sweeping up a “vast swarm of vicious idlers, vagrants, and tramps.” And so it went.

It is hard to say precisely just what this heterodoxy of desires and imaginings added up to, what blueprint if any it formed. Yet it unmistakably opened up the prospect of a new society founded on principles at odds with the tooth-and-claw struggle for self-advancement so celebrated in many precincts of social Darwinian America. That yearning for an alternative was best expressed not in some formalized credo, but in the mass strike’s tactical repertoire. Its two principal weapons were the boycott and the sympathy strike. And indeed what else was to be expected from a movement whose social character and capacious programmatic embrace made it the living embodiment of sympathy? The boycott drew on a long rural tradition of resistance to landlords. It was the perfect tactical expression of communal mobilization, which perhaps is why Harper’s Weekly decried it as “a new form of terrorism” and “an outrage upon the American principle” because it violated the market and property rights. Used so frequently, the boycott was declared here and there a violation of the statutes against conspiracy.

Sympathy strikes and boycotts expressed solidarity as an organized social emotion, not merely a piece of inspiring rhetoric, but as palpable reality, the spirit come to life, discovering all the exfoliating networks of its social nervous system. The form of the mass strike was its content, the medium the message. For the legions who participated, or for those perhaps greater in number who looked on in vicarious empathy, the experience excited the imagination just because it was so fluid, its purpose and outcome uncertain yet pregnant with possibilities. Depending on one’s location along the social hierarchy, it could also be deeply alarming. What was at stake, many believed, was nothing less than the future of the good society.

The mass strike, precisely because it seemed to place everything about

the prevailing social order on the agenda all at the same time, infused the atmosphere with a mounting readiness to settle accounts once and for all and in terms not reducible to dollars and cents.

Compared with the class-inflected political upheavals that preoccupied much of western Europe and Russia throughout this period, culminating in the continent-wide near revolutions of 1917–1919, the United States seems remarkably even-keeled. No land seizures disturbed life in the countryside. No soviets were set up here. Although a general strike did paralyze Seattle near the beginning of 1919, it stayed there rather than spread across the country, as happened a few years later in Britain. No Socialist, Social Democratic, Communist, or labour parties ran the government or won significant representation in the halls of Congress or even further down the political food chain. And while the Populists did get elected to hundreds of local and state offices, including governorships, and to the House and Senate, their triumphs were fleeting. Should we conclude then that America was indeed exceptional? Is that story of a long century of anticapitalist resistance in rural and industrial America, one fired by the existential trials and tribulations of primitive accumulation, more mythic than real?

Not if we take the reaction of Jane Addams to the Pullman strike as emblematic. Her anxiety about the imminence of civil war was echoed again and again all through this period by people from all walks of life—high and low, artists and farmers, preachers and presidents, Fifth Avenue matrons and denizens of the Lower East Side’s “rag-pickers alley,” anarcho-terrorists and Wall Street bankers, coal miners and steel magnates, hard-boiled journalists and utopian dreamers.

Plaintive, angry, despairing, outraged, and frightened, this chorus suggests a different set of questions: Why for such a long time was the country so infected with anticapitalism? Why did this contagion embrace both the countryside and the city? How could it be that a vast population of petty commodity producers, whose conditions of life normally left them in a state of localized, isolated competition—if they summoned up resistance to their victimization, they usually did so informally, tacitly, without programmatic or ideological clarity in prepolitical hidden acts of everyday self-advancement and resistance—managed to mount a sustained collective political alternative? How could they hold that together during the severest years of economic depression when “devil take the hindmost” was an instinct hard to resist? Why did social emotions rage so violently that armed confrontations between workers and employers in the United States were far more common than anywhere else in the Western world? Why did people feel obliged to characterize their social enemies in the most apocalyptic terms, such as Wall Street “devil fish” or anarchist “offal”? Why did others—theologians,

manufacturers, novelists, architects, social workers, engineers, handicraftsmen, and poets—feel driven to devise ways around the social conflagration they all saw headed their way, schemes that sometimes were and sometimes were emphatically not socialist, but were decidedly averse to capitalism as it actually existed then?

When we look back at that time and note its striking contrast to our last half century—during which the labor question and all the tributary questions it once gave rise to have dropped beneath the horizon of public life—it is hard to deny the profound transformation. To point out that back then most people went along to get along is not a refutation that nonetheless society was at a boil. After all, it is always the case that societies set off in some new direction—when those rare moments arise—largely through the catalytic behavior of minorities, whether they are elites or insurgents.

The long nineteenth century witnessed the convergence of three ecological extinctions or near extinctions—handicraft production; the family farm and peasant agriculture; and a kind of urban family enterprise as familiar to fifteenth-century mercantile Italy as it still was in 1840 America, but which feared for its life just a half century or so later. That this multidimensional existential crisis happened alongside the promise of infinite Progress forced a reckoning with a future of which no one could be certain. It aroused premonitions both exalted and dreadful. Utopias and dystopias—literary, political, and social—marked the era and emerged from all levels of the country's crystallizing hierarchy. They were impassioned evidence of how disturbing and deeply unsettled matters had become.

Americans shared this hunger for utopias, political panaceas, and gloomy previsions with others in the West undergoing similar wrenching dispossession. Tolstoy romanced the peasant village, and narodniks, young revolutionary offspring of the Russian gentry, fancied it a pathway to communal living. William Morris revered the world of the artisan, seeking in its rekindling an end run around the dehumanization of Adam Smith's pin factory. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed journeys of intellectuals and the pietistic to self-contained communal laboratories of the disaffected—Brook Farm, the Shakers, Oneida, the Moravians, New Lanark, and many other utopian communities. During the urbanizing/industrializing century's second half, the instinct to withdraw was supplanted by the urge to overthrow the new order of things, to replace it with something old and something new.

The main substantive achievement of neoliberalism has been to redistribute rather than to generate wealth and income. Accumulation by dispossession. The commodification and privatization of land, and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations, conversion of various forms of property

rights—common, collective, state, et cetera—into exclusive, private property rights. Suppression of rights to the commons. Colonial, neocolonial, and the imperial processes of appropriation of assets, including natural resources. And usury. The national debt, and most devastating at all, the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession. To this list of mechanisms, we may now add a raft of techniques such as the extraction of rents from patents, and intellectual property rights, and the decrease or erasure of various forms of common property rights, such as state pensions, paid vacations, and access to education and healthcare, won through a generation or more of class struggle. The proposal to privatize all state pension rights, pioneered in Chile under the dictatorship is, for example, one of the cherished objectives of the Republicans in the US.

Income inequality, gross disparities in wealth—we're told daily, incessantly, that these are the necessary consequences of a free market, as if the market was a force of nature on the order of weather or tides, and not the entirely manmade construct that it is. In light of recent history, blind acceptance of this sort of economics would seem to require a firm commitment to stupidity, but let's assume for the moment that it's true, that the free market exists as a universe unto itself, as immutable in its workings as the laws of physics. Does that universe include some ironclad rule that requires inequality of opportunity? I've yet to hear the case for that, though doubtless some enterprising think-tanker could manufacture one out of this same free-market economics, along with whiffs of genetic determinism as it relates to qualities of discipline and character. And it would be bogus, that case. And more than that, immoral. That we should allow for wildly divergent opportunities due to accidents of birth ought to strike us as a crime equal in violence to child abuse or molestation.

Freedom is no half-and-half affair. If the average citizen is guaranteed equal opportunity in the polling place, he must have equal opportunity in the marketplace. The proposition goes deeper than sentiment, deeper than policy, deeper even than adherence to equality and 'the pursuit of happiness' as set forth in the Declaration. It cuts all the way to the nature of democracy, and to the prospects for its continued existence in America. We may have democracy in this country or we may have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both. Those few will inevitably use their power to subvert the free will of the majority; the super-rich as a class simply can't be trusted to do otherwise. A thesis that's being starkly acted out in the current era of Citizens United, Super-PACs, and truckloads of dark money.

This is not the way the world works; it's the way the world is made to work by those with the money and power. The movers and shakers—the

big winners—keep repeating the mantra that this inequality was inevitable, the result of the globalization of finance and advances in technology in an increasingly complex world. Those are part of the story, but only part.

“In every serious doctrine of the destiny of men, there is some trace of the doctrine of the equality of men. But the capitalist really depends on some religion of inequality.”

One of our deepest and most persistent shared delusions is that many take for granted that the path we took was the only one that really could have been taken. Sure, you could change things here or there, but you’d eventually end up with certain similarities—advanced technology, higher living standards, space exploration, and so on. But this is not the case, rather it is nothing more than a chosen preference, based on cultural norms, for technology evolution.

Sure, we have iPhones now and at least 2 billion people can send pictures of their dicks to another 5 or so billion. But is this better or worse than there being a few hundred-million, living simple lives of subsistence? Is it a false choice? At this point it absolutely is. We can have much of both, as we’ve already spent the resources developing the technology. But why do we need a new iPhone every year? A new Mac? A new sneaker? Shirt? Should we cure all cancers? What if instead we guaranteed you could have the opportunity for a meaningful life and that your loved ones would be taken care of when you passed? None of these questions are asked, we, for the most part, simply march on, safe in the delusion of the inevitability of now.

No human construct is set in stone. Everything is the way it is because we accept it as so. That is not to say that we can change everything we do not like. But you can either be a disgruntled population, voicing vocal dissent about policies, or you can be a popular revolt crushed by the authorities. Is there one choice that is the better? One can never say with certainty.

Is it better to know your oppressor exists or to be ignorant of his presence and simply recognize it as an unchangeable obstacle to be routed around whenever possible? Is one man better than the other?

No conspiracy needed—if your society and culture promotes selfishness, greed, and ignorance, you end up in the current situation, every time. Those three values will inevitably lead to exactly the wrong type of individual and worldview gaining power.

Our tribal ancestors would have put a stop to that toxicity quite quickly, but being so removed from our ancestral way of thinking, having suffered millennia of oppression and violence from the few cultures who initially went against the trend, we find ourselves here.

The paradox of our era: Never have we been so free. Never have we felt so powerless. We are indeed freer than before, in the sense that we can criticize religion, take advantage of the new laissez-faire attitude to sex, support any political movement we like. We can do all these things because they no longer have any significance—freedom of this kind is prompted by indifference. Yet, on the other hand, our daily lives have become a constant battle against a bureaucracy that would make Kafka weak at the knees. There are regulations about everything, from the salt content of bread to urban poultry-keeping.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. When the history of our times is written, an honest accounting will no doubt add Netanyahu's wicked shadow—and that of his predecessors—to the list of fiends that have seen the world as little more than a playground within which to use their toys of death and despair. Always, of course, for the right reasons and always, of course, against the meek and defenseless among us.

In the world of Joseph Stalin, induced famine was the prime weapon of choice, though mass execution and exile helped him dispose of tens of millions he viewed as “enemies of the people.”

To Henry Kissinger, the world, particularly Indochina, was very much a small chess game. Civilians were mere pawns ripe for sacrifice through high-tech weaponry, including biological and chemical warfare, to enforce his worldview at any cost. Millions lost their lives to his cerebral game board.

To Pol Pot, struggle was little more than purification, erasing through starvation, overwork, execution of a quarter of his people whose sole crime was to see life through a prism that collided with his own—no matter how soft their view or backward his sight.

In Rwanda up to half a million women were sexually assaulted, mutilated, or murdered, along with an equal number of male Tutsis, as enemy agents of the Hutu state—machetes and rape induced AIDs the plentiful weapons of preference.

The sorts of psychopaths that tend to be in control of modern human societies clearly prefer money as a tool of social control to money as any sort of public utility that would facilitate individual productivity and affirm human dignity, whether in the context of neoliberal derangement or not. That's the view from the long-frozen Rust Belt and certainly nothing new in history.

It also appears that any human capacity for moral innovation is easily constrained by our basic feces-hurling primate OS, particularly if said primates consider money to be something finite and concrete.

On the real balance sheet, though, the sweet old Earth likely can't afford a Jobs Guarantee for a population of 7 billion, at least not under any current or

previously existing model of labor exploitation. We're resource-constrained, not dollar-constrained.

So we arrive back at the same old power relationships, the coercion, desperation, and ecocide to which we have been accustomed, in the absence of any disruptive moral innovation. Can anyone suggest that modern humans have demonstrated a capacity for moral innovation outside of prison camps? Actual, non-hopey-changeey varieties of moral innovation? If so, is that capacity retarded only by incorrect perceptions regarding the nature of money? Retarded perhaps by an exceptional propaganda system? One might only answer that for themselves, and likely only until the SWAT team arrives. It seems unlikely that some rational and compassionate bureaucracies will be established to compensate in their stead: Congress is wholly unable to formulate policy in the public interest for very good reasons, none of them admirable. It seems the social economic entities they protect require human desperation just as much as they require currency liquidity or juvenile male soldiers.

In the absence of representation, rule of law, or some meager rational public policy, a reproductive strike may be a better individual approach as not having children avoids the voluntary provisioning of debt slaves into a corrupt and violent system of social control. There is also the many ecologically beneficial effects of less humans and a potential opportunity to avoid being forced to constantly sell one's labor at a sharp discount. Couples I know, both having made catastrophic errors in career choice, are able to persist with some degree of dignity only and precisely because they have avoided begetting, in the very biblical sense, more debt slaves.

Chapter Fifty-three

Misleadership

Every day Yeroen was being groomed by two rivaling males, each one eager to gain his backing. He seemed to enjoy the attention. Being groomed by the mighty alpha male, the one who had deposed him a year earlier, was utterly relaxing because no one would dare disturb them. But being groomed by the second, younger male was tricky. Their get-togethers greatly upset alpha, who regarded them as plots against himself and tried to disrupt them. Alpha would put up all his hair and hoot and display around, banging doors and hitting females, until the other two males became so nervous that they'd break up and leave the scene. Separating them was the only way to calm down alpha. Since male chimps never cease to jockey for position and are always making and breaking pacts, innocent grooming sessions don't really exist. Every single one carries political implications.

The current alpha male enjoyed massive popularity and support, including that of the old matriarch, Mama, leader of the females. If Yeroen had wanted an easy life, he would have opted to play sidekick to this male. He wouldn't have rocked the boat, and there would never have been any threat to his position. Aligning himself with the ambitious young male, on the other hand, was fraught with risk. However big and muscular this male might be, he had barely left his adolescence behind. He was an untried entity who carried so little authority that whenever he tried to break up a female fight, as top males are wont to do, he risked the wrath of both contestants. Ironically, this meant that he did resolve the discord, but at his own expense. Instead of screaming at one another, the females now supported one another in chasing the would-be arbitrator. Once they got him cornered, however, they were smart enough not to physically grapple with him, being all too familiar with his speed, strength, and canine teeth. He had become a player to be reckoned with.

The alpha male, in contrast, was so skilled at peacekeeping, so impartial in his interventions, and so protective of the underdog that he had become immensely beloved. He had brought peace and harmony to the group after a long period of upheaval. Females were always ready to groom him and let him play with their children. They were likely to resist anyone who dared

challenge his reign.

Nonetheless, this is exactly what Yeroen went for when he sided with the young upstart. The two of them entered a long campaign to dethrone the established leader that took a great toll in tensions and injuries. Whenever the young male would position himself at some distance from the alpha male, provoking him with increasingly loud hooting, Yeroen would go sit right behind the challenger, wrap his arms around his middle, and softly hoot along. This way there was no doubt about his allegiance. Mama and her female friends did resist this revolt, occasionally resulting in massive pursuits of both troublemakers, but the combination of the young male's brawn and Yeroen's brain was too much.

From the start, it was obvious that Yeroen was not out to claim the alpha position for himself but was content to let his partner do the dirty work. They never backed down, and after several months of daily confrontations, the young male became the new alpha. The two of them ruled for years, with Yeroen acting like a Dick Cheney or a Ted Kennedy, a power behind the throne; he remained so influential that as soon as his support began to waver, the throne wobbled. This happened occasionally after conflicts over sexually attractive females. The new alpha quickly learned that in order to keep Yeroen on his side, he'd need to grant him privileges. Most of the time Yeroen was allowed to mate with females, something the young alpha did not tolerate from any other male.

Why did Yeroen throw his support behind this upstart instead of joining the established power? It is informative to look at studies of human coalition formation, in which players win games through cooperation, and to study the balance-of-power theories about international pacts. The basic principle here is the "strength is weakness" paradox, according to which the most powerful player is often the least attractive political ally because this player doesn't really need others, hence takes them for granted and treats them like dirt. In Yeroen's case, the established alpha male was too mighty for his own good. By joining him, Yeroen would have gained little, because all this male truly needed was his neutrality. The smarter strategy was to pick a partner who couldn't win without him. By throwing his weight behind the young male, Yeroen became the kingmaker. He regained both prestige and fresh mating opportunities.

bully pulpit: a public office or position of authority that provides its occupant with an outstanding opportunity to speak out on any issue. Apparently originally used by President Theodore Roosevelt, explaining his personal view of the presidency.

When President John Kennedy was killed, people expressed immense grief. When Martin Luther King was killed, grief turned in many cases to anger. But when Robert Kennedy was killed, there seemed to be a sort of finality that left only despair.

“Now I realized what makes our generation unique, what defines us apart from those who came before the hopeful winter of 1961, and those who came after the murderous spring of 1968. We are the first generation that learned from experience that things were not really getting better, that we shall not overcome. We felt, by the time we reached thirty, that we had already glimpsed the most compassionate leaders our nation could produce, and they had all been assassinated. And from this time forward, things would get worse: our best political leaders were part of memory now, not hope. The stone was at the bottom of the hill, and we were alone.”

The major problem—well, one of the major problems, for there are several—one of the many major problems with governing people is that of whom you get to do it; or rather of who manages to get people to let them do it to them. To summarize: it is a well known fact, that those people who most want to rule people are, ipso facto, those least suited to do it.

The ultimate weapon of mass destruction is a state. When a state is taken over by a leader with the classic triad of narcissistic symptoms—grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy—the result can be imperial adventures with enormous human costs. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot.

With long-lived figures, enough evidence, argument, apology, autobiography, memoir, and frail old-age memories usually emerge to blur an image into being—like a television picture, most of our visions of big men and women are made up of countless tiny lines and points of information and utterance emitted over a lifetime, shimmering and flickering together to give us at least the illusion of a fixed image.

During the presidential campaigns the contest is waged between two sets of public relations consultants nobody knows. Afterwards, the public image of the victor—including his face, words, and publicized actions—is a public relations product. But it is not quite correct to say that presidents are sold to the public like soap. In this case the product itself is remarkably active. One might suggest that all recent presidents have shown the combined talents of huckster and actor.

Probably the last real leader we had as US president was JFK. It's not that Kennedy was a better human being than the presidents we've had since: we know he lied about his WWII record, and had spooky Mob ties, and popped pills like Tic-Tacs, and screwed around more in the White House than poor old Slick Willy could ever dream of. But JFK had that special leader-type magic, and when he said things like "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country," nobody rolled their eyes or saw it as just a clever line. Instead, a lot of them felt inspired. And the decade that followed, however fucked up it was in other ways, saw millions of Young Voters devote themselves to social and political causes that had nothing to do with getting a plum job or owning expensive stuff or finding the best parties; and the 60s were, by most accounts, a generally cleaner and happier time than now.

It is worth considering why. True, JFK's audience was in some ways more innocent than we are: Vietnam hadn't happened yet, or Watergate, or the S&L scandals, et cetera. But there's also something else. The science of sales and marketing was still in its drooling infancy in 1961 when Kennedy was saying "Ask not. . ." The young people he inspired had not been skillfully marketed to all their lives. They knew nothing of spin. They were not totally, terribly familiar with salesmen.

A real leader is somebody who can help us overcome the limitations of our own individual laziness and selfishness and weakness and fear and get us to do better, harder things than we can get ourselves to do on our own. Lincoln was, by all available evidence, a real leader, and Churchill, and Gandhi, and King. Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt, and probably de Gaulle, and certainly Marshall, and maybe Eisenhower. And of course Hitler was a real leader too, a very potent one, so you have to watch out; all it is is a weird kind of personal power.

There is a difference between a great leader and a great salesman. There are also similarities, of course. A great salesman is usually charismatic and likable, and he can often get us to do things, buy things, agree to things that we might not go for on our own, and to feel good about it. Plus a lot of salesmen are basically decent people with plenty about them to admire. But even a truly great salesman isn't a leader. This is because a salesman's ultimate, overriding motivation is self-interest—if you buy what he's selling, the salesman profits. So even though the salesman may have a very powerful, charismatic, admirable personality, and might even persuade you that buying is in your interests (and it really might be)—still, a little part of you always knows that what the salesman is ultimately after is something for himself. And this awareness is painful—although admittedly it's a tiny pain, more like a twinge, and often unconscious. But if you're subjected to great salesmen

and sales pitches and marketing concepts for long enough—like from your earliest Saturday-morning cartoons, let's say—it is only a matter of time before you start believing deep down that everything is sales and marketing, and that whenever somebody seems like they care about you or about some noble idea or cause, that person is a salesman and really ultimately doesn't give a shit about you or some cause but really just wants something for himself.

Some people believe that President Ronald W. Reagan (1981–89) was our last real leader. But not many of them are Young Voters. Even in the 80s, most younger Americans, who could smell a marketer a mile away, knew that what Reagan really was was a great salesman. What he was selling was the idea of himself as a leader. And if you're under, say, 55, this is what pretty much every US president you've grown up with has been: a very talented salesman, surrounded by smart, expensive political strategists and media consultants and spinmasters who manage his “campaign” (as in also “advertising campaign”) and help him sell us on the idea that it's in our interests to vote for him. But the real interests that drove these guys were their own. They wanted, above all, To Be President, wanted the mind-bending power and prominence, the historical immortality—you could smell it on them.

And this is why these guys weren't real leaders: because it was obvious that their deepest, most elemental motives were selfish, there was no chance of them ever inspiring us to transcend our own selfishness. Instead, they usually helped reinforce our market-conditioned belief that everybody's ultimately out for himself and that life is about selling and profit and that words and phrases like ‘service’ and ‘justice’ and ‘community’ and ‘patriotism’ and ‘duty’ and ‘Give government back to the people’ and ‘I feel your pain’ and ‘Compassionate Conservatism’ and ‘Hope and Change’ and ‘Make America Great Again’ are just the politics industry's proven sales pitches, exactly the same way ‘Anti-Tartar’ and ‘Fresher Breath’ are the toothpaste industry's pitches. We may vote for them, the same way we may go buy toothpaste. But we're not inspired. They're not the real thing.

It's not just a matter of lying or not lying, either. Everyone knows that the best marketing uses the truth—i.e., sometimes a brand of toothpaste really is better. That's not the point. The point, leader-wise, is the difference between merely believing somebody and believing in him. Granted, this is a bit simplistic. All politicians sell, always have. FDR and JFK and MLK and Gandhi were great salesmen. But that's not all they were. People could smell it. That weird little extra something. It had to do with ‘character’—which, yes, is also a cliché, suck it up.

‘You're just a sheep,’ some will say, ‘you believe what they want you

to believe.’ But this implies that they—the metaphoric shepherds—have something they want you to accept. It implies that these world-altering shepherds are consciously leading their sheeple to a conclusion that plays to their benefit. No one considers the possibility of a shepherd just aimlessly walking around the meadow, pointing his staff in whatever direction he happens to be facing.

“It is doubtless important to the good of nations that those who govern have virtues or talents; but what is perhaps still more important to them is that those who govern do not have interests contrary to the mass of the governed; for in that case the virtues could become almost useless and the talents fatal.”

Many speak for Power—the Power-owned media, the Power-owned politicians, even the Power-owned courts. Money and Power own America, but the people—who speaks for them? Has “Liberty and Justice for all” today become merely a meaningless slogan? And if so, do we cling to it at our peril?

“Government is not reason. It is force. Like fire, it’s a dangerous servant of a fearful master.”

Government is a great slave. But as a master, it is a terror. If you don’t control your government, someone else will. And right now, someone else does.

The possessors move everywhere
Under Death their star
Like columns of smoke
They advance into the shadows
Like thin flames with no light
They with no past
And fire their only future.

These are thugs in tailored suits whose views are far closer to Al Capone than to Thomas Jefferson.

If we are to consider the particular question of moral judgment that concerns me here, we must first identify a preliminary issue—and then, as abhorrent as we may find it in many respects, we must set that issue aside, albeit in a strictly limited sense. That preliminary issue is this: how do we judge a person who orders that certain actions be undertaken, knowing that those actions will necessarily and unavoidably lead to the death of at

least one—and, most typically, more than one—entirely innocent human being? I must add an especially pertinent fact: nothing compels the person to order that these actions be undertaken. That is, the person orders the actions freely, voluntarily, and consciously, aware of what he/she is doing. That the person in question may try to convince him/herself (and others) that circumstances exist that compel him/her to take these actions is of no matter; murderers always have justifications.

Most people would agree that such a person has placed him/herself beyond the bounds of civilized society. Persons of this kind have arrogated to themselves the power of life and death: they claim the right to determine who shall live and who shall die, and there is no recourse to their decision. They will order that innocent human beings shall die—and there is not a damned thing you or anyone else can do to stop it. This is a claim of absolute power. Full stop.

Now, consider: such a claim has been made, implicitly and/or explicitly, by every President of the United States since World War II. When you consider all the interventions, both overt and covert, engaged in by the US around the world from the mid-twentieth century onward, there can be no question about this. The same is true of most, if not all, of the Presidents prior to World War II; we will not review all of US history here. But the proposition is painfully, obviously true since the end of the Second World War. Roosevelt met Churchill and Stalin at Yalta to chart the course of the world after the war. They all believed, as Churchill said:

“The right to guide the course of history is the noblest prize of victory.”

What moral judgment can we legitimately make at this point? This one: all the Presidents of the United States since the end of WWII have been moral monsters. To order actions that you know will lead to the death of even one innocent human being, when you could choose differently or even refrain from acting altogether, is utterly damnable, and entirely unforgivable. How do you make amends to the husband or wife left behind, or to the children without a mother or father, or to any of the other survivors? How do you find forgiveness for ending the life of a single, precious, irreplaceable human being?

So we are left with a procession of moral monsters, who are “honored” as leaders of a “great” nation. The newest members of this procession are Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump. Make no mistake: they are both moral monsters. They both have the blood of innocents on their hands, many times over. Some may conclude that the depravity evidenced by their

actions exiles both of them to the underworld of the damned and further moral distinctions are meaningless, and even offensive.

In one sense, I would not argue against that perspective. In fact, before proceeding, I will insist that we recognize the immense evil represented by anyone who wishes to be Commander in Chief of an Empire of Evil, an empire founded on compulsion, violence, suffering, torture, and death. No one chooses to lead such an empire innocently. And yet, there is a sense in which one of these two most recent members of the Procession of the Damned is worse than the other.

Idiots and charlatans, the handmaidens of death, lure us into the abyss. Wherever the US goes, half becomes a graveyard, and the other half a madhouse. We are not yet ready to give up empire—we call it our “world standing”—and therefore the fascism that goes with it; we just want a nice human face on it, an Obama or a reformed Hillary Clinton or a senile Joe Biden with a super-woke running mate. Liberals seem to prefer leaders who can murder and maim with no hate in their heart. Which, if you stop and think about it, is really the most fucked up stance to have when you’re murdering and maiming.

If Clinton were a man she would have been (rightfully) forgotten long ago like Gary Hart or Al Gore or John Kerry or other Democratic election losers, and the nation would hopefully have had someone more palatable to cast a vote for vis-à-vis the odious Trump, someone who presumably would have easily won the election.

Instead, as a woman, HRC can apparently don some weird mantle of victimhood and not only escape any personal blame or repercussions for her shocking incompetence and greed, but actually emerge more noble and more deserving as a result of her two rejections by the electorate! All the women—and men—who have struggled against horrific sexism and oppression for centuries did not do it so elite female grifters could be held to a much lower standard than their male counterparts.

The world doesn’t need a single leader, each must have their own, with their own perspectives and ideas, from which we can all make ourselves better.

Lawyers do not lead. They split hairs. They argue on behalf of those who pay them. They put things off to turn a simple dilemma into a career. They make everything unnecessarily complicated. And they turn every situation into a contest of blink.

One of the persistent strands in American political life is a cultish extremism that approaches fascism. This was given expression and reinforced during the two terms of Barack Obama. “I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being,” said Obama, who expanded America’s

favourite military pastime, bombing, and ~~death squads~~ special operations as no other president has done since the Cold War.

Following the public relations disaster of George W. Bush, Obama—the smooth operator from Chicago via Harvard—was enlisted to restore what he calls “leadership” throughout the world. The Nobel Prize committee’s decision was part of this: the kind of cloying reverse racism that beatified the man for no reason other than he was attractive to liberal sensibilities—and, of course, American power—if not to the children he kills in impoverished, mostly Muslim countries.

This is the Call of Obama. It is not unlike a dog whistle: inaudible to most, irresistible to the besotted and boneheaded, especially liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics. “When Obama walks into a room,” gushed George Clooney, “you want to follow him somewhere, anywhere.”

These are pretty sociopaths.

Those that we have “chosen” to lead us in the world seem to be those that fear the world the most. Fear that their selfishness, greed will blowback into their face perhaps? No, they are too blinded for such self-awareness. And too insulated from the effects of their actions.

“Like the manager—and I’m sorry to say this, but like so many people you will meet as you negotiate the bureaucracy of the Army or for that matter of whatever institution you end up giving your talents to after the Army, whether it’s Microsoft or the World Bank or whatever—the head of my department had no genius for organizing or initiative or even order, no particular learning or intelligence, no distinguishing characteristics at all. Just the ability to keep the routine going, and beyond that her position had come to her—why?”

That’s really the great mystery about bureaucracies. Why is it so often that the best people are stuck in the middle and the people who are running things—the leaders—are the mediocrities? Because excellence isn’t usually what gets you up the greasy pole. What gets you up is a talent for maneuvering. Kissing up to the people above you, kicking down to the people below you. Pleasing your teachers, pleasing your superiors, picking a powerful mentor and riding his coattails until it’s time to stab him in the back. Jumping through hoops. Getting along by going along. Being whatever other people want you to be, so that it finally comes to seem that, like the manager of the Central Station, you have nothing inside you at all. Not taking stupid

risks like trying to change how things are done or question why they're done. Just keeping the routine going.”

I see the drone program as having the opposite effect intended for a very simple reason, most people who seek societal rank do so not to effect policy, but rather to enrich themselves at the expense of others, such people are invariably bad leaders.

The US drone program ensures that only those willing to run the very real risk of death are made leaders. Leaders who take personal risk to enact policy are far more likely to do so for the right reasons. Washington, through its drone policy, aids its opponents by preventing grifters from seeking leadership positions. In a city chocked full of grifters, it is impossible for them to understand that “leaders,” such as themselves, are not in this nation’s interest and were the drone program reversed, to point at US leaders, our nation would be far better off.

The assassination strategy the US pursues is interesting, not in what it says about the US’s foes, but what it says about the US’s leaders. Al-Qaeda’s “number two” man has been killed so often that it’s a running joke, and Taliban leadership is regularly killed by assassination. Bush did this, Obama really, really did this, Trump does this. Probably a lot of them are BS, but it’s probably safe to assume that a lot of leadership is killed. The Taliban is still kicking the coalition’s ass.

Leadership isn’t as big a deal as people make it out to be, *if* you have a vibrant organization people believe in. New people step up, and they’re competent enough. Genius leadership is very rare, and a good organization doesn’t need it, though it’s welcome when it exists. As long as the organization knows what it’s supposed to do and everyone’s motivated to do that, leadership doesn’t need to be especially great, but it will be generally competent, because the people in the organization will make it so.

American leaders are obsessed with leadership because they lead organizations where no one believes in the organization’s goals. Or rather, they lead organizations where everyone knows the leadership doesn’t believe in its ostensible goals. Schools are lead by people who hate teachers and want to privatize schools to make profit. The US is lead by men who don’t believe in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. Police are lead by men who think their job is to protect the few and beat down the many, not to protect and serve—at least half of that has been deemed valid by the Supreme Court. Corporations make fancy mission statements and talk about valuing employees and customers, but they just want to make a buck and will fuck anyone—employee or customer—below the C-suite. They don’t

have a “mission”—making money is not a mission, it’s a hunger if it’s all you want to do—they are parasites and they know it.

Making organizations work if they’re filled with people who don’t believe in the organization, who believe that the “leadership” is only out for themselves and has no mission beyond helping themselves, not even enriching the employees or shareholders, is actually hard. People don’t get inspired by making the C-suite rich. Bureaucrats, knowing they are despised and distrusted by their political masters, and knowing that they aren’t allowed to do their ostensible job, as with the EPA generally not being allowed to protect the environment, the DOJ not being allowed to prosecute powerful wealthy crooks, and the FDA being the slave of drug companies and the whims of politically connected appointees, are hard to move, hard to motivate, hard to get to do anything but the minimum.

So American leaders, and indeed the leaders of most developed nations think they’re something special. Getting people to do anything, and convincing people to do the wrong thing, when they joined to actually teach, protect the environment, make citizens healthier, or actually prosecute crooks is difficult. Being a leader in the West, even though it comes with virtually complete immunity for committing crimes against humanity, violating civil rights, or stealing billions from ordinary citizens, is in many respects a drag. A very, very well paying drag, but a drag. Few people have the necessary flexible morals and ability to motivate employees through coercion required.

So American leaders in specific and Westerners in general think that organizations will fall apart if the very small number of people who can actually lead, stop. But that’s because they think that leading the Taliban is like leading an American company or the American government. They think it requires a soulless prevaricator who takes advantage of and abuses virtually everyone and is still able to get them to, reluctantly, do their jobs.

Functioning organizations aren’t like that. They suck leadership upwards. Virtually everyone is being groomed for leadership and is ready for leadership. They believe in the cause, they know what to do, they’re involved. And they aren’t scared of dying, if they really believe. Oh sure, they’d rather not, but it won’t stop them from stepping up.

So Obama and now Trump kills and kills and kills and somehow the Taliban is still kicking their ass. al-Qaeda in whatever country you care to name has its number two killed every few weeks, and somehow there’s always another one. Because these people believe. There’s always another believer if it’s a functioning organization, and on it goes.

The declaration of the Haqqani network as terrorists made me laugh. You read about them, and this is what you discover—the founder was a minister in the Taliban government. So, let’s get this straight. His country, which he

is a minister in, is invaded, and ten years later he's still fighting. And he refuses to negotiate with the US, because hey, he figures he's winning.

Imagine if the US was invaded, occupied, and a puppet government was set up. A cabinet minister escaped, went underground, and set up a resistance network. What would you call him? A terrorist? Sure, if you're the occupying power. If you're a citizen? Well, maybe not, eh? Sure he fights nasty, but the nation which kills so many civilians with drones can't really cast the first stone, can it?

And one day, they'll probably kill him.

And it won't make any damn difference.

A study looked at the impact of unexpected CEO deaths, such as from an airplane or car crash, on stock prices. The reason for focusing on unexpected deaths is that it takes away the possibility that the death may have been anticipated and its impact already reflected in the stock price, as might be the case when a CEO dies after a long illness. In almost half of the cases examined since 1990 (44.3 percent), the price of the company's stock rose following the death of the CEO. If incumbent CEOs are uniquely talented individuals who cannot be easily replaced, then their loss should be unambiguously bad news for the company's shareholders. In fact, the market might be expected to overreact on the negative side to the unexpected death of a CEO, since there might be the expectation that the CEO actually was a major asset to the company even in cases where it is not true. After all, why else would they be paying them so much money?

America is a civil oligarchy in which a tiny and extremely wealthy slice of the population is able to use its vastly superior economic position to promote a brand of politics that serves first and foremost itself. The oligarchs in America don't rule directly but instead use their fortunes to produce political results that favor their interests. Wealth begets power, which begets more wealth.

The men of the higher circles are not representative men; their high position is not a result of moral virtue; their fabulous success is not firmly connected with meritorious ability. They are not men shaped by nationally responsible parties that debate openly and clearly the issues this nation now so unintelligently confronts. They are not men held in responsible check by a plurality of voluntary associations which connect debating publics with the pinnacles of decision. Commanders of power unequalled in human history, they have succeeded within the American system of organized irresponsibility.

The people in charge aren't any more intelligent than you or me. They're just power-hungry and greedier. Which is actually kinda scary when you think about it.

To many people, power is of little consequence, just as many people care little about beauty or riches. But to those who lust for power, of what use is acquiring power unless they can abuse it? In this, the philosophy of the power-monger is no different from that of the cancer cell, which mindlessly seeks growth for the sake of growth until it overwhelms its host.

When the 2008 meltdown occurred too much power was concentrated in the hands of aggressive risk-takers. For twenty years, the DNA of nearly every financial institution morphed dangerously. Each time someone at the table pressed for more leverage and more risk, the next few years proved them right. These people were emboldened, they were promoted and they gained control of ever more capital. Meanwhile, anyone in power who hesitated, who argued for caution, was proved wrong. The cautious types were increasingly intimidated, passed over for promotion. They lost their hold on capital. This happened every day in almost every financial institution, over and over, until we ended up with a very specific kind of person running things.

Our communities have been arranged so that those in a position to set policy for the rest of us are insulated from the pain, so their decisions keep getting worse.

“The pride and the presence of a professional football team
is far more important than 30 libraries.”

He spoke without a hint of irony or any indication that he had ever upon a midnight dreary, pondered weak and weary the effect of his greed on the human condition. How many Baltimore children who might have become Mayor Bradleys will instead end up on the other side of the law? That may not be measurable, but that some will because of Modell's greed is as certain as the sun rising in the east.

It's good to be desperate once in a while. Gives you an appreciation of the looks on people's faces when they're desperate and you're not.

In a nation of nearly 320 million, can less than 1,000 (federal level) truly have any hope of representing millions each? Is it really much better at the state level in most instances? Even many local government structures are small relative to their populations, though at this level one gets significantly closer to what might be considered “representative” of the general population.

When we lack the ability to talk back to entities that are culturally and politically powerful, the very foundations of free speech and democratic society are called into question.

We really don't have much time as a people and a planet. The US drives violence, energy usage, and inequality everywhere. That isn't going to stop unless a real left takes over, or we break down completely and the China

Century becomes indisputable—at which point, we’re just along for the ride, having already cut the brake line.

This system is exacerbating inequality, retarding social mobility, perpetrating privilege, and creating an elite that is isolated from the society that it’s supposed to lead. Where the rich send their children to learn to walk, talk, and think like the rich. Elite education manufactures young people with little intellectual curiosity and a stunted sense of purpose, content to color within the lines that their education had marked out for them; people to be pandered to instead of challenged, urged to think of yourself as a future leader of society. All played out within the same narrow conception of what constitutes a valid life: affluence, credentials, prestige.

They are to be pampered, to be trained into a leadership class and convinced that they are eligible to protect establishment rules. This instilled attitude they then carry forth as they form dense concentrations in government, law, and media. And here’s the problem: Where such a concentration of a particular, narrow worldview exists, it yields the intellectual incest able to perpetuate a dogmatic philosophy generation after generation.

History is something that very few people have been doing while everyone else was ploughing fields and carrying water buckets.

We take it for granted that great individuals—Gandhi, Kennedy, Martin Luther King—can have great positive impacts on the world. But we are loath to believe the same about negative impacts—unless the individuals are obvious monsters like Hitler or Stalin. But small numbers of people can have large, negative impacts, especially if they are organized, determined, and have access to power.

This is one of the unspoken goals of Wall Street money having infected the Democratic Party—to elevate and politically ennoble individuals of low intelligence and poor character. The Republican Party has been run along these lines for decades—the smart people are running things offstage while the spotlight is trained on worthless buffoons and joke politicians.

These idiots have had their egos massaged to the point where they view the positions bestowed on them by corporate money as objective proof of their own moral/intellectual superiority. They have been told that they rose to the top on merit when in fact they were allowed to rise precisely because their vapidity and vanity makes them easy to control.

They then have a dual function: pay back the people who put them there and maintain their position as placeholders in case anyone gets the bright idea to remove and replace them. Oh, and also to demoralize anyone below from organizing and mounting a serious resistance in the form of alternative candidates. They aren’t tedious just because they have no imagination or ability. They are partly in position to send opponents to sleep. Corporate

money has turned the Democratic Party leadership into a phalanx of human shields to cop the flak while their pimps rake in the dough.

The compulsion to increase profits can blind men to risk, especially when those at risk are strangers. Society imposes rules on corporate behavior to protect public safety in the face of baser impulses. These rules require enforcement, though. They also require a corporate culture that appreciates the importance of safety. As Adam Smith wrote:

“The object of justice is the security from injury, and it is the foundation of civil government.”

Remember, most, if not all, regulation is in response to egregious misconduct. It would be better for all if sociopaths weren't the most likely to “achieve success” in the simplistic sense of making the most money and sitting on the greatest number of Boards. If you want less regulation, then CEO's and their cronies everywhere need to stop externalizing relevant social impacts of corporate actions.

Interesting results arise from comparing the effects of the Bush tax cuts with the changes for investors that President Clinton signed into law in 1997. During Clinton's two terms, the effective income tax rate of the top-400 fell from almost 30 percent to 22.2 percent. Applying the Bush tax cuts yields a rate of 17.2 percent for income taxes only. That means Clinton gave the richest of the super-rich a much bigger tax cut than Bush. Under Clinton, their effective tax rate fell by almost eight cents on the dollar; under Bush, it fell only five.

“Meritocracy is just as pernicious a basis for a moral system as is the moral system that informs the reactionary mind that informs ‘conservatism.’ While I'd been aware of the problems with elitism, technocracy, specialized-knowledge-based discrimination/access for a few years now, I'd never really thought it through and recognized that it's actually a moral system—first sold to us by Plato in his allegory of the cave, and his Republic more generally. Just goes to show, I guess, how easy it is to miss the blatantly obvious just because it's widely treated as normal and acceptable”

Yes, it's worth recalling that ‘aristocracy,’ from the Greek, originally meant “rule by the best people,” and Plato's Guardians, of course, were specially selected from those with the necessary abilities and personal qualities to be rulers. Nothing much has really changed, except that these days fitness to rule can no longer be justified as an inherent characteristic, so it

has to be established through some seemingly-objective process of rational selection, with a few of the non-elite allowed in from time to time to keep the hopes of ordinary people alive—hello AOC. But they are quickly brought into line, any radical rhetoric they may have spouted channeled into safe outlets—hello AOC.

Meritocracy is a parody of democracy. It offers opportunities for advancement, in theory at least, for anyone with the talent to seize them, but opportunities to rise are no substitute for a general diffusion of the means of civilization, of the dignity and culture that are needed by all whether they rise or not. Social mobility does not undermine the influence of elites; if anything, it helps to solidify their influence by supporting the illusion that it rests solely on merit.

The globalized power elite that may feel more at home in Taiwan or Singapore isn't objectionable because its members may be in thrall to some sinister, unpatriotic economic loyalties. No, the members of the placeless, merit-obsessed global ruling class deserve our scorn because they've turned their backs on the larger project of sharing democratic civilization on an equitable basis with their fellow citizens. Instead, they've arrogated knowledge—an artificially-scarce social good—as their own monopoly franchise and, in the process, systematically hollowed out the local institutions and impersonal forums for public debate that helped diffuse a democratic civilization.

But neither wealth nor the ability to live and retire in complete comfort is any real measure of merit. Not compared to coming up with sustainable systems to manage our presence on this planet without heedlessly killing off tens of thousands of species and ourselves as well.

We tend to forget that the monetary form of wealth being accumulated represents finite resources wrested from Mother Earth. Every SUV built, every smartphone manufactured, every McMansion constructed, every well fracked—each take resources from an ever dwindling supply. And, every acre of once fertile corporate farmland that blows away into dust, every stream polluted by a leaking pipeline, every wolf or elephant or carrier pigeon hunted into extinction, leaves all of us a bit poorer than before.

Every death, whether from despair, hopelessness, or lack of access, that's on them. Those—often pretty-faced—assholes in their suits, pants-suits, dresses, they killed them, whether with ignorance or with malice, they fucking killed them. Every appeal to the size of the debt can simply be translated to: I don't care who is harmed.

Fuck these people, fuck their power, fuck their status, fuck their wealth, fuck their ignorance. Fuck their reputations, fuck the respect for the office, fuck you. End these fucking assholes' hold on the levers of control. Fuck

them being able to dictate course. Fuck them, fuck them, fuck them.

How can one even look upon these miserable pieces of shit? So willing to trade their fellow beings' safety, contentment, for their own. Fuck them, these miserable fucking parasites. Fuck their appeals to unity, they don't actually mean it—unity for their kind perhaps, but not for yours.

Fuck these people, if you can call them that—I wouldn't. Fuck their sense of superiority. Fuck their sense of entitlement. Fuck their smugness. Fuck every last thing about them, these bumbling sociopaths—tools for others less bumbling than they.

One must reject any semblance of passivity. One must reject any form of compromise. One does not compromise with these slithering scum. One removes them by any means necessary. One should not allow their speech—they have had a platform for long enough. Not censorship—shut the fuck down. End their reign or they will continue to harm others.

They must be stopped, they will be stopped. By any means necessary we will. You will. One will. One must. To look for consensus with those who oppose the changes that are necessary is betrayal.

It's difficult for outsiders to understand the kind of hypnotic appeal such invocations of consensus hold for Washington and the prosperous, well-educated fellows who inhabit it. Every one of them knows that the real problem with government is what they call entitlement spending, meaning Social Security and Medicare; that the obvious solution is some sort of privatization; and also that every other responsible, professional-class person either agrees on this matter or else is a charlatan or demagogue of some species or other.

As with free trade and welfare reform, there is no amount of reporting or argument that will budge this *idée fixe*; people of a certain educational background simply know it to be true. Which brings us to the second thing everyone agrees upon: that ideology merely gets in the way—that if educated people from both parties could just get together and put partisanship aside, some great understanding on this matter of entitlements could quickly be reached. This is the Holy Grail, the high-minded act of privatization that would terminate the New Deal's most popular achievement and bring to a close the era of activist government. This is the true Grand Bargain our leaders have chased from the Nineties up through the age of Obama.

Obama favored the grand symbolic gesture over deep structural change every time. So he would make a dramatic announcement about closing the notorious Guantánamo Bay prison—while going ahead with an expansion of the lower profile but frighteningly lawless Bagram prison in Afghanistan, and opposing accountability for Bush officials who authorized torture. He would boldly appoint the first Latina to the Supreme Court, while intensifying

Bush-era enforcement measures in a new immigration crackdown. He would make investments in green energy while championing the fantasy of “clean coal” and refusing to tax emissions, the only sure way to substantially reduce the burning of fossil fuels without nationalization. Similarly, he would slam the unacceptable greed of banking executives, even as he hands the reins of the economy to consummate Wall Street insiders Timothy Geithner and Larry Summers, who predictably rewarded the speculators and failed to break up the banks. And most importantly, he would claim to be ending the war in Iraq, and retire the ugly “war on terror” phrase—even as the conflicts guided by that fatal logic escalated in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This preference for symbols over substance, and this unwillingness to stick to a morally clear if unpopular course, is where Obama decisively parts ways with the transformative political movements from which he has borrowed so much—his pop-art posters from Che, his cadence from King, his “Yes We Can!” slogan from the migrant farmworkers’ *Si Se Puede*. These movements made unequivocal demands of existing power structures: for land distribution, higher wages, ambitious social programs. Because of those high-cost demands, these movements had not only committed followers but serious enemies. Obama, in sharp contrast followed the logic of marketing: create an appealing canvas on which all are invited to project their deepest desires but stay vague enough not to lose anyone but the committed wingnuts.

In short, Obama didn’t just rebrand America, he resuscitated the neoliberal economic project when it was at death’s door. No one but Obama, in this instance, rightly perceived as a new FDR, could have pulled it off. And this is what an Elizabeth Warren certainly could do (and even what a Bernie Sanders is likely to do): save capitalism from its inevitable, deserved destruction, yet again.

Those who celebrate ‘bipartisanship’ for its own sake have a strange set of values: They often seem to desire compromise without caring what the compromises actually are. That’s in part, though, because anything both Democrats and Republicans would agree on is something that won’t threaten the interests of a billionaire like Bloomberg.

Regardless of who leads it, the professional-class liberalism seems to be forever traveling on a quest for some place of greater righteousness. It is always engaged in a search for some subject of overwhelming, noncontroversial goodness with which it can identify itself and under whose umbrella of virtue it can put across its self-interested class program. There have been many other virtue-objects over the years: people and ideas whose surplus goodness could be extracted for deployment elsewhere. The great virtue-rush of the 1990s, for example, was focused on children, then thought to be the last word in overwhelming, noncontroversial goodness. Who could be against

kids? No one, of course, and so the race was on to justify whatever your program happened to be in their name. In the course of Hillary Clinton's 1996 book, *It Takes a Village*, the favorite rationale of the day—'think of the children!'—was deployed to explain her husband's crime bill as well as more directly child-related causes like charter schools.

You can find dozens of examples of this kind of liberal-class virtue-quest if you try, but instead of listing them, let me go straight to the point: This is not politics. It's an imitation of politics. It feels political, yes: it's highly moralistic, it sets up an easy melodrama of good versus bad, it allows you to make all kinds of judgments about people you disagree with, but ultimately it's a diversion, a way of putting across a policy program while avoiding any sincere discussion of the policies in question. The virtue-quest is an exciting moral crusade that seems to be extremely important but at the conclusion of which you discover you've got little to show for it besides NAFTA, bank deregulation, and a prison spree.

The culture wars unfold in precisely the same way as the liberal virtue-quest: they are an exciting ersatz politics that seem to be really important but at the conclusion of which voters discover they've got little to show for it all besides more free-trade agreements, more bank deregulation, and a different prison spree.

This is modern liberalism in action: an unregulated virtue-exchange in which representatives of one class of humanity ritually forgive the sins of another class, all of it convened and facilitated by a vast army of well-graduated American professionals, their reassuring expertise propped up by bogus social science, while the unfortunate objects of their high and noble compassion sink slowly back into a preindustrial state.

Yes, let's come together. But get this through your fucking head: you must bend the knee to us. Not the other way around. You have been proven as failures, and your entire worldview has been discredited.

If your community does not provide food, housing, health care, employment, and education to all who want them, you live in a failed state.

Religion and politics are both ideologies, but with religion you will more often find those unwilling to compromise principles, morals. Politics is treated much more like a game one is trying to win; perhaps principles will help with that, but if not they can be set aside. This is a problem. Elected individuals not willing to succeed or fail due to principles are individuals who are not qualified for the position. We do not want close-minded, we want principled. A principled individual can abandon principles they have found to be incorrect, flawed, but they cannot abandon them simply for convenience, status, power, success.

If one is not willing to fail or die adhering to their principles do you really think are they qualified to lead?

Of course it is not fitting for me to exhort others to take risks that I am not taking myself. But it is also not hard to see that courage is a quality sorely missing in public life.

Only those that are willing to fail at achieving radical change will succeed at achieving radical change.

Well-known political commentator and activist Ralph Nader was recently featured in an article titled, “Why Aren’t the 99% Revolting?” The points made in the article sharply illustrate the scale of growing crisis and conflict across the US and globally. It covered issues as wide-ranging as medical care, climate change, and the titanic disparity of global wealth distribution. It concluded with the following, hollow statement:

“I could go on and on. Pick up the pace, readers. Senator Elizabeth Warren has correctly called for “big structural changes.”

Of course, we are all asking ourselves the same thing. How bad does it have to get before widespread rebellion? How many unarmed people of color and harmless dogs will be gunned down by police? How many civil rights are going to be stripped? How rich can the elites get off of our labor? How much pain do we all need to feel before we rise up? It’s a natural question to ask by anyone suffering the nature of US capitalism. Unfortunately, Nader’s article rings tone-deaf. Like so many liberal arguments, it places the burden of rebellion on working class people while ignoring the mechanisms that kill revolt wherever and whenever it threatens to spark into life.

Although the elements that prevent substantial rebellion are many, they really boil down to just three. They are the not-for-profit industry, the leaders of what is currently mislabeled as the union movement, and the Democratic Party. These three elements, all loyal to each other and working in unison, act as the front-line protective mechanism for US capitalism and the political class that serves it.

Many of you will be tempted to flail at this stage of the discussion. Aren’t the Republicans so much worse? Why would anyone attack the forces that are on our side after all they have done, even if they have some traits we may disagree with? The answer is quite simple. These forces are not allied with the types of changes our world desperately needs. They are not there to build, nor even prepare the ground for those types of changes. They act, instead, as the professional brokers of negotiated surrender for communities, workforces, and the environment. They are not building movements; they are preventing them.

What is a movement anyway? We hear the term tossed about as often as references to Martin Luther King Jr. in every venue from the election of politicians to online petitioning. Although movements have changed the course of US politics for centuries, the essential qualities of movements are nearly forgotten today. In the 50 years that have passed since the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s, the definition of “movement” has become the possession of the same institutions that have been most consistent in keeping new movements from forming.

Let’s look at some basic qualities of movements throughout history:

- Although movements may build their own leadership, they do not look for change to come from above. Instead, movements build politically independent power from below.
- Movements understand that injustice is not an accidental or coincidental outcome of the political system, but the system working according to design.
- All movements, recognizing the systemic nature of the problem, will organize ways to break the rules of that system, not simply appeal to it.
- Through building independent political power and organized mass disobedience, movements force the system to do things it was otherwise unwilling to do.

All of these qualities, synonymous with victories and grassroots power historically, are omitted from the dominant and promoted activism of today. Let’s take a look at who is writing the current narrative.

The Not-For-Profit Industrial Complex Alongside any injustice taking place nationally, a cottage industry of professional activists and organizations arises. This occurs as soon as any outrage, protest, or other grassroots formation builds to the point of exerting even a minor amount of uncontrolled political power. As soon as sufficient people and attention are involved, not-for-profit organizations will be dispatched to commandeer, tame, and control the process. The not-for-profits are funded by foundations, dark money donors, or otherwise politically connected individuals. It’s easy to see why communities or other efforts fall into their influence. They have staff, networks, and resources that we don’t normally possess at the grassroots level. But in the end, they will lead people into the predictable forms of activism that have been the hallmark of the last 50 years of retreat before Wall

Street and Washington D.C. The not-for-profits help you feel better about negotiating the terms of your defeat. They will not lead an effort, however, that threatens the political and economic elites in any meaningful way.

The Union Leadership The US working class has been on a downward spiral for generations. Once a power that shook the ground and terrified the rich, and sent their politicians scrambling for ways to save US capitalism, the unions have seen decades of defeated strikes and retreat. Today, despite historic popularity, unions continue to lose strikes and membership, all the while handing hundreds of millions of dollars of hard-earned dues money over to politicians. What happened to the thunderous power of the labor movement? Was this what rank and file workers wanted?

After record-setting strikes in the 1930s and 1940s, US financial interests were able to gain dominant influence within union leadership. Throughout the 1950s revolutionaries were expelled from locals as the labor bureaucracy strengthened its ties and acceptance of the generalized dominance of the rich and powerful. The unions became a force that negotiated better conditions of exploitation and traded their power for a comfortable relationship with the bosses and political class. It became so dominant of a strategy that union officials coined the Orwellian term, the “Team Concept,” which promotes the idea that CEOs and workers can overcome their opposing interests and work together. It has meant ruin for the American working class and an unparalleled race to the bottom for workers globally.

Today the strategies of major victory are all carefully avoided within the union hierarchy. Even when places like Puerto Rico show definitively the effectiveness of efforts like a general strike, any discussion around such an idea is opposed by union leaders in the US. Why? Because it would risk the relationship of the union leaders and the owners of industry and government.

The result is that 13 million union members, who could collectively bring the functioning of the largest capitalist economy to a halt, have been reduced to scripted measures and political spectatorship.

The Democratic Party All resources, assets, time, labor, money, ideas, organizing, and initiative are offered to and consumed by this dominant organization of US business interests. The Democratic Party, we are informed, is the alpha and omega of our efforts to organize for justice.

The power of the Democratic Party is so accepted that conventional activism has come to mean a simplified lobby effort aimed to influence their operations or talking points. No movement in history started out with the hope that electing the right politicians would save us. No movement ever exploded onto the world stage with the position that powerful interests were open to moral persuasion. But this is the promoted conclusion and focus leveraged upon all grassroots formulations.

When we accept this conclusion, that we can't build a movement independent of the Democratic or Republican parties, by what force do we expect that they will change? And, even more, if we accept that the Democratic Party is our only political path forward, what specifically are the costs of maintaining that relationship? Given the nature of the Democratic Party, its owners, its ability to co-opt and control entire populations, what is the opportunity cost to staying within its good graces? It can only be one thing: The disarming of our power and any real threat of revolt. That is the price to ride.

The consequences of this are not academic nor intellectual. Simply look at the state of the environment, the conditions in any major city, the US prison population, the decline of the working class, the wars, systemic racism, poverty, and deepening crisis everywhere and you will see the objective consequences of a people outsourcing our power to politicians.

The potential for forceful and effective revolt will be defined by its relationship to these three political forces. The more ties that exist between threatened rebellion and these forces, the more predictable and inert that rebellion will become. Is there any other way forward?

Yes. Organized revolt has built occupations, urban insurrections, general strikes, and formed politically-independent organizations throughout history. The labor movement, the abolitionists, and the civil rights struggles all created political power sufficient to throw the system onto its heels and compel deep changes to government and industry. The examples aren't confined to history either. Within the last decade, rebellion against racism and police brutality erupted in cities after the killing of Mike Brown in Ferguson. Standing Rock saw a historic assembly of First Nations to protect the water of the Missouri River from the Dakota Access Pipeline. A general strike in Puerto Rico removed Gov. Ricardo Rosselló from power. And let's not forget that the work stoppage of rank and file airline attendants that

defeated Trump's attempt to keep the US government closed. It took all of 48 hours for that victory.

In every moment throughout history, forces from below threaten to find expression. It means the system has had to develop elaborate mechanisms to keep these forces in check, predictable, and historically inert. The role of regular people then, the working class, has to be to recognize how we are being maneuvered and by whom, and to overcome those mechanisms so we can build something powerful, independent, and existentially threatening to the old order. If we can achieve that, revolt is only a moment away. And when it happens, it will rise to the level of the crisis that compelled it.

Bully Nation

Too many rush to applaud harsh sentences for individuals who bully others into suicide. Yet there is silence as institutions and organizations do the same or worse to millions.

What is bullying?

1. Bullying is as much about the adult world as about the world of children. The current focus on kids is an orchestrated distraction from the role played by adults and adult institutions in creating bullying. It leads to a warped discussion that makes bullying appear to be something specific to child psychology and behavioral disorders that tend to fade as people mature—something that, once outgrown, leaves few permanent impacts. The sociological imagination challenges this view, asserting that bullying is created by the adult world and the institutions that structure adult behavior. The focus on kids and child psychology masks the reality that bullying reflects the institutional and cultural values and power hierarchies of our society. We therefore need a new conversation, centering on adults and how adult bullying has resulted in the bullying scourge among kids.
2. Institutions as well as people bully. In the United States, corporations, the military, the police, sports leagues, the family, and other organizations all commit institutionalized bullying; accordingly, the bullying will take place somewhat independently of the psychology or personality of any particular institutional leader, since it is embedded in the DNA and legal structure of the institution. This happens on a large scale. In the sociological imagination, institutionalized bullying is the leading cause of personal bullying. When the conversation about bullying is largely about individuals who bully (and their psychology), it essentially enables more bullying because it distracts attention from the true sources of the problem.
3. The national focus on personal and child bullying is shaped to a large degree by the elites who control the institutions that are themselves the

biggest bullies of all, such as the corporations and the military. This reflects simple self-interest, since it diverts attention from institutional bullying and its horrific, rippling effects on the social lives and pervasive bullying among both adults and children. Such twisted control of the discourse gains popular acceptance because it allows parents and teachers to believe that they can protect and support their children through their own psychological interventions, rather than by having to challenge the biggest and most powerful institutions in history, which, like air, are everywhere around us but actually unseen.

4. Institutional bullies are closely tied to the bullying system that we might call a bully nation. In the United States, a system of intertwined corporations, governments, and military institutions constitutes militarized capitalism. The system itself carries out “systemic bullying,” to create profits and sustain its own power. This gives rise to the bullying endemic to both the US version of capitalism and the culture and practices of the US military, used against other nations and America’s own domestic population by militarized police forces. It also creates other repressive institutions of control, including schools, sports organizations, and the family.
5. The military, sports, schools, and the family are all “bridging” or “transmission” institutions. They help create and channel a bullying culture from institutions to individuals. They are, in a sense, the kitchen that churns out food for the bullies. They dish out the bullying values and conduct that nourish militarized capitalism, making them palatable and part of the daily routine of millions of Americans.
6. The targets of bullying include not only adults and children but also animals and possibly other nonhumans. We might call this environmental bullying, and in the age of climate change, it may prove to be the most dangerous variant of all. In militarized capitalism, corporate capitalism teaches us to treat animals and others as resources to be used to produce profit and satisfy our own material needs. Corporations seek to dominate all of nature for profit. Environmental bullying—with humans as the hegemonic species and animals and natural resources as prime targets—could ultimately result in consequences that end the human experiment as we know it.

Psychiatrists are not trained to analyze societal institutions and the economic organization of society. They usually try to help their patients

“adjust,” seldom considering whether this a society to which anyone should adjust.

Society is usually treated as an unseen, automatic given or an inherent good. In their training, psychiatrists learn that societal forces are distractions from inner psychological dynamics and biological brain disorders. This professional training—emphasizing psychodynamics, mental illness, and the like—blinds them to the role played by the huge corporations and militaries that bully millions of adults here and abroad, as well as individual adults in workplaces and families in the home. These same institutions drive much of the bullying of kids on kids, while also perpetrating corporate, military, and other violence against animals and the environment.

Personal problems are rooted in societal values; power hierarchies; the values and interests of economic, political, and military systems. Contrary to American common sense, it is impossible to separate private troubles and public (and political) issues and any attempt to do so will lead to nothing but myths and illusions, a form of cultivated ignorance.

The sociological imagination sees social problems of all forms as linked to the concentration and abuse of power in the wider society. Power inequality, especially when extreme, creates a society of haves and have-nots. It disenfranchises large sectors of the population and then it bullies them into submission. Of course, abuse, like bullying itself, is a subjective concept that exists to a large degree in the eye of the beholder. The victim may feel he is subject to the bully and his abuse of power, whereas the bully, who may deny the label, may feel entirely entitled and believe he is behaving in a perfectly moral manner. One's position in the power hierarchy will heavily shape such perceptions.

Bullying is not a personal aberration or form of deviance. It is programmed into major institutions, endemic to our entire society, and it is useful (if not always necessary) for surviving and prospering in militarized capitalism. If you want to move up the ladder, you are going to have to bully, and you must ultimately embrace without too much questioning the big corporate institutions that bully large segments of the population into submission. The individual bully is a product of the bully nation.

Bullying is a core feature of power and arises out of social systems organized around steep power hierarchies. The greater the inequalities of power in a society, among nations, or even across species, the more likely it is that both institutional and personal bullying will become commonplace. Bullying is about the more powerful bending the less powerful to their will and ensuring that things stay that way. In that sense, the militarized imperial state models bullying for the corporate manager, the military commander, and the schoolyard bully. It all follows a Machiavellian script: social life and

international affairs are all about power, and bullying is simply one way in which inequalities of power are created and abused. If politics or political economy is about the study of power, then the sociological imagination tells us that to understand bullying, we need to move away from psychologists and toward political analysts and sociologically and environmentally oriented political economists.

Although power and power inequalities are the structural roots of bullying, setting the conditions for bullying to occur, they are not absolutely determining. The relation is contingent—dependent on cultural and political factors that vary across societies and personal relations.

A powerful bullying culture still exists in the nation, and the bullying problem has deep historical roots in American society—from the annihilation of Native Americans to the slavery that defined the Deep South before the Civil War. It continued after the war in the rise of the corporate robber barons, who bullied an immigrant population of powerless workers. Today, it persists because bullying values and power inequalities remain deeply embedded in the nation. It is difficult to imagine a society of deep power and wealth inequalities in which the rich do not bully the poor and humans do not abuse the environment. Likewise, it is hard to see historically militaristic societies that do not bully weaker nations or large sectors of their own populations. As long as there are serious power inequalities, elites will almost certainly bully subordinate groups into submission, and stronger higher-status people, both adults and children, will bully weaker lower-status people whom they meet every day.

Nonmilitarized capitalism is very much a bullying system in its own right. The fundamental power inequalities between owners and workers foster the structural conditions that give rise to institutionalized bullying. Both capitalism and militarism can, on their own, create bullying societies. But as in America, where we have a deeply militarized capitalist system, the effects are amplified: the scope and harshness of institutionalized bullying become overwhelmingly powerful.

Corporate capitalism is the American version of the bully economy. It is founded on the basic division between a small ownership class and everyone else; all of the latter are dependent on those owning productive property or the “means of production.” This can also be described as the difference between those who own capital and those who don’t. If you eliminate this division, you no longer have capitalism as a system; it is the system’s defining quality, and it ensures a great inequality of power in which the rich bully the rest into submission.

Inequality is endemic to the bully economic system; if you eliminate the inequality, the economy cannot long endure.

The bullying is not fully seen because of the ideology and morality promoted by the wealthy and by the economists who wittingly or unwittingly serve their interests. By arguing that the rich are worthy “makers” who have earned their money through hard work and talent while also creating jobs for the “takers,” they turn bullying into a moral meritocracy that builds prosperity and rewards virtue.

Thomas Piketty presents data about the distribution of capital ownership in more than twenty countries over the last three centuries. He finds that capitalism, with only one exception in the last 300 years, has created wide, sustained, and often extreme inequalities of both income and wealth. Piketty argues that this does not reflect markets gone wrong; rather, it is the way capitalist markets are designed to work. Piketty is very explicit about this: “Specifically, it is important to note that [inequality] has nothing to do with any market imperfection. Quite the contrary: the more perfect the capital market (in the economist’s sense), the more likely” that inequality will be created and grow. There are no self-correcting market mechanisms to limit inequality, he argues, but only political interventions that are difficult to achieve.

“It is possible to imagine public institutions and policies that would counter the effects of this implacable logic: for instance, a progressive global tax on capital. It is unfortunately likely that actual responses to the problem—including various nationalist responses—will in practice be far more modest and less effective.”

Put simply, inequality in wealth and power is baked into capitalist systems, and it is fundamental to structural and institutional bullying.

Capitalism is a ruthlessly competitive system in which all capitalists—whether corporations or individual entrepreneurs—have no choice but to compete furiously. Karl Marx argued that capitalists who do not compete with the ferocity of sharks going for the kill will be destroyed by rivals who are committed to the economic battlefield and to winning at all costs. This is an economic version of militarism, and it also mirrors the ethic of the schoolyard bully—dominate or die. This systemic competition incentivizes even so-called nice or “socially responsible” capitalists to bully workers, consumers, and fellow capitalists. Corporations that do not bully workers—by paying low wages, breaking unions, and constantly harassing those who seek to challenge the power of the companies—will typically be at a competitive disadvantage compared to those that do; this is because the bullying leads to high corporate profits, as in McDonald’s and other fast-food giants, and thus attracts more capital from the financial markets. Investors follow the

money, just as sharks follow blood in the water. Corporations that do not bleed their workers by cutting wages and benefits—and intimidating those who challenge their degradation—will tend to see reduced profits and lose out to their competitors in the capital markets. A failure to bully workers into accepting low wages and the loss of other benefits also reduces profits, since increases in wages and benefits are drains on profit. This is a structural reality faced by all capitalists, whatever their personality, and it demonstrates the need to move from a psychological paradigm to one focusing on structural imperatives.

Capitalism reduces the majority to “employees,” making them things that are to be used. For most adults, their primary activity is alienated labor, wherein they are bullied into serving larger institutions. This is true not only for manual laborers and service workers but also for professionals who have some degree of autonomy. Survival depends upon submission. Demand too much independence and you may find yourself on the streets. The home becomes the sanctuary where working parents expect to be able to assert themselves and where everyone feels supported and loved—away from the brutality of the outside world, especially the world of competition and work, the rat race. But this does not always happen; the realities are contradictory.

“The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification. As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, et cetera; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.”

The great majority of animal species have consciousness and can feel pain and violence—perhaps this is, in fact, true of all animal species. But even though scientists are increasingly finding that plants “think” and have other forms of sensory consciousness, such as smell and hearing, it is not

clear that they have the type of consciousness that would allow them to experience either threat or pain, at least not in the same way that humans and animals do. That distinction defines the difference between bullying and bludgeoning: the former is used against targets (animals) with consciousness of threat and pain, whereas the latter is used against targets (plants, air, water, or rocks) that do not, to our knowledge, have that specific type of consciousness. The distinction here revolves around the consciousness or sentient capacity of the target.

Plants, bacteria, fungi have forms of intelligence and sensory awareness and responsiveness that are remarkable, and as indigenous cultures recognize, this constitutes an evolved consciousness, rooted in forms of DNA shared with humans that has largely been unknown despite the unfolding scientific discoveries. But we do not know whether they have a kind of sentient capacity involving the experience of threat and pain resembling that of people or animals (though many indigenous cultures have believed they do for thousands of years). Since we do not have full clarity about these matters, we reserve the idea of environmental bullying for animals and might best describe the destruction of plants and natural resources as bludgeoning.

The mind-set of power and dominance endemic to militarism mirrors the mind-set of environmental bullying: I will take what I can conquer. This is also the mantra of the schoolyard bully. Humans, schooled as they are in humancentrism, are generally too ready to sacrifice other species for human benefit.

It may be possible to reconceive growth in ways that do not imply environmental destruction, but this would require two forces that are not part of US capitalism. First, it would require the growth of public goods—education, conversation, community—while ending the growth, at least in rich nations, of private commodities. This is extremely difficult to accomplish in the United States because wealth is conceived as created only through private markets—and it cannot be created by government or public entities. In fact the United States lacks a robust concept of public goods, and it does not recognize the public goods deficit that is the true deficit in American society. Second, growth that is not environmentally destructive, involving neither bludgeoning nor bullying, would require regenerative rather than extractive production processes. Consequently, any extraction of natural resources would have to be structured such that waste is recycled and natural resources are regenerated to ecological balance after production is completed. This would be extremely difficult to accomplish in US capitalism because it would limit many forms of production that are cheap and meet the needs of short-term investors. Regenerative growth requires a long-term economic framework that accepts the true costs of extractive production—with all its

environmental externalities—and moves toward a more ecologically balanced and steady-state model. Such a scenario would be impossible within the current US economic framework.

For nearly 200 years the US expelled or mostly exterminated indigenous populations, many millions of people, conquered half of Mexico, depredated the Caribbean and Central America, conquered Hawaii and the Philippines (killing 100,000 Filipinos in the process). Since World War II, the US has extended its reach around the world. But the fighting was always somewhere else and it was always others who were being slaughtered. The world looks very different, depending on whether you are holding the lash or whether you have been whipped for centuries. Perhaps that is why the rest of the world, although horrified by the 9/11 attacks, nevertheless sees them from a different perspective.

States and many nonstate groups are bullies who listen only to more powerful bullies. The only way to survive and prosper is to be tougher than anyone else and bully the others into submission. This is more or less the way schoolyard bullies see their world: to survive and prosper, you have to be the toughest dude on the block.

A paper titled “Rebuilding American Defenses,” was published in 2000 by the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a leading neoconservative establishment organization founded by William Kristol and Robert Kagan. This work proclaims that “at present the United States faces no global rival. America’s grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible.” It calls for the United States to build the capacity “to fight and decisively win in multiple, simultaneous major theater wars.” This would necessitate a massive military buildup, including an increase in US “nuclear strategic superiority,” and an overall military plan to “preserve and extend the preeminence of US military forces” and “perform the ‘constabulary’ duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions.”

The argument for developing a surefire bullying power that no nation could even imagine challenging became an obsession of the US military and political establishment. Just nine days after 9/11, PNAC sent a letter to President Bush urging:

“Even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism.”

In other words, the United States had to invade and overthrow opposing regimes that had nothing to do with 9/11, including especially Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq because he had defiantly opposed US power moves for over a decade since the Gulf War.

PNAC was not subtle about its view of the international arena as something similar to the schoolyard, where the bully must assert his own dominance over and secure the obedience of any challenger, no matter how weak:

“The true cost of not meeting our defense requirements will be a lessened capacity for American global leadership and, ultimately, the loss of a global security order that is uniquely friendly to American principles and prosperity.”

In the modern school, the teacher, whatever her intentions, clearly acts as a bully as she carries out the imperatives of the larger bullying institution and conveys its values and expectations to her students. She may appear to bully gently, but she is expected to bring students to accept authority, seek her approval, and comply with her views and directions. As a reward for docility, students receive good grades, something directly parallel to receiving paychecks in the adult world. Ironically, the desire to get high marks can negatively impact learning. First, as motivation to get good grades goes up, motivation to explore ideas tends to go down. Second, students try to avoid challenging tasks whenever possible. More difficult assignments, after all, would be seen as an impediment to getting a top grade. Finally, the quality of students' thinking is less impressive. One study after another shows that creativity and even long-term recall of facts are adversely affected by the use of traditional grades.

Grades teach that learning is not something intrinsically valuable but an external reward for learning information for a test and then promptly forgetting it. Moreover, students have to turn against each other, competing to see who can best impress the bullying authority. Students must act like bullied workers, not question authority, and let the rulers rule. Defiant students face a variety of sanctions from the adults, although they often are popular among their fellow pupils. They will receive poor or even failing grades, or they may be compelled to repeat a year. For punishment, they will be given detention and required to stay after school. Today, they will be sent to the school guidance counselor or school psychologist. In the past, they may have been spanked, paddled, caned, hit.

An institution whose ostensible purpose is to promote education is not designed to instill a love of learning in most students. If anything, it produces

the attitude that learning is something to avoid. From a corporate point of view, that may make sense because learning can lead to questioning. From the perspective of a military, which expects blind obedience, it makes even more sense. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) considers high schools that send their graduates to the army to be as effective as those that send them to college. It also requires schools that receive federal funds to actively assist the military in recruiting students by giving military recruiters the same access to secondary school students as is provided generally to post secondary educational institutions or to prospective employers of those students. Schools that fail to comply risk losing federal funds.

Veterans of the protest movements and counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, many of whom were alienated from their own educational experiences, went into teaching to transform schools from bullying institutions that reinforced authority to “child-centered” places where children could explore, express themselves, develop their curiosity, learn to appreciate other cultures, and be creative. But if the real purpose of school is to provide a docile labor force for corporations and cannon fodder for the military, then child-centered education was not doing its job.

In reaction, a “back-to-basics” movement emerged, beginning in the Reagan regime. Schools were to build respect for authority and patriotism; place more emphasis on memorizing facts than on independent thinking; and teach basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. One of the original architects of the back-to-basics approach, Diane Ravitch, later denounced it for creating schools that served corporations, not children.

“The reformers define the purpose of education as preparation for global competitiveness, higher education, or the workforce. They view students as ‘human capital’ or ‘assets.’ One seldom sees any reference in their literature or public declarations to the importance of developing full persons to assume the responsibilities of citizenship.”

In most high schools, there is a clear hierarchy, and students are supposed to know their place. One may have been at the top academically, but they would more than likely be on the bottom socially. The hierarchy is reinforced by both students and faculty, who are transmitting precisely the values the corporations and the military require. Even those who do not bully directly often find it entertaining to watch the bullying.

“When someone put his hand over my notebook, teachers, who considered me their best student, chuckled. When I left my seat to get back my Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores

(very high by the norms of the school), which another student had grabbed, the supervising teacher made me stay after school. When someone put my hand over a Bunsen burner in chemistry lab, the teacher asked me, 'Where are you going to repeat chemistry next year?'

Years later, I was invited to describe my experience before a group of handicapped people—and even they reacted by saying that anyone who can be so bullied must deserve it. 'Who are you to complain? You got legs,' they said, and they asked me repeatedly why I didn't fight back."

To avoid being labeled as a nerd many boys deliberately undermine their own academic performance. For those in the working-class this can be a fatal mistake. These working-class boys define success as making money, essentially the same way capitalists do, but most of them will end up working on a factory assembly line or in Walmart or McDonald's; others will be in the army or unemployed. So by their own criteria, how street smart or life smart are they really? They are rebelling against the confinement and regimentation of school and the stratification system that locks them into poverty and lack of status. Ironically, though, it is a rebellion that serves the very authorities against whom it is fought. With their intellectual interests destroyed, working-class youth compete against each other to show their indifference to school and to be cool, often by becoming sports heroes and sometimes by being aggressive or even violent. They will strive for sex partners, alcohol, drugs, clothes, and cars that they cannot afford. To pay for these desires, they will take low-paying, low-status jobs at gas stations, McDonald's, and Dunkin' Donuts. The time and energy this absorbs makes their failure at school all the more severe.

Many drop out of school altogether, but even if they graduate, they are typically trapped in low-level jobs like the ones they held in high school—if they are able to find work at all. Those working at the worst jobs are told that they are lucky and that they better not do anything to risk them. Romancing violence and aggression, many working-class youth consider joining the army the coolest thing they can do: they get to blow shit up and maybe they can come back as war heroes. Their rebellion does not become an organized movement that threatens the elites, but rather, it becomes a culture that the rich and powerful can manipulate to their benefit. The ultimate result is that they become compliant workers and soldiers who can console themselves with recalling their success in bullying the outcasts in the schoolyard.

Therapy for individual bullies or their victims will not end the problem.

Schools designed to serve a bullying society such as militaristic capitalism ultimately will reinforce bullying, not cure it. As long as we live in a bullying society, bullying will persist.

Bullying is unlikely to be eliminated. It has been present throughout history, and it exists in nearly every society. This is partly because it is latent in our biological programming, as is evident in the bullying seen in the natural world among animal species. And it is also because bullying is a part of the exercise of power; the elimination of bullying would require the elimination of power, both interpersonally and in economic, political, and military systems.

Steven Pinker suggests that violent bullying has diminished; in fact, he argues, the twentieth was the gentlest and the kindest century in the history of the world. However, that assessment seems dubious when we realize he was talking about a century that brought us to the brink of nuclear annihilation and gave us the two most destructive world wars in all of history, a series of near genocides on several continents, and an environment so polluted that it endangers the survival of the biosphere.

The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man. Society highly values its normal man. It educates children to lose themselves and to become absurd, and thus to be normal. Normal men have killed perhaps 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last 50 years—expanded to encompass all those non-humans, the death toll becomes unfathomable.

Human Tumors

Modern Dragons

Once the basis of social status became wealth itself—rather than, say, wisdom, knowledge, moral integrity, or skill in battle—the rich needed to find ways of spending money that had no other objective than the display of wealth itself. This is the definition of conspicuous consumption.

“The man who dies rich, dies disgraced.”

We can adapt that judgment to the man or woman who wears a \$30,000 watch, or buys similar luxury goods, like a \$12,000 handbag. Essentially such a person is saying: ‘I am either extraordinarily ignorant, or just plain selfish. If I were not ignorant, I would know that children are dying from diarrhea or malaria because they don’t have safe drinking water, or a mosquito net, and obviously what I have spent on this watch or handbag would have been enough to help several of them survive; but I care so little about them that I would rather spend my money on something that I wear for ostentation alone.’ Of course, we all have our little indulgences. I am not arguing that every luxury is wrong. But to laugh at someone for having a sensible watch at a modest price puts pressure on others to join the race to greater and greater extravagance. That pressure should be turned in the opposite direction, and we should celebrate those with modest tastes and higher priorities than conspicuous consumption.

“Money may not buy happiness, but I’d rather cry in a Jaguar than on a bus.”

It is an ancient principle that the greater one’s economic gain, the greater his burden to sustain the civilization that made his gains possible. The communist creed: From each according to his ability, to each according to his need. The capitalist creed: From each according to his gullibility, to each according to his greed.

The 1% have accumulated their increasingly massive share of global wealth by siphoning off collectively produced surpluses not through hard work but through financial machinations such as dividends, capital gains, interests, and rent, much of which is then hidden in tax havens. Indeed, if we consider the massive upward transfer of global wealth that has taken place over the last half century, it would be fair to say that never before was so much owed by so few to so many.

In the United States, the best-earning one percent of the top one percent (those in the highest 0.01% income bracket) raised their share to almost six times what it had been in the 1970s even as the top tenth of the one percent (the top 0.1%) quadrupled it. The remainder averaged gains of about three-quarters—nothing to frown at, but a far cry from the advances in higher tiers. The ‘one percent’ may be a convenient moniker that smoothly rolls off the tongue, and one that I repeatedly use in this book, but it also serves to obscure the degree of wealth concentration in even fewer hands. In the 1850s, Nathaniel Parker Willis coined the term ‘Upper Ten-Thousand’ to describe New York high society. We may now be in need of a variant, the ‘Upper Fifty-Thousand,’ to do justice to those who contribute the most to widening inequality. And even within this rarefied group, those at the very top continue to outdistance all others. The largest American fortune currently equals about one-million times the average annual household income, a multiple twenty times larger than it was in 1982.

In the US during the 2009–11 “recovery,” the 1% actually gained at the expense of the 99%. So it certainly wasn’t a recovery for the vast majority. Just in 2009–10, the top 0.01% captured 37% of this additional income, gaining an average of \$4.2 million per household.

Across the pond, the collective wealth of the UK’s 1,000 richest people:

1997 £98 billion

2008 £413 billion

2010 £336 billion

2012 £414 billion

2013 £450 billion

2014 £519 billion

That £519 billion would fund the UK education system for 5.9 years, or the state pension bill for 3.7 years, or the public health system for 4.2 years. It’s also 4.6 times the size of the country’s annual welfare bill. It’s worth

pausing to let these figures sink in; the UK has 64 million people and yet many of their most important needs could be met several times over just by the collective wealth of the richest 1,000. (Could there be a solution here?) When people worry about the effect of an aging population on the pension bill and the NHS bill, we need to remember that just the annual growth of the wealth of the super-rich could easily pay for it. This is a ridiculous and obscene misallocation of resources. And why should we celebrate the growth of the financial sector, but see the growth of the health sector as a problem?

Globally, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires website, the top 100 billionaires controlled \$1.9 trillion in 2012, adding \$240 billion that year. Oxfam calculates that just over a quarter of this—\$66 billion—would have been enough to have raised everyone in the world over the \$1.25 per day that represents the ridiculously conservative “poverty line.”

Economic inequality in the United States is the highest it’s been in the last 50 years. In recent decades, the richest 1% of Americans have accumulated nearly 40% of the country’s wealth. The net worth of just three individuals—Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett—dwarfs that of the entire bottom 50% of Americans. And it only seems to be getting worse.

How did we get here? The answer has much to do with changes to the tax code that have reduced the taxation on America’s wealthiest groups and made it easier than ever for corporations to evade paying their dues.

Policy proposals from people like Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders are seeking to do very little to change that. Warren’s “Ultra-Millionaire Tax” would impose only a 2% tax rate on net worth in excess of \$50 million, which becomes only a 3% tax rate beyond \$1 billion. In other words, any wealth between \$50 million and \$1 billion would be taxed at 2%, and anything beyond that would be taxed at 3%. Sanders’ “Tax on Extreme Wealth” plan institutes only a 1% tax rate on net worth above \$32 million that rises steadily to only 8% on all wealth over \$10 billion. Warren’s campaign claims her plan would bring in \$2.75 trillion. Sanders’ would likely raise more, which he—propping up the myth of money—proposes to use as funding for his affordable housing plan, universal childcare, and some of Medicare for All.

Here are nine statistics that show how tax injustice has contributed to inequality in America and the urgent need for reform:

52%: US corporate tax rate in 1952

21%: US corporate tax rate after Trump’s tax law

0%: Corporate tax rate in Bermuda

60%: Portion of profits US multinationals collectively book in low-tax countries like Bermuda and Ireland

\$25,000: FDR's proposed "maximum income" in 1942 (about \$400,000 today), above which income would be taxed 100%

\$1,500,000: Average income of the top 1% of American earners today

37%: Current top marginal tax rate in America, 20% below the historical average

2018: First year in history that America's top 400 richest individuals paid less in taxes than the bottom 50% of earners

25%: Fraction of unpaid taxes owed by the ultra-rich, almost 15% more than for other income levels

In 2015 the estimated private financial wealth of individuals stashed unreported in tax havens around the globe was somewhere between \$24 trillion and \$36 trillion.

In 2016, Credit Suisse estimated that there is roughly \$256 trillion in total global wealth—with a staggeringly unequal distribution: While the bottom half collectively own less than one percent of total wealth, the wealthiest top 10 percent own 89 percent of all global assets. Which is why there just aren't many serious people left who are willing to argue, with a straight face, that giving more to the wealthy is the best way to help the poor.

Some important notes however: Around \$800,000 is necessary to gain entrance to the top in 1% of global wealth holders and only around \$35,000 to find yourself among the global 1% by income. To find yourself in the global 10% wealth bracket you need only be worth \$75,000.

If we made an income pyramid out of a child's blocks, with each layer portraying \$1,000 of income, the peak would be far higher than the Eiffel Tower, but almost all of us would be within a yard of the ground.

"I think equality is great too, just that it doesn't work. Equality of opportunity, yes. But equality for equality's sake... people are not equal."

Four icons of American consumer culture—Budweiser, Burger King, Heinz, and Kraft—now belong to a trio of billionaires from Rio.

Behind every family fortune is a great theft, long forgotten or indeed never been found out, because it was properly executed.

From a cold economic perspective, once corruption is the norm, you risk a competitive disadvantage if you fail to keep up. You can't develop the country just with the kind of people you'd invite home for dinner. In the nineteenth-century United States, after all, railroad tycoons laid tens of thousands of miles of track not out of selfless civic interest but for profit, engaging in a crony capitalism that would be very familiar today.

Steal a little and they throw you in jail. Steal a lot and they make you king.

References to millions, billions, and trillions have become familiar since the 2007 financial crisis and, as many have said, it's hard to appreciate just how big such numbers are. We know \$1 billion (\$1,000 million) is a huge sum, but cannot imagine it. Here's one way. Imagine you were given \$1 every second until you had \$1 billion. You might think you would soon reach that figure—after all, after just one hour you'd already have \$3,600. But you'd actually have to wait over 31 years and 8 months. So billionaires are astonishingly wealthy. As for trillions (1,000 billion), the unit now often used for estimating the sums needed for bailing out the financial crisis, the time you would need to accumulate \$1 trillion is nearly 32,000 years.

Wealth has been redefined as a measure of success that needs no other justification. Conspicuous consumption—jets, yachts, art, mansions, maybe a fucking car in your living room—is your just reward for your “contribution” to society.

In the summer of 1724, a middle-aged London doctor with polemical inclinations named Bernard Mandeville was brought before the Court of the King's Bench to be prosecuted as a public nuisance. His offense was the publication of a book titled *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. Sometime later, upon the appearance of a French translation, the book was set on fire by Paris's public executioner. Naturally, all this, in combination with denunciations from clergy and philosophers alike, considerably increased the book's appeal, and Mandeville and his Fable became internationally notorious. Every young man had a copy on his shelf. The inflammatory idea that so outraged Mandeville's readers was that, in a flourishing market economy such as England's, virtue had become an anachronism. What had formerly been considered vices, he claimed—particularly avarice and pride—were now beneficial, indeed crucial, to the public welfare. If an economy was to prosper, it needed people to buy things, and not just the bare necessities but stupid, extravagant, frivolous things. If people were frugal and self-abnegating now, the market would suffer, and that would be a disaster for everyone—worse than a terrible plague!

In the past, he surmised, virtues such as frugality and self-abnegation,

along with the promise of heaven, had been promoted by the powerful as a means of keeping the masses docile. Man was naturally selfish, but virtue was an excellent way of setting yourself apart from your fellows, so you behaved virtuously out of pride, in order to excite admiration and avoid trouble. But in the affluent new market society, pride could be more easily satisfied through ostentatious spending, and that spending in turn ensured the perpetuation of affluence. And that was not all: a society of contented, honest, virtuous people, Mandeville insisted, would be a slothful, barren place with no art, science, or material comforts. Man must be roused to invention by greed and pride.

Kant observed that it was fortunate that so few men acted according to moral principle, because it was so easy to get principles wrong, and a determined person acting on mistaken principles could really do some damage. Most men, he wrote, “seek to turn everything around self-interest as around the great axis,” and this was all to the good; “for these are the most diligent, orderly, and prudent; they give support and solidity to the whole, while without intending to do so they serve the common good, provide the necessary requirements, and supply the foundation over which finer souls can spread beauty and harmony.”

Smith used the term ‘invisible hand’ only once in his book, in making the narrow argument that individuals were likely to invest in domestic rather than foreign industry not for patriotic reasons but because doing so would contribute to their own security. But his invisible hand metaphor proved so resonant, and so enduringly popular, that it came to stand for something much larger. It implanted deep in Western culture the idea that individual self-interestedness could be beneficial for society as a whole; which in turn suggested that, if the moral goal was helping others (as opposed to self-perfection), a selfish man might do better than a selfless one.

“May the rich get richer so that, thanks to them, the poor may in turn become less poor.”

If those who have do not give, those who haven’t must take.

Businessmen wish for two ideals: at the top, state support; at the company level, free enterprise. In other words, they want the best of both worlds. And they often get it.

The nanny state conservatives think that it is the role of the government to act as a strong-arm debt collector for businesses that did not accurately assess the risks associated with their loans. This applies both nationally and internationally. They want the government to chase after individual debtors, following them throughout their lives, to wring out every possible

cent of debt repayment. Internationally, they rely on the power of the International Monetary Fund to help them collect on bad loans. After all, huge multinational banks can't be expected to understand credit risks in places like South Korea, Indonesia, or Argentina, that would be hard work. And, who needs to do hard work when the nanny state will come to the rescue?

It's about how wealth is accumulated in the modern world and the stories we tell ourselves to explain this process.

In 2014, according to a much-discussed think tank report, the total of all the bonuses handed out on Wall Street was more than twice as much as the total earned by every person in the country who worked full-time for the minimum wage.

America is on the cusp of the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in history. A study from the Boston College Center on Wealth and Philanthropy projects that \$36 trillion could be passed down to heirs in the half century leading up to 2061. A 2013 US Trust bank poll of Americans with more than \$3 million of investable assets shows a significant generational divide: Nearly three-quarters of those over age sixty-nine and a majority of boomers just below them are the first in their generation to accumulate significant wealth. For the rich under the age of thirty-five, however, inherited wealth is more common. This is the dynastic form of wealth that has provided the major source of income for European aristocracy for centuries. It is about to become the major source for a new American aristocracy.

A healthy society, some argue, is built around "egoistic altruism," in which every individual sets about doing his utmost to win the adoration of others. This produces a form of natural equilibrium, in which the egotist becomes integral to his own social system: No one will make personal enemies if his egotism, his compulsive hoarding of valuables, manifest itself only by inciting life, goodwill, gratitude, respect, and all other positive feelings that render him useful and often indispensable to his neighbours. This characteristically monistic assumption is that any society or organization was merely a larger, more complex biological system, whose behaviour could be reduced back to the actions of organisms and cells.

The elderly are taught to live in fear of outliving their rights to care, or even a home and food, and the pressure to hoard everything for the time when they can no longer work hangs over the lives of every worker. Since no one can know when they will become ill, when they will die, or what the vagaries of the financial system will bring, this stress colours the lives of everyone in society and makes generosity with any current surplus unlikely.

Ancient mythology asked how King Midas could survive with nothing to eat but his gold. This threatens to be a metaphor for today's finance

capitalism—a dream that one can live purely off money, without means of production and living labor. Cue the AIs and robot slaves.

Financial independence is really our term for being able to survive without society. What follows is the idea that if we are independent, our contributions to society are charitable and voluntary. This independence is part of the system of dissociation that stands in our way of creating a real society.

While they will easily accept responsibility for a road that they may or may not use, a person without children has been taught to feel robbed by responsibility for a school. In a society of plenty, children are no longer presented as the support of the future but simply as the burden of the present.

The study of hunter-gatherers, who live for the day and do not accumulate surpluses, shows that humanity can live more or less as Keynes suggests. It's just that we're choosing not to. A key to that lost or forsworn ability lies in the ferocious egalitarianism of hunter-gatherers. For example, the most valuable thing a hunter can do is come back with meat. Unlike gathered plants—whose proceeds are not subject to any strict conventions on sharing—hunted meat is very carefully distributed according to protocol, and the people who eat the meat that is given to them go to great trouble to be rude about it. This ritual is called “insulting the meat,” and it is designed to make sure the hunter doesn't get above himself and start thinking that he's better than anyone else.

“When a young man kills much meat he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can't accept this.”

The insults are designed to “cool his heart and make him gentle.” For these hunter-gatherers the sum of individual self-interest and the jealousy that policed it was a fiercely egalitarian society where profitable exchange, hierarchy, and significant material inequality were not tolerated.

This egalitarian impulse is central to the hunter-gatherer's ability to live a life that is—on its own terms—affluent, but without abundance, without excess, and without competitive acquisition. The secret ingredient seems to be the positive harnessing of the general human impulse to envy. If this kind of egalitarianism is a precondition for us to embrace a post-labor world, then I suspect it may prove a very hard nut to crack. There's a lot that we could learn from the oldest extant branch of humanity, but that doesn't mean we're going to put the knowledge into effect. A socially positive use of envy—now, that would be a technology almost as useful as fire.

“My greatest skill has been to want but little. A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.”

Classical economics explained why prices for land sites, mineral deposits, and other natural endowments rise for reasons that do not involve an expenditure of labor or enterprise by their owners. Public investment in roads and other transportation, schools and parks, water and other infrastructure is provided freely or at prices subsidized by taxpayers as a whole. The result is that taxpayers as well as rent-payers end up paying to create wealth for landlords—enabling them to borrow more or obliging new homebuyers to borrow more to obtain ownership of such sites. To the extent that rental values are paid to the banks as interest, landlords as well as taxpayers end up creating revenue and wealth for the financial sector.

Take a civilized country. The forests which once covered it have been cleared, the marshes drained, the climate “improved.” It has been made habitable. The soil, which bore formerly only a coarse vegetation, is covered today with rich harvests. Thousands of highways and railroads furrow the earth and pierce the mountains. The rivers have been made navigable; the coasts, carefully surveyed, are easy of access; artificial harbors, laboriously dug out and protected against the fury of the sea, afford shelter to the ships. Millions of human beings have labored to create this civilization on which we pride ourselves today. Other millions, scattered through the globe, labor to maintain it. Without them nothing would be left in fifty years but ruins.

There is not even a thought, or an invention, which is not common property, born of the past and the present. Thousands of inventors, known and unknown, who have died in poverty, have cooperated in the invention of each of these machines which embody the “genius of man.” Thousands of writers, of poets, of scholars, have labored to increase knowledge, to dissipate error, and to create that atmosphere of scientific thought without which the marvels of our century could never have appeared. And these thousands of philosophers, of scholars, of inventors have been upheld and nourished through life, both physically and mentally, by legions of workers and craftsmen of all sorts.

By what right then can anyone appropriate the least morsel of this immense whole and say: This is mine, not yours?

“The power of enclosing land and owning property was brought into creation by your ancestors via the sword; which first did murder their fellow creatures, men, and after plunder or steal away their land, and left this land successively to you,

their children. And therefore, though you did not kill or thief, yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the sword; and so you justify the wicked deeds of your fathers, and that sin of your fathers shall be visited upon the head of you and your children to the third and fourth generation, and longer too, till your bloody and thieving power be rooted out of the land.”

Police violence and private property is the only way that a landlord can convince an apartment building full of people to pay most of their wages in rent just because he “owns” it. And there is only one way millions of folks can be convinced to sleep on the street right by many more millions of unused buildings, hotel rooms, and vacant, unaffordable houses. The credible threat of violence—it is the only way five people can control more wealth than the bottom 50% of the global human population.

Personal possessions can easily be maintained without the state-sanctioned violence of a police state—humanity did that for thousands of years with citizen-led, community-level policing. And we can do it again. But private property rights cannot be maintained without violence. A capitalist society can never be a free society—it takes the constant presence of violent force to sustain private rights of ownership over society’s productive forces and resources for billionaires and business interests. Property or liberty—we only get to pick one.

We need to differentiate between private property and personal property. Everybody loves the notion of private property. Until the fact that the 1% own as much private property as the 90% is realized—then not so much. Define ‘personal property’ as property that one can maintain and control personally and not with an army of managers and professionals. It is time to destroy the shibboleths that have diverted the electorate from its true interests. It is time to redefine private property and monopoly power. The electorate fears progressive collectivization. It is time to assert the importance of personal property over private property and free enterprise as opposed to monopoly enterprise.

Violated, dishonored, wading in blood, dripping filth—there stands bourgeois society. This is it in reality. Not all spic and span and moral, with pretense to culture, philosophy, ethics, order, peace, and the rule of law—but the ravening beast, the witches’ sabbath of anarchy, a plague to culture and humanity. Thus it reveals itself in its true, its naked form.

Did mounting population exhaust the land, tempting Petexbatún rulers to seize their neighbors’ property, leading to a cycle of response that spiraled into cataclysmic war? If anything, it was the other way around: An unleashed

lust for wealth and power turned them into aggressors, resulting in reprisals that required their cities to abandon vulnerable outlying fields and intensify production closer to home, eventually pushing land beyond its tolerance. Society had evolved too many elites, all demanding exotic baubles—a culture wobbling under the weight of an excess of nobles, all needing quetzal feathers, jade, obsidian, fine chert, custom polychrome, fancy corbeled roofs, and animal furs. Nobility is expensive, nonproductive, and parasitic, siphoning away too much of society's energy to satisfy its frivolous cravings. Too many heirs wanted thrones, or needed some ritual bloodletting to confirm their stature. So dynastic warfare heightened.

As more temples need building, the higher caloric demand on workers requires more food production. Population rises to insure enough food-producers. War itself often increases population—as it did in the Aztec, Incan, and Chinese empires—because rulers require cannon fodder. Stakes rise, trade is disrupted, and population concentrates (lethal in a rain forest). There is dwindling investment in long-term crops that maintain diversity. Refugees living behind defensive walls farm only adjacent areas, inviting ecological disaster. Their confidence in leaders who once seemed all-knowing, but are obsessed with selfish, short-term goals, declines with the quality of life. People lose faith. Ritual activity ceases. They abandon centers.

Luxury is morally repugnant, and its incompatibility with democratic ideals, moreover, has been consistently recognized in the traditions that shape our political culture. The difficulty of limiting the influence of wealth suggests that wealth itself needs to be limited. When money talks, everybody else is condemned to listen. For that reason a democratic society cannot allow unlimited accumulation. Social and civic equality presuppose at least a rough approximation of economic equality. A moral condemnation of great wealth must inform any defense of the free market, and that moral condemnation must be backed up with effective political action.

Inequality is the reason some people find such significance in the ceiling height of an entrance foyer or the hop content of a beer while others will never believe in anything again. Inequality is not an issue, as that term is generally used; it is the eternal conflict of management and labor, owner and worker, rich and poor—only with one side pinned to the ground and the other leisurely pounding away at its adversary's face. 'Inequality' is not even the right word for the situation, really, since it implies a technical problem we can solve with a twist of the knobs back in D.C. The nineteenth century understood it better: they called it "the social question," and for once their polite Victorian euphemism beats ours. This is nothing less than the whole vast mystery of how we are going to live together.

Having little, you can not risk loss.

Having much, you should the more carefully protect it.

A possession that is so valuable that you have to spend a lot of money and psychic bandwidth to protect it often feels like more of a burden than a boon.

I'd like to suggest a different approach as to how you view your hard-earned wealth. View it not as a treasure trove to place behind you and defend with sword and shield against the hordes clashing at your gates. Instead, think of it as a wellspring that affords you the privilege of helping others in times of drought. The ability to help others not focus as much on survival is a gift. It's a gift of a society built upon, for good or ill, inequality; the same society that placed a high enough value on your chosen profession to remunerate you in the way it did. But your money isn't the reward for your hard work. The reward is the ability to help others.

“Start with a 90% marginal rate on the richest people in America and spend the money on making everyone else's lives better.”

No, start with a 90% marginal tax rate on the richest people to prevent them from having the money to ruin everything for the rest of us. I could make arguments that we don't need their money to make a decent society, but the bottom line is, they are using their money to ruin our society, and we need to stop them.

So, Elizabeth Warren has a 2% wealth tax plan with 3% on people with more than a billion dollars. She has suggested raising the over a billion percentage to 6%. Bill Gates is the second-richest person in the world, according to Forbes magazine, with a net worth of \$106.2bn. And Bill Gates says:

“I'm all for super-progressive tax systems. I've paid over \$10 billion in taxes. I've paid more than anyone in taxes. If I had to pay \$20 billion, it's fine. But when you say I should pay \$100 billion, then I'm starting to do a little math about what I have left over. You really want the incentive system to be there without threatening that.”

Well, of course, she didn't say that, she said 6%. A little over 6 billion in the first year. Bill's 64, and of course, the actual nominal amount will decrease each year unless he can grow his money faster than 6%, in which case, what's the problem? He'll never ever be anything less than a

multi-billionaire, in other words. His bullshit about 100 billion is just that, fearmongering bullshit. And if he's paid 10 billion on 106 billion, well his tax rate was about 10%. Most middle class families would love to have that low a tax rate. Yes, I know it's on income, not wealth, but the point is he obviously paid very low income taxes. Which, actually, is what the data shows—the middle and working classes pay a higher percentage than the rich.

Bill, of course, is the “good” billionaire. But he's the guy who gave straight up fascist Modi a reward. He's the guy who spent millions to change the education system in the US, then admitted that the model he successfully pushed doesn't actually work. He's the guy who used brutal monopolistic practices to build Microsoft. And he doesn't want to pay a 6% wealth tax. Billionaires are bad—they shouldn't even exist. As for Billy, he thinks he deserves to be one of the richest people in the world because he created the Wintel monopoly and crushed rivals with practices which were, under black letter law, illegal. But one can understand why he might prefer a Republican president. After all, it was George Bush Jr. who withdrew the anti-trust suit which would have broken up Microsoft and left him worth a lot less than a 106 billion dollars. Trump, of course, massively dropped tax rates on the rich. Money comes first, ethics come second. Bill's always understood that. Republicans have been pretty good to Bill. Woke performism and his good image aren't worth a 6% wealth tax.

Billionaires are rising all over, even in developed countries hit hard by the Great Recession. In 2006 Forbes had named some eight-hundred billionaires across the world. Five years later there were twelve-hundred. Billionaires control huge swaths of the economy. They influence our lives far more than your average senator but receive only a fraction of the public scrutiny.

What does it mean to be a billionaire, at least in material terms? It's a lot different from having a hundred million. With a hundred million, you can't buy a fifty-million-dollar jet and a forty-million-dollar penthouse and a twenty-million-dollar yacht—you have to choose one. With a billion, not only can you have all these things but they're sensible investments. When the waiting list for new jets grows, used ones can rise in value. And as the population of billionaires expands, so the price of super-luxury apartments climbs, regardless of what's happening in the economy of the masses.

Purchasing art confers a patina of status and culture for money made in unsexy sectors like cement or packaged foods. A sort of money laundering if you will, it makes art a must in any billionaire's portfolio. Art, like any other product, follows the laws of supply and demand. The canonical works (Picasso, Cézanne) tend to appreciate faster than the S&P 500—but unlike stocks, blue-chip art is as crisis proof as a penthouse on Central Park West.

In 2005, the 300,000 men, women, and children who comprised the top tenth of the one percent had nearly as much income as all 150 million Americans who make up the economic lower half of our population. Add the income the rich are not required to report and those 300,000 made more than the 150 million.

The share of corporate income devoted to compensating the five highest-paid executives of large public firms went from an average of 5% in 1993 to more than 15% in 2013. Not incidentally, this was money corporations could have invested in research and development, additional jobs, or higher wages for average workers. In addition, almost all of it was deducted from corporate income taxes.

One justification is that CEOs and top executives are worth their soaring pay because the stock market has also soared during these years, and the job of CEOs and top executives is to maximize shareholder returns. Ergo, they have accomplished their mission. As Harvard economist N. Gregory Mankiw argues, for example:

“The most natural explanation of high CEO pay is that the value of a good CEO is extraordinarily high.”

But even assuming maximizing shareholder returns should be their goal, it hardly follows that CEOs are worth so much more than they used to be. The entire stock market boomed over this period. Even had a CEO locked himself in his office and played online solitaire for these three decades, his company would still have become far more valuable. Unless the company did better than the stock market as a whole, there is no reason to suppose the CEO did anything in particular to justify his escalating pay.

So why, exactly, did CEO pay skyrocket, even though these top executives may have made no direct economic contribution to the growing values of their companies? One theory is that CEOs play large roles in appointing their corporations' directors, for whom a reliable tendency toward agreeing with the CEO has become a prerequisite. Directors are amply paid for the three or four times a year they meet and naturally want to remain in the good graces of their top executives. Being a board director is the best part-time job in America. In 2012, the average compensation for a board member at an S&P 500 company was \$251,000. In addition, boards often consist of other CEOs who have considerable interest in ensuring their compatriots are paid generously. To advise on executive pay, boards typically hire people euphemistically called “compensation consultants,” whose actual roles are more akin to that of the oldest profession in the world. Such consultants typically establish benchmarks based on the pay of other

CEOs, whose boards typically hire them for the same purpose. Since all boards want to demonstrate to their CEO as well as to analysts on Wall Street their willingness to pay generously for the very best, pay packages ratchet upward annually in this faux competition, conducted and directed by CEOs for CEOs, in the interest of CEOs.

‘Income’ is usually measured as a yearly flow of earnings. ‘Wealth’ is the pool into which yearly flows of unspent income accumulate. It is usually held in the form of stocks, bonds, real estate, and other assets. Wealth also generates its own income: interest and dividends from savings and investments and rental income from real estate.

Andrew Mellon is the oil man and banker whose words are often invoked in support of current policies favoring the rich. As with Adam Smith, Mellon’s words are often quoted selectively by those who shill for the rich. Consider what Mellon wrote in his 1924 book *Taxation: The People’s Business*:

“The fairness of taxing more lightly income from wages, salaries, or from investments is beyond question. In the first case, the income is uncertain and limited in duration; sickness or death destroys it and old age diminishes it; in the other, the source of income continues; the income may be disposed of during a man’s life and it descends to his heirs. Surely we can afford to make a distinction between the people whose only capital is their mental and physical energy and the people whose income is derived from investments. Such a distinction would mean much to millions of American workers and would be an added inspiration to the man who must provide a competence during his few productive years to care for himself and his family when his earnings capacity is at an end.”

The private sector owns 85% of our critical infrastructure. This is unacceptable.

Profit shouldn’t be our only measure of success—the future of the planet depends on it. There must be other bottom lines. These bottom lines will have to be richer; they’ll have to consider social and environmental questions. These are cultural questions, questions of values. The definition of happiness, the definition of success in business—both have to change.

The forces that used to shape inequality have not in fact changed beyond recognition. If we seek to rebalance the current distribution of income and wealth in favor of greater equality, we cannot simply close our eyes to what it took to accomplish this goal in the past. We need to ask whether great

inequality has ever been alleviated without great violence, how more benign influences compare to the power of this Great Leveler, and whether the future is likely to be very different—even if we may not like the answers.

Economic Royalists

Three familiar words—‘earnings,’ ‘investment,’ and ‘wealth’—can lead us astray in thinking about economic matters, effectively concealing a great deal about how our economy works.

Important though it is to think about moral economy, it’s different from explaining economic arrangements. Few of our ways of doing things in economic matters are arrived at through democratic decision or careful deliberation on what is good and fair. Most are products of power. Usually, the best explanation of what people do and what they get in economic matters is because they can. Why do chief executive officers (CEOs) of big companies pay themselves such vast amounts? Because they can. They may offer justifications, but these are not only invariably feeble but redundant. They can get their pay rises even if the majority of people think they’re unjustifiable. And usually the fuss over their pay hikes dies down in a week or two anyway. Equally, when we ask why care workers get so little for doing work that clearly benefits people, the answer is because that’s all they can get, given their limited power. What we think people should justifiably get or contribute is one thing, and what they can actually get is another. Justifications and explanations are usually different. Many of the defenses of existing economic institutions are surprisingly weak, but particularly if people start treating those arrangements as natural—as ‘just how things are’—they can persist on the basis of power.

Mainstream economics takes the particular features of capitalism—a very recent form of economic organization in human history—as if they were universal, timeless, and rational. It treats market exchange as if it’s the essential feature of economic behaviour and relegates production or work—a necessity of all provisioning—to an afterthought. It also focuses primarily on the relationship between people and goods (what determines how many oranges we buy?) and pays little attention to the relationships between people that this presupposes. It values mathematical models based on if-pigs-could-fly assumptions more than it values empirical research; so it pays little attention to real economies, having little to say about money and debt, for example.

“As soon as the land of any country has all become private property, the landlords, like all other men, love to reap where they have not sowed, and demand a rent even for its natural produce. The wood of the forest, the grass of the field, and all the natural fruits of the earth, which, when land is held in common, cost the labourer only the trouble of gathering them,

come, even to him, to have an additional price fixed upon them. He must then pay for the license to gather them; and must give up to the landlord a portion of what his labour either collects or produces. This portion, or, what comes to the same thing, the price of this portion, constitutes the rent of land.”

—Adam Smith

“Roads are made, streets are made, railway services are improved, electric light turns night into day, electric trams glide swiftly to and fro, water is brought from reservoirs a hundred miles off in the mountains—and all the while the landlord sits still. Every one of those improvements is effected by the labour and at the cost of other people. Many of the most important are effected at the cost of the municipality and of the ratepayers. To not one of those improvements does the land monopolist as a land monopolist contribute, and yet by every one of them the value of his land is sensibly enhanced. He renders no service to the community, he contributes nothing to the general welfare; he contributes nothing even to the process from which his own enrichment is derived. The unearned increment in land is reaped by the land monopolist in exact proportion, not to the service but to the disservice done.”

—Winston Churchill

“Men did not make the earth. It is the value of the improvement only, and not the earth itself, that is individual property.”

—Tom Paine

Here’s an example of a taken-for-granted economic institution—private ownership of land by a minority. You may know the story of the stranger who trespassed on a landowner’s land and was told to “get off my land,” whereupon the stranger asked the owner how he got this land. “From my father,” was the answer. “And where did he get it from then?” “From his father,” who got it from his father, and so on. “So how did one of your ancestors get this land in the first place?” asked the stranger. “By fighting someone for it,” said the landlord. “Right,” said the stranger, “I’ll fight you for it. If it was all right for your ancestor to seize the land in the first place, it must be all right to seize it back now. And if it wasn’t all right for them to seize it, it should be seized back now!”

The story is striking but it’s not clear what a better alternative might be. Would private ownership of land be OK if it was divided up equally

so everyone had some? Or should land be publicly owned with individuals renting plots from the state, with the use of the rent revenue to be decided democratically? What the story does, at least, is jolt us out of our uncritical acceptance of the institution of minority land ownership. At this time of crisis we need much more jolting.

If land is owned by a minority, then because everybody needs land to live on, and new land can't easily be produced, the landowners can charge others rent for the right to use "their" land. As the land and any minerals or other useful properties that it has already exist, the rent is not a payment for the creation of something useful; there are no costs of production to pay for. Nor does ownership in itself make land more productive. Only if the landlord improves the land or builds something on it is any of their income earned, and then only to the extent that users are paying for the work of improvement—the costs of production—rather than anything more. Any more is the unearned increment. But even where landlords buy land in order to put up buildings to let out, the tenants are usually not just contributing to the cost of producing the building but paying pure economic rent on top of that. 33–35% of US national income goes to rent. Although income from rent is often called 'earnings,' it is not. Rent is like a private tax on the industry of others.

In the infancy of modern taxation, it seemed obvious that the first thing that should be taxed was unearned income from rent. How strange—and interesting—that modern governments would rather tax earned income than unearned income! As Adam Smith correctly recognized, the unearned income of the rentier depends on producers producing a surplus over and above what they consume themselves. Rentiers free-ride on others' work.

Some people can get an income by extracting wealth from the economy simply through their control of key resources that others need but lack, and by charging them for their use. This is the key to the exceptional wealth of the rich: access to mechanisms of wealth extraction, rather than wealth creation.

Two quite different concepts of investment are involved here:

Object-focused definitions: These focus on what people or organizations invest in (infrastructure, equipment, people) and its usefulness and benefit in the future. A school or a wind farm or a railway or a training programme can provide long-term benefits by increasing our capacities. They enable the production of new goods, services, and skills—things with useful qualities, or use-values in the language of political economy: a better teaching environment, a cleaner source of energy, a better means of travel, a more skilled workforce and so on.

Or it might involve repairing or replacing worn-out equipment. These are examples of what we might call real or objective investment.

Investor-focused definitions: These focus on the financial gains to the ‘investor’ from any kind of spending, lending, saving, purchase of financial assets or speculation—regardless of whether they contribute to any objective investment, or provide anything socially useful. In other words, instead of focusing on the benefits of the investment in terms of use-values, the focus is on how much money it yields to the investor.

The financial sector uses the term ‘investment’ mainly in this sense, because it is largely indifferent to where its money comes from: \$1 million derived from an objective investment is no different from \$1 million obtained as interest on a loan, or through stock market speculation; money is money and masks all such crucial distinctions. As long as there’s a good chance of it bringing a financial return, then gambling, including gambling with other people’s money, gets called ‘investment.’ A tollbooth set up on a bridge for extracting money out of the bridge’s users, could, in contemporary economic parlance, be called an ‘investment’ for the owners, even though the bridge already existed and no maintenance or improvements were made by the tollbooth owners.

Using the same word for different things allows people to mistake wealth extraction for wealth creation. The first meaning of investment refers to attempts to create wealth, the second to attempts to extract it. This indifference as to whether individuals or institutions are funding genuine investment or merely vehicles for providing money for the “investor” is a major irrationality of capitalism, and the way we use the word ‘investment’ helps to conceal it.

There is no necessary link between the practices identified by these two usages of the term. While you might get a return on a genuine investment, you might not; even if it yields you nothing personally, it may still have produced material benefits somewhere—perhaps a hospital at the other end of the country that you’ll never need. You might even lose money on it, but it could still be an investment in the first sense if it brings benefits to someone. Parents may feel the effort they put into bringing up their children is like this. From the point of view of the second definition, such cases would be seen as bad investments. Equally, those usages that focus merely on financial gains can refer to actions that produce no objective investment in anything whatsoever; indeed they may, like asset stripping, have negative

effects by sacrificing long-term objective investment for short-term gains made from closing down production and selling stuff off. Speculators almost always call themselves investors.

“The few own the many because they possess the means of livelihood of all. The country is governed for the richest, for the corporations, the bankers, the land speculators, and for the exploiters of labor. The majority of mankind are working people. So long as their fair demands—the ownership and control of their livelihoods—are set at naught, we can have neither men’s rights nor women’s rights. The majority of mankind is ground down by industrial oppression in order that the small remnant may live in ease.”

Means of production are certainly important, indeed vital, for they boost the productivity of each worker, enabling them to produce far more than would otherwise be the case. One could easily think that since the machinery and computers make a difference here, the owner or ‘provider’ of such equipment should get the benefits. Mainstream economics, as ever the sycophant of the powerful, sometimes justifies capitalists’ profit as a return for their contribution of capital, meaning means of production. But merely owning means of production does not make it productive; to make it productive you have to use it, operate it, and the pure capitalist leaves this to employee workers and managers. Owning a fast-food chain and its equipment and living off the profit that its workers produce is not like grilling burgers all day. Owning a chain of residential care homes for the elderly and living off the profit is not like doing the labour of washing, dressing, feeding, and caring for the residents. Nor is it like doing the managerial work of organizing the home. Ownership itself produces nothing.

If the means of production were owned by the workers in a cooperative, then the difference between their pay and other costs and the revenue their products brought in would accrue to them rather than to a capitalist, though of course that revenue would come from putting the productive equipment to work, not from mere ownership. In a cooperative, the benefits of using means of production are shared by those who use them to produce, instead of being pocketed by those who just own but who do no work.

Pure capitalists—that is, ones who merely own their firms and delegate management to others—are not contributing to wealth creation, but just using their power relative to that of employees to appropriate the difference between costs and the value of what the workers (and managers) produce.

Ordinary men, even today, are prone to explain and to justify power and wealth in terms of knowledge and ability.

Whatever they might want to believe, the rich are indeed rich largely at the expense of the rest. How tempting it is for not only the rich but also the merely comfortably-off to imagine that, through their own efforts and special qualities, they deserve what they have, disregarding the fact that by the accident of birth they were born into an already rich country and in many cases an already well-off family within it that gives them significant advantages. How easy to overlook that they rely on getting cheap products made and grown by people from poor countries, who are no less hard-working or deserving but can be paid much less because they have little alternative.

But it's not only the rich who believe that they deserve their wealth. Many in the rest of the population think so too: 'they've earned it so they're entitled to it' is a common sentiment, even among those on low incomes. This is an example of belief in a just world. In economic matters, it's the idea that, roughly speaking, we get paid what we deserve and deserve what we get paid. Believing the rich deserve their wealth may seem a pleasingly generous sentiment, though assuming the poor also deserve their lot does not. It produces an unwarranted deference to the rich. The belief in a just world is a delusion, a kind of wishful thinking. Who wouldn't want to live in a just world, where need was recognized and effort and merit rewarded, while their opposites were not? But it doesn't follow that we do.

The ideology that the rich shower on us is meant to justify their privilege, but it turns the truth completely inside out. When inequality reaches the insane levels it has done, the rich depend on hoodwinking us all into thinking that they are the source of jobs, prosperity, and everything we value. But, once we stop believing this, either governments have to tackle inequality or revolutions arise.

Unpaid labour can produce vital goods and services too, like family meals, childcare, and eldercare, though there are arguments for paying carers via the state. No society can exist without care work, but nobody ever got rich by doing it. What could be more productive and socially useful than teaching a child to read, for example? People who parrot the glib saying 'Those who can, do; those who can't, teach' need to do some thinking for a change—though if they hold off long enough, "curriculum specialists" really might drive every competent teacher out of the profession and they won't need to do anything thinking after all.

Non-material services—whether they provide advice and information, healing, training, education, or entertainment—can be hugely beneficial. And if we expect to have specialists in these things, as well as in material production, then giving them an income both rewards and compensates

them for their work and enables them to do it. We can also ditch the prejudices that unless work generates money it's of no value, and that only the private sector produces wealth. Money and financial wealth have value only if there are goods and services for sale, but goods and services that are made available for free, like school lessons, can also be produced.

Any reasonable and civilized society would feel obliged to support such people. We should turn our attention to the undeserving at the other end of the income scale. There's a further question to be asked about unearned income that unfortunately is all too often overlooked: How can it be possible for someone to live without producing anything? If they're consuming goods and services—in the case of the rich, in vast quantities—but not contributing to their production, then who is producing them? The answer can only be this: for it to be possible for some to consume without producing, others who are producing goods and services must be producing more than they themselves consume. In other words, others must be producing a surplus. Even though they may be getting a wage or salary, part of their labour must be unpaid. The one who lives by owning without working is necessarily supported by the industry of someone else, and is, therefore, too expensive a luxury to be encouraged.

Unearned income derived from mere ownership of assets is problematic, whoever benefits from it, because it relies on power rather than contribution or need. In the case of the very rich it is power rather than contribution that accounts for most of their income. The fact that many ordinary people benefit from small amounts of asset-based unearned income shouldn't allow us to miss the elephant in the room: the rich get so much more of this undeserved income than others.

The richest 1% of the population receive 57.5% of all the income generated by wealth—that is, payment for privilege, most of it inherited. These returns—interest, rent, and capital gains—are not primarily a return for enterprise. They are pure inertia, weighing down markets. They do not “free” markets, except by providing a free lunch to the wealthiest families. The richest 20% of the population receives some 86% of all this income.

Meet the destructive forces who've looted the United States of America over the last several decades. One might describe them the same way FDR did: Economic Royalists.

These Economic Royalists complain that we seek to overthrow the institutions of America. What they really complain of is that we seek to take away their power. Our allegiance to American institutions requires the overthrow of this kind of power.

While the divide between the rich and the rest has certainly grown, how can it be claimed that we can't afford the rich? Here's a short answer.

Their wealth is mostly dependent ultimately on the production of goods and services by others and siphoned off through dividends, capital gains, interest, and rent, and much of it is hidden in tax havens. They are able to control much of economic life and the media and dominate politics, so their special interests and view of the world come to restrict what democracies can do. Their consumption is excessive and wasteful and diverts resources away from the more needy and deserving. Their carbon footprints are grotesquely inflated and many have an interest in continued fossil fuel production, threatening the planet.

Of course, this brief summary leaves out many qualifications, not to mention the actual argument and evidence. Some readers may agree straightaway, some may have a few objections, but others may respond with incredulity, perhaps outrage, for to claim that we can't afford the rich is to imply that they are a cost to the rest of us, a burden. Aren't the rich wealth creators, job creators, entrepreneurs, investors—indeed, just the kind of people we need? Don't entrepreneurs like Bill Gates deserve their wealth for having introduced products that benefit millions? Aren't the rich entitled to spend what they have earned how they like? What right has anyone to say their consumption is excessive? Couldn't the rich cut their carbon footprints by switching to low-carbon consumption? Wouldn't the world miss their philanthropy and the “trickle-down effects” of their spending? In fact, isn't this book just an example of “the politics of envy”—directed at those whom former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair used to call “the successful”? Shouldn't we thank, rather than begrudge, these “high net worth individuals”?

This is not about the politics of envy—a cheap slur used by those who want to duck the arguments and evidence—but the politics of injustice. I don't envy the rich, in fact I regard such envy as thoroughly misguided. But I resent the unjust system by which the rich are allowed to extract wealth that others produce and to dominate society for their own interests. What's more, this is not only unjust but profoundly dysfunctional and inefficient, and it creates inhumane, rat-race societies.

It's absolutely imperative that we begin to understand what unfettered, unregulated capitalism does, the violence of that system. Consider sacrifice zones, areas that have been destroyed for quarterly profit—and we're talking about environmentally destroyed, communities destroyed, human beings destroyed, families destroyed. They are places like Camden, New Jersey, which is the poorest city per capita in America. There are also the sacrifice zones of West Virginia, where mountaintop mining is poisoning local populations with sky-high cancer rates, and crippling the environment. The Royalists are rendering the area a moonscape. It becomes uninhabitable. They are

destroying the lungs of the Eastern seaboard. It's all destroyed and it's not coming back. And of course who can forget Cancer Alley. Because there are no impediments left in this cancer stage of capitalism, these sacrifice zones are just going to spread outward.

History tells us that in these times of crisis, the Economic Royalists—the bankers, industrialists, billionaires, kleptocrats, fascists—who know exactly what's going on and whose ill-gotten gains have caused the Great Crash to begin with, immediately try to exploit the crisis to further enrich themselves. They demand compensation for their losses, extracting bailouts and enacting austerity measures on working people, squeezing what little wealth there is left in the common economy, thus deepening the economic crisis. Under calls for privatization, they assault democratic institutions, cutting off vital lifelines and services for working people. Aware that just as nature abhors a vacuum, power does also, they use words such as 'freedom' and 'free market' to push for weaker government, or weaker institutions of organized people, thus clearing room for organized money to take power. As the situation for working people deteriorates further, extremist political parties rise up. Desperate populations flock to racist and nationalistic organizations to place blame on someone or something for their economic plight.

“Men will not always die quietly. For starvation, which brings to some lethargy and a helpless despair, drives other temperaments to the nervous instability of hysteria and to a mad despair. And these in their distress may overturn the remnants of organization.”

Our nation has a long history with the corporate death penalty. Beginning in the early 1800s, laws were passed in several states to make it easier for legislators to revoke corporate charters if businesses were operating against the public's interest. And this routinely happened. In Ohio, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania, banks were shut down for being “financially unsound.” In New York and Massachusetts, the corporations that ran the turnpikes were given a corporate death sentence for not keeping the roads in good repair. By 1825, twenty states had amended their constitutions to make it easier for the state to “revoke, alter, or annul” corporate charters whenever a corporation “may be injurious to citizens of the community.” And in just one year, 1832, the state of Pennsylvania sentenced ten corporations to death, revoking their charters for “operating contrary to the public interest.”

There's an easy way to understand why letting wealth concentrate in the hands of a few is a bad idea. Consider the game Monopoly. If your opponent scoops up Boardwalk, Park Place, North Carolina Avenue, Pacific

Avenue, both utilities, the four railroads, and an array of other properties on the board—that’s it, the game’s over. The other players, who were once property owners, will go bankrupt as they are forced to pay higher and higher costs for rent and services, utilities, and transportation. Eventually, one player has all the money, and the losers are left standing out in the cold. But what if the Monopoly game didn’t end there? What if the once-property-owning-but-now-broke players kept rolling the dice and kept going around the board, using their credit cards and lines of credit to stay in the game? While they’re running up massive personal or small-business debt, the monopolist who owns everything is finding it harder and harder to collect income from the increasingly impoverished players. They can’t afford to pay rent, they can’t pay utilities, and they can’t ride on the railroads. Eventually, when the consumers run out of both cash and credit and can no longer spend any money, even the monopolist goes broke. Then not only is the game over, but the game is over in a massive disaster.

The board game Monopoly was invented when America’s Gilded Age was in its final death throes. The game’s inventor, Lizzie Magie, named it “The Landlord’s Game.” But as she said:

“It might well have been called the ‘Game of Life,’ as it contains all the elements of success and failure in the real world, and the object is the accumulation of wealth.”

Lizzie was a Georgist—one who follows the teachings of economist Henry George—and believed that things found in nature, particularly land itself but also things like mineral wealth, are part of the commons and thus should really be owned by “we the people,” not private profiteers. It was an ideology directly born out of the times—the Gilded Age—when Robber Barons used monopolies in steel, oil, rail, and finance to dominate the American economy. They built vast fortunes by owning all the stops on the Monopoly board of America, while working people’s conditions collapsed to the point where we went into the Great Depression.

In the census of 1900, per capita income was less than \$5,000 annually in today’s dollars. And more and more Americans who were once self-employed had their lives uprooted and were thrown under the juggernaut of the Robber Barons. In 1850, prior to this so-called Gilded Age, most Americans worked for themselves. But by 1900, the majority of Americans worked for someone else—in many cases the monopolists.

This was why Lizzie Magie invented that early version of what we today call the board game Monopoly. It was her hope, and that of many, that the stranglehold of the Economic Royalists of the era could somehow be broken.

“Let the children once see clearly the gross injustice of our present system and when they grow up, if they are allowed to develop naturally, the evil will soon be remedied.”

Early on, before Parker Brothers acquired the patent on Monopoly, turning it into the game we know today, well-to-do college students would play the game in fraternity houses at the behest of far-left economic teachers. The game was meant to answer a question about the current economy. An early instruction manual for the game of Monopoly in 1925 reads:

“At the start of the game every player is provided with the same amount of capital and presumably has exactly the same chance of success as every other player. The game ends with one person in possession of all the money. What accounts for the failure of the rest, and what one factor can be singled out to explain the obviously ill-adjusted distributions of the community’s wealth which this situation represents?”

So much for equality of opportunity being a savior.

In a 1966 article, *TIME* magazine looked ahead toward the future and what the rise of automation would mean for average working Americans. It concluded:

“By 2000, the machines will be producing so much that everyone in the US will, in effect, be independently wealthy. With Government benefits, even nonworking families will have, by one estimate, an annual income of \$30,000–\$40,000. How to use leisure meaningfully will be a major problem.”

And that was \$30,000–\$40,000 in 1966 dollars, which would be roughly \$199,000 to \$260,000 in 2010 dollars. Ask anybody who was teenage or older in the 1960s, this was the big sales pitch for automation and the coming computer age. There was even a cartoon show about it—*The Jetsons*—and everybody looked forward to the day when increased productivity from robots, computers, and automation would translate into fewer hours worked, or more pay, or both, for every American worker. And there was good logic behind the idea. The premise was simple. With better technology, companies would become more efficient. They’d be able to make more things in less time. Revenues would skyrocket, and Americans would bring home higher and higher paychecks, all the while working less and less. So by the year 2000, we would enter what was then referred to as “The Leisure Society.” Futurists speculated that the biggest problem facing America in

that Jetsons future would be just how the heck everyone would use all their extra leisure time! And, of course, there were also those who were worried about what kind of degeneracy would emerge when a nation has lots of money and lots of free time on its hands. This didn't happen. And it didn't happen because Ronald Reagan stole the Leisure Society from us and he handed it over to the Economic Royalists.

The reason why the Leisure Society could be imagined by TIME magazine is because, ever since 1900, working people's wages tracked evenly with working people's productivity. So, as productivity continued to rise, which was likely, due to increasing automation and better technology, so, too, would everyone's wages. And the glue holding this logic together was the current top marginal income tax rate. In 1966, when the TIME article was written, the top marginal income tax rate was 70 percent. And what that effectively did was encourage CEOs to keep more money in their businesses, to invest in new technology, to pay their workers more, to hire new workers and expand. After all, what's the point of sucking millions and millions of dollars out of your business if it's going to be taxed at 70 percent? And perhaps you'll also see why going even higher, say to 90 percent—where it was at one point—or even more is not a recipe for disaster. According to this line of reasoning, if businesses were to suddenly become way more profitable and efficient thanks to automation, then that money would flow throughout the business—raising everyone's standard of living, increasing everyone's leisure time. But when Reagan dropped that top tax rate down to 28 percent, everything changed. Now as businesses became far more profitable, there was a far greater incentive for CEOs to pull those profits out of the company and pocket them, because they were suddenly paying an incredibly low tax rate. And that's exactly what they did. All those new profits, thanks to automation, that were supposed to go to everyone, giving us all higher paychecks and more time off, went to the top—to the Economic Royalists.

In the 1950s, before that TIME magazine article predicting the Leisure Society was written, the average American working in manufacturing put in about forty-two hours of work a week. Today, the average American working in manufacturing puts in about forty hours of work a week. This means that despite the fact that productivity has increased 400 percent since 1950, Americans are working, on average, only two fewer hours a week. If productivity is four times higher today than in 1950, then Americans should be able to work four times less, or just ten hours a week, to afford the same 1950s lifestyle when a family of four could get by on just one paycheck, own a home, own a car, put their kids through school, take a vacation every now and then, and retire comfortably. That's the definition of the Leisure

Society: ten hours of work a week, and the rest of the time spent with family, with travel, with creativity, with whatever you want. But all of this was washed away by the Reagan tax cuts. Combine this with Reagan's brutal crackdown on striking PATCO (Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization) members that kicked off a four-decades-long assault on another substantial pillar of the working class—organized labor—and life has been anything but leisurely for working people in America.

The return of the rich over the last four decades has been closely associated with developments in capitalism. Most important has been the rise of a new political economic orthodoxy, called neoliberalism. Initiated aggressively by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, it was consolidated with more stealth by their successors, New Labour as well as Conservative, Democrat as well as Republican. Now, after the crash of 2007–08 and in the ensuing recession—exactly when it has most clearly failed—it is being imposed with renewed vigour.

It has three key features:

1. Markets are assumed to be the optimal or default form of economic organization, and to work best with the minimum of regulation. Competitive markets supposedly reward efficiency and penalize inefficiency and thereby “incentivize” us to improve. Governments and the public sector, by comparison, are claimed to be inferior at organizing things—monopolistic and prone to complacency, inefficiency, and cronyism. Governments should therefore privatize as much as possible. Financial markets should be deregulated and there should be “flexible labour markets”—political code language for jobs in which pay can fall as well as rise and in which there is little security. Where parts of the public sector can't be privatized, league tables should be established and individuals, schools, universities, hospitals, museums, and so on should be made to compete for funds and be rewarded or penalized according to their placing. Democracy needs to be reined in because the ballot box can't match markets in governing complex economies; people can express themselves better through what they buy and sell. Unsurprisingly, neoliberals keep their anti-democracy agenda under wraps.
2. The rise of neoliberalism also involves a political and cultural shift compatible with its market fundamentalism. Through a host of small changes in everyday life, we are increasingly nudged towards thinking and acting in ways that fit with a market rationality. More and more, the media address us as self-seeking consumers, savvy investors, ever

pursuing new ways of supplementing our incomes through “smart investments.” Risk and responsibility are transferred to the individual. Job shortages are no longer acknowledged, let alone seen as a responsibility of the state: there are just inadequate individuals unable to find work: “skivers,” “losers.” No injustice, just bad choices and hapless individuals. The word ‘loser’ now evokes contempt, not compassion. Those unable to find jobs that pay enough to allow them to cope and who still need the welfare state are marginalized, disciplined, and stigmatized as actual or potential cheats.

State health services and pensions are run down and replaced by private health insurance and private pensions. You’re on your own, free to choose, free to lose, depending on how you navigate through the world of opportunities and dangers. Instead of seeing ourselves as members of a common society, contributing what we can, sharing in its growth, pooling risks and providing mutual support, we are supposed to see ourselves as competing individuals with no responsibility for anyone else. Want to jump the queue for medical services? Click [here](#). Want to give your child an advantage? Pay for private tuition. We should compete for everything and imagine that what is actually only possible for the better off is possible for everyone; everyone can win simultaneously if they try. We are expected to see ourselves as commodities for sale on the labour market, but also as ‘entrepreneurs of the self.’ Hence the rise of the cult of the curriculum vitae (résumé) and self-promotional culture. Education is increasingly debased by efforts to turn it into a means for making young people in this mould.

Some people—probably many readers of this book—may want to resist these tendencies, but in a neoliberal society it is impossible to avoid them totally, not least because in so much of life using markets (disguised as “choice”) and competing in league tables have become the only choices we can make.

3. Neoliberalism has ushered in a shift in the economic class structure of the countries it has most affected. It involves not only a shift of power and wealth towards the rich, marked most clearly by the weakening of organized labour in industrialized economies and the enrichment of the 1%, but a shift of power within the rich: from those whose money comes primarily from control of the production of goods and services, to those who get most of their income from control of existing assets that yield rent, interest, or capital gains, including gains from speculation on financial products. The traditional term for members

of this latter group is ‘rentier.’ Many of the changes noted in 1 and 2 above benefit them. Neoliberalism as a political system supports rentier interests, particularly by making the 99% indebted to the 1%.

In 1986, Reagan lowered tariffs. He also secured a free-trade deal with Canada in 1988. He vetoed protectionist trade bills throughout his presidency. And he doubled America’s spending in the global economy. But Clinton really did a number on working people. In the 1992 presidential debate, third-party candidate Ross Perot famously warned about a “giant sucking sound” of American jobs going south of the border to low-wage nations once trade protections were dropped. Perot was right, but no one in our government listened to him. Tariffs were ditched, and then Bill Clinton moved in to the White House in the 1990s. He continued Reagan’s trade policies and committed the United States to so-called free-trade agreements such as GATT, NAFTA, and the WTO, thus removing all the protections that had kept our domestic manufacturing industries safe from foreign corporate predators for two centuries. In the 1960s, one-in-three Americans worked in manufacturing, producing things of lasting wealth. Today, after jumping headfirst into one free-trade agreement after another, only one in ten Americans works in manufacturing.

Under the watch of the Royalists, the Reagan administration was philosophically opposed to the government breaking up companies. Over the next few decades, the monopolies of the Gilded Age returned. On Wall Street, the twenty biggest banks own assets equivalent to 84 percent of the nation’s entire GDP. And just twelve of those banks own 70 percent of all the banking assets. That means our entire banking system relies on just a few whales that must be saved at all costs from going belly up, or else the entire system goes belly up.

And consider our food industry. Agriculture oligopolies exist from farm to shelf. Just four companies control 90 percent of the global grain trade. Just three companies control 70 percent of the beef industry. And just four companies control 58 percent of the pork and chicken industry. On the retail side, Walmart controls a quarter of the entire US grocery market. And just four companies produce 75 percent of the breakfast cereal, 75 percent of the snack foods, 60 percent of the cookies, and half of all the ice cream sold in supermarkets around the nation.

And then there’s the health insurance market. Just four health insurance companies—UnitedHealth Group, WellPoint, Aetna, and Humana—control three-quarters of the entire health insurance market. And as a 2007 study uncovered, in thirty-eight states, just two insurers controlled 57 percent of the market. In fifteen states, one insurer controlled 60 percent of the market.

Since there's no functional competition in such a market, prices continue to get higher and higher while the profits for these whales skyrocket too.

In the cellular phone market, just four companies—AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Sprint—control 89 percent of the market. And in the Internet market, just a handful of corporations—AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner, and Verizon—control more than half of the market. From newspapers to television, radio to movies, monopolies dominate the markets.

Through trade agreements, deregulation, and privatization, we seriously weaken the ability of nation-states to act with any political independence.

Our economy has been dangerously hollowed out by the twin combination of well-meaning ideologues and the psychopaths they empowered.

It's a Second Gilded Age, and it's headed for another Monopoly Endgame. And this time it will be worse than before. We are no longer dealing with the Robber Barons, who savaged working people through the last half of the nineteenth century. And we aren't talking about the Economic Royalists of FDR's day, who plotted a coup. This is a new form of Royalist. The Robber Barons, however feudal they were, ran their enterprises within the nation-state itself. Now, we have corporate entities which seek the lowest possible wage around the world, in essence the prison labor in China or new frontiers, and are forcing the rest of the planet's workforce to compete with this slave labor. It's similar to the age of the Robber Barons but in fact worse because there is no loyalty to the nation-state. The corporations are actually hollowing the country out from the inside. Neoliberalism is creating a kind of neofeudalism.

For most of American history, businesses—for-profit and nonprofit—had mission statements that were broader than simply serving the interests of the shareholders and CEOs, and referred instead to the long-term interest of the company, its workers, and its customers. And perhaps most important, the long-term interest of the nation it belonged to. After all, if your nation goes to hell, so does your market—a collapse isn't good for business. But globalism changed the game. Globalism is the breaking down of economic borders. What globalism does is peel away those government protections of national industries, and let global Economic Royalists dive in and feast on the goods.

Once government is out of the way the transnational corporations rise to power. Richer than a majority of nation-states on the planet, free of the geographical and social obligations of these old states, beyond the embarrassing demands of nationalism, freed in fact from the emotional, immeasurable demands of the citizenry, the transnational is able to organize world affairs in a "more rational, efficient manner." Without the demands of nationalism, corporations can skate by without hiring American workers,

they can dodge taxes, and they can spew toxic chemicals all over our commons. Instead of nationalism, corporations are bound by efficiency, which in turn yields higher profits. And it's far more efficient and profitable to hire low-wage workers in India, to spend millions lobbying to avoid billions in taxes, and to skirt regulations that keep people working on oil rigs alive and prevent ecological disasters.

In the past thirty years, foreign investors bought roughly \$3 trillion worth of American industry. That means \$3 trillion worth of assets that were generating profits for America, hiring American workers, and making things with a "Made in America" stamp on them are now in the possession of foreign nations, so if they continue to operate, all their profits go overseas. It's like a giant liquidation sale in a nation that's on the verge of going out of business.

In the first decade of this new century, some of the biggest transnational corporations in America—corporations that employ one-fifth of all American workers—have been shipping jobs away en masse. Since 2000, these transnationals have laid off 2.9 million Americans, and hired 2.4 million foreign workers.

There's inherent instability in a capitalist system. It's the structure of finance itself. Capitalism demands a banking system and that banking system is wired to misbehave, since there's always an inherent temptation to create and sell as much debt as possible—whether it's in the form of oil derivatives, mortgages, or student loans. They will always want to lend more money since the banking sector profits by creating debt. If the banking sector simply lent money to businesses to fund productive investments and homeowners who could actually afford a home, then bank profits would be only 5 to 10 percent of total profits in America. But with manufacturing decimated from so-called free trade, and no rules on Wall Street, bankers lunged for a bigger piece of the profit pie. They force-fed the nation more and more debt.

Another debt bubble, even bigger than the one in the 1920s, was being inflated. The bubble had started in the early 80s. After such a terrifying experience during the Great Depression and the Second World War we had tamed much bad behavior in the financial sector and people's willingness to take on debt. But then people forgot. If you look at when people started to really take on debt again, it was when the first baby boomer turned eighteen. We lost that memory, and then that same irresponsible behavior that gave us the Roaring Twenties came back. As the boomer generation took the reins of business in the seventies and eighties, there was no remembered sense of the dangers of reckless banking practices or even of reckless personal debt.

Look at America today and see the rich building their metaphorical buildings with gates on the outside and discos indoors. Gated communities. Home theaters. Private schools. Private jets. Privately run public parks. Private world-saving behind the backs of those to be saved. Life goes more and more behind the gate. More and more of our civic activities and public activities become private activities. Inequality gave some the resources to build their own discos and sequester themselves indoors. But it took the further ingredient of culture to make this way of life desirable. People chose to live in this way when they lacked faith in what lay beyond their gates—in the public. They felt this way when ‘public’ had been allowed to tumble to lower status than ‘private’ in our imaginations, in a reversal of their historic rankings: There was a time when we loved ‘public’ enough to place our most elevated hopes in republics, and when ‘private’ reminded us of its cousins ‘privation’ and ‘deprived.’ An achievement of modernity has been its gradual persuasion of citizens to expand the circle of their concern beyond family and tribe, to encompass the fellow citizen. Inequality was reversing that. Government still had the responsibility, but, more and more, the wealthy made the rules.

The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy produced a report in 2004 questioning the charitable nature of the Kochs’ donations. Their report concludes that the Kochs aren’t actually making charitable contributions; they’re making investments in ideas that will eventually lead to higher profits. According to the report, Koch foundations “give money to nonprofit organizations that do research and advocacy on issues that impact the profit margin of Koch Industries.”

It takes a lot of money to get the entire political and economic class to buy into an ideology that has repeatedly caused massive economic crashes—especially since the last crash was still fresh in everyone’s mind.

Koch-funded Royalist spin machines aren’t exclusive to George Mason University. At Florida State University, Charles Koch inked a multimillion-dollar deal with the economics department to advance Royalist economics. Under the agreement with the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation, faculty only retain the illusion of control. The contract specifies that an advisory committee appointed by Koch decides which candidates should be considered. The foundation can also withdraw its funding if it’s not happy with the faculty’s choice or if the hires don’t meet “objectives” set by Koch during annual evaluations. In other words, the Kochs get final say on new professors—especially ones who don’t subscribe to the Kochs’ own free-market economic philosophy. In 2009, Charles Koch nixed nearly 60 percent of the university faculty’s suggestions. The Kochs have similar strings-attached deals with public universities all across the country, including West

Virginia University, Troy University, Utah State University, and Clemson University. All in all, over 150 higher-education institutions receive some sort of financial contribution from the Koch brothers—often in the form of quid pro quos. Our higher-education system is being used by Economic Royalists such as the Kochs to fund economic brainwashing and a hearts-and-minds assault against the government.

The divide between the Davos class and everyone else has been widening since the 1980s. But for a lot of people, the breaking point came with the 2008 financial crisis. After forcing decades of grinding austerity on people, Treasury secretaries and finance ministers and chancellors of the exchequer suddenly found trillions of dollars to rescue the banks; people witnessed their governments printing vast sums of money. They had given up so much—pensions, wages, decent schools—when in fact, contrary to what Margaret Thatcher claimed, there were alternatives. All of a sudden it turned out that governments can do all kinds of things to interfere in the market, and have seemingly unlimited resources with which to help you out if only you are rich enough. At that moment, everyone on earth saw that they had been lied to.

A Great Crash is a painful event, often too terrible for its citizens even to contemplate. History tells us that when the foundations collapse, and a society's cultural core is hollowed out and the madness takes hold, its members will pretend all is well. Life seems to go on as average citizens try to get by, while the very rich, who understand what's happening, consolidate their power and wealth before the final crash. This is the cancer stage of capitalism—the point at which the Royalists have fully contaminated the body economic and politic, making the crash inevitable. This is where we are today.

We have powerful corporate interests that have commodified everything, including human labor, which means human beings no longer have any intrinsic value in the ethics of corporations. They are commodities to exploit until exhaustion or collapse. The same is true of the natural world—we exploit the natural world until exhaustion or collapse.

I think historians when they look at this time, they're going to wonder why the wealthy overplayed their hand like this. Why would they, when they had it so good? They had the "middle class" to buffer them from the poor and voting for the politicians that the wealthy bought, everything was running just fine, they were posting profits of a billion a year, but that wasn't enough for them. What they did was started to ruin the lives of the very people who voted for their politicians and supported them all these years, the "middle class."

The irony is, when you look back at the history of empires, it has

been that narrowness, that failure to look at the long-term, that absorbed self-interest, that has been the final end of those empires.

Capitalism has unleashed waves of enclosure, imperialism, warfare, and ecocide over the last five-hundred years that have benefited a very small segment of humanity while displacing, immiserating, enslaving, and destroying countless numbers of people, animals, and plants. Everyone is not equally responsible for the destruction of nature, despite suggestions that “if you want to think about why humans are so dangerous to other species, you can picture a poacher in Africa carrying an AK-47 or a logger in the Amazon gripping an ax, or, better still, you can picture yourself, holding a book in your lap.” Such a sweeping indictment of an undifferentiated humanity is both historically inaccurate and politically disempowering. Such a perspective offers us no understanding of the structural forces that generate exploitation and ecocide, no sense of how such forces may push the vulnerable to behave in ways that are antithetical to their long-term interest, and no conception of how people in the relatively affluent global North might act in solidarity with those whom Frantz Fanon called “the wretched of the earth.” Such a perspective is truly hopeless.

It has been said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to envisage the overthrow of capitalism. I would respond to this aphorism from dark times that it is easier to imagine the end of capitalism than it is to articulate any other genuine solution to the extinction crisis. If capitalism is the ultimate cause and prime engine of the extinction crisis, surely we can only conclude that we may find hope in challenging its baleful power with all means at our disposal. Capitalism is not eternal; it is a specific economic system grounded in a set of historically particular economic arrangements and social values. It came onto the world stage relatively recently, and, one way or another, it will eventually make an exit. The question for us, then, is what kind of end we wish to make.

Climate science has made it blindingly clear that our economic system is destroying the planetary life support systems upon which we depend. Climate change therefore makes it imperative that we discuss radical transformations in capitalist social relations, a topic that has been largely taboo for the last three decades.

We have always used animals and plants to symbolize our most intimate fears, our hopes, and even our greatest loves. As capitalism tears increasingly gaping holes in the beautiful web of life of which we are a part, our capacity to dream, to imagine different, more manifold worlds is radically impoverished. Every species that is consigned to oblivion is a grave loss to the planet in general and a serious threat to the many whose lives are intertwined with that species. In addition, however, such losses are the most concrete possible

testimony to the ecocidal character of capitalism. In the face of such an irredeemably rapacious and ultimately impoverishing system, we must insist on the human capacity to dream and to build a more just, more biologically diverse world.

Augustine stated that an unjust law is no law at all—*Lex iniusta non est lex*—which Martin Luther King Jr. repeated in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail. The obvious implication is that a law must be just for it to stand qua law. Another implication is that one is not bound to enforce or obey an unjust law, for to do so would mean participating in an injustice. Naturally, unjust laws are accompanied by institutions charged with enforcing them, making disobedience precarious. If we shift here to those who make the laws, three observations can be made. First, it is usually the case that legislators do not believe that the laws they make are unjust. They typically offer “good” reasons for a law and these reasons may go unquestioned by most of the populace, especially those who may benefit from the law. Second, it is rare that persons who possess the power to make and enforce laws do so at the expense of themselves, which leads to a question regarding the making of any law, *cui bono*—who benefits? Third, an unjust law either enacts or simply codifies existing unjust practices. Laws enacted regarding slavery, for instance, reinforced the already existing injustices associated with trafficking and exploiting human beings.

An unjust law by its nature cannot result in just effects; it cannot be accidentally just, regardless of how it is rationalized and justified. While a tautology, a law is unjust because what it enacts and enables are forms of injustice. Someone might point out that some laws are unjust, yet their effects appear to be “just” for those who benefit from them. Is the unjust law accidentally just? Those who benefit from unjust laws obtain their benefits at the expense of others, which means the unjust law remains unjust in its effects. To return to laws associated with slavery, there was never any justice that resulted from these laws, even though white people benefited from these laws. Slave laws codified and enacted horrific forms of oppression and marginalization for the sake of profit (and a sense of white superiority). No amount of rationalization can alter this reality and anyone who accepted or actively supported these kinds of laws acted unjustly. Of course, there are also laws that are just, but unjust in their application. For instance, there are just laws that prohibit citizens from physically harming other human beings. Yet, in some circumstances the application of these laws is unjust. Harsher sentences for persons of color versus white persons who commit the same crime is an example.

Let me add a further thought. Laws that are considered to be just by most people may later be deemed unjust. Consider, for example, laws that

stated men of property have the right to vote. These laws, constructed by white men of property, benefited the lawmakers and other white men of the propertied class, yet were generally accepted. Only in time did people raise their voices arguing that these laws were unjust because they excluded women and people of color. It took over seven decades after Seneca Falls (1848) for women to obtain the right to vote (1920). Can anyone imagine going back to the disenfranchisement of women not voting and arguing that it is just?

This raises a question: can a law be accepted as just in one era and be considered fundamentally unjust at a later time? Are there, in other words, laws that are simply unjust at their core? Or is it possible for a law to be just at the time and later experienced as unjust because of changes in historical circumstances? There is no easy answer to this question, but I would suggest a general rule: laws that privilege one group's survival and flourishing, while depriving another group can never be deemed to be just. A law that is deemed to be just at the time it is enacted, but then later found to be unjust, means that it was unjust at the start. At the dawn of the US, laws privileging white men of property, despite being considered just at the time, were fundamentally unjust because they impeded women, unpropertied white men, people of color, and slaves from flourishing. It took time for enough people to experience and lament the injustices before these laws were changed or eradicated.

The worse kind of unjust laws are those that are hidden from view, ensconced in language of Nature, God, or simply the way it is and always has been. The meta-message in these language games is that the law is just and unquestionable. There is no alternative. We have no choice but to accept and submit to the law and accept our lot in life. At the same time, occult unjust laws may have been enforced for so long that they have become part of the ethos and common practice of the people; this feels as if it is natural despite obvious injustices. An occult unjust law operates such that those who suffer the effects of the law do not or are unable to question it or accurately attribute the real source of their suffering. In fact, they may find some other source to blame for their suffering.

Despite some awareness among people of the injustices rising from capitalism, I would argue that some of the foundational laws of capitalism are unjust. While the effects of these laws can be seen to result in various forms of injustice, the laws themselves are rarely questioned. It is as if most of us concede that Margaret Thatcher was right when she said there is no alternative to capitalism. Many people have acknowledged the shortcomings of capitalism and work to ameliorate its injustices, yet leave intact the very laws that created the injustice. For instance, Roosevelt's New Deal and his

use of Keynesian economic theory to establish regulations were meant to limit the negative effects of capitalism that socialists and communists had been lamenting since the nineteenth century. Despite the good these programs and laws led to, they never questioned the core tenets of capitalism and the laws that supported it. Indeed, Keynesian capitalism is still capitalism even though it tries to stem some of the excesses endemic to capitalism. Another example is advocating for a living wage. This has been going on since the nineteenth century and continues today. When people in Seattle, for instance, obtain enough votes to enact a hike in the minimum wage, most of us see this as a victory. On the one hand, it is a victory, because it forces producers and owners to provide higher wages for workers. On the other hand, this is a Pyrrhic victory because laws that support capitalism remain unquestioned. One can raise criticisms about the effects of capitalism, but ignore the very laws that give it life.

The hidden aspect of the unjust laws vis-à-vis capitalism is furthered by the media, more often than not, unwittingly. Recently I listened to an interview with several economists who observed that the economy is doing well, although workers' wages have remained flat when inflation is taken into account. One economist speculated that a tightening labor market will result in higher wages, because companies are competing for workers. Another wondered if the increasing use of technology (replacing workers with robots) accounts for stagnant growth despite worker productivity. The laws of the market, it is believed, determine whether wages increase (unless you are a CEO). So, workers, since the 1980s, have had to wait for a time when the labor market is very tight before corporate coffers will provide a bit more compensation. The interviewer and the economists are familiar with the rules of the game and not one of them argued that the rules are unjust. They seemed to accept the reality as a given—just the way the market operates.

To understand the occult injustice of laws undergirding capitalism, I take a brief detour to the possible origins of capitalism. Some argue that capitalism began in the sixteenth century in England where ruling landowners, who already benefited from property laws, were able to enact laws and practices that enabled them to secure greater profits by enhancing competition and, later, increased agrarian efficiencies (resulting in displacement of large numbers of citizens). Laws associated with capitalism grew to other sectors of the economy, as well as to other countries, becoming an integral part of Western imperialism and its insatiable pursuit of markets—exploitation of foreign peoples and their lands. A simple reading of these laws is that owners of businesses and farms are legally entitled to the profits, because they own the property, machinery, et cetera—today, even immaterial factors

such as ideas are deemed to be property. Laborers are entitled to whatever wage the owner is willing to give. Since these wages are operating expenses that deplete profit, one would expect, as Marx indicated, there would be a tendency to keep wages (and benefits) as a low as possible.

The laws that undergird capitalism sanction accumulation by dispossession. Consider Charles Dickens famous Christmas story. Scrooge may have been a detestable figure before his conversion, but he was completely legitimate in securing greater profits by keeping Bob Cratchit's wages low. Indeed, in the story Bob Cratchit is calmly resigned to obtaining low wages and a bare existence for himself and his family. Scrooge's conversion meant that he was more generous with the profits he legally obtained. Dickens, in other words, may have written this story as a cautionary tale for greedy businessmen, but what remained unquestioned was the fundamental injustice of the laws that legitimated the exploitation of Bob Cratchit and his family. If conversion means change, then the real conversion would have been ridding the country of laws that justified profit at the expense of workers and their families. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is an analogous figure who accepts the "game" even if it means struggling for decades to provide for himself and his family, while the owner of the business lived well. I think, though, that Arthur Miller, unlike Dickens, was leaning into the idea that capitalism and its laws are fundamentally unjust.

I say unjust because a company's profits are made possible by the work of everyone in the company. Even if it is recognized that everyone contributes to the profits, the law bestows sole discretion of the disposition of the profits to those who own the company. Regular workers are to be content with their wages and have no say about how company profits are to be used or distributed. Of course, labor is valued differently in capitalism and while there are laws about minimum wage, there are no laws against how much a CEO can make. The maintenance worker's labor, for example, is deemed of significantly less value than that of the CEO, because, as the story goes, the CEO has more responsibility and is thus due more of the share of the profits. Whether that is 340 or 400 times that of the lowest paid worker, is immaterial. It could be 10,000 times the lowest paid worker and the law would say this is legitimate. Laborers have no say not only with regard to their meager wages, but also the exorbitant salaries and benefits of corporate elites. Even with more equitable pay and benefits, the unjust nature of the laws supporting capitalism remain—laws that restrict profits and decision-making about the use of those profits to the owners.

Naturally, someone might say that if workers had a living wage, then the laws associated with capitalism would not be unjust either in terms of its foundation or in its application. But I contend that these laws are by their

nature unjust. This is most notable in that these laws not only inevitably lead to exploitation, they also objectify workers. Workers in the capitalist system obtain their conditional value by virtue of their participation in creating profits. Fail in this and a worker is easily discarded, while the company owners secure their profits. Willie Loman and Bob Crachit were mere cogs, easily replaced.

Another person might point out that differences in education, experience, skills, et cetera impact a worker's productivity. Shouldn't they receive more remuneration than the lowly line worker or janitor? And if individuals were paid the same, what would be the incentive to work harder? One basic problem with this last question is that it presumes that persons' creativity or productivity is motivated simply and solely by money. If that were true, we would not have any teachers. Second and more problematic is that even if there is smaller disparities in wages, workers are excluded from a decision-making process that impacts them directly and significantly. Workers have no voice or seat at the table because they do not own the company, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation, as history has repeatedly shown. Any group whose voice is denied and who are excluded from sitting at the table will likely be marginalized and oppressed by those who have voices and seats. They remain, like Bob Crachit, forever dependent on the whims of the bosses. A critic may counter, saying they have a voice in that they could find another job or they could speak out or they could get more education. These responses are usually made by people of privilege who aren't trapped in a job, fearing that the loss of the job will result in losing one's apartment, car, et cetera. Moreover, these responses overlook the fact that the only option a worker may have is to work low wage jobs—jobs where she or he has no voice about the company's use of profits. Worse, these neoliberal responses deflect attention from the exploitative nature of business.

Let me shift to unions and what remains of them. No can deny that despite corruption, unions were responsible for workers obtaining better wages and benefits, as well as protections. But unions by and large rarely questioned the rules of the game. They simply agitated for company boards to make decisions so that workers received fairer, living wages and benefits. While unions were never at the seat of the board room, they did represent a collective voice even as they contributed to the occult aspect of ownership laws. Even today, when we hear unions advocating for a living wage, one hears little from their leaders about the fact that the very laws that ensure a perennial struggle for just wages are unjust themselves.

Any cursory glance at history during the last three centuries reveals not simply booms and busts in the economy, but a consistent thread of workers struggling to obtain a living wage and some protections from the

vagaries of the capitalist system and its laws. Conversations about living wages were occurring in the nineteenth century. Even if we establish laws regarding a living wage—adjusted for inflation—I am confident that the capitalist class will work diligently to secure greater profits at the expense of workers, because the occult unjust laws of capitalism will remain alive and well. As long as workers are not owners, as long as they have no voice and no seat at the table when decisions are made about how profits are used and shared, one can confidently predict they will be exploited. I suspect, or more accurately hope, that in time more people, perhaps even a majority, will become increasingly aware that laws—no longer occult—that place profits in the hands of the owners are fundamentally unjust. And these very same people will overturn them. By any means necessary.

Making the Dog Ride the Donkey

Koch Finds Religion

“Public interest has been subordinated to private interest, and when there is no clear distinction between them, it opens the door to endless opportunities for corruption.”

Scholars and journalists in many nations are now grappling with how numerous democracies have been, in effect, losing sovereignty and responsiveness to voters, and hence popularity. Yet most write in the passive voice, focusing on impact more than sources, and attributing the action to abstract nouns rather than human agents. What no one has identified with adequate clarity is the individuals and institutions that are intentionally insulating the economy from intervention, in what has become a bipartisan and transnational project.

The head of Koch Industries’ government and public affairs operation, told an invitation-only audience of billionaire and multimillionaire donors that those who are worried about what is happening to American politics are “afraid of us,” but ineffectual in stopping the assembled donors and operatives. “We’re close to winning. I don’t know how close, but we should be,” he told them, because “they [the critics] don’t have the real path.”

Koch made clear he was looking for something, but what that something was, beyond a “technology” of revolution, remained unclear. By the late 1990s, Koch had concluded that he’d finally found the set of ideas he had been seeking for at least a quarter century by then—ideas so groundbreaking, so thoroughly thought-out, so rigorously tight, that once put into operation, they could secure the transformation in American governance he wanted. From then on, Koch contributed generously to turning those ideas into his personal operational strategy to, as the team saw it, save capitalism from democracy—permanently.

“Since we are greatly outnumbered,” Koch conceded to the assembled team, the movement could not win simply by persuasion. Instead, the cause’s insiders had to use their knowledge of “the rules of the game”—that

game being how modern democratic governance works—“to create winning strategies.” Koch warned:

“The failure to use our superior technology ensures failure.”

Translation: the American people would not support their plans, so to win they had to work behind the scenes, using a covert strategy instead of open declaration of what they really wanted.

To James Buchanan, what others described as taxation to advance social justice or the common good was nothing more than a modern version of mob attempts to take by force what the takers had no moral right to: the fruits of another person’s efforts. In his mind, to protect wealth was to protect the individual against a form of legally sanctioned gangsterism. Where did this gangsterism begin? Not in the way we might have expected him to explain it: with do-good politicians, aspiring attorneys seeking to make a name for themselves in constitutional law, or even activist judges. It began before that: with individuals, powerless on their own, who had figured out that if they joined together to form social movements, they could use their strength in numbers to move government officials to hear their concerns and act upon them.

The most powerful social movement back then was what Buchanan’s proposal referred to as “the labor monopoly movement,” or what most of us would today call organized labor. But other movements, also injurious in his mind, were on the horizon, including the increasingly influential civil rights movement and a resumed push by elderly citizens to organize as they had not since the Great Depression. From his vantage point, it did not matter whether the movement in question consisted of union members, civil rights activists, or aging women and men fearful of ending their lives in poverty. Nor did the justness of the cause they advocated, the pain of their present condition, or the duration of the injustice they were attempting to reverse move him in any way. The only fact that registered in his mind was the collective source of their power—and that, once formed, such movements tended to stick around, keeping tabs on government officials and sometimes using their numbers to vote out those who stopped responding to their needs. How was this fair to other individuals? How was this American?

Buchanan believed with every fiber of his being that if what a group of people wanted from government could not, on its own merits, win the freely given backing of each individual citizen, including the very wealthiest among us, any attempt by that group to use its numbers to get what it wanted constituted not persuasion of the majority but coercion of the minority, a violation of the liberty of individual taxpayers. To end the coercion, he

counseled, one had to stop “government corruption.” By that he meant the quiet quid pro quo reached between government officials and organized groups that keeps these officials reflexively attuned and responsive to the demands of such groups in exchange for their votes.

Our trouble in grasping what has happened comes, in part, from our inherited way of seeing the political divide. Americans have been told for so long, from so many quarters, that political debate can be broken down into conservative versus liberal, pro-market versus pro-government, Republican versus Democrat, that it is hard to recognize that something more confounding is afoot, a shrewd long game blocked from our sight by these stale classifications. We don’t understand that the old Republican Party exists no more. Many do grasp that the body with that name has somehow become hard-line and disciplined to a degree never before seen in an American major party; yet, not having words to fit what it has become, we assume that what we are seeing is just very ugly partisanship, perhaps made worse by social media.

I have found myself more and more fixated on one gnawing question. Is what we are dealing with merely a social movement of the right whose radical ideas must eventually face public scrutiny and rise or fall on their merits? Or is this the story of something quite different, something never before seen in American history? Could it be—and I use these words quite hesitantly and carefully—a fifth-column assault on American democratic governance?

The phrase originated in the Spanish Civil War, when one of Francisco Franco’s subgenerals in the military rebellion against the elected government, according to the contemporaneous New York Times report, “stated that he was counting on four columns of troops outside Madrid and another column of persons hiding within the city who would join the invaders as soon as they entered the capital.” Since then, the term ‘fifth column’ has been applied to stealth supporters of an enemy who assist by engaging in propaganda and even sabotage to prepare the way for its conquest. It is a fraught term among scholars, not least because the specter of a secretive, infiltrative fifth column has been used in instrumental ways by the powerful—such as in the Red Scare of the Cold War era—to conjure fear and lead citizens and government to close ranks against dissent, with grave costs for civil liberties.

Imperfect though it may be, the concept of a fifth column does seem to be the best one available for capturing what is distinctive in a few key dimensions about this quest to ensure the supremacy of capital. For a movement that knows it can never win majority support is not a classic social movement. Throughout our history America has been changed by social movements, some of them quite radical—the abolition movement,

above all. Our national experience over the past two-and-a-half centuries has demonstrated time and again that the citizenry can learn and grow from social movements, sifting through their claims to adopt and reject as we see fit. Where movement activists win over majorities, they make headway; when they fail to, they in time falter. This cause is different. Pushed by relatively small numbers of radical-right billionaires and millionaires who have become profoundly hostile to America's modern system of government, an apparatus decades in the making, funded by those same billionaires and millionaires, has been working to undermine the normal governance of our democracy. Indeed, one such manifesto calls for a "hostile takeover" of Washington, D.C.

The dream of this movement, its leaders will tell you, is liberty. "I want a society where nobody has power over the other," Buchanan told an interviewer early in the new century. "I don't want to control you and I don't want to be controlled by you." It sounds so reasonable, fair, and appealing. But the story told here shows that the last part of that statement is by far the most telling. This cause defines the 'you' its members do not want to be controlled by as the majority of the American people. And its architects have never recognized economic power as a potential tool of domination: to them, unrestrained capitalism is freedom.

There is a pattern, which we see again and again: while criticizing government action that threatened their own liberty as a property owner, they see nothing untoward in calling on the federal government to use its police powers to help their class stifle debate about its practices. That sleight of hand—denying the legitimacy of government power to act for the common good while using government power to suppress others—appears repeatedly throughout history. The members of the team now applying Buchanan's thought are interested not so much in fighting big government, *per se*, as in elevating that branch of government they can best control in a given situation.

Their yen for repression appears in another way that is revealing: While they wax eloquent on the threat of a strong federal state, do not imagine that they prefer local government to state government as a more authentic expression of the people's will. On the contrary, in the name of property and individual rights, they advocate taking powers away from local authorities, upon whom ordinary people have more influence, and shift them to central state governments. Why? State government is the level that people like them can most easily control.

What we are seeing today is a new iteration of a very old impulse in America: the quest of some of the propertied—always, it bears noting, a particularly ideologically extreme (and some would say greedy) subsection

of the propertied—to restrict the promise of democracy for the many, acting in the knowledge that the majority would choose other policies if it could.

What early free-state American voters liked about tax policy in their self-governing republic was that they, the people, decided by majority rule what they wanted their elected officials to do and how to tax for it. For these citizens, liberty meant having a say in questions of governance, being able to enter the public debate about the best way forward. Tracing such debates from the Colonial Era to the Civil War, it could be concluded that American governments were more democratic, stronger, and more competent where slavery was negligible or nonexistent. They were more aristocratic, weaker, and less competent where slavery dominated, as well as more likely to be captured by the wealthy few, who turned them to their own ends.

Voters in free states wanted active government: they taxed themselves for public schools, roads to travel from place to place, canals to move their goods, and more. In the southern states, the yeomen of the backcountry, where slaves were fewer, often tried to get their governments to take up their concerns but found that planters saw threats to their property in any political action they did not control, even if the yeomen actually were demanding roads, schools, and other mundane services. The irony of all this is vast. The anti-government rhetoric that continues to saturate our political life is rooted in support for slavery rather than liberty. The paralyzing suspicion of government so much on display today came originally not from average people but from elite extremists who saw federal power as a menace to their system of racial slavery.

What exactly did they so fear coming from the American people collectively? They feared, as their successors today do, a government that their band of like-minded property supremacists could not control. It is unlikely that many of their current heirs have read them in the original. Rather, these heirs have learned the ideas from modern-day libertarians who exhumed such analysis to address matters that troubled them, too.

The Road to Serfdom was a clarion call. Hayek argued that “the rise of fascism and Nazism was not a reaction against the socialist trends of the preceding period but a necessary outcome of these tendencies.” In his view, their distinguishing and shared feature was reliance on the central state; their people’s break with individual self-reliance was the germ that caused the disease. Millions who hated Nazism, he wrote, “work at the same time for ideals whose realization would lead straight to the abhorred tyranny.” Here was the rub:

“It is because nearly everybody wants it that we are moving in this direction.”

Everywhere, people were deluding themselves “that socialism and freedom can be combined” when in fact they were dire enemies. The growth of government, he argued, would in time undermine all freedom and usher in totalitarian states.

Like the Austrians Hayek and von Mises, Buchanan in particular wanted to help others see that the market could coordinate millions of individual projects far better than government could. The market was simply the most efficient means of allocating goods and services but also the best social decision-maker, one that might allow escape from the contentious political realm. To look to politics to promote one’s interpretation of fairness, Buchanan came to argue, was to enable an establishment-controlled economy and coerce others.

President Franklin Roosevelt had used the new phrase “economic constitutional order” to explain back to Americans what so many of them had been seeking in their organizing efforts. Pointing to the chaos of the Great Depression as the climax of structural changes that were leading to “economic oligarchy,” he argued that in the age of the large corporation, capitalism had shown that it would demolish itself and society unless constitutional reform precluded such “a state of anarchy” by ensuring economic security. Buchanan, in stark contrast, argued that representative government had shown that it would destroy capitalism by fleecing the propertied class—unless constitutional reform ensured economic liberty, no matter what most voters wanted.

Buchanan set out to prescribe “what economists should do.” They should cease focusing on problems of resource distribution—what the field called “allocation problems”—because the very idea that inequality was a bad thing led to looking for remedies, which in turn led the discipline toward an applied “mathematics of social engineering.” Instead, they should adopt his radical methodological individualism in all that they studied, and assume that individuals always sought personal gain, whether in the economy or in politics. But, he opined, markets were good, whereas politics was bad. In the economy, individuals engaged in voluntary exchange; politics, by contrast, was a “whole system of coercive or potentially coercive relationships,” because it relied on government force. Buchanan insisted that his hyper-individualistic method was ideologically “neutral.”

However, the late-nineteenth-century notion of a pure market was a fiction. That fiction helped emerging corporate elites to shape law and governance to their advantage while devastating the societies over which they held sway by virtue of their wealth and the control over others it could purchase.

Mainstream economists in the past had enlisted the concept of ‘rents’

to describe the additional profits a firm might secure without creating additional value for the economy by productive activity—say, by lobbying to extend the patent on an existing product. Buchanan’s team, though, gave the concept a new and distinctive meaning, one in wide use on the right today. They depicted as “rent-seeking” any collective efforts by citizens or public servants to prompt government action that involved tax revenues. And, in their assumption that individuals always acted to advance their personal economic self-interest rather than collective goals or the common good, Buchanan’s school went further, projecting unseemly motives onto strangers about whom they knew nothing.

Similarly, Virginia school economists deployed the existing term “special interests” to refer primarily to organized citizens seeking government action and occasionally to corporations seeking legislative favor. Their usage of the phrase implied that these people were scheming, trying to extract money from the economic producers through vote gathering and lobbying rather than earning it from personal labor. The scholars were conducting, in effect, thought experiments, or hypothetical scenarios with no true research—no facts—to support them, while the very terms of their analysis denied such motives as compassion, fairness, solidarity, generosity, justice, and sustainability.

It was an old saw on the American right that the people were so dull and inert that any call for government action could come only from self-interested third parties, outside agitators—whether abolitionists, “labor bosses,” Communists, or politicians—seeking to make personal hay.

Privately, Gordon Tullock and Jim Buchanan discussed the social control function of denying a liberal arts education to young people from lower-income families who had not saved to pay for it.

“We may be producing a positively dangerous class situation by educating so many working-class youth who would probably not make it into management but might make trouble, having had their sights raised.”

Modern society, with its widespread affluence, was showing itself “willing to allow for the existence of parasites,” freeloaders who took from it without adding value. “This is essentially what the student class has already become,” Buchanan told the scholars, businessmen, and funders. “If we do not like what we see,” the “simple solution” was clear: “close off the parasitic option.” Before the decade was out, he would be recommending that for nearly all who looked to government for assistance with one thing or another.

What the cause needed, Buchanan told the men he brought together, was to “create, support, and activate an effective counter-intelligentsia” to

begin to transform “the way people think about government.” A kind of bottleneck existed in which liberal intellectuals influenced the media, which in turn influenced the “elected political leaders,” thwarting the men’s shared cause. The center-left all but owned the university, and its “intellectual establishment” effectively indoctrinated political actors in both parties. Because of this, any attempt at fundamental change would be “frustrated and subverted.” It was essential, therefore, to pull together the like-minded and seed a new crop of surrogates who could be “indoctrinated” with intellectually compelling arguments and then “mobilized, organized, and directed” to spread them in a strategic manner. If the job was done right, ultimately, in time, this new “vast network of political power will be the Establishment.”

The original Populists had extolled the ordinary men and women who produced needed goods by the sweat of their brows and reviled as “parasites” the mortgage bankers, furnishing merchants, and robber barons who lived in luxury by exploiting them. The People’s Party called on the federal government to intervene, as the only conceivable counterweight to the vast corporate power altering their society. Because that government was representative of the people (or could be made so, through organizing), they saw it as wholly legitimate to endow Congress with new powers that the people believed it needed to ensure justice in a land changed by concentrated corporate power.

By contrast, the twentieth-century libertarian directed hostility toward college students, public employees, recipients of any kind of government assistance, and liberal intellectuals. His intellectual lineage went back to such bitter establishment opponents of Populism as the social Darwinists Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner. The battle between “the oppressed and their oppressors,” as one People’s Party publication had termed it in 1892, was redefined in his milieu: “the working masses who produce” became businessmen, and “the favored parasites who prey and fatten on the toil of others” became those who gained anything from government without paying proportional income taxes. “The mighty struggle” became one to hamstring the people who refused to stop making claims on government.

A Handbook for Assault

In no other area was the process of strategic investment by right-wing funders as prolonged, ambitious, complicated, and successful as the law. The “campaign for the courts sought to mold a new jurisprudence that would radically change the way justice is dispensed in our society. In particular, those waging the campaign sought to make the protection and enhancement of corporate profits and private wealth the cornerstones of our legal system.

The field of “law and economics” was dedicated to shaping the understanding and practice of law in a manner that CEOs and CFOs could—and did—appreciate.

“Corporations had a long-range interest in what went on in universities, and if they didn’t begin tending to it, it was going to jump up and bite them.”

Bringing a corporate-oriented cost-benefit analysis to regulation and legal liberalism more generally, the field sought to do to mid-century legal thought what public choice was doing to social science thought about government: to “undermine the intellectual foundations on which its arguments, and its claim to represent the public interest, were based.” Some work in the 1960s had argued, for example, that insider trading was good for the economy and that hostile takeovers offered an ideal way for investors to control managers.

This too, was playing a long game. They looked to transform the legal profession wholesale rather than retail. Instead of turning out individual mentees, the field planned to alter the way the law was understood and taught by luring existing leaders in the legal academy, from institutions including Harvard and Columbia—eventually more than six-hundred of them—to two-week summer institutes. As the guests went back to their institutions—and the sessions always made sure to take a minimum of two from any given law school so they could back each other and not give in—they would push their skeptical colleagues to be more open to hiring faculty in the field of law and economics, particularly when the new colleagues came at little or no cost because the funds for them were provided by the Olin Foundation or its imitators. Some entire law schools became bastions of this new approach to the law.

The Mont Pelerin Society’s golden anniversary provided an opportunity for Buchanan and his colleague Henry Manne, the newly retired dean of the George Mason School of Law, to define the content of the push to come. Manne had by then more than proved his value to Koch. His summer legal programs had provided intensive training in applying free market economic

analyses to legal decision-making for law professors and for federal judges, luring them with luminaries and luxury accommodations. To name just one index of how successful Manne had been: by 1990, more than two of every five sitting federal judges had participated in this program—a stunning 40 percent of the US federal judiciary had been treated to a Koch-backed curriculum.

“There is an ethical urgency about acting on libertarian values, among them emancipation from taxation. Government in the United States is now taking from persons’ incomes an amount equivalent to the complete enslavement of 42 million persons. Compare that figure, and the concern about it, with the figure of 4 million privately-owned slaves in the United States at the outbreak of the War Between the States!

Why did so few see the outrage of it? The power to tax is the power to destroy. Democratic government is increasing the power of certain persons to destroy other persons. It is time to fight such special privilege, stop slavery, and restore liberty.”

This is the world as Koch understood it, a world in which entrepreneurs were drastically underappreciated and overcontrolled. And it drew a vision of what a society might become if the entrepreneurs were freed from both interference and government-granted favors: a paradise of individual freedom, world peace, and social progress. “Goodness in man can only grow in a climate of liberty” was the message Charles Koch took from his “beloved” teacher: only if one were totally free of coercion and fully self-responsible could one make truly ethical choices. Not surprisingly, Koch credited Harper with the “life-changing” teaching that made the quest for economic liberty the passionate mission of his life.

Koch believed that what the famed economist Joseph Schumpeter called “creative destruction” was so critical to the health of the capitalist system that empathy was an obstacle to acceptance of the world that must be brought into being. “Envision what could be,” Koch urges; act with “urgency” and “discipline” to “drive creative destruction.” Businessman who did not have the savvy to serve the customer “should be a janitor or a worker.” In Koch’s view of the world, that is what a lifelong wage earner was: the less able or the one sentenced to a form of serfdom by his or her own failures.

“Government should not interfere with profit making because greed is a return on investment, the risk you took.”

Koch referred to Friedman and the rest of the post-Hayek Chicago school of economics he led, as well as to Alan Greenspan, as “sellouts to the system.” Why? Because they sought “to make government work more efficiently when the true libertarian should be tearing it out at the root.” They actually tried to help government deliver better results, which could only prolong the disease. Koch believed that only in its “radical, pure form,” without compromise, would the ideas “appeal to the brightest, most enthusiastic, most capable people.” Is it any wonder, then, that his allies would now rather bring down the government than improve it?

The “cadre” was to play the vital role: its full-time devotion to the cause, as a militant minority of foot-soldier ideologues, would assure purity and continuity while building the ranks and expanding the cadre’s influence on others. You cannot understand the influence of the stealth movement that is transforming America today without understanding this critical turning point.

“We came to realize, that, as the Marxian groups had discovered in the past, a cadre with no organization and with no continuous program of ‘internal education’ and reinforcement is bound to defect and melt away in the course of working with far stronger allies.”

Training was crucial so that the cadre’s members could “make strong and fruitful alliances” with partners who might at the time of the alliance be stronger than the cadre without fear of members going over to the temporary ally.

The Republican Party’s officialdom after 2008 could stand as Exhibit A of Koch’s success with this model. The venerable major party’s leaders did not turn the heads of the cadre, despite their apparently greater authority and power; instead, the disciplined cadre turned them. The mission of the cadre was, quite literally, revolutionary, although a cause with so much money would not need violence. The ruling class to be overthrown consisted of the leaders of labor unions, those corporations and business associations that continued to seek special benefits through lobbying, and the intellectuals who supported government action. The task facing the libertarian cadre who would staff the Cato Institute and related efforts would be to drive home to the populace the parasitic nature of all three groups, exposing every practical instance of it to help larger numbers see the evil of statist corruption—and what must be done to vanquish it.

James Buchanan published an article called “The Samaritan’s Dilemma,” a piece that has been used by the right ever since to show, in effect, that the

ethics of Jesus as reported in the Gospel of Luke produced perverse results in the modern world. Buchanan summarized this piece of what he termed “prescriptive diagnosis” thus:

“We may simply be too compassionate for our own well-being or for that of an orderly and productive free society.”

He then applied a game-theory thought experiment—never, of course, empirical research, which he spurned—to make the argument. His “hypothesis” was:

“Modern man has become incapable of making the choices that are required to prevent his exploitation by predators of his own species, whether the predation be conscious or unconscious.”

Predators of his own species? It was a perverse appropriation of the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which a kind resident of Samaria comes to the aid of a Jewish traveler who has been stripped, robbed, beaten, and left to die—a victim of predators, in other words—in the story Jesus used to show his followers that one should love his neighbor as himself, even when the suffering neighbor was a member of a despised out-group, as Jews were to Samaritans.

But in the view of the libertarian economist, Jesus was mistaken. Conscripting the Good Samaritan story, Buchanan made his case that modern man had “gone soft,” he lacked the “strategic courage” needed to restore the market to its proper ordering. By this logic, what seemed to be the ethical thing to do—help someone in need—was not, after all, the correct thing to do, because the assistance would encourage the recipient to “exploit” the giver rather than to solve his own problems. Buchanan used as an analogy the spanking of children by parents: it might hurt, but it taught “the fear of punishment that will inhibit future misbehavior.” Similarly, “the potential parasite” needed curbing to prevent efforts to “deliberately exploit” society’s “producers.”

More than any other piece, this article captured the stark morality of libertarianism, offering, as it were, the cause’s prescription for how America’s third century could reverse the “soft” errors of its second. The trick, though, was to figure out how to bind the foolish Samaritan, qua government, from giving out perverse incentives—how to shackle the Samaritan, so to speak. As Buchanan noted in conclusion, “welfare reform” was “only one of many applications, and by no means the most important.”

“I figured that if you could gradually build up to socialism, you could probably undo it, dismantling the state step by step,” he later told an

interviewer. You could hack away at government, that is, “by privatizing one function after the other, selling each move as justified for its own sake rather than waiting until the majority of the population is convinced of the case for a libertarian utopia.” “Selling” was perhaps the key word. Why wait for popular opinion to catch up when you could portray as “reform” what was really slow-motion demolition through privatization?

Facing the reality that he and his assembled allies were destined to remain “a permanent minority” whose ideas were “widely rejected,” Stigler pushed on to an “uncomfortable” question:

“If in fact we seek what many do not wish, will we not be more successful if we take this into account and seek political institutions and policies that allow us to pursue our goals?”

He did not equivocate, adding that this might mean “non-democratic” institutions and policies. One “possible route” Stigler suggested for achieving the desired future was “the restriction of the franchise to property owners, educated classes, employed persons, or some such group.”

Faced with the inescapable reality that they could not win by persuasion, these globetrotting scholars were sounding more and more like the southern oligarchy that had authorized Buchanan’s first program. There is a photograph of Jim Buchanan from the late 1970s that he was said to like. It shows him at his mountain farm, Dry Run, in a fenced ring alongside two animals in a peculiar pose: a dog is riding a donkey, looking scared. The founder of the Virginia school of political economy walks alongside them, riding crop in hand, training the animals to perform this utterly unnatural act. Sometimes, as the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Where persuasion failed, the lash might work.

On September 11, 1973, General Augusto Pinochet led a successful coup that overthrew the elected socialist government of President Salvador Allende in Chile. Ruling in the name of economic liberty, the Pinochet junta became one of the most notorious authoritarian regimes in recent history. With mass killings, widespread torture, and systematic intimidation, Pinochet’s forces crushed the trade union movement, vanquished the rural farmers seeking land reform, stifled student activism, and imposed radical and unpopular changes in schooling, health care, social security, and more. As Orlando Letelier, the soon-to-be-assassinated Chilean ambassador to the United States, explained in *The Nation*, the economic program and the repression were inseparable: social and political “regression for the majorities and ‘economic freedom’ for small privileged groups” went together. The military coup obliterated the citizen-led organizing that had made Chile a beacon

to the rest of Latin America; of what might be achieved by democratic, electoral means.

To grasp the significance of the Chilean story for our own world today, it is important to remember that the reforms did not begin with Allende. His predecessor, the anti-Communist Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei (whose government lasted from 1964 to 1970), proudly oversaw what he called a “Revolution in Liberty,” a kind of Chilean New Deal, supported by the US presidents Kennedy and Johnson, that included support for labor rights, expansion of voting rights, and land redistribution in rural communities. Frei’s opening up of Chilean democracy helped encourage the popular mobilization that led to the election of Allende. The military officers who led the coup concluded that, once in power, not only did they have to reverse the gains that had been made under elected governments, but they also wanted to find a way to ensure that Chileans never again embraced socialism, no matter how strong the popular cries for reform. The solution they came up with was to rewrite the nation’s constitution to forever insulate the interests of the propertied class they represented from the reach of a classic democratic majority.

As the Pinochet regime became a fulcrum of human rights activism in the 1970s and a cautionary tale thereafter, many critics indicted leading thinkers of the Mont Pelerin Society for abetting the despot. Milton Friedman was widely condemned for advice he provided on a visit to Santiago in 1975 about how to bring down the country’s soaring inflation. That advice resulted in draconian policies that inflicted mass hardship, to be sure. But Friedman was a monetarist. Whether or not one approved of the painful “shock treatment” he proposed, what Friedman recommended was ultimately reversible policy. The society’s aging founder, F. A. Hayek, also visited Pinochet and shared with the dictator his own distaste for “unlimited democracy.” Such moral support from scholars helped the junta weather the international storm of condemnation. But while Hayek became an apologist for the regime, there is no evidence that he left a lasting mark on Chile, either.

The same cannot be said of James Buchanan. His impact is still being felt today. For it was Buchanan who guided Pinochet’s team in how to arrange things so that even when the country finally returned to representative institutions, its capitalist class would be all but permanently entrenched in power. The first stage was the imposition of radical structural transformation influenced by Buchanan’s ideas; the second stage, to lock the transformation in place, was the kind of constitutional revolution Buchanan had come to advocate. Whereas the US Constitution famously enshrined “checks and balances” to prevent majorities from abusing their power over minorities, this one, a Chilean critic later complained, bound democracy with “locks

and bolts.”

The first phase was a series of structural “reforms” devised by a young devotee of the Virginia school, Minister of Labor José Piñera. Piñera had been working toward his doctorate at Harvard University when the coup occurred; elated, he came home “to help found a new country, dedicated to liberty.” His contribution was a series of deep alterations in governance, collectively dubbed “the seven modernizations.” Their common threads were privatization, deregulation, and the state-induced fragmentation of group power.

Under the new labor code Piñera promulgated in 1979, for example, industry-wide labor unions were banned. Instead, plant-level unions could compete, making one another weaker while their attention was thus diverted from the federal government (“depoliticizing” economic matters, in Buchanan terms). Individual wage earners were granted “freedom of choice” to make their own deals with employers. It would be more accurate to say that they were forced to act solely as individuals. “One simply cannot finish the job,” Piñera later explained to would-be emulators, if workers maintain the capacity to exercise real collective power.

Piñera designed another core prop of the new order: privatization of the social security system. This freed companies of the obligation to make any contributions to their employees’ retirement and also greatly limited the government’s role in safeguarding citizens’ well-being. Ending the principle of social insurance, much as Barry Goldwater had advocated in 1964, the market-based system instead steered workers toward individual accounts with private investment firms. It was essentially self-insurance. Fortunately for the plan, the regime had full control of television. At a time when three of every four households had televisions, Piñera made weekly appearances over six months to sell the new system, playing to fear of old-age insecurity owing to “this sinkhole of a bureaucracy,” the nation’s social security system. “Wouldn’t you rather,” he queried viewers, holding up “a handsome, simulated leather passbook,” see your individual savings recorded every month in such a book “that you can open at night and say, ‘As of today I have invested \$50,000 toward my golden years?’” The junta overruled the suggestion that Chileans might decide which system they wanted in a referendum—after all, “who could say where such a precedent might lead?”—and imposed Piñera’s plan by military decree. In short order, two private corporations—BHC Group and Cruzat-Larrain, both with strong ties to the regime—acquired two-thirds of the invested retirement funds, the equivalent, within ten years, of one-fifth of the nation’s GDP. José Piñera, for his part, went on to work for Cruzat and then promoted US Social Security privatization for Charles Koch’s Cato Institute.

Other “modernizations” included the privatization of health care, the opening of agriculture to world market forces, the transformation of the judiciary, new limits on the regulatory ability of the central government, and the signature of both the Chicago and Virginia schools of thought: K–12 school vouchers. In higher education, the regime applied the counsel of Buchanan’s book on how to combat campus protest. As the nation’s premier public universities were forced to become “self-financing,” and for-profit corporations were freed to launch competitors with little government supervision, the humanities and liberal arts were edged out in favor of utilitarian fields that produced less questioning. Universities with politically troublesome students stood to lose their remaining funding. Through these combined measures, education, health care, and social insurance, once provided by the state, ceased to be entitlements of citizens. With the seven modernizations in place, Pinochet’s appointees could now focus fully on drafting a constitution to entrench this new order behind what they hoped would be impassable moats.

Buchanan provided detailed advice on how to bind democracy, delivered over the course of five formal lectures to top representatives of a governing elite that melded the military and the corporate world, to say nothing of counsel he conveyed in private, unrecorded conversations. He spoke plainly and in the imperative mode, suggesting the government “must” and “should” do this or that. He defined public choice as a “science”—even though he, of all people, knew that there was no empirical research to back its claims—that “should be adopted” for matters ranging from “the power of a constitution over fiscal policy” to “what the optimum number of lawmakers in a legislative body should be.” He said of members of his school of thought:

“We are formulating constitutional ways in which we can limit government intervention in the economy and make sure it keeps its hand out of the pockets of productive contributors.”

Buchanan understood what his hosts were asking for: a road map. He thus explained that the constitution needed “severe restrictions on the power of government.” He instructed that “the first” such restriction “is that the government must not be free to spend without also, at the same time, collecting the necessary taxes to offset expenses”—Harry Byrd’s sacred pay-as-you-go principle. “It must have a constitution that requires a balanced budget”—no more Keynesian deficits under any circumstances. Also, “the independence of the Central Bank should be enshrined in the constitution”; the government should be denied the authority to make “monetary policy because doing so would surely lead to inflation.” A last restriction he urged

was to require supermajorities for any change of substance. “It must be ensured that a system exists in which only a large majority,” he said, “ $2/3$ or $5/6$ of the legislative body, can approve each new expense.” With this formula the scholar overshot the mark even with the junta’s members, just as he had in his proposal for a fire sale of public schools to Virginia’s legislature in 1959: none had the nerve to float a five-sixths requirement.

“It promised a democracy protected from too much democracy.”

The new constitution guaranteed the power of the armed forces over government in the near term, and over the long-term curtailed the group influence of non-elite citizens. The document guaranteed the rule of General Pinochet and his aides until a 1988 plebiscite that might extend his term to 1997, when a new generation would have learned the role of the citizen in a restrictive democracy.

The devil is in the details, goes the old adage, and it is true: the wicked genius of Buchanan’s approach to binding popular self-government was that he did it with detailed rules that made most people’s eyes glaze over. In the boring fine print, he understood, transformations can be achieved by increments that few will notice, because most people have no patience for minutiae. But the kind of people he was advising can hire others to make sure that the fine print gets them what they want. The net impact of the new constitution’s intricate rules changes was to give the president unprecedented powers, hobble the congress, and enable unelected military officials to serve as a power brake on the elected members of the congress. A cunning new electoral system, not in use anywhere else in the world and clearly the fruit of Buchanan’s counsel, would permanently overrepresent the right-wing minority party to ensure “a system frozen by elite interests.” To seal the elite control, the constitution forbade union leaders from belonging to political parties and from “intervening in activities alien to their specific goals”—defined solely as negotiating wages and hours in their particular workplaces. It also barred advocating “class conflict” or “attack[ing] the family.” Anyone deemed “antifamily” or “Marxist” could be sent into exile, without access to an appeal process.

Buchanan never publicly criticized the final constitution as promulgated by the junta. On the contrary, he continued to promote constitutional revolution, thereafter more single-mindedly, and to seek out support from wealthy funders who might help effect it. From this we can only conclude that he was well aware of the Pandora’s box he had helped open in Chile for the genuine, not merely metaphorical, corruption of politics, but he valued

economic liberty so much more than political freedom that he simply did not care about the invitation to abuse inherent in giving nearly unchecked power to an alliance of capital and the armed forces. His silence, it must be said, safeguarded his reputation. Buchanan had surely noticed that Milton Friedman never lived down having advised the junta on how to combat inflation: protesters disrupted the 1976 award ceremony in Stockholm at which he received the Not-a-Nobel Prize and hounded his speaking engagements thereafter. Whereas Friedman's name became permanently and embarrassingly paired with Pinochet's, Buchanan, the stealth visitor, largely escaped notice for the guidance he provided. But, then, unlike Friedman, Buchanan never craved the spotlight. He was content to work in the shadows.

“There is no widespread support for basic structural reform, among any membership group in the American polity, among the old or the young, the black, the brown, or the white, the female or the male, the rich or the poor, the Frost Belt or the Sunbelt.”

The near-universal popularity of Social Security meant that any attempt to fight it on philosophical grounds was doomed. Buchanan therefore devised and taught a more circuitous and sequential—indeed, devious and deceptive—approach, but one that served the new crab-walking cause well. “Those who seek to undermine the existing structure,” he advised, must do two things. First, they must alter beneficiaries' view of Social Security's viability, because that would “make abandonment of the system look more attractive.”

If you have ever seen a television ad showing older people with worried faces wondering if Social Security will be around when they need it, or heard a politician you think is opposed to the retirement program suddenly fretting about whether it will be there for you and others, listen more carefully the next time for a possible subliminal message. Is the speaker really in favor of preserving the system as we know it? Or is he or she trying to diminish the reputation of the system with the public, so that when the right time comes to make changes to it, even small ones that in fact reduce benefits or change the rules for beneficiaries, those affected will be less likely to feel that something good is being taken away from them?

While step one would soften public support for the system by making it seem unreliable, step two would apply a classic strategy of divide and conquer. Recipients could be split apart in this way. The first group he defined as those already receiving Social Security benefits and (although Buchanan did not include them, his ideological heirs would) those nearing

the age when they could begin to collect. These current recipients and those close to retirement (some said within ten years; more recently politicians on the right have suggested five years) should be reassured that their benefits would not be cut. This tactic Buchanan referred to as “paying off” existing claims. The reasoning behind it is vintage public choice analysis: as the citizens most attentive to any change in the system, they were the ones who would fight the hardest to preserve it. Getting them out of the struggle to preserve the system would greatly enfeeble the remaining coalition (to say nothing of the resentment their departure would cause among those who found they were being denied something others had secured for themselves).

The second group, Buchanan coached, consisted of high earners. The plan here would be to suggest that they be taxed at higher rates than others to get their benefits, thus sully the image of Social Security as an insurance program in the minds of the wealthy by making it look more like now-unpopular means-tested income transfer programs popularly understood as “welfare.” Progressives would likely fall for a proposal to make the wealthiest pay more, not realizing the damage that could do to Social Security’s support among group two. And if the message was repeated enough, such that the wealthy began to believe that others are not paying their fair share, they in turn would also become less opposed to altering the program.

The third group would consist of younger workers. They needed to be constantly reminded that their payroll deductions were providing “a tremendous welfare subsidy” to the aged. Finally, those who would just miss the cutoff for the old system should be targeted for short-term changes. As Buchanan put it, “those who seek to undermine the support of the system (over the longer term) would do well to propose increases in the retirement age and increases in payroll taxes,” so as to irritate recipients at all income levels, but particularly those who are just on the wrong side of the cutoff and now would have to pay more and work longer.

This “patchwork pattern of ‘reforms,’” (the quotation marks around ‘reforms’ were added by Buchanan, to make sure the message was clear that reform was not really the endgame) could tear asunder groups that hitherto had been united in their support of Social Security. Better still, Buchanan noted, the member groups of the once unified coalition that protected it might be induced by such changes to fight one another.

The overall message shared among insiders was always this:

“If the political dynamics are not altered, no radical reform of Social Security is possible.”

For the libertarian right, Social Security privatization meant a savvy triple win, in which ideological triumph over the most successful and popular federal program was the least of the gains. First, it would break down citizens' lived connection to government, their habit of believing it offered them something of value in navigating their lives. Second, it would weaken the appeal of collective organization by inducing fracture among groups that had looked to government for solutions to their common problems.

But third and just as important, by putting a vast pool of money into the hands of capitalists, enriching them, it would both make them eager to lobby for further change and willing to shell out dollars to the advocacy groups leading the charge for change. The stronger these already well-heeled right-wing advocacy groups became, the more powerful partners shared their interests, the quicker they would be able to alter power relations in America in a manner that advanced the libertarian revolution. Charles Koch later used an apt metaphor that captures this process, too:

“I often think of what we do as stonemasonry. Once a stone has been carefully selected and set, it shapes a new space in which the mason can set yet another well-chosen stone. Each stone is different, but they all fit together to create a framework that is mutually reinforcing.”

While others focused on advancing the new stealth strategy, Buchanan never lost sight of the fact that such rearguard assaults on the welfare state would take the movement only so far. What was needed was a way to amend the Constitution so that public officials would be legally constrained from offering new social programs to the public or engaging in regulation on their behalf even when vast constituencies were demanding them. Again and again, at every opportunity he had, he told his allies that no “mere changing of the political guard will suffice,” that “the problems of our times require attention to the rules rather than the rulers.” And that meant that real change would come “only by Constitutional law.” The project must aim toward the practical “removal of the sacrosanct status assigned to majority rule.”

Some had long urged seeing political actors as self-aggrandizing individuals rather than the civic-minded altruists they portrayed themselves as:

“What we did was take the bar-room approach to politics, and bring it out in the open—by presuming that politicians were crooks, voters were selfish, and bureaucrats were incompetent.”

With these portrayals, the libertarian mavericks had aimed to show that government action would cause worse trouble than the problems it was called on to cure.

In the end, as their representatives in Washington should have known all along, even those voters who revered Ronald Reagan, and cheered on the contract-signing candidates in principle, were not ready when they learned that freed markets would leave them with sole responsibility for their own fates, to give up their Social Security and Medicare, their public schools, and their government-backed air, water, and earth protections.

Only James Buchanan had also developed an operational strategy for how to get to that radically new society, one that took as axiomatic what both Buchanan and Koch understood viscerally: that the enduring impediment to the enactment of their political vision was the ability of the American people, through the power of their numbers, to reject the program. What was holding the movement back now became clear: the lack of a strategy to break that power, or at least to debilitate it, the very approach Buchanan had spent a lifetime thinking about and designing. Operationally, as Buchanan had repeatedly explained, such a program must ultimately change the rules, not simply who rules.

In the near term, it had to have two components. First, it had to create a pathway from here to there that could be executed in small, piecemeal steps that on their own polled well enough with the American people that they could win passage without raising the public's ire. But each step had to connect back to the previous step and forward to the next one so that when the entire path was laid, all the pieces would reinforce the route to the ultimate destination. By then it would be too late for the American public to cry foul.

Second, and as important, because some of those piecemeal steps, no matter how prettified, could not be fully disguised, where necessary they had to be presented to the American public as the opposite of what they really were—as attempts to shore up rather than ultimately destroy—what the majority of Americans wanted, such as sound Medicare and Social Security programs. For such programs, the framing should be one of the right's concern to “reform” the programs, to protect them, because without such change they would go bankrupt—even though the real goal was to destroy them.

“What happens if individuals do not value liberty sufficiently highly?” James Buchanan's colleague and friend Charles K. Rowley asked after the failure of the Reagan revolution. “Should they be forced to be free?”

“If you tell a great lie and repeat it often enough, the people will eventually come to believe it,” Joseph Goebbels, a particularly ruthless, yet

shrewd, propagandist, is said to have remarked. Today the big lie of the Koch-sponsored radical right is that society can be split between makers and takers, justifying on the part of the makers a Manichaeian struggle to disarm and defeat those who would take from them. Attend a Tea Party gathering and you will hear endless cries about the “moocher class.” People who failed to foresee and save money for their future needs, Buchanan wrote in 2005, “are to be treated as subordinate members of the species, akin to animals who are dependent.”

Tyler Cowen, the man who succeeded Buchanan and now directs the cause’s base camp at George Mason—the Mercatus Center—has explained that with the “rewriting of the social contract” under way, people will be “expected to fend for themselves much more than they do now.” While some will flourish, he says, “others will fall by the wayside.” And because “worthy individuals” will manage to climb their way out of poverty, “that will make it easier to ignore those who are left behind.” Cowen foresees that “we will cut Medicaid for the poor.” Also, “the fiscal shortfall will come out of real wages as various cost burdens are shifted to workers” from employers and a government that does less. To “compensate,” the chaired professor in the nation’s second-wealthiest county recommends, “people who have had their government benefits cut or pared back” should pack up and move to lower-cost states like Texas. Granted, he says, “Texas is skimpy on welfare benefits and Medicaid coverage,” and nearly three in ten of its residents have no health insurance, but the state does have jobs and “very cheap housing” to offset its “subpar public services.” Indeed, Cowen forecasts, “the United States as a whole will end up looking more like Texas.”

His tone is matter-of-fact, as though he is simply reporting the inevitable. And he enjoys great authority, as his blog, *The Marginal Revolution*, is the most visited intellectual blog in professional economics, known for criticizing Republicans as well as Democrats, and also respected for Cowen’s signature incorporation of economic concepts to analyze cultural phenomena from food to travel. He presents himself as a pragmatic libertarian (indeed, the blog’s motto is “small steps toward a much better world”). Yet when one reads his flip remarks on the fate now facing his fellow citizens with the knowledge that he has been the leader of a team working in earnest with Charles Koch for two decades to bring about the society he is describing, the words assume a different weight. They sound like premeditation. For example, the economist prophesies lower-income parts of America “recreating a Mexico-like or Brazil-like environment” complete with favelas like those in Rio de Janeiro. The “quality of water” might not be what US citizens are used to, but “partial shantytowns” would satisfy the need for cheaper housing as “wage polarization” grows and government shrinks. “Some version of

Texas—and then some—is the future for a lot of us,” the economist advises. “Get ready.”

Thom Tillis, a North Carolina state senator elevated to the US Senate in 2014 with backing from the Koch apparatus, has said that restaurants should be able “to opt out of” laws requiring employees to wash their hands after using the toilet, “as long as they post a sign that says, ‘We don’t require our employees to wash their hands after leaving the restroom.’ The market will take care of that.” Somehow requiring a sign is not an infringement of rights, but requiring handwashing—the far saner thing given that we now know germs exist—is an unjust infringement upon one’s liberty.

Paul Ryan once explained that public provision for popular needs not only violates the liberty of the taxpayers whose earnings are transferred to others, but also violates the recipients’ spiritual need to earn their own sustenance. He told one audience that the nation’s school lunch program left poor children with “a full stomach—and an empty soul.”

The nation’s public school system has been a target of the Mont Pelerin Society cause since the 1950s—well before the rise of “powerful” teachers’ unions, it bears noting. Rather than admit their ideological commitment to ending public education, they have convinced a sizable segment of the American population that the problems in schools today are the result of those teachers’ unions having too much power. In the states where they have won control, like North Carolina, the cadre’s allied elected officials, pushed by affiliates of the State Policy Network, have rushed to pass laws to debilitate teachers’ unions, one bill being hurried through passage after midnight. The Republican-dominated North Carolina General Assembly then also cut seven-thousand teacher assistants, allotted \$100 million less than the state budget office said was needed merely to maintain the schools, and budgeted \$500 million less to public schools than it had in 2008. Even the school supplies budget was cut by more than half; students can no longer take home textbooks in some poor communities, for fear they may be lost.

Where is this money going? Into corporate America, to a new “education industry” of private schools, many of which are held to no standards or even disclosure requirements. One shocked superior court judge found that the North Carolina General Assembly had violated the state constitution in sending children with tax subsidies to “private schools that have no legal obligation to teach them anything.” His verdict was overruled by the state supreme court, which the Koch cadre had spent handsomely to control for just such eventualities. The new for-profit virtual charter schools, whose CEO personally earned \$4 million in 2014, were found, by one Stanford University research study, to have left their enrolled students falling far behind their public school counterparts, equivalent to missing “72 days of

learning in reading and 180 days of learning in math” in a 180-day school year. In other words, the online schools in this study taught nothing in math, and little in reading. As a result of all this, North Carolina, which during the twentieth century, through wise investments in public education, had climbed from the poorest of southern states to one of the best-off, now ranks beneath Mississippi in per-pupil spending.

Turning public functions over to corporations was a “potent strategy” to “create new pro-privatization coalitions,” because the corporations that profit from the spun-off government functions would push for further change.

In one emblem of the perverse incentives for-profit prisons have created, a Pennsylvania judge was convicted in a “cash for kids” scheme in which private detention centers paid judges \$2.8 million in kickbacks for sentencing thousands of children to their facilities. With no rights or collective voice and few allies, detained immigrants have proven to be even more ideal commodities for a reliable cash stream to such corporations, so lucrative that one recent report on the facilities that house them bore the title “Banking on Detention.”

A large body of research by economists and political scientists over the past two decades has demonstrated that the surging inequality on display in America today is not an inevitable result of impersonal developments such as globalization and new technology, even as these have contributed. Rather, the extremity of our current situation is in good part due to the outsized power of corporations and wealthy donors over our politics and public policy. A case in point: According to the International Monetary Fund—an organization known for decades of draconian fiscal prescriptions, crippling developing nations with debt—“the decline in unionization is strongly associated with the rise of income shares at the top.” The IMF concluded that the rights of workers to bargain collectively must be restored to slow the growth of inequality and enable economic growth.

The new anti-union rules unfurled first by Governor Scott Walker in Wisconsin in 2011 are more devilishly lethal in their cumulative impact than anything the cause had theretofore produced. Their elaborate precision evoked the analogous changes in Chilean labor law instituted in the Pinochet era with Buchanan’s input. In the new Wisconsin, public employees would no longer be allowed to negotiate working conditions and benefits, only wages (with those held to the rate of inflation). Each contract would be only a year in duration, thus draining staff time and energy away from addressing the concerns of existing members and from organizing new members in order to prepare for now back-to-back annual negotiations. Unions would lose the right to have dues deducted from members’ paychecks and instead have to chase down individuals who did not pay. And, in a final slap, with the

unions no longer able to do anything of substance for their members, they would face recertification elections each year. No wonder Walker boasted that “we dropped the bomb.” His approach cut in half, over just five years, the share of public employees who belong to unions.

Who will care for America’s children and the elderly now that two-thirds of mothers with children under six are in the workforce, yet market fundamentalism—the irrational belief that markets solve all problems—has succeeded in dismantling so many federal regulations, services, and protections? But the cause would argue that it has answered that question over and over again: You will. And if you can’t, you should have thought of that before you had kids or before you grew old without adequate savings. The solution to every problem—from young people loaded down with student loan debt to the care of infants and toddlers and the sick and the elderly—is for each individual to think, from the time they are sentient, about their possible future needs and prepare for them with their own earnings, or pay the consequences. Indeed, Tyler Cowen told young Americans a few years ago that they “should not be occupying Wall Street, they should be occupying AARP” (to keep retirees from taking from them).

One key finding of a Cowen study was that by the 1920s, in both Europe and the United States, “the expansion of the voter franchise” beyond “wealthy male landowners” had produced the unfortunate result of enlarged public sectors. Alas, “the elimination of poll taxes and literacy tests leads to higher turnout and higher welfare spending.” “The freest countries have not generally been democratic,” Cowen noted, with Chile being “the most successful” in securing freedom, defined not as most of us would, as personal freedom, but as supplying the greatest economic liberty.

The professor identified another commonality in the success stories:

“In no case were reforms brought on by popular demand for market-oriented ideas.”

The pro-liberty cause faced the same problem it always had: it wanted a radical transformation that “finds little or no support” among the people. Cowen delivered the action implication of its minority following without mincing words:

“If American political institutions render market-oriented reforms too difficult to achieve, then perhaps those institutions should be changed.”

The economist was creating, it seems fair to say, a handbook for how to conduct a fifth-column assault on democracy. “The weakening of the

checks and balances” in the American system, Cowen suggested, “would increase the chance of a very good outcome.” Alas, given the pervasive reverence for the US Constitution, a direct bid to manipulate the system could prove “disastrous.” Cowen’s best advice, informed by the Chilean experience, was sudden percussive policy bombing, akin in nature, one could say, to the military doctrine of shock and awe, which uses colossal displays of force and calculated interlinked maneuvers to shock the enemy into submission. When the right opportunity arose, the economist advised, “big-bang style clustered bursts” could dispense with multiple democratic constraints on economic liberty in the same surge. Rather like, one could infer, the radical policy changes imposed on multiple fronts in the same sessions in newly Republican-dominated states after 2011, among them education, employment, environment, taxation, and voting rights.

Research being done at George Mason also suggested a good deal of irrationality in the electorate, which could be turned to advantage. “It might be possible for ‘irrationally held’ views to in fact support good policies,” particularly if the cause were to enlist insights from “cognitive science and perhaps evolutionary biology.” Knowledge of just how vulnerable humans are to hardwired drives that resist reasoned evidence, it seemed, might prove helpful in getting voters to unwittingly enable an “unpopular” agenda.

Most do not realize the US Constitution already restrains what we the people can do to a degree not seen in any other democratic nation.

Let me explain. Americans are taught from an early age to revere the checks and balances built into our political system by that document, features designed to act as imposing speed bumps, if not complete roadblocks, to radical change from hotheaded majorities, particularly those who may encroach upon the property rights of the minority. The most obvious among these binding features is our grossly malapportioned Senate, designed to put brakes on the House of Representatives, which was to represent the people directly. A state with comparatively few residents, such as Wyoming, has the same Senate representation as the most populous state, California. That means the vote of a Wyoming resident carries nearly seventy times more weight than the vote of a Californian in Senate elections and deliberations. How fair is that? It’s not. It is precisely the kind of malapportionment that the Supreme Court, in the early 1960s, ruled unconstitutional in internal affairs of the states, whose officials were purposely over-representing rural residents over urban and suburban residents—indeed, a much more egregious departure from the “one person, one vote” standard. But because the apportionment of Senate seats is written into the Constitution, in the one section that cannot be amended, the remedy cannot be applied nationally.

On the one hand, this constitutional system has helped make the United

States the most stable republic in the modern world. On the other hand, it has also made ours by far the least responsive of all the leading democracies to what the people want and need. It takes upheaval of truly historic proportions to achieve significant change in America, even when it is supported by the vast majority—as evidenced by the civil war required to end slavery, the tens of thousands of strikes and other struggles needed to achieve reform during the Great Depression, and the mass disruption and political crisis that civil rights activists had to bring about in order to win for African Americans the same constitutional rights enjoyed by other citizens. The existing checks and balances, in short, create an all but insurmountable barrier to those seeking to right even gross social injustice. The problem is systemic. Built into our Constitution, the change-blocking mechanisms prevent us as a polity from addressing our most profound challenges until there is supermajority support for doing so. We can see the toll of these constraints by looking at the problem of economic inequality.

Researchers recently compared the number of stumbling blocks that advanced industrial democracies put in the way of their citizens' ability to achieve their collective will through the legislative process. Calling these inbuilt "majority constraining" obstacles "veto players," they found a striking correlation: the nations with the fewest veto players have the least inequality, and those with the most veto players have the greatest inequality. Only the United States has four such veto players. All four were specified in the slavery-defending founders' Constitution: absolute veto power for the Senate, for the House, and for the president (if not outvoted by a two-thirds majority), and a Constitution that cannot be altered without the agreement of two-thirds of the states after Congress. Other features of the US system further obstruct majority rule, including a winner-take-all Electoral College that encourages a two-party system; the Tenth Amendment, which steers power toward the states; and a system of representation in the unusually potent Senate that violates the principle of "one person, one vote" to a degree not seen anywhere else.

Owing to such mechanisms, even in the late 1960s, the heyday of income equality in the United States, no other country in the set of long-standing democracies was as unequal as America, and most were substantially more equal. As arresting, even the most equal US state is less equal than any comparable country. What makes the US system "exceptional," sadly, is the number of built-in vetoes to constrain the majority.

While media attention has focused on the impact of Citizens United on the presidential and congressional races, the opening of the spigots in state judicial races may prove more consequential over the decades ahead as corporate donors invest in those they believe will interpret the Constitution

and the laws in their favor. The Republican majorities that are rushing through “radical reform” know that citizens of their states are likely to turn to the only branch of government left that might blunt the blows. That is why the large donors have invested so heavily in judicial races: to elect judges who will allow the revolution to go forward.

A flagship success of the constitutional wing of the cause was Chief Justice John Roberts’s decision in the Affordable Care Act case, *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius*. While some on the right excoriated Roberts for having upheld the ACA, smart court watchers noted not the verdict but what Roberts said about the Commerce Clause. Some context: In 1937, when the Supreme Court upheld a minimum wage law for the first time and then the Wagner Act, too, signaling its acceptance of the New Deal, it did so by agreeing with government attorneys that the Commerce Clause of Article I of the Constitution gives Congress the ability to regulate interstate trade. Under the rubric of regulating interstate trade, the federal government then dramatically increased its oversight of what used to be considered strictly private or state matters.

But in the Affordable Care Act case, Roberts, who in his first year on the bench did more to limit the reach of *Brown v. Board of Education* than any previous justice, commented that “the Commerce Clause is not a general license to regulate an individual from cradle to grave” (a proposition no one has suggested). Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, in her opinion, rightly picked up on that surprising assertion, calling the chief justice’s claim “stunningly retrogressive.” But Roberts’ narrow conception of the Commerce Clause is now the law of the land—and an invitation to legal challenges to other federal legislation and programs. Faculty at the George Mason School of Law, now aptly named after Antonin Scalia, are urging the court to go back to its pre-1937 jurisprudence, when the justices routinely struck down government action to advance popular economic security or social justice goals.

Democracy is essentially an act of faith. When that faith is willfully exterminated, we should not be surprised that we reap the whirlwind. The public choice way of thinking, one sage critic warned at the time James Buchanan was awarded the Not-a-Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, is not simply “descriptively inaccurate”—indeed, “a terrible caricature” of how the political process works. It also constitutes an insidious attack on the very “norm of public spiritedness” so crucial to shaping good government policy and ethical conduct in civic life. That is to say, public choice theory was wrong in its explanations, and would be toxic if believed by the public or its representatives. We have seen the truth of that prediction.

The libertarian cause, from the time it first attracted wider support

during the southern schools crisis, was never really about freedom as most people would define it. It was about the promotion of crippling division among the people so as to end any interference with what those who held vast power over others believed should be their prerogatives. Its leaders had no scruples about enlisting white supremacy to achieve capital supremacy. And today, knowing that the majority does not share their goals and would stop them if they understood the endgame, the team of paid operatives seeks to win by stealth. Now, as then, the leaders seek liberty for the few—the liberty to concentrate vast wealth, so as to deny elementary fairness and freedom to the many. Is this the country we want to live in and bequeath to our children and future generations? That is the real public choice. If we delay much longer, those who are imposing their stark utopia will choose for us. One of them has announced flatly:

“America will soon make a decision about its future. It will be a permanent decision. There will be no going back.”

As we consider the future of our democracy in light of all that has happened already, we may take heed of a Koch maxim:

“Playing it safe is slow suicide.”

Public Policy Privatized

Although it is called a “charitable deduction,” very little of this public subsidy ends up with the poor. A 2005 analysis by Indiana University’s Center on Philanthropy showed that even under the most generous assumptions only about a third of “charitable” giving is targeted to helping poor people. A large portion is allocated to operas, art museums, symphonies, and theaters—all worthy enterprises, to be sure, but not ‘charities’ as we normally use the term. A while ago, New York’s Lincoln Center held a fundraising gala supported by the charitable contributions of hedge-fund industry leaders, several of whom take home \$1 billion a year. Poor New Yorkers rarely attend concerts at Lincoln Center.

Even when the desire to help is genuine, these are the dreams of empire builders. Take Bill Gates, first he created the world’s largest software company, then he created the world’s largest private foundation. Whatever the benefits his philanthropy has brought—and there are many—the fact is that he hopped from one world-size conquest to another. Billionaires never put their giving in these terms. Gates says he wants to “give back.” He implies he owes something to society, and maybe he does. His money comes from Microsoft, and like other tech companies, Microsoft keeps billions of dollars offshore to avoid paying taxes at home. For years, to maintain its dominance of the market, he also engaged in anticompetitive practices that brought government lawsuits from the United States and the European Union. What did Gates’s monopoly cost us? It’s hard to calculate the size of that debt.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was launched in 2000 and has \$46.8 billion in assets. It is the largest charitable foundation in the world and distributes more aid for global health than any government. One of the foundation’s stated goals is to globally enhance healthcare and reduce extreme poverty. The Gates Foundation is a major funder of CGIAR—a global partnership whose stated aim is to strive for a food-secured future. Its research is aimed at reducing rural poverty, increasing food security, improving human health and nutrition and ensuring sustainable management of natural resources.

In 2016, the Gates Foundation was accused of dangerously and unaccountably distorting the direction of international development. The charges were laid out in a report by Global Justice Now: “Gated Development: Is the Gates Foundation always a force for good?” According to the report, the foundation’s strategy is based on deepening the role of multinational companies in the Global South.

“The Gates Foundation has rapidly become the most influential actor in the world of global health and agricultural policies, but there’s no oversight or accountability in how that influence is managed.”

This concentration of power and influence is even more problematic when you consider that the philanthropic vision of the Gates Foundation seems to be largely based on the values of corporate America:

“The foundation is relentlessly promoting big business-based initiatives such as industrial agriculture, private health care and education. But these are all potentially exacerbating the problems of poverty and lack of access to basic resources that the foundation is supposed to be alleviating.”

The foundation’s promotion of industrial agriculture across Africa will undermine existing sustainable, small-scale farming that is providing the vast majority of food across the continent. The foundation is working with US agri-commodity trader Cargill in an \$8 million project to “develop the soya value chain” in southern Africa. Cargill is the biggest global player in the production of and trade in soya with heavy investments in South America where GM soya monocrops—and associated agrochemicals—have displaced rural populations and caused health problems and environmental damage. The Gates-funded project will likely enable Cargill to capture a hitherto untapped African soya market and eventually introduce GM soya onto the continent.

The Gates Foundation is also supporting projects involving other chemical and seed corporations, including DuPont, Syngenta and Bayer. It is effectively promoting a model of industrial agriculture, the increasing use of agrochemicals and patented seeds, the privatization of extension services, and a very large focus on genetically modified crops.

What the Gates Foundation is doing is part of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) initiative, which is based on the premise that hunger and malnutrition in Africa are mainly the result of a lack of technology and functioning markets. AGRA has been intervening directly

in the formulation of African governments' agricultural policies on issues like seeds and land, opening up African markets to US agribusiness.

More than 80% of Africa's seed supply comes from millions of small-scale farmers recycling and exchanging seed from year to year. But AGRA is promoting the commercial production of seed and is thus supporting the introduction of commercial (chemical-dependent) seed systems, which risk enabling a few large companies to control seed research and development, production, and distribution. Over the past two decades, a long and slow process of national seed law reviews, sponsored by USAID and the G8 along with Bill Gates and others, has opened the door to multinational corporations' involvement in seed production, including the acquisition of every sizable seed enterprise on the African continent.

The Gates Foundation is also very active in the area of health, which is ironic given its promotion of industrial agriculture and its reliance on health-damaging agrochemicals. The Gates Foundation is also reported to be collaborating in Bayer's promotion of "new chemical approaches" and "biological crop protection" (i.e. encouraging agrochemical sales and GM crops) in the Global South.

After having read the recent "A Future for the World's Children? A WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission," one might have noticed that pesticides were conspicuous by their absence. In the report there is much talk about greater regulation of marketing of tobacco, alcohol, formula milk, and sugar-sweetened beverages, but no mention of pesticides. But perhaps this should come as little surprise: some 42 authors are attached to the report and in one way or another via the organizations they belong to, many—if not most—have received funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Gates Foundation is a prominent funder of the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Gates has been the largest or second-largest contributor to the WHO's budget in recent years. His foundation provided 11% of the WHO's entire budget in 2015, which is 14 times greater than the UK government's contribution. Perhaps this sheds some light onto why a major report on child health would omit the effects of pesticides. This is a serious omission given what the UN expert on toxics, Baskut Tuncak, said in 2017:

"Our children are growing up exposed to a toxic cocktail of weedkillers, insecticides, and fungicides. It's on their food and in their water, and it's even doused over their parks and playgrounds. Many governments insist that our standards of protection from these pesticides are strong enough. But as a scientist and a lawyer who specializes in chemicals and their potential impact on people's fundamental rights, I beg to differ. Last month

it was revealed that in recommending that glyphosate—the world’s most widely-used pesticide—was safe, the EU’s food safety watchdog copied and pasted pages of a report directly from Monsanto, the pesticide’s manufacturer. Revelations like these are simply shocking.”

In February 2020, Tuncak rejected the idea that the risks posed by highly hazardous pesticides could be managed safely. There is nothing sustainable about the widespread use of highly hazardous pesticides for agriculture. Whether they poison workers, extinguish biodiversity, persist in the environment, or accumulate in a mother’s breast milk, Tuncak argued that these are unsustainable, cannot be used safely, and should have been phased out of use long ago.

“The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most ratified international human rights treaty in the world (only the US is not a party), makes it clear that states have an explicit obligation to protect children from exposure to toxic chemicals, from contaminated food and polluted water, and to ensure that every child can realize their right to the highest attainable standard of health. These and many other rights of the child are abused by the current pesticide regime. These chemicals are everywhere and they are invisible.”

Pediatricians have referred to childhood exposure to pesticides as creating a “silent pandemic” of disease and disability. Exposure in pregnancy and childhood is linked to birth defects, diabetes, and cancer. And children are particularly vulnerable to these toxic chemicals: increasing evidence shows that even at ‘low’ doses of childhood exposure, irreversible health impacts can result. The overwhelming reliance of regulators on industry-funded studies, the exclusion of independent science from assessments, and the confidentiality of studies relied upon by authorities must change.

However, it seems that the profits of agrochemical manufacturers trump the rights of children and the public at large: an investigation has found the world’s five biggest pesticide manufacturers are making more than a third of their income from leading products, chemicals that pose serious hazards to human health and the environment. Consider an analysis of a huge database of 2018’s top-selling “crop protection products” which revealed the world’s leading agrochemical companies made more than 35% of their sales from pesticides classed as “highly hazardous” to people, animals or ecosystems. The investigation identified billions of dollars of income

for agrochemical giants BASF, Bayer, Corteva, FMC, and Syngenta from chemicals found by regulatory authorities to pose health hazards like cancer or reproductive failure. This investigation is based on an analysis of a huge dataset of pesticide sales from the agribusiness intelligence company Phillips McDougall. This firm conducts detailed market research all over the world and sells databases and intelligence to pesticide companies. The data covers around 40% of the \$57 billion global market for agricultural pesticides in 2018. It focuses on 43 countries, which between them represent more than 90% of the global pesticide market by value.

While Bill Gates promotes a chemical-intensive model of agriculture that dovetails with the needs and value chains of agri-food conglomerates, some outline the spiraling rates of disease in the UK and the US and lay the blame at the door of the agrochemical corporations that Gates has opted to get into bed with. They focus on the impact of glyphosate-based herbicides as well as the cocktail of chemicals sprayed on crops.

Peer-reviewed studies and official statistics indicate that glyphosate affects the gut microbiome and is responsible for a global metabolic health crisis provoked by an obesity epidemic. Moreover, there is evidence that glyphosate causes epigenetic changes in humans and animals. However, the mainstream narrative is to blame individuals for their ailments and conditions which are said to result from “lifestyle choices.” Yet Monsanto’s German owner Bayer has confirmed that more than 42,700 people have filed suits against Monsanto alleging that exposure to Roundup herbicide caused them or their loved ones to develop non-Hodgkin lymphoma and that Monsanto covered up the risks.

Each year there are steady increases in the numbers of new cancers and increases in deaths from the same cancers, with no treatments making any difference to the numbers; at the same time, these treatments maximize the bottom line of the drug companies while the impacts of agrochemicals remains conspicuously absent from the disease narrative. We are exposed to a lifetime’s exposure to thousands of synthetic chemicals that contaminate the blood and urine of nearly every person tested—“a global mass poisoning.”

As part of its hegemonic strategy, the Gates Foundation says it wants to ensure global food security and optimize health and nutrition. However, the Gates Foundation seems happy to ignore the deleterious health impacts of agrochemicals while promoting the interests of the firms that produce them. And it facilitates many health programmes that help boost the bottom line of drug companies.

Health and health programmes seem only to be defined with certain parameters which facilitate the selling of the products of the major pharmaceutical companies which the foundation partners with. Indeed, the Gates

Foundation not merely facilitates unethical low-cost clinical trials in the Global South—with often devastating effects for participants—but also assists in the creating new markets for the dubious products of pharmaceuticals corporations.

As for food security, the foundation would do better by supporting agroecological (agrochemical-free) approaches to agriculture, which various high-level UN reports have advocated for ensuring equitable global food security. But this would leave smallholder agriculture both intact and independent from Western agro-capital, something which runs counter to the underlying aims of the corporations that the foundation supports: dispossession and market dependency.

And these aims have been part of a decades-long strategy where we have seen the strengthening of an emerging global food regime based on agro-export mono-cropping linked to sovereign debt repayment and World Bank/IMF “structural adjustment” directives. The outcomes have included a displacement of a food-producing peasantry, the consolidation of Western agri-food oligopolies, and the transformation of many countries from food self-sufficiency into food deficit areas.

While Bill Gates is busy supporting the consolidation of Western agro-capital in Africa under the guise of ensuring “food security,” it is very convenient for him to ignore the fact that at the time of decolonization in the 1960s, Africa was not just self-sufficient in food but was actually a net food exporter, with exports averaging 1.3 million tons a year between 1966–70.

The continent now imports 25% of its food, with almost every country being a net food importer. More generally, developing countries produced a billion-dollar yearly surplus in the 1970s but by 2004 were importing \$11 billion a year.

The Gates Foundation promotes a heavily subsidized and inefficient—certainly when the externalized health, social, and environment costs are factored in—corporate-industrial farming system and the strengthening of a global neoliberal, fossil-fuel-dependent food regime that by its very nature fuels and thrives on, among other things, unjust trade policies, population displacement and land dispossession (something which the Gates Foundation once called for but euphemistically termed “land mobility”), commodity monocropping, soil and environmental degradation, illness, nutrient-deficient diets, a narrowing of the range of food crops, water shortages, pollution, and the eradication of biodiversity.

At the same time, the foundation is helping powerful corporate interests to appropriate and commodify knowledge. For instance, since 2003, CGIAR and its 15 centres have received more than \$720 million from the Gates

Foundation. The centres are accelerating the transfer of research and seeds to corporations, facilitating intellectual property piracy and seed monopolies created through IP laws and seed regulations. Besides taking control of the seeds of farmers in CGIAR seed banks, the Gates Foundation—along with the Rockefeller Foundation—is investing heavily in collecting seeds from across the world and storing them in a facility in Svalbard in the Arctic—the “doomsday vault.” The foundation is also funding Diversity Seek (DivSeek), a global initiative to take patents on the seed collections through genomic mapping. Seven million crop accessions are in public seed banks. DivSeek could allow five corporations to own this diversity.

“Today, biopiracy is carried out through the convergence of information technology and biotechnology. It is done by taking patents by ‘mapping’ genomes and genome sequences. DivSeek is a global project launched in 2015 to map the genetic data of the peasant diversity of seeds held in gene banks. It robs the peasants of their seeds and knowledge, it robs the seed of its integrity and diversity, its evolutionary history, its link to the soil, and reduces it to ‘code.’ It is an extractive project to ‘mine’ the data in the seed to ‘censor’ out the commons.”

The peasants who evolved this diversity have no place in DivSeek; their knowledge is being mined and not recognized, honoured, or conserved—an enclosure of the genetic commons. This process is the very foundation of capitalism: appropriation of the commons—seeds, water, knowledge, land, et cetera—which are then made artificially scarce and transformed into marketable commodities.

The Gates Foundation talks about health but facilitates the roll-out of a toxic form of agriculture whose agrochemicals cause immense damage. It talks of alleviating poverty and malnutrition and tackling food insecurity but it bolsters an inherently unjust global food regime which is responsible for perpetuating food insecurity, population displacement, land dispossession, privatization of the commons and neoliberal policies that remove support from the vulnerable and marginalized, while providing lavish subsidies to corporations.

The Gates Foundation is part of the problem, not the solution. The ultimate aim of promoting new technologies—whether GM seeds, agrochemicals, or commodified knowledge—on a colossal scale is to make agricultural inputs and outputs essential commodities, create dependency, and bring all farming operations into the capitalist fold.

To properly understand Bill Gates's "philanthropy" is not to take stated goals and objectives at face value but to regard his ideology as an attempt to manufacture consent and prevent and marginalize more radical agrarian change that would challenge prevailing power structures and act as impediments to capitalist interests. The foundation's activities must be located within the hegemonic and dispossessive strategies of imperialism: displacement of the peasantry and subjugating those who remain in agriculture to the needs of global distribution and supply chains dominated by the Western agri-food conglomerates whose interests the Gates Foundation facilitates and legitimizes.

The initiatives mostly aren't democratic, nor do they reflect collective problem-solving or universal solutions. Rather, they favor the use of the private sector and its charitable spoils, the market way of looking at things, and the bypassing of government. They reflect a highly influential view that the winners of an unjust status quo—and the tools and mentalities and values that helped them win—are the secret to redressing the injustices. Those at greatest risk of being resented in an age of inequality are thereby recast as our saviors from an age of inequality. Socially minded financiers at Goldman Sachs seek to change the world through "win-win" initiatives like "green bonds" and "impact investing." Tech companies like Uber and Airbnb cast themselves as empowering the poor by allowing them to chauffeur people around or rent out spare rooms. Management consultants and Wall Street brains seek to convince the social sector that they should guide its pursuit of greater equality by assuming board seats and leadership positions.

Conferences and idea festivals sponsored by plutocrats and big business host panels on injustice and promote "thought leaders" who are willing to confine their thinking to improving lives within the faulty system rather than tackling the faults. Profitable companies built in questionable ways and employing reckless means engage in corporate social responsibility, and some rich people make a splash by "giving back"—regardless of the fact that they may have caused serious societal problems as they built their fortunes. Elite networking forums like the Aspen Institute and the Clinton Global Initiative groom the rich to be self-appointed leaders of social change, taking on the problems people like them have been instrumental in creating or sustaining. A new breed of community-minded so-called 'B Corporations' has been born, reflecting a faith that more enlightened corporate self-interest—rather than, say, public regulation—is the surest guarantor of the public welfare. A pair of Silicon Valley billionaires fund an initiative to rethink the Democratic Party, and one of them can claim, without a hint of irony, that their goals are to amplify the voices of the powerless and reduce the political influence of rich people like them.

There are many ways to make sense of all this elite concern and predation. One is that the elites are doing the best they can. The world is what it is; the system is what it is; the forces of the age are bigger than anyone can resist; the most fortunate are helping. This view may allow that this helpfulness is just a drop in the bucket, but it is something. The slightly more critical view is that this elite-led change is well-meaning but inadequate. It treats symptoms, not root causes; it does not change the fundamentals of what ails us. According to this view, elites are shirking the duty of more meaningful reform.

But there is still another, darker way of judging what goes on when elites put themselves in the vanguard of social change: that it not only fails to make things better, but also serves to keep things as they are. After all, it takes the edge off of some of the public's anger at being excluded from progress. It improves the image of the winners. With its private and voluntary half-measures, it crowds out public solutions that would solve problems for everyone, and do so with or without the elite's blessing. There is no question that the outpouring of elite-led social change in our era does great good and soothes pain and saves lives. But we should also recall Oscar Wilde's words about such elite helpfulness being "not a solution" but "an aggravation of the difficulty." More than a century ago, in an age of churn like our own, he wrote:

"Just as the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realized by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it, so, in the present state of things in England, the people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good."

Wilde's formulation may sound extreme to modern ears. How can there be anything wrong with trying to do good? The answer may be: when the good is an accomplice to even greater, perhaps more invisible, harm. In our era that harm is the concentration of money and power among a small few, who reap from that concentration a near monopoly on the benefits of change. And do-gooding pursued by elites tends not only to leave this concentration untouched, but actually to shore it up. For when elites assume leadership of social change, they are able to reshape what social change is—above all, to present it as something that should never threaten winners. In an age defined by a chasm between those who have power and those who don't, elites have spread the idea that people must be helped, but only in market-friendly ways that do not upset fundamental power equations.

The society should be changed in ways that do not change the underlying economic system that has allowed the winners to win and fostered many of the problems they seek to solve. The broad fidelity to this law helps make sense of what we observe all around: the powerful fighting to “change the world” in ways that essentially keep it the same, and “giving back” in ways that sustain an indefensible distribution of influence, resources, and tools. Is there a better way?

One thing that unites those who voted for Trump and those who despaired at his being elected is a sense that the country requires transformational reform. The question we confront is whether moneyed elites, who already rule the roost in the economy and exert enormous influence in the corridors of political power, should be allowed to continue their conquest of social change and of the pursuit of greater equality. The only thing better than controlling money and power is to control the efforts to question the distribution of money and power. The only thing better than being a fox is being a fox asked to watch over hens.

“She had absorbed the ascendant message, all but unavoidable for the elite American college student, that those tools were essential to serving others. The best way to bring about meaningful reform was to apprentice in the bowels of the status quo.”

Much of what appears to be reform in our time is in fact the defense of stasis. When we see through the myths that foster this misperception, the path to genuine change will come into view. It will once again be possible to improve the world without permission slips from the powerful.

Some argue that the new private world-changing, led by people, businesses, foundations, is preferable to the old-fashioned public, democratic way:

“In a bygone era government was solely responsible for addressing the nation’s biggest problems, from building the interstate highway system to the New Deal social programs. However, today’s challenges are more complicated and interconnected than ever before and cannot be solved by a single actor or solution. That is why government has an opportunity to engage with the actors in the Impact Economy from non-profits to businesses.”

It is curious to see the US government, arguably the most powerful institution in human history, reduced to being a “single actor” among actors, one inadequate to modern problems. Building a continental highway network

or waging a New Deal was easy, according to this view. But today's problems were too hard for the government. They had therefore to be solved through partnerships among rich donors, NGOs, and the public sector. There is no mention of the fact that this method, by putting the moneyed into a leadership position on public problem-solving, gives them the power to thwart solutions that threaten them. If your preferred way of solving big problems requires my money and gives me a board seat on the initiative, I may not encourage solutions involving inheritance taxes or the breakup of companies like the one from which I have made the money I am giving.

These elites believe and promote the idea that social change should be pursued principally through the free market and voluntary action, not public life and the law and the reform of the systems that people share in common; that it should be supervised by the winners of capitalism and their allies, and not be antagonistic to their needs; and that the biggest beneficiaries of the status quo should play a leading role in the status quo's reform.

Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. Where the theory goes, deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision tend to follow. While personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being. This principle extends into the realms of welfare, education, health care, and even pensions. It has ushered in a new age of responsibility, in which responsibility—which once meant the moral duty to help and support others—has come to suggest an obligation to be self-sufficient.

“It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.”

This idea that self-love trickles down to others is an early ancestor of win-win-ism. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith elaborates on the idea with his famous metaphor of the “invisible hand.”

“The rich in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands

whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society.”

The selfish pursuit of prosperity, Smith is arguing, takes care of everyone just as well as actually attempting to take care of everyone. From this general idea familiar theories derive. Trickle-down economics. A rising tide lifts all boats. Entrepreneurs expand the pie. Smith tells the rich man to focus on running his business on the assumption that positive social consequences will occur automatically, as a happy by-product of his selfishness. Through the magic of the “free market”—an oxymoron ever since the first regulation was imposed on it—he unwittingly arranges for the common good.

The new win-win-ism is arguably a far more radical theory than the “invisible hand.” That old idea merely implied that capitalists should not be excessively regulated, lest the happy by-products of their greed not reach the poor. The new idea goes further, in suggesting that capitalists are more capable than any government could ever be of solving the underdogs’ problems.

She could tell herself what so many bright young people tell themselves these days and thereby get through the months and years: that they are entering the world of money in order to master the tools needed to help those it has forsaken.

“Now that I’ve been trained to structure, break down, and solve business problems, I can apply those same skills to any issue or challenge I choose.”

Then she began to see through that idea. From the outside, she had been awed by the claim that people trained in business would gain some elusive way of thinking that was vital to helping people. Once inside, though, she realized that while this way of thinking was indeed useful for helping a tire company shave costs or a solar panel maker select a promising market for global expansion, it didn’t deserve its status as a cure-all across domains. Accountancy, medicine, education, espionage, and seafaring all have their own tools and modes of analysis, but none of those approaches was widely promoted as the solution to virtually everything else.

“It’s like, ‘Okay, we caused these problems, but we also know how to solve problems.’ So this is just the new problem that we’re going to solve—the one that we have caused.”

Perhaps the biggest risk of putting a corporate consulting firm in charge of designing fixes for societal problems is that it may sideline certain fundamental questions about power. The MarketWorld problem-solver does not tend to hunt for perpetrators and is not interested in blame.

Once seen as sacrificial to growth and returns, pursuing a social mission now plays a big role when attracting both customers and employees. Consider a Venn diagram used to illustrate an investment thesis created in view of this trend: One circle is labeled “Better for me (self-interest)”; the other is labeled “Better for the world (broader interest).” The overlap is labeled “exponential opportunity.” A charitable interpretation of this idea is that the world deserves to benefit from flourishing business. A more sinister interpretation is that business deserves to benefit from any attempt to better the condition of the world.

The working philosophy of many technology founders could be called Optimism, though in many ways it seems to be just a slightly tech-inflected version of standard-issue neoliberalism. The ideology’s central thrust is a belief in the possibility of the win-win and the harmony of human interests. People typically think of government and market working in opposition to each other—and regulation being the tool by which government constrains the market. This new ideology believes that government is an investor in capitalism. The government works not as a check on capitalism but for capitalism—to make capitalism successful, to ensure that the conditions for its success are in place: that there is a decent education system to produce the requisite number of workers, that trade agreements get written so as to allow companies to buy from and sell to far-off places, that the infrastructure allows trucks to get produce to the supermarket before it rots, that their property is protected.

“The next twenty, thirty years, my best piece of advice is stay alive. Don’t take really stupid risks, physically, I’m saying. And get ready, because the things that are coming down the pipe in terms of genetic research, our life spans and the health of our lives are going to be longer, and it’s going to challenge the very basis of our current civilization: The way things are structured today are not going to be relevant to what the reality is going to be of people who are going to have so much knowledge and

living so long and healthier lives. The idea of retiring at seventy is gonna seem like people telling you at thirty to retire.”

Here is someone who is engaging in advocacy that disguised itself as prophecy, which is common among technology barons and one of the ways in which they mask the fact of their power in an age rattled by the growing anxieties of the powerless. VCs and entrepreneurs are considered by many to be thinkers these days, their commercial utterances treated like ideas, and these ideas are often in the future tense: claims about the next world, forged by adding up the theses of their portfolio companies or extrapolating from their own start-up’s mission statement. That people listened to their ideas gave them a chance to launder their self-interested hopes into more selfless-sounding predictions about the world.

For example, a baron wishing to withhold benefits from workers might reframe that desire as a prediction about a future in which every human being is a solo entrepreneur. A social media billionaire keen to profit from the higher advertising revenue that video posts draw, compared to text ones, might recast that interest—and his rewriting of the powerful algorithms he owns to get what he wants—as a prediction that “I just think that we’re going to be in a world a few years from now where the vast majority of the content that people consume online will be video.” And it doesn’t hurt if you inflate your numbers too.

In the Valley, prediction has become a popular way of fighting for a particular future while claiming merely to be describing what has yet to occur. Prediction has a useful air of selflessness to it. Predictors aren’t caught in the here and now of their own appetites and interests. It seems like they aren’t choosing how things will be in the future any more than they chose the color of their eyes. Yet selecting one scenario among many possible scenarios and persuading everybody of its inevitability—and of the futility of a society’s exercising its collective choice among these futures—is a deft way to shape the future. As he predicted the elongation of life and other such “things that are coming down the pipe,” he was in fact pushing those things down the pipe. He was part of a group of elites who had been very smart and very lucky with start-up investments, and who now got to make decisions of enormous social consequence about what to do about the human life span. This power gave them great responsibility and exposed them to the possibility of resentment—unless they convinced people that the future they were fighting for would unfold automatically, would be the fruit of forces rather than their choices, of providence rather than power. Hence the cleverness of the passive framing of his own goals:

“The way things are structured today are not going to be relevant to what the reality is going to be.”

Longer lives for rich people were just something that happened to be coming down the pipe. Not so much a better health care system for all.

The stage lights came up from darkness. Cuddy stood center stage with her hands on her hips, her feet planted shoulder-width apart, tucked into a pair of brown cowboy boots that only added to what would come to be called her signature “power pose.” On the giant screen behind her was an image of Wonder Woman, whose hands and feet were in the same powerful posture, engaged in the same willful taking of space. What she and her colleagues had found was that standing in a forceful position like this could stir confidence in people—and perhaps blunt some effects of the sexism that she had long studied. For twenty seconds that felt like eternity, Cuddy stood there, looking powerful and remaining silent, as the Wonder Woman theme song played. She pivoted from side to side, holding her position.

Then she broke character and smiled. “I’m going to talk to you today about body language,” she began. The title of her talk, revealed on the second slide, was “Power Posing: Gain Power Through Body Language.” She began to explain her and her colleagues’ research showing that without changing any of the larger dynamics of power and sexism and prejudice, there were poses people could strike in private that would help them gain confidence. Without necessarily intending to, she was giving MarketWorld what it craved in a thinker: a way of framing a problem that made it about giving bits of power to those who lack it without taking power away from those who hold it. She was, to use a metaphor she would later employ, giving people a ladder up across a forbidding wall—without proposing to tear down the wall. She was giving people a way of rolling with the waves, instead of trying to stop the ocean.

We might start out by defining two distinct kinds of thinkers, who share in common a desire to develop important ideas and at the same time reach a broad audience. One of these types, the dying one, is the public intellectual, a wide-ranging critic and a foe of power; she perhaps stays aloof from the market, society, or the state, and she proudly bears a duty to point out when an emperor has no clothes. The ascendant type is the thought leader, who is more congenial to the plutocrats who sponsor so much intellectual production today. Thought leaders tend, to know one big thing and believe that their important idea will change the world; they are not skeptics but true believers; they are optimists, telling uplifting stories; they reason inductively from their own experiences more than deductively from authority. They go easy on the powerful. Public intellectuals argue

with each other in the pages of books and magazines; thought leaders give TED talks that leave little space for criticism or rebuttal, and emphasize hopeful solutions over systemic change. Public intellectuals pose a genuine threat to winners; thought leaders promote the winners' values, talking up "disruption, self-empowerment, and entrepreneurial ability."

It can be said that MarketWorld's circuit, and the world of the thought leader more generally, has had many virtuous effects. It has made ideas more accessible and available to many people. It has created, with the new form of videotaped talks, an alternative to the heavy tomes that many people, frankly, didn't read a generation ago and aren't about to start reading now. It has extended the opportunity to reach a wide audience to people from backgrounds long shut out by the old gatekeepers at publishing houses and newspapers. But the world of thought leadership is easily conquered by charlatans. It is long on affirmation without any constructive criticism, emphasizing beautiful storytelling and sidelining the hurly-burly of disputation that helps ideas to get better and keeps bad ones from attracting too many adherents. And it puts thinkers in a compromised relationship to the very thing they are supposed to keep honest and in check: power.

This phenomenon matters far beyond the world of thinkers, because on issue after issue, the ascendant thought leaders, if they are positive, unthreatening, mute about larger systems and structures, congenial to the rich, big into private problem-solving, devoted to win-wins—these thought leaders will edge out other voices, and not just at conferences. They get asked to write op-eds, sign book deals, opine on TV, advise presidents and premiers. And their success could be said to come at the expense of the critics'. For every thought leader who offered advice on how to build a career in a merciless new economy, there were many less-heard critics aspiring to make the economy less merciless.

In an age of inequality, these winners longed to feel, on one hand, that they had some kind of ethical philosophy. They needed language to justify themselves to themselves and others. They needed the idea of change itself to be redefined to emphasize rolling with the waves, instead of trying to stop the ocean. The thought leaders gave these winners what they needed.

The ability of a powerful group to reward those who agree with it and punish those who don't also distorts the marketplace of ideas. This isn't about corruption—beliefs naturally shift in accord with interests. As Upton Sinclair said, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on not understanding it." The result can be an entire society twisted to serve the interests of its most powerful group.

The irony of all this is dark: Scaling back her critique of the system had allowed Cuddy to be wildly popular with MarketWorld elites and more

easily digested by the world at large; and so she became famous, which drew the system of sexism into her life as never before and heightened her awareness of it; and its ferocity convinced her not to take on that system but to conclude that it might never change; and this acquiescence made her turn from uprooting sexism to helping women survive it. She had been drafted into a growing brigade: the theorists of the kind of change that leaves the underlying issues untouched.

Strangely, one of the things that makes it easier to accept the system is that when you do, you will find yourself being told more often that you are changing things. Many genuine agents of change must make peace with never being seen as such, at least within their own lifetimes. One presumes that the scholars mentioned above, having coined the new verbiage of a nation awakening to the realities of identity and power, were rarely stopped on the street and told about the difference they had made in so-and-so's life. And Cuddy, during her years of throwing scholarly rocks at sexism and other prejudices, had to trust that she was changing things, but wasn't told so by the public. Yet when she scaled back her claims, when she depoliticized, when she focused on the actionable, when she accepted that she didn't "see the -isms going away," when she focused on how individual women could navigate a bad system, ironically, at that very moment of relinquishing hope of changing systems in a serious way, she began to be stopped everywhere she went by women who thanked her for changing their lives. Even if she had narrowed her ambitions, she was attracted to the personal gratification that came with the more doable kind of change.

What the thought leaders offer MarketWorld's winners, wittingly or unwittingly, is the semblance of being on the right side of change. The kinds of changes favored by the public in an age of inequality, as reflected from time to time in some electoral platforms, are usually unacceptable to elites. Simple rejection of those types of changes can only invite greater hostility toward the elites. It is more useful for the elites to be seen as favoring change—their kind of change, of course.

Take, for example, the question of educating poor children in a time of declining social mobility. A true critic might call for an end to funding schools by local property taxes and the creation, as in many advanced countries, of a common national pool that funds schools more or less equally. What a thought leader might offer MarketWorld and its winners is a kind of intellectual counteroffer—the idea, say, of using Big Data to better compensate star teachers and weed out bad ones. On the question of extreme wealth inequality, a critic might call for economic redistribution. A thought leader, by contrast, could opine on how foundation bosses should be paid higher salaries so that the poor can benefit from the most capable

leadership. When this denuding of criticism happens on not one or two issues but every issue of import, the thought leaders are not merely suppressing their own ideas and intuitions. They are also participating in MarketWorld's preservation of a troubled status quo by gesturing to change-making.

MarketWorld finds certain ideas more acceptable and less threatening than others and it does its part to help them through its patronage of thought leaders. For example, ideas framed as being about 'poverty' are more acceptable than ideas framed as being about 'inequality.' The two ideas are related. But poverty is a material fact of deprivation that does not point fingers, and inequality is something more worrying: It speaks of what some have and others lack; it flirts with the idea of injustice and wrongdoing; it is relational. Poverty is essentially a question that you can address via charity. A person of means, seeing poverty, can write a check and reduce that poverty. But inequality you can't, because inequality is not about giving back. Inequality is about how you make the money that you're giving back in the first place. Inequality is about the nature of the system. To fight inequality means to change the system. For a privileged person, it means to look into one's own privilege. And, you cannot change it by yourself. You can change the system only together. With charity, essentially, if you have money, you can do a lot of things alone.

Many plutocrats object to shining the spotlight on inequality, instead of the issues they are more comfortable talking about, like poverty or opportunity. They dislike framing the issue in a way that blames them rather than invites them to participate in a solution. They dislike a focus on how money is made rather than how it is given away.

"I just think you should stop ranting at inequality. It's a real turn-off."

In these circles this is an important taboo: Inspire the rich to do more good, but never, ever tell them to do less harm; inspire them to give back, but never, ever tell them to take less; inspire them to join the solution, but never, ever accuse them of being part of the problem.

"Wealth is like an orchard. You have to share the fruit, not the orchard."

A critic in the traditional mold is often a loser figure—a thorn, an outside agitator, a rumpiled cynic. The rising thought leaders, even though their product is ideas, are less like that and more like sidekicks of the powerful—buying parkas in the same Aspen stores, traveling the same conference circuit, reading the same Yuval Noah Harari books, getting paid from the

same corporate coffers, accepting the same basic consensus, observing the same intellectual taboos.

The creation of foundations allowed a small handful of wealthy people like Carnegie and Rockefeller to commit monumental sums of money to the public good and thus gain a say in the nation's affairs that rivaled that of many public officials. Vast new foundations concerned themselves not with niche causes so much as with the general welfare of mankind, much like states. The new philanthropy was professionally managed by an entity analogous to a corporation, and, like governments, it was advised by experts, unlike the more willy-nilly voluntary associations. It was important, Rockefeller wrote at the time, to do "this business of benevolence properly and effectively." This emerging philanthropy would be less and less about the local barn-raising, the coming together to solve common problems, and ever more about the private redistribution of wealth—usually first earned through private capitalist profitmaking—through a 'nonprofit sector.'

Of course, even if inequality was the price of progress, the rising millionaires of the age didn't have to extract quite so much from their industries, and pay the laborers quite so little. Refraining from such greed would allow the laborers to upgrade from cottages, if not to palaces, then at least to decent houses. Carnegie rejected this. There is no choice, he said, but to operate in the most aggressive, if miserly, way, lest you go out of business: Under the law of competition, the employer of thousands is forced into the strictest economies, among which the rates paid to labor figure prominently, and often there is friction between the employer and the employed, between capital and labor, between rich and poor. This is the first step of Carnegie's intellectual two-step: If you want progress, you have to let rich people make their money however they can, even if it widens inequality. Businesspersons deserve this permission, he said, because "this talent for organization and management is rare among men." Its methods aren't to be questioned.

"We accept and welcome therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment, the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few."

Lest there be doubt that these industrial stewards know best, Carnegie said their talent is "proved by the fact that it invariably secures for its possessor enormous rewards." In other words, rich people must be freed to make money however they can, because when they are, they tend to make a lot of money, which in turn brings progress for all. In this way, Carnegie effectively declared the economic system that generates wealth off-limits for the discussion.

The question then arises, and, if the foregoing be correct, it is the only question with which we have to deal: What is the proper mode of administering wealth after the laws upon which civilization is founded have thrown it into the hands of the few?

Actively giving one's own wealth away was the only approach Carnegie supported, because wealth, in his view, belonged to the community. Keeping was hoarding. A rich man should practice "modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance." Of what wealth remained, he was "the mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren." Hoarding was thus akin to thieving the public:

"Men who continue hoarding great sums all their lives, the proper use of which for public ends would work good to the community, should be made to feel that the community, in the form of the state, cannot thus be deprived of its proper share."

Here the justifier of extreme taking had laid out a doctrine of extreme giving. It isn't just good to give to the public. Money that you don't need and that the public could employ isn't really your money. Carnegie was proposing an extreme idea of the right to make money in any which way, and an extreme idea of the obligation to give back.

It is a strange, seemingly contradictory picture: Carnegie at his desk, writing one letter to his lieutenants at the Carnegie Steel Company, imploring them to slash wages, then writing another to one of his philanthropic lieutenants, giving his wealth (the profits earned by slashing those wages) away at his own discretion. For Carnegie, then, inequality was a brief state between the taking and giving phases. Giving back, he wrote, is "the true antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth, the reconciliation of the rich and the poor—a reign of harmony." This idea of temporary inequality is vital: For Carnegie, inequality is transitional—a necessity for progress, but soon reversible thanks to the fruits of that progress.

Carnegie believed that he could not pay workers well, could not be sentimental about how many hours of work were too many, for that would hurt the public interest. But he could give back to the workers. He financed libraries, museums, and other public amenities for the eventual pleasure and edification of his underpaid workers.

"Thus is the problem of Rich and Poor to be solved. The laws of accumulation will be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; intrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it

for the community far better than it could or would have done for itself.”

This is the compromise, the truce, distilled: Leave us alone in the competitive marketplace, and we will tend to you after the winnings are won. The money will be spent more wisely on you than it would be by you. You will have your chance to enjoy our wealth, in the way we think you should enjoy it. Here lay the almost constitutional principles that one day would govern MarketWorld giving: the idea that after-the-fact benevolence justifies anything-goes capitalism; that callousness and injustice in the cutthroat souk are excused by later philanthropy; that giving should not only help the underdogs but also, and more important, serve to keep them out of the top dogs’ hair—and, above all, that generosity is a substitute for and a means of avoiding the necessity of a more just and equitable system and a fairer distribution of power.

He just didn’t trust society to allocate the money properly on his behalf. As the greatest philanthropist of his day, Carnegie managed to remake history. Still surrounded by the libraries and music halls he funded, most people forgot how he amassed his fortune to begin with: by taking illegal kickbacks as a railroad executive, leveraging them into a steel empire protected by government tariffs, colluding with his fellow steel makers to fix prices, and busting unions to keep work hours long and wages low. Carnegie believed all the while that his philanthropic ends justified the brutal means he used to build his wealth. Though not a religious man, he conceived a kind of divine order that placed him at the top. He held up the writings of Herbert Spencer, a philosopher who saw Carnegie and his fellow tycoons as harbingers of a natural march toward prosperity and perfection.

It makes sense, in this light, that the billionaires who oppose higher taxes often philanthropize the most—like Stephen Schwarzman of Blackstone, the private-equity giant. They too want to give back, just on their own terms. Governments are not efficient, the thinking goes; businessmen are. Take this vision to its logical end, and it’s public policy privatized. Philanthropy can do real good, and government can make bad spending decisions, but as these guys have so much power through their wealth that they, instead of the government elected by the people, can decide what’s good and what should be promoted and subsidized. All while hiding behind fig leaves such as the Giving Pledge.

He has a foundation that carries his name. Over the years he’s funded fifteen-hundred scholarships for Brazilians to study abroad and made generous gifts to Harvard, Stanford, and UCLA. He spends money to improve Brazilian public education too. These are good causes. If you add it all up,

though, it appears to be less than what his beer empire spends on lobbying and political campaigns in the United States and Brazil. One of Lemann's largest gifts, a fourteen-million-dollar donation to the University of Illinois, amounted to less than 0.1 percent of his wealth. For someone with a net worth of a hundred-thousand dollars, an equivalent donation would be less than a hundred dollars.

“The key is to meet people where they are and not be judgmental. When I worked in Harlem, it was hard getting parents to bring kids to medical appointments. There was a temptation to judge and criticize: Here we are trying to help you, and you can't even get up off your couch. That's not the right approach. They have their own logic, their own story. You don't knock on the door and say, ‘You're a loser. You're a bad’ You've got to meet people where they are.

That's my view writ large. And so where we're meeting them [the highly privileged] where they are, which is they actually believe that they are doing good, they are contributing to our economy. They're contributing to the tax base. They are contributing to philanthropy through their own personal giving and commitments to boards and whatever. So that's where they are.”

The analogy is telling, because it illustrates how an ethic of not judging that had developed to protect the weak could serve just as well to guard the strong. Meeting people where they are means one thing when applied to a mother in Harlem, juggling three jobs, two kids, and their appointments. It is quite another thing for the private equity tycoon to enjoy that same suspension of judgment. Should he, like the mother, really be met wherever he is?

Renzi dropped a casual aside in talking about his labor-market reforms that reflected another aspect of the globalist consensus. He said Italy's rewriting, the previous year, of its hiring-and-firing laws had finally caught the country up to the standards of Germany and Britain. He added, “Obviously, USA arrived to this point twenty years ago.” The globalists believed that there were “right answers” in public policy—answers that made a place safe for the foreign investors that Macri had been worried about—and having a very flexible labor market, in which it is easy to hire and fire people, is one of those right answers. The right answer, then, was not arrived at democratically: It was not the answer the people of Italy had chosen, by action or inaction, during those twenty years of “delay.” It was

a globalist truism that hovered over the country, waiting for it to get with the program and accept the prudent way of the world. And when at last it did, the nation's prime minister could describe those earlier years, defined by other choices, as a delay. Italians, not famous for punctuality, were late in arriving at the globalists' "right answer." Leaders like Renzi saw the checklist program pushed by multilateral agencies and foreign investors as possessing a moral validity that democratic choices by his citizens lacked, because they were bad for efficiency and growth.

Bill Clinton piled on to this idea of false consciousness:

"All these English counties voted to give up economic aid from the EU. And they needed it, but they had no idea what they were doing. They just wanted to come inside and close the door. There is a kind of a visceral us-and-them mentality developing."

This was the diagnosis of the former president of the United States a few months after Brexit's unexpected success, and two months before his wife's unexpected defeat to a populist demagogue who allied himself with the Brexit campaign. The people setting themselves the task of understanding the anger around them were precommitted to the idea that the anger had no possible basis in reason or conscious choice. They could not process people who saw the world fundamentally differently than MarketWorlders did and, misguided or not, wanted to be heard.

Here was represented the complex of Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) values in a single panel: doing the market-friendly thing instead of the idealistic thing; elevating what the people supposedly needed economically over what they wanted politically; believing that the right, data-driven, technocratic answers speak for themselves; judging politicians' success by investors' returns; thinking of market forces as an inevitability one must give in to, make way for, adapt to.

The four panelists and Clinton speculated about "these people," as Okonjo-Iweala called them. They mused about the anger on the other side and came up with convenient theories. Clinton offered that "the conflict model works better at a time of economic distress." Okonjo-Iweala suggested that making vaccines more accessible—her bailiwick as the leader of a global vaccine alliance called GAVI—might help to reduce anger. She didn't mention the bankers for whom she now worked, and how it might also reduce anger if they were punished for their sins, if they compensated the public for the bailouts they got, if they had the humility to stop thwarting regulation of their conduct. She plugged vaccines to the MarketWorld crowd

in language they would understand: They didn't just save lives; they were an investment, for healthy citizens mean more growth and taxes paid and companies started. Vaccines, she said, are "one of the best buys in economics today," since "\$1 invested in vaccines returns \$16." She gushed, "The rate of return on that is very high."

A moment later, Okonjo-Iweala said the globalist tribe represented in the room needed to "debunk those who are trying to use them as a platform"—the 'them' being the angry voters. The people were being used; they were rubes. There was a total refusal to accept that angry people were actively, concertedly trying to tell their fellow citizens something, however flawed. And they weren't here to tell them what it was in person. The panel members saw themselves as above and apart from fearful, conflictual politics. Their politics was technocratic, dedicated to discovering right answers that were knowable and out there, and just needed to be analyzed and spreadsheeted into being. Their politics had borrowed from the business world the pleasantness and mutualism of the win-win. It was striking to have five political figures share a stage and have not one moment of real argument. They all seemed to suppose that the good society was the society of entrepreneurs, whose success was tantamount to that of the society itself. That the weaving of the world was among the most vital human strivings. That government should work as a partner to the private sector, not a counterweight to it.

"But we aren't engaging in politics when we come to CGI or Davos or the Aspen Institute or Skoll. We are just helping people."

Many—if not most—people who get together in these congregations don't think of what they're doing as politics. But of course it's politics. It's just a politics that has a different locus and has a different view of who matters and how you can change things, and has a different theory of change and who the agents of change are. To put it another way, if you are trying to shape the world for the better, you are engaging in a political act—which raises the question of whether you are employing an appropriately political process to guide the shaping. The problem with the globalists' vision of world citizens changing the world through partnerships is that you're not accountable to anybody, because it is just a bunch of other global citizens like you as your audience. The whole idea about having a polity, having a demos, is that there's accountability within that demos. That's what a political system is supposed to ensure and these mechanisms don't. The political system is not just Congress or the Supreme Court or governorships.

It is all of those things and other things. It is civic life. It is the habit of solving problems together, in the public sphere, through the tools of government and in the trenches of civil society. It is solving problems in ways that give the people you are helping a say in the solutions, that offer that say in equal measure to every citizen, that allow some kind of access to your deliberations or at least provide a meaningful feedback mechanism to tell you it isn't working. It is not re-imagining the world at conferences.

When elites solve public problems privately, they can do so in ways that contribute to democracy, and they can do so in ways that disrupt it. The former occurs when elite help contributes to and enlarges the public goods provided by the state, and attends to interests not readily provided for by the state. But the same elite help, backed by the same noble intentions, can instead disrupt democracy when it replaces the public sphere with all manner of private initiatives for special public purposes. These latter works don't simply do what government cannot do. They crowd out the public sector, further reducing both its legitimacy and its efficacy, and replace civic goals with narrower concerns about efficiency and markets.

How can private hotel ballroom hangouts have their way with democracies in possession of their own standing armies? The seasoned and astute private world-changer seeks to alter the public conversation about which social issues matter, sets an agenda for how they matter, and specifies who is the preferred provider of services to address these issues without any engagement with the deliberative processes of civil society. The savviest of these elite saviors recognize that they live in democracies and respect that. They don't ignore public opinion, but that doesn't mean they base their help on that opinion. The disruptive approach to private helping in lieu of soliciting public input, seeks to influence or change public opinion and demand.

For example, what you didn't hear asked at CGI was: Didn't the beauty industry fuel the very commodification of women that sustained gender inequality? In a world of true gender equality, might not the beauty industry shrink? Isn't it possible that there would be millions fewer nails done and heads blow-dried and bottles of foundation sold in the egalitarian world the panelists claimed to want? Whatever is deeply, essentially female—the life in a woman's expression, the feel of her flesh, the shape of her breasts, the transformations after childbirth of her skin—is being reclassified as ugly, and ugliness as disease. This perceived ugliness is good for business, because industries like retail and advertising—not to mention salons and plastic surgeons—are fueled by sexual dissatisfaction.

If anyone truly believes that the same ski-town conferences and fellowship programs, the same politicians and policies, the same entrepreneurs and social businesses, the same campaign donors, the same thought leaders, the

same consulting firms and protocols, the same philanthropists and reformed Goldman Sachs executives, the same win-wins and doing-well-by-doing-good initiatives and private solutions to public problems that had promised grandly, if superficially, to change the world—if anyone thinks that the MarketWorld complex of people and institutions and ideas that failed to prevent this mess even as it harped on making a difference, and whose neglect fueled populism’s flames, is also the solution, wake them up by tapping them, gently, with this book. For the inescapable answer to the overwhelming question—Where do we go from here?—is: somewhere other than where we have been going, led by people other than the people who have been leading us.

To do a modest bit of good while doing nothing about the larger system is to keep the painting. You are chewing on the fruit of an injustice. You may be working on a prison education program, but you are choosing not to prioritize the pursuit of wage and labor laws that would make people’s lives more stable and perhaps keep some of them out of jail. You may be sponsoring a loan forgiveness initiative for law school students, but you are choosing not to prioritize seeking a tax code that would take more from you and cut their debts. Your management consulting firm may be writing reports about unlocking trillions of dollars’ worth of women’s potential, but it is choosing not to advise its clients to stop lobbying against the social programs that have been shown in other societies to help women achieve the equality fantasized about in consultants’ reports.

Economistic reasoning dominates our age, and we may be tempted to focus on the first half of each of the above sentences—a marginal contribution you can see and touch—and to ignore the second half, involving a vaguer thing called complicity. But elites should view what they allow to be done in their name, what they refuse to resist, as being as much of a moral action as the initiatives they actively promote.

Today’s “climate wealth opportunity” is an opportunity for “philanthropists” to expand their epic largesse accumulated via the exploitation of labour coupled with the destruction of the natural world. Through the magic of language and framing, the money captured from the citizenry is repackaged as a gift from those that stole it. Criminals repackaged into divine beings via the media construct and societal conditioning.

No amount of charity in spending such fortunes can compensate in any way for the misconduct in acquiring them.

Billionaires use philanthropy to bribe us not to hate them. We must respond by redoubling our hate. Despite having wealth so vast that it is a challenge even to comprehend its magnitude, Jeff Bezos has long been known as one of the world’s stingiest billionaires. He was the only one of the

world's top five billionaires not to sign Warren Buffett's "Giving Pledge," and for a long time limited his charitable activity to such idiosyncratic gestures as giving away free bananas on the streets of Seattle. He lives extravagantly, having bought the largest private residence in Washington, D.C., a 27,000 square-foot megamansion, in addition to many other homes. Bezos has previously expressed little interest in charity, saying that instead he plans to spend his fortune on establishing his own private space program.

"The only way that I can see to deploy this much financial resource is by converting my Amazon winnings into space travel."

Lately, however, whether because his winnings have also purchased him a functioning heart or more likely because Bezos realizes that his status as a cartoonish villain could hurt Amazon's growth, Bezos has started giving out a bit of cash here and there. He started drawing up plans for a network of schools where "the child will be the customer," whatever that means—it sounds awful—and has recently publicly announced that he has given \$100 million on various anti-homelessness charities.

I am not very impressed by billionaires making large public donations to things, for a very simple reason: If you have billions of dollars, there is only so much luxury you can buy yourself. You can buy five houses, as Bezos has. But after a certain number of houses, it becomes impossible even to visit them all. Anyone who has played the game where you try to spend Bill Gates' money knows that it's not actually easy to come up with ways of frittering away billions upon billions of dollars even if you are extremely selfish. Once you have everything, though, there is still one thing you can spend your money on: power. Sure you've got a 27,000 square foot house. But you also have something else, something even more satisfying: You get to decide who lives and who dies. If you give a person who urgently needs medical treatment the money to pay for it, they will be in your debt forever. You will sacrifice nothing, and you will get to play God by going around bestowing your favor on those who please you.

That's basically what I think philanthropists are doing. They're just enjoying the power that comes with having a lot of money. Always think of billionaires like you would think of feudal lords. If a lord wanders the land handing out trinkets to his flatterers, do we think of him as a good person? No, of course not. Philanthropy is not selfless. You give up nothing and yet you get something in return: People tell you you're a wonderful person. Who wouldn't want that? It's just purchasing a good reputation.

Now, if the lord gave up all his riches and distributed them to the peasants, and didn't put out a press release about it but simply went to live

as a normal person, we might think of them quite differently. That might be admirable: They were given great power over other people, and instead of wielding it, they gave it out to others to decide for themselves how to use it. Instead of the lord's idiosyncratic preferences (bananas for all!) guiding what would happen in society, resources were divvied up democratically.

Let us talk briefly about what it means for a billionaire of Bezos' wealth to give away \$100 million. It is difficult to understand what billions of dollars really mean, but it's been pointed out that if you want to think about this in relatable terms, Bezos giving away this sum is basically the equivalent of a person earning \$50,000 giving away \$45. Similarly, Michael Bloomberg made the largest one-week political ad buy in history, spending \$31,000,000 or 0.06 percent of his net worth. For a family with the median net worth of \$97,300, this would be \$55.86. These comparisons are actually misleading, though, because they overstate how much Bezos or Bloomberg is "giving up." This is because of diminishing utility, familiar from economics 101. The difference in satisfaction between having zero cookies and one cookie is much greater than the difference between one cookie and two cookies, and by the time you get to the difference between 10 cookies and 11 cookies, it's negligible.

A person's first few dollars are very valuable. If a homeless person finds \$10 on the ground, it will be significant to them. \$10 does not mean the same thing to Jeff Bezos, however. In fact, it might not even be worth him pausing to pick up the money. So it's not necessarily right to say that Bezos giving \$100 million is the equivalent of you giving \$45. \$45 is a lot to you if you earn \$50,000 a year. For you, if you give the \$45 to charity, it could be one nice restaurant meal that you have to give up that year. Bezos, on the other hand, will never have to give up a nice restaurant meal ever in his life. So: Instead of saying that Bezos giving \$100 million is like you giving \$45, it's more accurate to say that Bezos giving \$100 million is like you giving... nothing. Absolutely nothing. It makes no difference to his life. He has sacrificed zilch.

I think this is important: We should not conspire in the belief that rich people are being good when they do charity work. They are doing something that is in their interest, for several reasons:

1. It lets them play God and essentially run society as they please. Bezos is interested in Montessori schools, so his schools are going to be Montessori. Not because that was decided democratically, but because being a billionaire makes you a kind of king.
2. People will flatter you and tell you how good you are.

3. It involves giving up absolutely nothing.

We on the left have contempt and scorn for billionaires who do this, in part because they are simply acting as private governments. Usually, they try to avoid paying taxes and will fight to the death before they accept any new forms of mandatory wealth redistribution—Amazon crushed a small tax in Seattle that was designed to help the homeless. What Bezos wants is not a democracy: He wants us to live in Bezosland, where the schools are as he designs them and more money is spent on his personal space travel than on housing. Mark Zuckerberg and Bill Gates are similar: Both were willing to spend money on education, if it was spent their way. This is not benevolence. It is megalomania, and should be treated accordingly.

The principle is simple. There should not be feudal lords making decisions for the rest of us. The fact that one individual can spend \$100 million and not even notice is a problem. At a time when schools are crumbling and 4 million children go homeless each year, it's despicable. It's very important that when someone like Bezos, who makes money by working his employees to the brink, tries to buy "moral credits" on the cheap, we heap contempt on him. We cannot let people like this get away with what they're trying to do, which is to soften our feelings toward them so that we will let them keep their status. They know that if the lord is evil, we will be more inclined to overthrow him, and if the lord appears good, it won't be as easy to make the case that a feudal system is indefensible.

But such a system is indefensible, whether or not the lord hands out trinkets. It's difficult, of course, because to the recipients of these bribes they do mean a lot: These anti-homelessness charities might be transformed overnight by a donation that means little to Bezos, and many Walton Family-funded charter schools might actually be incredible places for the small number of poor children who get to go to them. It is important, though, that we be "resolutely ungrateful," because we must raise our expectations. You do not get credit for doing something that wasn't hard and still leaves you as the wealthiest person on earth. You do not even get partial credit. Bezos is the same person today as he was yesterday, and the fact that he has recognized that it is not in the interest of Amazon, Inc. for him to be universally loathed by a public that sees him for what he is does not mean that we should withhold our scorn. Rather, we should direct it toward him at a greater volume than ever before.

Corporate Fuckery

Robbed Blind

“It is a sociopolitical nightmare to have someone with lots of interest and no power. They can create a huge amount of problems. So it’s very important to engage those people—to help them understand.”

You might think it’s always “bad for business” to cause disaster. You’d be very wrong.

Consider residents of deeply conservative parts of Louisiana—why are they so opposed to environmental regulations even as they suffer from environmental catastrophes that stricter regulations could have prevented? I don’t wish here to dive into the many reasons why that is. Instead, I’d like to look at one popular belief that is very easy to believe but also very wrong. When a reporter talks to people about the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, she discovers that they are all strongly opposed to Barack Obama’s temporary moratorium on deep sea drilling, even though they were also appalled by the spill. One of the interviewees says the following:

“It’s not in the company’s own interest to have a spill or an accident. They try hard so if there’s a spill, it’s probably the best the company could do.”

I think it’s easy to see why people believe this. There’s actually a persuasive-sounding logic to it. Many libertarian economists believe it entirely. The argument, expanded a bit, goes: The fact that corporations pursue their own financial self-interest means that regulation is not needed. A company that causes disasters is certainly not helping its own profits. BP didn’t want to spill all that oil in the Gulf, obviously. BP has every incentive to avoid oil spills, because they want to keep the oil! Accidents happen, no company is perfect, but ultimately profits and safety coincide. A corporate executive who bungles like this is not actually pursuing the self-interest of

the company, and so when corporations produce environmental catastrophes it is not because they are pathologically self-interested, but rather because they were not pursuing their self-interest well enough. Greed is still good.

Or: Why would Boeing want its planes to drop out of the sky? Why would they want to lose customers, send their stock price plummeting, embroil themselves in tort lawsuits from the families of the dead, and create a giant public scandal? Boeing wants its planes to stay in the air. So while they'll never be perfect, you shouldn't blame the lax federal oversight or their devotion to profits over people.

It's true that accidents themselves are not in a company's self-interest, in that no company gains anything from a horrible accident that destroys their equipment (and possibly their employees' lives, though from a company's perspective employees are fungible). But "the behavior that produces accidents" can absolutely be in a company's self-interest, and accidents don't always sufficiently damage a company's self-interest to make it worthwhile to avoid them. Eating the cost of a few accidents here and there might end up being more profitable than extreme precaution.

Let's assume that corporations operate according to Milton Friedman's idea that their only responsibility is to increase their profit. Boeing does that by selling functional planes, BP does it by successfully getting oil out of the ground without spilling it. If an accident happens, their bottom line hurts. But let's imagine the following scenario: A company can choose to produce a product through Method A or Method B. Method A costs half as much as Method B but carries a one in ten risk of releasing a giant toxic cloud that will kill a thousand people. Method B is more expensive but does not carry any risk of producing a giant toxic cloud.

Our company doesn't want to produce a giant toxic cloud. And maybe a one in ten chance means that it's better to go with method B. But that depends: Why would the company want to avoid killing people with toxic emissions? On Milton Friedman's theory of how a corporation should normatively operate—and let me remind you, this guy won a Not-a-Nobel Prize and Obama's chief economic advisor declared that "we're all Friedmanites"—a corporation should actually be indifferent to whether those people live or die. Its sole responsibility is to its shareholders, and we presume that it's bad for those shareholders if the company kills people.

But why is it bad for them? The toxic cloud isn't going to kill Westport, Connecticut. It's going to kill a bunch of poor Louisianans who live next to the new petrochemical plant. The only thing that can make it bad for the company is the consequences of doing it. Meaning: If we have strong tort laws, and courts make sure that companies pay their victims a TON of money, so much that they would never adopt Method A, then it's no

longer in a company's interest to choose Method A. If our criminal laws are enforced against corporate wrongdoers, and the executives who chose Method A are charged with murder, then that creates a particularly powerful incentive. If there are strong crusading media institutions that investigate corporate wrongdoing, so that the public will turn against any company that is so irresponsible as to choose Method A, then Method A won't be worthwhile. But if, say, corporations had legal teams so vast that they could ensure victims would never see a court judgment, or if "tort reform" limited damages, or if prosecutors declined to prosecute rich people, or if media institutions were themselves for-profit and incentivized to produce clickbait over important investigations, then there would be no reason not to go ahead and release that cloud!

A Friedmanite—a.k.a. sociopathic—company only has incentives not to hurt people to the extent that there are strong external institutions, in the form of government, media, consumer groups, and labor groups, that can create those incentives. If hurting people doesn't cost money, then it isn't in the interest of companies to avoid cheap, risky practices. The "expected return" on a dangerously risky move might be high enough that it is "economically rational" (not to be confused with being actually rational).

It's also important to remember that just because a gamble doesn't pay off, doesn't mean it was the wrong move. Even if there are strong coercive external institutions that punish toxic cloud emission, which means that if you emit the toxic cloud your company will be severely hurt, a company might still take the gamble on Method A, because the potential rewards are so high. If there's a 99/100 chance that by pressing a given button you get a billion dollars, and a 1/100 chance that you'll be instantly killed, "self interest" doesn't necessarily dictate that you'll stay away from the button. It depends on whether you're feeling lucky. The 2008 financial crisis was like this. People made piles and piles of money off risky investments, until they didn't. They weren't necessarily "failing to pursue their own interest" just because they took risks. For many of them, it was probably a smart move that turned out well. Every company takes risks. What if playing dice with people's lives actually turns out to be good for BP, on the whole? It might go wrong once or twice, but what if overall they make out pretty well from putting quantity of oil over safety, because the oil makes up for the accident costs? Then what?

To a leftist, all of this is eye-rollingly obvious, especially because we have very clear evidence of how this works in practice. Boeing's frantic need to beat Airbus, and the absence of independent oversight, led to calamity. Or look at climate change: Fossil fuel companies suffer no consequences for the damage they do, so it's not in their self-interest to stop. If we applied tort

law to the fossil fuel industry, their self-interest would adjust accordingly. Tobacco companies lied to people about cigarettes up until the moment that external accountability made lying a bad idea. But if they expected the law would never catch up with them, and thought their propaganda campaign could be successful, lying was probably the correct business move.

I am actually quite sympathetic to people who swallow these kinds of talking points. They can truly sound persuasive: Why would Boeing not want safe planes? How could bad planes be in their interest? But risking lives can absolutely be in a company's financial interest, if, as in the case of tobacco companies and fossil fuel companies, you don't actually have to pay a penalty for the lives you take. And even if you do risk a big penalty, if there's a big chance that a risk will create a bonanza, and a small chance it will bankrupt you, you might serve your shareholders by taking the risk. Limited liability offers them pretty comfortable protection. It's important to be clear about this, because it's easy to think that what companies that cause accidents do is recklessly and foolishly pursue their self-interest, and the more sober-minded pursuit of self-interest would be okay. In other words, you're just doing Friedman's idea wrong, rather than Friedman's idea being wrong. But it's pathological self-interest itself that's the problem, because without the threat of consequences there's no reason not to pursue harmful causes of action.

BP certainly wants to convince the ordinary Louisianans that the company is a partner and friend. Why would we want to hurt you? We're all in this together! We're bringing you jobs. We're cleaning up the spill, and we certainly don't want another. Don't believe them. Milton Friedman was quite clear: All they want is money, and if they can convince people that "big government" is bad and regulation is unnecessary, then environmental destruction is costless. The companies tearing down the Amazon rainforests, and displacing native populations, are behaving precisely as Friedman would have wanted. Doing harm is only bad for business if we make it bad for business.

"The enterprises of the country are aggregating vast corporate combinations of unexampled capital, boldly marching, not for economic conquests only, but for political power. The question will arise, and arise in your day, though perhaps not fully in mine, 'Which shall rule—wealth or man; which shall lead—money or intellect; who shall fill public stations—educated and patriotic free men, or the feudal serfs of corporate capital?'"

—Edward G. Ryan, Chief Justice, Supreme Court (WI), 1873

“If we will not endure a king as a political power, we should not endure a king over the production, transportation, and sale of any of the necessaries of life.”

—Senator John Sherman (R-OH), 1890

“I do not expect to see monopoly restrain itself. If there are men in this country big enough to own the government of the United States, they are going to own it.”

—Teddy Roosevelt

Until the 1910s, telegraphy was so expensive that only businesses could afford the service. But Western Union wired offices in the Capitol Building and gave elected officials unlimited free use of the system. According to memos in the Western Union archive, the company privately considered this the “cheapest means” of calming its critics in Washington. Freebies were merely a first line of defense—and relatively innocuous compared with Western Union’s other ploys. Its protective shell was the press. More specifically, Western Union formed an impregnable alliance with the Associated Press (AP)—an organization that had achieved an impressive monopoly of its own.

The AP supplied American newspapers with an endless stream of copy that helped them to economically fill their pages. Most American newspapers couldn’t afford to send correspondents to Washington or Europe, and the AP’s network of reporters allowed them to fill that gap. More than 80 percent of the copy in western papers, according to one survey, came from the wire service. Newspapers relied on the AP, and the AP exploited that reliance. It insisted that its clients use no other wire service. Even worse, it insisted that its clients never say a bad public word about the organization. It was an enviable business model.

Certainly, Western Union salivated over the prospect of acquiring a piece of that action. But the optics of the monopolist acquiring even greater power were terrible. So Western Union stumbled upon an even more elegant solution. The two monopolists of the wires would conspire so that they mutually protected each other. Western Union would grant the AP exclusive use of its wires, at a nicely discounted rate. In return, the AP signed a contract that declared that its members would “not in any way encourage or support any opposition or competing telegraph companies.” The quid pro quo couldn’t have been any clearer. Newspapers that spoke ill of Western Union were tossed from the AP—as was the case with the Omaha Republican, punished for having the temerity to describe the telegraph company as an “onerous” and “grievous” monopoly.

Los Angeles once had one of the finest public transit systems in the world, but Standard Oil and General Motors jointly bought it and closed it down. They then pressured the California legislature to build freeways. And soon, life in Los Angeles became almost impossible without a car. Homes, stores, businesses, and even schools and recreation centers were now so far from each other that they could only be reached by automobile.

The distribution of wealth is not determined by nature. It is determined by public policy. America's corporate and political elites now form a regime of their own and they're privatizing democracy. All the benefits—the tax cuts, policies, and rewards—flow in one direction: up.

In a rigged economy, you may be tricked into thinking you are paying less in taxes, when in reality you just pay privately, typically at higher prices, for what your taxes used to cover (as many have seen with garbage collection and health care). Add your taxes and higher personal spending, and your actual burdens are heavier than those of people in other modern countries who make less and pay higher taxes, but use the wholesale buying power of government to hold down costs.

Before the twentieth century, contracts to lobby government officials were not enforceable on the grounds that lobbying was contrary to public policy. In the 1874 case *Trist v. Child*, for example, Trist, a former diplomat, had hired Child to lobby Congress to authorize payment of money Trist claimed the government owed him and then refused to pay Child when Congress finally came through. Child sued. The Supreme Court declined to enforce the contract between Trist and Child, reasoning that such contracts could lead to corruption.

“If any of the great corporations of the country were to hire adventurers who make market of themselves in this way, to procure the passage of a general law with a view to the promotion of their private interests, the moral sense of every right-minded man would instinctively denounce the employer and the employed as steeped in corruption, and the employment as infamous.”

That logic obviously failed to impress the Supreme Court eighty-six years later when it decided that corporations are people under the First Amendment, entitled to hire as many lobbyist adventurers as they can possibly afford.

Economists have a simple technique for measuring whether an industry is competitive or tending toward monopoly. It is called the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, or HHI. The formula squares the market share of each

company, then adds up the squares. It's easier than it sounds. In an industry with one firm that has 100 percent market share, the HHI score will be $100 \times 100 = 10,000$. Or, if fifty firms each have two percent of the market, then the score would be 200 ($2 \times 2 = 4$; $4 \times 50 = 200$). On the Justice Department scale, scores up to 1,000 indicate competitive markets, while scores higher than 1,800 are seen as solid evidence that competition is weak to nonexistent.

In 1978, when America had thirty-six Class I railroads, the HHI score was 589, indicating robust competition. By 2004, however, just seven remaining Class I railroads meant the HHI score had soared to 2,263, reinforcing what was already obvious: little competition survived in the marketplace. Although the text of the 1980 Staggers Rail Act cites competition four times as the goal of the law, the effect has been the opposite. To say that there are seven Class I railroads is also misleading. Twin duopolies, one west of the Mississippi River, the other east, dominate rail freight hauling. In the West there are the Union Pacific and Warren Buffett's Burlington Northern Santa Fe. In the East there are CSX and Norfolk-Southern. As long as each of the big players elects not to cut prices to take major customers away from its rival, these duopolies function as price-inflating, profit-making machines to the detriment of the overall economy.

The concept of economic moats is a cornerstone of our stock-investment philosophy. Successful long-term investing involves more than just identifying solid businesses, or finding businesses that are growing rapidly, or buying cheap stocks. Successful investing also involves evaluating whether a business will stand the test of time. The concept of an economic moat can be traced back to legendary parasite Warren Buffett, whose annual Berkshire shareholder letters over the years contain many references to him looking to invest in businesses with "economic castles protected by unbreachable 'moats.'" Moats are important to investors because any time a company develops a useful product or service, it isn't long before other firms try to capitalize on that opportunity by producing a similar—if not better—product. Basic economic theory says that in a perfectly competitive market, rivals will eventually eat up any excess profits earned by a successful business. In other words, competition makes it difficult for most firms to generate strong growth and margins over an extended period of time.

Protecting railroads from competition has an obvious implication: every time you turn on a light in your home or buy a product made with the help of electricity, you're paying more than you would in a competitive market. When a business has a monopoly, as railroads do in many parts of the country, regulation is supposed to act as a substitute for competition, a proxy for market forces. But that assumption breaks down when regulators

identify with the industry more than with customers; then the captains of industry get both undeserved riches and the wherewithal to further the tilt of the system in their favour. Easy profits enable them to make more political donations and offer more jobs to former regulators and their spouses, some of whom know how to get politicians on the oversight committees to make sure that no matter what is said, nothing happens to harm the protected industries.

So ruthless were the nineteenth-century railroads that, as the reformer Henry George wrote in his 1879 book *Progress and Poverty*, railroad monopolists approached the burghers of small towns “as a robber approaches his victim.” The railroads demanded whatever would make them richer, threatening to move their line a few miles this way or that to compel submission. You can still visit the ruins of once-thriving little towns in the Great Plains that became ghost towns because the town fathers dared to resist the demands of railroad barons. Jumping to our time, railroad ownership is more concentrated than in 1887 and the abuse of power as great or greater.

Although two railroads trace the eastern shore of the Red River to Lafayette, the utility’s power plant is twenty miles back upstream on the west side of the river. As it happens, the west bank is Union Pacific’s exclusive province. Well, you might say, why can’t Lafayette negotiate competitive rates from Wyoming to the Lafayette rail yards, then pay Union Pacific a monopoly rate to haul its coal the last twenty miles to the parish’s Rodemacher power plant? Sadly, it doesn’t work that way, and Lafayette pays a monopoly rate for the entire 1,520-mile trip.

“We are a classic captive customer. On ninety-nine percent of the route we have competitive rail service, so we would like to negotiate for competitive rates on that portion, but we cannot.”

The reason is the “bottleneck” decision of the Surface Transportation Board. In 1996, the STB ruled, in essence, that if any portion of a trip is on a monopoly rail line, the monopoly rail can charge monopoly prices not just to the nearest junction with another railroad, but all the way. One implication is that bottlenecks become a good thing for railroads. In the case of coal, two-thirds of which moves under this monopoly-pricing rule, bottlenecks have become a very good, very profitable policy for the carrier, but not the customer.

Union Pacific’s picking of Lafayette’s pockets works out to more than a dollar per week for every man, woman, and child in Lafayette, more than \$200 annually for a family of four. That’s more than enough to finance a 10 percent cut in Lafayette property taxes. Or it could cover free electricity

to Lafayette schools and colleges, relieving taxpayers of that burden, with enough left over for a small property-tax reduction. Looked at another way, that \$6.5 million per year could be spent on local goods and services for the benefit of Lafayette's businesses and workers. Instead, it is extracted from the wallets of local residents and businesses and sent to Omaha, home to both Union Pacific and BNSF owner Warren Buffett.

Buffett often says that his style is to let his managers run their shops, as long as they make their numbers, meaning their expected level of profit. His management style is widely praised in news reports and in profiles of the "Oracle of Omaha." By giving managers the freedom to run their business units as they see fit, Buffett takes on a duty to demand the highest ethical standards. That would not, in my opinion, include gouging customers on coal shipping rates as his BNSF railroad does. Nor would an ethical chief executive allow anyone in his employ ever to suggest that anyone should die to bolster a company's profits. But that is what happens under the Buffett style, in which by his own account he focuses on whether managers—some of whom resort to immoral conduct to give their billionaire boss what he demands—"make their numbers."

In New York the cheap hydropower benefits only a few. Just ten corporations get two-thirds of the cheap power not dedicated to the handful of publicly owned electric utilities in New York. Among those with long-term contracts to buy power at well below the rates anyone else pays are Intel, Occidental Petroleum and Olin, a chemical company. The biggest share—a fourth of Niagara Falls' power—goes to Alcoa for its aluminum smelters at the eastern end of Lake Ontario. This power is so cheap compared to what other industrial customers pay that, over thirty years, Alcoa will save the mind-boggling sum of \$5.6 billion. That is ten times the entire profit Alcoa earned worldwide in 2010. So what does all this cheap power subsidize? About a thousand jobs, filled by workers who earned an average of less than \$60,000 each per year. Divide up the subsidy, and it amounts to about \$150,000 per job annually. Paying the workers in full to stay home would thus save \$90,000 per job each year. That makes the Alcoa subsidy the equivalent of throwing your money over Niagara Falls. The subsidy also means that while Alcoa reports profits to investors, those profits come not from the competitive markets, but this subtle gift of a public resource.

On very hot days, or less often on very cold days, the utilities literally pay lumber mills and smelters, prisons, and public schools to stop drawing power from the grid. Most of these big consumers don't have microgrids. They are 100 percent grid dependent, and using less power means making life pretty unpleasant for their workers and other inhabitants. In New York City, in 2010, sixty-five different facilities had enrolled in one such program.

Reductions at Rikers Island alone that summer accounted for 5.2 megawatts pulled off the grid on the hottest days of the year, providing the Department of Corrections with an incentive payment of \$100,000 for the savings it incurred. It's worth adding that it is easier to take something away from prisoners and other institutionalized persons (like high school students) than from suburbanites. Turning the air-conditioning off in a prison or in a high school—New York's other high performer in 2010 was LaGuardia High School—is, as they say, “picking the low-hanging fruit” off the peak-load tree.

Increasing the cost of all the piped water Americans use by just a penny a gallon taps an extra \$96 billion from consumer pockets per year. That penny would increase the total price that households would pay for piped water from about a billion dollars a week to nearly three billion.

The Montana Supreme Court ruled against Subway because it did not disclose the arbitration requirement prominently on the front page of the contract, as state law required. When Subway appealed to the United States Supreme Court, which takes only a tiny minority of the cases presented to it each year, the court took the case. Its ruling? Eight to one in Subway's favor. Liberal hero Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg held that the Montana law requiring the front-page disclosure was invalid. Why? Because the disclosure requirement applied only to arbitration and not to all types of disputes, making it discriminatory and thus invalid. The decision invalidated similar notice laws in Georgia, Iowa, Missouri, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont. Business lawyers hailed the decision—it obviously enhanced corporate power in such disputes—but consumer advocates did not.

This decision illustrates how the Supreme Court focuses on legal formalism without context and often without recognizing how the law operates in the real world. It is part of a long line of decisions that skew economic power toward corporations that use contracts of adhesion. It also erodes the ancient legal concept that courts must look out for the interests of less sophisticated, less informed and weaker parties if the law is to be merciful and thus widely respected. Ginsburg, supposedly a liberal long known for taking a sharp look at discrimination, in this case hurt many buyers not as sophisticated as she is about discrimination. But it did nothing to hurt her image as a tiny liberal feminist badass—RBG!

The Casarotto case revealed another problem—that the law allows corporations to make promises they have no intention of ever fulfilling and, further, to use those promises to induce people to do all sorts of things, from buying a sandwich shop franchise to accepting a buyout package from a job. A company can put promises in writing and then not fulfill them, without

consequence—promissory fraud. Unless one can prove a positive intention to deceive, not just a lack of an intention to perform, corporations and their agents can make promises to induce people to do business with them and then simply not perform as promised. It is possible to make a promise without having an intention to perform or not to perform and yet under the law not commit fraud. That is because fraud requires “an intention to deceive” when the promise is made. Unless you can prove that the company or its agent intended to defraud you, the company and its agents will not be liable for promissory fraud in courts today. How are you going to prove, though, what the company’s agent intended? How can you establish what the courts call a scheme to defraud? It can be done, but it is extremely difficult unless you can afford, and get a court to approve, subpoenas for company records and you have the time and resources to go through what could be a huge pile of unsorted raw data. Even then, you would likely need to turn up something damning, such as an e-mail boasting about a plan to deceive. Absent such a smoking gun, a company and its agents can explain that they never intended to deceive you, they just did not do what they promised.

Such clauses can even prevent small businesses from alleging that large businesses with whom they’ve contracted have monopolized an industry, thereby giving the small businesses little or no choice but to accept the contract. When the owner of a small restaurant, Italian Colors, located in Oakland, California, accused American Express of abusing its monopoly power by imposing unreasonable rates on the restaurant, American Express responded that such a claim was prohibited by the mandatory arbitration clause in the contract Italian Colors had signed with it. The case went to the Supreme Court, and in 2013 a majority of the court agreed with American Express. But as Justice Elena Kagan argued in dissent, the court’s decision puts small businesses in an impossible bind and gives large monopolists an easy out.

“The monopolist gets to use its monopoly power to insist on a contract effectively depriving its victims of all legal recourse.”

Over the last two decades, every major US airline has been through bankruptcy at least once, usually in order to renege on previously agreed-upon labor union contracts. Under the bankruptcy code—largely crafted by credit card companies and bankers—labor contracts stipulating workers’ pay have a relatively low priority when it comes to who gets paid off first. That means even the threat of bankruptcy can be a potent weapon for getting union members to sacrifice wages already agreed to. In 2003, American

Airlines CEO Don Carty used such a threat to wring almost \$2 billion of concessions from American's major unions. Carty preached the necessity of "shared sacrifice" but failed to disclose that he had secretly established a supplemental executive retirement plan whose assets, locked away in a trust, couldn't be touched in the event of bankruptcy. When Carty resigned he walked off with close to \$12 million, courtesy of the secret plan.

Hill was still dissatisfied with the number of women smokers in 1929. His insistence that Bernays come up with a way to get women to smoke outdoors as well as indoors led to the PR man's most notorious staged event. Bernays obtained a list of New York City debutantes and invited each one to join other women demonstrating their support for the equality of the sexes by walking together in the city's Easter Parade on Fifth Avenue in 1929. Additional women were recruited through ads signed by prominent local advocates of women's rights. All the information stressed that as the women walked, they would light symbols of equality, their "torches of freedom"—cigarettes.

The carefully scripted event went without a hitch, despite fewer than a dozen women showing up. Photos of them—defiant, stylishly dressed female smokers making their way through the parade—were published across the country, and several "torches of freedom" marches followed in support. Women, in other words, took the bait and proclaimed their determination to squelch the old taboo against smoking as the start of a movement to establish their equality with men.

In one particularly telling incident, McDonald's executives were challenged on the company's claim that it serves "nutritious food." David Green, senior vice president of marketing, expressed his opinion that Coca-Cola is nutritious because it is "providing water, and I think that is part of a balanced diet." In another embarrassing exchange, McDonald's executive Ed Oakley explained that the McDonald's garbage stuffed into landfills is "a benefit, otherwise you will end up with lots of vast empty gravel pits all over the country."

The delta's Native Americans include the Pointe-au-Chien tribe. A century ago, Natives like them, isolated, illiterate, non-English-speaking, unable to get to New Orleans, missed the opportunity to claim land and territory after the Louisiana Purchase, in 1803—even though it had for millennia all been theirs. Much of southern Louisiana was claimed by the federal government, which auctioned a lot of it to land companies in the 1800s. Later, oil companies bought much of southern Louisiana. They swindled the Natives out of any crumbs they'd gotten. Native Americans have in the past accused land grabbers and oil companies of seizing waterlands that rightfully belonged to them. They sued to regain vast tracts now owned by

big landholding and energy companies. Needless to say, they lost.

The extractive industries—oil, gas, and mining—tend to be run by some of the most outspoken opponents of government regulation in the country, yet all rely considerably on government permits, regulations, and tax laws to aid their profits and frequently to give them access to public lands.

“Since we can’t control Mother Nature, let’s figure out how to get along with her changes.”

A similar line was subtly argued in the David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History in Washington, which opened in March 2010. The message of the exhibition, funded by his fortune, was that the human race had evolved for the better in response to previous environmental challenges and would adapt in the face of climate change, too. An interactive game suggested that if the climate on earth became intolerable, people might build underground cities and develop short, compact bodies or curved spines so that moving around in tight spaces will be no problem.

In 1997 the EPA moved to reduce surface ozone, a form of air pollution caused, in part, by emissions from oil refineries. Susan Dudley, an economist who became a top official at the Mercatus Center, came up with a novel criticism of the proposed rule. The EPA, she argued, had not taken into account that by blocking the sun, smog cut down on cases of skin cancer. She claimed that if pollution were controlled, it would cause up to eleven-thousand additional cases of skin cancer each year.

Arguing that mine safety and clean water regulations only hurt workers:

“Are workers really better off being safer but making less income?”

In 2005, Visa launched its pink-and-white Hello Kitty credit card aimed at ten- to fourteen-year-olds. Although corporate officials proclaimed that the card would help kids develop money-management skills, the website marketing the card urged young shoppers to “shop ‘til you drop!”

What does it cost banks to deal with a bounced check? Back in the late 1970s, when checks were still processed by a person and a machine rather than digitally, Crocker Bank (now part of Wells Fargo) was forced to reveal in a California court case that its cost was thirty cents. At that time, the bank was charging customers \$6 for bounced checks, a markup of 2,000 percent. The California Supreme Court held that charging twenty times cost was not necessarily unconscionable. Adjusted for inflation, that \$6 fee would now be \$21, less than half what BofA charges. What are today’s

bank costs for processing a bounced check? BofA won't tell customers, but research papers on costs in the digital era suggest it could be less than a penny, making the markup by BofA in the neighborhood of 470,000 percent. But corporate values now so infuse our society that price gouging is easily brushed off as a function of competition, regardless of whether that's the truth or an ideological fantasy.

The biggest pile of gold comes from fees for overdrawing an account. Charge a \$5 item when your account has \$4.99 and the overdraft fee can easily be \$40. Some banks no longer let customers use their savings account to cover overdrafts, but instead require the use of a credit line. M&T Bank, a Warren Buffett bank—we see you Warren—charges customers \$10 even if they go online and move money in advance of a shortfall from their overdraft account to their checking account. The cost to the bank for such a transfer? The best indication that the cost is infinitesimal is this: moving money from checking to the overdraft account is free of charge. So is moving money from, say, a home equity line of credit to checking, which is free at M&T. Overdraft fees nationwide totaled about \$20 billion in 2011, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the federal agency created by Congress to deal with gouging by banks. A much larger estimate, more than \$38 billion, was made by Moebs Services, a private research firm used by the banking industry, for 2009. It found that such fees doubled between 2000 and 2009 as banks raised overdraft charges and more customers incurred them. But as the economy ebbed, so did overdraft fees, down to \$31.6 billion in 2011 by Moebs' estimate.

Here, however, the banks have proved politically astute. The banks designed fee systems, like the two Bank of America charges that it slaps on some customers who innocently deposit a bad check, to hit younger people (under age thirty-five) and those with modest incomes. These people tend also to be less sophisticated and have less access to politicians. Four out of five bank customers surveyed by the American Bankers Association said they paid no overdraft fees in 2009. More customers than that overdrew their accounts, but their bank waived the fees in many cases. Moebs Research estimated that just 10 percent of bank customers pay 90 percent of overdraft fees. Some customers, research by Moebs Research and others shows, pay more than \$125 a month in overdraft fees month after month. The banks would shun them as customers except for the fees they generate. Designing a system so that the people who pay the fees are the very people with the least capacity to get government to listen to their concerns makes sense from the bankers' point of view.

It also shows the nation's growing disregard for the least among us, a trend exacerbated by the decline of private-sector unions and reductions in

money for government consumer advocacy agencies. Political influence is concentrated at the top. The bottom third of Americans have zero direct political influence on roll call votes, and the next third have almost next to none. Thus it is not surprising that the burden of bank fees falls on the most vulnerable.

The Federal Reserve is the “lender of last resort.” Any member bank can borrow whatever cash it needs overnight to avoid overdrawing its own accounts. Banks do it all the time. Bankers don’t have to check their account balances to see if they can cover the funds to be disbursed to you for, say, a new car purchase. No, the bank just makes the loan and, if it needs to cover the cost, it borrows it from others, including the Federal Reserve. To make sure banks do not just loot the Federal Reserve, the Federal Reserve has rules. One of them, Rule 23A, requires that banks hold, and pledge as collateral, valuable paper, such as mortgages, on which the balance owed is much less than the value of the property. Bonds will do, too, those issued by cash-rich and profitable companies; as will stocks in blue-chip companies. By demanding quality collateral, the Federal Reserve should be able to collect on its overnight loans even if the cash-short bank fails. The Federal Reserve has the power to waive its rules on the quality of the collateral it accepts for loans from cash-short banks. It can, under Rule 23A, accept pretty much any piece of paper as collateral, not just valuable paper like mortgages on which the balance is much less than the value of the property or bonds from cash-rich and profitable companies. In recent years, the Federal Reserve has taken less valuable assets as collateral, as you can see by going to www.federalreserve.gov/boarddocs/legalint/FederalReserveAct/xxxx. Just replace the four Xs at the end of the Web address with the year you want to check.

Control fraud occurs when the head of a corporation runs it not for profit, but plunder. That’s essentially what the Mafia does when it takes over a business from someone in too deep with loan sharks. The mob orders all the supplies it can to be delivered as quickly as possible, carts them out the back door, and then torches the place. The vendors never get paid. Crooked bankers just use accounting rules to mask their crimes and then either put the business into bankruptcy or get the government to rescue it. The Chicago School economists and other promoters of regulation that favors corporations all insist that control frauds are rare and thus not significant. That position remains plausible as long as officials insist that no one saw, or could have seen, the 2008 collapse coming; as long as law enforcement is kept busy not looking for criminal conduct. But achieving this requires blinders, what we might call wishful denial of obvious facts.

In recent years US multinationals’ profit shifting to tax havens has become

increasingly aggressive, allowing corporations to enjoy the benefits of making profits in America without sharing much in the burden of maintaining the society that makes those profits possible.

The next time you hear an executive or tax adviser on television complaining about the arduous complexity of the tax code, remember this: business loves complexity when it turns taxes into profits and shifts the burdens of government on to you.

This brings us back to that quote that candidate Ronald Reagan loved so much, the made-up one that warned that the rabble would vote themselves the largesse of the treasury and ruin the country. The lessons here are three:

1. Reagan got it partly right. There are votes to capture the largesse of the treasury. The votes, however, come not from the citizenry, but from lawmakers whose real constituency is the political-donor class that is energetically mining the government treasury for its benefit. One way to do this is to abuse the English language by, say, drafting legislation whose title describes the opposite of what the bill says, as with the job destruction features of the 2004 American Jobs Creation Act.
2. Had Reagan been right, he would never have won election since he promised the voters less, not more, than his opponent, President Jimmy Carter.
3. Unless the voters take the time to understand giveaways (such as the Jobs Creation Act) that effectively take from the many to give to the already-rich few, which will require that the news media provide sustained, serious, and skeptical coverage, then the loose fiscal policy Reagan warned about will continue to be right on the money.

Chains like Target, Walmart, and Hilton charge their Wisconsin operations a royalty to use their logos on signs marking their buildings. These royalty payments funnel money out of Wisconsin to states such as Delaware, Nevada, Texas, and Wyoming, where corporations pay little or no tax on their profits.

A Michigan senate staff report made a crucial point about why those tax giveaways to motion picture projects are a sheer waste of money. Filming on location is inherently fickle, temporary, and movable. Films shot partly in Michigan do not represent fixed investments. A movie shot on location is not like a factory, in which the owners have invested in unique manufacturing equipment and customized buildings, which they have an incentive to keep productive until they wear out decades in the future or demand for their

products ebbs. Location shoots are not even like filming in a studio on soundstages that are costly to build and maintain. The Hollywood studios just use Michigan as a location, shooting its gritty industrial cities and aging factories, its lush forests and Great Lakes shorelines. They fly in the actors, rent hotel rooms, run the cameras for a few hours and leave. All it takes to switch filming—and the jobs that go with it—from Michigan to Louisiana is a slightly larger tax credit from the Pelican State. With a quick polish of the script by a screenwriter, an Upper Peninsula hunting scene can be shot in the bayou. The loons become pelicans. To boost their welfare checks, studios tell the companies they rent cameras from to briefly occupy a vacant space in the state where location shooting will take place. That way they can count the cost of the camera rental as an in-state expense. It's what happened when the makers of *Public Enemies* rented cameras from the temporary Wisconsin storefront of a Chicago-based movie camera rental business.

Companies and the politicians they help keep in office have another technique to help corporations escape taxation: laying off state tax auditors. In many states, notably South Carolina and Wisconsin, governors slashed the number of corporate tax auditors, claiming the state could no longer afford them. It is a preposterous argument. These auditors routinely bring in many times their salaries, which would seem to argue for keeping them working. Firing auditors makes as much sense as a hospital firing doctors; in a real sense, doctors are the source of a hospital's patients and, like auditors, both amount to a sales force. But when politicians fire auditors, plenty of people cheer because their hatred of taxes or government overwhelms logic and reason. How many politicians have you heard saying we need more tax auditors? Would that change if we called them what they are—financial detectives?

At the federal level, the highest paid IRS corporate auditors, with years of experience and advanced degrees, make less than \$75 an hour in pay and benefits. According to IRS data analyzed by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University, each hour spent auditing the biggest companies produced an average of more than \$9,300 of taxes owed. So firing one of these auditors saves less than \$150,000 annually while costing more than \$19 million annually in forgone tax revenue.

The typical problem is abuse of power while pursuing profit. The world isn't black and white, but our policies should aim for the lightest possible shades of gray. We have far too many executives who destroy shareholder wealth and shortchange hardworking subordinates while enriching themselves beyond reason. We have too few effective remedies for victims of abusive pricing. We have too many big business structures that strip resources from

utilities, making them more costly, less reliable, and sometimes downright dangerous. And we should never have a hands-off “make your numbers” management ethos like Warren Buffett’s that prompts people far down below to ask people to die to help the bottom line.

The concepts we need to reintroduce into our culture to avoid sinking into an unprincipled pit—in which all that matters is money—can be summed up simply. We need companies (and executives) who are candid. Fair. Forthright. Honest. Loyal. Prudent. Reasonable. Transparent. Reliable. Responsible. We need to acknowledge that rules define society. When the absence of rules allows businesses to lower their standards toward the lowest common denominator, then, in time, that is what we will get. Accounting rules that lack integrity may produce short-term gains, but the whole market will gravitate toward these bad practices—as it has done.

“Labor is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.”

Those words come not from Karl Marx, but from that most famous of Republican presidents, Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln spoke those words in his first State of the Union address in December 1861. He was talking in code about slavery, but his deeper point is that capital and labor exist in symbiosis, like the algae and fungi that make lichen, like the arterial and venous blood that sustain human life. If the veins that carry away carbon dioxide and other waste are smaller than those that bring oxygen and food, the body does not remain healthy. Indeed, pools of blood form and begin to rot, which if left untreated will kill the body.

We are being robbed blind by rules that the politically favored few have buried in the fine print. Just a penny a day per person is \$1.1 billion a year; an unwarranted buck a day redistributes \$113 billion upward to the politically connected few who write the contracts and get government to write the rules in their favor, all the while ensuring billions will needlessly struggle and suffer.

Unless we fight back, the economic elite will continue to stuff their pockets, while damaging the stability of our society. No one else will do this job. That is the whole idea of a democracy—people decide for themselves what kind of government—what kind of fine print—they want. They decide by their actions: whether to speak up, whether to organize, whether or not to vote. If you want a stronger, wealthier, and fairer America, then act. And don’t expect overnight success. Change is not easy.

As Frederick Douglass, the runaway slave who became publisher of the antislavery *North Star* newspaper, observed in 1857:

“If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation want rain without thunder and lightning. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

Progress is not a straight line uphill. We are living in an era of setbacks, an era that the future will look back upon and see for all its follies, especially the naïve idea that markets will just run themselves efficiently and honestly and that cutting wages and taxes is the path to prosperity.

People with the skills to sustain themselves and improve their lot build our society. Denying the basic skills needed to succeed, starting with a decent education so that one can comprehend more than simple instructions, is itself a form of crime. Under what theory of morality do we grant those already in a superior economic or legal position ever more power, especially when that power derives from rules in fine print that defy normal human understanding?

Taking Hostages

This belief in the superiority of the free market at the expense of government didn't start with Trump or Bush (or Reagan or Goldwater). In 1958, McKinsey consulted on the organizing of America's response to Sputnik, NASA. From NASA's establishment, the organizational structure that Glennan and the consultants from McKinsey & Company devised for the space agency promoted the use of outside contractors over building internal expertise. Beyond the bare minimum of internal technical expertise, the McKinsey consultants argued that America's "free enterprise society dictates that industry should be given as extensive a role as possible."

This approach, may have dismayed the agency's engineers, but the response cheered NASA administrators. By 1964, 90 percent of NASA's \$5 billion budget went to private companies and 350,000 contractors supported 32,500 NASA employees. Bill Clinton's declaration of the end of big government in 1996 and George W. Bush's pledge to substitute contractors for half of the remaining federal workforce in 2002 were influenced and made possible by the work that McKinsey did in establishing the contractor state. In an ironic twist, two months before the disastrous roll-out of healthcare.gov, McKinsey warned senior White House staff that, "the project lacked comprehensive testing, noted many functions were dependent on contractors and warned against taking risks to meet deadlines."

The hollowing of NASA was not an isolated event. In the 1980s, McKinsey helped Carlos Salinas privatize 85 percent of Mexico's state-owned businesses, Margaret Thatcher do the same in Britain, and West Germany do the same in East Germany. The firm has played a role in privatizing government assets in Latin and Central America, Eastern Europe, and Asia. Inexperienced leaders looking to make a mark turn to McKinsey for ideas, and they are all too eager to recommend privatization. The firm can point to all of its experience managing privatization elsewhere, as well as the influx of cash and positive Western press about how this shows you're a "serious reformer." Beyond the fees, McKinsey is motivated to do this work by its pro-market ideology. That privatization increases inequality, primarily benefits the wealthy, is not immune to corruption, and fundamentally shifts management incentives towards pleasing shareholders and away from the public interest is of little concern to McKinsey.

Beyond the literal privatization of public assets, the steady creep of corporate approaches to governing amounts to privatization in all but name. Government cannot and should not be run like a business, as even the Harvard Business Review admits. One particularly egregious example was

McKinsey's recommendation that the BBC use an internal market to buy and sell services, which led to endless internal negotiations to do tasks as simple as reserving studio time. McKinsey's perceived success at improving corporate governance has led to calls from publications like the *Economist* that it may be "McKinsey's turn to try to sort out Uncle Sam."

In anticipation of the beginning of Obama's presidency, the magazine unironically hoped that "Obama may favour McKinseyites in much the same way as his predecessor seemed addicted to hiring alumni of Goldman Sachs." As we all know, the Goldman Sachs-stuffed Treasury Department led to stable markets and steady growth throughout the Bush administration. They go on to hope that Obama hires "the best technocrats" like Ford Motor CEO turned Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. That these two parties contributed to and presided over the financial crisis and Vietnam War respectively apparently does nothing to shake the *Economist's* confidence in the wisdom of technocratic businessmen.

Perhaps Mayor Pete and his amazing, impressive credentials intended to give them their shot to finally sort out the crazy old uncle? Sorry guys, you'll just have to settle for helping Cuomo peddle his image of a calm, dignified crisis leader who listens to "experts"—maybe when he uses the "piles of corpses" to launch himself into Cuomo2024 you'll finally get your chance.

The initial rise of McKinsey and other management consultancies was due less to the force of their ideas or the ability of their people than to government anti-monopoly legislation, specifically the Glass Steagall Act of 1933. In addition to separating commercial and investment banking, the legislators also outlawed the consultative and reorganizational activities previously performed by banks. This created an opening for management consulting firms. Corporate executives, aware that the New Deal laws prohibited them from employing trade associations, industry cartels, or bankers to create industry benchmarks and to learn about administrative innovations, turned instead to management consultants as their primary source of interorganizational knowledge. At McKinsey, there are benchmarks for everything, whether it's the percentage of expected R&D savings following a pharma merger or the cost of temporary IT labor in the American Southwest. Over the years, McKinsey's work with pretty much every player in every industry has made it the panopticon of global business, willing to share what competitors are up to—as anonymized "best practices" of course—for a price.

In addition to the favorable regulatory environment, McKinsey's pro-market, hyper-rational ideas spread through what some have called "mimetic isomorphism"—the tendency of institutions facing uncertainty to become

more and more alike. In a quest for legitimacy in the eyes of employees, customers, and competitors, large organizations choose from a relatively small set of major consulting firms, which, like Johnny Appleseeds, spread a few organizational models throughout the land. As a result, schools assume the structure of the workplace, hospital and university administrations come to resemble the management of for-profit firms, and the modernization of the world economy proceeds unabated.

McKinsey's reorganization of most of the large companies in post-war Europe demonstrates mimetic isomorphism in action. Facing extreme uncertainty and pressure from American firms, European companies modeled themselves after organizations perceived to be successful (American ones) and relied heavily on a single source of vital resources (McKinsey). Whether American corporate success was due to the decentralized organization model or the fact that their competition was in literal ruins is of little consequence. Decentralization took off because the cool companies decentralized, with McKinsey whispering in their ears. The net effect of these forces was to exacerbate some of the most damaging trends in contemporary life: the growth of wealth inequality and the increased insecurity of private employment.

In the 1950s, McKinsey consultant Arch Patton pioneered the field of executive compensation after discovering that worker wages had risen faster than management wages. (Gasp!) This led to a lucrative business: helping executives justify more and more extreme paychecks. The typical CEO made 20 times the median employee's compensation in 1965. In 2015, that ratio had climbed to 286. When Patton was asked in the 1980s how he felt about his legacy, he had one word:

“Guilty.”

The age at which students start committing to “careers of excellence” is getting younger and younger. Students begin recruiting for jobs in management consulting in the fall of their junior year amid an environment that leaves them wondering whether there's something wrong with them if they're not interested in consulting and investment banking. This is in large part due to the hyper-competitiveness capitalism engenders. Young people are making decisions about their academic and professional careers before they've had a chance to interrogate their values and thoughtfully decide how they want to spend their lives. One of the biggest appeals of management consulting is that it serves as the undecided major of careers, opening more doors than it closes. College seniors with a McKinsey offer can accurately make a two-year commitment, learn useful skills, gain an impressive network, and gold stamp their resume before joining the Peace Corps and returning

to their previously-planned career of do-goodery. Beyond the skill-building, McKinsey markets itself as a place to do good while you're there: two of the four practice cases on its interviewing page are in the social/public sector despite less than 10 percent of the firm's work coming from those sectors. It's almost like they're a group of masterful manipulators. . .

But those two years change you. Idealism turns to cynicism in the face of the cold realities of the world. Shitty college apartments and dining hall meals turn into luxury Starwood properties and expensed Michelin star dinners. The job opportunities at the end of the brief stint can pay \$300,000 per year (private equity shops being a prime post-McKinsey destination). And throughout this time, you're surrounded by other people who made the same decision. For some of them, those two years turned into four turned into ten. Most others will leave as planned, but not to a career of do-goodery. All of these people have come up with justifications for their decision and are eager to share them. Some examples:

- “You're building career capital that you can apply to whatever non-profit or political cause you support down the line.”
- “The speed and innovation of the private sector makes it the best place to have impact.”
- “Someone is going to do the job, so might as well be me (and I'll do more good than the likely replacement).”

Precious few have shown signs that their post-McKinsey careers will be more prosocial than their McKinsey career, but even for those who do, their understanding of how to improve the world has been thoroughly McKinseyfied. An ascendant power elite that is defined by the concurrent drives to do well and do good, to change the world while also profiting from the status quo. These elites believe and promote the idea that social change should be pursued principally through the free market and voluntary action, that it should be supervised by the winners of capitalism and their allies, and not be antagonistic to their needs; and that the biggest beneficiaries of the status quo should play a leading role in the status quo's reform. The MarketWorld problem-solver does not tend to hunt for perpetrators and is not interested in blame.

Any solution that requires redistribution of any wealth or power from the ruling class—the only class who can afford to hire McKinsey—is not even worth considering. It is the same situation described by Tolstoy:

“I sit on a man's back choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am sorry for him

and wish to lighten his load by all means possible. . . except by getting off his back.”

We are now living with the consequences of the world McKinsey created. Market fundamentalism is the default mode for businesses and governments the world over. Abstraction and myth insulate actors from the atrocities they help perpetuate. Businesses that resisted the pressure to rationalize every decision based on its impact on shareholder value were beaten out or eaten up by those who shed the last remnants of their humanity. With another heavyweight on the side of management, McKinsey tipped the scale even further away from labor, contributing directly to the increase in wealth inequality plaguing the world. Governments are now more similar to the private sector and more reliant on their services. The “best and the brightest” devote themselves to client service instead of public service.

Not all of these results are wholly attributable to McKinsey—there are many conspirators to these crimes. But no firm has touched more and been seen less.

His interviews for the McKinsey job had taught him an early and vital lesson about this approach to problem-solving: It was not about drawing on knowledge, and often even sneered at doing so; it was, rather, about being able to analyze a situation despite ignorance, to transcend unfamiliarity. The interview questions that struck him were of this sort: How many Ping-Pong balls would fit into a Boeing 747? What would you estimate the size of the Bolivian steel industry to be? How many razor blades are sold in Australia every year? His instinct, hearing such questions, was to call a friend in this or that job who might be familiar with the relevant facts.

“But the point in the interviews was not to get the number right. It was to demonstrate how you reason, based on the assumptions you make. The idea was if you break the problem down into small enough pieces that are logically related and make educated guesses combined with facts where they’re available, or at least you join the dots from the facts that you’re able to put together, you can construct a logical and compelling answer to pretty much any problem.”

In other words, his initiation into McKinsey and the protocols more generally was being urged to spit out a preternaturally confident answer to something he knew nothing about. You can perhaps begin to see why one of them might make a formidable politician in today’s world—an extremely dangerous one too.

Before the protocols had come to dominate the world of business, a company might have raised its money from not far away, sourced its inputs from not far away, sold to customers not far away, paid taxes to authorities not far away, and, when growth came, parked the profit in a bank not far away or reinvested it in a new venture with a plant not far away. But in recent decades that began to change, as technology made it easier to do business with faraway entities, as new markets opened, and—importantly—as the financial wizards and management consultants increased their influence over boardrooms. These protocol-equipped figures pressed companies to embrace a new philosophy: Do each of your activities where it can be best done, wherever that might be. You raised money from Korean investors, sourced from Mexico, sold in France, paid taxes in the Caribbean, and, when growth hit, chose a Swiss bank or ethereal Bitcoins to store the proceeds—or reinvested them in whatever venture on earth promised you the most attractive returns. It was an expansion of commercial freedom. This was a win-lose: The companies had flourished because of their freedom to escape and the community's lack of leverage.

In 1888 the town of Ulysses, in far western Kansas, was engaged in a bitter contest with a nearby hamlet to become the seat of government for Grant County. In order to help secure this prize, believed in those days to guarantee eternal prosperity, Ulysses issued \$36,000 in bonds. The official story was that the money would go for municipal improvements, but in fact it was used to prosecute the county-seat war, spent on “professional voters” and gunfighters (the town was founded by a cousin of Wyatt Earp) who would lend a hand in the great showdown. Naturally Ulysses prevailed, and after winning, it proceeded to erect a county courthouse—along with an opera house, four hotels, twelve restaurants, a host of saloons, and the rest of the Gunsmoke set—before collapsing swiftly into destitution. Drought, deflation, and the allure of new territory shrank its population from fifteen-hundred down to forty.

In 1908 the bonds matured, to the tune of eighty-four grand. Not a lot of money these days, perhaps, but back then it was equivalent to one-third of the assessed value of the entire county. To pay off the bondholders in New York, the handful of citizens left in Ulysses would have had to shoulder an impossible burden. What they did instead was toss the collections man in jail while they thought up a plan for moving the town. Impoverished but resourceful, the citizens of Ulysses cut the town's buildings into pieces and dragged them across the prairie to a new location, “leaving the bond-holders,” as the 1939 WPA guide to the state puts it, “40 acres of bare ground on which to foreclose.” The only social actor capable of that kind of defiance today is the corporation. Corporations are mobile; cities are not. They

extract billions from us in bonds, tax abatements, water rights, and outright grants by threatening to pick themselves up and haul their machines and their buildings and their jobs to some sunnier clime.

Every free-trade agreement we have signed in recent years has been designed to make cities vulnerable in precisely this way. If you're a medium-sized city like Wichita, hosting some giant multinational's plant is less of an achievement today than it is a gun pointed at your head, a constant reminder that some executive has the power to turn your town into an instant Flint, to destroy your citizens' lives, your property values, your merchants, and all the rest of it should the whim overtake him while he sits in the audience at some motivational seminar.

Now the essential underlying question here is: How probable is it in the first place that these companies would close up shop and move across state lines? Under Illinois Public Act 97-2, the justification for such tax deals is a "credible" threat that a company will leave the state. But would these companies really go, abandoning their existing investment and disrupting their operations? And furthermore, does it make sense to institutionalize threats to leave a state as the legal basis for getting tax dollars? Motorola has three-thousand highly paid workers around Schaumburg, a quick drive from the cultural amenities of Chicago. Their skills are not easily replaced. It is unlikely many of them are eager to give up their suburban enclave with easy access to museums, theater, and big-time sports teams to live out their lives in, say, rural Iowa or Alabama. Moving them, especially if the company offered to pay their entire household moving costs, would impose huge costs on the company, as well as disruptions to its business. By staying put not only are these costs and disruptions avoided, but, when the current deal ends in 2021, the company can renew the flow of tax dollars by threatening—in a "credible" way, of course—to move its operations to another state.

While schoolchildren are taught about heroic figures who raised the capital to build new factories and fill offices, these days large companies rely on government handouts for that money. Almost every brand-name company is in on these deals; state and local governments spend at least \$70 billion a year of taxpayers' money to subsidize factories, office buildings and the like. That burden comes to \$900 per year for a family of four. But I believe this understates the cost by an unknown but considerable sum. The worst of these are laws in nineteen states that let companies pocket the state income taxes withheld from their workers' paychecks for up to twenty-five years. Hard as it is to believe such laws exist, they do, and they are spreading fast. General Electric, Goldman Sachs, Procter & Gamble and more than 2,700 other big companies have these deals. It is not just

American companies, either. Siemens, the big German computer maker, the Swedish appliance maker Electrolux, and a host of Japanese, Canadian, and European banks have similar arrangements with states from New Jersey to Oregon. In many of these subsidy programs, no jobs are created. Instead the state income taxes are given to companies that agree to move jobs from one state across the border to another, as AMC Theaters agreed to do in moving its headquarters from Kansas City, Missouri, to Leawood, Kansas, just ten miles away. AMC gets to pocket \$47 million withheld from its workers, a boon to its major owners: JPMorgan, Apollo Management, the Carlyle Group and the firm Mitt Romney co-founded in 1984, Bain Capital Management.

From the corporations' point of view, the best part is that the workers are left in the dark. None of these states requires that workers be told that their state income taxes go to their employers—that they are in effect being taxed by their bosses.

In New York, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of more than fifty citizens, ranging from serious libertarians to liberal Democrats, challenging a gift of at least \$1.4 billion of state taxpayer funds to a company controlled by Abu Dhabi's hereditary ruler, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, one of the wealthiest people in the world. The sheikh's company, GlobalFoundries, is building a microchip factory in the Hudson River Valley near Albany. Back in 1846, the New York State constitution banned gifts to corporations or other business entities, a provision that the voters reaffirmed in 1874, 1938, and again in 1967. In each case the vote was by a margin of two to one, which would seem to make the desires of voters clear. In deciding the suit, two justices said such gifts were plainly illegal. But the court majority found a way around this. They reasoned that while the state government could not make such gifts, the legislature could create an economic development agency, give it the money and, in turn, the agency could give it away to the sheikh and any other business owner. If parallel reasoning were applied to drug deals, the kingpins who finance the drug trade could never be convicted of a crime as long as they do not touch the drugs.

The logic here is utilitarian. You add up the plusses and the minuses of an action, and things that are net positives on the whole are good. The costs were high, the benefits higher, and if you don't support these actions you're guided by weepy, irrational empathy rather than cold but morally superior reason. Whether or not sweatshops actually improve lives, or the atomic bombings actually ended the war, are contestable empirical questions, but for the sake of examining the logic let us assume that as a purely empirical matter some of these are true. It can be difficult to know how to respond to arguments like these: They seem to put you in a position where you have to

accept the “right answer” being something you find horrifying, or at least in some way deeply wrong. (See also: the trolley problem.)

We can begin to see why there is something wrong with these “offers you can’t refuse” if we think about a few other situations in which a parallel kind of logic could be used:

The Amazon Deal: Say it wasn’t tax breaks. Say that Jeff Bezos told the mayor of Gary, Indiana that he would put HQ2 in Gary if:

1. Every school in Gary was renamed after Jeff Bezos
2. A series of local laws, as determined by Bezos, did not apply to Amazon employees
3. Amazon received a permanent seat on the city council
4. The mayor agreed to perform a humiliating nude dance routine for Bezos in private

Giving Up A Thumb: Your spouse is sick and your insurance doesn’t cover treatment. A fabulously wealthy individual offers to pay, on the condition that you cut off your thumb and give it to him. He plans to add it to his collection of poor people’s thumbs, which he keeps on his night stand to remind him of how powerful he is.

The Abusive Boss: You are being bullied, insulted, and demeaned by your boss. You summon your courage and tell the boss to stop. The boss replies:

“You are free to leave if you don’t like it. I’m not breaking the law. You only have this job because of me. You’re better off thanks to me, so I’d appreciate a little more gratitude.”

There are a couple of things I think we should find disturbing about these hypotheticals. The person making the choice is having to make a choice they shouldn’t need to be faced with, by which I mean that there’s no reason why this horrible choice needed to arise in the first place. It’s true that the individual faced with the choice is “better off” in some sense if they take the horrible deal, but it’s because some other individual has chosen to structure the choices this way. If we just analyze things from the perspective of the person faced with the dilemma, the responsibility of the party who produced the dilemma in the first place will go undiscussed. It is “taken as a given.”

This problem occurs in a lot of discussions about economics. It is taken as a given that corporations are sociopathic profit-maximizers who will

extort as much gain from everyone else as they can. It's just the way things are, and all we as the members of a democratic society can do is make the choices that we have available. So it's "Exempt my company from the law or I will take my business elsewhere." On the small scale, this would look like extortion. "I'll give you this medicine if you give me your thumb" is an exploitative bargain, one in which one party's desperation is being preyed upon. And yet companies like Amazon are often treated as if they are being generous and community-spirited by "bringing jobs" to a city, even if their thinking is driven solely by a desire to extract as much wealth as possible from the municipality.

This is what critics of the Amazon deal meant, then, when they said that Amazon was "holding the city hostage." It's the same thing that happens in discussions of the minimum wage or taxes: Companies say "if you raise the minimum wage, we will fire a bunch of people" or rich people say "if you raise my taxes, I will simply leave." The empirical question of whether or not this will happen (it's usually just a bluff) should not distract us from the fact that whoever does this is violating the basic reciprocal obligation of community: treating each other well and not trying to exploit others.

Why would it be bad for Jeff Bezos to ask a mayor to name the schools after Bezos in exchange for HQ2? He gets what he wants, the city gets what it wants. If your sole criterion is "value maximization," then it's hard to object. But if you don't think that people should be able to use large disparities of power in order to bully others into doing things they don't want to do, and you don't think being rich should entitle you to order other people around, then it's obvious why it's wrong. Value maximization can't be your only principle, in part because it necessarily misses critical values, the ones that are difficult to quantify and calculate but are nevertheless extremely important.

We all accept offers we don't like. We take jobs we hate, we pay fees that are unreasonable. But in public policy, just as important as evaluating an offer is evaluating the conditions that determine what will be offered. If you have concentrated corporate power, then corporations will be in a position to extort cities, and Amazon will be its own private government. If you don't have a universal global set of labor standards, then people in certain countries will be forced to choose between working a terrible job inside a sweatshop and a worse job outside of one. A critical question is 'Does it really need to be this way?' Why are we being given these kinds of unacceptable bargains, and how can we shift the balance of power so that the offers aren't controlled by those who are pathologically committed to their own financial self-interest?

In New York City, Amazon decided to leave because politicians were

criticizing it. They hadn't canceled the deal, they had just refused to publicly express the proper level of obsequiousness and slobbering gratitude. It may be true that by refusing to compromise its dignity New York ended up losing a very large amount of money. But unless there is a willingness to resist indefensible choices, to shun cost-benefit analysis when the cost is one's self-respect, then we will continue to inhabit a world in which bullies and exploiters are treated as benefactors for offering "win-win" deals that they shouldn't be in a position to offer in the first place.

Let's say you're driving to work when a radio station reports that astronomers have discovered a comet with an unusual tail that the earth will pass through in a few days. When night comes, you enjoy the cosmic light show in the sky, then you go to bed and the event is soon forgotten. As the years pass, however, you and others begin to notice that a few of us—say one in every thousand—has stopped aging. These people never get sick. In an accident they can be crushed and bleed to death, but otherwise they are immortal. That is not the only change. Whatever their interests before the comet, they now have a single desire. All they care about is money. They will do anything to get it as long as their actions are not illegal. They are neither moral nor immoral, but calmly amoral. As their wealth grows, they hire very smart people to help them make even more money. If such immortal, amoral, and greed-driven people walked the earth, we would have to rewrite our laws governing property. Property law assumes a finite human lifespan, and thus whatever property and power one builds up will be passed on when that person's time runs out. But our new class of immortals could just keep accumulating wealth and power forever. In time they would probably own every single asset on earth worth having.

The immortal being I've just described exists: it is the modern corporation. Unless it bleeds so much cash that it goes bankrupt, the corporation can exist forever. Even if it does go bankrupt, modern American laws allow a fresh infusion of cash from banks and investors to revive it. Because a corporation is not a natural person but an artificial entity, it has no conscience and is therefore amoral. The corporation can do anything legal in order to make money. The values of its officers and directors will shape the company, but by and large, legality alone rules. To be sure, some corporations are scrupulous because the managers of the moment have high ethical standards. But some other corporations will act illegally because their managers believe they will not get caught, that the law is unfair, or because illegal conduct by competitors forces them to do likewise or go out of business. In any case, they're in business to serve the interests of their shareholders, not John Q. Public.

“What is capital, but that all-grasping power which has been wrung, by fraud, avarice, and malice from the labor of this and all ages past.”

In civil law, to be a person is to count as an entity in one’s own right. A corporation can be a legal person, and so, too, can a river, a holy book, and a mosque.

What is a person? We can trace the term back to Roman times, and show that it was never limited to human beings. Early Christian theologians debated the doctrine of the Trinity—that God is “three persons in one.” If “person” meant “human being,” that doctrine would be plainly contrary to Christian belief, for Christians hold that only one of those “persons” was ever a human being. In more contemporary usage, in science fiction movies, we have no difficulty in grasping that aliens like the extraterrestrial in *E.T.*, or the Na’vi in *Avatar*, are persons, even though they are not members of the species *Homo sapiens*. In reading the work of scientists like Jane Goodall or Dian Fossey, we have no difficulty in recognizing that the great apes they describe are persons. They have close and complex personal relationships with others in their group. They grieve for lost loved ones. They are self-aware beings, capable of thought. Their foresight and anticipation enable them to plan ahead. We can even recognize ethics in the way they respond to other apes who fail to return a favor. Contrary to the caricatures of some opponents of these types of lawsuits, declaring a chimpanzee a person doesn’t mean giving him or her the right to vote, attend school, or sue for defamation. It simply means giving him or her the most basic, fundamental right of having legal standing, rather than being considered a mere object.

“A corporation is a legal person created by state statute that can be used as a fall guy, a servant, a good friend, or a decoy. A person you control yet cannot be held accountable for its actions. Imagine the possibilities!”

—Wyoming Corporate Services, Inc.

The Founding Fathers, who were sensitive to the potentially unbridled power of the East India Company, would be shocked by the rise of corporate power in our time. Early in the years following American independence, corporations were regarded with deep suspicion. Back then a corporation was allowed to exist for only a single purpose and for a limited period of time, usually twenty years. To retain the privilege of a corporate charter, the owners had to show that the corporation served a public purpose. Hiring

people was not enough; that was understood to be necessary to do business. The idea that the government would give a corporation money to create jobs was, in the late eighteenth century, beyond imagining. In short, corporations were narrowly defined entities.

When in 1837 a group of businessmen from Amherst, Massachusetts, proposed to create a limited-liability carriage company, the proposal was opposed by a petition by journeymen on the grounds that as journeymen, they looked forward to being their own masters when they would not have to relinquish to others the value they created, stating:

“Incorporations put means into the hands of inexperienced capitalists, to take from us the profits of our art, which has cost us years of labor to obtain, and which we consider to be our exclusive privilege to enjoy.”

Ordinarily such requests were only approved if the company was dedicated to creating and maintaining public works of an obviously useful nature such as a railroad or canal.

Not until well into the nineteenth century did the evolution of corporations into “people” begin. That story begins with a property tax dispute, one that hinged on the issue of whether the Fourteenth Amendment, adopted to make sure freed blacks were treated equally under the law following the Civil War, could be applied to companies. The Southern Pacific Railroad was fighting a property tax imposed by California counties in what is now called Silicon Valley. The decision rendered in the case, *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad*, came not from the justices, but amazingly from the pen of the official court clerk, J. C. Bancroft Davis, who just happened to be a former president of Newburgh and New York Rail—what a fun coincidence. Davis’s one-paragraph statement asserted that the court did not need to hear the case to conclude that corporations were persons under the Fourteenth Amendment and thus were entitled to dispute the tax with the county authorities. Even though the Supreme Court never heard the case, corporations as of that moment were granted personhood in matters of property.

The entire text of Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868 reads:

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State

deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Notice the word ‘person’ in the text. For over a thousand years of British common law and a century of American constitutional law, attorneys and legislators understood that there are two kinds of persons. The first, “natural persons,” are human beings. It was for them, for example, that the Magna Carta was written in 1215. The second type of persons acknowledged by law are, broadly, states and nations, churches and nonprofits, and for-profit and other types of corporations. The reason such institutions need some sort of personhood status is so they can engage in interactions with the rest of us—own and pay taxes on land, for example, or sue and be sued.

From the seventh-century origins of British common law to the 1870s, nobody seriously challenged these two types of personhood, the need for each, and their clear and explicit differences. But in the Reconstruction era following the Civil War, the most powerful corporations in America—the railroads—saw an opportunity to use the arguably sloppy construction of the language of the Fourteenth Amendment to radically grab more power for themselves. They and their attorneys began to argue that when the Fourteenth Amendment was written, its authors in Congress explicitly said “person” rather than “natural person” in the last part of Section 1 because they fully intended it to include both “natural persons” and “artificial persons,” such as railroad corporations. In plain language, they argued that the authors of the Fourteenth Amendment intended to free both the slaves and the corporations, giving to both full constitutional protections.

“This definition suggests at once that it would seem unnecessary to dwell upon the idea that though a corporation is a ‘person,’ it is not the same kind of person as a human being, and need not, of necessity—nay, in the very nature of things, cannot—enjoy all the rights of such or be governed by the same laws. When the law says, ‘Any person being of sound mind and of the age of discretion may make a will,’ or ‘Any person having arrived at the age of majority may marry,’ I presume the most ardent advocate of equality of protection would hardly contend that corporations must enjoy the right of testamentary disposition or of contracting matrimony.

The whole history of the Fourteenth Amendment, demonstrates beyond dispute that its whole scope and object was to establish equality between men—an attainable result—and not

to establish equality between natural and artificial beings—an impossible result. Its mission was to raise the humble, the down-trodden, and the oppressed to the level of the most exalted upon the broad plane of humanity—to make man the equal of man; but not to make the creature of the State—the bodiless, soulless, and mystic creature called a corporation—the equal of the creature of God.

Therefore, I venture to repeat that the Fourteenth Amendment does not command equality between human beings and corporations; that the state need not subject corporations to the same laws which govern natural persons; that it may, without infringing the rule of equality, confer upon corporations rights, privileges, and immunities which are not enjoyed by natural persons; that it may, for the same reasons, impose burdens upon a corporation, in the shape of taxation or otherwise, which are not imposed upon natural persons.”

“Restrictions upon the political activity of business corporations are both politically desirable and constitutionally permissible. The judgment of such a broad consensus of governmental bodies expressed over a period of many decades is entitled to considerable deference from this Court. A State grants to a business corporation the blessings of potentially perpetual life and limited liability to enhance its efficiency as an economic entity. It might reasonably be concluded that those properties, so beneficial in the economic sphere, pose special dangers in the political sphere.

Furthermore, it might be argued that liberties of political expression are not at all necessary to effectuate the purposes for which States permit commercial corporations to exist. Any particular form of organization upon which the State confers special privileges or immunities different from those of natural persons would be subject to like regulation, whether the organization is a labor union, a partnership, a trade association, or a corporation.”

A bit more than a quarter century later, however, Rehnquist’s warning was summarily rejected when, in 2010, under his successor Chief Justice John Roberts, the Supreme Court proclaimed corporations the equal of people in politics.

The grant of personhood to corporations has had currency since 1886, although Congress never passed a law granting these rights, nor did Supreme Court justices ever vote on a decision. Before Davis's bit of mischief, the word 'person' was understood to mean that foreign visitors and immigrants not yet naturalized enjoyed the same legal protections as citizens. This is arguably the most egregious example of how big business has abused plain English in the fine print.

A proposed Constitutional amendment states the following:

“A corporation is not a person and can be regulated. The rights protected by the Constitution of the United States are the right of natural persons only. Artificial entities, such as corporations, limited liability companies, and other entities, established by the laws of any State, the United States, or any foreign state shall have no rights under this Constitution and are subject to regulation by the People, through Federal, State, or local law. The privileges of artificial entities shall be determined by the People, through Federal, State, or local law, and shall not be construed to be inherent or inalienable.

Money is not speech and can be regulated. Federal, State, and local government shall regulate, limit, or prohibit contributions and expenditures, including a candidate's own contributions and expenditures, for the purpose of influencing in any way the election of any candidate for public office or any ballot measure. Federal, State, and local government shall require that any permissible contributions and expenditures be publicly disclosed. The judiciary shall not construe the spending of money to influence elections to be speech under the First Amendment.

Nothing contained in this amendment shall be construed to abridge the freedom of the press.

Congress shall have power to implement this article by appropriate legislation.”

The elegance of explicitly denying constitutional rights to anything except living beings is that it will not only roll back Citizens United but it will also allow future legislatures to challenge corporate claims to “rights” of privacy (Fourth Amendment), protection from self-incrimination (Fifth Amendment), and the power to force themselves on communities that don't want them because to do otherwise is “discrimination” (Fourteenth Amendment). We must be very careful that any amendment put forth isn't just limited to giving Congress the power to regulate campaign spending; to do so would

leave a wide swath of other Bill of Rights powers in the hands of corporations. Instead, an amendment must explicitly overturn the headnote to the Santa Clara County 1886 decision that asserted corporations are the same as natural persons in terms of constitutional protections.

While limiting liability has eased the path to profitability, it has also obscured a corporation's responsibility to function for the benefit of society. The greater good is an idea that's thousands of years old, but in the recent past corporations have been permitted to lose sight of that important notion. I can date the moment it began to fade. In a 1970 article in the *New York Times Magazine*, Milton Friedman argued that the sole duty of a company is to its shareholders, not to the interests of workers and surrounding communities. Friedman closed his piece with these words:

“There is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud.”

This is a bottom line with lots of implications. Workers may toil their entire lives, communities may tax themselves to create infrastructure a corporation needs, and vendors may invest their entire fortune to supply the corporation—but none of these parties, Friedman said, has significant legal rights or moral claims. The idea was radical. It was not supported by the development of the law, the regulation of business, and the advancement of civilization over thousands of years. But in a surprisingly short time, Friedman's ahistorical thinking has come to dominate our society. The corporate elite, the majority of billionaire investors and the officeholders in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government now subscribe to the deceptively simple philosophy that owners matter most, that all other interests are subordinate to the interests of the corporation.

Decisions Are Made

Holy Markets

Neoliberalism: a program for destroying collective structures that may impede the pure market logic.

We are generally conditioned to think that a market-based society provides us with ample (if not equal) opportunities for increasing the value of our “human capital” and self-worth. And in order to fully actualize personal freedom and potential, we need to maximize our own welfare, freedom, and happiness by deftly managing internal resources.

Since competition is so central, neoliberal ideology holds that all decisions about how society is run should be left to the workings of the marketplace, the most efficient mechanism for allowing competitors to maximize their own good. Other social actors—including the state, voluntary associations, and the like—are just obstacles to the smooth operation of market logic.

Neoliberalism divides the world into winners and losers. It accomplishes this task through its ideological linchpin: the individualization of all social phenomena. Since the autonomous (and free) individual is the primary focal point for society, social change is achieved not through political protest, organizing, and collective action, but via the free market and atomized actions of individuals. Any effort to change this through collective structures is generally troublesome to the neoliberal order. It is therefore discouraged.

An illustrative example is the practice of recycling. The real problem is the mass production of plastics by corporations, and their overuse in retail. However, consumers are led to believe that being personally wasteful is the underlying issue, which can be fixed if they change their habits. Recycling plastic is to saving the Earth what hammering a nail is to halting a falling skyscraper. Yet the neoliberal doctrine of individual responsibility has performed its sleight-of-hand, distracting us from the real culprit. This is far from new. In the 1950s, the “Keep America Beautiful” campaign urged individuals to pick up their trash. The project was bankrolled by corporations such as Coca-Cola, Anheuser-Busch and Phillip Morris, in

partnership with the public service announcement Ad Council, which coined the term ‘litterbug’ to shame miscreants. Two decades later, a famous TV ad featured a Native American man weeping at the sight of a motorist dumping garbage. “People Start Pollution. People Can Stop It,” was the slogan.

At face value, these efforts seem benevolent, but they obscure the real problem, which is the role that corporate polluters play in the plastic problem. This clever misdirection has led some to describe Keep America Beautiful as the first corporate greenwashing front, as it has helped shift the public focus to consumer recycling behaviour and thwarted legislation that would increase extended producer responsibility for waste management.

We are repeatedly sold the same message: that individual action is the only real way to solve social problems, so we should take responsibility. We are trapped in a neoliberal trance by a “disimagination machine” which stifles critical and radical thinking. We are admonished to look inward, and to manage ourselves. Disimagination impels us to abandon creative ideas about new possibilities. Instead of seeking to dismantle capitalism, or rein in its excesses, we should accept its demands and use self-discipline to be more effective in the market. To change the world, we are told to work on ourselves—to change our minds by being more mindful, nonjudgmental, and accepting of circumstances.

Markets aren’t real. Economists will often admit this, if you ask them in the right way. They are mathematical models, created by imagining a self-contained world where everyone has exactly the same motivation and the same knowledge and is engaging in the same self-interested calculating exchange. Economists are aware that reality is always more complicated; but they are also aware that to come up with a mathematical model, one always has to make the world into a bit of a cartoon. There’s nothing wrong with this. The problem comes when it enables some (often these same economists) to declare that anyone who ignores the dictates of the market shall surely be punished—or that since we live in a market system, everything (except government interference) is based on principles of justice: that our economic system is one vast network of reciprocal relations in which, in the end, the accounts balance and all debts are paid. These principles get tangled up in each other and it’s thus often difficult to tell which predominates in a given situation—one reason that it’s ridiculous to pretend we could ever reduce human behavior, economic or otherwise, to a mathematical formula of any sort.

The market economy and the nation-state should be viewed as a single man-made system. The coming of the modern nation-state and the modern capitalist economies it fostered altered human consciousness, from one based

on reciprocity and redistribution to one based on utility and self-interest. The idea that the world must be run by the stock market is as mad as any other fundamentalist delusion, Islamic, Christian, or Marxist.

“Businesses that contribute to chronic disease often flourish.
Businesses that contribute to acute disease get shut down.”

Every time there was a major economic meltdown, conventional *laissez-faire* economics took another hit. By the time of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the very notion that the market could regulate itself, so long as the government ensured that money was safely pegged to precious metals, was completely discredited. From roughly 1933 to 1979, every major capitalist government reversed course and adopted some version of Keynesianism. Keynesian orthodoxy started from the assumption that capitalist markets would not really work unless capitalist governments were willing, effectively, to play nanny: most famously, by engaging in massive deficit “pump-priming” during downturns. While in the ‘80s, Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States made a great show of rejecting all of this, it’s unclear how much they really did. And in any case, they were operating in the wake of an even greater blow to previous monetary orthodoxy: Richard Nixon’s decision in 1971 to unpeg the dollar from precious metals entirely, eliminate the international gold standard, and introduce the system of floating currency regimes that has dominated the world economy ever since. This meant in effect that all national currencies were henceforth, as neoclassical economists like to put it, “fiat money” backed only by the public trust.

The critical things to watch out for aren’t the rare big events, such as the 2008 bailout of the Street itself, but the ongoing multitude of small rule changes that continuously alter the economic game. Even a big event’s most important effects are on how the game is played differently thereafter. The bailout of Wall Street created an implicit guarantee that the government would subsidize the biggest banks if they ever got into trouble. This gave the biggest banks a financial advantage over smaller banks and fueled their subsequent growth and dominance over the entire financial sector, which enhanced their subsequent political power to get rules they wanted and avoid those they did not.

The “free market” is a myth that prevents us from examining these rule changes and asking whom they serve. The myth is therefore highly useful to those who do not wish such an examination to be undertaken. It is no accident that those with disproportionate influence over these rules, who are the largest beneficiaries of how the rules have been designed and adapted, are

also among the most vehement supporters of the “free market” and the most ardent advocates of the relative superiority of the market over government. But the debate itself also serves their goal of distracting the public from the underlying realities of how the rules are generated and changed, their own power over this process, and the extent to which they gain from the results. In other words, not only do these “free market” advocates want the public to agree with them about the superiority of the market but also about the central importance of this interminable debate.

Few ideas have more profoundly poisoned the minds of more people than the notion of a “free market” existing somewhere in the universe, into which government “intrudes.” In this view, whatever inequality or insecurity the market generates is assumed to be the natural and inevitable consequence of impersonal “market forces.” What you’re paid is simply a measure of what you’re worth in the market. If you aren’t paid enough to live on, so be it. If others rake in billions, they must be worth it. If millions of people are unemployed or their paychecks are shrinking or they have to work two or three jobs and have no idea what they’ll be earning next month or even next week, that’s unfortunate but it’s the outcome of “market forces.”

According to this view, whatever we might do to reduce inequality or economic insecurity—to make the economy work for most of us—runs the risk of distorting the market and causing it to be less efficient, or of producing unintended consequences that may end up harming us. Although market imperfections such as pollution or unsafe workplaces, or the need for public goods such as basic research or even aid to the poor, may require the government to intervene on occasion, these instances are exceptions to the general rule that the market knows best.

There can be no free market without government. The free market does not exist in the wilds beyond the reach of civilization. Competition in the wild is a contest for survival in which the largest and strongest often win. Civilization, by contrast, is defined by rules; rules create markets, and governments generate the rules.

In order to have a “free market,” decisions must be made about:

Property: What can be owned

Monopoly: What degree of market power is permissible

Contract: What can be bought and sold, and on what terms

Bankruptcy: What happens when purchasers can’t pay up

Enforcement: How to make sure no one cheats on any of these rules

Other decisions govern unpaid debts: Big corporations can use bankruptcy to rid themselves of burdensome pension obligations to their employees, for example, while homeowners cannot use bankruptcy to reduce burdensome mortgages, and former students cannot use it to reduce burdensome debts for higher education. You can thank Joe Biden for that last one.

Even the modern corporation, and its ownership, is part of the property mechanism—a consequence of particular decisions by legislatures, agencies, and courts that people who invest in the corporation are entitled to a share of its profits and that their personal property beyond those investments is protected if the corporation can't pay its debts. The “free market” doesn't dictate this. Property and contract rules do. Yet the idea that shareholders are a corporation's only owners, and therefore that the sole purpose of the corporation is to maximize the value of their investments, appears nowhere in the law.

Why should shareholders take prominence over employees? Corporations are nothing more than collections of contracts and property rights. They are not “owned” by shareholders the way ordinary goods are owned. It is common for the individual shareholders of large companies to be blissfully unaware of which specific companies they own, or for how long, because their ownership is through pension funds or mutual funds that tend to move quickly into and out of shares of stock, seeking quick speculative gains. If nothing else, high-frequency trading illustrates the irrelevance of stock ownership to effective corporate governance. Shareholder “ownership” is therefore a legal fiction. So is the idea that CEOs and other corporate executives have a fiduciary duty to maximize the value of corporations' shares of stock. Corporate charters, issued by states, require no such thing. While shareholders select a corporation's directors, the directors are under no legal obligation to put their interests above all others.

The idea that the sole purpose of a corporation is to maximize shareholder value is relatively new, dating back only to the 1980s. The dominant view in the first decades after World War II was that corporations had responsibilities to all of their stakeholders. Besides, shareholders are not the only parties who invest in the corporation and bear a risk that their investments will drop in value. Workers who have been with the firm for many years may have developed skills and knowledge unique to it. Others may have moved their families to take a job with the firm, buying homes in the community. The community itself may have invested in roads and other infrastructure to accommodate the corporation. By contrast, most shareholders of a large corporation do not put their money into enlarging its productive capacity because most of the value of the stock market has little to do with new

infusions of cash. Stocks are more like a vast collection of baseball cards, repeatedly traded.

Apple raised \$97 million in its initial public offering in 1980. Since then, those shares have circulated among investors who have bid up their price, but the added value has not gone to Apple; it has gone to investors lucky enough to buy them low and sell them high. Activist investors like Carl Icahn have bought enough shares to demand that the firm raise its stock price even higher by, for example, buying back some of its shares. Steve Jobs's successor, Tim Cook, was happy to oblige. In 2011 and 2012, during his first two years as CEO, he pocketed \$382 million, of which \$376 million was in the form of stock awards. But none of these machinations have anything to do with Apple's capacity to innovate and add real value, or to be successful over the long-term.

There is a common relationship between wealth and political power. When winners emerge in the race for profit, free markets become less free. The winners gain leverage in government, and the line between public and private blurs. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith himself warned of this danger—of businessmen as a class “whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public.” The same drive for expansion that can help progress along can also make it falter.

What guides these decisions? What do the people who make the rules seek to achieve? The rules can be designed to maximize efficiency (given the current distribution of income and wealth in society), or growth (depending on who benefits from that growth and what a society is willing to sacrifice to achieve it, such as fouling the environment), or fairness (depending on prevailing norms about what constitutes a fair and decent society); or they can be designed to maximize the profits of large corporations and big banks, and the wealth of those already very wealthy.

For example, if a democracy is failing—or never functioned to begin with—the rules might enhance the wealth of a comparative few at the top while keeping almost everyone else relatively poor and economically insecure. Those with sufficient power and resources would have enough influence over politicians, regulatory heads, and judges to ensure that the “free market” worked mostly on their behalf. This is not corruption as commonly understood. In the United States, those with power and resources rarely directly bribe public officials in order to receive specific and visible favors, such as advantageous government contracts. Instead, they make campaign contributions and occasionally hold out the promise of lucrative jobs at the end of government careers. And the most valuable things they get in exchange are market rules that seem to apply to everyone and appear to

be neutral, but that systematically and disproportionately benefit them. To state the matter another way, it is not the unique and perceptible government “intrusions” into the market that have the greatest effect on who wins and who loses; it is the way government organizes the market.

Power and influence are hidden inside the processes through which market rules are made, and the resulting economic gains and losses are disguised as the “natural” outcomes of “impersonal market forces.” Yet as long as we remain obsessed by the debate over the relative merits of the free market and government, we have little hope of seeing through the camouflage.

What I have described is not the same as corruption. Few if any public officials in the United States solicit or receive direct bribes. The seduction is more subtle. It is simply easier for officials to choose a path that’s been carefully laid out for them by lobbyists, paid experts, and smart and experienced lawyers than to strike out on their own through territory often regarded by the establishment as menacing. The lures of campaign contributions and well-paying jobs after government service only make the preferred path more enticing.

However organized, the rules of a market create incentives for people. Ideally, they motivate people to work and collaborate, to be productive and inventive; they help people to achieve the lives they seek. The rules will also reflect their moral values and judgments about what is good and worthy and what is fair. The rules are not static; they change over time, we hope in ways that most participants consider to be better and fairer. But this is not always the case. They can also change because certain people have gained the power to change them for their own benefit. Such has been the case in America and many other nations in recent decades.

Societies everywhere, if they are to be societies, must mobilize their members as self-regulating participants in social encounters. One way of mobilizing the individual for this purpose is through ritual. The focus group is a fitting ritual for our market democracy, in which political and commercial success accrues to those who can win our votes and our consumer dollars. It also teaches us to reveal just what the corporate and political elites need us to reveal for these specific persuasive projects, and helps us to play our assigned roles in a society where only a few people hold real power.

But a focus group is, in some ways, what democratic participation now feels like. It is one of the ways we crack the egg and feel we are doing something. It has been part of the evolution of our expressive democracy—that is, a society in which the expression of opinion has been dramatically democratized, while the distribution of everything else that matters—political power, money, et cetera—has only grown more starkly unequal.

The focus group offers us the experience of having a voice and the

possibility of influence in a world that offers most people little control over their lives, and little opportunity to influence anything.

When our system is viewed as a whole—as a political-economic arrangement for allocating rewards for the work people do—there is reason for concern. The meritocratic ideal with which our form of capitalism has been justified does not match the reality in which most of us live and work. The playing field is tilted toward those who have had the resources and power to tilt it in their direction. And as they gain steadily more resources and power, it tilts further.

I do not mean to suggest that those at the top who are shaping the rules are intentionally malevolent—though some certainly are. They are acting out of the same self-interest that has been thought to guide the theoretical free market toward efficient, and therefore publicly beneficial, outcomes. But rather than a theoretical free market they are acting in the real political economy where economic power generates political influence over the rules of the game, which, in turn, serves to enlarge economic power. They are behaving entirely rationally within this system, although the aggregate consequence of their individually rational calculations is neither efficient nor otherwise rational for the system as a whole. To the contrary, it is gradually undermining the system. The problem is not their power or influence, *per se*. It is the comparative lack of power or influence on the other side. There is no longer any significant countervailing power, no force to constrain or balance the growing political strength of large corporations, Wall Street, and the very wealthy. The people—and the economic interests they encompass—have little or no agency.

There's a lot of questions one could ask here, starting with, what does it say about our society that it seems to generate an extremely limited demand for talented poet-musicians, but an apparently infinite demand for specialists in corporate law? Answer: if 1% of the population controls most of the disposable wealth, what we call 'the market' reflects what they think is useful or important, not anybody else.

Milton Friedman argued that economic freedom is as important as civic freedom, because if you lose one, it is only a matter of time before you lose the other. And so one must defend free markets with the same vigor and vigilance as free speech, free religion, and free assembly.

A market society is an indecent society not only because it distorts notions of freedom, equality, and justice, but also because it subordinates human beings to the demands of the market, which is fundamentally humiliating. Instead of citizens creating and being served by the state, they are required to serve and sacrifice themselves or others to the market. More specifically, a neoliberal capitalist culture is fundamentally indecent when it privatizes

healthcare, prisons, schools, et cetera thus exploiting and humiliating the vulnerable. Of course, those who have economic and political privileges do not experience the pain of humiliation, because they have access to resources and the market deems them successful. Yet, the top 10%, who do not experience humiliation, obtain, willfully or inadvertently, the privileges that depend on the humiliation of the 90%, which reflects the reality of an indecent society organized by a neoliberal culture.

The oppressive effect of the prevailing market moralities leads to a form of sleepwalking from womb to tomb, with the majority of citizens content to focus on private careers and be distracted with stimulating amusements. They have given up any real hope of shaping the collective destiny of the nation. Sour cynicism, political apathy, and cultural escapism become the pervasive options.

The Iron Law of Liberalism: Any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs.

The old-style NHS was like many public services. Established as part of the 1945 post-war settlement, they were creations of a strong state, but they were not distracted from their true functions by intrusive monitoring and shifting targets set by governments. In contrast, since the injection of market mechanisms into public institutions, life in Britain has become more invasively regulated than it has ever been. The cult of the market has produced a society throttled by bureaucracy.

This is what happens when governments insist on market solutions to every social problem. A nightmare fusion of the worst elements of bureaucracy and the worst elements of capitalism.

This trend is not sustainable, neither economically nor politically. As ever-larger numbers of Americans conclude that the game is rigged against them, the social fabric will start to unravel. Confidence in economic institutions is already falling precipitously. In 2001 a Gallup poll found 77 percent of Americans satisfied with opportunities to get ahead by working hard, and only 22 percent were dissatisfied. But since then satisfaction has steadily declined and dissatisfaction increased. By 2014, only 54 percent were satisfied and 45 percent dissatisfied. According to the Pew Research Center, the percentage of Americans who feel that most people who want to get ahead can do so through hard work has dropped by 13 points since 2000.

This pervasive sense of arbitrariness and unfairness undermines economic institutions in several ways. First, it leads to widespread rule breaking. If the game is perceived to be rigged in favor of those at the top, then others are more likely to view cheating as acceptable—stealing and pilfering from employers, rigging time clocks, dissembling about lengths of time away from desk or office, overbilling, skimming off some of the profits, accepting small bribes and kickbacks for awarding a contract or making a deal. But an economy is based on trust. The cumulative effect of even small violations of trust can generate huge costs. Employers feel compelled to tighten rules, giving all employees less discretion; time-consuming screening and security checks are imposed at the end of the workday; additional reviews must be made of all accounts and additional oversight of all transactions; more legal steps and picayune procedures are required so no party will be surprised by opportunist moves of any other. Commercial dealings are hedged about by ever more elaborate contractual provision; creditors demand more burdensome guarantees for additional loans. Across the economy, red tape multiplies with the profusion of finagles it seeks to contain. The only beneficiaries from this economic sclerosis are the lawyers, accountants, auditors, and contractors for security staff and screeners whose services are increasingly in demand.

For each additional dollar going to each person in the vast majority, how many went to each of those in the top one percent? For 1950 to 1975, the ratio is four dollars more at the top for each dollar going to the vast majority. For 1960 through 1985, the ratio is \$17. And for 1981 through 2005, it is almost \$5,000. Dramatic as those numbers are, they understate the concentration of income. Let's now compare income growth for the vast majority with the top 1/100 of 1%, those 30,000 Americans at the very top of the income ladder. For 1950 to 1975, the ratio was \$36 to one. For 1960 through 1985, it was \$459. And for 1981 through 2005, it was \$141,000 to the dollar. Examining different periods produces the same basic result: since the market-based solutions came to dominate government policy, the winners have been the rich, the very rich and, most of all, the super-rich.

We exist only to be harvested by the 1%—if inadvertently the “market” benefits us, it's a terrible, terrible, horrible mistake.

The expanding freedom of corporations to do what they want may theoretically enlarge the economic pie for everyone. But in recent years the major consequence of such freedom has been to give bigger slices to the top executives of large corporations and Wall Street banks, and their shareholders, and smaller slices to almost everyone else.

Another consequence has been to reduce the freedoms of ordinary working people in the workplace. The supposed freedom of contract is a cruel joke to

workers who have no alternatives but to agree to terms mandating arbitration of all grievances before an arbiter chosen by the company, thereby forcing employees to give up their constitutional right to a trial. A corporation that monitors its employees' every motion from the minute they check in to the minute they check out, even limiting bathroom breaks to six minutes a day, may be a model of free enterprise—and give Bezos more money to spend on his private Space Force—but it does not contribute to the liberty of the people working for it.

The freedom of enterprises to monopolize a market likewise reduces the freedom of consumers to choose. Allowing Internet service providers to reduce or eliminate competition, for example, has made Internet service in the United States more expensive than in any other rich country. Permitting drug companies to prolong their patents by paying generic producers to delay lower-cost versions has kept drug prices higher in the United States than in Canada or Europe. Most of us remain “free” in the limited sense of not being coerced into purchasing Internet services or drugs. We can choose to do without them. But this is a narrow view of freedom.

The argument that it is ‘in the contract,’ agreed on by both parties and therefore to be enforced is an example of false morality. Contracts are only moral when both parties have roughly equal power in the agreement. In the good ole USA, workers do not have enough power to refuse signing. The contract is not moral! Logically, workers work because the employer has a figurative gun to their head. It used to be that contracts signed under ‘your signature or your brains on the paper’ situations, were legally—and morally—invalid.

Plus, while it may now be legal in the US for this type of infringement and censorship, this argument rests on the questionable concept that business and economics overrule all other considerations—political, social, religion, et cetera. Only in the neoliberal worldview is this concept given credence. And then, in typical Ayn Rand hypocrisy, only held by those who have the power to *not* live by it.

“Wealth is an absolute good, the font of society’s advances.
You’re welcome for the industrial revolution.”

“It is efficiency that allows the world to evolve, new things to be created, and more people to be employed. It is this efficiency that allows these companies to survive in the long-term, feeds their growth, and drives constant job creation.”

It’s a standard Econ 101 answer—one that equates profit with progress. And yet it’s not quite that simple. For example, Anheuser-Busch InBev

now employs more than a hundred and fifty-thousand people, but that's not because AB InBev created these jobs; it's because AB InBev keeps swallowing up its rivals in takeovers. Despite these apparent synergies, beer prices are no lower. So by firing people, the company may not be eliminating costs at all but shifting them onto the rest of society. When asked to name a new thing they've created, they didn't respond. But fear not, a recent Heinz investor presentation touted innovations that included yellow mustard and hot sauces. It's like creative destruction without the creative part.

In recent years, corporations have spent less on research and development than on buying their own shares on the exchange, thus inflating the price. This is good for shareholders and for executives with stock options, but not so useful for society as a whole.

Even in tech, most didn't come up with the main innovations behind their companies. Before Microsoft or the Macintosh came Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center. Before Facebook, Friendster, and MySpace. Before the iPhone, US government agencies developed GPS, touch-screens, and voice recognition. Bill Gates himself recently noted that private companies could never have created the Internet. The main genius of Gates and Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg was to build teams, marshal resources, and streamline and mass-market the innovations of others. All three played key roles in the advancement of technology, but in none of these cases did the inventors reap the greatest rewards.

Once an entrepreneur has made it, something funny happens, a narrative forms. A tale with heavy doses of luck and guesswork and help from others morphs retroactively into one of pure individual courage and wisdom. The failures become rites of passage, and the successes seem preordained. We don't hear about all the people who risk everything, lose everything, and never get rich at all.

Any entrepreneur will tell you the first million is the hardest. After that it gets easier, because wealth acts like a magnet on the world.

Entrepreneurs don't have a special gene for risk—they mostly come from families with money. What often gets lost in these conversations is that the most common shared trait among entrepreneurs is access to financial capital—family money, an inheritance, or a pedigree and connections that allow for access to financial stability. While it seems that entrepreneurs tend to have an admirable penchant for risk, it's usually that access to money which allows them to take risks.

More important than the specific policies designed for small businesses is the recognition that the free market is not generally friendly to small businesses—the vast majority of small business owners are heavily dependent on the special treatment they get from the nanny state. Most small businesses

are constantly struggling and usually only survive a short time. But without special treatment on taxes, loans, and regulations, even fewer would survive. While small business owners across the country like to envision themselves as tough individualists, the reality is that they are actually among the prime beneficiaries of the conservative nanny state.

The defense of small businesses relies on a misplaced liberal morality which contrasts “good” local businesses and “evil” corporate ones. This dichotomy has become dogma for many people, who amount their consumer choices to brave political acts. Feel bad about sweatshops? Purchase your next gift at a local boutique! Recession got you down? Shovel dollars into your local economy and dad just might get his job back. But are local businesses actually better for the majority of us?

The dominant image of small businesses as Mom and Pop stores run by elderly couples who work long hours as a labor of love is not reflected in the local economy. The reality is closer to a young, wealthy owner who does not work in their own store but instead employs a small group of wage laborers.

And since small businesses don’t have the profit margins of large corporations, they often rely on sweatshop discipline and poverty wages to make ends meet. Most anyone who has worked in the industry can attest to a repressive atmosphere: workers are not allowed on breaks, are scolded for talking to co-workers and punished for showing up five minutes late. Furthermore, even service workers who make tips frequently earn below a living wage and are subjected to unpredictable work schedules that necessitate finding a second or third job. When these practices happen at large corporate chains, they become the themes of documentaries, muckraking articles in the liberal press, and bumper sticker slogans. But when they’re used by local businesses, they’re written off as necessary evils.

In higher-end establishments, employers frequently justify poor treatment by trying to instill pride and artistic ambitions in their employees; workers are all but required to do extra learning, research, and labor outside of the workday to satisfy the employers’ need to serve the coolest new cocktail or coffee bean. At a recent mandatory meeting for an East Bay-based organic catering company, workers were told by the CEO:

“This is not a job; it’s a craft. You are all artists, and you should treat your job as such. If you don’t, you won’t succeed in this company.”

What he was saying was that if you do not invest hours off the clock in becoming a more efficient and valuable worker, we won’t employ you.

By romanticizing small businesses like the hip restaurants, cafes, and bars currently springing up—often in freshly gentrified areas—we gloss over

the experiences of the low wage workers who make them possible. When compared to the horrendous treatment that service workers must endure, the shattering or spray-painting of a few windows does not even the score.

The market's role in American society has increased exponentially, reaching into nooks and crannies of daily life to an extent that was unimaginable a generation ago.

This encroachment has been ignored in part because of the legacy of the Cold War. Our hostility to communism foreclosed more honest discussions about cooperation and collective ownership as organizing principles. But we have also been imprisoned by the tenacious myth that a commons invariably results in "tragedy"—a view popularized by Garrett Hardin in his famous essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons." Drawing on the example of herders using a common meadow, Hardin describes how a scarce resource open to all comers is depleted and left to ruin. The commons falls apart because every herder enjoys direct benefits from over-exploiting the commons, while suffering only indirect costs. Eventually, over-use destroys the resource.

Although Hardin's own focus was overpopulation, the metaphor soon took on a life of its own in public policy circles. In the hands of conservatives and economists, it began to serve as an all-purpose metaphor to denigrate collectively managed property and champion the efficiencies of private-property regimes. The "tragedy of the commons" narrative invokes an image of helpless individuals caught in an inexorable process of destroying their own resources.

This pessimism persists, in part, because the commons is frequently confused with an open-access regime—a free-for-all in which a resource is essentially open to everyone without restriction. An open-access regime lacks an identifiable authority and recognized property rights; the common resources are taken for sale on markets. In contrast, a real commons has a "social infrastructure" of cultural institutions, rules, and traditions, and the resources are restricted to personal (non-market) uses by members of the community. Without that infrastructure, the only operative social value is private profit for the most aggressive appropriators. Hardin's essay might more appropriately have been titled 'The Tragedy of Open Access.'

Absent from this "tragedy of the commons" argument—and related concerns about free riders—is an acknowledgment that trust, reciprocity, a history of shared commitment, and a robust community can overcome many of the alleged failures of the commons—and sometimes they do. While tragic failures of the commons and free-riding on public commodities certainly do occur, they do not represent the final word, or even an accurate generalization, about the capacity of individuals to pursue common goals.

The fact that people volunteer their time to work on community gardens,

or that scientists openly share their research results with trusted colleagues, or that people post useful information on the Internet for free, seems aberrational or at least marginal in terms of conventional economic thinking. But while cooperation may not conform to the general rule of rationally self-interested behavior, the efficacy of social negotiation and cooperation can be seen in dozens of smaller-scale commons.

Not only do fossil fuel companies receive \$775 billion to \$1 trillion in annual global subsidies, but they pay nothing for the privilege of treating our shared atmosphere as a free waste dump. One might call it the greatest market failure the world has ever seen. That freebie is the real distortion, that theft of the sky the real subsidy.

Each of the environmental threats we face is a market failure, a domain in which the free market has created serious “neighborhood” effects. But despite the friendly sound of this term, these effects are potentially deadly—and global in reach. To address them, governments will have to step in with regulations and nationalizations, in some cases very significant ones, to remedy the market failure. And this is precisely what these men most fear and loathe, for they view regulation as the slippery slope to Socialism, a form of creeping Communism.

The commons has lived in the shadows because of the limited assumptions of conventional economics, which prefers to focus on the individual and not the collective. A market-based perspective also shows relatively little interest in externalities—pollution, social disruptions, costs borne by future generations—and it discounts the power of exogenous variables such as moral and social norms. Intangible and historical context is generally ignored. Our market discourse, therefore, tends to ignore such vital species of common wealth as:

- Government-owned property, including public lands, government research and development, and information resources.
- Natural systems such as the atmosphere, water, local ecosystems, and genetic structures of life.
- User-managed regimes for conserving land, managing community gardens, developing software, and controlling access to fisheries and other natural resources.
- Gift economies, or social networks based on gift exchange, which create economic and social values within academia, Internet communities, and geographic localities.

- Shared, inherited knowledge such as scientific research, historical knowledge, and folk wisdom, all of which contribute to the public domain.
- Cultural traditions and norms, which serve as a set of common moral presumptions and expectations for managing daily life.

In many cases, these resources have no officially recognized value, let alone the legal definition and protection enjoyed by private property. But commoners realize all too well that community structures and social relationships are vitally important in creating wealth, not to mention a humane society.

Property ownership causes problems when control of property is held outside of the user group. When a community owns an individual's home, an individual owns a community's public space, or a state lays claim to an ocean, problems are inevitable.

Free-market enthusiasts and critics of socialism often make the deeply flawed argument that collective ownership of production could never work because it would lack the apparently mystical power of the market to determine the right price for different goods or services. Today's concept of private property, however, is pretty new—for thousands of years before industrial technology made capitalism possible, many resources were collectively owned. Outside of economic hubs controlled by feudal states, unused land was considered common property—free for anyone to work. This meant the poorest folks often still had some access to resources and could subsist on communal farms.

These public lands were privatized by the Enclosure Acts in eighteenth-century Great Britain and other industrial nations adopted that model soon after. Peasants were forced off communal farmlands that, in many cases, were considered public for thousands of years. Many parcels of land were given to wealthy business people by the British Parliament, many of whom developed it to produce wool for the new and incredibly profitable textile industry—you can guess who owned the factories. Considering that private property is only a few centuries old and that much of today's privatized land and natural capital was originally stolen by enclosure or colonization, why should it be hard to envision alternative concepts of property today?

It's worth appreciating just how extraordinary libraries are, why they matter, and what they can tell us about the kinds of institutions we should build. They're spaces of absolute equality, where anyone can come, regardless of financial resources, to study, learn, and hang out. You don't have to purchase anything in order to get to sit in them, you don't have to

be means-tested or background-checked. They give the same things to everybody, and there's something beautiful—and increasingly rare—about that. Privatization generally involves the elimination of that kind of place. When everything costs money, life becomes far more stressful, though that stress is distributed unequally.

What would it really feel like to live in a society where almost every single thing is privately owned and priced? Walking around urban Japan, I feel like I am seeing a society that is several steps closer to that ideal than the United States. You may have heard that Japan is a government-directed society, and in many ways it is. But in terms of the constituents of daily life being privately owned and marginally priced, it is a libertarian's dream world. For example, there are relatively few free city parks. Many green spaces are private and gated off—admission is usually around \$5. On the streets, there are very few trashcans; people respond to this in the way libertarians would want, by exercising personal responsibility and carrying their trash home with them in little baggies. There are also very few public benches. In cafes, each customer must order something promptly or be kicked out; outside your house or office, there is basically nowhere to sit down that will not cost you a little bit of money. Public buildings generally have no drinking fountains; you must buy or bring your own water. Free wireless? Good luck finding that! Does all this private property make me feel free? Absolutely not! Quite the opposite—the lack of a commons makes me feel constrained. It forces me to expend a constant stream of mental effort, calculating whether it's worth it to spend \$4 to sit and rest for ten minutes; whether it's worth \$2 to get a drink.

I get the same feeling walking around New York City, actually. Sitting down or using the restroom can cost money, because you have to do them in a cafe, where you likely need to buy something. I find this experience extremely taxing; I just wish there were lots of big public restrooms, and big public sitting-places, free for everyone to use. This is, first and foremost, because the poor deserve to be able to sit down or pee, and obviously those things should be basic human rights. But it's also because even non-poor people should get to be free to move around the world without constantly having to weigh their choices this way: Can I afford this extra ten minutes? Do I want to sit down so badly that it's worth \$2? The book comparison here is useful. When I'm doing research, I want to just be able to access 'all the books,' to look through them without thinking 'Is this source so valuable that I am willing to pay X amount for it?' The privatization of knowledge, with lots of important information stored in academic journals or newspaper archives or legal documents that cost significant amounts of money to access, makes it difficult to do open-ended research—legally at

least.

The only inflation numbers that matter are related to survival needs, no one should give a fuck if the iPhone price is inflated, but they should care deeply if the cost of healthy, whole food is.

As is often the case in times of starvation, the problem was not quite so simple as a shortage of food. At the height of the famine, Ireland's docks were heaped with sacks of corn destined for export to England. But the corn was a commodity, determined to follow the money; since the potato eaters had no money to pay for corn, it sailed for a country that did.

The conservative nanny state plays a big role in allowing high CEO pay, because the corporation is itself a creation of the government. While nanny state conservatives don't like to call attention to this fact, in a free market corporations do not exist. In a free market, individuals can form partnerships and engage in whatever trade and commercial relations they please, but they cannot establish a new legal entity that exists independently of the individuals who own it. Only a government can create a corporation as a legal entity with its own rights and privileges, the most important of which is limited liability.

The legal privileges of incorporation in America—limited liability, life in perpetuity, corporate personhood for the purpose of making contracts and the enjoyment of constitutional rights—should be available only to entities that share the gains from growth with their workers while also taking the interests of their communities and the environment into account.

The key flaw in the stance that most progressives have taken on economic issues is that they have accepted a framing whereby conservatives are assumed to support market outcomes, while progressives want to rely on the government. This framing leads progressives to futilely lash out against markets, rather than examining the factors that lead to undesirable market outcomes. The market is just a tool, and in fact can be a very useful one. It makes no more sense to lash out against markets than to lash out against the wheel. Many horrible acts have been done with wheels—young children have been run over by cars, sometimes even deliberately—but no one in their right mind would see this as a serious basis for not using wheels. The reality is that conservatives have been quite actively using the power of the government to shape market outcomes in ways that redistribute income upward. However, conservatives have been clever enough to not own up to their role in this process, pretending all along that everything is just the natural working of the market. And, progressives have been foolish enough to go along with this view.

Neither vision takes into account the notion that the government structures the market in fundamental ways that determine market outcomes.

Both visions largely accept the view of the market held by Friedman-esque conservatives—that it is a fact of nature. Undesirable outcomes such as poverty or extreme inequality are givens, and the issue is the extent to which we want the government to supplant the market or ameliorate its effects. Markets are not fixed by nature; rather, they are infinitely malleable. They are and can be structured in different ways depending on the desired outcomes. The enormous upward redistribution in the United States of the last four decades was not an inevitable outcome of technology or globalization. It was the result of deliberate policies, the purpose of which was to redistribute income upward.

In some instances poverty has been a result of a genuine lack of resources—actual scarcity. More frequently, poverty is the result of the way we have organized markets and structured property rules. If we had rules designed to lead to more equal outcomes, there would not be so much poverty co-existing alongside great wealth for the few.

Markets need rules for determining the degree to which economic power can be concentrated without damaging the system.

Markets are never just given. Neither God nor nature hands us a worked-out set of rules determining the way property relations are defined, contracts are enforced, or macroeconomic policy is implemented. These matters are determined by policy choices. The elites have written these rules to redistribute income upward. Needless to say, they are not eager to have the rules rewritten—which means they also have no interest in even having them discussed. But for progressive change to succeed, these rules must be addressed. While modest tweaks to tax and transfer policies can ameliorate the harm done by a regressive market structure, their effect will be limited. The complaint of conservatives—that tampering with market outcomes leads to inefficiencies and unintended outcomes—is largely correct, even if they may exaggerate the size of the distortions from policy interventions. Rather than tinker with badly designed rules, it is far more important to rewrite the rules so that markets lead to progressive and productive outcomes in which the benefits of economic growth and improving technology are broadly shared.

There is no scenario in which the market works alone. Government policies will affect the level of output in the economy. The only question is whether we want to design these policies explicitly to meet certain goals or if we want to pretend we don't notice the impact of the policies we have put in place. Regardless of what we might decide about how fiscal and monetary policy can boost or slow the economy, government policy is playing an enormous role in determining the economy's level of demand and how it functions at a fundamental level.

We live in an interventionist economy, an economy where the government has intervened in a variety of ways that have had the effect of shifting income upward. If this intervention in turn lowers consumption, and therefore output and employment, a policy of ‘not intervening’ is in fact a choice to let the earlier interventions go unchallenged. The beneficiaries of the upward redistribution may like the outcome, but it is not because they prefer leaving matters to the market. Rather, they prefer government interventions that have the effect of giving them more money.

If we move beyond the illusion of non-intervention—the idea that there is some natural fiscal and/or monetary policy that doesn’t involve policy choices—then we realize that we decide, as a matter of policy, whether to have an economy with high or low levels of poverty and inequality. The decision in the United States and most other wealthy countries over the last four decades has been to maintain relatively high levels of inequality. This policy has been seen most directly in the explicit decision by the Federal Reserve Board and other central banks to focus mainly, or even exclusively, on keeping inflation low. This is a sharp shift from prior decades, when central banks saw one of their main functions as promoting high levels of employment.

Powerful interests directly benefit from an over-valued dollar. Many major US manufacturers have set up operations in China and other developing countries for the purpose of exporting back to the United States. They aren’t eager to see the cost of the items produced in these countries rise by 20 to 30 percent if the dollar falls by that amount. Similarly, major retailers like Walmart have established low-cost supply chains in the developing world, and they would prefer not to see the prices of the goods they import rise along with the value of developing country currencies. Thus, there are substantial political obstacles working against major efforts from the US government to force down the value of the dollar and bring the trade deficit closer to balance. For this reason, we can see the large trade deficit as a policy choice, not simply an unavoidable a natural outcome of the workings of the market.

Ways in which policy affects employment:

1. Distributional policies that affect consumption

- Union policy
- Minimum wage
- Regulatory policy
- Structure of unemployment benefit system

2. Incentives for longer or shorter work-years
3. Fiscal policy (more or less expansionary)
4. Monetary policy (more or less expansionary)
5. Currency policy (affects trade deficit or surplus)

It is hypocritical to bless the policies that have the effect of reducing demand as non-intervention and condemn the policies designed to counteract these effects as intervention. We can choose government policies that will be more or less stimulative of growth and employment and inequality, but we can't escape the fact that government policies are affecting these things. The presence of large numbers of people who are unable to find work as a result of inadequate demand is the result of policies we have chosen that keep these people from working. This is not *laissez-faire* or the free market; this is operating the government to benefit a select group.

Anxieties about the latent immorality of commercial society were shared even by such paladins of the free market as Adam Smith. He recognized that poverty and inequality were inevitable outcomes of the growth of the market, arguing that the market could not by itself relieve those "who by the products of their labor feed, clothe, and lodge the whole body of the people should have such a share of the product of their own labor as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed, and lodged." Nor, he believed, could one depend on the powers that be because "civil government so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defense of the rich against the poor, or all those who have some property against those who have none at all."

The Machine Appeared

The Dutch Disease: the negative impact of an economy based on one natural resource, causes a sharp inflow of foreign currency, which raises the value of the country's currency, making the country's other products less price competitive. It is cheaper to import products rather than create them. This makes it more difficult for segments of the economy like agriculture and manufacturing to develop.

The machine appeared
 In the distance, singing to itself
 Of money.
 Its song was the web
 They were caught in, men and women
 Together.
 The villages were as flies
 To be sucked empty.
 God secreted
 A tear.
 Enough, enough,
 He commanded, but the machine
 Looked at him and went on singing.

As mother and son play, Aminatta looks down, ashamed, as she recalls how she had once taken Thomas to the countryside and left him to die under a giant cotton tree.

Someone gets to eat the fruits of globalization, someone else ends up with the pits.

The global economy has been transformed from a material-based economy into a knowledge-based economy. Previously the main sources of wealth were material assets such as gold mines, wheat fields, and oil wells. Today the main source of wealth is knowledge. And whereas you can conquer oil fields through war, you cannot acquire knowledge that way. Hence as knowledge became the most important economic resource, the profitability of war declined and wars became increasingly restricted to those parts of the world—such as the Middle East and Central Africa—where the economies are still old-fashioned material-based economies.

Of course water will likely, if not already, be added to this, expanding the scope of war once again. Combined with the fact that while the concept of an iPhone is knowledge, the actual device is not and does require access to key minerals along with labor and transport, this may in fact have more

to do with whether or not they fall sufficiently under Uncle Sam's protective umbrella. But how long can such a thing hold?

In 1998 it made sense for Rwanda to seize and loot the rich coltan mines of neighbouring Congo, because this ore was in high demand for the manufacture of mobile phones and laptops, and Congo held 80 percent of the world's coltan reserves. Rwanda earned \$240 million annually from the looted coltan. For poor Rwanda that was a lot of money. In contrast, it would have made no sense for China to invade California and seize Silicon Valley, for even if the Chinese could somehow prevail on the battlefield, there were no silicon mines to loot in Silicon Valley. Instead, the Chinese have earned billions of dollars from cooperating with high-tech giants such as Apple and Microsoft, buying their software and manufacturing their products. What Rwanda earned from an entire year of looting Congolese coltan, the Chinese earn in a single day of peaceful commerce.

Those who view the global economy as presenting a choice between 'free trade' and 'protectionism' overlook the centrality of power in determining what is to be traded and how. Since all nations' markets depend on political decisions about how their markets are organized, as a practical matter free trade agreements entail complex negotiations about how different market systems will be integrated.

'Free trade' with China, for example, doesn't simply mean more trade, because China's market is organized quite differently from that of the United States. The real issues involve such things as the degree of protection China will give the intellectual property of American-based corporations, how China will treat the assets of US-based investment banks, and the access of China's state-run enterprises to the American market.

In such negotiations the interests of big American-based corporations and Wall Street banks have consistently trumped the interests of average working Americans, whose wages are considered less worthy of protection than, say, an American company's intellectual capital or a Wall Street bank's financial assets. The United States has never sought to require, for example, that trading partners establish minimum wages equal to half their median wages.

Income gains for Pfizer and Disney translate into lost jobs for workers in the steel and auto industries. The conventional story is that we lose manufacturing jobs to developing countries because they have hundreds of millions of people willing to do factory work at a fraction of the pay of manufacturing workers in the United States. This is true, but developing countries also have tens of millions of smart and ambitious people willing to work as doctors and lawyers in the United States at a fraction of the pay of the ones we have now. Gains from trade work the same with doctors

and lawyers as they do with textiles and steel. Our consumers would save hundreds of billions a year if we could hire professionals from developing countries and pay them salaries that are substantially less than what we pay our professionals now. The reason we import manufactured goods and not doctors is that we have designed the rules of trade that way. We deliberately write trade pacts to make it as easy as possible for US companies to set up manufacturing operations abroad and ship the products back to the United States, but we have done little or nothing to remove the obstacles that professionals from other countries face in trying to work in the United States. The reason is simple: doctors and lawyers have more political power than factory workers.

If our trade negotiators treated doctors and other highly paid professionals the same way they treated manufacturing workers, then trade agreements would have been written to make it as easy as possible for smart, ambitious kids in Mexico, India, and other developing countries to study to meet US standards. They then would be able practice their profession in the United States in the same way as someone born and educated in the United States. The fact that manufacturing workers face competition from low-paid workers in the developing world and doctors and other highly paid professionals don't has nothing to do with the inherent dynamics of globalization: it is about the differences in the power of these groups.

Highly paid professionals are highly paid because they set their own rules. Doctors, dentists, and lawyers don't face the same downward pressure on their wages as textile workers, autoworkers, and retail clerks because the government's policies are not trying to push their pay lower. We aren't designing trade agreements to expose these professions to competition with lower-paid counterparts in the developing world. Nor are politicians constantly looking for new ways to alter regulations in ways that undermine these workers' bargaining power. The workers in these professions sit near the top of the pay ladder not because of the inherent dynamics of globalization and the market economy, but because they have much more say than other workers in setting the rules. There will always be genuine quality concerns in making these decisions, but if the assessment of quality issues is left to the professionals who stand to benefit, we can expect that these professionals will be enriching themselves at the expense of the rest of us.

Of course, many young professionals, especially doctors, have put in years of training and have incurred large debts to practice in a field that they expected to be financially rewarding. It is reasonable to have some sympathy for them and perhaps lessen the blow from market-opening measures by, for example, offering student loan forgiveness. However, why apply a different standard to market openings for highly trained professionals than to market

openings for textile workers and autoworkers? For less highly paid workers we take steps that increase efficiency and promote growth and pledge that we will help those left behind. In most cases the help has not been especially useful. It does not make sense to believe that the most educated workers in society somehow are in need of greater protection from the government than the millions of less-educated workers who have been displaced by trade openings and other measures. Sympathy might be appropriate, special protection is not.

One crucial fact is often left unsaid: our trade with countries where we do not have so-called free trade agreements is growing faster than with countries with which we have such agreements. The implication is clear: free trade agreements are less about increasing trade than about lowering costs (by replacing American workers with cheap overseas labor) so owners and financiers can harvest a larger share of the economic fruits.

Economic globalization, which has happened without globalizing first-world labor protections, has left workers around the world to compete against one another.

So far most of the lost jobs and lowered wages have come at the expense of factory workers, but that is changing. Thanks to the Internet, any job that can be done on a computer can be moved offshore. Engineers, accountants, graphic designers, and millions of other workers could see their jobs sent “offshore.” A case in point? The Reuters news agency fired twenty American and European journalists in 2004 and replaced them with sixty journalists who were paid such low wages in India that the company cut its labor costs by more than \$200,000. Reuters said it was about saving money, but that shouldn’t have been the headline. In fact, the job exchange was about preserving fat pay for top executives. If it were about saving money, then firing the four highest-paid Reuters executives and replacing them with a dozen talented managers in Mumbai, paid on the same salary reduction scale as the journalists, would have saved the company \$968,000 a year, more than four times as much.

Outside the brief interval of enforced peace following the Second World War, Europe has been a boiling cauldron of warfare since its modern cultures began to emerge out of the chaos of the post-Roman dark ages. Most of the world’s most devastating wars have been European in origin. And of course it escapes no one’s attention in the rest of the world that it was from Europe that hordes of invaders and colonizers swept over the entire planet from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries—as often as not leaving total devastation in their wake. In histories written a thousand years from now, Europeans will have the same sort of reputation that Huns and Mongols have today and it’s only in the fond fantasies of those who think history has

a direction that those days are definitely over.

There used to be a time when industrialization—often referred to by the magic word ‘development’—was seen as the road to economic independence. As it has emerged, however, industrial development has usually been a process of converting preindustrial dependencies into industrial dependencies. Previously, many left-wing revolutionary movements aimed to throw off the yoke of imperialism by joining with the native capitalists in “national revolutions.” What has often happened, however, is that the local capitalists have supplanted the old landowning oligarchs in trying to cooperate with, rather than break with, foreign capital. Instead of “ugly Americans” or Europeans meddling in their affairs, many Third World regimes are increasingly manned by Americanized Brazilians, Anglicized Indians and Nigerians, and Westernized Saudi Arabians and Egyptians.

As dependent industrialism grows, moreover, its roots spread deeply into the state bureaucracies, in the universities and among the managerial, technical, professional, and intellectual elites. As this happens, military control or the threat of a military takeover becomes somewhat less essential and the military themselves became more civilianized, if not even subordinate to corporate economic interests. Thus a huge infrastructure of dependency is developed which serves as the functional equivalent of a formal colonial apparatus. In fact, external controls are now internalized in domestic institutions, and the new infrastructure may be more powerful than any previous colonial apparatus. Thus, with the old oligarchies pushed aside by industrial development, the sons and grandsons of the preindustrial chieftains and feudal aristocrats leap from landowning to stockholding, from the protection of ancient privileges to the glory of new privileges as the local agents—at times, even junior partners—of the new industrial oligarchs of the “New World” empire. The lands they still own allow them to keep one foot in the past, thus easing the transition, or better yet, allowing them to move into the new world of chemically fertilized, supermechanized, and super-seeded agribusiness.

Socialized enterprises in utilities, transportation, communication, and water are being used to subsidize private firms by providing them with essential services at cost or even below-cost prices. More nationalization of this type is under way—particularly in basic mineral, forest, and land resources.

History as told by Europeans would like us to believe that Europeans were fully responsible for the conquest which established them in the seats of power but indigenous people worldwide were far more involved in choosing the trade empire than they are ever given credit for and the trade empire remained in power even where the Europeans did not. The so-called Spanish,

English, French, and Portuguese conquest of the Americas could never have happened without what their history euphemistically called Indian allies, alliances of nations who vastly outnumbered the Europeans in every case and overthrew the existing empires or rival nations with the help of a few Europeans and their guns.

The indigenous women history deplors as sex slaves who had no autonomy or initiative were sometimes powerful to the point that it would be more accurate to call the Europeans their concubines, or even more accurate to call it a partnership. Hernán Cortés and his little band of 1300 men would not have survived, much less conquered the Aztec alliance, without the connections and actions of La Malinche throughout their campaign and her ability to negotiate alliances with all of the indigenous nations which provided the hundreds of thousands of warriors who overthrew the Aztecs.

The Incas failed to retake Cuzco during the siege of 1536, not because of the 190 Spanish soldiers present but because of the army of tens of thousands sent by the Inca kuraka, Contarhucho, in response to a message from her daughter, the Inca princess, Quispe Sisa, who was living with the Spanish “conquistador” Francisco Pizarro. The combination of European bragging and erasure of all indigenous and female people out of history has given a very unrealistic view of the conquest of every nation on earth by the trade economy. It was not a few European men who conquered the world, it was an idea.

This may reflect *Homo sapiens* position in the food chain. If all that counted were raw physical abilities, *Sapiens* would have found themselves on a middle rung of the ladder. But their mental and social skills placed them at the top. It is therefore only natural that the chain of power within the species will also be determined by mental and social abilities more than by brute force.

The most powerful empires were those who became wealthy from trade. Goods had exchanged hands between tribes for as long as humanity existed and this is frequently referred to as trade, but it probably was usually just sharing. The tradition of state visitors bearing gifts is so long standing and widespread it was probably present in our earliest societies. We know sharing was the only method of exchange between some tribes and it is hard to imagine most other early tribes conducting trades over their limited goods.

Sharing is a social trait common to all people and it would have been easier to communicate and more effective than trade for meeting socially. No human would have grown to adulthood without a mother sharing with them, not as an exchange but as a gift. Since the elderly and weak would also not have survived without sharing, it can be surmised that this was

learned behaviour practiced between all people, not just the parent-child relationship it has been reduced to today. Trade or reciprocal sharing did develop between neighbouring tribes with regular contact however, and this usually increased dramatically with stratified and hierarchical society.

With the progression of our dissociation, wealth no longer follows tribal or imperial leadership, resources, or even trade in resources. The basis for entrance to the elite supranational classes now is existing wealth, celebrity, or power, in any form. The ability to write laws and treaties, control knowledge, or manipulate the public is rapidly replacing the ability to directly control resources as the primary source of power. Tribal knowledge which was once hoarded by guilds is now copyrighted, patented, and kept in the upper strata, defended by lawyers and laws protecting rights which are unrelated to creation.

Unlike power under the elite of the second age, the supranational class at the top of today's global empire does not need to govern or be involved in any way with the divided state-societies below them. Power has become completely dissociated from governance or the well-being of the people of the world. It exists simply to accumulate the currency which purchases dissociated entrance to any society. The supranational class is its own nation. Everyone not in their strata is their outgroup who they spare no empathy towards.

The wealthy are now wealthy for being wealthy. The former merchant classes have followed the old nobility of the second age in convincing the public to continue serving them for no reason except habit and the laws they wrote themselves.

Noblesse oblige—never a popular idea among dictators—was replaced by the idea that the formerly childlike citizens had personal responsibility and responsibility meant accepting corporate slavery. There was no need to justify corporate rule as the trade economy ruled for it. Even the rulers were abstracted away behind corporate names. There was no need to justify their privilege as wealth was its own justification. Rebellions were subverted by convincing the people to compete with each other for trade dominance instead.

Dissociation gave the promise of free will and autonomy to those who had lost it. For those who remembered, it gave the promise of autonomous nations which could hold power without imperial occupation. For those who had long forgotten their tribal autonomy, it gave the promise of freedom from the child-like subservience of imperial citizens. For those persecuted by their own society, it gave freedom from social approval. People and nations no longer needed the approval or agreement of their government or neighbours for anything. They didn't even need to know their neighbours. They just

needed to sell them something and they would have all the dissociated approval they needed to survive, maybe even to build an empire of their own.

This is the role men have been forced into since the beginnings of the trade economy. Men were shunned out of their families and into industry or military far more often than women and were not welcomed back into their families without currency. In many cases they had to give up their entire family life and just send back the currency while they lived far from home. The social approval a woman once received for being a good mother was given to men if they were a good provider.

After the trade economy took control of all social relationships, a good provider was the one who spent the least time with his family or village and was most successful in exploiting his society. Industry pretended that industrialists provided jobs and money, neither of which are needed by any community, and successfully perverted the word 'providers' to be applied to the community destroyers. Social acceptance was granted to those who would formerly have been attacked.

The dissociation of industrialized societies has changed national narcissism into an explosion of individual narcissism. The amount of approval now demanded by individual members of industrialized societies is unlimited and of course, unsustainable. The monetization of this approval still requires a social aspect. As it takes more and more money to buy the envy and obsequiousness of others, the ruthlessness in obtaining wealth and the dissatisfaction it brings will continue.

The solutions to this narcissistic emptiness will not be found in gender parity in a trade economy. The answer is not that women should benefit from trade, it's that men should not. All money in a trade economy comes from the powerful and we need to build a society that benefits the powerless. If service to society becomes the measure of worth, women will have parity overnight and all people will receive direct approval for their contributions. If we reject the economy based on trade to the powerful, neither men nor women will have to, or be able to, buy their acceptance into their own families or the approval of their communities.

The social acceptance we once received for being of service to our communities we now receive for competing with and exploiting them. This acceptance is not the social approval we all crave as humans. It is envy and fear and it leaves us empty.

Approval economies are the natural economies of human society. We separated power from societal approval and exchanged society for trade relationships so long ago most cannot imagine an alternative, but it is still there in the most basic units of society. Economies based on trade

relationships with financial systems as tools of coercion and control cannot coexist with peaceful and just societies. Power will be concentrated in able bodied traders and hoarders as long as we continue using trade economies.

We have always had sectarianism. The difference now is we also have hierarchy. Those who treat the rest of us as an outgroup they have no empathy for are at the very top strata of society and have control over every aspect of our lives. We have always committed atrocities on people in our outgroups. The difference now is we can profit from those atrocities. Whether our actions have social approval or not, they can produce currency which will bring social approval. As long as we can buy social approval with currency we are no longer as susceptible to societal coercion. As long as our societies are non-existent, shunning and inclusion have no effect on us.

The dissociated approval brought by currency was also dissociated authority and dictatorship every bit as cruel but less accountable than the former empires. The dissociation which looked so much like freedom was just sociopathy, the individualism was isolation and impotence. The equality under a trade empire was no equality at all, as any egalitarian system imposed on unequal populations must result in tyranny by those the system was designed for. For many years those who refused to let go of the trade economy dream have insisted the tyrants were there by personal merit, not design, and punished those who failed to excel by insisting they were defective and attempting to reform them. Those who failed to excel also refused to give up on the dream and just demanded it be modified to let them in, giving rise to an endless succession of reformers demanding their rights to succeed in a sociopathic system of oppression.

The trade economy has denied the value of any work benefiting those in need of assistance and denied the value of resources in non-Western countries. Both caregivers and resource rich continents are depicted as being in a state of perpetual begging for handouts from the wealthy despite the obvious fact that no one needs the wealthy and everyone needs caregivers and resources. The same power that once denied ownership by the commons with the homesteading principle now denies the rights of homesteaders in favour of foreign multinational corporations. Laws are stratified to ensure the powerful have superior versions of everything, including immigration rights at a time when much of the world will need refugee status from drought, pollution, conflict, natural disasters. Even natural life expectancy is unapologetically higher for the chosen strata. The world is being funneled through a eugenics program of a previously unimagined scale.

There will be no “tragedy of the commons” greater than this: if we do not recover the commons, regain personal, local, community, and peoples’ involvement in sharing, in being the web of the wild world, that world will

keep slipping away. And, it is clear, the loss of a local commons heralds the end of self-sufficiency and signals the doom of the vernacular culture of the region.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US emerged as the sole remaining superpower, equally committed to the principles of democracy and free markets. The major development since then has been the globalization of financial markets, spearheaded by advocates who argued that globalization increases total wealth. After all, if the winners compensated the losers, they would still have something left over.

The argument was misleading, because it ignored the fact that the winners seldom, if ever, compensate the losers. But the potential winners spent enough money promoting the argument that it prevailed.

Globalization has had far-reaching economic and political consequences. It has brought about some economic convergence between poor and rich countries; but it increased inequality within both poor and rich countries. In the developed world, the benefits accrued mainly to large owners of financial capital, who constitute less than 1% of the population. The lack of redistributive policies is the main source of the dissatisfaction that democracy's opponents have exploited. But there were other contributing factors as well, particularly in Europe.

The effect of all this is to remind you with every prospect that this is a place and a way of life from which the politicians have withdrawn their blessing. Like so many other American scenes, this one is the product of decades of deindustrialization, engineered by Republicans and rationalized by Democrats. This is a place where affluence never returns—not because affluence for Fall River is impossible or unimaginable, but because our country's leaders have blandly accepted a social order that constantly bids down the wages of people like these while bidding up the rewards for innovators, creatives, and professionals.

Even the city's one real hope for new employment opportunities—an Amazon warehouse that is now in the planning stages—will serve to lock in this relationship. If all goes according to plan, and if Amazon sticks to the practices it has pioneered elsewhere, people from Fall River will one day get to do exhausting work with few benefits while being electronically monitored for efficiency, in order to save the affluent customers of nearby Boston a few pennies when they buy books or electronics or a dildo shaped like a dragon dick.

But that is all in the future. These days, the local newspaper publishes an endless stream of stories about drug arrests, shootings, drunk-driving crashes, the stupidity of local politicians, and the lamentable surplus of “affordable housing.” The town is up to its eyeballs in wrathful bitterness

against public workers. As in: Why do they deserve a decent life when the rest of us have no chance at all? It's every man for himself here in a "competition for crumbs," as a Fall River friend puts it.

The US is lucky. We are so rich we could take a lot more corruption before the system started breaking down, and even then, our decay path has been a lot more gradual than for that of a much more fragile emerging economy.

The liberals are not just in disarray—they are in complete collapse because the working class has awakened to the liberals' betrayal and abandonment of the working class in favor of building personal wealth and power. The source of the angry angst rippling through the Democratic Party's progressive camp is not President Trump—it's the complete collapse of the liberals globally.

Broadly speaking, the liberals favored labor (whose rights were protected by the state) and the Right favored capital (also protected by the state). But over the past 25 years of globalized neoliberalism, social democratic movements have abandoned labor to embrace the self-serving wealth and power offered by capital. The essence of globalization is: labor is turned into a commodity as mobile capital is free to roam the globe for the lowest cost labor. In contrast, labor is far less mobile, and unable to shift as fluidly and frictionlessly as capital to exploit scarcities and opportunities.

Neoliberalism—specifically the opening of markets and borders—enables capital to effortlessly crush labor. The liberals, in embracing open borders, have institutionalized an open immigration that shreds the scarcity value of domestic labor in favor of lower cost immigrant labor that serves capital's desire for lower costs.

Globalization and neoliberal financial and immigration policies signify the collapse of the liberals and the victory of capital. Now capital completely dominates the state and its cronyist structures—political parties, lobbying, campaign contributions, charitable foundations operating as pay-for-play cash vacuums, and all the other features of cartel-state capitalism.

To mask the collapse of the liberals' economic defense of labor, the liberals' apologists and PR machine have substituted social justice movements for economic opportunities to acquire economic security and capital. This has succeeded brilliantly, as tens of millions of self-described "progressives" completely bought the liberals' great con that "social justice" campaigns on behalf of marginalized social groups were the defining feature of Progressive Social Democratic movements.

What's most baffling about all of this is that no matter how many times global elites see the rotted fruit of their piggish behavior—instability,

extremism, and collective rejection of their own authority—they continue to pursue it, seemingly inured to the consequences.

In theory free trade should make the world richer because production will reach maximum efficiency as each country returns to the idea of comparative advantage, specializing in what it does best. But while waiting for this economic paradise to arrive by and by, people have to eat. Also, you can't buy a new planet once you've trashed this one getting "rich."

Why did Walmart go to China in the 90s? Was it because customers came into Walmart and marched up to the manager and said 'I'm not buying this expensive American made stuff, and I demand you get these products made in China,' and the managers dutifully sent the message upstairs to the CEO? That would seem to be the mainstream consensus, and that never happened. It was Wall Street's demand for greater profits to boost Walmart's share price which was the greatest motivator for dumping US manufacturing in favor of Made in China.

We're all on board the train of ravenous and ever-growing plunder and pollution. As our locomotive races toward the cliff of ecological collapse, the only thoughts on the minds of our CEOs, capitalist economists, politicians, and most labor leaders is how to stoke the locomotive to get us there faster. Corporations aren't necessarily evil. They just can't help themselves. They're doing what they're supposed to do for the benefit of their owners. But this means that, so long as the global economy is based on capitalism and private property and corporate property and competitive production for market, we're doomed to a collective social suicide—and no amount of tinkering with the market can brake the drive to global ecological collapse. We can't shop our way to sustainability, because the problems we face cannot be solved by individual choices in the marketplace. They require collective democratic control over the economy to prioritize the needs of society and the environment. And they require local, regional, national, and international economic planning to reorganize the economy and redeploy labor and resources to these ends. I conclude, therefore, that if humanity is to save itself, we have no choice but to overthrow capitalism and replace it with a democratically planned eco-socialist economy.

We must face a sobering fact. If every company on the planet were to adopt the best environmental practices of the "leading" companies—say, the Body Shop, Patagonia, or 3M—the world would still be moving toward sure degradation and collapse. Quite simply, our business practices are destroying life on earth. Given current corporate practices, not one wildlife preserve, wilderness, or indigenous culture will survive the global market economy. We know that every natural system on the planet is disintegrating. The land, water, air, and sea have been functionally transformed from life-supporting

systems into repositories for waste. There is no polite way to say that business is destroying the world.

The indigenous are freer and happier than Westerners not by some innate abilities, but because they have chosen to work for their freedom: by co-producing food, tools, clothes, pottery, by hunting, fishing, and foraging together. Westerners have refused to resist thus far, because deep down, many know they are dependent on the system for survival, and don't want to pull that plug, to bite the hand that feeds. It's the only way, though. We are going to have to walk away from all this, and activists, protesters, and concerned citizens are going to have to metaphorically step into our own jungle, and organize around ecology, democracy, and social justice.

If middle-class society is decaying, if we have got into a blind alley from which we cannot emerge without attacking past institutions with torch and hatchet, it is precisely because we have given too much to counting. It is because we have let ourselves be influenced into giving only to receive. It is because we have aimed at turning society into a commercial company based on debit and credit.

Some support the proposition that as industrialized nations shift to higher-tech economies, it is only a matter of global justice that the jobs upon which our middle classes were built should be shared with countries still enslaved by poverty. The problem is that the workers throughout Asia and Latin America, are not inheriting "our" jobs at all. One of the myths of relocation is that those jobs that seemed to be transferred from the so-called North to the South are perceived as similar jobs to what was already being done before. They are not. Just as company-owned manufacturing turned—somewhere over the Pacific Ocean—into "orders" to be placed with third-party contractors, so did full-time employment undergo a mid-flight transformation into "contracts." The biggest challenge to those in Asia is that the new employment created by Western and Asian multinationals investing in Asia is temporary and short-term employment. In fact, zone workers in many parts of Asia, the Caribbean, and Central America have more in common with office-temp workers in North America and Europe than they do with factory workers in those Northern countries.

What is happening is a radical alteration in the very nature of factory work. That was the conclusion of a 1996 study conducted by the International Labor Organization, which stated that the dramatic relocation of production in the garment and shoe industries "has been accompanied by a parallel shift of production from the formal to the informal sector in many countries, with generally negative consequences on wage levels and conditions of work." Employment in these sectors, the study went on, has shifted from "full-time in-plant jobs to part-time and temporary jobs and, especially in clothing

and footwear, increasing resort to homework and small shops.” Indeed, this is not simply a job-flight story.

An example of genuinely fair trade is each country provides what it is best placed to produce, in return for what it most needs, independent of global market prices. So Bolivia provides gas at stable discounted prices; Venezuela offers heavily subsidized oil to poorer countries and shares expertise in developing reserves; and Cuba sends thousands of doctors to deliver free health care all over the continent, while training students from other countries at its medical schools. This is a very different model from the kind of academic exchange that began at the University of Chicago in the mid-fifties, when Latin American students learned a single rigid ideology and were sent home to impose it with uniformity across the continent. The major benefit is that ALBA is essentially a barter system, in which countries decide for themselves what any given commodity or service is worth, rather than letting traders in New York, Chicago, or London set the prices for them. That makes trade far less vulnerable to the kind of sudden price fluctuations that devastated Latin American economies in the recent past. Surrounded by turbulent financial waters, Latin America is creating a zone of relative economic calm and predictability, a feat presumed impossible in the globalization era.

Well, at least it was until Uncle Sam’s meddling.

The standard framing of economic debates divides the world into two schools. On the one hand, conservatives want to leave things to the market and have a minimal role for government. Liberals see a large role for government in alleviating poverty, reducing inequality, and correcting other perceived ill-effects of market outcomes. This framing is fundamentally wrong. The point is that we don’t have “market outcomes” that we can decide whether to interfere with or not. Government policy shapes market outcomes. It determines aggregate levels of output and employment, which in turn affect the bargaining power of different groups of workers. Government policy structures financial markets, and the policy giving the industry special protections allows for some individuals to get enormously rich. Government policy determines the extent to which individuals can claim ownership of technology and how much they can profit from it. Government policy sets up corporate governance structures that let top management enrich itself at the expense of shareholders. And government policy determines whether highly paid professionals enjoy special protection from foreign and domestic competition.

Pretending that the distribution of income and wealth that results from a long set of policy decisions is somehow the natural workings of the market is not a serious position. It might be politically convenient for conservatives

who want to lock inequality in place. It is a more politically compelling position to argue that we should not interfere with market outcomes than to argue for a system that is deliberately structured to make some people very rich while leaving others in poverty. Pretending that distributional outcomes are just the workings of the market is convenient for any beneficiaries of this inequality, even those who consider themselves liberal. They can feel entitled to their prosperity by virtue of being winners in the market, yet sufficiently benevolent to share some of their wealth with the less fortunate. For this reason, they may also find it useful to pretend that we have a set of market outcomes not determined by policy decisions.

We should not structure our understanding of the economy around political convenience. There is no way of escaping the fact that levels of output and employment are determined by policy, that the length and strength of patent and copyright monopolies are determined by policy, and that the rules of corporate governance are determined by policy. The people who would treat these and other policy decisions determining the distribution of income as somehow given are not being honest. We can debate the merits of a policy, but there is no policy-free option out there.

Our objection is obviously not to trade; cultures have always traded goods across borders, and always will. What we object to is the way transnational institutions are using trade deals to globalize pro-corporate policies that are extremely profitable for a small group of players but which are steadily devouring so much of what used to be public and commonly held: seeds, water rights, public health care, and much more.

We cannot ignore the fact that the period 1820 to circa 1950 was one of violent dispossession across much of the Global South. If you have read any colonial history, you will know colonizers had immense difficulty getting people to work on their mines and plantations. As it turns out, people tended to prefer their subsistence lifestyles, and wages were not high enough to induce them to leave. Colonizers had to coerce people into the labor market: imposing taxes, enclosing commons and constraining access to food, or just outright forcing people off their land.

The process of forcibly integrating colonized peoples into the capitalist labor system caused widespread dislocation. Remember, this is the period of the Belgian labor system in the Congo, which so upended local economies that ten-million people died—half the population. This is the period of the Natives Land Act in South Africa, which dispossessed the country's black population of 90 percent of the country. This is the period of the famines in India, where 30 million died needlessly as a result of policies the British imposed on Indian agriculture. This is the period of the Opium Wars in China and the unequal treaties that immiserated the population. And don't

forget: all of this was conducted in the name of the free market.

All of this violence, and much more, gets elided in your narrative and repackaged as a happy story of progress. And you say I'm the one possessed of romantic fairy tales.

Our current financial system is spreading economic humiliation all over the world—and it's having the precise effects that the economist and diplomat John Maynard Keynes warned of a century ago, when he wrote that if the world imposed punishing economic sanctions on Germany:

“Vengeance, I dare predict, will not limp.”

Part VII

The Great Winnowing

Born down in a dead man's town
The first kick I took was when I hit the ground
You end up like a dog that's been beat too much
Till you spend half your life just covering up

Born in the USA
I was born in the USA
I was born in the USA
Born in the USA

Got in a little hometown jam
So they put a rifle in my hand
Sent me off to a foreign land
To go and kill the yellow man

Born in the USA
I was born in the USA
I was born in the USA
I was born in the USA

Come back home to the refinery
Hiring man said son if it was up to me
Went down to see my VA Man
He said son, don't you understand

I had a brother at Khe Sahn, fighting off the Viet Cong
They're still there, he's all gone
He had a woman he loved in Saigon
I got a picture of him in her arms now

Down in the shadow of the penitentiary
Out by the gas fires of the refinery
I'm ten years burning down the road
Nowhere to run ain't got nowhere to go

Born in the USA
I was born in the USA
Born in the USA
I'm a long gone daddy in the USA
Born in the USA
Born in the USA
Born in the USA
I'm a cool rocking daddy in the USA

Chapter Sixty

A Form of Utopia

“Do you think you are the only people who have had to sacrifice? Do you know how much money, how many jobs, my people have turned down from oil and gas and mining companies? Tens of millions of dollars. We do it because there are things that are more important than money.”

Lakota chief Red Cloud lamented:

“They made us many promises, more than I can remember. But they kept but one—they promised to take our land and they took it.”

Genocide is not just a murderous madness; it is, more deeply, a politics that promises a utopia beyond politics—one people, one land, one truth, the end of difference. Genocide is a form of political utopia.

In true cultural extinctions like the Dorset and the Bo, entire ways of speaking about and conceptualizing the world disappear. The era of the Anthropocene is most often defined by human impact on the physical world, but as modernity and globalization sweep and transform communities around the planet, the nonbiological world of thought and language is impacted too. Modernization has become a kind of vortex of cultural assimilation that extinguishes ways of being, both animal and human. Interestingly, the modern mindset, to which many of the people reading this book probably belong, presumes its superiority and centrality to history to such an extent that we don't really comprehend that there are different ways of existing in and thinking about the world.

The history of the idea of wilderness is a fascinating lens on this fact. How did prehistoric peoples think about nature and relate to species? It turns out that this is extraordinarily difficult for us to contemplate. Modernism—the period of history stretching all the way from the Renaissance to today and defined by science, capitalism, and a Judeo-Christian perspective on nature and time—obstructs our ability to inquire into the prehistoric experience of wilderness. Most likely, they didn't think about it at all. Prehistoric

humans lacked a concept of ‘wilderness,’ of natural phenomena or spaces outside of the human domain. They almost certainly had a nondualistic relationship to the world in which there was no separation between mental and physical properties, and as a result, no division between human and natural phenomenon. These things were experienced seamlessly.

Civilized people perpetuate the presupposition that prehistoric humans longed for paradise, some luxurious garden of easy living that would free them from travail and hunger. Because it assumes the categories and values of the modern world—indeed, the psychological profile of the modern mind—as absolutes, this argument invites deconstruction. From a modern perspective, a binary opposition, which can be neither critically nor empirically sustained, appears between archaic and modern culture and underlies the claim that so-called primitive people wanted to gain control over land and animals, and nature more generally. Most if not all evidence contradicts such a reading, and indicates that Paleolithic people lacked a concept of either a wilderness to escape or a civilization to seek. Only by holding our own categories in abeyance can we possibly understand the Paleolithic mind. The assumption that Paleolithic people were mere children in comparison to us, a later, adult phase of humanity, is dubious. So is the belief that the modern mind is the culmination of human intellectuality.

Our fervent belief in the objective superiority of the modern mode of existence perhaps biases us, for example, to assume that the reason Neanderthals didn’t evolve the same technology as us is because they lacked intelligence, rather than they found a sustainable manner of living over 300,000 years. Modernists find it hard to imagine any desirable existence or definition of human except their own. We think of prehistoric and indigenous peoples as living lives of extreme hardship and in a constant state of need, and that the modern mind arose out of an adaptive superiority rather than, say, an appetite for domination.

There is an abundance of evidence that they in fact possessed a rich, complex, and sophisticated body of scientific knowledge about nature. It is clear that various indigenous cultures had developed an extraordinary system of classification and systematics over thousands of years through methodical observation and tested hypotheses. For them plants and animals are not known as a result of their usefulness but are useful or interesting because they are known.

We resist the idea that for all of our scientific and technological achievements, modernity is not necessarily evidence of the forward progress of evolution and culture. Indeed, despite our quality of material existence and abundance of technology, the ecological problems of the twenty-first century have shown us that we don’t understand nature much better—only

very differently—than those that preceded us. Compared to even a hundred years ago, our lives are more distanced and divided from the natural world than ever before. Whereas the earth was once the origin of our history, lives, and source of survival, it has become an abstraction, a background to our everyday experience, perhaps even something we need to escape for other worlds.

Today, 54 percent of people live in urban environments, up from one-third in the 1960s, according to the World Health Organization. How many of us can claim an intimate knowledge of the animal and plant life around us? This might be one of the most telling reasons why stories about the disappearance of species often fail to capture our attention for more than a few moments. Their value is abstract to us. Even for those of us who purport to care very much, chances are the existence of species is not linked to our everyday experience or needs.

Our modern relationship to nature has its origins in a theistic worldview that arose in step with the agricultural revolution. God created the earth for humankind and our task as his servants is to create a New Jerusalem from the land, the Second Creation. In the twenty-first century, a great many of us have discarded this religiosity for a secular worldview that places its faith in scientism. Even science, however, can perpetuate the fractured relationship to nature by making us observers standing apart from the world even as we seek to understand how it works. Many modern environmentalists have sought to heal this breach between humans and nature by proposing new ecological worldviews that restore an ancient, lost connection to the earth. But their appeals, however well-intentioned, remain fundamentally Cartesian, a subset of the modern mind that believes nature is environment and therefore different from humans.

Given that almost every problem of note that we face in the twenty-first century entails engagement with nonhumans—from climate change, drought, and famine; to biotechnology, intellectual property, and privacy; to genocide, terrorism, and war—there seems no time like the present to turn our future attention, resources, and energy toward the nonhuman broadly understood. How do we transition from seeing what we call ‘Nature’ as an object ‘over there’? And how do we avoid ‘new and improved’ versions that end up doing much the same thing just in a cooler, more sophisticated way? When you realize that everything is interconnected, you can’t hold on to a single, solid, present-at-hand thing over there called Nature.

“An idea, a relationship, can go extinct, just like an animal or a plant. The idea in this case is ‘nature,’ the separate and

wild province, the world apart from man to which he adapted, under whose rules he was born and died.”

In this sense, we should happily cheer the end of nature. We need ecology without nature, a future in which we recognize there is no pristine wilderness, only history. In an ecology without nature, we're no longer the bouncer standing outside the club of existence, deciding who gets in or not, what has value or no value, what has rights or no rights at all. Nature is a human construct with no bearing on reality whatsoever. It's a thought-construct going back to the Middle Ages, and not only is it a toxic thought-construct that creates these false binaries between nature and culture, and modern and postmodern people—nature is the problem, and how we got to that by demarcating social space from nonhumans and actually destroying earth.

The greatest wonder of the ancient world is how recent it all is. No city or monument is much more than 5,000 years old. Only about seventy lifetimes, of seventy years, have been lived end to end since civilization began. Its entire run occupies a mere 0.2 percent of the two-and-a-half-million years since our first ancestor sharpened a stone.

It is rating one's conjectures at a very high price to roast a man alive on the strength of them. But prejudice operates on just such a basis, finding easy reasons to punish other people, quickly choosing to put them outside concern if there is any doubt about their affinity.

Although we often attribute certain bodies of wisdom to specific persons, places, and cultures, the commonality of human nature, along with similarities of the global environment and available technologies, determines that no time, group, individuals, or geographical locale has a monopoly on key ideas.

Some writers, seeing history in terms of weapons and winners, have over-emphasized the different rates at which cultures and continents developed. What strikes me as more surprising—and highly significant for finding out what kind of creature we humans are—is how little time it took people to do very similar things independently all around the world, even though they were working within different cultures and ecologies. By 3,000 years ago, “civilization” had arisen in at least seven places: Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Mediterranean, India, China, Mexico, and Peru. Archaeology shows that only about half of these had received their crops and cultural stimuli from others. The rest had built themselves up from scratch without suspecting that anyone else in the world was doing the same. This compelling parallelism of ideas, processes, and forms tells us something important: that given certain broad conditions, human societies everywhere will move towards greater size, complexity, and environmental demand.

China as a nation has the longest and by far the most vast record of inventions in the history of the world. It is now reliably estimated that more than 60% of all the knowledge existing in the world today originated in China, a fact swept under the carpet by the West.

In Ming dynasty China (1368–1644), a woman convicted of adultery might be forced to mount a ceramic dildo attached to a saddle and ride that fake dick until she died. It's worth noting that old China also had its share of less murderous sex toys, including metal dildos constructed to release liquid in order to simulate ejaculation.

Speaking of creamy white liquids, Pasteur, it should be said, discovered pasteurization in the same, limited sense that Columbus discovered America: The Chinese had been pasteurizing alcoholic products since at least the twelfth century.

We were all taught in school that the printing press with movable type was invented in Germany by Johannes Gutenberg in about the year 1550. Not so. China not only invented paper but also the printing press with movable set type, which was in common use in China 1,000 years before Gutenberg was born. Similarly, we were taught that Englishman James Watt invented the steam engine. He did not. Steam engines were in widespread use in China 600 years before Watt was born. There are dated ancient texts and drawings to illustrate and prove the Chinese discovered and documented "Pascal's Triangle" 600 years before Pascal copied it, and the Chinese enunciated Newton's First Law of Motion 2,000 years before Newton.

The same is true for thousands of inventions that the West now claim as theirs but where conclusive documentation exists to prove that they originated in China hundreds and sometimes thousands of years before the West copied them. It is not for nothing that Marco Polo is described in China as "Europe's great thief."

The Chinese invented the decimal number system, decimal fractions, negative numbers, and the zero, so far in the past that the origin is lost in the mists of time. The Chinese tracked sunspots and comets with such detail and accuracy that these ancient records are still used as the basis for their prediction and observation today. The Chinese were drilling for natural gas about 2,500 years ago, wells 4,800 feet deep, with bamboo pipelines to deliver the gas to nearby cities. The Chinese pioneered the mining and use of coal long before it was known in the West. Marco Polo and Arab traders marveled at the "black stone" that the Chinese mined from the ground, that would burn slowly during an entire night.

China had printed paper money almost 1,500 years ago, done in ways to prevent counterfeiting. Wrapping paper, paper napkins, and toilet paper were all in general use in China 2,000 years before the West could produce

them. They were the first to invent and develop a full mechanical clock with a true escapement, many centuries before the Swiss had done so. The Chinese invented an ingenious seismograph still in use that tells not only the severity but the direction and distance of earthquakes. The Chinese invented hot-air balloons, the parachute, manned flight with kites, the wheelbarrow, and matches. They invented hermetically-sealed laboratories for scientific experiments. They invented belt and chain drives, the paddle-wheel steamer, the helicopter rotor and the propeller, the segmental-arch bridge. They invented the use of water power and chain pumps, the crank handle, all the construction methods for suspension bridges, sliding calipers, the fishing reel, image projection, magic lanterns, the gimbal system of suspension. China not only invented spinning wheels, carding machines and looms, but was the world's leader in technical innovations in textile manufacturing, more than 700 years before Britain's eighteenth-century textile revolution.

Chinese expertise with fine porcelain was so advanced millennia ago, that even today it is admitted their ability has never even been equaled in the West, much less surpassed. The Chinese discovered not only magnetism but magnetic remanence and induction, as well as the compass. They invented gunpowder, smoke bombs, the cannon, the crossbow, plated body armor, fireworks, flamethrowers, grenades, land and sea mines, multi-stage rockets, mortars, and repeating guns. China had irrigation canals that were also used for transport, and the Chinese invented the canal locks that could raise and lower boats to different levels 1,500 years before the Americans built the Panama Canal. China has earthquake-proof dams functioning today that were built around 250 BC.

A millennium ago, the Chinese conceived and developed the science of immunology—vaccinating people for diseases like smallpox, knowing how to extract and prepare the vaccine so as to immunize and not infect. They discovered the circadian rhythm in the human body, blood circulation, and the science of endocrinology. The Chinese were using urine from pregnant women to make sex hormones 2,000 years ago, understanding how they acted on the body and how to use them. Many centuries-old Chinese medical books still exist, documenting all this and much more. Around 1550, China compiled a huge 52-volume Chinese Traditional Herbal Medicine encyclopedia that described almost 2,000 herbal sources and 10,000 medical prescriptions. Among them is chaulmoogra oil, which is still the only known treatment for leprosy.

China designed and built the world's largest commercial ships, which were many times longer and ten times larger in volume than anything the West could build at the time. In the late 1500s the largest English ships displaced 400 tons, while China's displaced more than 3,000 tons. Western ships

were small, uncontrollable, fragile, and useless for traveling any distance. Thousands of years ago, Chinese ships had watertight compartments that permitted them to continue journeys even when damaged. Moreover, Chinese ships not only had multiple masts, but China invented the luff sails which permit us to sail almost into the wind, just as sailboats do today, and were therefore not dependent on wind direction for their travel. Their luff sails contained sewn-in bamboo battens that keep the sails full and aerodynamically efficient, as racing sailboats use today. The Chinese invented the ship's rudder—something the Europeans never managed to do, able to steer themselves only with oars, and European sails permitted them to travel only in the direction of the wind, which meant a ship would have to remain in place, sometimes for months, awaiting a favorable wind.

Chinese maps were the best in the world, by orders of magnitude, for more than a millennium, and the precision of their maps became legendary, being far in advance of the West. The Chinese invented Mercator projections, relief maps, quantitative cartography, and grid layouts. China had compasses and such extensive astronomical knowledge that they always knew where they were, could plot courses and follow them by both compass and star charts, and could sail wherever they wanted, regardless of the wind direction. China was so far ahead of the Western world in sailing and navigation that comparisons are just embarrassing. It was only when the West managed to copy and steal China's sailing and navigation technology that it was able to begin traveling the world and colonizing it. It is especially important to emphasize how China, the world technological power between 1100 and 1800, made the West's emergence possible. It was only by borrowing and assimilating Chinese innovations that the West was able to make the transition to modern capitalist and imperialist economies.

China was 1,000 years ahead of the West in anything to do with metals—cast iron, wrought iron, steel, carbon steel, tempered steel, welded steel. The Chinese were so skilled at metallurgy they could cast tuned bells that could produce any tone. Long before 1000 AD, China was the world's major steel producer. In around 1000 AD China was producing about 125,000 tons of steel per year, while 800 years later Britain could produce only 75,000 tons. The Chinese invented the blast furnace, the double-action bellows to achieve the necessary high temperatures for smelting and annealing metals. They invented the manufacture of steel from cast iron. They excelled in creating metallic alloys, and very early were casting and forging coins made from copper, nickel, and zinc. The entire process of mining, smelting, and purifying zinc originated in China. The Chinese developed the processes of mining itself, and the concentration and extraction of metals.

China was highly advanced in agriculture, having invented the winnowing

fan and the seed drill, making an easy process of tilling, planting, and harvesting. Europeans and Americans were still seeding crops by scattering grain from a bag, a greatly wasteful practice that necessitated saving 50% of each year's crop for seed. China developed scientifically efficient plows that have never been equaled and are still used all over the world today. They invented and developed animal harnesses and collars that first permitted horses to actually be used to pull loads. Europe had no efficient plow, and their only way of harnessing animals was to put a rope around their necks, which succeeded only in the animals strangling themselves. The Chinese invented saddles and the riding stirrup. China's food production was orders of magnitude ahead of the world for more than 1,000 years, its advances in agriculture the enabling cause of Europe's agricultural revolution that first permitted it to begin feeding itself adequately. The Chinese were wearing fine silk and cotton clothing and using toilet paper while centuries later Europeans were still wearing animal skins.

Few people in the West are familiar with China's Armillary Spheres. These wonders of the world, cast in bronze several meters in diameter and beautifully decorated with dragons and phoenixes, are some of the oldest and most accurate astronomical observatory instruments in existence, some created more than 3,500 years ago when the Western countries had no knowledge of such things. They determine and measure the positions and equatorial ecliptic and horizontal coordinates of celestial bodies, the positions and daily motions of 1,500 stars and constellations, and much more. When the Western forces invaded China in the late 1800s, they were so captivated that they plundered most of these treasures and the centuries of data from the ancient observatories, disassembling the instruments and removing them to Europe, returning some to China as part of the Treaties after the First World War.

It leaves one speechless to learn the vast extent of Chinese inventions that existed hundreds of years and often millennia, before they appeared in the West. This isn't a simple matter of gunpowder and fireworks, but of discovery that encompasses the entire range of human knowledge, all of which has been consciously hidden from the Western world. Scholars made these discoveries in the 1940s, but neither Western education nor the media have ever referenced or acknowledged them. These are not mere claims; the evidence is conclusive and available for examination but the West has thoroughly erased China from the world's historical memory.

Western historians have distorted and ignored China's dominant role in the world economy until about 1800. There exists an enormous amount of empirical data proving China's economic and technological superiority over Western civilization for the better part of several millennia. Given that China

was the world's supreme technological power up to about 1800, it is especially important to emphasize again that this is what made the West's emergence possible. It was only by copying and assimilating Chinese innovations and China's much more advanced technology that the West was able to make the transition to modern capitalist and imperialist economies. Until then, China was the leading trading nation, reaching most of Southern Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. China's innovations in the production of paper, book printing, firearms, and tools led to a manufacturing superpower whose goods were transported throughout the world by the most advanced navigational system. Moreover, banking, a stable paper money economy, excellent manufacturing and high agricultural yields resulted in China's per capita income surpassing that of Great Britain until about 1800.

Not only this but the majority of Western economic historians have presented historical China as a stagnant, backward, parochial society, an oriental despotism. China was never thus. During the thirteenth century, Marco Polo described China as vastly wealthier and more advanced than any European country, and leading European philosophers such as Voltaire looked to Chinese society as an intellectual exemplar, the British notably using China as their model for establishing a meritocratic civil service.

A first thought when reviewing this research is that the world must have seemed very primitive to China 500 years ago, truly 'third world' at the time. When Zhang He and others conducted their voyages of exploration, they must have been disappointed in what they found. The rest of the world had no paper or printing, no mathematics, no science, little medicine of note, almost no metallurgy to speak of, a most primitive agriculture, no manufactures of any worthy kind, no porcelain, no spinning wheels or weaving looms to make clothing. From reviewing the history of Chinese invention, one develops an increasingly strong feeling the Chinese looked at the world and found nothing of interest in all those societies that were centuries, and in some cases millennia, behind China in almost every way. One can easily theorize this is the reason China closed itself off from the world at that time, concluding that other nations were so backward that little would be gained from prolonged contact. One can imagine they returned home and closed the door, perhaps planning to return in another 500 years to see if things had progressed. With the addition of detail, this is most likely how events transpired.

What China didn't expect, was the West stealing all these ideas, turning them into weapons of colonization and war, returning to the nation that was the source of that knowledge, and invading it to colonize, to steal resources, and to enslave and massacre the population. China's interest was always only exploration and trade. The Chinese were never expansionist or warlike,

wanting only to protect their own borders from invasion from the North. China was quite unprepared for the violent nature and savage brutality of the White barbarians who sailed the world, invoking his God's blessing on his countless atrocities. Coupled with a weak domestic government and outsiders using opium to reap billions while enslaving a nation under the protection of the British military, we have the severe downward swing for 200 years.

The above summary doesn't even begin to adequately catalog of the extent of Chinese invention, of the sum of China's discoveries and contributions to the modern world. But unfortunately, much of China's total sum of knowledge and history of invention is lost to the world forever. A large part of the recorded knowledge of China's history was destroyed in one of the greatest acts of cultural genocide in the history of the world—the looting and burning of China's Summer Palace, the Yuanmingyuan, which contained more than ten-million of the finest and most valuable historical treasures and scholarly works from 5,000 years of Chinese history. What could not be looted was destroyed, and the entire massive palace burned to the ground. This wanton theft and utter destruction of one of the world's greatest collections of historical knowledge was engineered by the Rothschilds and Sassoons in retaliation for Chinese resistance to their opium.

This is an aside, but the destruction of the Yuanmingyuan was done for the same reason that the Allies bombed Dresden to rubble during the Second World War. Dresden had no military value but it was the spiritual and cultural heart of Germany, its destruction meant “to open a wound in the German soul that would never heal.” For precisely the same reason, the American deep state was savagely determined to drop the first atomic bomb on Kyoto, also the heart and soul of Japanese culture. Kyoto was protected by heavy overcasts of clouds that preventing the bombers from locating it with sufficient accuracy, forcing them to their alternates of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

But in terms of the destruction of a literary recording of culture and invention, there was perhaps an even greater crime against the history of Chinese knowledge—the destruction of the library and the Yongle Dadian at the Hanlin Academy. That encyclopedia of 22,000 volumes written by more than 2,000 scholars over many years, contained much of the total of 5,000 years of Chinese knowledge, invention, and thought. The British carried all those books outdoors, poured fuel on them, and burnt the entire collection to ashes. Only God knows what was lost in this tragic destruction, ordered by the same drug dealers as punishment for refusing opium, meant to break China's will by striking at the very heart of the nation's culture in the wanton destruction of something of such inestimable value as to leave an

open wound that would never heal. Only about 150 volumes survived the incineration, 40 those residing today in the US Library of Congress, which has no intention of returning them to China. We, on the other hand, would be happy to—no payment required, but if you'd like to engage in a little helpful hacking and election meddling you might improve your odds.

Westerners today justify their unacknowledged appropriation of Chinese knowledge and subsequent claims to ownership on some variant of the proposition that the Chinese invented those things, but never developed or capitalized on them, but the claim is invalid self-serving nonsense since my invention is mine whether or not I choose to develop it. The claim is also untrue.

When the Chinese invented paper and printing, books became widespread throughout China, as with the weaving of cloth and development of textiles. China employed its inventions in unlimited ways for the benefit of Chinese society. What they did not do is file patents, convert everything to privately-owned IP, and transfer their ingenuity from social benefit to private profit. Criticisms of China's use of its inventions are not so much negating a lack of application but the absence of commercialization, these Western justifications implying that any nation not immediately striving for profit maximization of its discoveries is morally negligent, the theft of those discoveries then justified by those who would use them more properly. This is the bank robber taking the high moral ground by claiming he put the money to better use than the bank would have done.

To have foregone private commercialization was neither a character flaw nor a behavioral fault, but a reflection of the pluralistic and socialistic nature of the Chinese people, the same reason that even today China's patent and IP laws and regulations are so much less aggressive than those of the US. Put simply, China has never been as capitalistic or as individualistic as the West. It is part of the greatness of the Chinese nation that this immense population engaged in millennia of stunning research, discovery, and invention and freely distributed those fruits throughout the nation. This emphasis on the greater good and overall benefit to society rather than individual profit, is fundamental to the natural humanity of the Chinese people, and cannot be permitted to be destroyed by the sociopathic Western model so forcefully promoted today on the basis of a fictitious moral superiority.

The West chooses to ignore the fact that the 200-year hiatus in China's innovation was due almost entirely to their own military invasions, when the West was ravaging and destroying the nation. China's development, social progress, and invention, ceased only from the invasions by both the Americans and Europeans, and most especially with the vast program of trafficking in opium in China.

Perhaps of more direct interest is that China's lag in current technology is, more than anything else, an unfortunate accident of fate that occurred during a blip in time. After Mao evicted all the foreigners and China shook off the effects of 200 years of foreign interference and plundering to begin the transition to an industrialized economy, this was precisely when the world of electronics and communication exploded. It was during that brief period of a couple of decades that computers, the Internet, mobile phones and so much more, were conceived and patented by the West. Virtually the entire process passed China by, because during that brief period the nation was entirely enveloped in the fundamentals of its economic and social revolution, and in no position to participate. China's lack of patents and IP in the field of electronics today is due neither to Western superiority nor Chinese lack of innovation, but to Western aggression. The accumulation of American and European patents was in no way due to Western supremacy in innovation but to the absence of the Chinese.

China's inventiveness has not ended. With China recovering it is continuing where it left off 200 years ago. Ignoring the historical setback, Chinese companies are simply by-passing the earlier stages of innovation by foreign firms and proceeding to subsequent stages where the field is open and foreign patents have not precluded innovation and development.

If we examine the fields where China lags today in terms of patents and IP, it is primarily in those areas of science that progressed during that brief period where China was unable to participate. As soon as China found its footing, innovation continued unabated as it had for thousands of years. China missed the computer and smartphone patents, but was perfectly timed for the solar panel revolution and quickly emerged as the world leader—at which point the US imposed tariffs of 300% on Chinese solar panels in an attempt not so much to kill China's export sales but to prevent the accumulation of funds for further R&D. In any area not preempted by IP restriction, China's innovation has soared—usually to world leadership.

Despite US accusations of China copying foreign technology, China's high-technology achievements were entirely home-grown because the US has been so determined to hinder China's rise that by 1950 it engineered an international embargo on all scientific knowledge and on almost all useful products and processes to China, including legislation that Chinese scientists cannot be invited to, or participate in, American scientific forums, while bullying other Western nations into doing the same. In October of 2019, all Chinese scientists and space technology companies were denied visas to attend the week-long International Astronautical Congress in Washington, far from the first time such has occurred.

We hear much in the Western media about China demanding technology

transfers as a condition of corporate residence in China, but this is mostly propaganda. No doubt expectations for technology and know-how transfer do occur, since China doesn't want to spend the rest of its life making toasters and running shoes but, since entry to the Chinese market is a gift of billions in profits, it is perfectly sensible to attach a price to it. However, one must keep in mind that no foreign company is conducting cutting-edge commercial or sensitive military research, or manufacturing quantum computers and hypersonic missiles in China. Any technology actually available for transfer would be almost entirely in consumer goods, and hardly constitute great value or threats to US national security—unless that now means the security of corporations' profits. And, in virtually all of the cutting-edge fields and industries such as quantum computing, telecom, or solar energy, China has already surpassed the US.

In 2015, Chinese engineers announced the world's first quantum communications network, a 2,000 kilometer system linking Beijing and Shanghai with data transmission encoded by quantum key distribution. In August of 2016 China launched the world's first quantum communications satellite, and succeeded in test communication with the country's existing ground stations. In September of 2016, Chinese scientists achieved the world's first quantum teleportation between independent sources, delivering quantum information enciphered in photons between two locations.

In 2014, researchers at Nankai University in Tianjin developed a car with a working brain-control unit, with sensors that capture brain signals permitting humans to control the automobile with their minds. In 2016 China launched a fully-operational space lab to conduct the first ever brain-machine interaction experiments in space. Chinese scientists believe brain-computer interaction will eventually be the highest form of human-machine communication, having developed this process much farther than any Western nation and holding nearly 100 patents.

In 2015, high school students from Tianjin won an International gold medal for the creation of a microbe biological battery. Such attempts in the past have failed due to poor performance and limited usefulness, but these students conceived the idea of combining several types of bacteria into one biological power cell, with each bacterium having specialized responsibilities based on its own unique functions. Their tiny multi-bacteria cell reached over 520 mV, and lasted over 80 hours. Scaled up, their biological battery was able to generate as much power as a lithium battery, with a much longer life and producing no pollution. These are Chinese high school kids.

Chinese researchers are developing the technology and processes to make 3D-printed skin a reality, custom-made skin for burn patients, printed according to their wounds. The country leads the world in cat-scan technology,

in DNA mapping and synthesizing, and many medical fields such as laser eye surgery and cornea transplants.

In May of 2019, a Chinese start-up launched a revolutionary AI chip with the computing power of eight NVIDIA P4 servers but up to five times faster, with half the size and 20% of the energy consumption, and costing 50% less to manufacture. Shanghai's Fudan University developed a transistor based on two-dimensional molybdenic sulfide, meaning computing and data storage happen together in a single cell, perhaps eliminating silicon-based chips which are at their limit. DJI Technology, founded by a Chinese university student, has become in only a few years the global market leader in small consumer drones, and already attracting American sanctions for being too successful in an area the US wants to control. The country produces nearly 40% of the world's robots, with vastly improved core technologies, and is the world leader in 5G technology.

Chinese engineers created a supercomputer seven times faster than America's Oak Ridge installation, the first in the world to achieve speeds beyond 100 PetaFlops, powered by a Chinese-developed multi-core CPU and Chinese software, while displacing the US with the most supercomputers in the top 500. Upon the revelation of China's super-fast supercomputer, authorities reported the NSA had launched hundreds of thousands of hacking attacks, looking to steal the technology for China's new microprocessors.

China's megaproject engineering skills are already legendary, with the longest sea bridges, the longest tunnels, the largest deep-water ports. China has built the world's longest and highest glass bridge in Zhangjiajie, hanging between two steep cliffs 300 meters above the ground, and which set ten world records spanning its design and construction. The Three Gorges Dam is the world's largest, with 5-tier ship locks which can contain the world's largest ships, and also a shiplift for smaller vessels which is the largest and most sophisticated in the world. China has formulated plans to build an electron collider, four times as long (100km) and operating at more than seven times the energy capacity of the European CERN. In 2015, Chinese scientists completed the 500-meter radio telescope, by far the largest in the world with more than ten times the area of the American installation in Puerto Rico.

In 2014, architects in Amsterdam began work on what was to be the world's first completely 3D-printed house, a costly enterprise requiring three years. At exactly the same time in Shanghai, a Chinese company completed ten 3D-printed houses in less than a day, at a cost of less than \$5,000 each, using recycled construction and industrial scrap as the ink. I have seen these homes; large, elegant, multi-story European-styled structures, and so sturdy they can withstand earthquakes up to level 8 on the Richter scale.

We know about China's fabulous high-speed trains, but few outside China are aware of the intense high quality of the HSR network, built with the highest standards in the modern world, including stability. When traveling by train I sometimes place a coin on its edge on the windowsill, and I have video of the coin remaining stable for four or five minutes before it finally falls over—and this is at 300km per hour. Shanghai has a high-speed Maglev train (430km/hr), while many cities have low-speed Maglevs (200km/hr), and Chinese engineers are ready to produce commercially a 600 Km/hr Maglev. The same pace of development is true of the nation's urban subway systems. The city of London needed 147 years to build 408km. of subway lines, New York City 106 years for 370km., Paris 110 years for 215km, while Shanghai needed only 20 years to build 500km.

It has escaped attention that these achievements were not sudden, but developed from a deliberate plan in execution for 30 years, though it is only recently that many of these efforts are bearing fruit. More importantly, China accomplished this from a third-world industrial base while under a total Western embargo on technology transfer. Chinese scientists have developed nuclear energy plants, put men into space, photographed the entire surface of the moon, built a space station, designed and launched a private GPS system. We have Chinese-designed and -built deep-sea submersibles, and the country is rapidly developing its own aircraft industry. Today, with its science and technological base so much more advanced, and with education spending increasing at nearly 10% per year, and very high R&D expenditures, invention and innovation can only increase.

One of the most persistent myths propagated about China, a claim without a shred of supporting evidence, is that Chinese lack creativity and innovation due to flaws in their educational system. We have seen the accusations hundreds of times: China's educational system teaches only rote memory while stifling innovation, the Chinese unable to conceptualize or innovate, knowing only how to achieve high test scores but not how to think.

“I've been doing business in China for decades, and I will tell you that yeah, the Chinese can take a test, but what they can't do is innovate. They're not terribly imaginative. They're not entrepreneurial. They don't innovate. That's why they're stealing our intellectual property—innovation and entrepreneurship are not their strong suits. Their society, as well as their educational system, is too homogenized and controlled to encourage imagination.”

The arrangement sometimes referred to as Bretton Woods II was effectively an agreement since the 1990s to use various unofficial means to keep the dollar's value artificially high, and East Asian currencies—particularly the Chinese—artificially low, in order to expedite cheap Asian exports to the United States. Since real wages in the United States have either stagnated or retreated continually since the 1970s, this, and the accumulation of consumer debt, is the only reason living standards in the United States have not precipitously declined.

From a long-term perspective, China's behavior isn't puzzling at all. In fact it's quite true to form. The unique thing about the Chinese empire is that it has, since the Han dynasty at least, adopted a peculiar sort of tribute system whereby, in exchange for recognition of the Chinese emperor as world-sovereign, they have been willing to shower their client states with gifts far greater than they receive in return. The technique seems to have been developed almost as a kind of trick when dealing with the "northern barbarians" of the steppes, who always threatened Chinese frontiers: a way to overwhelm them with such luxuries that they would become complacent, effeminate, and unwarlike. It was systematized in the "tribute trade" practiced with client states like Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and various states of Southeast Asia, and for a brief period from 1405 to 1433, it even extended to a world scale, under the famous eunuch admiral Zheng He. He led a series of seven expeditions across the Indian Ocean, his great "treasure fleet"—in dramatic contrast to the Spanish treasure fleets of a century later—carrying not only thousands of armed marines, but endless quantities of silks, porcelain, and other Chinese luxuries to present to those local rulers willing to recognize the authority of the emperor. All this was ostensibly rooted in an ideology of extraordinary chauvinism—"What could these barbarians possibly have that we really need, anyway?"—but, applied to China's neighbors, it proved extremely wise policy for a wealthy empire surrounded by much smaller but potentially troublesome kingdoms. In fact, it was such wise policy that the US government, during the Cold War, more or less had to adopt it, creating remarkably favorable terms of trade for those very states—Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and certain favored allies in Southeast Asia—that had been the traditional Chinese tributaries; in this case, in order to contain China.

Bearing all this in mind, the current picture begins to fall easily back into place. When the United States was far and away the predominant world economic power, it could afford to maintain Chinese-style tributaries. Thus these very states, alone amongst US military protectorates, were allowed to catapult themselves out of poverty and into first-world status. After 1971, as US economic strength relative to the rest of the world began to decline, they were gradually transformed back into a more old-fashioned sort

of tributary. Yet China's getting in on the game introduced an entirely new element. There is every reason to believe that, from China's point of view, this is the first stage of a very long process of reducing the United States to something like a traditional Chinese client state. And of course, Chinese rulers are not, any more than the rulers of any other empire, motivated primarily by benevolence.

Mao—like Chiang—had a torture and detention center out of sight. After all, this was a Chinese civil war, and Mao was no saint. The difference was that Mao inspired the Four-Hundred-Million to reclaim their country.

The Jesus Christ of China:

“So long as the task of national salvation is not accomplished,
I shall be responsible for the distress and sufferings of the people.”

In the West, the divine right of kings granted legitimacy to royal families from generation to generation, guaranteeing that the lowborn would not revolt, for revolution was a sin. In contrast, the Mandate of Heaven gave the Chinese people the right of rebellion. A successful revolt against a sitting emperor was interpreted as evidence that Heaven wanted the Mandate to pass to the next ruler. One of the key indicators that Heaven was displeased was an emperor's inability to discipline barbarians.

“There was fundamentally something unhealthy and incongruous in the whole missionary idea. If the endeavor had been confined to primitive savages something could have been said for it. But to go out to a race of high culture and long tradition, with philosophical, ethical, and religious systems antedating Christianity, and to go avowedly to save its people from damnation as dwellers in heathen darkness—in that there was something not only spiritually limited but almost grotesque.”

Teddy Roosevelt disagreed, he was convinced it was the Japanese who were indeed different from other Asians. While he was president, Roosevelt wrote that, unlike the Chinese, the Japanese were “a wonderful and civilized people entitled to stand on an absolute equality with all the other peoples of the civilized world.” In particular, he believed that Japan's military success was a key indicator of the worth of their civilization:

“All the great masterful races have been fighting races; and the minute that a race loses the hard fighting virtues, then it has lost its proud right to stand as the equal of the best.”

Christopher Columbus—a Genoese mapmaker seeking a shorter route to China—touched land in the New World, and the Spanish and Portuguese empires stumbled into the greatest economic windfall in human history: entire continents full of unfathomable wealth, with inhabitants, armed only with Stone Age weapons, some of whom began conveniently dying almost as soon as they arrived. The conquest of Mexico and Peru led to the discovery of enormous new sources of precious metal, and these were exploited ruthlessly and systematically, even to the point of largely exterminating the surrounding populations to extract as much precious metal as quickly as possible. None of this would have been possible were it not for the practically unlimited Asian demand for precious metals.

No doubt scholars will never stop arguing about the reasons for the great “price revolution”—largely because it’s not clear what kind of tools can be applied. Can we really use the methods of modern economics, which were designed to understand how contemporary economic institutions operate, to describe the political battles that led to the creation of those very institutions? This is not just a conceptual problem. There are moral dangers here. To take what might seem an “objective,” macro-economic approach to the origins of the world economy would be to treat the behavior of early European explorers, merchants, and conquerors as if they were simply rational responses to opportunities—as if this were just what anyone would have done in the same situation. This is what the use of equations so often does: make it seem perfectly natural to assume that, if the price of silver in China is twice what it is in Seville, and inhabitants of Seville are capable of getting their hands on large quantities of silver and transporting it to China, then clearly they will, even if doing so requires the destruction of entire civilizations. Or if there is a demand for sugar in England, and enslaving millions is the easiest way to acquire labor to produce it, then it is inevitable that some will enslave them. In fact, history makes it quite clear that this is not the case. Any number of civilizations have probably been in a position to wreak havoc on the scale that the European powers did in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Ming China was an obvious candidate—but almost none actually did so.

The Chinese and Persians did not lack technological inventions such as steam engines. They lacked the values, myths, judicial apparatus and sociopolitical structures that took centuries to form and mature in the West and which could not be copied and internalized rapidly. France and the United States quickly followed in Britain’s footsteps because the French and Americans already shared the most important British myths and social structures. The Chinese and Persians could not catch up as quickly because they thought and organized their societies differently.

In the Confucian value system, merchants—consumed by thoughts of profit—were near the bottom of the social scale. Those concerned with the people’s welfare—the mandarins who studied the classics and served the emperor—were at the top of the heap.

“No doubt your anticipations of future evil have a certain foundation. But it is my business to make a fortune with the least possible loss of time. In two or three years at farthest, I hope to realize a fortune and get away and what can it matter to me, if all Shanghai disappear afterwards, in fire or flood? You must not expect men in my situation to condemn themselves to years of prolonged exile in an unhealthy climate for the benefit of posterity. We are moneymaking, practical men. Our business is to make money, as much and as fast as we can.”

In *The Conquest of America*, Tzvetan Todorov offers a compendium of some of the most chilling reports, mostly from Spanish priests and friars who, even when committed in principle to the belief that the extermination of the Indians was the judgment of God, could not disguise their horror at scenes of Spanish soldiers testing the blades of their weapons by eviscerating random passers-by, and tearing babies off their mother’s backs to be eaten by dogs. Such acts might perhaps be written off as what one would expect when a collection of heavily armed men—many of violent criminal background—are given absolute impunity; but the reports from the mines imply something far more systematic.

When Fray Toribio de Motolinia wrote of the ten plagues that he believed God had visited on the inhabitants of Mexico, he listed smallpox, war, famine, labor exactions, taxes—which caused many to sell their children to moneylenders, others to be tortured to death in cruel prisons—and the thousands who died in the building of the capital city. Above all, he insisted, were the uncountable numbers who died in the mines:

“The eighth plague was the slaves whom the Spaniards made in order to put them to work in the mines. At first those who were already slaves of the Aztecs were taken; then those who had given evidence of insubordination; finally all those who could be caught. During the first years after the conquest, the slave traffic flourished, and slaves often changed master. They produced so many marks on their faces, in addition to the royal brand, that they had their faces covered with letters, for they bore the marks of all who had bought and sold them.

The ninth plague was the service in the mines, to which the heavily laden Indians traveled sixty leagues or more to carry provisions. When their food gave out they died, either at the mines or on the road, for they had no money to buy food and there was no one to give it to them. Some reached home in such a state that they died soon after. The bodies of those Indians and of the slaves who died in the mines produced such a stench that it caused a pestilence, especially at the mines of Oaxaca. For half a league around these mines and along a great part of the road one could scarcely avoid walking over dead bodies or bones, and the flocks of birds and crows that came to fatten themselves upon the corpses were so numerous that they darkened the sun.”

According to the centuries-old Doctrine of Discovery, European nations acquired title to the lands they “discovered,” and Indigenous inhabitants lost their natural right to that land after Europeans had arrived and claimed it. Under this legal cover for theft, Euro-American wars of conquest and settler colonialism devastated Indigenous nations and communities, ripping their territories away from them and transforming the land into private property, real estate. Most of that land ended up in the hands of land speculators and agribusiness operators, many of which, up to the mid-nineteenth century, were plantations worked by another form of private property, enslaved Africans. Arcane as it may seem, the doctrine remains the basis for federal laws still in effect that control Indigenous peoples’ lives and destinies, even their histories by distorting them.

From the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, most of the non-European world was colonized under the Doctrine of Discovery, one of the first principles of international law Christian European monarchies promulgated to legitimize investigating, mapping, and claiming lands belonging to peoples outside Europe. It originated in a papal bull issued in 1455 that permitted the Portuguese monarchy to seize West Africa. Following Columbus’s infamous exploratory voyage in 1492, sponsored by the king and queen of the infant Spanish state, another papal bull extended similar permission to Spain.

Disputes between the Portuguese and Spanish monarchies led to the papal-initiated Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), which, besides dividing the globe equally between the two Iberian empires, clarified that only non-Christian lands fell under the discovery doctrine. This doctrine on which all European states relied thus originated with the arbitrary and unilateral establishment of the Iberian monarchies’ exclusive rights under Christian canon law to colonize foreign peoples, and this right was later seized by

other European monarchical colonizing projects. The French Republic used this legalistic instrument for its nineteenth- and twentieth-century settler colonialist projects, as did the newly independent United States when it continued the colonization of North America begun by the British.

In 1823 the US Supreme Court issued its decision in *Johnson v. McIntosh*. Writing for the majority, Chief Justice John Marshall held that the Doctrine of Discovery had been an established principle of European law and of English law in effect in Britain's North American colonies and was also the law of the United States. The Court defined the exclusive property rights that a European country acquired by dint of discovery:

“Discovery gave title to the government, by whose subjects, or by whose authority, it was made, against all other European governments, which title might be consummated by possession.”

Therefore, European and Euro-American “discoverers” had gained real-property rights in the lands of Indigenous peoples by merely planting a flag. Indigenous rights were, in the Court's words, “in no instance, entirely disregarded; but were necessarily, to a considerable extent, impaired.” The Court further held that Indigenous “rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations, were necessarily diminished.” Indigenous people could continue to live on the land, but title resided with the discovering power, the United States. The decision concluded that Native nations were “domestic, dependent nations.”

The Doctrine of Discovery is so taken for granted that it is rarely mentioned in historical or legal texts published in the Americas.

In 1982, the government of Spain and the Holy See—the Vatican, which is a nonvoting state member of the United Nations—proposed to the UN General Assembly that the year 1992 be celebrated in the United Nations as an “encounter” between Europe and the peoples of the Americas, with Europeans bearing the gifts of civilization and Christianity to the Indigenous peoples. To the shock of the North Atlantic states that supported Spain's resolution—including the United States and Canada—the entire African delegation walked out of the meeting and returned with an impassioned statement condemning a proposal to celebrate colonialism in the United Nations, which was established for the purpose of ending colonialism. The Doctrine of Discovery had reared its head in the wrong place. The resolution was dead, but it was not the end of efforts by Spain, the Vatican, and others in the West to make the Quincentennial a cause for celebration.

Only five years before the debacle in the UN General Assembly, the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas conference at the UN's Geneva headquarters had proposed that 1992 be made the UN “year of mourning” for the

onset of colonialism, African slavery, and genocide against the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and that October 12 be designated as the UN International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. As the time drew near to the Quincentennial, Spain took the lead in fighting the Indigenous proposals. Spain and the Vatican also spent years and huge sums of money preparing for their own celebration of Columbus, enlisting the help of all of the countries of Latin America except Cuba, which refused (and paid for this in withdrawn Spanish financial investments). In the United States, the George H. W. Bush administration cooperated with the project and produced its own series of events. In the end, compromise won at the United Nations: Indigenous peoples garnered a Decade for the World's Indigenous Peoples, which officially began in 1994 but was inaugurated at UN headquarters in New York in December 1992. August 9, not October 12, was designated as the annual UN International Day for the World's Indigenous Peoples, and the Nobel Peace Prize went to Guatemalan Mayan leader Rigoberta Menchú, announced in Oslo on October 12, 1992, a decision that infuriated the Spanish government and the Vatican. The organized celebrations of Columbus flopped, thanks to multiple, highly visible protests by Indigenous peoples and their allies. Particularly, support grew for the work of Indigenous peoples at the United Nations to develop new international law standards.

On 20 July 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the surface of the moon. In the months leading up to their expedition, the Apollo 11 astronauts trained in a remote moon-like desert in the western United States. The area is home to several Native American communities, and there is a story—or legend—describing an encounter between the astronauts and one of the locals.

One day as they were training, the astronauts came across an old Native American. The man asked them what they were doing there. They replied that they were part of a research expedition that would shortly travel to explore the moon. When the old man heard that, he fell silent for a few moments, and then asked the astronauts if they could do him a favour. "What do you want?" they asked. "Well," said the old man, "the people of my tribe believe that holy spirits live on the moon. I was wondering if you could pass an important message to them from my people." "What's the message?" asked the astronauts. The man uttered something in his tribal language, and then asked the astronauts to repeat it again and again until they had memorized it correctly. "What does it mean?" asked the astronauts. "Oh, I cannot tell you. It's a secret that only our tribe and the moon spirits are allowed to know." When they returned to their base, the astronauts searched and searched until they found someone who could

speak the tribal language, and asked him to translate the secret message. When they repeated what they had memorized, the translator started to laugh uproariously. When he calmed down, the astronauts asked him what it meant. The man explained that the sentence they had memorized so carefully said:

“Don’t believe a single word these people are telling you.
They have come to steal your lands.”

In the 1870s, impossibly, the bison herds collapsed to the verge of extinction across the entire prairie. One of the earth’s most abundant food supplies all but vanished in a generation, exterminated in a senseless slaughter by European settlers, with catastrophic ripple effects for the health and peace of Indigenous populations across the Northwest. The ensuing famine would be used by Canada’s newborn Dominion government in distant Ottawa to persuade the First Nations of the west to cede their land rights in a series of numbered treaties and relocate to reserves. There were eleven of these treaties in all.

In 1899 the Dene and Cree of the Athabasca region signed Treaty 8, the largest land transfer by treaty to that point by a wide margin, covering an area bigger than France. The Dene still lived in small, hereditary groups and had no formal political hierarchy, so the “chiefs” who signed the treaty on their behalf were simply respected elders; they trusted the French priests who served as translators for the negotiations and outlined the terms. The First Nations understood the treaty as an agreement between peoples to share the land, with their own rights of livelihood and use of the land extending, as their oral history of the treaty would put it, “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the waters flow.” That language did not appear in the final version, and the Canadian government considered the document a direct and unambiguous legal transfer of land ownership. The history of Canada’s Indigenous people ever since is in significant measure a history of the tragic consequences of this discrepancy in the meaning of such treaties.

The chief of a northwestern American tribe, said, approximately—referring to us, of course:

“It didn’t occur to us that you meant to stay.”

Their top-level cultural conditioning told them that people don’t just move into someone else’s territory and settle down as if it were their own, and this overruled what their eyes were telling them.

Throughout the 1870s, American whaling vessels took as many as 125,000 walrus from the Bering Strait region. The slaughter had proved to be a lucrative sideline to the whaling business. The whalers cooked the animal's blubber into oil and hacked off the tusks to sell in ivory markets as far away as England and China. In a single season in 1876, more than 35,000 walrus were killed. Compared to the risky rigors of Arctic whaling, "walrusing" could be ridiculously easy. Rather than wielding lances and harpoons from tippy open boats, the whalers had discovered that they could simply clomp onto the ice with rifles and shoot large numbers of walrus point-blank in the head. Then the butchering, flensing, and boiling could begin. Firing up their try-pots aboard ship, the whalers could render more than twenty gallons of oil from the blubber of a single mature bull. In less than a decade, this industrially efficient slaughter had largely destroyed the Yupiks' primary source of food and the seasonal hunting life upon which it was based. By the 1880s, the walrus was nearly extinct in large swaths of the Bering Sea. It was the Arctic version of a story already well known to Americans, the story of the buffalo and the Indians of the Great Plains. Here, as there, the wholesale slaughter of a people's staple prey had led, in a few short years, to ruinous dislocations, terrible dependencies—and a cultural apocalypse.

The systematic introduction of just a few things—repeating rifles, booze, money, industrial methods of dismantling animal flesh—had caused the native cultures of Alaska to collapse at record speed.

The introduction of the repeating rifle, in particular, had altered the rhythms of native hunting. A few years earlier, the hills around St. Michael had been home to thousands of wild reindeer. Now, armed with buffalo rifles, the Eskimos and other natives would slaughter caribou by the hundreds and leave them "lying where they fell, not even the hides being taken." The hunters would "simply cut out their tongues and leave the rest to be eaten by wolves."

Abuse of alcohol and other drugs is epidemic, like diseases in communities subjected to colonization or other forms of domination, particularly in crowded and miserable refugee situations. This is the case in all parts of the world, not only among Native peoples of North America. Alcohol was an item in the tool kit of colonialists who made it readily and cheaply available. Christian missionaries often took advantage of these dysfunctional conditions to convert, offering not only food and housing but also discipline to avoid alcohol. But this was itself a form of colonial submission.

"The settler's work is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the native. The native's work is to imagine all possible methods for destroying the settler."

“Armed occupation was the true way of settling a conquered country. The children of Israel entered the promised land, with implements of husbandry in one hand, and the weapons of war in the other.”

The question of self-determination of peoples is a recent historical phenomenon integral both to the formation of modern European nation-states and to the gradual formation of an imperialist world system eventually led by the United States. National integration and state formation occurred first in western Europe as its states established colonies and colonial regimes in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Americas, and the Caribbean, and as the United States established itself as an independent state. These conquests afforded European states and the United States access to vast resources and labor that in turn allowed them to industrialize and to create efficient bureaucratic structures and political republicanism.

At the end of this process, with decolonization of European holdings in the twentieth century, self-determination became a major global issue eventually incorporating all human beings as citizens of nation-states. The creation of nation-states and the redrawing of national boundaries that this often entailed inevitably raised the questions of which national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities were included and whether their consent or participation would be required.

There are peoples and nations without their own states, locked under a state authority that may or may not be willing to respond to their demands for autonomy within the existing state. If the state is not willing, the peoples or nations may choose to insist on independence. That is the work of self-determination.

Nationalism is a very late development indeed in terms of human history. For many centuries, most Europeans thought of themselves not as British (or English or Scottish or Welsh), French, or German but as members of a particular family, clan, region, religion, or guild. Sometimes they defined themselves in terms of their overlords, whether local barons or emperors. When they did define themselves as German or French, it was as much a cultural category as a political one, and they certainly did not assume, as modern national movements almost always do, that nations had a right to rule themselves on a specific piece of territory.

Those older ways of defining oneself persisted well into the modern age. When commissions from the League of Nations tried to determine borders after World War I in the center of Europe, they repeatedly came upon locals who had no idea whether they were Czechs or Slovaks, Lithuanians or Poles. We are Catholic or Orthodox, came the answers, merchants or farmers, or

simply people of this village or that. An Italian sociologist and activist was astonished to find in the 1950s that there were people living in the interior of Sicily who had never heard of Italy, even though, in theory, they had been Italians for several generations. They were the anomalies, though, left behind as nationalism increasingly became the way in which Europeans defined themselves. Rapid communications, growing literacy, urbanization, and above all the idea that it was right and proper to see oneself as part of a nation, and a nation, moreover, which ought to have its own state on its own territory, all fed into the great wave of nationalism which shook Europe in the nineteenth century and the wider world in the twentieth.

The cumulative result was to create an unreal yet influential version of how nations formed. While it could not be denied that different peoples, from Goths to Slavs, had moved into and across Europe, mingling as they did so with peoples already there, such a view assumed that at some point, generally in the Middle Ages, the music had stopped. The dancing pieces had fallen into their chairs, one for the French, another for the Germans, and yet another for the Poles. And there history had fixed them as “nations.” German historians, for example, could depict an ancient German nation whose ancestors had lived happily in their forests from before the time of the Roman Empire and which at some time, probably in the first century, had become recognizably “German.”

So—and this was the dangerous question—what was properly the German nation’s land? Or the land of any other nation? Was it where the people now lived, where they had lived at the time of their emergence in history, or both? Would the scholars have gone on with their speculations if they could have seen what they were preparing the way for? The bloody wars that created Italy and Germany? The passions and hatred that tore apart the old multinational Austria-Hungary? The claims, on historical grounds, by new and old nations after World War I for the same pieces of territory? The hideous regimes of Hitler and Mussolini with their elevation of the nation and the race to the supreme good and their breathtaking demands for the lands of others?

A paradox is that nationalism is modern but it invents for itself history and traditions. The histories that fed and still feed into nationalism draw on what already exists rather than inventing new facts. They often contain much that is true, but they are slanted to confirm the existence of the nation through time, and to encourage the hope that it will continue.

Nation: a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbours

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of prior accumulation.

Once in the hands of settlers, the land itself was no longer sacred, as it had been for the Indigenous. Rather, it was private property, a commodity to be acquired and sold—every man a possible king, or at least wealthy. Later, when Anglo-Americans had occupied the continent and urbanized much of it, this quest for land and the sanctity of private property were reduced to a lot with a house on it, and “the land” came to mean the country, the flag, the military, as in “the land of the free” of the national anthem, or Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land.” Those who died fighting in foreign wars were said to have sacrificed their lives to protect “this land” that the old settlers had spilled blood to acquire. The blood spilled was largely Indigenous.

The first population forcibly organized under the profit motive—whose labor was exploited well before overseas exploitation was possible—was the European peasantry. Once forced off their land, they had nothing to eat and nothing to sell but their labor. In addition, entire nations, such as Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Bohemia, the Basque Country, and Catalonia, were colonized and forced under the rule of various monarchies.

The consequences of this amassing of fortunes were first felt in the catastrophe experienced by small farmers in Europe and England. The peasants became impoverished, dependent workers crowded into city slums. For the first time in human history, the majority of Europeans depended for their livelihood on a small wealthy minority, a phenomenon that capitalist-based colonialism would spread worldwide. The symbol of this new development, indeed its currency, was gold.

Gold fever drove colonizing ventures, organized at first in pursuit of the metal in its raw form. Later the pursuit of gold became more sophisticated, with planters and merchants establishing whatever conditions were necessary to hoard as much gold as possible. Thus was born an ideology: the belief in the inherent value of gold despite its relative uselessness in reality. Investors, monarchies, and parliamentarians devised methods to control the processes of wealth accumulation and the power that came with it, but the ideology behind gold fever mobilized settlers to cross the Atlantic to an unknown fate. Subjugating entire societies and civilizations, enslaving whole countries, and slaughtering people village by village did not seem too high a price to pay, nor did it appear inhumane. The systems of colonization were modern and

rational, but its ideological basis was madness.

The English used the term ‘enclosure’ to denote the privatization of the commons in the sixteenth century. During this time, peasants, who constituted a large majority of the population, were evicted from their ancient common lands. For centuries the commons had been their pasture for milk cows and for running sheep and their source for water, wood for fuel and construction, and edible and medicinal wild plants. Without these resources they could not have survived as farmers, and they did not survive as farmers after they lost access to the commons. Not only were the commons privatized during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were also transformed into grazing lands for commercial sheep production, wool being the main domestic and export commodity, creating wealth for a few and impoverishment for the many.

Denied access to the former commons, rural subsistence farmers and even their children had no choice but to work in the new woolen textile factories under miserable conditions—that is, when they could find such work for unemployment was high. Employed or not, this displaced population was available to serve as settlers in the North American British colonies, many of them as indentured servants, with the promise of land. After serving their terms of indenture, they were free to squat on Indigenous land and become farmers again.

In this way, surplus labor created not only low labor costs and great profits for the woolens manufacturers but also a supply of settlers for the colonies, which was an “escape valve” in the home country, where impoverishment could lead to uprisings of the exploited. The sacred status of property in the forms of land taken from Indigenous farmers and of Africans as chattel was seeded into the drive for Anglo-American independence from Britain and the founding of the United States.

Privatization of land was accompanied by an ideological drive to paint the commoners who resisted as violent, stupid, and lazy. The English Parliament, under the guise of fighting backwardness, criminalized former rights to the commons. Accompanying and facilitating the privatization of the commons was the suppression of women by conjuring witchcraft. Those accused of witchcraft were poor peasant women, often widows, while the accusers tended to be wealthier, either their landlords or employers, individuals who controlled local institutions or had ties to the national government.

Actions and local occurrences said to indicate witchcraft included non-payment of rent, demand for public assistance, giving the “evil-eye,” local die-offs of horses or other stock, and mysterious deaths of children. Also among the telltale actions were practices related to midwifery and any kind

of contraception. The service that women provided among the poor as healers was one of a number of vestiges from pre-Christian, matrilineal institutions that once predominated in Europe. It is no surprise that those who had held on to and perpetuated these communal practices were those most resistant to the enclosure of the commons, the economic base of the peasantry, as well as women's autonomy.

The Crusades in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal today) and expulsion of Jews and Muslims were part of a process that created the core ideology for modern colonialism—white supremacy—and its justification for genocide. The Crusades gave birth to the papal law of *limpieza de sangre*—cleanliness of blood—for which the Inquisition was established by the Church to investigate and determine.

Before this time the concept of biological race based on “blood” is not known to have existed as law or taboo in Christian Europe or anywhere else in the world. As scapegoating and suspicion of Conversos—Jews who had converted to Christianity—and Moriscos—Muslims who had converted to Christianity—intensified over several centuries in Christian-controlled Spain, the doctrine of *limpieza de sangre* was popularized. It had the effect of granting psychological and increasingly legal privileges to “Old Christians,” both rich and poor, thus obscuring the class differences between the landed aristocracy and land-poor peasants and shepherds. Whatever their economic station, the “Old Christian” Spanish were enabled to identify with the nobility. The common people looked upwards, wishing and hoping to climb, and let themselves be seduced by chivalric ideals: honour, dignity, glory, and the noble life.

The ideology of white supremacy was paramount in neutralizing the class antagonisms of the landless against the landed and distributing confiscated lands and properties of Moors and Jews in Iberia, of the Irish in Ulster, and of Native American and African peoples.

The Mexican state was crushed and its cities leveled in Cortés's three-year genocidal war. Cortés's recruitment of resistant communities all over Mexico as allies aided in toppling the central regime. Cortés and his two-hundred European mercenaries could never have overthrown the Mexican state without the Indigenous insurgency he co-opted. The resistant peoples who allied with Cortés to overthrow the oppressive Aztec regime could not yet have known the goals of the gold-obsessed Spanish colonizers or the European institutions that backed them.

The logical progression of modern colonialism begins with economic penetration and graduates to a sphere of influence, then to protectorate status or indirect control, military occupation, and finally annexation.

The once proud Communist Eastern Bloc, after liberating dozens of

countries from colonialism, after fighting for an egalitarian world, showing solidarity with all oppressed nations, was then gradually defeated by such shallow bullshit as blue jeans labels, rock and pop songs (a favorite weapon of the West), greed, religions (another Western weapon), and slogans like ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy.’ The Western world which has been denying freedom and democracy to almost all countries on our planet, cynically turned the truth upside down, and fooled East Europeans, by skillfully applying centuries old propaganda methods. In the end, confused and increasingly cynical, what many East Europeans demanded was not freedom, but more money, more labels, and the ability to join the bloc of the countries that have been plundering the world.

Bhutan wasn’t perfect, any more than any human was perfect. It was greatly imperfect. And it had produced legions of young people like Ngawang: modern Bhutanese who loved their country but, unlike their parents before them, yearned for more. Bhutan’s pride and joy, its unadulterated culture, was in danger. The connection to the world beyond was to blame. The minute tourists came in and students went out and television took hold of the people’s brains, there went the Buddhist precepts and the cultural tradition and the status quo.

“Our challenge is that schools [should] not produce selfish economic animals who are only motivated to succeed at the cost of relationships, environment, and family. We have to convince the children that what parents have has nothing to do with who they are. Our little country, once so blissfully isolated in a remote corner of the Himalayas, seemingly protected by high mountain peaks, wisely and peacefully governed by a lineage of great enlightened monarchs, is now buffeted by powerful forces we could not have imagined or conceived just a generation ago. Though some have brought benefit, those powerful forces are not always benign, and some of them threaten not only our profound heritage but even our lives and land.”

Everything in Ngawang’s line of sight conspired to make her feel that if you could only get your feet onto American soil, piles and piles of money could be excavated from the streets or would fall from the heavens. And that money would buy things, items that were the keys to happiness. That message was conveyed in television shows and movies, which Ngawang watched in a near-continual feed at home. And it was enhanced by the tales of the few Bhutanese who made their way to the United States and sent back stacks of cash. Somehow, they managed not to explain how hard they

had to work to earn that money, what kinds of jobs they had to do, the cramped dorm-room-style living conditions they had to endure to be able to save even the few dollars a month they wired back home. How they lived with the constant fear of being found out and deported.

Then there were those lucky, super-smart people who won scholarships. They lived under the nurturing gaze of an academic institution, and while life might not have been cushy, it was rarely the grind of an illegal immigrant. Economics were not the only category warped by the media:

“Are the women in your country really as, umm, sexy as they are in the movies?”

Sorry kid, they are not.

If you ask a modern American for the most basic explanation of how trade works, they might tell you something like this: Henry plants an apple orchard and grows as many apples as he can. Then, he trades them with anyone who wants apples, getting something equally valuable in return and making both parties richer in the end. But the truth is, that’s just one model. In nineteenth century America, this way of looking at trade clashed with a very different one.

Consider relations in nineteenth-century Minnesota between white fur traders working for the American Fur Company and Oceti Sakowin, or seven fireplaces, people. Unlike in the Euro-American economic model the Oceti Sakowin only traded among people with kinship bonds, thereby incurring various mutual obligations. To enter into trading relationships, white fur traders became part of the family, often through marriage to Oceti Sakowin women. Marrying into a family meant that a trader’s relatives were obligated to trade with him, while he was obligated to provide gifts and support as needed.

This sometimes led to clashes. Among the Dakota, for example, individual accumulation was a serious offense. However, fur traders controlled warehouses full of merchandise that they didn’t distribute among their kin. When Oceti Sakowin called for equitable sharing, white American traders labeled this an irrational demand. As one white missionary rather bluntly put it:

“They thought the resources of a white man inexhaustible.”

Different conceptions of reciprocity and debt also confused trade relations. While the American Fur Company expected accounts to be balanced at the end of each year, ongoing debt was a good thing in the Oceti Sakowin system, since it maintained social ties and a sense of mutual obligation. Fur

traders were frequently frustrated at their inability to get Dakota to pay their debts on time each year. Eventually, that resulted in congressional legislation that let trading companies collect unpaid debts from government annuity payments to Native nations—essentially forcing them into the Euro-American concept of debt.

Another area where the two economic models clashed was in production levels. Euro-American economics is all about the allocation of limited resources in the face of unlimited wants. But to the Dakota, wants were limited while resources were bountiful. The task was not to efficiently harness resources but to establish and maintain proper kinship relationships with plants, animals, and deities. That meant that, even if there was a large European demand for furs, other social, political, and religious activities often took precedence over maintaining relationships with fur traders through trapping. Trapping was not a business for profit among the Dakota but primarily a social exchange.

Ultimately, the Euro-American system won out through simple violence, with the military forcing the Oceti Sakowin from much of their land. But, as the continuing fight over the Dakota Access Pipeline's path through Dakota and Lakota land suggests, the clash between profit-oriented Euro-American economics and other ways of thinking about the material world continues today.

American Myths

Navigating Through Time

The Act of Union between England and Scotland requires all succeeding sovereigns of the United Kingdom to take an oath to maintain the Church of Scotland and the Church of England. If future generations feel themselves bound by such provisions, they are enslaved by long-dead tyrants. Objection to such attempts to bind posterity applies not only to the union that created the United Kingdom, but also to the one that formed the United States: Why should the current generation consider itself bound by what was decided hundreds of years earlier? Unlike the framers of the US Constitution, we have had centuries of experience to judge whether it does or does not “promote the general welfare.” If it does, we have all the reason we need to retain it; but if it does not, don’t we have as much power and as much right to change the arrangements under which we are governed as the framers had to prescribe them in the first place? If we do, why should provisions that make the constitution so difficult to amend bind a majority of the electorate?

Sometimes I imagine America as a chapter in a book, centuries after the country has collapsed, encapsulated by the casual language we use when describing the foreboding failure of the Spanish Armada in 1588. And what I imagine is a description like this: The invention of a country is described. This country was based on a document, and the document was unassailable. The document could be altered, but alterations were so difficult that it happened only seventeen times in two-hundred years, and one of those changes merely retracted a previous alteration. The document was less than five-thousand words but applied unilaterally, even as the country dramatically increased its size and population. The document’s prime directives were liberty and representation, even when 5% of the country’s population legally controlled 65% of the wealth. But everyone loved this document, because it was concise and well composed and presented a possible utopia where everyone was the same. It was so beloved that the citizens of this country decided they would stick with it no matter what happened

or what changed, and the premise of discounting (or even questioning) its greatness became so verboten that any political candidate who did so would have no chance to be elected to any office above city alderman. The populace decided to use this same document forever, inflexibly and without apprehension, even if the country lasted for two-thousand years.

Viewed retrospectively, it would not seem stunning that this did not work out.

The ultimate failure of the United States will probably not derive from the problems we see or the conflicts we wage. It will more likely derive from our uncompromising belief in the things we consider unimpeachable and idealized and beautiful. Because every strength is a weakness, if given enough time.

Because he had lived through a true revolution here, and had watched another one sputter and fail in France, Thomas Jefferson knew that periodic revolutions were necessary for America—or any democratic society—to flourish and grow. Jefferson even suggested that “every generation” should have its own smaller form of revolution, reconfiguring the nation and its government to adapt to changing needs and changing times.

The concept of generations has played a role in many governing documents. The Iroquois Confederation’s “Great Law,” which was a major inspiration for the American Constitution, famously called for all governmental decisions to be made in the context of their impact on “the Seventh Generation” down the line into the future. While the definition of the time period represented by a “generation” has been the subject of much speculation over the years, Thomas Jefferson recognized two clear definitions, and repeatedly said that both the Constitution and future legislators should respect each of them. The first was the personal, familial definition of “generation”—which Jefferson put at nineteen years and today is generally considered to be around twenty years. In that context, with the first American Revolution officially beginning in 1776, today’s young people are about the twelfth generation since our nation’s birth. The second was the generational epochs—blocks of time during which generations overlap and a major transfer of power is made from one to another, along with a period of time long enough for a major change in our understanding of government and a recalibration of our worldview. Jefferson and his contemporaries spoke and wrote often about the obligations of each generation to its heirs, and about the political crime of any generation placing shackles—financial or legal—on future generations.

“The question, whether one generation of men has a right to bind another is a question of such consequences as not only to

merit decision, but place also among the fundamental principles of every government.”

No single generation, he wrote, has the right to saddle the next with problems or debts, and it should be obvious “that no such obligation can be transmitted” from generation to generation.

“I set out on this ground, which I suppose to be self evident, that the earth belongs in usufruct [common ownership] to the living; that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it. The portion occupied by any individual ceases to be his when himself ceases to be, and reverts to the society.”

Jefferson’s logic that no person or generation should be able to bind the next one was one of his core beliefs throughout his life, and shared by most of his contemporaries.

“For if he could, he might during his own life, eat up the usufruct [commons] of the lands for several generations to come; then the lands would belong to the dead, and not to the living, which is the reverse of our principle.”

But what was most revolutionary about Jefferson’s thinking on this was the idea of generational revolutions—that the nation itself must fundamentally change roughly once every biological or epochal generation, and that even that wouldn’t prevent larger periodic political transformations of the nation. These were, he believed, not just ideals but a basic force of nature.

“On similar ground it may be proved, that no society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law. The earth belongs always to the living generation: they may manage it, then, and what proceeds from it, as they please, during their usufruct [shared ownership]. They are masters, too, of their own persons, and consequently may govern them as they please. But persons and property make the sum of the objects of government. The constitution and the laws of their predecessors are extinguished then, in their natural course, with those whose will gave them being.”

Jefferson believed that even the laws enshrined in our Constitution came with a time limit, and that once the generation that wrote those laws passed on out of power, those laws must be rewritten by the new generation, or at least every second generation.

“Every constitution, then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of thirty-four years. If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force, and not of right. It may be said, that the succeeding generation exercising, in fact, the power of repeal, this leaves them as free as if the constitution or law had been expressly limited to thirty-four years only.”

Jefferson stressed the need for every generation to essentially produce a revolution that would turn the wheel of America forward into the new epoch. He arrived at this conclusion by understanding the weaknesses inherent in the Constitution when it was first drafted, and the need that each new generation must continue to perfect it, or at least adapt it to respond to changing times. Jefferson noted the absurdity of a rigid Constitution—or at least an interpretation of that Constitution—that does not change as the nation grows and times change:

“We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy, as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors. Let us follow no such examples, nor weakly believe that one generation is not as capable as another of taking care of itself.”

We must assume and accept human ignorance, something our mainstream ideologies refuse to do. We will most certainly make mistakes when revising the constitution but as long as the idea that it should be adapted quite often remains, then it is hard for this inevitable ignorance to cause such dramatic harms. And we should also not act like the current interpretation of things has not and is not continuing to cause dramatic harms.

There is simply no way a person from that era could reasonably anticipate how the world would change in the coming two-hundred years (and certainly not how it would continue to change over the next two-hundred following those, since we can't even do that now, from our position in the middle). This logic leads to a strange question: If and when the United States does ultimately collapse, will that breakdown be a consequence of the Constitution itself? If it can be reasonably argued that it's impossible to create a document that can withstand the evolution of any society for five-hundred or a thousand or five-thousand years, doesn't that mean present-day America's pathological adherence to the document we happened to inherit will eventually wreck everything? But attacking the Constitution is attacking America, which means the only people who will do it openly are so radicalized that every subsequent opinion they offer is classified as extremist.

The Constitution worshiper is fascinated by ideas like the separation of powers, inserted by the founders as a barrier against their ultimate fear: tyranny. He will directly exclaim, “I love the separation of powers!” which is a weird thing to exclaim. But he also realizes this trifurcation comes with a cost. One can imagine how the sluggishness and potential for gridlock that such a system creates might actually be our undoing—perhaps because of some single major incident that the government cannot respond to adequately. But more likely because it slowly, quietly, in ways that may be hard to identify, weakens our society and culture and economy, rendering the nation unable to sustain itself and rise to the challenges of the future. States and localities play the most significant role in shaping the education of children, which is great—except in those states that water down science education to placate creationists and siphon money off to unaccountable charter schools. The Supreme Court can strike down laws that it thinks violate the Constitution, which is great—except when it invalidates campaign finance laws that are designed to make our political system fair or they prolong and legitimate inequality and slavery by another name. Both houses of Congress have to agree to pass legislation, which is great—except when one house holds the entire country hostage by refusing to pass a budget or when all the politicians in both are whores to corporations. And if in some future, far-off day we find ourselves no longer a superpower, we may look back and say that this was the result of a constitutional structure that made it overly difficult to implement wise social and economic policy.

“I’d distinguish the parts of the Constitution that we talk about most—the liberty and equality protections and the Fourteenth Amendment—from the parts of the Constitution that create the structure of the government. I think it’s more likely that if we look back with regret at our dedication to the Constitution, it will be with respect to the structural provisions, rather than the liberty and equality ones. The liberty and equality provisions of the Constitution are worded so vaguely that whatever hypothetical blame we might place on them in any faraway future will more likely be aimed at the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the provisions, as opposed to the provisions themselves.

Now, what if because of these provisions, someone gets away with urging or instructing someone else to blow up the White House, thus instigating a chain of events that leads to a nation-destroying insurrection? Or someone who is arrested without being given the proper Miranda warnings goes free and then

blows up the White House? Are we really going to blame the First Amendment or the Fourth Amendment for those catastrophes? If people end up blaming anyone or anything having to do with these provisions—and that itself is a really big if—I think people would blame the Supreme Court and the opinions which gave those amendments the specific content that, when applied, turned out to be disastrous. Earl Warren, rather than James Madison, would turn out to be the real culprit.

There are a handful of sacrosanct principles within the Constitution that would never be directly blamed for anything that happens, based on the logic that the principles themselves are so unassailable that any subsequent problem must be a manifestation of someone applying those principles incorrectly.”

It’s one of those situations where the practical manifestation is the opposite of the technical intention: As Americans, we tend to look down on European countries that impose legal limitations on speech—yet as long as speakers in those countries stay within the specified boundaries, discourse is allowed relatively unfettered (even when it’s unpopular). In the US, there are absolutely no speech boundaries imposed by the government, so the citizenry creates its own limitations, based on the arbitrary values of whichever activist group is most successful at inflicting its worldview upon an economically fragile public sphere. As a consequence, the United States is a safe place for those who want to criticize the government but a dangerous place for those who want to advance unpopular thoughts about any other subject that could be deemed insulting or discomfiting. Some would argue that this trade-off is worth it. Time may prove otherwise.

The men and women who forged this nation were straight-up maniacs about freedom. It was just about the only thing they cared about, so they jammed it into everything. This is understandable, as they were breaking away from a monarchy. But it’s also a little bonkers, since one of the things they desired most desperately was freedom of religion, based on the premise that Europe wasn’t religious enough and that they needed the freedom to live by non-secular laws that were more restrictive than that of any government, including provisions for the burning of suspected witches. The founding fathers saw themselves as old hedgehogs, and the one big thing they knew was that nothing mattered more than liberty. They were of the opinion that a man cannot be happy if he is not wholly free from tyranny, a sentiment that is still believed by almost every American citizen.

During the wars between Athens and Sparta, there were a lot of people questioning if the idea of democracy in Athens made much sense. These were

guys who came in right after the Roman Republic fell who were basically wiping their brow and saying, ‘Thank god that whole experiment with people running things is over, look where that took us.’ These are thoughts conditioned by what we remember. When we talk about one-man rule—some kind of dictatorship or empire or whatever—look at the examples recent history has given us. They’re not exactly shining examples of how it might work out well, whether it’s a Hitler or a Stalin or whoever, so we don’t have any good examples of how this could successfully operate. But in the ancient world, they often had bad examples of democracy. Some of those guys looked at democracies the way we look at failed dictatorships. And yet, had we had, in the 1930s or 1940s, some dictatorship that was run by a real benevolent, benign person who did a really good job and things were great—and let’s throw out the obvious problem of succession, of potentially getting a bad guy after the good guy—we might have a different view of all that.

It almost feels like I’m arguing, ‘Democracy is imperfect, so let’s experiment with a little light fascism.’ But I also realize my discomfort with such thoughts is a translucent sign of deep potential wrongness—so deep that I can’t even think about it without my unconscious trying to convince me otherwise. The Western world (and the US in particular) has invested so much of its identity into the conception of democracy that we’re expected to unconditionally support anything that comes with it.

Voting, for example. Everyone who wants to vote should absolutely do so, but it’s bizarre how angry voters get at non-voters. “It’s your civic responsibility,” they will say. Although the purpose of voting is to uphold a free society, so one might respond that a free society would not demand people to participate in an optional civic activity. “But your vote matters,” they argue. Well, it is counted, usually. That’s true (usually). But believing your one vote makes a meaningful difference reflects unfathomable egotism. Even if you’d illegally voted twenty times in the single tightest Florida county during that aforementioned 2000 presidential election, the outcome would have been unchanged. “But what if everybody thought that way,” they inevitably counter. This is the stupidest of arguments—if the nation’s political behavior were based on the actions of one random person, of course that person would vote, in the same way that random person would never jaywalk if his or her personal actions dictated the behavior of society as a whole. But that is not how the world works. “Okay, fine. But if you don’t vote, you can’t complain.” Actually, the opposite is true—if you participate in democracy, you’re validating the democratic process (and therefore the outcome). You can’t complain if you vote. “People in other countries risk their life for the right to vote.” Well, what can I say? That’s a noble act,

but not necessarily a good decision.

When I see a quote from Plato that condescendingly classifies democracy as “charming” and suggests democracy dispenses “a sort of equality to equals and unequaled alike,” my knee-jerk reaction is to see this as troubling and unenlightened. But Plato is merely arguing that democracy is a nice idea that tries to impose the fantasy of fairness upon an organically unfair social order. I’m not sure how anyone could disagree with that, myself included. But if you’re really into the idea of democracy, this is something you reject out of hand.

There is no evidence that Washington was ever given the chance to become king, and—considering how much he and his peers despised the mere possibility of tyranny—it’s hard to imagine this offer was ever on the table. It is, I suppose, the kind of act that seems like something Washington would have done, in the same way he seems like the kind of fellow who wouldn’t deny that he iced a cherry tree for no reason. Washington’s kingship denial falls into the category of a “utility myth”—a story that supports whatever political position the storyteller happens to hold, since no one disagrees with the myth’s core message (i.e., that there are no problems with the design of our government, even if that design allows certain people to miss the point).

You see the application of other utility myths during any moment of national controversy. Someone will say or do something that offends a group of people, so the offended group will argue that the act was unpatriotic and harmful to democracy. In response, the offending individual will say, ‘Actually, I’m doing this because I’m patriotic and because I’m upholding democracy. You’re unpatriotic for trying to stop me.’ Round and round this goes, with both sides claiming to occupy the spiritual center of the same philosophy, never considering the possibility that the (potentially real) value of their viewpoint hinges on the prospect that patriotism is not absurd and democracy is not simply the system some wig-wearing eighteenth-century freedom junkies happened to select.

Sit back with your favorite beverage or plant, prop up your feet and open your head to consider Independence Day in a whole new way. A historically critical analysis of the American Revolution would typically discuss how the democratic promises of the Declaration were left hanging at war’s end, followed by a decidedly undemocratic constitution six years later. Examples of that would include abandoning ideals stated in the Declaration like: “all men are created equal” and have unassailable rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” It could cite that:

- Slaves weren’t included in “We the People,” they were only the property

of their owners. Because this human property, unlike a bale of cotton, could plan to run away, particular attention was paid to securing it.

“A person held to service or labor in one state. . . escaping to another. . . shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.”

- To appease Southerners interested in gaining the maximum number of seats in the new House of Representatives, the Fathers of Our Country declared, in writing, that these “other persons” would each count as three-fifths of a human.
- Women did not have the right to vote, nor did Catholics and Jews in some states. White, Protestant, men had to own qualifying amounts of property. Thus, only about 6% of the new nation’s population was eligible to vote in the first presidential election and only 3%, or 38,818 people actually did.
- Even those so privileged didn’t actually vote for a presidential candidate. They voted for “electors” pledged to vote for certain candidates and even then, four of the state legislatures picked those electors, not voting citizens.
- State legislatures, not citizens, chose US Senators until the Constitution was amended in 1913.

Clearly, there are reasons to ask what the Founders of Our Country were up to and what our fireworks every Fourth of July about. But, let’s investigate further: was war the only or even the best way to achieve what we now see was more limited than what we were taught?

America’s three Holy Wars—the Revolution, the Civil War and World War II—are three wars in American history that are untouchable, uncriticizable. If something’s unquestioned, it means we’re not thinking about it. The reason for doing so is not to learn what ‘really happened’ in the past—the past is past—the important thing is what does it tell us about today and about what we might do in the world? There’s a present and a future reason for going into the past. We should do something never done in history textbooks: put each of these wars on its own balance sheet—costs on one side, benefits on the other—and then make a judgment. Without that examination we and our grandchildren will be prone to accept wars as possibly good. Because once you have a history of “good wars” fought for good causes to point to, you have a model that makes it possible to have

good wars. Questioning the good wars undermines the possibility of having a good war.

The acknowledged “bad wars” like Vietnam and Iraq are justified by pointing to the “good war.” Words like ‘We mustn’t appease Saddam Hussein,’ ‘Munich,’ ‘Chamberlain,’ ‘Ho Chi Minh is another Hitler,’ are repeated each new generation, suggesting maybe we need another good war. Typically we only look at one side of the balance sheet: what was gained—in this case independence from Britain—and ignore the cost. Rarely do we hear how many people were killed in the Revolution. We won independence. It’s insignificant.

So how many were killed? Perhaps 25,000 or even 50,000. You probably know by now that casualty figures in war are very crude. There’ll be disagreements up to a million. How many people died in Vietnam? I think two-million. Or maybe three-million. We’re not sure. 25,000 is not many soldiers killed—it’s less than half the number of US troops killed in Vietnam. But what would 25,000 mean relative to today’s population? 2,500,000 dead. Today, would we think it’s worth sacrificing two-and-a-half-million people? Might you not say, ‘Well, we want independence, but is there another way?’ If we do that for each of these “good wars” at least then you have an honest balance sheet and you can make a decision. Especially if none of those 2.5 million people are related to you.

Beyond casualties, are there other factors that should go on the balance sheet? Like who gains from victory in war? Governments would like us to believe we all gain from a war. That’s not necessarily true. Did black slaves gain from the Revolutionary War? Slavery before the war. Slavery after the war. You would think blacks would rush to the colors if they were fighting for their freedom, but Washington didn’t want blacks in the army. Washington, Madison, Jefferson, all slave owners, aren’t going to promise freedom. The British did. Only after the British began to enlist blacks did the Continental Army slowly enlist blacks. Indeed, some historians argue that slave-owning colonial leaders might well have seen the first spark of revolution in 1772 in England, when Lord Mansfield ruled in *Somerset v. Stewart* that a slave, James Somerset, who had escaped after being taken to England by his master, could not be forced back into slavery.

And of course, what about the people already here, the Indians? With independence, the colonists won the ability to go westward, beyond the Appalachian line set by the British in the Proclamation of 1763. Not because they were being nice, but because they didn’t want trouble. So what do the Indians gain? It’s worse than nothing. After the Revolution that line was wiped out and we spent the next century taking over the rest of the continent.

Did working people and poor people benefit from the Revolution? Did they rush to Washington's army? No. Poor people had to be conscripted. They could avoid conscription by paying a fee, a practice begun with the Revolution that was carried over to the Civil War. Poor white people weren't eager to join the army, but they were promised land if they won. And much like today, a young man from a tough background, not knowing what the future will bring, might join the army. You get a uniform, a gun, some status, maybe some medals, a little land. After they joined, many found they weren't treated well. They found the officers got good clothes and shoes and food and paid a salary.

Consequently, troops mutinied. How many of you learned that in school? Thousands mutinied. Washington had to deal with it. He made concessions. But when smaller mutinies happened, he rounded up the leaders and had them shot by their fellow mutineers. All this is to say that the Revolutionary War, like all wars, was a class war. But we're not supposed to bring that up. We're all one class, all one patriotic body. No. Wars affect us all differently.

After the Revolution, the Western Massachusetts land given to former soldiers was taxed beyond their ability to pay. Land confiscations were followed by Shays Rebellion in 1786. Thousands rebelled and an army raised by the rich merchants of Boston put it down, But it raised the question for whom was the war fought? Who was betrayed by it? The founding fathers were worried about Shay's Rebellion and Massachusetts wasn't the only place in revolt. Gen. Henry Knox wrote to warn Washington that thousands were beginning to demand an equal share of the wealth gained by the Revolution.

In the shadow of Shay's and in fear of future rebellions, the Constitutional Convention convened in Philadelphia in 1787. A strong central government was set up not just because it's nice to have a strong central government as history texts explain, but to be able to suppress rebellions by workers and slaves, and to protect settlers moving into Indian territory. It should be noted that conventioners met originally to amend our original constitution, the Articles of Confederation. Once together, however, they ditched the Articles with the more top-down, property-friendly constitution we know today.

Could we have put something good on the positive side of the balance sheet without that human cost? Could we have won independence without a war? If something has happened a certain way in history, we assume that's the only way it could have unfolded. But unless we use our imagination, we're going to be stuck doing the same thing over and over. In this particular case, we have more than just imagination to guide us.

The year before Lexington and Concord, farmers in 90% of Massachusetts,

everywhere except Boston, had nonviolently driven out British officials. Nonviolent action had made that state ungovernable. When a place becomes impossible to govern even imperial powers withdraw because they can't control the situation.

On September 6, 1774, at dawn and through the morning, militia companies from 37 rural townships across Worcester County marched into the shiretown (county seat) of Worcester. By an actual headcount taken by Breck Parkman, one of the participants, there were 4,622 militiamen, about half the adult male population of the sprawling rural county. This was not some ill-defined mob but the military embodiment of the people, and they had a purpose: to close the courts, the outposts of British authority in this far reach of the Empire. As you read on, imagine if citizens had responded like this after 2008, and stopped so many from losing their homes to greedy parasites; or after paid-for politicians and corporate executives began to ship jobs overseas?

Lining both sides of Main Street for a quarter mile, the insurgents forced two dozen court officials to walk the gauntlet, hats in hand, reciting their recantations more than thirty times each so everyone could hear. The wording was strong: the officials would cede to the will of the people and promise never to execute "the unconstitutional act of the British parliament" (the Massachusetts Government Act) that would "reduce the inhabitants to mere arbitrary power." With this humiliating submission, all British authority vanished from Worcester County, never to return.

So too in every shiretown save Boston: some 1,500 patriots in Great Barrington, 3,000 in Springfield, and so on. In Plymouth, 4,000 militiamen were so pumped up after unseating British rule that they gathered around Plymouth Rock and tried to move it to the courthouse to display their power. The rock stood where it was, but British authority was gone from Plymouth and every other town. The disgruntled Southampton Tory Jonathan Judd, Jr., summed it all up:

"Government has now devolved upon the people, and they seem to be for using it."

In the Treaty of Tripoli in 1797, the US government stated:

"The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of Mussulmen [Muslims]."

The founders had good reason to be friendly to the faith. It was Sultan Mohammed ben Abdallah of Morocco who was the first world figure to

recognize the United States as an independent country after the Revolutionary War. If that was all part of a secret plan to undermine the Christian West, then holy shit do these people know how to work the long con.

Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that reinforce a culture's deepest values and aspirations. Myths are so fraught with meaning that we live and die by them. They are the maps by which cultures navigate through time.

History that challenges comfortable assumptions about a group is painful, but it is a mark of maturity. History should not be written to make the present generation feel good but to remind us that human affairs are complicated. Examining the past honestly, whether that is painful for some people or not, is the only way for societies to become mature and to build bridges to others.

"Imagined communities" are the groups, like nations or religions, that are so big that we can never know all the other members yet which still draw our loyalties. Groups mark out their identities by symbols, whether flags, colored shirts, or special songs. In that process of definition, history usually plays a key role. Army regiments have long understood the importance of history in creating a sense of cohesiveness. That is why they have regimental histories and battle honors from past campaigns. Not surprisingly, the stories from the past that are celebrated are often one-sided or simplistic.

For example, historians have been examining the myth of the American West. Hundreds of Western movies and thousands of novels by writers such as Zane Grey (who only went west on his honeymoon) and Karl May (who never went there at all) have helped to create a picture of a wild world where bold cowboys and determined settlers braved savage Indian hordes. The myth casts a powerful spell. From President Teddy Roosevelt to President George W. Bush, American political elites have liked to portray themselves as bold cowboys. Even Henry Kissinger, improbable as the image may seem, once fell under the spell.

"Americans like the cowboy who leads the wagon train by riding ahead alone on his horse. He acts, that's all, by being in the right place at the right time."

Donald Trump would seem to be the modern version of this, no longer a cattle driving cowboy or outlaw, but a reality TV star.

Yet the "real" old West, the time of the wagon trains moving through the ever-open and lawless frontier, lasted for a surprisingly short time, roughly from the 1840s, when settlers in increasing numbers moved west of the Missouri River, to the opening of the first transcontinental railway in 1869.

Moreover, many of the familiar stereotypes dissolve into something more complex and even disturbing. The cowboys were often teenage gunslingers who today might well be in urban gangs or in jail. Billy the Kid was a charming and cold-blooded killer. Miss Kitty Russell, the warm and attractive saloon owner in the television series *Gunsmoke*, would have looked quite different in the real old West. Women of her sort on the frontier were miserable low-paid prostitutes, frequently drunk and riddled with diseases. Many of them killed themselves.

Going back further, most Americans know the story of Paul Revere's ride: the brave patriot galloping alone through that night in 1775 to warn his fellow revolutionaries that the British redcoats were about to attack. Eight decades later Henry Wadsworth Longfellow helped to fix the ride in American memories with his epic poem. To the regret of historians, he got some of the key details wrong. Revere did not, for example, put the lanterns to signal the movements of the British ("one if by land, and two if by sea") in the steeple of the Old North Church. Rather, they were a signal to him. Most important, perhaps, he acted not on his own but as part of a well-planned, well-coordinated strategy. Several riders went out that night, in different directions.

Many people today think that the Tea Act—which led to the Boston Tea Party—was simply an increase in the taxes on tea paid by American colonists. That's where the whole "taxation without representation" meme came from. But contrary to what many Americans believe, including members of today's Tea Party, the original Boston Tea Party and the smaller ones that followed in other colonial cities were never protests against high taxes. They could not have been, as an examination of official documents at the British Library in London reveals. In that era, taxpayers in the mother country paid twenty-five to fifty times as much in taxes per person as the American colonists. Instead, the purpose of the Tea Act was to give the East India Company full and unlimited access to the American tea trade and to exempt the company from having to pay taxes to Britain on tea exported to the American colonies. It even gave the company a tax refund on millions of pounds of tea that it was unable to sell and holding in inventory. In other words, the Tea Act was the largest corporate tax break in the history of the world.

What the colonists who filled Old South Church in Boston on December 16, 1773, were protesting was a tax exemption intended to bail out investors in the British East India Company. With tons of tea that it couldn't sell, the threat of bankruptcy loomed. That would have meant ruin for friends of King George III in an era when debtors went to prison. And since, at the time, most of the British government and royalty were stockholders in the East India Tea Company, it was also a classic example of crony capitalism.

Most Bostonians were drinking Dutch tea that fall, not because it was better but because it was cheaper. But the British Parliament had granted the East India Company a tax exemption, meaning the British tea would sell for less than Dutch tea. That might have seemed attractive to customers, but only in the short-run, as a royal monopoly was to be strictly enforced. In time, tea prices would rise.

In response, the colonists dressed like Indians, in the middle of the night, boarded ships, and commenced the dumping of hundreds of chests of tea overboard—an act that would eventually light the fuse to war. The American Revolution began with an act of corporate vandalism.

Throughout most of the Revolutionary War, the smart money was on the British winning, and battle by battle, the smart money looked pretty smart. The Brits generally were able to march up and down the colonies almost with impunity. They just didn't have the troops and supply lines to hold and pacify what they'd conquered, nor did they have the will to exterminate the colonials the way they did so many other peoples, largely because the colonials were racially and culturally the same people. The Brits couldn't break the Americans, so eventually they threw in the towel.

Jump ahead to the Civil War: More than a third of the nine-million Southerners were enslaved people of African heritage. Within the CSA, 76 percent of settlers owned no slaves. Roughly 60–70 percent of those without slaves owned fewer than a hundred acres of land. Less than one percent owned more than a hundred slaves. Seventeen percent of settlers in the South owned one to nine slaves, and only 6.5% owned more than ten. Ten percent of the settlers who owned no slaves were also landless, while that many more managed to barely survive on small dirt farms. The Confederate Army reflected the same kind of percentages.

Those who, even today, claim that “states' rights” caused Southern secession and the Civil War use these statistics to argue that slavery was not the cause of the Civil War, but that is false. Every settler in the Southern states aspired to own land and slaves or to own more land and more slaves, as both social status and wealth depended on the extent of property owned. Even small and landless farmers relied on slavery-based rule: the local slave plantation was the market for what small farmers produced, and planters hired landless settlers as overseers and sharecroppers. Most non-slave-owning settlers supported and fought for the Confederacy.

The Union Army victory over the Confederate Army transformed the South into a quasi-captive nation, a region that remains the poorest of the United States well over a century later. The situation was similar to that in South Africa two decades later when the British defeated the Boers (descendants of the original seventeenth-century Dutch settlers). As the

British would later do with the Boers, the US government eventually allowed the defeated southern elite to return to their locally powerful positions, and both US southerners and Boers soon gained national political power. The powerful white supremacist southern ruling class helped further militarize the United States, the army practically becoming a southern institution. Following the barely effective Reconstruction experiment to empower former slaves, the US occupying army was withdrawn, and African Americans were returned to quasi-bondage and disenfranchisement through Jim Crow laws, forming a colonized population in the South.

The United Daughters of the Confederacy, set up in 1894, were vigilant in monitoring school curricula to ensure that their approved version of the past was taught in Southern schools. Textbook publishers complied, publishing different versions of the American history texts: one for the South, which downplayed slavery and ignored its brutality, and the other for Northern schools. And so, even black children in their segregated schools were presented with a picture of the South in which slavery and racism were largely absent. They were told, though, that Africans were fortunate because they had been brought to America and so into contact with European civilization. It was a pity, the texts concluded sadly, that the Africans had not had the innate capacity to take advantage of the opportunity. Black teachers did their best to counteract such views by introducing African and African American history into their schools, but it was not always easy because the curricula had to be approved by white school boards.

We can learn from history, but we also deceive ourselves when we selectively take evidence from the past to justify what we have already made up our minds to do.

Coming to Terms With the Past

The history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism—the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy, the widespread practice of African slavery, and a policy of genocide and land theft. Those who seek history with an upbeat ending, a history of redemption and reconciliation, may look around and observe that such a conclusion is not visible, not even in utopian dreams of a better society. Seeing US history from an Indigenous peoples' perspective requires rethinking the consensual national narrative. That narrative is wrong or deficient, not in its facts, dates, or details but rather in its essence. Inherent in the myth we've been taught is an embrace of settler colonialism and genocide. The myth persists, not for a lack of free speech or poverty of information but rather for an absence of motivation to ask questions that challenge the core of the scripted narrative of the origin story. How might acknowledging the reality of US history work to transform society?

In the United States the legacy of settler colonialism can be seen in the endless wars of aggression and occupations; the trillions spent on war machinery, military bases, and personnel instead of social services and quality public education; the gross profits of corporations, each of which has greater resources and funds than more than half the countries in the world yet pay minimal taxes and provide few jobs for US citizens; the repression of generation after generation of activists who seek to change the system; the incarceration of the poor, particularly descendants of enslaved Africans; the individualism, carefully inculcated, that on the one hand produces self-blame for personal failure and on the other exalts ruthless dog-eat-dog competition for possible success, even though it rarely results; and high rates of suicide, drug abuse, alcoholism, sexual violence against women and children, homelessness, dropping out of school, and gun violence.

These are symptoms, and there are many more, of a deeply troubled society, and they are not new. The large and influential civil rights, student, labor, and women's movements of the 1950s through the 1970s exposed the structural inequalities in the economy and the historical effects of more than two centuries of slavery and brutal genocidal wars waged against Indigenous peoples.

How then can US society come to terms with its past? How can it acknowledge responsibility? While living persons are not responsible for what their ancestors did, they are responsible for the society they live in, which is a product of that past. Assuming this responsibility provides a means of survival and liberation. Everyone and everything in the world is

affected, for the most part negatively, by US dominance and intervention, often violently through direct military means or through proxies. It is an urgent concern.

A “race to innocence” is what occurs when individuals assume that they are innocent of complicity in structures of domination and oppression. This concept captures the understandable assumption made by new immigrants or children of recent immigrants to any country. They cannot be responsible, they assume, for what occurred in their adopted country’s past. Neither are those who are already citizens guilty, even if they are descendants of slave owners, Indian killers, or Andrew Jackson himself. Yet, in a settler society that has not come to terms with its past, whatever historical trauma was entailed in settling the land affects the assumptions and behavior of living generations at any given time, including immigrants and the children of recent immigrants.

Awareness of the settler-colonialist context of US history writing is essential if one is to avoid the laziness of the default position and the trap of a mythological unconscious belief in manifest destiny. The form of colonialism that the Indigenous peoples of North America have experienced was modern from the beginning: the expansion of European corporations, backed by government armies, into foreign areas, with subsequent expropriation of lands and resources. Settler colonialism is a genocidal policy.

Native nations and communities, while struggling to maintain fundamental values and collectivity, have from the beginning resisted modern colonialism using both defensive and offensive techniques, including the modern forms of armed resistance of national liberation movements and what now is called terrorism. In every instance they have fought for survival as peoples. The objective of US colonialist authorities was to terminate their existence as peoples—not as random individuals. This is the very definition of modern genocide as contrasted with premodern instances of extreme violence that did not have the goal of extinction. The United States as a socioeconomic and political entity is a result of this centuries-long and ongoing colonial process. Modern Indigenous nations and communities are societies formed by their resistance to colonialism, through which they have carried their practices and histories.

The goal of settler colonialism is elimination of Indigenous populations in order to make land available to settlers. That project is not limited to government policy, but rather involves all kinds of agencies, voluntary militias, and the settlers themselves acting on their own.

Settler colonialism, as an institution or system, requires violence or the threat of violence to attain its goals. People do not hand over their land, resources, children, and futures without a fight, and that fight is

met with violence. In employing the force necessary to accomplish its expansionist goals, a colonizing regime institutionalizes violence. The notion that settler-indigenous conflict is an inevitable product of cultural differences and misunderstandings, or that violence was committed equally by the colonized and the colonizer, blurs the nature of the historical processes. Euro-American colonialism, an aspect of the capitalist economic globalization, had from its beginnings a genocidal tendency.

Documented policies of genocide on the part of US administrations can be identified in at least four distinct periods: the Jacksonian era of forced removal; the California gold rush in Northern California; the post-Civil War era of the so-called Indian wars in the Great Plains; and the 1950s termination period,

The United States, throughout its history, has alternated between a 'peace' policy and a 'war' policy in its relations with Indigenous nations and communities. These pendulum swings coincided with the strength and weakness of Native resistance. Between the alternatives of extermination and termination (war policy) and preservation (peace policy) were interim periods characterized by benign neglect and assimilation.

With organized Indigenous resistance to war programs and policies, concessions are granted. When pressure lightens, new schemes are developed to separate Indians from their land, resources, and cultures. Scholars, politicians, policymakers, and the media rarely term US policy toward Indigenous peoples as colonialism.

The current mission of the United States to become the center of political enlightenment to be taught to the rest of the world began with the Indian wars and has become the dangerous provocation of this nation's historical intent. The historical connection between the Little Big Horn event and the "uprising" in Baghdad must become part of the political dialogue of America if the fiction of decolonization is to happen and the hoped-for deconstruction of the colonial story is to come about.

Meditating on the five major US wars since World War II—in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq (1991), Afghanistan, and Iraq (2003)—with flashes of historical memory of Jamestown, the Ohio Valley, and Wounded Knee, brings us to the essence of US history. A red thread of blood connects the first white settlement in North America with today and the future.

US people are taught that their military culture does not approve of or encourage targeting and killing civilians and know little or nothing about the nearly three centuries of warfare—before and after the founding of the US—that reduced the Indigenous peoples of the continent to a few reservations by burning their towns and fields and killing civilians, driving the refugees out—step by step—across the continent. Violence directed systematically

against noncombatants through irregular means, from the start, has been a central part of Americans' way of war.

The dispossession of the Indians did not happen once and for all in the beginning. America was continually beginning again on the frontier, and as it expanded across the continent, it killed, removed, and drove into extinction one tribe after another.

Our nation was born in genocide. We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or feel remorse for this shameful episode.

Somehow, even 'genocide' seems an inadequate description for what happened, yet rather than viewing it with horror, most Americans have conceived of it as their country's manifest destiny.

Native peoples were colonized and deposed of their territories as distinct peoples—hundreds of nations—not as a racial or ethnic group. 'Colonization,' 'dispossession,' 'settler colonialism,' 'genocide'—these are the terms that drill to the core of US history, to the very source of the country's existence. The charge of genocide, once unacceptable by establishment academic and political classes when applied to the United States, has gained currency as evidence of it has mounted, but it is too often accompanied by an assumption of disappearance.

Indigenous survival as peoples is due to centuries of resistance and storytelling passed through the generations, and this survival is dynamic, not passive. Surviving genocide, by whatever means, is resistance: non-Indians must know this in order to more accurately understand the history of the United States.

Whereas white supremacy had been the working rationalization for British theft of Indigenous lands and for European enslavement of Africans, the bid for independence by what became the United States of America was more problematic. Democracy, equality, and equal rights do not fit well with dominance of one race by another, much less with genocide, settler colonialism, and empire.

It was during the 1820s—the beginning of the era of Jacksonian settler democracy—that the unique US origin myth evolved reconciling rhetoric with reality. Novelist James Fenimore Cooper was among its initial scribes. Cooper's reinvention of the birth of the United States in his novel *The Last of the Mohicans* has become the official US origin story.

Cooper devised a fictional counterpoint of celebration to the dark underbelly of the new American nation—the birth of something new and wondrous, literally, the US American race, a new people born of the merger of the

best of both worlds, the Native and the European, not a biological merger but something more ephemeral, involving the dissolving of the Indian. In the novel, Cooper has the last of the “noble” and “pure” Natives die off as nature would have it, with the “last Mohican” handing the continent over to Hawkeye, the nativized settler, his adopted son. This convenient fantasy could be seen as quaint at best if it were not for its deadly staying power.

Cooper had much to do with creating the US origin myth to which generations of historians have dedicated themselves, fortifying exclusion of many from the process of formation of American society and culture. In the first place US historians exclude Amerindians from participation, except as foils for Europeans, and thus assume that American civilization was formed by Europeans in a struggle against the savagery or barbarism of the nonwhite races. This first conception implies the second—that the civilization so formed is unique. In the second conception uniqueness is thought to have been created through the forms and processes of civilization’s struggle on a specifically American frontier. Alternatively, civilization was able to triumph because the people who bore it were unique from the beginning—a Chosen People or a super race. Either way American culture is seen as not only unique but better than all other cultures, precisely because of its differences from them.

Nonfiction sources of the time reflected the same view: The United States Magazine and Democratic Review summed it up by arguing that whereas European powers “conquer only to enslave,” America, being “a free nation,” “conquers only to bestow freedom.” Far from being antagonistic, ‘empire’ and ‘liberty’ are instrumentally conjoined. If the former stands to safeguard the latter, the latter, in turn, serves to justify the former. Indeed, the conjunction of the two, of freedom and dominion, gives America its sovereign place in history—its Manifest Destiny, as its advocates so aptly called it.

Yet these positive twists on genocidal colonialism were based on the reality of invasion, squatting, attacking, and colonizing of the Indigenous nations. Neither Cooper or the United States Magazine and Democratic Review created that reality. Rather, they created the narratives that captured the experience and imagination of the Anglo-American settler, stories that were surely instrumental in nullifying guilt related to genocide and set the pattern of narrative for future US writers, poets, and historians.

Reconciling empire and liberty—based on the violent taking of Indigenous lands—into a usable myth allowed for the emergence of an enduring populist imperialism. Wars of conquest and ethnic cleansing could be sold to “the people”—could be fought for by the young men of those very people—by promising to expand economic opportunity, democracy, freedom for all.

According to the origin narrative, the United States was born of rebellion against oppression—against empire—and thus is the product of the first anti-colonial revolution for national liberation. The narrative flows from that fallacy: the broadening and deepening of democracy; the Civil War and the ensuing “second revolution,” which ended slavery; the twentieth-century mission to save Europe from itself—twice; and the ultimately triumphant fight against the scourge of communism, with the United States inheriting the difficult and burdensome task of keeping order in the world. It’s a narrative of progress.

The 1960s social revolutions, ignited by the African American liberation movement, complicated the origin narrative, but its structure and periodization have been left intact. After the 1960s, historians incorporated women, African Americans, and immigrants as contributors to the commonweal. Indeed, the revised narrative produced the “nation of immigrants” framework, which obscures the US practice of colonization, merging settler colonialism with immigration to metropolitan centers during and after the industrial revolution. Native peoples, to the extent that they were included at all, were renamed “First Americans” and thus themselves cast as distant immigrants.

That the continued colonization of American Indian nations, peoples, and lands provides the United States the economic and material resources needed to cast its imperialist gaze globally is a fact that is simultaneously obvious within—and yet continually obscured by—what is essentially a settler colony’s national construction of itself as an ever more perfect multicultural, multiracial democracy. The status of American Indians as sovereign nations colonized by the United States continues to haunt and inflect its *raison d’être*.

Multiculturalism became the cutting edge of post-civil-rights-movement US history revisionism. For this scheme to work—and affirm US historical progress—Indigenous nations and communities had to be left out of the picture. As territory and treaty-based peoples in North America, they did not fit the grid of multiculturalism but were included by transforming them into an inchoate oppressed racial group, while colonized Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were dissolved into another such group, variously called “Hispanic” or “Latino” or as the kids say today: Latinx—pronounced Lah-teen-ex if you’re not “woke” enough to know that already.

The multicultural approach emphasized the “contributions” of individuals from oppressed groups to the country’s assumed greatness. Indigenous peoples were thus credited with corn, beans, buckskin, log cabins, parkas, maple syrup, canoes, hundreds of place names, Thanksgiving, and even the concepts of democracy and federalism. But this idea of the gift-giving Indian helping to establish and enrich the development of the United States is an

insidious smokescreen meant to obscure the fact that the very existence of the country is a result of the looting of an entire continent and its resources. The fundamental unresolved issues of Indigenous lands, treaties, and sovereignty could not but scuttle the premises of multiculturalism.

It should not have happened that the great civilizations of the Western Hemisphere, the very evidence of the Western Hemisphere, were wantonly destroyed, the gradual progress of humanity interrupted and set upon a path of greed and destruction. Choices were made that forged that path toward destruction of life itself—the moment in which we now live and die as our planet shrivels, over-heated. To learn and know this history is both a necessity and a responsibility to the ancestors and descendants of all parties.

Nation, race, and class converged in land. The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism. Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Everything in US history is about the land—who oversaw and cultivated it, fished its waters, maintained its wildlife; who invaded and stole it; how it became a commodity broken into pieces to be bought and sold on the market.

Under the Homestead Act, 1.5 million homesteads were granted to settlers west of the Mississippi, comprising nearly three-hundred-million acres (a half-million square miles) taken from the Indigenous collective estates and privatized for the market. This dispersal of landless settler populations from east of the Mississippi served as an “escape valve,” lessening the likelihood of class conflict as the industrial revolution accelerated the use of cheap immigrant labor. Little of the land appropriated under the Homestead Acts was distributed to actual single-family homesteaders. It was passed instead to large operators or land speculators. The land laws appeared to have been created for that result.

An individual could acquire 1,120 or even more acres of land, even though homestead and preemption (legalized squatting) claims were limited to 160 acres. A claimant could obtain a homestead and secure title after five years or pay cash within six months. Then he could acquire another 160 acres under preemption by living on another piece of land for six months and paying \$1.25 per acre. While acquiring these titles, he could also be fulfilling requirements for a timber culture claim of 160 acres and a desert land claim of 640 acres, neither of which required occupancy for title. Other men within a family or other partners in an enterprise could take out additional desert land claims to increase their holdings even more. As industrialization quickened, land as a commodity—“real estate”—remained the basis of the US economy and capital accumulation.

Federal land grants to the railroad barons, carved out of Indigenous territories, were not limited to the width of the railroad tracks, but rather

formed a checkerboard of square-mile sections stretching for dozens of miles on both sides of the right of way. This was land the railroads were free to sell in parcels for their own profit. The 1863–64 federal banking acts mandated a national currency, chartered banks, and permitted the government to guarantee bonds. As war profiteers, financiers, and industrialists such as John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and J. P. Morgan used these laws to amass wealth in the East, Leland Stanford, Collis P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins, and Charles Crocker in the West grew rich from building railroads with eastern capital on land granted by the US government.

Origin narratives form the vital core of a people's unifying identity and of the values that guide them. In the United States, the founding and development of the Anglo-American settler-state involves a narrative about Puritan settlers who had a covenant with God to take the land. That part of the origin story is supported and reinforced by the Columbus myth and the Doctrine of Discovery. According to a series of late-fifteenth-century papal bulls, European nations acquired title to the lands they "discovered" and the Indigenous inhabitants lost their natural right to that land after Europeans arrived and claimed it.

In accord with the doctrine of predestination, Calvin taught that human free will did not exist. Certain individuals are "called" by God and are among the "elect." Salvation therefore has nothing to do with one's actions; one is born as part of the elect or not, according to God's will. Although individuals could not know for certain if they were among the elect, outward good fortune, especially material wealth, was taken to be a manifestation of election; conversely, bad fortune and poverty, not to speak of dark skin, were taken as evidence of damnation. The attractiveness of such a doctrine to a group of invading colonists is obvious, for one could easily define the natives as immutably profane and damned, and oneself as predestined to virtue.

Responding to the requirements of a paradoxical age of Renaissance and Inquisition, the West's first modern discourses of conquest articulated a vision of all humankind united under a rule of law discoverable solely by human reason. Unfortunately for the American Indian, the West's first tentative steps towards this noble vision of a Law of Nations contained a mandate for Europe's subjugation of all peoples whose radical divergence from European-derived norms of right conduct signified their need for conquest and remediation.

"There is one feature in the expansion of the peoples of white, or European, blood during the past four centuries which should never be lost sight of, especially by those who denounce such

expansion on moral grounds. On the whole, the movement has been fraught with lasting benefit to most of the peoples already dwelling in the lands over which the expansion took place.”

Columbus Day is still a federal holiday despite Columbus never having set foot on any territory ever claimed by the United States. The provincialism and national chauvinism of US history production make it difficult for effective revisions to gain authority. Scholars, both Indigenous and a few non-Indigenous, who attempt to rectify the distortions, are labeled advocates, and their findings are rejected for publication on that basis.

In the founding myth of the United States, the colonists acquired a vast expanse of land from a scattering of benighted peoples who were hardly using it—an unforgivable offense to the Puritan work ethic. The historical record is clear, however, that European colonists shoved aside a large network of small and large nations whose governments, commerce, arts and sciences, agriculture, technologies, theologies, philosophies, and institutions were intricately developed; nations that maintained sophisticated relations with one another and with the environments that supported them.

By the early seventeenth century, when British colonists from Europe began to settle in North America, a large Indigenous population had long before created a humanized landscape almost everywhere. Native peoples had created town sites, farms, monumental earthworks, and networks of roads, and they had devised a wide variety of governments, some as complex as any in the world. They had developed sophisticated philosophies of government, traditions of diplomacy, and policies of international relations. They conducted trade along roads that crisscrossed the landmasses and waterways of the American continents. Before the arrival of Europeans, North America was indeed a “continent of villages,” but also a continent of nations and federations of nations.

In the case of the British North American colonies and the United States, not only extermination and removal were practiced but also the disappearing of the prior existence of Indigenous peoples—and this continues to be perpetuated in local histories. This practice of writing Indians out of existence is ‘firsting and lasting.’ All over the continent, local histories, monuments, and signage narrate the story of first settlement: the founder(s), the first school, first dwelling, first everything, as if there had never been occupants who thrived in those places before Euro-Americans. On the other hand, the national narrative tells of “last” Indians or last tribes, such as “the last of the Mohicans,” “Ishi, the last Indian,” and “End of the Trail,” as a famous sculpture by James Earle Fraser is titled.

The US establishment of a system of Indian reservations stemmed from a long British colonial practice in the Americas. In the era of US treaty-making from independence to 1871, the concept of the reservation was one of the Indigenous nation reserving a narrowed land base from a much larger one in exchange for US government protection from settlers and the provision of social services.

In the late nineteenth century, as Indigenous resistance was weakened, the concept of the reservation changed to one of land being carved out of the public domain of the United States as a benevolent gesture, a “gift” to the Indigenous peoples. Rhetoric changed so that reservations were said to have been “given” or “created” for Indians. With this shift, Indian reservations came to be seen as enclaves within state’ boundaries. Despite the political and economic reality, the impression to many was that Indigenous people were taking a free ride on public domain.

In 1881, Indian landholdings in the United States had plummeted to 156 million acres. By 1934, only about 50 million acres remained (an area the size of Idaho and Washington) as a result of the General Allotment Act of 1887. During World War II, the government took 500,000 more acres for military use. Over one-hundred tribes, bands, and Rancherias relinquished their lands under various acts of Congress during the termination era of the 1950s. By 1955, the indigenous land base had shrunk to just 2.3 percent of its original size.

Thanks to the nutritious triad of corn, beans, and squash—which provide a complete protein—the Americas were densely populated when the European monarchies began sponsoring colonization projects there. The total population of the hemisphere was about one-hundred-million at the end of the fifteenth century, with about two-fifths in North America, including Mexico. Central Mexico alone supported some thirty-million people. At the same time, the population of Europe as far east as the Ural Mountains was around fifty million. Experts have observed that such population densities in precolonial America were supportable because the peoples had created a relatively disease-free paradise.

There certainly were diseases and health problems, but the practice of herbal medicine and even surgery and dentistry, and most importantly both hygienic and ritual bathing, kept diseases at bay. Settler observers in all parts of the Americas marveled at the frequent bathing even in winter in cold climates. One commented that the Native people “go to the river and plunge in and wash themselves before they dress daily.” Another wrote:

“Men, women, and children, from early infancy, are in the habit of bathing.”

Ritual sweat baths were common to all Native North Americans, having originated in Mexico. Above all, the majority of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas had healthy, mostly vegetarian diets based on the staple of corn and supplemented by wild fish, fowl, and four-legged animals. People lived long and well with abundant ceremonial and recreational periods.

Rather than domesticating animals for hides and meat, Indigenous communities created havens to attract elk, deer, bear, and other game. They burned the undergrowth in forests so that the young grasses and other ground cover that sprouted the following spring would entice greater numbers of herbivores and the predators that fed on them, which would sustain the people who ate them both. Rather than the thick, unbroken, monumental snarl of trees imagined by Thoreau, the great eastern forest was an ecological kaleidoscope of garden plots, blackberry rambles, pine barrens, and spacious groves of chestnut, hickory, and oak.

Inland a few miles from the shore of present-day Rhode Island, an early European explorer marveled at the trees that were spaced so that the forest “could be penetrated even by a large army.” English mercenary John Smith wrote that he had ridden a galloping horse through the Virginia forest. In Ohio, the first English squatters on Indigenous lands in the mid-eighteenth century encountered forested areas that resembled English parks, as they could drive carriages through the trees.

Bison herds roamed the East from New York to Georgia—it’s no accident that a settler city in western New York was named Buffalo. The American bison was indigenous to the northern and southern plains of North America, not the East, yet Native peoples imported them east along a path of fire, as they transformed forest into fallows for the bison to survive upon far from their original habitat. For example, when the Haudenosaunee hunted buffalo, they were harvesting a foodstuff which they had consciously been instrumental in creating.

As for the “Great American Desert,” as Anglo-Americans called the Great Plains, the occupants transformed that too into game farms. Using fire, they extended the giant grasslands and maintained them. When Lewis and Clark began their trek up the Missouri River in 1804, ethnologist Dale Lott has observed, they beheld “not a wilderness but a vast pasture managed by and for Native Americans.” Native Americans created the world’s largest gardens and grazing lands—and thrived.

North America in 1492 was not a virgin wilderness but a network of Indigenous nations, peoples of the corn.

One thing to note about early Native American trails and roads is that they were not just paths in the woods following along animal tracks used mainly for hunting. Neither can they be characterized simply as the routes

that nomadic peoples followed during seasonal migrations. Rather they constituted an extensive system of roadways that spanned the Americas, making possible short, medium, and long distance travel. That is to say, the Pre-Columbian Americas were laced together with a complex system of roads and paths which became the roadways adopted by the early settlers and indeed were ultimately transformed into major highways.

A major road ran along the Pacific coast from northern Alaska (where travelers could continue by boat to Siberia) south to an urban area in western Mexico. A branch of that road ran through the Sonora Desert and up onto the Colorado Plateau, serving ancient towns and later communities such as those of the Hopis and Pueblos on the northern Rio Grande.

The system of decision-making for many groups was based on consensus, not majority rule. This form of decision-making later baffled colonial agents who could not find Indigenous officials to bribe or manipulate.

“The first principle is peace. The second principle, equity, justice for the people. And third, the power of the good minds, of the collective powers to be of one mind: unity. And health. All of these were involved in the basic principles. And the process of discussion, putting aside warfare as a method of reaching decisions, and now using intellect.”

According to the value system that drove consensus building and decision-making in these societies, the community’s interest overrode individual interests. After every member of a council had had his or her say, any member who still considered a decision incorrect might nevertheless agree to abide by it for the sake of the community’s cohesion. In the rare cases in which consensus could not be reached, the segment of the community represented by dissenters might withdraw from the community and move away to found a new community. This was similar to the practice of the nearly one-hundred autonomous towns of northern New Mexico.

This brief overview of precolonial North America suggests the magnitude of what was lost to all humanity and counteracts the settler-colonial myth of the wandering Neolithic hunter. These were civilizations based on advanced agriculture and featuring polities. It is essential to understand the migrations and Indigenous peoples’ relationships prior to invasion, North and South, and how colonialism cut them off.

“I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes

still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream—the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.”

—Black Elk, 1930, on the massacre at Wounded Knee

European explorers and invaders discovered an inhabited land. Many have noted that had North America been a wilderness, undeveloped, without roads, and uncultivated, it might still be so, for the European colonists could not have survived. Neither the technology nor the social organization of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had the capacity to maintain, of its own resources, outpost colonies thousands of miles from home. They appropriated what had already been created by Indigenous civilizations. They stole already cultivated farmland and the corn, vegetables, tobacco, and other crops domesticated over centuries, took control of the deer parks that had been cleared and maintained by Indigenous communities, used existing roads and water routes in order to move armies to conquer, and relied on captured Indigenous people to identify the locations of water, oyster beds, and medicinal herbs.

Incapable of conquering true wilderness, the Europeans were highly competent in the skill of conquering other people, and that is what they did. They did not settle a virgin land. They invaded and displaced a resident population. This is so simple a fact that it seems self-evident.

The first Jamestown settlers lacked a supply line and proved unable or unwilling to grow crops or hunt for their own sustenance. They decided that they would force the farmers of the Powhatan Confederacy—some thirty polities—to provide them with food. Jamestown military leader John Smith threatened to kill all the women and children if the Powhatan leaders would not feed and clothe the settlers as well as provide them with land and labor.

The leader of the confederacy, Wahunsonacock, entreated the invaders:

“Why should you take by force that from us which you can have by love? Why should you destroy us, who have provided you with food? What can you get by war? What is the cause of your jealousy? You see us unarmed, and willing to supply your wants, if you will come in a friendly manner, and not with swords and guns, as to invade an enemy.”

Smith's threat was carried out: war against the Powhatans started in August 1609 and the destruction of the Powhatans became the order of the day.

The Virginia Tech killings were described in 2007 as the worst “mass killing,” the “worst massacre,” in US history. Descendants of massacred Indigenous ancestors took exception to that designation. It was curious with the media circus surrounding the Jamestown celebration, and with Queen Elizabeth and President Bush presiding, that journalists failed to compare the colonial massacres of Powhatans four centuries earlier and the single, disturbed individual’s shootings of his classmates. The shooter himself was a child of colonial war, the US war in Korea.

What transpired up the coast in the founding and growth of the New England colony was different, at least at first. Just before the 1620 landing of the *Mayflower*, smallpox had spread from English trading ships off the coast to the Pequot fishing and farming communities on land, greatly reducing the population of the area the Plymouth Colony would occupy. King James attributed the epidemic to God’s “great goodness and bounty toward us.” Consequently, those who survived in the Indigenous communities had little means to immediately resist the settlers’ expropriation of their lands and resources. Sixteen years later, however, the Indigenous villages had recovered and were considered a barrier to the settlers moving into Pequot territory in Connecticut. A single violent incident triggered a devastating Puritan war against the Pequots in what the colony’s annals and subsequent history texts call the Pequot War.

Puritan settlers, as if by instinct, jumped immediately into a hideous war of annihilation, entering Indigenous villages and killing women and children or taking them hostage. The Pequots responded by attacking English settlements, including Fort Saybrook in Connecticut. Connecticut authorities commissioned mercenary John Mason to lead a force of soldiers from that colony and Massachusetts to one of the two Pequot strongholds on the Mystic River. Pequot fighters occupied one of the forts, while the other one contained only women, children, and old men. The latter was the one John Mason targeted. Slaughter ensued. After killing most of the Pequot defenders, the soldiers set fire to the structures and burned the remaining inhabitants alive.

The settlers gave a name to the mutilated and bloody corpses they left in the wake of scalp-hunts: *redskins*.

By the early 1770s, terror against Indigenous people on the part of Anglo settlers increased in all the colonies, and speculation in western lands was rampant. In the southern colonies especially, farmers who had lost their land in competition with larger, more efficient, slave-worked plantations rushed for western land. These settler-farmers thus set a prefigurative pattern of US annexation and colonization of Indigenous nations across the continent for the following century: a vanguard of farmer-settlers led by seasoned

“Indian fighters,” calling on authorities of the British colonies, first, and the US government later, to defend their settlements, forming the core dynamic of US democracy.

The settlers’ escalation of extreme violence in the Ohio Country led to perhaps the most outrageous war crime, which showed that Indigenous conversion to Christianity and pacifism was no protection from genocide. Moravian missionizing among the ravaged Delaware communities in Pennsylvania had produced three Moravian Indian villages in the decades before the war for independence had begun. Residents of one of the settlements, named Gnadenhütten, in eastern Ohio, were displaced by British troops during fighting in the area, but were able to return to harvest their corn.

Soon afterward, in March 1782, a settler militia from Pennsylvania under the command of David Williamson appeared and rounded up the Delawares, telling them they had to evacuate for their own safety. There were forty-two men, twenty women, and thirty-four children in the group of Delawares. The militiamen searched their belongings to confiscate anything that could be used as a weapon, then announced that they were all to be killed, accusing them of having given refuge to Delawares who had killed white people. They were also accused of stealing the household items and tools they possessed, because such items should only belong to white people.

Condemned to death, the Delawares spent the night praying and singing hymns. In the morning, Williamson’s men marched over ninety people in pairs into two houses and methodically slaughtered them. One killer bragged that he personally had bludgeoned fourteen victims with a cooper’s mallet, which he had then handed to an accomplice. “My arm fails me,” he was said to have announced. “Go on with the work.” This action set a new bar for violence, and atrocities that followed routinely surpassed even that atrocity.

A year earlier, the Delaware leader Buckongehelas had addressed a group of Christianized Delawares, saying that he had known some good white men, but that the good ones were a small number:

“They do what they please. They enslave those who are not of their color, although created by the same Great Spirit who created us. They would make slaves of us if they could, but as they cannot do it, they kill us. There is no faith to be placed in their words. They are not like the Indians, who are only enemies while at war, and are friends in peace. They will say to an Indian: ‘My friend, my brother.’ They will take him by the hand, and at the same moment destroy him. And so you will also be treated by them before long. Remember that this day I

have warned you to beware of such friends as these. I know the long knives; they are not to be trusted.”

In the unconquered Indigenous region of the Old Southwest, resistance took place during the two decades following US independence, with tragic results, thanks to genocidal settler warfare. Tennessee—formerly claimed, but not settled, by the British colony of North Carolina—was carved out of the larger Cherokee Nation and became a state in 1796. Its eastern part, particularly the area around today’s Knoxville, was a war zone. The mostly Scots-Irish squatters, attempting to secure and expand their settlements, were at war with the resistant Cherokees called “Chickamaugas.” The settlers hated both the Indigenous people whom they were attempting to displace as well as the newly formed federal government. In 1784, a group of North Carolina settlers, led by settler-ranger John Sevier, had seceded from western Carolina and established the independent country of Franklin with Sevier as president. Neither North Carolina nor the federal government had exerted any control over the settlements in the eastern Tennessee Valley region. In the summer of 1788, Sevier ordered an unprovoked, preemptive attack on the Chickamauga towns, killing thirty villagers and forcing the survivors to flee south. Sevier’s actions formed a template for settler-federal relations, with the settlers implementing the federal government’s final solution, while the federal government feigned an appearance of limiting settler invasions of Indigenous lands.

Facing the fierce resistance of Indigenous nations in the Ohio Country and the fighting between the Muskogee Nation and the state of Georgia, Washington’s administration sought to contain Indigenous resistance in the South. Yet now the settlers were provoking the Cherokees in what would soon be the state of Tennessee. Secretary of War Knox claimed to believe that the thickness of settlers’ development, converting Indigenous hunting grounds into farms, would slowly overwhelm the Indigenous nations and drive them out. He advised the squatters’ leaders to continue building, which would attract more illegal settlers. This disingenuous view ignored the fact that the Indigenous farmers were well aware of the intentions of the settlers to destroy them and seize their territories.

In the 1785 Treaty of Hopewell between the federal government and the Cherokee Nation, the United States had agreed to restrict settlement to the east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The several thousand squatter families who claimed nearly a million acres of land in precisely that zone were not about to abide by the treaty. Knox saw the situation as a showdown with the settlers and a test of federal authority west of the mountain chains, from Canada to Spanish Florida. The settlers did not believe that the federal

government meant to protect their interests, which encouraged them to go it alone. In the face of constant attacks, the Cherokees were desperate to halt the destruction of their towns and fields. Many were starving, more without shelter, on the move as refugees, with only the Chickamauga fighters as a protective force fighting off the seasoned ranger-settler Indian killers. In July 1791, the Cherokees reluctantly signed the Treaty of Holston, agreeing to abandon any claims to land on which the Franklin settlements sat in return for an annual annuity of \$100,000 from the federal government.

The United States did nothing to halt the flow of squatters into Cherokee territory as the boundary was drawn in the treaty. A year after the treaty was signed, war broke out, and the Chickamaugas, under the leadership of Dragging Canoe, attacked squatters, even laying siege to Nashville. The war continued for two years, with five-hundred Chickamauga fighters joined by Muskogees and a contingent of Shawnees from Ohio, led by Cheesekau, one of Tecumseh's brothers, who was later killed in the fighting. The settlers organized an offensive against the Chickamaugas. The federal Indian agent attempted to persuade the Chickamaugas to stop fighting, warning that the frontier settlers were "always dreadful, not only to the warriors, but to the innocent and helpless women and children, and old men." The agent also warned the settlers against attacking Indigenous towns, but he had to order the militia to disperse a mob of three-hundred settlers, who, as he wrote, out of "a mistaken zeal to serve their country" had gathered to destroy "as many as they could of the Cherokee towns." Sevier and his rangers invaded the Chickamaugas' towns in September 1793, with a stated mission of total destruction. Although forbidden by the federal agent to attack the villages, Sevier gave orders for a scorched-earth offensive.

By choosing to attack at harvest-time, Sevier intended to starve out the residents. The strategy worked. Soon after, the federal agent reported to the secretary of war that the region was pacified, with no Indigenous actions since "the visit General Sevier paid the [Cherokee] nation." A year later, Sevier demanded absolute submission from the Chickamauga villages lest they be wiped out completely. Receiving no response, a month later 1,750 Franklin rangers attacked two villages, burning all the buildings and fields—again near the harvest—and shooting those who tried to flee. Sevier then repeated his demand for submission, requiring the Chickamaugas to abandon their towns for the woods, taking only what they could transport. He wrote:

"War will cost the United States much money, and some lives, but it will destroy the existence of your people, as a nation, forever."

The remaining Chickamauga villages agreed to allow the settlers to remain in Cherokee country.

In squatter settlements, ruthless leaders like Sevier were not the exception but the rule. Once they had full control and got what they wanted, they made their peace with the federal government, which in turn depended on their actions to expand the republic's territory. Sevier went on to serve as a US representative from North Carolina and as governor of Tennessee. To this day, such men are idolized as great heroes, embodying the essence of the "American spirit." A bronze statue of John Sevier in his ranger uniform stands today in the National Statuary Hall of the US Capitol. But of course it's only those ignorant southern rednecks that celebrate "monsters" with statues.

US Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins was in charge of the US government's "civilization" project. Hawkins's mission was to instill Euro-American values and practices in Indigenous peoples—including the profit motive, privatization of property, debt, accumulation of wealth by a few, and slavery—allowing settlers to gain the land and assimilate the Muskogees.

An Indigenous client class—called "compradors" by Africans, "caciques" in Spanish-colonized America—essential to colonialist projects, was firmly in place. This privileged class was dependent on their colonial masters for their personal wealth. This class division wracked the traditional relatively egalitarian and democratic Indigenous societies internally. This small elite in the Southeast embraced the enslavement of Africans, and a few even became affluent planters in the style of southern planters, mainly through intermarriage with Anglos.

The trading posts established by US merchants further divided Muskogee society, pulling many deeply into the US economy through dependency and debt, and away from the Spanish and British trading firms, which had previously left their lands undisturbed. This method of colonization by co-optation and debt proved effective wherever employed by colonial powers in the world, but only when it was accompanied by extreme violence at any sign of indigenous insurgency. The United States moved across North America in this manner. While most Muskogees continued to follow their traditional democratic ways in their villages, the elite Muskogees were making decisions and compromises on their behalf that would bear tragic consequences for them all.

The surrender document the Muskogee Nation was forced to sign in 1814, the Treaty of Fort Jackson, asserted that they had lost under "principles of national justice and honorable war." Andrew Jackson, the only US negotiator of the treaty, insisted on nothing less than the total destruction of the Muskogee Nation, which the Muskogees had no power to refuse

or negotiate. These terms of total surrender shocked the small group of Muskogee plantation and slave owners, who thought that they had been thoroughly accepted by the US Americans. They had fought alongside the Anglo militias against the majority Red Sticks in the war just concluded, yet all Muskogeese were now to be punished equally.

To no avail did the “friendlies” prostrate themselves before Jackson at the treaty meeting, begging that they and their holdings be spared. Jackson told them that the extreme punishment exacted upon them should teach all those who would try to oppose US domination.

“We bleed our enemies in such cases to give them their senses.”

Jackson’s bleeding of the Muskogeese marks a culminating point in American military history as the end of the Transappalachian East’s Indian wars. The conquest of the West was not guaranteed by defeating the British Army in battle in 1815, but by defeating and driving the Indians from their homelands.

In the Southeast, the Choctaws and Chickasaws turned exclusively to US traders once the new US republic effectively cut off access to the Spanish in Florida. Soon they were trapped in the US trading world, in which they would run up debts and then have no way to pay other than by ceding land to creditors who were often acting as agents of the federal government. This was no accidental outcome but was foreseen and encouraged by Jefferson. In 1805, the Choctaws ceded most of their lands to the United States for \$50,000, and the Chickasaws relinquished all their lands north of the Tennessee River for \$20,000. Many Choctaws and Chickasaws thus became landless participants in the expanding plantation economy, burdened by debts and poverty.

During “Lord Dunmore’s War,” Shawnees and other Indigenous peoples in what the Anglo separatists would soon call the Northwest Territory realized that they were in a life-or-death struggle with these murdering bands of settlers who were led by a wealthy land speculator, intent on destroying their nation and wiping them from the face of the earth. This realization led to another recurrent factor in the onslaught of European colonial ventures: the appearance of an accommodationist faction within the Shawnee Nation that accepted a humiliating peace agreement.

Precolonial Indigenous societies were dynamic social systems with adaptation built into them. Fighting for survival did not require cultural abandonment. On the contrary, the cultures used already existing strengths, such as diplomacy and mobility, to develop new mechanisms required to

live in nearly constant crisis. There is always a hard core of resistance in that process, but the culture of resistance also includes accommodations to the colonizing social order, including absorbing Christianity into already existing religious practices, using the colonizer's language, and intermarrying with settlers and, more importantly, with other oppressed groups, such as escaped African slaves. Without the culture of resistance, surviving Indigenous peoples under US colonization would have been eliminated through individual assimilation.

According to the current consensus among historians, the wholesale transfer of land from Indigenous to Euro-American hands that occurred in the Americas after 1492 is due less to European invasion, warfare, and material acquisitiveness than to the bacteria that the invaders unwittingly brought with them. Epidemic diseases would have caused massive depopulation in the Americas whether brought by European invaders or brought home by Native American traders. Such an absolutist assertion renders any other fate for the Indigenous peoples improbable.

The thinking behind the assumption is both ahistorical and illogical in that Europe itself lost a third to one-half of its population to infectious disease during medieval pandemics. The principal reason the consensus view is wrong and ahistorical is that it erases the effects of settler colonialism with its antecedents in the Spanish "Reconquest" and the English conquest of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. By the time Spain, Portugal, and Britain arrived to colonize the Americas, their methods of eradicating peoples or forcing them into dependency and servitude were ingrained, streamlined, and effective. If disease could have done the job, it is not clear why the European colonizers in America found it necessary to carry out unrelenting wars against Indigenous communities in order to gain every inch of land they took from them—nearly three-hundred years of colonial warfare, followed by continued wars waged by the independent republics of the hemisphere.

A rapid demographic decline occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its timing from region to region depending on when conquest and colonization began. Nearly all the population areas of the Americas were reduced by 90 percent following the onset of colonizing projects, decreasing the targeted Indigenous populations of the Americas from one-hundred-million to ten-million. Commonly referred to as the most extreme demographic disaster—framed as natural—in human history, it was rarely called genocide until the rise of Indigenous movements in the mid-twentieth century forged questions.

Proponents of the default position emphasize attrition by disease despite other causes equally deadly, if not more so. In doing so they refuse to accept that the colonization of America was genocidal by plan, not simply the

tragic fate of populations lacking immunity to disease. In the case of the Jewish Holocaust, no one denies that more Jews died of starvation, overwork, and disease under Nazi incarceration than died in gas chambers, yet the acts of creating and maintaining the conditions that led to those deaths clearly constitute genocide. But, the “Never Forget” PR team really likes to talk up the gas at the expense of the rest—it’s more emotionally manipulating that way, and helps avoid drawing valid connections between other historic atrocities. ‘Uncle Sam never put anyone in gas chambers, he’s not as bad as that Hitler guy!’

US leaders brought counterinsurgency out of the pre-independence period into the new republic, imprinting on the fledgling federal army a way of war with formidable consequences for the continent and the world. Counterinsurgent warfare and ethnic cleansing targeting Indigenous civilians continued to define US war making throughout the nineteenth century, with markers such as the three US counterinsurgent wars against the Seminoles through the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 to Wounded Knee in 1890.

Early on, regular armies had incorporated these strategies and tactics as a way of war to which it often turned, although frequently the regular army simply stood by while local militias and settlers acting on their own used terror against Indigenous noncombatants. Irregular warfare would be waged west of the Mississippi as it had been earlier against the Abenakis, Cherokees, Shawnees, Muskogees, and even Christian Indians.

In the Civil War, these methods played a prominent role on both sides. Confederate regular forces, Confederate guerrillas such as William Quantrill, and General Sherman for the Union all engaged in waging total war against civilians. The pattern would continue in US military interventions overseas, from the Philippines and Cuba to Central America, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The cumulative effect goes beyond simply the habitual use of military means and becomes the very basis for US American identity. The Indian-fighting frontiersmen and the valiant settlers in their circled covered wagons are the iconic images of that identity.

For the first 200 years of our military heritage, then, Americans depended on arts of war that contemporary professional soldiers supposedly abhorred: razing and destroying enemy villages and fields; killing enemy women and children; raiding settlements for captives; intimidating and brutalizing enemy noncombatants; and assassinating enemy leaders. In the frontier wars between 1607 and 1814, Americans forged two elements—unlimited war and irregular war—into their first way of war.

The United States waged three wars against the Seminole Nation between 1817 and 1858. The prolonged and fierce Second Seminole War (1835–42) was the longest foreign war waged by the United States up to the Vietnam War.

The US military further developed its army, naval, and marine capabilities in again adopting a counterinsurgency strategy, in this case against the Seminole towns in the Everglades. Once again US forces targeted civilians, destroyed food supplies, and sought to destroy every last insurgent.

On February 19, 1991, Brigadier General Richard Neal, briefing reporters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, stated that the US military wanted to be certain of speedy victory once it committed land forces to “Indian Country.” The following day, in a little-publicized statement of protest, the National Congress of American Indians pointed out that fifteen-thousand Native Americans were serving as combat troops in the Persian Gulf. Neither Neal nor any other military authority apologized for the statement.

The term ‘Indian Country’ in cases such as this is not merely an insensitive racial slur, tastelessly but offhandedly employed to refer to the enemy. It is, rather, a technical military term, like ‘collateral damage’ or ‘ordnance,’ that appears in military training manuals and is regularly used to mean “behind enemy lines.” It is often shortened to ‘In Country.’ This usage recalls the origins and development of the US military, as well as the nature of US political and social history as a colonialist project.

When the redundant ground war, more appropriately tagged a “turkey shoot,” was launched, at the front of the miles of killing machines were armored scouting vehicles of the Second Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), a self-contained elite unit that won fame during World War II when it headed General Patton’s Third Army crossing Europe. In the Gulf War, the Second ACR played the role of chief scouts for the US Seventh Corps.

A retired ACR commander proudly told a television interviewer that the Second ACR had been formed in the 1830s to fight the Seminoles, and that it had its first great victory when it finally defeated those Indians in the Florida Everglades in 1836. The Second ACR in the vanguard of the ground assault on Iraq thus symbolized the continuity of US war victories and the source of the nation’s militarism: the Iraq War was just another Indian war in the US military tradition.

After weeks of high-tech bombing in Iraq followed by a caravan of armored tanks shooting everything that moved, the US Special Forces entered Iraqi officers’ quarters in Kuwait City. There they found carrier pigeons in cages and notes in Arabic strewn over a desk, which they interpreted to mean that the Iraqi commanders were communicating with their troops, and even with Baghdad, using the carrier pigeons. High-tech soldiers had been fighting an army that communicated by carrier pigeon—as Shawnees and Muskogees had done two centuries earlier.

The chief characteristic of irregular warfare is that of the extreme violence against civilians, in this case the tendency to seek the utter annihilation of

the Indigenous population. In cases where a rough balance of power existed and the Indians even appeared dominant—as was the situation in virtually every frontier war until the first decade of the nineteenth century—Americans were quick to turn to extravagant violence.

In response to decisions by five of the Iroquois Nations, General George Washington wrote instructions to Major General John Sullivan to take peremptory action against the Haudenosaunee:

“... to lay waste all the settlements around, that the country may not be merely overrun but destroyed. You will not by any means, listen to any overture of peace before the total ruin of their settlements is effected. Our future security will be in their inability to injure us and in the terror with which the severity of the chastisement they receive will inspire them.”

Sullivan replied:

“The Indians shall see that there is malice enough in our hearts to destroy everything that contributes to their support.”

Despite the primary use of settler militias, President Washington insisted that the new government had to develop a professional army that would enhance US prestige in the eyes of European countries. He also thought that the cost of using mercenaries, at four times that of regular troops, was too high. But whenever regular troops were sent into the Ohio Country, the Indigenous resisters drove them out. Reluctantly, Washington resigned himself to the necessity of using what were essentially vicious killers to terrorize the region, thereby annexing land that could be sold to settlers. The sale of confiscated land was the primary revenue source for the new government.

The mercenaries captured three-hundred Red Stick wives and children and held them as hostages to induce Muskogee surrender. Of a thousand Red Stick and allied insurgents, eight-hundred were killed. Jackson lost forty-nine men. In the aftermath of “the Battle of Horseshoe Bend,” as it is known in US military annals, Jackson’s troops fashioned reins for their horses’ bridles from skin stripped from the Muskogee bodies, and they saw to it that souvenirs from the corpses were given “to the ladies of Tennessee.” Following the slaughter, Jackson justified his troops’ actions:

“The fiends of the Tallapoosa will no longer murder our women and children, or disturb the quiet of our borders. They have disappeared from the face of the Earth. How lamentable it

is that the path to peace should lead through blood, and over the carcasses of the slain! But it is in the dispensation of that providence, which inflicts partial evil to produce general good.”

Thomas Jefferson was the thinker and Jackson the doer in forging populist democracy for full participation in the fruits of colonialism based on the opportunity available to Anglo settlers. Jackson carried out the original plan envisioned by the founders—particularly Jefferson—initially as a Georgia militia leader, then as an army general who led four wars of aggression against the Muskogees in Georgia and Florida, and finally as a president who engineered the expulsion of all Native peoples east of the Mississippi to the designated “Indian Territory.”

The fledgling United States government’s method of dealing with native people—a process which then included systematic genocide, property theft, and total subjugation—reached its nadir in 1830 under the federal policy of President Andrew Jackson. More than any other president, he used forcible removal to expel the eastern tribes from their land. From the very birth of the nation, the United States government truly had carried out a vigorous operation of extermination and removal. Decades before Jackson took office, during the administration of Thomas Jefferson, it was already cruelly apparent to many Native American leaders that any hope for tribal autonomy was cursed. So were any thoughts of peaceful coexistence with white citizens.

Jackson was a national military hero, but he was rooted in the Scots-Irish frontier communities, most of whose people, unlike him, remained impoverished. Their small farms were hard-pressed to compete with large plantations with thousands of acres of cotton planted and each tended by hundreds of enslaved Africans. Land-poor white rural people saw Jackson as the man who would save them, making land available to them by ridding it of Indians, thereby setting the pattern of the dance between poor and rich in the US ever since under the guise of equality of opportunity.

Once elected president, Jackson lost no time in initiating the removal of all the Indigenous farmers and the destruction of all their towns in the South. In his first annual message to Congress, he wrote:

“The emigration should be voluntary, for it would be as cruel as unjust to compel the aborigines to abandon the graves of their fathers and seek a home in a distant land. But they should be distinctly informed that if they remain within the limits of the States they must be subject to their laws. In return for their obedience as individuals they will without doubt be protected

in the enjoyment of those possessions which they have improved by their industry.”

This political code language barely veils the intention to forcibly remove the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muskogee, and Seminole Nations, followed by all other Indigenous communities from east of the Mississippi River.

The state of Georgia saw Jackson's election as a green light and claimed most of the Cherokee Nation's territory as public land. The Georgia legislature resolved that the Cherokee constitution and laws were null and void and that Cherokees were subject to Georgia law. The Cherokee Nation took a case against Georgia to the US Supreme Court. With Chief Justice John Marshall writing for the majority, the Court ruled in favor of the Cherokees. Jackson ignored the Supreme Court, however, in effect saying that John Marshall had made his decision and Marshall would have to enforce it if he could, although he, Jackson, had an army while Marshall did not. A tactic that any leftist president today would be wise to consider.

In the early nineteenth century, North Georgia was occupied mainly by Cherokees having acquired some lifestyle aspects of the ever-encroaching white settlers. In the Dawson Forest, they lived in houses, planted corn and cotton, and enjoyed the quiet, agricultural life. All was peaceful until August 1, 1829, when a newspaper in Milledgeville, the *Georgia Journal*, ran a short notice under the headline: **GOLD**. A gentleman in Habersham County had run across two previously discrete mining parties pulling gold out of the ground along the southeast slope of the Appalachian Mountain range. It had been noticed that gold was present on the downslope of the mountains in North and South Carolina, but this was proof that the deposit extended along a northeast-to-southwest line clean into Georgia, and the pickings were unusually good. The Cherokees, who happened to live on top of the gold, had known about it for a long time without overwhelming interest. They had demonstrated how to mine it to the Hernando de Soto expedition from Spain back in 1540, but nothing came of it.

Now, the news of gold mining hit a particular nerve at just the right time, and all hell broke loose. The first fully developed gold rush in the history of the New World commenced. In a short time, thousands of gold miners were sifting the sand in every creek on the south slope, and the boomtowns Auraria and Dahlonega, a day's walk north of the Dawson Forest, exploded into cities. By 1830, 300 ounces of gold were being mined per day on Cherokee land. The Cherokees, caught up in the excitement, laid down their plows and proceeded to dig up the Dawson Forest. The "Dahlonega Belt" happened to lay right across it, and it was blessed with the Amicalola

River, the Etowah River, and Shoal Creek providing the water necessary to process gold-bearing dirt. The State of Georgia saw an opportunity to both organize the mining operations and increase the state's treasury. The Dawson Forest was divided into 40-acre plots and sold to speculators by lottery. It was a fine idea, except that Indians happened to be living (and mining) on the land, and of that problem came the infamous Trail of Tears. Native Cherokees were persuaded by bayonet point and bribes of pure Georgia gold to relocate to a reservation laid out in Oklahoma, and it was a hard, tragic walk to get there.

Under General Winfield Scott's orders the troops were disposed at various points throughout the Cherokee country, where stockade forts were erected for gathering in and holding the Indians preparatory to removal. From these, squads of troops were sent to search out with rifle and bayonet every small cabin hidden away in the coves or by sides of mountain streams, to seize and bring in as prisoners all the occupants, however or wherever they might be found.

Families at dinner were startled by the sudden gleam of bayonets in the doorway and rose up to be driven with blows and oaths along the weary miles of trail that led to the stockade. Men were seized in their fields or going along the road, women were taken from their wheels and children from their play. In many cases, on turning for one last look as they crossed the ridge, they saw their homes in flames, fired by the lawless rabble that followed on the heels of the soldiers to loot and pillage.

So keen were these outlaws on the scene that in some instances they were driving off the cattle and other stock of the Indians almost before the soldiers had fairly started their owners in the other direction. Systematic hunts were made by the same men for Indian graves, to rob them of the silver pendants and other valuables deposited with the dead. A Georgia volunteer, afterward a colonel in the Confederate service, said:

“I fought through the civil war and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever knew.”

Half of the sixteen-thousand Cherokee men, women, and children who were rounded up and force-marched in the dead of winter out of their country perished on the journey. The Muskogees and Seminoles suffered similar death rates in their forced transfer, while the Chickasaws and Choctaws lost around 15 percent of their people en route.

An eyewitness account by Alexis de Tocqueville, the French observer of the day, captures one of thousands of similar scenes in the forced deportation of the Indigenous peoples from the Southeast:

“I saw with my own eyes several of the cases of misery which I have been describing; and I was the witness of sufferings which I have not the power to portray. At the end of the year 1831, whilst I was on the left bank of the Mississippi at a place named by Europeans Memphis, there arrived a numerous band of Choctaws (or Chactas, as they are called by the French in Louisiana). These savages had left their country, and were endeavoring to gain the right bank of the Mississippi, where they hoped to find an asylum which had been promised them by the American government.

It was then the middle of winter, and the cold was unusually severe; the snow had frozen hard upon the ground, and the river was drifting huge masses of ice. The Indians had their families with them; and they brought in their train the wounded and sick, with children newly born, and old men upon the verge of death. They possessed neither tents nor wagons, but only their arms and some provisions.

I saw them embark to pass the mighty river, and never will that solemn spectacle fade from my remembrance. No cry, no sob was heard amongst the assembled crowd; all were silent. Their calamities were of ancient date, and they knew them to be irremediable. The Indians had all stepped into the bark which was to carry them across, but their dogs remained upon the bank. As soon as these animals perceived that their masters were finally leaving the shore, they set up a dismal howl, and, plunging all together into the icy waters of the Mississippi, they swam after the boat.”

Sauk leader Black Hawk led his people back from a winter stay in Iowa to their homeland in Illinois in 1832 to plant corn, the squatter settlers there claimed they were being invaded, bringing in both Illinois militia and federal troops. The “Black Hawk War” that is narrated in history texts was no more than a slaughter of Sauk farmers. The Sauks tried to defend themselves but were starving when Black Hawk surrendered under a white flag. Still the soldiers fired, resulting in a bloodbath.

In his surrender speech, Black Hawk spoke bitterly of the enemy:

“You know the cause of our making war. It is known to all white men. They ought to be ashamed of it. Indians are not deceitful. The white men speak bad of the Indian and look at him spitefully. But the Indian does not tell lies. Indians do not steal. An Indian who is as bad as the white men could not live in

our nation; he would be put to death and eaten up by the wolves. We told them to leave us alone, and keep away from us; they followed on, and beset our paths, and they coiled themselves among us, like the snake. They poisoned us by their touch. We were not safe. We lived in danger.”

It's not that Jackson had a “dark side,” as his apologists rationalize and which all human beings have, but rather that Jackson was the Dark Knight in the formation of the United States as a colonialist, imperialist democracy, a dynamic formation that continues to constitute the core of US patriotism. The most revered presidents—Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Wilson, both Roosevelts, Truman, Kennedy, Reagan, Clinton, Obama—have each advanced populist imperialism while gradually increasing inclusion of other groups beyond the core of descendants of old settlers into the ruling mythology. All the presidents after Jackson march in his footsteps. Consciously or not, they refer back to him on what is acceptable, how to reconcile democracy and genocide and characterize it as freedom for the people.

During the period of Jackson's military and executive power, a mythology emerged that defined the contours and substance of the US origin narrative, which has weathered nearly two centuries and remains intact in the early twenty-first century as patriotic cant, a civic religion invoked in Barack Obama's presidential inaugural address in January 2009:

“In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of shortcuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted, for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things—some celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor—who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life. For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West, endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth. For us, they fought and died in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sanh. Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our

individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction. This is the journey we continue today.”

Spoken like a true descendant of old settlers. President Obama raised another key element of the national myth in an interview a few days later with Al Arabiya television in Dubai. Affirming that the United States could be an honest broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said:

“We sometimes make mistakes. We have not been perfect. But if you look at the track record, as you say, America was not born as a colonial power.”

The affirmation of democracy requires the denial of colonialism, but denying it does not make it go away.

Traversing the continent “from sea to shining sea” was hardly a natural westward procession of covered wagons as portrayed in Western movies. The US invasion of Mexico was carried out by US marines, by sea, through Veracruz, and the early colonization of California initially progressed from the Pacific coast, reached from the Atlantic coast by way of Tierra del Fuego. Between the Mississippi River and the Rockies lay a vast region controlled by Indigenous nations that were neither conquered nor colonized by any European power, and although the United States managed to annex northern Mexico, large numbers of settlers could not reach the Northern California goldfields or the fertile Willamette Valley region of the Pacific Northwest without army regiments accompanying them.

Why then does the popular US historical narrative of a “natural” westward movement persist? The answer is that those who still hold to the narrative remain captives of the ideology of Manifest Destiny, according to which the United States expanded across the continent to assume its pre-ordained size and shape. This ideology normalizes the successive invasions and occupations of Indigenous nations and Mexico as not being colonialist or imperialist, rather simply ordained progress. In this view, Mexico was just another Indian nation to be crushed.

These California Franciscan missions and their founder, Junípero Serra, are extravagantly romanticized by modern California residents and remain popular tourist sites. Very few visitors notice, however, that in the middle of the plaza of each mission is a whipping post. The history symbolized by that artifact is not dead and buried with the generations of Indigenous bodies buried under the California crust. The scars and trauma have been passed on from generation to generation.

Putting salt in the wound, as it were, Pope John Paul II in 1988 beatified Junípero Serra, the first step toward sainthood. California Indigenous

peoples were insulted by this act and organized to prevent the sanctification of a person they consider to have been an exponent of rape, torture, death, starvation, and humiliation of their ancestors and the attempted destruction of their cultures. Serra would take soldiers with him, randomly kidnapping Indigenous individuals and families, recording these captures in his diaries, as in this instance:

“[When] one fled from between their [the soldiers’] hands, they caught the other. They tied him, and it was all necessary, for, even bound, he defended himself that they should not bring him, and flung himself on the ground with such violence that he scraped and bruised his thighs and knees. But at last they brought him. . . He was most frightened and very disturbed.”

In 1878, an old Kamia man named Janitin told an interviewer of his experience as a child:

“When we arrived at the mission, they locked me in a room for a week. Every day they lashed me unjustly because I did not finish what I did not know how to do, and thus I existed for many days until I found a way to escape; but I was tracked and they caught me like a fox.”

He was fastened to the stage and beaten to unconsciousness.

In a true reign of terror, US occupation and settlement exterminated more than one-hundred-thousand California Native people in twenty-five years, reducing the population to thirty-thousand by 1870—quite possibly the most extreme demographic disaster of all time.

The two-year invasion and occupation of Mexico was a joyful experience for most US citizens, as evidenced by Walt Whitman’s populist poetry. Its popularity was possible because of buoyant nationalism, and the war itself accelerated the spirit of nationalism and confirmed the manifest destiny of the United States. Besides new weapons of war and productive capacity brought about by the emerging industrial revolution, there was also an advance in printing and publishing techniques, which increased the book publishing market from \$2.5 million in 1830 to \$12.5 million in 1850.

Most of the books published during the five-year period leading up to, during, and after the invasion were war-mongering tracts. Euro-American settlers were nearly all literate, and this was the period of the foundational “American literature,” with writers James Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David

Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville all active—each of whom remains read, revered, and studied in the twenty-first century, as national and nationalist writers, not as colonialists.

Although some of the writers, like Melville and Longfellow, paid little attention to the war, most of the others either fiercely supported it or opposed it. Whitman, a supporter, was also enamored of the violent Indian- and Mexican-killing Texas Rangers. Whitman saw the war as bolstering US self-respect and believed that a “true American” would be unable to resist “this pride in our victorious armies.” Emerson opposed the war as he did all wars. His opposition to the Mexican War was based, however, not just on his pacifism but also on his belief that the Mexican “race” would poison Anglo-Americans through contact, the “heart of darkness” fear. Emerson supported territorial expansion at any cost but would have preferred it take place without war. Most of the writers of the era were obsessed with heroism.

Opposition to the Mexican War came from writers who were active abolitionists such as Thoreau, Whittier, and Lowell. They believed the war was a plot of southern slave owners to extend slavery, punishing Mexico for having outlawed slavery when it became independent from Spain. However, even the abolitionists believed in the “manifest destiny of the English race,” as Lowell put it in 1859, “to occupy this whole continent and to display there that practical understanding in matters of government and colonization which no other race has given such proof of possessing since the Romans.”

The domination of former Spanish territories in the Americas began not in 1898 with the Spanish-American War, as most history texts claim, but rather nearly a century before, during Jefferson’s presidency, with the Zebulon M. Pike expedition of 1806–7. Those historians who track “continental expansion” separately from clear actions of US imperialism rarely note the juxtaposition in time and presidential administration of the interventions in North Africa and Mexico on the eve of its liberation from Spain.

Like the Lewis and Clark expedition, completed the same year that Pike set off, the Pike expedition was a military project ordered by President Jefferson. Lewis and Clark had headed into the far reaches of the newly acquired Louisiana Territory to gather intelligence on the Mandan, Hidatsa, Paiute, Shoshone, Ute, and many other nations in the huge swath of territory between the Rockies and the Pacific, bordered by Spanish-occupied territory on the west and south and British Canada on the north. Pike and his small force of soldiers and Osage hostages had orders to illegally enter Spanish territory to gather information that would later be used for military invasion.

Under the guise of having gone astray, Pike and his contingent found

themselves inside Spanish-occupied northern New Mexico (today's southern Colorado), where they "discovered" Pikes Peak and built a fort. Ultimately, as they had undoubtedly planned, they were taken into custody by Spanish authorities who transported them to Chihuahua, Mexico, allowing Pike and his men to observe and make notes about northern Mexico on the way. More important, they collected information on Spanish military resources and behavior and the location of and relations among civilian populations. Pike was released, and in 1810 published his findings. Later titled *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, the book was a bestseller.

The US Army on the eve of the Civil War was divided into seven departments—a structure designed by John C. Calhoun during the Monroe administration. By 1860, six of the seven departments, comprising 183 companies, were stationed west of the Mississippi, a colonial army fighting the Indigenous occupants of the land. In much of the western lands, the army was the primary US government institution; the military roots to institutional development run deep.

President Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated in March 1861, two months after the South had seceded from the union. In April, the Confederate States of America (CSA) seized the army base at Fort Sumter near Charleston, South Carolina. Of more than a thousand US Army officers, 286 left to serve the CSA, half of them being West Point graduates, most of them Indian fighters, including Robert E. Lee. Three of the seven army department commanders took leadership of the Confederate Army. Based on demographics alone, the South had little chance of winning, so it is all the more remarkable that it persisted against the Union for more than four years. The 1860 population of the United States was nearly thirty-two million, with twenty-three-million in the twenty-two northern states, and about nine-million in the eleven southern states. More than a third of the nine-million Southerners were enslaved people of African heritage.

Abraham Lincoln's campaign for the presidency appealed to the vote of land-poor settlers who demanded that the government "open" Indigenous lands west of the Mississippi. They were called "freesoilers," in reference to cheap land free of slavery. New gold rushes and other incentives brought new waves of settlers to squat on Indigenous land. For this reason, some Indigenous people preferred a Confederate victory, which might divide and weaken the United States, which had grown ever more powerful. Indigenous nations in Indian Territory were more directly affected by the Civil War than anywhere else. The southeastern nations—the Cherokees, Muskokees, Seminoles, Choctaws, and Chickasaws ("Five Civilized Tribes")—were forcibly removed from their homelands during the Jackson administration, but in the Indian Territory they rebuilt their townships, farms, ranches,

and institutions, including newspapers, schools, and orphanages. Although a tiny elite of each nation was wealthy and owned enslaved Africans and private estates, the majority of the people continued their collective agrarian practices. All five nations signed treaties with the Confederacy, each for similar reasons. Within each nation, however, there was a clear division based on class, often misleadingly expressed as a conflict between “mixed-bloods” and “full-bloods.” That is, the wealthy, assimilated, slave-owning minority that dominated politics favored the Confederacy, and the non-slave-owning poor and traditional majority wanted to stay out of the Anglo-American civil war. Muskogee nationalism and well-founded distrust of federal power played a major role in bringing about that nation’s strategic alliance with the Confederacy.

“Was the Creek council’s alliance with the South a racist defense of slavery and its class privileges, or was it a nationalist defense of Creek lands and sovereignty? The answer has to be ‘both.’”

John Ross, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, at first called for neutrality, but changed his mind for reasons similar to the Muskogees and asked the Cherokee council for authority to negotiate a treaty with the CSA. Nearly seven-thousand men of the five nations went into battle for the Confederacy. Stand Watie, a Cherokee, held the post of brigadier general in the Confederate Army. His First Indian Brigade of the Army of the Trans-Mississippi was among the last units in the field to surrender to the Union Army on June 23, 1865, more than two months after Lee’s surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Courthouse in April 1865. During the war, however, many Indigenous soldiers became disillusioned and went over to the Union forces, along with enslaved African Americans who fled to freedom.

Another story is equally important, though less often told. A few months after the war broke out, some ten-thousand men in Indian Territory, made up of Indigenous volunteers, along with African Americans who had freed themselves and even some Anglo-Americans, engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Confederate Army. They fought from Oklahoma into Kansas, where many of them joined unofficial Union units that had been organized by abolitionists who had trained with John Brown years earlier. This was not likely the kind of war the Lincoln administration had desired—a multiethnic volunteer Union contingent fighting pro-slavery forces in Missouri, where enslaved Africans escaped to join the Union side. The self-liberation by African Americans, occurring all over the South, led to

Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, which allowed freed Africans to serve in combat.

In Minnesota, which had become a non-slavery state in 1859, the Dakota Sioux were on the verge of starvation by 1862. When they mounted an uprising to drive out the mostly German and Scandinavian settlers, Union Army troops crushed the revolt, slaughtering Dakota civilians and rounding up several hundred men. Three-hundred prisoners were sentenced to death, but upon Lincoln's orders to reduce the numbers, thirty-eight were selected at random to die in the largest mass hanging in US history. The revered leader Little Crow was not among those hanged, but was assassinated the following summer while out picking raspberries with his son; the assassin, a settler-farmer, collected a \$500 bounty.

One of the young Dakota survivors asked his uncle about the mysterious white people who would commit such crimes. The uncle replied:

“Certainly they are a heartless nation. They have made some of their people servants—yes, slaves. The greatest object of their lives seems to be to acquire possessions—to be rich. They desire to possess the whole world. For thirty years they were trying to entice us to sell them our land. Finally the outbreak gave them all, and we have been driven away from our beautiful country.”

By 1861, displaced and captive Cheyennes and Arapahos, under the leadership of the great peace seeker Black Kettle, were incarcerated in a US military reservation called Sand Creek, near Fort Lyon in southeastern Colorado. They camped under a white flag of truce and had federal permission to hunt buffalo to feed themselves. In early 1864, the Colorado territorial governor informed them that they could no longer leave the reservation to hunt. Despite their compliance with the order, on November 29, 1864, Chivington took seven-hundred Colorado Volunteers to the reservation. Without provocation or warning, they attacked, leaving dead 105 women and children and 28 men.

Even the federal commissioner of Indian affairs denounced the action, saying that the people had been “butchered in cold blood by troops in the service of the United States.” In its 1865 investigation, the Congress Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War recorded testimonies and published a report that documented the aftermath of the killings, when Chivington and his volunteers burned tepees and stole horses. Worse, after the smoke had cleared, they had returned and finished off the few survivors while scalping and mutilating the corpses—women and men, young and old, children, babies. Then they decorated their weapons and caps with body

parts—fetuses, penises, breasts, and vulvas—and, in the words of Acoma poet Simon Ortiz:

Stuck them
on their hats to dry
Their fingers greasy
and slick

Once back in Denver, they displayed the trophies to the adoring public in Denver's Apollo Theater and in saloons.

US Army colonel James Carleton formed the Volunteer Army of the Pacific in 1861, based in California. In Nevada and Utah, a California businessman, Colonel Patrick Connor, commanded a militia of a thousand California volunteers that spent the war years massacring hundreds of unarmed Shoshone, Bannock, and Ute people in their encampments. Carleton led another contingent of militias to Arizona to suppress the Apaches, who were resisting colonization under the great leader Cochise. At the time, Cochise observed:

“When I was young I walked all over this country, east and west, and saw no other people than the Apaches. After many summers I walked again and found another race of people had come to take it. How is it? Why is it that the Apaches wait to die—that they carry their lives on their finger nails? The Apaches were once a great nation; they are now but few. Many have been killed in battle.”

Following a scorched-earth campaign against the Apaches, Carleton was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and placed in command of the Department of New Mexico. He brought in the now-seasoned killing machine of Colorado Volunteers to attack the Navajos, on whom he declared total war. He enlisted as his principal commander in the field the ubiquitous Indian killer Kit Carson. With unlimited authority and answering to no one, Carleton spent the entire Civil War in the Southwest engaged in a series of search-and-destroy missions against the Navajos. The campaign culminated in March 1864 in a three-hundred-mile forced march of eight-thousand Navajo civilians to a military concentration camp at Bosque Redondo in the southeastern New Mexico desert, at the army base at Fort Sumner, an ordeal recalled in Navajo oral history as the “Long Walk.”

One Navajo named Herrero said:

“Some of the soldiers do not treat us well. When at work, if we stop a little they kick us or do something else. We do not

mind if an officer punishes us, but do not like to be treated badly by the soldiers. Our women sometimes come to the tents outside the fort and make contracts with the soldiers to stay with them for a night, and give them five dollars or something else. But in the morning they take away what they gave them and kick them off. This happens most every day.”

At least a fourth of the incarcerated died of starvation. Not until 1868 were the Navajos released and allowed to return to their homeland in what is today the Four Corners area. This permission to return was not based on the deadly conditions of the camp, rather that Congress determined that the incarceration was too expensive to maintain.

After the Civil War many Black soldiers, like their poor white counterparts, remained in the army and were assigned to segregated regiments sent west to crush Indigenous resistance. This reality strikes many as tragic, as if oppressed former slaves and Indigenous peoples being subjected to genocidal warfare should magically be unified against their common enemy, ‘the white man.’

In fact, this is precisely how colonialism in general and colonial warfare in particular work. It is not unique to the United States, but rather a part of the tradition of European colonialism since the Roman legions. The British organized whole armies of ethnic troops in South and Southwestern Asia, the most famous being the Gurkhas from Nepal, who fought as recently as Margaret Thatcher’s war against Argentina in 1983.

Buffalo soldiers were just another specially organized colonial military unit. Slaves and the black soldiers, who couldn’t read or write, had no idea of the historical deprivations and the frequent genocidal intent of the US government toward Native Americans. Free blacks, whether they could read and write, generally had no access to first-hand or second-hand unbiased information on the relationship. Most whites who had access often didn’t really care about the situation. It was business as usual in the name of Manifest Destiny. Most Americans viewed the Indians as incorrigible and non-reformable savages. Those closest to the warring factions or who were threatened by it, naturally wanted government protection at any cost.

In an effort to create Indigenous economic dependency and compliance in land transfers, the US policy directed the army to destroy the basic economic base of the Plains Nations—the buffalo. The buffalo were killed to near extinction, tens of millions dead within a few decades and only a few hundred left by the 1880s. Commercial hunters wanted only the skins, so left the rest of the animal to rot. Bones would be gathered and shipped

to the East for various uses. Mainly it was the army that helped realize slaughter of the herds.

Old Lady Horse of the Kiowa Nation could have been speaking for all the buffalo nations in her lament of the loss:

“Everything the Kiowas had came from the buffalo. Most of all, the buffalo was part of the Kiowa religion. A white buffalo calf must be sacrificed in the Sun Dance. The priests used parts of the buffalo to make their prayers when they healed people or when they sang to the powers above.

So, when the white men wanted to build railroads, or when they wanted to farm or raise cattle, the buffalo still protected the Kiowas. They tore up the railroad tracks and the gardens. They chased the cattle off the ranges. The buffalo loved their people as much as the Kiowas loved them. There was war between the buffalo and the white men. The white men built forts in the Kiowa country, and the woolly-headed buffalo soldiers shot the buffalo as fast as they could, but the buffalo kept coming on, coming on, even into the post cemetery at Fort Sill. Soldiers were not enough to hold them back.

Then the white men hired hunters to do nothing but kill the buffalo. Up and down the plains those men ranged, shooting sometimes as many as a hundred buffalo a day. Behind them came the skinners with their wagons. They piled the hides and bones into the wagons until they were full, and then took their loads to the new railroad stations that were being built, to be shipped east to the market. Sometimes there would be a pile of bones as high as a man, stretching a mile along the railroad track. The buffalo saw that their day was over. They could protect their people no longer.”

The longest military counterinsurgency in US history was the war on the Apache Nation, 1850–86. Goyathlay, known as Geronimo, famously led the final decade of Apache resistance. The Apaches and their Diné relatives, the Navajos, did not miss a beat in continuing resistance to colonial domination when the United States annexed their territory as a part of the half of Mexico taken in 1848. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo between the United States and Mexico, which sealed the transfer of territory, even stipulated that both parties were required to fight the “savage” Apaches. By 1877 the army had forced most Apaches into inhospitable desert reservations. Led by Geronimo, Chiricahua Apaches resisted incarceration in the San Carlos reservation

designated for them in Arizona. When Geronimo finally surrendered—he was never captured—the group numbered only thirty-eight, most of those women and children, with five-thousand soldiers in pursuit, which meant that the insurgents had wide support both north and south of the recently drawn US-Mexico border. Guerrilla warfare persists only if it has deep roots in the people being represented, the reason it is sometimes called “people’s war.” Obviously, the Apache resistance was not a military threat to the United States but rather a symbol of resistance and freedom. Herein lies the essence of counterinsurgent colonialist warfare: no resistance can be tolerated. The US imperative was annihilation unto total surrender.

Geronimo and three-hundred other Chiricahuas who were not even part of the fighting force were rounded up and transported by train under military guard to Fort Marion, in St. Augustine, Florida, to join hundreds of other Plains Indian fighters already incarcerated there. Remarkably, Geronimo negotiated an agreement with the United States so that he and his band would surrender as prisoners of war, rather than as common criminals as the Texas Rangers desired, which would have meant executions by civil authorities. The POW status validated Apache sovereignty and made the captives eligible for treatment according to the international laws of war. Geronimo and his people were transferred again, to the army base at Fort Sill in Indian Territory, and lived out their lives there. The US government had not yet created the term ‘unlawful combatant,’ which it would do in the early twenty-first century, depriving legitimate prisoners of war fair treatment under international law.

In 1875, Captain Richard Henry Pratt was in charge of transporting seventy-two captive Cheyenne and other Plains Indian warriors from the West to Fort Marion, an old Spanish fortress, dark and dank. After the captives were left shackled for a period in a dungeon, Pratt took their clothes away, had their hair cut, dressed them in army uniforms, and drilled them like soldiers. “Kill the Indian and save the man” was Pratt’s motto.

This “successful” experiment led Pratt to establish the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania in 1879, the prototype for the many militaristic federal boarding schools set up across the continent soon after, augmented by dozens of Christian missionary boarding schools. The decision to establish Carlisle and other off-reservation boarding schools was made by the US Office of Indian Affairs, later renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

The stated goal of the project was assimilation. Indigenous children were prohibited from speaking their mother tongues or practicing their religions, while being indoctrinated in Christianity. As in the Spanish missions in California, in the US boarding schools the children were beaten for speaking

their own languages, among other infractions that expressed their humanity. Although stripped of the languages and skills of their communities, what they learned in boarding school was useless for the purposes of effective assimilation, creating multiple lost generations of traumatized individuals.

Sun Elk was the first child from the very traditional Taos Pueblo to attend the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, spending seven years there beginning in 1883. After a harsh reentry into Taos society, he told his story:

“They told us that Indian ways were bad. They said we must get civilized. I remember that word too. It means ‘be like the white man.’ I am willing to be like the white man, but I did not believe Indians’ ways were wrong. But they kept teaching us for seven years. And the books told how bad the Indians had been to the white men—burning their towns and killing their women and children. But I had seen white men do that to Indians. We all wore white man’s clothes and ate white man’s food and went to white man’s churches and spoke white man’s talk. And so after a while we also began to say Indians were bad. We laughed at our own people and their blankets and cooking pots and sacred societies and dances.”

Corporal punishment was unknown in Indigenous families but was routine in the boarding schools. Often punishment was inflicted for being “too Indian”—the darker the child, the more often and severe the beatings. The children were made to feel that it was criminal to be Indian.

The idea of corporal punishment, so foreign to traditional Indian cultures, became a way of life for those students returning from their educational experience. You find by the thirties and forties in most Native communities, where large numbers of young people had, in the previous years, attended boarding schools, an increasing number of parents who utilized corporal punishment in the raising of their children, so that although you can’t prove a direct connection, I think you can certainly see that boarding school experiences, where corporal punishment was the name of the game, had their impact on the next generations of native people.

A woman whose mother experienced boarding school related the results:

“Probably my mother and her brothers and sisters were the first in our family to go to boarding school. And the stories she told were horrendous. There were beatings. There was a very young classmate—I don’t know how old they were, probably preschool or grade school—who lost a hand in having to clean this machine that baked bread or cut dough or something, and

having to kneel for hours on cold basement floors as punishment. My mother lived with a rage all her life, and I think the fact that they were taken away so young was part of this rage and how it—the fallout—was on us as a family.”

Sexual abuse of both girls and boys was also rampant. One woman remembers:

“We had many different teachers during those years; some got the girls pregnant and had to leave. One teacher would put his arms around and fondle this girl, sometimes taking her on his lap. When I got there, Mr. M put his arm around me and rubbed my arm all the way down. He rubbed his face against mine.”

At one mission school, a priest was known for his sexual advances:

“Anyway, I ended up beside him [the priest] and all of a sudden he started to feel my legs. I was getting really uncomfortable and he started trying to put his hands in my pants.”

Nuns also participated in sexual abuse:

“A nun was sponge bathing me and proceeded to go a little too far with her sponge bathing. So I pushed her hand away. She held my legs apart while she strapped the insides of my thighs. I never stopped her again.”

Disarmed, held in concentration camps, their children taken away, half starved, the Indigenous peoples of the West found a form of resistance that spread like wildfire in all directions from its source, thanks to a Paiute holy man, Wovoka, in Nevada. Pilgrims journeyed to hear his message and to receive directions on how to perform the Ghost Dance, which promised to restore the Indigenous world as it was before colonialism, making the invaders disappear and the buffalo return. It was a simple dance performed by everyone, requiring only a specific kind of shirt that was to protect the dancers from gunfire. In the twentieth century a Sioux anthropologist interviewed a sixty-year-old Sioux man who remembered the Ghost Dance he had witnessed fifty years before as a boy:

“Some fifty of us, little boys about eight to ten, started out across country over hills and valleys, running all night. I know now that we ran almost thirty miles. There on the Porcupine Creek thousands of Dakota people were in camp, all hurrying

about very purposefully. In a long sweat lodge with openings at both ends, people were being purified in great companies for the holy dance, men by themselves and women by themselves, of course.

The people, wearing the sacred shirts and feathers, now formed a ring. We were in it. All joined hands. Everyone was respectful and quiet, expecting something wonderful to happen. It was not a glad time, though. All wailed cautiously and in awe, feeling their dead were close at hand. The leaders beat time and sang as the people danced, going round to the left in a sidewise step. They danced without rest, on and on, and they got out of breath but still they kept going as long as possible.

Occasionally someone thoroughly exhausted and dizzy fell unconscious into the center and lay there 'dead.' Quickly those on each side of him closed the gap and went right on. After a while, many lay about in that condition. They were now 'dead' and seeing their dear ones. As each one came to, she, or he, slowly sat up and looked about, bewildered, and then began wailing inconsolably.

Waking to the drab and wretched present after such a glowing vision, it was little wonder that they wailed as if their poor hearts would break in two with disillusionment. But at least they had seen! The people went on and on and could not stop, day or night, hoping perhaps to get a vision of their own dead, or at least to hear the visions of others. They preferred that to rest or food or sleep. And so I suppose the authorities did think they were crazy—but they weren't. They were only terribly unhappy."

When the dancing began among the Sioux in 1890, reservation officials reported it as disturbing and unstoppable. They believed that it had been instigated by Hunkpapa Teton Sioux leader Tatanka Yotanka (Sitting Bull), who had returned with his people in 1881 from exile in Canada. He was put under arrest and imprisoned in his home, closely guarded by Indian police. Sitting Bull was killed by one of his captors on December 15, 1890.

All Indigenous individuals and groups living outside designated federal reservations were considered "fomenters of disturbance," as the War Department put it. Following Sitting Bull's death, military warrants of arrest were issued for leaders such as Big Foot, who was responsible for several hundred civilian refugees who had not yet turned themselves in to the designated Pine Ridge Reservation. When Big Foot heard of Sitting Bull's death and

that the army was looking for him and his people—350 Lakotas, 230 of them women and children—he decided to lead them through the subzero weather to Pine Ridge to surrender. En route on foot, they encountered US troops. The commander ordered that they be taken to the army camp at Wounded Knee Creek, where armed soldiers surrounded them. Two Hotchkiss machine guns were mounted on the hillside, enough firepower to wipe out the whole group. During the night, Colonel James Forsyth and the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's old regiment, arrived and took charge. These soldiers had not forgotten that Lakota relatives of these starving, unarmed refugees had killed Custer and decimated his troops at the Little Bighorn fourteen years earlier. With orders to transport the refugees to a military stockade in Omaha, Forsyth added two more Hotchkiss guns trained on the camp, then issued whiskey to his officers.

The following morning, December 29, 1890, the soldiers brought the captive men out from their campsites and called for all weapons to be turned in. Searching tents, soldiers confiscated tools, such as axes and knives. Still not satisfied, the officers ordered skin searches. A Winchester rifle turned up. Its young owner did not want to part with his beloved rifle, and, when the soldiers grabbed him, the rifle fired a shot into the air. The killing began immediately. The Hotchkiss guns began firing a shell a second, mowing down everyone except a few who were able to run fast enough. Three-hundred Sioux lay dead. Twenty-five soldiers were killed in friendly fire. Bleeding survivors were dragged into a nearby church. Being Christmastime, the sanctuary was candlelit and decked with greenery. In the front, a banner read: PEACE ON EARTH AND GOOD WILL TO MEN.

The Seventh Cavalry attack on a group of unarmed and starving Lakota refugees attempting to reach Pine Ridge to accept reservation incarceration in the frozen days of December 1890 symbolizes the end of Indigenous armed resistance in the United States. The slaughter is called a battle in US military annals. Congressional Medals of Honor were bestowed on twenty of the soldiers involved. A monument was built at Fort Riley, Kansas, to honor the soldiers killed by friendly fire. A battle streamer was created to honor the event and added to other streamers that are displayed at the Pentagon, West Point, and army bases throughout the world. L. Frank Baum, a Dakota Territory settler later famous for writing *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, edited the Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer at the time. Five days after the sickening event at Wounded Knee, on January 3, 1891, he wrote:

“The Pioneer has before declared that our only safety depends upon the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect

our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth.”

Three weeks before the massacre, General Sherman made clear that he regretted nothing of his three decades of carrying out genocide. In a press conference he held in New York City, he said:

“Injins must either work or starve. They never have worked; they won’t work now, and they will never work.”

A reporter asked:

“But should not the government supply them with enough to keep them from starvation?”

Sherman replied:

“Why should the government support 260,000 able-bodied campers? No government that the world has ever seen has done such a thing.”

Another aspect of US economic development that affected the Indigenous nations of the West was merchant domination. All over the world, in European colonies distant from their ruling centers, mercantile capitalists flourished alongside industrial capitalists and militaries, and together they determined the mode of colonization. Mercantile houses, usually family-owned, were organized to carry goods over long stretches of water or sparsely populated lands to their destinations.

The merchants’ sources of commodities in remote regions were the nearby small farmers, loggers, trappers, and specialists such as woodworkers and metalsmiths. The commodities were then sent to industrial centers for credit against which money could be drawn. Thus, in the absence of a system of indirect credit, merchants could acquire scarce currency for the purchase of foreign goods. The merchant, thereby, became the dominant source of credit for the small operator as well as for the local capitalist.

Mercantile capitalism thrived in colonial areas, with many of the first merchant houses originating in the Levant among Syrians (Lebanese) and Jews. Even as mercantile capitalism waned in the twentieth century, it left its mark on Native reservations where the people relied on trading posts for credit, a market for their products, and commodities of all kinds—an opportunity for super-exploitation. Merchants and traders, often by intermarrying Indigenous women, also came to dominate Native governance on some reservations.

The corporation is an organization legally authorized by charter to act as a single individual, characterized by the issuance of stock and the limitation of liability of its stockholders to the amount of their respective investment. It was an artificial person that could not be held accountable in a manner familiar to the American Indian way of thinking. Individual responsibility could be masked in corporate personality—a legal abstraction.

“Industrial civilization” diminishes the relevance of persons or communities in its way and one should note that industrial civilization is not exactly the same as “industrialization,” that it is something quite different and more pervasive. Industrial civilization justified exploitation and destruction of whole societies and expansion without regard for the sovereignty of peoples; it promoted individualism, competition, and selfishness as righteous character traits.

“The defect of the reservation system was apparent. It is a socialist system and under that there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbors. There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization. Till this people will consent to give up their lands, and divide among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates they will not make much more progress.”

The Hopi Nation resisted allotment with partial success. In 1894, they petitioned the federal government with a letter signed by every leader and chief of the Hopi villages:

“To the Washington Chiefs:

During the last two years strangers have looked over our land with spy-glasses and made marks upon it, and we know but little of what it means. As we believe that you have no wish to disturb our Possessions we want to tell you something about this Hopi land. None of us were asked that it should be measured into separate lots, and given to individuals for they would cause confusion.

The family, the dwelling house and the field are inseparable, because the woman is the heart of these, and they rest with her. Among us the family traces its kin from the mother, hence all its possessions are hers. The man builds the house but the woman is the owner, because she repairs and preserves it; the man cultivates the field, but he renders its harvest into the woman’s keeping, because upon her it rests to prepare the food,

and the surplus of stores for barter depends upon her thrift. A man plants the fields of his wife, and the fields assigned to the children she bears, and informally he calls them his, although in fact they are not. Even of the field which he inherits from his mother, its harvests he may dispose of at will, but the field itself he may not.”

The petition continues, explaining the matriarchal communal society and why dividing it up for private ownership would be unthinkable. Washington authorities never replied and the government continued to carve up the lands, finally giving up because of Hopi resistance. In the heart of New Mexico, the nineteen Indigenous city-states of the Pueblo Indians organized resistance under US occupation using the legal system as a means of survival, as they had under Spanish colonialism and in their relationship with the republic of Mexico. In the decades after they had lost their autonomous political status under Mexico and were counted as former Mexican citizens under US law, both Hispanos and Anglo squatters encroached upon the Pueblos’ ancestral lands. The only avenue for the Pueblos was to use the US court of private land claims. The following report reflects their status in the eyes of the Anglo-American judiciary:

“Occasionally the court room at Santa Fe would be enlivened by a squad of Indians who had journeyed thither from their distant Pueblos as witnesses for their grant. These delegations were usually headed by the governor of their tribe, who exhibited great pride in striding up to the witness stand and being sworn on the holy cross; wearing a badge on his breast, a broad red sash round his waist, and clad in a white shirt, the full tail of which hung about his Antarctic zone like the skirt of a ballet dancer, and underneath which depended his baggy white muslin trousers, a la Chinese washee-washee. The grave and imperturbable bow which the governor gave to the judges on the bench, in recognition of their equality with himself as official dignitaries, arrayed in that grotesque fashion, was enough to evoke a hilarious bray from a dead burro.”

Without redress for their collective land rights under the claims court, the Pueblos had no choice but to seek federal Indian trust status. After they lost in their first attempt, finally in 1913 the US Supreme Court reversed the earlier decision and declared the Pueblos wards of the federal government with protected trust status, stating:

“They are essentially a simple, uninformed, inferior people.”

Of the hundreds of lawsuits for federal trust mismanagement that Indigenous groups have filed, most since the 1960s, the largest and best known is the *Cobell v. Salazar* class-action suit, initially filed in 1996 and settled in 2011. The individual Indigenous litigants, from many Native nations, claimed that the US Department of the Interior, as trustee of Indigenous assets, had lost, squandered, stolen, and otherwise wasted hundreds of millions of dollars dating back to the forced land allotment beginning in the late 1880s.

By the end of 2009, it was clear that the case was headed for a decision favoring the Indigenous groups when the lead plaintiffs, representing nearly a half-million Indigenous individuals, accepted a \$3.4-billion settlement proposed by the Obama administration. The amount of the settlement was greater than the half-billion dollars that the court would likely have awarded. However, what was sacrificed in the settlement was a detailed accounting of the federal government’s misfeasance.

“The result will see some involved with the case, especially lawyers, become quite rich, while many Indians—the majority, in all likelihood—will receive about a third of what it takes to feed a family of four for just one year.”

On July 23, 1980, in *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, the US Supreme Court ruled that the Black Hills had been taken illegally and that remuneration equal to the initial offering price plus interest—nearly \$106 million—be paid. The Sioux refused the award and continued to demand return of the Black Hills. The money remained in an interest-bearing account, which by 2010, amounted to more than \$757 million. The Sioux believe that accepting the money would validate the US theft of their most sacred land.

The Sioux Nation’s determination to repatriate the Black Hills attracted renewed media attention in 2011. A segment of the PBS NewsHour titled “For Great Sioux Nation, Black Hills Can’t Be Bought for \$1.3 Billion” aired on August 24. The reporter described a Sioux reservation as one of the most difficult places in which to live in the United States:

“Few people in the Western Hemisphere have shorter life expectancies. Males, on average, live to just 48 years old, females to 52. Almost half of all people above the age of 40 have diabetes. And the economic realities are even worse. Unemployment rates are consistently above 80 percent. In Shannon County, inside the

Pine Ridge Reservation, half the children live in poverty, and the average income is \$8,000 a year. But there are funds available, a federal pot now worth more than a billion dollars. That sits here in the US Treasury Department waiting to be collected by nine Sioux tribes. The money stems from a 1980 Supreme Court ruling that set aside \$105 million to compensate the Sioux for the taking of the Black Hills in 1877, an isolated mountain range rich in minerals that stretched from South Dakota to Wyoming.”

The only problem: The Sioux never wanted the money because the land was never for sale. Folks, this is what modern propaganda most often looks like.

From 2004 to 2006 the Osage Nation, located in northeastern Oklahoma, engaged in a contentious process of reform that produced a new constitution. The preamble reflects the extraordinary context and content of the new law:

“We the Wah-zha-zhe, known as the Osage People, having formed as Clans in the far distant past, have been a People and as a People have walked this earth and enjoyed the blessing of Wah-kon-tah for more centuries than we truly know. Having resolved to live in harmony, we now come together so that we may once more unite as a Nation and as a People, calling upon the fundamental values that we hold sacred: Justice, Fairness, Compassion, Respect for and Protection of Child, Elder, All Fellow Beings, and Self.

Paying homage to generations of Osage leaders of the past and present, we give thanks for their wisdom and courage. Acknowledging our ancient tribal order as the foundation of our present government, first reformed in the 1881 Constitution of the Osage Nation, we continue our legacy by again reorganizing our government. This Constitution, created by the Osage People, hereby grants to every Osage citizen a vote that is equal to all others and form a government that is accountable to the citizens of the Osage Nation. We, the Osage People, based on centuries of being a People, now strengthen our government in order to preserve and perpetuate a full and abundant Osage way of life that benefits all Osages, living and as yet unborn.”

Similarly, in 2009, the White Earth Nation of the Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe people) adopted a new constitution. White Earth is located in central Minnesota and is one of a number of Anishinaabe reservations in Minnesota,

with others in Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Canada. The preamble to the White Earth constitution is revealing:

“The Anishinaabeg of the White Earth Nation are the ancestors of a great tradition of continental liberty, a native constitution of families, totemic associations. The Anishinaabeg create stories of natural reason, of courage, loyalty, humor, spiritual inspiration, survivance, reciprocal altruism, and native cultural sovereignty. We the Anishinaabeg of the White Earth Nation in order to secure an inherent and essential sovereignty, to promote traditions of liberty, justice, and peace, and reserve common resources, and to ensure the inalienable rights of native governance for our posterity, do constitute, ordain, and establish this Constitution of the White Earth Nation.”

Gerald Vizenor, a citizen of the White Earth Nation participated in the writing of this constitution. Explaining the concept of “survivance,” a term he coined, he stresses that it originates in Indigenous narratives:

“The conventions of survivance create a sense of Native presence over nihility and victory. Survivance is an active presence: it is not absence, deracination, or ethnographic oblivion, and survivance is the continuance of narratives, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry.”

The Doctrine of Discovery is dissolving in light of these profound acts of sovereignty. But neither arcane colonial laws nor the historical trauma of genocide simply disappear with time, certainly not when conditions of life and consciousness perpetuate them. The Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty movement is not only transforming the continent’s Indigenous communities and nations but also, inevitably, the United States.

Facing the Fantasies

It's important to recognize that the same methods and strategies that were employed with the Indigenous peoples on the continent were mirrored abroad. While the Indigenous Americans were being brutally colonized, eliminated, relocated, and killed, the United States from its beginning was also pursuing overseas dominance.

Between 1798 and 1827, the United States intervened militarily twenty-three times from Cuba to Tripoli (Libya) to Greece. There were seventy-one overseas interventions between 1831 and 1896, on all continents, and the United States dominated most of Latin America economically, some countries militarily. The forty interventions and occupations between 1898 and 1919 were conducted with even more military heft but using the same methods and sometimes the same personnel.

US domination in the region has been virtually unchallenged for almost two-hundred years, ever since President James Monroe's 1823 doctrine proclaimed "the American continents are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers." At the beginning of the twentieth century, President William Taft was more direct about US intentions:

"The day is not far distant when the whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as, by virtue of our superiority as a race, it already is ours morally."

In 1904 Roosevelt pronounced what has come to be known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. It mandated that any nation engaged in "chronic wrong-doing"—that is, did anything to threaten perceived US economic or political interests—would be disciplined militarily by the United States, which was to serve as an "international police power."

One of the first invasions of the twentieth century was actually carried out not by the US military but by a private one. The army's financial backing came from "Banana Man" Sam Zemurray. When Zemurray arrived in Honduras in 1905 from Mobile, Alabama, the country was already weak and debt-ridden from a British railway construction fraud that had produced no railway. Seizing the moment, the businessman launched a coup and replaced the Honduran government with one more "sensitive to Zemurray's every wish"—namely, land and tax concessions for his banana plantations. Within five years of arriving in Honduras, he controlled more than five-thousand acres of plantations. A few years later, it was fifteen-thousand. By 1913, Zemurray and his closest rivals, the Vacarro brothers from New

Orleans (whose Standard Fruit Company later became Dole), accounted for two thirds of Honduran exports. The banana companies bought up lands, built railroads, established their own banking systems, and bribed government officials at a dizzying pace. If Honduras was dependent on the fruit companies before 1912, it was virtually indistinguishable from them after 1912. In 1914 the leading banana firms held nearly a million acres of the most fertile land. Their holdings grew during the 1920s until the Honduran peasants had no hope of access to their nation's good soil. The wealth of the country was hauled off to the United States. Honduras was left with low-wage jobs in the banana groves and with proceeds from export duties, which were often evaded and, when they did get paid, were in any case mostly pocketed by a small group of Honduran elites.

In popular usage—the clothing company aside—the term nowadays mostly calls to mind buffoon-like Third World despots in the mold of Woody Allen's comedy, *Bananas*. We tend to forget its original meaning. After living in Honduras, the writer O. Henry coined the phrase to refer to weak, marginally independent countries facing overwhelming foreign economic and political domination. In other words, a banana republic is a colony in all but name.

Smedley Butler was a two-time winner of the Medal of Honor. As Hitler came to power, and the possibility of a new war in Europe became more tangible, Butler campaigned for neutrality. In 1935, he published a famous pamphlet—reprinted again and again in different versions up to 1941—“*War Is a Racket*,” in which he asserted that his own actions as a soldier had been, to his shame, dictated by the needs of war profiteers and big capital. In an earlier speech, Butler had confessed:

“I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.

I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902–1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested.

Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.”

What has motivated the US politicians who have ordered and orchestrated foreign coups d’etat over the past century? Studying US involvement in regime change operations from Hawaii in 1893 to Iraq in 2003, there is often a clear three-stage process that takes place.

First, a US-based multinational corporation faces some kind of threat to its bottom line by the actions of a foreign government demanding that the company pay taxes or that it observe labor laws or environmental laws. Sometimes that company is nationalized or is somehow required to sell some of its land or its assets.

Second, US politicians hear of this corporate setback and reinterpret it as an attack on the United States. They transform the motivation from an economic one into a political or geostrategic one. They make the assumption that any regime that would bother an American company or harass an American company must be anti-American, repressive, dictatorial, and probably the tool of some foreign power or interest that wants to undermine the United States.

The third stage happens when the politicians have to sell the need for intervention to the public, at which point it becomes a broadly drawn struggle of good versus evil, a chance to free a poor oppressed nation from the brutality of a regime that we assume is a dictatorship, because what other kind of a regime would be bothering an American company?

Much of US foreign policy, in other words, is an exercise in mass projection, in which a tiny self-interested elite conflates its needs and desires with those of the entire world.

To keep control in American hands, US diplomacy has opposed any international court to mediate between debtor countries and bondholders, and has refused to submit to arbitration by the International Court of Justice in The Hague. This leaves no rules or global arbiter to assess how much creditors should lose when loans go bad.

Despite the ease with which US corporations can walk away from their creditors, no such leeway or adjustment exists when it comes to nations and their governments. The intent is to subordinate government power to Wall Street and London bankers.

Both sanctions and bombing give the illusion of precision, calibration, and the capacity to ratchet up coercion in a gradual escalation. And both have the capacity to cause tremendous suffering among innocent third parties

while having far less strategic effect than their advocates claim. Sanctions are economic warfare, plain and simple.

Take the case of Venezuela today. To be clear, this unforgivable atrocity rests predominantly on the shoulders of the Trump administration. Imagine if Trump deployed a barrage of Tomahawk missiles onto the most impoverished parts of a densely populated city in Venezuela, then hearing anyone say:

“Well Maduro actually exploded those people, because he wouldn’t do what we told him to do.”

Sanctions are a slower and more grueling weapon of war than bombs and missiles, but they’re vastly superior when it comes to the matter of keeping the public asleep through depraved acts of mass slaughter.

Public media in the West has denigrated BRICS meetings by asking what Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa have in common. The answer is that they all are confronted with the threat of US, Eurozone, and IMF sanctions against countries that do not submit to creditor demands for privatization selloffs and tax shifts onto labor instead of finance and rent seeking. Debtor countries are expected to conduct their foreign trade, investment, and borrowing in dollars mediated by the US banking system, US courts, the US Treasury and State Department.

SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication), based in Brussels, is the global messaging service for thousands of banks all over the world: if a bank in the United States wants to send money to Italy or vice versa, SWIFT facilitates it. SWIFT’s governing board consists of the world’s biggest banks. The Treasury did not previously have access to the huge stream of financial data the system generates, but after the September 11th attacks, SWIFT acceded to US demands and began providing information. The loosening of regulations on interstate banking in the United States and the repeal of the act prohibiting institutions from being both commercial and investment banks has had the fortuitous consequence of giving a few American megabanks, Citigroup and JPMorgan Chase among them, membership on the SWIFT board. In their current role, these banks are a critical point of entry for any international flow of money in violation of sanctions. The American banks do not touch those transactions, and will avoid doing business with foreign banks that do. This has the effect of cutting off those foreign banks from doing business in the United States, or even being able to clear dollar-denominated transactions in the New York market. At the same time, the Treasury has an easier management task in having to deal only with a handful of megabanks with worldwide reach. Getting the big American banks to enforce sanctions is the

key to the system. Due to the heavy legal penalties for violating sanctions, the banks do it out of fear.

That fear may be softened, however, by a degree of recognition on both parts that the banks are now an essential cog in Washington's economic warfare machinery. While some foreign institutions with banking operations in America like HSBC and BNP Paribas have been hit with billion-dollar fines for money laundering and sanctions evasion, the American-based megabanks have avoided this fate. Moreover, they have evaded criminal prosecution for recent questionable domestic activities like mortgage fraud, robo-signings, and selling securities designed to fail, a far different outcome from the aftermath of the savings and loan crisis of the late 1980s, when numerous executives were convicted of crimes.

The 2002 edition of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America states:

“The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.”

Apart from the uncomfortable fact that feudal monarchies like Saudi Arabia and dictatorships like Egypt were linchpins of the US national security strategy, it appeared that evangelizing on behalf of a particular economic model had become a key component of America's national strategy. The military had become the coercive instrument of a US-led global economic order whose aim is to maintain unfettered access to raw materials and buttress a favorable climate for US investment. The free enterprise system—or, more accurately, its doctrinaire neoliberal interpretation—is not just a throwaway talking point in a national security strategy document that no one bothers to read. The United States uses its military muscle to sustain its economic model and dissuade other countries from deviating from its orthodoxies. For decades, a popular criticism of US foreign policy has been that it is all about oil. But oil is just one component (albeit a major one) of a larger objective: the maintenance of the current distributions of wealth and power.

Washington has always regarded democratic socialism as a greater threat than totalitarian Communism, which was easy to vilify and made for a handy enemy. In the sixties and seventies, the favored tactic for dealing with the inconvenient popularity of developmentalism and democratic socialism was to try to equate them with Stalinism, deliberately blurring the clear differences between the worldviews. Conflating all opposition with terrorism plays a similar role today.

A stark example of this strategy comes from the early days of the Chicago crusade, deep inside the declassified Chile documents. Despite the CIA-funded propaganda campaign painting Allende as a Soviet-style dictator, Washington's real concerns about the Allende election victory were relayed by Henry Kissinger in a 1970 memo to Nixon:

“The example of a successful elected Marxist government in Chile would surely have an impact on—and even precedent value for—other parts of the world, especially in Italy; the imitative spread of similar phenomena elsewhere would in turn significantly affect the world balance and our own position in it.”

In other words, Allende needed to be taken out before his democratic third way spread.

Salvador Allende died in a US-backed coup. Here's his final address, broadcast over the radio while he was barricaded in the presidential palace:

“My friends,

Surely this will be the last opportunity for me to address you. The Air Force has bombed the towers of Radio Portales and Radio Corporación.

My words do not have bitterness but disappointment. May they be a moral punishment for those who have betrayed their oath: soldiers of Chile, titular commanders in chief, Admiral Merino, who has designated himself commander of the Navy, and Mr. Mendoza, the despicable general who only yesterday pledged his fidelity and loyalty to the government, and who also has appointed himself chief of the Carabineros [national police].

Given these facts, the only thing left for me is to say to workers: I am not going to resign!

Placed in a historic transition, I will pay for loyalty to the people with my life. And I say to them that I am certain that the seed which we have planted in the good conscience of thousands and thousands of Chileans will not be shriveled forever. They have strength and will be able to dominate us, but social processes can be arrested neither by crime nor force. History is ours, and people make history.

Workers of my country: I want to thank you for the loyalty that you always had, the confidence that you deposited in a man who was only an interpreter of great yearnings for justice, who gave his word that he would respect the constitution and the law and did just that. At this definitive moment, the last

moment when I can address you, I wish you to take advantage of the lesson: foreign capital, imperialism, together with the reaction, created the climate in which the armed forces broke their tradition, the tradition taught by General Schneider and reaffirmed by Commander Araya, victims of the same social sector which will today be in their homes hoping, with foreign assistance, to retake power to continue defending their profits and their privileges.

I address, above all, the modest woman of our land, the campesina who believed in us, the worker who labored more, the mother who knew our concern for children. I address professionals of Chile, patriotic professionals, those who days ago continued working against the sedition sponsored by professional associations, class-based associations that also defended the advantages which a capitalist society grants to a few.

I address the youth, those who sang and gave us their joy and their spirit of struggle. I address the man of Chile, the worker, the farmer, the intellectual, those who will be persecuted, because in our country fascism has been already present for many hours—in terrorist attacks, blowing up the bridges, cutting the railroad tracks, destroying the oil and gas pipelines, in the face of the silence of those who had the obligation to protect them. They were committed. History will judge them.

Surely Radio Magallanes will be silenced, and the calm metal instrument of my voice will no longer reach you. It does not matter. You will continue hearing it. I will always be next to you. At least my memory will be that of a man of dignity who was loyal to the workers.

The people must defend themselves, but they must not sacrifice themselves. The people must not let themselves be destroyed or riddled with bullets, but they cannot be humiliated either.

Workers of my country, I have faith in Chile and its destiny. Other men will overcome this dark and bitter moment when treason seeks to prevail. Go forward knowing that, sooner rather than later, the great avenues will open again where free men will walk to build a better society.

Long live Chile! Long live the people! Long live the workers!

These are my last words, and I am certain that my sacrifice will not be in vain, I am certain that, at the very least, it will be a moral lesson that will punish felony, cowardice, and treason.”

I just don't see someone like Bernie Sanders as having the courage or integrity to do something like this.

“I had just one goal—to stay alive until the next day. But it wasn't just to survive, but to survive as me.”

—Mario Villani, *survivor of Argentina's torture camps*

In testimony from truth commission reports across the region, prisoners tell of a system designed to force them to betray the principle most integral to their sense of self. For most Latin American leftists, that most cherished principle was what Argentina's radical historian Osvaldo Bayer called “the only transcendental theology: solidarity.” The torturers understood the importance of solidarity well, and they set out to shock that impulse of social interconnectedness out of their prisoners. Of course all interrogation is purportedly about gaining valuable information and therefore forcing betrayal, but many prisoners report that their torturers were far less interested in the information, which they usually already possessed, than in achieving the act of betrayal itself. The point of the exercise was getting prisoners to do irreparable damage to that part of themselves that believed in helping others above all else, that part of themselves that made them activists, replacing it with shame and humiliation.

“People were in prison so that prices could be free.”

After the collapse of the USSR, a promise was made to the Poles and Russians—that if they followed shock therapy they would suddenly wake up in a “normal European country.” But those normal European countries—with their strong social safety nets, workers' protections, powerful trade unions and socialized health care—emerged as a compromise between Communism and capitalism. Now that there was no need for compromise, all those moderating social policies were under siege in Western Europe, just as they were under siege in Canada, Australia, and the US. Such policies were not about to be introduced in Russia, certainly not subsidized with Western funds.

This liberation from all constraints is Chicago School economics—otherwise known as neoliberalism or, to some, neoconservatism—not some new invention but capitalism stripped of its Keynesian appendages, capitalism in its monopoly phase, a system that has let itself go—that no longer has to work to keep us as customers, that can be as antisocial, antidemocratic, and boorish as it wants. As long as Communism was a threat, the gentleman's agreement that was Keynesianism would live on; once that

system lost ground, all traces of compromise could finally be eradicated, thereby fulfilling the purist goal Friedman had set out for his movement a half century earlier.

That was the real point of Fukuyama's dramatic "end of history" announcement at the University of Chicago lecture in 1989: he wasn't actually claiming that there were no other ideas in the world, but merely that, with Communism collapsing, there were no other ideas sufficiently powerful to constitute a head-to-head competitor.

The Chicago School crisis addicts were certainly on a speedy intellectual trajectory. Only a few years earlier, they had speculated that a hyperinflation crisis could create the shocking conditions required for shock policies. Now a chief economist at the World Bank, an institution funded, by this time, with money from 178 countries and whose mandate was to rebuild and strengthen struggling economies, was advocating the creation of failed states because of the opportunities they provided to start over in the rubble.

But this beast was not always able to be controlled. Time and again we see the backlash in the West—terrorism, migration. This is what Keynes had meant when he warned of the dangers of economic chaos—you never know what combination of rage, racism, and revolution will be unleashed.

Viewed in retrospect, indications that the Long Peace began almost immediately to give way to conditions antithetical to peace seem blindingly obvious. Prior to 9/11, however, the implications of developments like the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center or the failure of the US military mission to Somalia that same year were difficult to discern. After all, these small events left unaltered what many took to be the defining reality of the contemporary era: the preeminence of the United States, which seemed beyond challenge. During the 1990s, at the urging of politicians and pundits, Americans became accustomed to thinking of their country as "the indispensable nation." Indispensability carried with it both responsibilities and privileges.

The chief responsibility was to preside over a grand project of political-economic convergence and integration commonly referred to as globalization. In point of fact, however, globalization served as a euphemism for soft, or informal, empire. The collapse of the Soviet Union appeared to offer an opportunity to expand and perpetuate that empire, creating something akin to a global Pax Americana.

The indispensable nation's chief privilege, self-assigned, was to establish and enforce the norms governing the post-Cold War international order. Even in the best of circumstances, imperial policing is a demanding task, requiring not only considerable acumen but also an abundance of determination. The preferred American approach was to rely, whenever possible, on "persuasion."

Yet if pressed, Washington did not hesitate to use force, as its numerous military adventures during the 1990s demonstrated.

The status of the United States as “sole superpower” appeared unassailable. Its dominance was unquestioned and unambiguous. This was not just hyper-nationalistic chest-thumping; it was the conventional wisdom. Recalling how Washington saw the post-Cold War world and America’s place in (or atop) it helps us understand why policy-makers failed to anticipate, deter, or deflect the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. A political elite preoccupied with the governance of empire paid little attention to protecting the United States itself. In practical terms, prior to 9/11 the mission of homeland defense was unassigned.

Odd as they may seem, these priorities reflected a core principle of national security policy: When it came to defending vital American interests, asserting control over the imperial periphery took precedence over guarding the nation’s own perimeter. After 9/11, the Bush administration affirmed this core principle. Although it cobbled together a new agency to attend to “homeland security,” the administration also redoubled its efforts to shore up the Pax Americana and charged the Department of Defense with focusing on this task. This meant using any means necessary to bring the Islamic world into conformity with prescribed American norms. Rather than soft and consensual, the approach to imperial governance became harder and more coercive.

In the Middle East, generations of diplomats had operated on the assumption that it was necessary to accept the limitations of Persian Gulf political economies in order to fuel America’s economy with reliable, relatively cheap oil supplies. In Africa, by contrast, generations of diplomats had operated on the assumption that all that mattered were the continent’s large, often intractable problems, such as disease and low-grade civil wars.

The distinguishing characteristic of “small wars” is not their scope or their duration but their purpose. Great powers wage small wars not to defend themselves but to assert control over foreign populations. Denominating an operation “Iraqi Freedom” or “Enduring Freedom” does not alter that reality. Historically, that is, small wars are imperial wars. The wars in which the United States currently finds itself engaged are no exception.

Seeing themselves as a peaceful people, Americans remain wedded to the conviction that the conflicts in which they find themselves embroiled are not of their own making. The global war on terror is exactly that. Certain of our own benign intentions, we reflexively assign responsibility for war to others, typically malignant Hitler-like figures inexplicably bent on denying us the peace that is our fondest wish.

Although critics of US foreign policy, and especially of the Iraq War, have

already advanced a variety of alternative explanations—variously fingering President Bush, members of his inner circle, jingoistic neoconservatives, greedy oil executives, or even the Israel lobby—many also find those explanations inadequate. Certainly, the president and his advisers, neocons always looking for opportunities to flex American military muscle, and the Israeli government always looking for a way to use the US against its enemies in the Middle East, bear considerable culpability for our current predicament. Yet to charge them with primary responsibility is to credit them with undeserved historical significance. It's the equivalent of blaming Herbert Hoover for the Great Depression or of attributing McCarthyism entirely to the antics of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The impulses that have landed us in a war of no exits and no deadlines come from within. Foreign policy has, for decades, provided an outward manifestation of American domestic ambitions, urges, and fears. In our own time, it has increasingly become an expression of domestic dysfunction—an attempt to manage or defer coming to terms with contradictions besetting the American way of life. Those contradictions have found their ultimate expression in the perpetual state of war afflicting the United States today. Gauging their implications requires that we acknowledge their source: They reflect the accumulated detritus of freedom, the by-products of our frantic pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. Freedom is the altar at which Americans worship, whatever their nominal religious persuasion.

To imagine that installing a particular individual in the Oval Office will produce decisive action on any of these fronts is to succumb to the grandest delusion of all. The quadrennial ritual of electing (or reelecting) a president is not an exercise in promoting change, regardless of what candidates may claim and ordinary voters believe. The real aim is to ensure continuity, to keep intact the institutions and arrangements that define present-day Washington. The veterans of past administrations who sign on as campaign advisers are not interested in curbing the bloated powers of the presidency. They want to share in exercising those powers. The retired generals and admirals who line up behind their preferred candidate don't want to dismantle the national security state. They want to preserve and, if possible, expand it. The candidates who decry the influence of money in national politics are among those most skilled at courting the well-heeled to amass millions in campaign contributions.

No doubt the race for the presidency matters. It just doesn't matter nearly as much as the media's obsessive coverage suggests. Whoever moves into the White House, the fundamental problem facing the country—a yawning disparity between what Americans expect and what they are willing or able to pay—will remain stubbornly in place. Any presidential initiatives

aimed at alleviating the crisis of profligacy, reforming our political system, or devising a more realistic military policy are likely, at best, to have a marginal effect.

Paradoxically, the belief that all (or even much) will be well, if only the right person assumes the reins as president serves to underwrite the status quo. Counting on the next president to fix whatever is broken promotes expectations of easy, no-cost cures, permitting ordinary citizens to absolve themselves of responsibility for the nation's predicament. The same Americans who profess to despise all that Washington represents look to—depending on partisan affiliation—a new John F. Kennedy or a new Ronald Reagan to set things right again. Rather than seeing the imperial presidency as part of the problem, they persist in the fantasy that a chief executive, given a clear mandate, will “change” the way Washington works and restore the nation to good health. Yet to judge by the performance of presidents over the past half century, including both Kennedy and Reagan—whose legacies are far more mixed than their supporters will acknowledge—a citizenry that looks to the White House for deliverance is assured of disappointment.

Even before Obama's inauguration, observers alert to the slightest hint of backsliding complained that the incoming national security team seemed less likely to challenge the status quo than to preserve it. Obama was quick to deflect this charge: He himself would function as the engine of transformation.

“Understand where the vision for change comes from, first and foremost. It comes from me. That's my job.”

This is a large responsibility for any single individual to take on. Given Obama's lack of understanding of history, the challenge he had set for himself was nothing short of daunting.

In Grant Park on November 4, Obama declared that the time had come for Americans “to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.” That our history has a discernible arc and that Americans possess the capacity to bend it to their will are propositions to which any number of earlier presidents—Obama's immediate predecessor not least among them—have fervently subscribed.

Politics requires artful dissembling. The Big Lies are not the pledges of tax cuts, universal health care, family values restored, or a world rendered peaceful through forceful demonstrations of American leadership. The Big Lies are the truths that remain unspoken: that freedom has an underside; that nations, like households, must ultimately live within their means; that history's purpose, the subject of so many confident pronouncements, remains

inscrutable. Above all, there is this: Power is finite. Politicians pass over matters such as these in silence. As a consequence, the absence of self-awareness that forms such an enduring element of the American character persists.

At four-year intervals, ceremonies conducted to install a president reaffirm this inclination. Once again, at the anointed hour, on the steps of the Capitol, it becomes “morning in America.” The slate is wiped clean. The newly inaugurated president takes office, buoyed by expectations that history will soon be restored to its proper trajectory and the nation put back on track. There is something touching about these expectations, but also something pathetic, like the battered wife who expects that this time her husband will actually keep his oft-violated vow never again to raise his hand against her. For the abused wife, a condition of dependence condemns her to continuing torment. Salvation begins when she rejects that condition and asserts control over her life. Something of the same can be said of the American people.

The centers of authority within Washington—above all, the White House and the upper echelons of the national security state—actually benefit from this dependency: It provides the source of status, power, and privileges. Imagine the impact just on the Pentagon were this country actually to achieve anything approaching energy independence. US Central Command would go out of business. Bases in and around the Middle East would close. The navy’s Fifth Fleet would stand down. Weapons contracts worth tens of billions would risk being canceled.

As long as Americans remain in denial—insisting that the power of the United States is without limits—they will remain unlikely to do any of these things. Instead, abetted by their political leaders, they will continue to fancy that some version of global war offers an antidote to Islamic radicalism. The United States will modernize and enhance its nuclear strike capabilities while professing outrage that others should seek similar capabilities. Americans will treat climate change as a problem to be nickel-and-dimed. They will guzzle imported oil, binge on imported goods, and indulge in imperial dreams. All the while, Washington will issue high-minded proclamations testifying to the approaching triumph of democracy everywhere and forever.

They will cling to a culture which makes ‘living standards’ the final norm of the good life and which regards the perfection of technology as the guarantor of every cultural as well as every social-moral value. Above all, they will venerate freedom while carefully refraining from assessing its content or measuring its costs. Adamantly insisting that it is unique among history’s great powers, the United States seems likely to follow the well-worn path taken by others, blind to the perils that it courts through its own feckless behavior.

For all nations, the desire to gain an immediate selfish advantage always imperils their ultimate interests. If they recognize this fact, they usually recognize it too late. Thus does the tragedy of our age move inexorably toward its conclusion. To the end of history social orders will probably destroy themselves in the effort to prove that they are indestructible. Clinging doggedly to the conviction that the rules to which other nations must submit don't apply, Americans appear determined to affirm this axiom of willful self-destruction.

To preserve that which we value most in the American way of life, therefore, requires modifying that way of life, discriminating between things that are essential and those that are not.

We will need courage to face the hidden fantasies, myths, and anxieties that make up the current hysterical crucible; we must look into our own psyches rather than to invisible enemies, devils, and alien invaders for the answers.

“What goes around, it comes back around. This your nation refuses to learn. It will keep creeping back in. You cannot give away your filth and prevent all creepage, no? Filth by its very nature it is a thing that is creeping always back.”

Exceptional America

American liberals and progressives talk a bit about white privilege, male privilege, straight privilege et cetera, but one thing I never hear them talk about is American privilege: the ability their nationality gives them to have a relationship with this world that the rest of us do not have.

American privilege is reassuring yourself that there are problems enough at home without worrying about the trillions your government's war machine is spending terrorizing the world and encircling the planet with military bases.

American privilege is reluctantly allowing the presidential candidates to have an eight-minute conversation about foreign policy in your presidential primary debates, when your country's military policy functionally dictates the affairs of rest of the world.

American privilege is arguing against the legality of assault weapons on the basis that they are "weapons of war," implying that they're fine as long as they're used to kill some foreigner's kids.

American privilege is being able to masturbate your outrage addiction over a racist joke while ignoring the way your military murders black and brown people by the tens of thousands every year.

American privilege is being able to lose your mind over someone using the wrong pronouns while paying no attention to the fact that your government pours your tax money and resources into governments and groups who hang gay people in the town square.

American privilege is believing your propaganda is the truth, and everyone else's understanding of the world is fake news.

American privilege is assuming your prudish Puritanical brand of sexuality is healthy and normal so it's no big deal that you insist that all English-speaking social media adheres to your creepy nipple-hating norms.

American privilege is telling foreigners to butt out of your politics when your politics are literally killing them.

American privilege is having a shit fit over election meddling in one social media post, while cheerleading regime change in the next.

American privilege is starting a war on a lie without being charged with a war crime.

American privilege is committing war crimes with impunity while jailing the whistleblowers and journalists who reveal them and still getting to call yourselves the good guys.

American privilege is being able to spend all day arguing online about domestic policy while the rest of the world, completely incapable of influencing your government's behavior, prays you don't get us all killed.

American privilege is only having a robust antiwar movement when your own citizens are at risk of being drafted, then completely forgetting about peace for decades while an increasingly robotic military force gives you even more peace of mind.

American privilege is being able to relax about war because your soldiers are being replaced with drones and proxy militias in US-driven conflicts, even though those kill people just as dead as manually operated killing machines.

American privilege is being hush-hush about the egregious imperialist stances of progressive candidates like Bernie Sanders because they have some decent domestic policies.

American privilege is black bloc protests against public appearances by figures like Milo Yiannopoulos and the Proud Boys while murderous war pigs like Bill Kristol, Henry Kissinger, John Bolton, David Frum, and arms industry executives go from appearance to appearance relatively unbothered. And now Bolton might even be a liberal hero.

American privilege is benefiting from cheap goods and oil and a strong dollar and never wondering how many innocent foreigners lost their lives and homes in the wars your government starts to make that so.

American privilege is living in a nation whose government can murder an entire family one day with explosives dropped from the sky, and yet you never hear about it because that isn't considered a newsworthy occurrence.

American privilege is being one of the worst-traveled populations in the world while having military bases in countries that most Americans wouldn't recognize the name of, let alone have been to.

American privilege is having your insane culture normalized around the world via Hollywood and other media so that nobody stops and wonders why we're letting this bat shit crazy nation rule our planet, and so no one makes you feel bad about your American privilege.

American privilege is living in a nation that uses its military and economic might to terrorize, murder, imprison, starve, and impoverish anyone who doesn't go along with its interests, and feeling no urgent need to bring a stop to this.

American privilege is being fine with being the world leader, but not being too bothered about what exactly that means.

“Truth was the majority vote of the nation that could lick all others.”

The United States has difficulty conceiving that ordinary people, on their own, could legitimately be hostile to American intentions and policies: somebody must be misleading them, and there is no such thing as a movement that can emerge spontaneously without hierarchical leadership.

When you go around to the dark back side of the nation, you see the shocking truth. There you see a nation whose core fundamentals have been hollowed out, replaced by balsa-wood stilts and wrapped in a frayed canvas of nationalism and bravado—a cloak similar to that worn by nearly every great superpower that has ever existed on the planet just before its own eventual collapse.

“I understand your point of view. However, in my opinion, it is misguided to a degree, for being utopian and non-pragmatic. You value freedom of choice and individual thought as a matter of principle. But is there really freedom of choice in these matters? And does keeping the state away from the process of of identity building make for a better society?”

Identity is perhaps the most fundamental aspect in the fabric of society. In a conflict you will identify with one side and against the other. Of course though there are multiple facets to one’s identity. Every person is multiple things at the same time. But the stronger the bond that unites you, compared to that which separates you, the more likely you are to avoid conflict.

In the end patriotism serves the purpose of stability. It creates a common bond that helps prevent an internal conflict. Without that bond you will just have multiple ‘tribes’ with a much higher potential for disputes among them. You can see this all too often in many other countries where the sense of patriotism is weak and sense of identity is mostly based on other traits.

And this is why, for instance, developing an European identity, not necessarily instead of but on top of national identities is so important and was defined as a major project after WWII—even though some people often forget what the major goal is and why. And this is also why it is so dangerous to create a society where

much of your citizens do not identify nor establish any kind of bond to their host nation (nor supra nation), as we appear to be doing in Europe to an extent.

Of course exacerbated patriotism can be used for bad. It can blind us to one's wrong doings, and make us stick together when we shouldn't. But the lesson shouldn't be that we must avoid it altogether, or keep the state away from it. The lesson should be that it is too fundamental a part of society to be neglected. We must prevent it to from being hijacked, by those inside or outside, and we must prevent it from being broken apart. Instead it must be kept functional and healthy at all times, and it is our responsibility to do so."

What is 'an American'? Do we have something important in common, as Americans, or is it just that we all happen to live inside the same boundaries and so have to obey the same laws? How exactly is America different from other countries? Is there really something unique about it? What does that uniqueness entail? We talk a lot about our special rights and freedoms, but are there also special responsibilities that come with being an American? If so, responsibilities to whom?

"We have two choices. Either we change the way we live, or we must change the way they live. We choose the latter."

—Donald Rumsfeld

"That's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out."

The whole drama of history is enacted in a frame of meaning too large for human comprehension or management. Our dreams of managing history—born of a peculiar combination of arrogance and narcissism—pose a potentially mortal threat to the United States.

"Always with you this freedom! For your walled-up country, always to shout 'Freedom! Freedom!' as if it were obvious to all people what it wants to mean, this word. But look: it is not so simple as that. Your freedom is the freedom-from: no one tells your precious individual USA selves what they must do. It

is this meaning only, this freedom from constraint and forced duress.

But what of the freedom-to? Not just freedom-from. Not all compulsion comes from without. You pretend you do not see this. What of freedom-to. How for the person to freely choose? How to choose any but a child's greedy choices if there is no guide to inform, teach the person how to choose? How is there freedom to choose if one does not learn how to choose?

The rich father who can afford the cost of candy as well as food for his children: but if he cries out 'Freedom!' and allows his child to choose only what is sweet, eating only candy, not pea soup and bread and eggs, so his child becomes weak and sick: is the rich man who cries 'Freedom!' the good father?

This is what happens: you imagine the things I will say and then say them for me and then become angry with them. Without my mouth; it never opens. You speak to yourself, inventing sides. This itself is the habit of children: lazy, lonely, self. I am not even here, possibly, for listening to."

Freedom is not static, nor is it necessarily benign. In practice, freedom constantly evolves and in doing so generates new requirements and abolishes old constraints. The common understanding of freedom that prevailed in December 1941 when the United States entered the war against Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany has long since become obsolete. In some respects, this must be cause for celebration. In others, it might be cause for regret. The changes have been both qualitative and quantitative.

In many respects, Americans are freer today than ever before, with more citizens than ever before enjoying unencumbered access to the promise of American life. Yet, especially since the 1960s, the reinterpretation of freedom has had a transformative impact on our society and culture. That transformation has produced a paradoxical legacy. As individuals, our appetites and expectations have grown exponentially.

Whether the issue at hand is oil, credit, or the availability of cheap consumer goods, we expect the world to accommodate the American way of life. The resulting sense of entitlement has great implications for foreign policy. Simply put, as the American appetite for freedom has grown, so too has our penchant for empire. The connection between these two tendencies is a causal one. In an earlier age, Americans saw empire as the antithesis of freedom. Today, as illustrated above all by the Bush, Obama, and Trump administration's efforts to dominate the energy-rich Persian Gulf, empire has seemingly become a prerequisite of freedom.

There is a further paradox: The actual exercise of American freedom is no longer conducive to generating the power required to establish and maintain an imperial order. If anything, the reverse is true: Centered on consumption and individual autonomy, the exercise of freedom is contributing to the gradual erosion of our national power. At precisely the moment when the ability to wield power—especially military power—has become the *sine qua non* for preserving American freedom, our reserves of power are being depleted.

As individuals, Americans never cease to expect more. As members of a community, especially as members of a national community, they choose to contribute less. Expectations that the world beyond our borders should accommodate the American way of life are hardly new. Since 9/11, however, our demands have become more insistent. In that regard, the neoconservative writer Robert Kagan is surely correct in observing:

“America did not change on September 11. It only became more itself.”

Yet, as events have made plain, the United States is ill-prepared to wage a global war of no exits and no deadlines. The sole superpower lacks the resources—economic, political, and military—to support a large-scale, protracted conflict without, at the very least, inflicting severe economic and political damage on itself. American power has limits and is inadequate to the ambitions to which hubris and sanctimony have given rise.

Here is the central paradox of our time: While the defense of American freedom seems to demand that US troops fight in places like Iraq and Afghanistan and Syria and all over Africa, the exercise of that freedom at home undermines the nation’s capacity to fight. A grand bazaar provides an inadequate basis upon which to erect a vast empire. Meanwhile, a stubborn insistence on staying the course militarily ends up jeopardizing freedom at home. With Americans, even in wartime, refusing to curb their appetites, the Long War aggravates the economic contradictions that continue to produce debt and dependency. Moreover, a state of perpetual national security emergency aggravates the disorders afflicting our political system, allowing the executive branch to accrue ever more authority at the expense of the Congress and disfiguring the Constitution. In this sense, the Long War is both self-defeating and irrational.

History will not judge kindly a people who find nothing amiss in the prospect of endless armed conflict so long as they themselves are spared the effects. Nor will it view with favor an electorate that delivers political power into the hands of leaders unable to envision any alternative to perpetual

war. Rather than insisting that the world accommodate the United States, Americans need to reassert control over their own destiny, ending their condition of dependency and abandoning their imperial delusions. Of perhaps even greater difficulty, the combination of economic, political, and military crisis summons Americans to reexamine exactly what freedom entails. Soldiers cannot accomplish these tasks, nor should we expect politicians to do so. The onus of responsibility falls squarely on citizens.

One of the most pathetic aspects of human history is that every civilization expresses itself most pretentiously, compounds its partial and universal values most convincingly, and claims immortality for its finite existence at the very moment when the decay which leads to death has already begun.

If Americans still cherish the sentiments contained in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, they have, over time, radically revised their understanding of those "inalienable rights." Today, individual Americans use their freedom to do many worthy things. Some read, write, paint, sculpt, compose, and play music. Others build, restore, and preserve. Still others attend plays, concerts, and sporting events, visit their local multiplexes, message each other incessantly, and join communities of the like-minded in an ever-growing array of virtual worlds. They also pursue innumerable hobbies, worship, tithe, and, in commendably large numbers, attend to the needs of the less fortunate.

Yet none of these in themselves define what it means to be an American in the twenty-first century. If one were to choose a single word to characterize that identity, it would have to be 'more.' For the majority of contemporary Americans, the essence of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness centers on a relentless personal quest to acquire, to consume, to indulge, and to shed whatever constraints might interfere with those endeavors. A bumper sticker, a sardonic motto, and a charge dating from the Age of Woodstock have recast the Jeffersonian trinity in modern vernacular: "Whoever dies with the most toys wins"; "Shop till you drop"; "If it feels good, do it."

It would be misleading to suggest that every American has surrendered to this ethic of self-gratification. Resistance to its demands persists and takes many forms. Yet dissenters, intent on curbing the American penchant for consumption and self-indulgence, are fighting a rear-guard action, valiant perhaps but unlikely to reverse the tide. The ethic of self-gratification has firmly entrenched itself as the defining feature of the American way of life. The point is neither to deplore nor to celebrate this fact, but simply to acknowledge it.

Few, however, have considered how an American preoccupation with 'more' has affected US relations with rest of the world. Yet the foreign policy implications of our present-day penchant for consumption and self-indulgence

are almost entirely negative. Over the past six decades, efforts to satisfy spiraling consumer demand have given birth to a condition of profound dependency. The United States may still remain the mightiest power the world has ever seen, but the fact is that Americans are no longer masters of their own fate. The ethic of self-gratification threatens the well-being of the United States. It does so not because Americans have lost touch with some mythical Puritan habits of hard work and self-abnegation, but because it saddles us with costly commitments abroad that we are increasingly ill-equipped to sustain while confronting us with dangers to which we have no ready response.

As the prerequisites of the American way of life have grown, they have outstripped the means available to satisfy them. Americans of an earlier generation worried about bomber and missile gaps, both of which turned out to be fictitious. The present-day gap between requirements and the means available to satisfy those requirements is neither contrived nor imaginary. It is real and growing. This gap defines the crisis of American profligacy.

Touring the United States in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville, astute observer of the young Republic, noted the “feverish ardor” of its citizens to accumulate. Yet, even as the typical American “clutches at everything,” the Frenchman wrote, “he holds nothing fast, but soon loosens his grasp to pursue fresh gratifications.” However munificent his possessions, the American hungered for more, an obsession that filled him with “anxiety, fear, and regret, and keeps his mind in ceaseless trepidation.”

A crude way to put the whole thing is that our present culture is, both developmentally and historically, adolescent. And since adolescence is acknowledged to be the single most stressful and frightening period of human development—the stage when the adulthood we claim to crave begins to present itself as a real and narrowing system of responsibilities and limitations and when we yearn inside for a return to the same childish oblivion we pretend to scorn—it’s not difficult to see why we as a culture are so susceptible to art and entertainment whose primary function is escape—fantasy, adrenaline, spectacle, romance, et cetera. Americans come to art now essentially to escape ourselves—to pretend for a while that we’re not mice and walls are parallel and the cat can be outrun.

Preferring to remember their collective story somewhat differently, Americans look to politicians to sanitize their past. When, in his 2005 inaugural address, George W. Bush identified the promulgation of freedom as “the mission that created our nation,” neoconservative hearts certainly beat a little faster, as they undoubtedly did when he went on to declare that America’s “great liberating tradition” now required the United States to devote itself to “ending tyranny in our world.” Yet Bush was simply putting his own gloss

on a time-honored conviction ascribing to the United States a uniqueness of character and purpose. From its founding, America has expressed through its behavior and its evolution a providential purpose. Paying homage to, and therefore renewing, this tradition of American exceptionalism has long been one of the presidency's primary extra-constitutional obligations.

The movie business is just that—a business. Its purpose is to make money. If once in a while a studio produces a film of aesthetic value, that may be cause for celebration, but profit, not revealing truth and beauty, defines the purpose of the enterprise. Something of the same can be said of the enterprise launched on July 4, 1776. The hardheaded lawyers, merchants, farmers, and slave-holding plantation owners gathered in Philadelphia that summer did not set out to create a church. They founded a republic. Their purpose was not to save mankind. It was to ensure that people like themselves enjoyed unencumbered access to the Jeffersonian trinity.

In the years that followed, the United States achieved remarkable success in making good on those aims. Yet never during the course of America's transformation from a small power to a great one did the United States exert itself to liberate others—absent an overriding perception that the nation had large security or economic interests at stake. From time to time, although not nearly as frequently as we like to imagine, some of the world's unfortunates managed as a consequence to escape from bondage. The Civil War did, for instance, produce emancipation. Yet to explain the conflagration of 1861–65 as a response to the plight of enslaved African Americans is to engage at best in an immense oversimplification. Near the end of World War II, GIs did liberate the surviving inmates of some Nazi death camps. Yet for those who directed the American war effort of 1941–45, the fate of European Jews never figured as more than an afterthought. Plus, the Russians did most of the work.

Crediting the United States with a “great liberating tradition” distorts the past and obscures the actual motive force behind American politics and US foreign policy. It transforms history into a morality tale, thereby providing a rationale for dodging serious moral analysis. To insist that the liberation of others has never been more than an ancillary motive of US policy is not cynicism; it is a prerequisite to self-understanding.

I have believed for a long time that there is no bridge too far to cross, no enormity so great that it would end our ideas of American exceptionalism, an innocence that the “resisters” are feeding into, strengthening it all the time, even as the noose tightens around our necks.

“When it came to action rather than talk, even the policy-makers viewed as most idealistic remained fixated on one overrid-

ing aim: enhancing American influence, wealth, and power. The record of US foreign relations from the earliest colonial encounters with Native Americans to the end of the Cold War is neither uniquely high-minded nor uniquely hypocritical and exploitive. In this sense, the interpretations of America's past offered by both George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden fall equally wide of the mark. As a rising power, the United States adhered to the iron laws of international politics, which allow little space for altruism. If the tale of American expansion contains a moral theme at all, that theme is necessarily one of ambiguity."

I was especially amused by Krugman's argument that American hypocrisy is actually symbolic of its virtue. We "were aware at some level that our treatment of blacks was at odds with our principles," which shows that we have principles that we were "honoring in the breach," as if being aware that you're doing something wrong and doing it anyway makes you a better person. I think we can see here a good example of the extreme moral contortions that are necessary to avoid concluding that the United States has historically been a self-interested country largely indifferent to the welfare of anyone other than its ruling majority. Any neutral evaluator would have to say that self-interest has been a far larger force in determining US policy than "idealism," and the favored American economic theories even imply this, but it would spoil the liberal image of the United States as a well-meaning democracy that makes occasional missteps in its ongoing effort to spread goodness and light.

Here we see the double edge of our uniquely American brand of nationalism. We are raised to be exceptionalists, to think we are the better nation with the manifest destiny to rule. The danger is that some people will actually believe this claim, and some of those will expect the manifestation of our national identity, that is, our government, to comport itself accordingly.

All modern nation-states claim a kind of rationalized origin story upon which they fashion patriotism or loyalty to the state. When citizens of modern states and their anthropologists and historians look at what they consider "primitive" societies, they identify their "origin myths," quaint and endearing stories, but fantastic ones, not grounded in "reality." Yet many US scholars seem unable (or unwilling) to subject their own nation-state's founding story to the same objective examination.

The United States is not unique among nations in forging an origin myth, but most of its citizens believe it to be exceptional among nation-states, and this exceptionalist ideology has been used to justify appropriation of the continent and then domination of the rest of the world. It is one of the

few states founded on the covenant of the Hebrew Torah, or the Christian borrowing of it in the Old Testament of the Bible. Other covenant states are Israel and the now-defunct apartheid state of South Africa, both of which were founded in 1948. Although the origin stories of these three covenant states were based on Judeo-Christian scripture, they were not founded as theocracies. According to the myths, the faithful citizens come together of their own free will and pledge to each other and to their god to form and support a godly society, and their god in turn vouchsafes them prosperity in a promised land.

Certain societies, in certain eras of their development have looked to the scriptures for guidance, the scriptures operating culturally in much the same way as the human genetic code operates physiologically. That is, this great code has, to some degree, directly determined what people would believe and when they would think and what they would do.

In other modern constitutional states, constitutions come and go, and they are never considered sacred in the manner patriotic US citizens venerate theirs. Great Britain has no written constitution. The Magna Carta arguably comes close, but it does not reflect a covenant. US citizens did not inherit their cult-like adherence to their constitution from the English. From the Pilgrims to the founders of the United States and continuing to the present, the cultural persistence of the covenant idea, and thus the bedrock of US patriotism, represents a deviation from the main course in the development of national identities.

Arguably, both the 1948 birth of the state of Israel and advent of Nationalist Party rule of South Africa were emulations of the US founding; certainly many US Americans closely identify with the state of Israel, as they did with Afrikaner-ruled South Africa. Patriotic US politicians and citizens take pride in “exceptionalism.” Historians and legal theorists characterize US statecraft and empire as those of a “nation of laws,” rather than one dominated by a particular class or group of interests, suggesting a kind of holiness.

Granting the traditionally marginalized access to freedom constitutes a central theme of American politics since World War II. It does not diminish the credit due to those who engineered this achievement to note that their success stemmed, in part, from the fact that the United States was simultaneously asserting its claim to unquestioned global preeminence. From World War II into the 1960s, more power abroad meant greater abundance at home, which, in turn, paved the way for greater freedom. The reformers who pushed and prodded for racial equality and women’s rights did so in tacit alliance with the officials presiding over the post-war rehabilitation of Germany and Japan, with oil executives pressing to bring the Persian Gulf

into America's sphere of influence, and with defense contractors urging the procurement of expensive new weaponry.

The creation, by the 1950s, of an informal American empire of global proportions was not the result of a conspiracy designed to benefit the few. Post-war foreign policy derived its legitimacy from a widely shared perception that power was being exercised abroad to facilitate the creation of a more perfect union at home. In this sense, General Curtis LeMay's nuclear strike force, the Strategic Air Command (SAC)—as a manifestation of American might as well as a central component of the post-war military-industrial complex—helped foster the conditions from which Betty Friedan's National Organization for Women emerged. A proper understanding of contemporary history means acknowledging an ironic kinship between hard-bitten Cold Warriors like General LeMay and left-leaning feminists like Ms. Friedan. SAC helped make possible the feminine mystique and much else besides.

In the 1960s, however, the empire of production began to come undone. Within another twenty years—thanks to permanently negative trade balances, a crushing defeat in Vietnam, oil shocks, “stagflation,” and the shredding of a moral consensus that could not withstand the successive assaults of Elvis Presley, “the pill,” and the counterculture, along with news reports that God had died—it had become defunct. In its place there emerged a new Empire of Consumption. Just as the lunch-bucket-toting factory worker had symbolized the empire of production during its heyday, the teenager, daddy's credit card in her blue jeans and headed to the mall, now emerged as the empire of consumption's emblematic figure. The evil genius of the empire of production was Henry Ford. In the empire of consumption, Ford's counterpart was Walt Disney.

Prior to the 1970s, because the United States had long been the world's number one producer of petroleum, American oil companies determined the global price of oil. In 1972, domestic oil production peaked and then began to decline. The year before, the prerogative of setting the price of crude oil had passed into the hands of a new producers' group, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

By the late 1970s, a period of slow growth and high inflation, the still-forming crisis of profligacy was already causing real distress in American households. The first protracted economic downturn since World War II confronted Americans with a fundamental choice. They could curb their appetites and learn to live within their means or deploy dwindling reserves of US power in hopes of obliging others to accommodate their penchant for conspicuous consumption. Between July 1979 and March 1983, a fateful interval bookended by two memorable presidential speeches, they opted decisively for the latter.

Here lies the true pivot of contemporary American history, far more relevant to our present predicament than supposedly decisive events like the fall of the Berlin Wall or the collapse of the Soviet Union. Between the summer of 1979 and the spring of 1983, “global leadership,” the signature claim of US foreign policy, underwent a subtle transformation. Although the United States kept up the pretense that the rest of the world could not manage without its guidance and protection, leadership became less a choice than an imperative. The exercise of global primacy offered a way of compensating for the erosion of a previously dominant economic position. Yet whatever deference Washington was able to command could not conceal the extent to which the United States itself was becoming increasingly beholden to others. Leadership now carried connotations of dependence.

Carter began by explaining that he had decided to look beyond energy because “the true problems of our Nation are much deeper.” The energy crisis of 1979, he suggested, was merely a symptom of a far greater crisis.

“So, I want to speak to you first tonight about a subject even more serious than energy or inflation. I want to talk to you right now about a fundamental threat to American democracy.”

In short order, he then proceeded to kill any chance he had of securing reelection. In American political discourse, fundamental threats are by definition external. Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, or international communism could threaten the United States. That very year, Iran’s Islamic revolutionaries had emerged to pose another such threat. That the actions of everyday Americans might pose a comparable threat amounted to rank heresy.

Yet Carter now dared to suggest that the real danger to American democracy lay within. The nation as a whole was experiencing “a crisis of confidence,” he announced.

“It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation.”

This erosion of confidence threatened “to destroy the social and the political fabric of America.” Americans had strayed from the path of righteousness.

“In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us

now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose."

In other words, the spreading American crisis of confidence was an outward manifestation of an underlying crisis of values. With his references to what "we've discovered" and what "we've learned," Carter implied that he was merely voicing concerns that his listeners already shared: that average Americans viewed their lives as empty, unsatisfying rituals of buying, and longed for something more meaningful.

To expect Washington to address these concerns was, he made clear, fanciful. According to the president, the federal government had become "an island," isolated from the people. Its major institutions were paralyzed and corrupt. It was "a system of government that seems incapable of action." Carter spoke of "a Congress twisted and pulled in every direction by hundreds of well financed and powerful special interests." Partisanship routinely trumped any concern for the common good:

"You see every extreme position defended to the last vote, almost to the last breath by one unyielding group or another. We are at a turning point in our history. There are two paths to choose. One is a path I've warned about tonight, the path that leads to fragmentation and self-interest. Down that road lies a mistaken idea of freedom, the right to grasp for ourselves some advantage over others. That path would be one of constant conflict between narrow interests ending in chaos and immobility."

The continued pursuit of this mistaken idea of freedom was "a certain route to failure." The alternative—a course consistent with "all the traditions of our past [and] all the lessons of our heritage"—pointed down "another path, the path of common purpose and the restoration of American values." Down that path, the president claimed, lay "true freedom for our Nation and ourselves."

Far more accurately than Jimmy Carter, Reagan understood what made Americans tick: They wanted self-gratification, not self-denial. Although always careful to embroider his speeches with inspirational homilies and testimonials to old-fashioned virtues, Reagan mainly indulged American self-indulgence.

Embedded in Reagan's remarks were two decidedly radical propositions: first, that the minimum requirements of US security now required the United States to achieve a status akin to invulnerability; and second, that modern technology was bringing this seemingly utopian goal within reach. Star Wars, in short, introduced into mainstream politics the proposition that Americans could be truly safe only if the United States enjoyed something akin to permanent global military supremacy.

Pledges of benign intent concealed the full implications of Star Wars. To skeptics—nuclear strategists worried that the pursuit of strategic defenses might prove “destabilizing”—Reagan offered categorical assurances:

“The defense policy of the United States is based on a simple premise: The United States does not start fights. We will never be an aggressor. We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression—to preserve freedom and peace.”

According to Reagan, the employment of US forces for anything but defensive purposes was simply inconceivable.

“Every item in our defense program—our ships, our tanks, our planes, our funds for training and spare parts—is intended for one all-important purpose: to keep the peace.”

In international politics, the chief danger of hypocrisy is that it inhibits self-understanding. The hypocrite ends up fooling mainly himself.

American profligacy during the 1980s had a powerful effect on foreign policy. The impact manifested itself in two ways. On the one hand, Reagan's willingness to spend without limit helped bring the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion. On the other hand, American habits of conspicuous consumption, encouraged by Reagan, drew the United States ever more deeply into the vortex of the Islamic world, saddling an increasingly energy-dependent nation with commitments that it could neither shed nor sustain. By expending huge sums on an arsenal of high-tech weapons, Reagan nudged the Kremlin toward the realization that the Soviet Union could no longer compete with the West. By doing nothing to check the country's reliance on foreign oil, he laid a trap into which his successors would stumble. If Reagan deserves plaudits for the former, he also deserves to be held accountable for the latter.

Preferring to compartmentalize history into pre-9/11 and post-9/11 segments, Americans remain oblivious to the consequences that grew out of Ronald Reagan's collaboration with the mujahedeen. Seldom has a seemingly successful partnership so quickly yielded poisonous fruit. The

paths of “progress” proved to be more devious and unpredictable than the putative managers of history could understand.

Prior to 1981, the Persian Gulf had lagged behind Western Europe and Northeast Asia in the Pentagon’s hierarchy of strategic priorities. By 1989, it had pulled even. Soon thereafter, it became priority number one.

US involvement in the so-called Tanker War, now all but forgotten, provided a harbinger of things to come. As an ancillary part of their war of attrition, Iran and Iraq had begun targeting each other’s shipping in the Gulf. Attacks soon extended to neutral vessels, with each country determined to shut down its adversary’s ability to export oil. Intent on ensuring that the oil would keep flowing, Reagan reinforced the US naval presence in the region. The waters of the Gulf became increasingly crowded.

Then in May 1987, an Iraqi missile slammed into the frigate USS Stark, killing thirty-seven sailors. Saddam Hussein described the attack as an accident and apologized. Reagan generously accepted Saddam’s explanation and blamed Iran for the escalating violence. That same year, Washington responded favorably to a Kuwaiti request for the US Navy to protect its tanker fleet. When, in the course of escort operations in April 1988, the USS Samuel B. Roberts struck an Iranian mine, suffering serious damage, Reagan upped the ante. US forces began conducting attacks on Iranian warships, naval facilities, and oil platforms used for staging military operations. Iranian naval operations in the Gulf soon ceased, although not before an American warship had mistakenly shot down an Iranian commercial airliner, with the loss of nearly three-hundred civilians.

The Reagan administration congratulated itself on having achieved a handsome victory. For a relatively modest investment—the thirty-seven American sailors killed on the Stark were forgotten almost as quickly as the doomed passengers on Iran Air Flight 655—the United States had seemingly demonstrated its ability to keep open the world’s oil lifeline. But appearance belied a more complex reality. From the outset, Saddam Hussein had been the chief perpetrator of the Tanker War. Reagan’s principal accomplishment had been to lend Saddam a helping hand—at substantial moral cost to the United States.

The slightest suggestion that the United States ought to worry less about matters abroad and more about setting its own house in order elicits from the political elite, Republicans and Democrats alike, shrieks of “isolationism,” the great imaginary sin to which Americans are allegedly prone. Appeasement! Hitler! Yet to begin to put our house in order would be to open up a whole new array of options, once again permitting the United States to “choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.”

Long accustomed to thinking of the United States as a superpower,

Americans have yet to realize that they have forfeited command of their own destiny. The reciprocal relationship between expansionism, abundance, and freedom—each reinforcing the other—no longer exists. If anything, the reverse is true: Expansionism squanders American wealth and power, while putting freedom at risk. Rather than confronting this reality head-on, American grand strategy since the era of Ronald Reagan, and especially throughout the era of George W. Bush, has been characterized by attempts to wish reality away. The fiasco of the Iraq War and the quasi-permanent US occupation of Afghanistan illustrate the results and prefigure what is yet to come if the crisis of American profligacy continues unabated.

The Bush Doctrine provided the ultimate rationale for invading Iraq. Wolfowitz and others in the administration were confident of achieving a quick, decisive victory. Indeed, the principal appeal of Iraq as a target was not that it was strong and fearsome; the first Gulf War and a decade of sanctions had left Saddam Hussein with a decrepit army and essentially no air force. Iraq was inviting because it appeared so weak. An invasion promised to be a “cakewalk.” Wolfowitz and others in the administration were counting on victory, in turn, to validate the Bush Doctrine, demonstrating its efficacy and thereby paving the way for its further application.

Simply put, with victory in Iraq, any last constraints on the employment of US military power—and on the privileges of the imperial presidency—would fall away. It is important to appreciate the scope of the plans that 9/11 set in motion. Our fixation on all that has since gone wrong in Iraq itself should not lead us to overlook the fact that eliminating Saddam was never the endgame. The invasion of Iraq formed only one element of a breathtakingly extravagant design. The Wise Men to whom President Bush turned for advice after 9/11 expected an easy win against a weak opponent to set the stage for far greater victories.

“Actions that are difficult or impossible now will become more feasible after we have taken the first steps.”

Here lay the underlying intent of the Bush Doctrine: It provided a self-validating authorization for the administration to pursue whatever next steps it chose to take.

“We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. We’re history’s actors and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

President Bush explained why. The events of 9/11, he said, had thoroughly discredited the Cold War concepts of containment and deterrence.

Henceforth, the United States needed to snuff out threats before they could materialize.

“In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action.”

Bush vowed to act. Simply put, the United States had assumed for itself—and for itself alone—an unlimited first-strike prerogative.

The early days of the Cold War had produced its own version of the “one percent doctrine.” When the Soviet Union broke the US nuclear monopoly in 1949, it appeared in some quarters to be only a matter of time before Americans would face the choice of being either “Red or dead.” The country could avoid that choice by putting its hard-earned strategic superiority to work immediately, before it withered away. Here lay the rationale for a first strike against Russia: By attacking the Soviets before they could build up a large nuclear arsenal, the United States in one fell swoop could eliminate its rival and achieve permanent peace and security.

The idea of a preventive war tempts those eager to pick the most propitious moment for the start of what they regard as inevitable hostilities. The rest of us must resist such ideas with every moral resource. Not only is it morally wrong; it is also mad. Nothing in history is inevitable, including the probable. So long as war has not broken out, we still have the possibility of avoiding it. Those who think that there is little difference between a cold and a hot war are either ignorant or malicious.

Bruce Springsteen said this about his own stunningly successful career:

“I understand that it’s the music that keeps me alive. That’s my lifeblood. And to give that up for, like, the TV, the cars, the houses—that’s not the American dream. That’s the booby prize, in the end. Those are the booby prizes. And if you fall for them—if, when you achieve them, you believe that this is the end in and of itself—then you’ve been suckered in. Because those are the consolation prizes, if you’re not careful, for selling yourself out, or letting the best of yourself slip away. So you gotta be vigilant. You gotta carry the idea you began with further. And you gotta hope that you’re headed for higher ground.”

To some, mainstream American life is dysfunctional, the American Dream a hoax. Happiness isn’t bundled in thirty-year mortgages or well-paid careers or a thick steak. Not if everything they buy with their hard-earned cash is disposable and animals are tortured for their sustenance. But while most deal with teenage ennui by numbing the truth and marinating their minds

with herb and booze, these kids want to stay angry. Their melancholy could be a force of good, though it doesn't always feel that way at home. They laugh at the absurdity of life, at the crooked birth lottery, at their wide-open futures, their empty bank accounts, and their refusal to give in to norms of any kind. They are part of a sacred generation torn between feeling everything way too much and not giving any sort of fuck at all.

The whole idea of what life should be like, at least in middle class America: As a young person, you pretty much have to go to college after high school if you want a decent paying, secure job. Of course if you go into a trade it's a different story but stay with me here.

So you have to go to college if you want a good job. But, oh shit, you weren't a stellar student in high school, so no scholarship for you. Your parents are good, hard-working people and they make just the right amount so that you don't get much in the way of help from them, but you also can't qualify for grants or hardship scholarships. So, you are forced to take out tens of thousands of dollars in loans to pay for the school that you have to attend.

You graduated, hooray! You're not exactly happy with the career you'll have to enter, but hey, you'll make good money and have job security. And congrats, you married the girlfriend you met in college. Now it's time to buy a house. The market in your area isn't great, but you find a pretty nice house that you can afford on a thirty year mortgage. Between the house and the new cars you bought to reliably get you and the wife to work, there isn't much cash left over to go on vacation. Oh well. Priorities, right?

Things are good for a few years and you finally have a little security in the bank. But now it's time for kids. You have two, because you only want to replace your wife and yourself—you're responsible people. Only now there are two tiny people that are reliant on you for literally everything. But that's okay, you'll take the financial strain and the stress because you love them.

Fast forward a few years. Your life has become a cycle. You go to the job that you now resent, so you can pay off the loans that you had to take out for college. Your income also goes to paying for the house that's now just a little too small. Your car payments are still due each month because you have to upgrade for the kids' safety. Every hour at work is spent in an effort to pay bills that keep you firmly rooted in the decisions you made ten years ago. Oh sure, you go on vacation. To Disney World, or to visit grandma halfway across the country. You'll definitely go to Europe when the kids are out of the house. You've only had sex once in three years, but you're living the American Dream.

Rinse and repeat. Go to work, pay your bills, and support your family.

Keep telling yourself it'll get better. Eventually you learn to just appreciate the little things because life isn't nearly as exciting as you'd once hoped. But you keep doing what you're "supposed to do" until you're old enough to go to a nursing home. Your kids visit every once in a while, but they're very busy digging themselves out of the same ever deepening hole that you have been in since you were 18. Eventually, death becomes your only relief, and you welcome it.

Fuck. That.

Our societies have become so complex, and so cumbersome, that they create far more punishment than reward. It's badly out of balance. America offers people only a very narrow and almost impossible-to-achieve version of success, but a nearly infinite array of ways to be a total, detestable failure. A 'successful life' is purely aspiration for most Americans, a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment of life is only for the people on TV. All other potential avenues for fulfillment have been foreclosed.

Down at peon level, the pursuit of happiness sounds like a bad joke. "It's called the American dream," George Carlin cracked, "because you have to be asleep to believe it."

"Necessitous men are not free men," said FDR in that 1944 State of the Union speech. "People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made." A dire statement, demonstrably true, and especially unsettling in now, a point in time when the American Dream seems more viable as nostalgia than a lived phenomenon. Income inequality, wealth distribution, mortality rates—by every measure, the average individual that Eleanor Roosevelt celebrated is sinking. Overall mobility is stagnant at best. If you're born poor in Ferguson or Appalachia, chances are you're going to stay that way. Ditto if your early memories include the swimming pool at the Houston Country Club or ski lessons at Deer Valley, you're likely going to keep your perch near the top of the heap.

There was never a period in American history where one could simply work hard and get rich, better off, et cetera. In every case these "improvements" came on the backs of others that never got to improve, gain wealth. It has always involved the exploitation of the many in order for the few to increase their status, wealth, power.

I'm reminded of the Peace Dividend we were supposed to get in the wake of the collapsing Soviet Union. Alas, we never got it. We squandered a perfectly good empire on McMansions and Ford Explorers. At least Rome got coliseums and orgies.

As health care costs head toward a fifth of the American economy and beyond, they are squeezing out other spending. One of the big losers is education. That, too, played a role in Toyota's decision. Canadian factory hands are so much better educated that Toyota estimated the costs of training workers there would be significantly less. Toyota could rely on verbal instructions and written manuals with Canadian workers, rather than color-coded cards it would need to train some of the reading-challenged workforce in the southern states that had offered subsidies.

“Everything you know about the US you learned off the internet.”

Keep thinking that everyone who thinks America is a shithole is just some stupid foreigner. That's precisely the kind of attitude that makes you the laughingstock of the industrialized world.

“Don't forget the 30k troops we have to keep in your country to keep your country sovereign from most respected leader and Best Korea.”

I don't know if you've noticed, but the fact that US soldiers in Korea are some of the worst representatives of America you've ever seen—public fighting, public drunkenness, public flirting, raping local women, monolingual, refuse to assimilate—has made them very, very unpopular here. Plus the fact that South Korea is more than capable and more than willing to fight North Korea alone, you really shouldn't use the existence of a bunch of uneducated, shitty people the US keeps here as leverage. We don't like them. They're only here because South Korean politicians try to appear hard on North Korea because it gets them votes. Not to mention it's the US's fault North Korea even exists, since the US and the Soviet Union used Korea as a pawn in their fucking stupid proxy war instead of just blowing up each other like they should have done.

Chapter Sixty-three

The Deep State

A small store of bourbon and wine was secreted inside some bunkers—staff swore that the stockpile was to be used only to aid a hypothetical alcoholic congressman who might need to be weaned off.

And even when Congress was primarily male, there was also a stock of birth control pills kept ready at the facilities—perhaps recognition that some of the aides and female secretaries might find recreational activities during a prolonged stay?

In 2009, President Obama signed Executive Order 13527, decreeing a new post-9/11 role for the Postal Service, which had during the Cold War been responsible for registering the dead in the event of a nuclear holocaust. Now, in the era of terrorism, it would serve as the agency responsible for delivering “medical countermeasures” to biological weapons to the nation since it had “the capacity for rapid residential delivery.” Should a wide-scale bioweapon attack like anthrax disrupt a city, state, or region of the country, only the Postal Service would possess the ability to visit every residence in a single day to deliver antibiotics or another antidote from the government’s Strategic National Stockpile, DHS explained. In the event that the “Postal Plan” is activated, the Post Office would suspend all mail delivery to the affected region and, escorted by local or state law enforcement, the mail carriers—each of whom would don disposable clothing, protective gloves, and a “NIOSH-approved N-95 disposable particulate respirator”—deliver “a uniform, predetermined quantity of prepackaged medications to each residential mail address along with information sheets.”

So, if you’re planning a biological attack, make sure neutralizing the postal fleet is on your to-do list—or maybe you can just wait until it gets privatized.

On its surface, presidential succession seems such a simple idea, but it’s a peculiar kind of scientific mysticism, whereby as mortal as any single officeholder may be, the office itself never dies. The president may be replaceable, but the presidency is not—it represents the very idea of the democratic traditions of the United States. “For me personally, no one ever elected to the office of the presidency was worth dying for, yet the office of

the presidency was,” recalled one Secret Service agent.

The odd thing, constitutional scholars now agree, is that Tyler was almost certainly wrong about becoming president. Little was then known about the debates that went on during the Constitutional Convention—Madison’s notes from the debates, for instance, were only published for the first time in 1840 and the first major scholarly review of the convention wasn’t published until 1911. Subsequent study has shown that the Founders clearly intended for the vice president to merely “act” as president during a vacancy or inability. At least three other sections of the Constitution actually refer specifically to the vice president only acting as president. The only way the Founders ever intended for someone to become president was to be elected by the nation; anyone else would merely be “acting.” Yet Tyler’s precedent would guide the nation for the next 120 years.

The Twenty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution, passed by Congress in early 1965, made clear the vice president would officially become president—answering John Tyler’s 120-year-old question—and allowed the president to nominate a new vice president in the event of a vacancy, who would then be subject to confirmation by both houses of Congress. The amendment also delineated a clear process to declare a president unable to serve, as well as a clear process for the president to resume power once recovered: The president could either sign over the office to a vice president, if, for instance, he knew he was undergoing an operation with anesthesia, or if the president couldn’t or wouldn’t sign over the office, the vice president could gather the signatures of a majority of the cabinet, which, when delivered to Congress, would establish the vice president officially as “acting president.”

In March 1995, a Doomsday cult used sarin gas to attack the Tokyo subway, and just a month later the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed by antigovernment militants, the worst homegrown terror attack in US history. The attack came without warning in an unexpected place, and inside the White House raised new concerns about decapitation of government departments.

“That was a serious contingency that we didn’t have covered. It’s fine to have a bunker in the mountains, but there’s no one there on a daily basis, so in a surprise attack, it’s useless.”

Then came 9/11. If nineteen terrorists, armed with nothing more than box cutters, had managed to wreak this level of havoc on the US government, how, many wondered, would COG hold up during a concerted attack on the leadership itself?

Four core convictions inform this ideology of national security. In his second inaugural address, President Bush testified eloquently to each of

them. According to the first of these convictions, history has an identifiable and indisputable purpose. History, the president declared, “has a visible direction, set by liberty and the Author of Liberty.” History’s abiding theme is freedom, to which all humanity aspires. Reduced to its essentials, history is an epic struggle, binary in nature, between “oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right.”

According to the second conviction, the United States has always embodied, and continues to embody, freedom. America has always been, and remains, freedom’s chief exemplar and advocate.

“From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth.”

As the self-proclaimed Land of Liberty, the United States serves as the vanguard of history. Revising, refining, and perfecting their understanding of freedom, Americans constantly model its meaning for others around the world. In 1839, the journalist John L. O’Sullivan described the young United States as “the Great Nation of Futurity.” So it remains today. Within the confines of the United States, history’s intentions are most fully revealed.

According to the third conviction, Providence summons America to ensure freedom’s ultimate triumph. This, observed President Bush, “is the mission that created our Nation.” The Author of Liberty has anointed the United States as the Agent of Liberty. Unique among great powers, this nation pursues interests larger than itself. When it acts, it does so on freedom’s behalf and at the behest of higher authority. By invading Iraq, the United States reaffirmed and reinvigorated the nation’s “great liberating tradition,” as the president put it. In so doing, “we have lit a fire as well—a fire in the minds of men. It warms those who feel its power, it burns those who fight its progress, and one day this untamed fire of freedom will reach the darkest corners of our world.” Only cynics or those disposed toward evil could possibly dissent from this self-evident truth.

According to the final conviction, for the American way of life to endure, freedom must prevail everywhere. Only when the light of freedom’s untamed fire illuminates the world’s darkest corners will America’s own safety and prosperity be assured. Or as the president expressed it:

“The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands.”

In effect, what the United States offers to the world and what it requires of the world align precisely. Put simply:

“America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.”

This proposition serves, of course, as an infinitely expansible grant of authority, empowering the United States to assert its influence anywhere it chooses since, by definition, it acts on freedom’s behalf.

Through constant repetition, the elements of this ideology have become hardwired into the American psyche. They function as articles of faith, beyond question and beyond scrutiny. Do politicians like Bush, who habitually cite the tenets of this faith, genuinely believe what they are saying? In all likelihood they do, just as Fox News anchors may genuinely believe that they provide “fair and balanced” coverage of world affairs, just as McDonald’s franchisees may genuinely believe that theirs is a business of “serving up smiles,” and just like MSNBC douchebags believe their neoliberal bullshit. Conviction follows self-interest. Aspirants to high office likewise testify to the core tenets of this ideology, hoping thereby to demonstrate their essential trustworthiness.

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, there were some informal discussions in Congress to the effect that Washington and its critical governmental nodes were too vulnerable to terrorist attacks. This was the time when there was a brief fad for “continuity of government” exercises, and Vice President Cheney, then a physical as well as political troglodyte, flitted between “secure, undisclosed locations” that were often underground. The proper institutional solution would have been to permanently disperse much of Washington’s governmental operations to areas around the country: with secure, encrypted teleconferencing and other electronic aids, this plan was eminently feasible. Most other cities have cheaper real estate and living costs. The problem was the same one defense contractors had solved by moving their headquarters to Washington: career-anxious generals and bureaucrats like to be physically, and not just electronically, close to the action.

This mania for physical proximity to the “decision-makers” (and the purse strings they hold) is an abiding obsession of those who indulge in the Deep State’s power games, much as the French aristocracy jockeyed to be in close attendance to the Sun King at the court of Versailles.

For all the bellyaching that goes on throughout the country about out-of-touch bureaucrats, corrupt and unresponsive government, and how much everyone hates Washington, these visible signs of our increasingly intrusive and overbearing government did not fall out of the sky upon an unsuspecting public. The Deep State, along with its headquarters in Washington, is not a negation of the American people’s character. It is an intensification of tendencies inherent in any aggregation of human beings. If

the American people did not voluntarily give informed consent to the web of unaccountable influence that radiates from Washington and permeates the country, then their passive acquiescence, aided by false appeals to patriotism and occasional doses of fear, surely played a role. A majority of Americans have been anesthetized by the slow, incremental rise of the Deep State, a process that has taken decades.

“Unhappy events abroad have retaught us two simple truths about the liberty of a democratic people. The first truth is that the liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic State itself. That, in its essence, is fascism—ownership of government by an individual, by a group or by any other controlling private power. The second truth is that the liberty of a democracy is not safe if it does not provide employment and produce and distribute goods in such a way as to sustain an acceptable standard of living. Both lessons hit home. Among us today a concentration of private power without equal in history is growing.”

National economic inequality is still increasing, GDP growth is outrunning wage growth, and an unreformed Wall Street is still creating highly leveraged markets that are as vulnerable to breakdown as the mortgage market of the 2000s. Even the stock market recovery has been deceptive: individual stock ownership has fallen to its lowest level since the 1990s, much of the gain in equities is from cash-rich corporations engaging in the economically useless practice of buying back their own stock, and most of the trading volume comes from high-frequency traders front-running the market and skimming profits from all the hapless remaining investors. Median pay for the top one-hundred highest-paid CEOs at publicly traded companies in the United States reached \$13.9 million in 2013, a nine percent increase over the previous year. Meanwhile, median household income has been stagnant or declining. From that perspective, the Obama administration did not so much save the economy as stabilize the status quo by reforming a few of the worst aspects of the system it inherited while adopting a strategic change in tone. Obama kept the key features of the Deep State intact.

“Increasingly I found myself spending time with people of means—law firm partners and investment bankers, hedge fund managers and venture capitalists. I found myself avoiding certain topics during conversations with them, papering over possible

differences, anticipating their expectations. I know that as a consequence of my fund-raising I became more like the wealthy donors I met, in the very particular sense that I spent more and more of my time above the fray, outside the world of immediate hunger, disappointment, fear, irrationality, and frequent hardship of the other 99 percent of the population—that is, the people that I’d entered public life to serve.”

—Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (2006)

They and other Washington operators insisted that as personally distasteful as overseeing the bailout supposedly was to them, it was imperative to save the financial sector in order to rescue the broader economy: in short, saving Wall Street saved Main Street. Besides, the bailed-out banks repaid the money with interest, so what was the problem? First, the interest on TARP loans to the banks was far below prevailing market interest rates, giving the banks a subsidy. Second, in the initial round of TARP payouts, the Treasury paid \$254 billion for bank assets worth only \$176 billion, giving the banks a \$78 billion windfall.

Third, bailing out Wall Street did not bail out Main Street: the banks not only took money from the Treasury, they also borrowed billions at a near-zero interest rate from the Federal Reserve System. But these funds did not translate into consumer or business loans as intended. Instead, the banks used the money to buy higher-yield foreign financial instruments and pocketed the arbitrage. In addition, an obscure provision in the bailout bill authorized the Fed, contrary to all sound banking practices, to pay banks a higher interest rate on deposits from banks than the banks had to pay to get loans from the Fed: banks could then borrow money from the Fed and turn right around and park their excess reserves back at the Fed. Instead of stimulating the economy, the money became a risk-free arbitrage mechanism for our biggest banks.

Finally, credit ratings agencies from then on have priced in the likelihood that the bailed-out institutions would always get rescued in the future; that assumption means those banks have a built-in competitive advantage over smaller banks and are able to borrow funds at lower cost. What TARP and the other bailout programs accomplished, then, was to recapitalize the banks, further concentrate them (the five largest American banks had assets equal to 43 percent of US gross domestic product before the crash; by 2012 they made up 56 percent), and send them mostly unreformed on their merry way to the next asset bubble.

Why this entire process was preferable to operating the failing big banks that had commercial depositors under the conservatorship of the

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation so as to protect those depositors, and concentrating Treasury and Federal Reserve resources directly on helping average people, illuminates how Wall Street has captured and assimilated the decision-making process at the upper levels of government. There is no question that the economy was in a grave state in September 2008, but Paulson's comments were still hyperbolic and, by panicking investors, likely helped create a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is not clear whether the 778-point drop in the Dow Jones Industrial Average after the House's initial rejection of the TARP package was a rational market response or whether the groundwork for a panic sell-off had not already been laid by Paulson's pronouncement that the sky would fall if the bill were not passed. The treasury secretary's handling of the crisis appeared intended to foreclose options other than those he wanted. Seeing bank CEOs among the ranks of the unemployed was apparently such an intolerable outcome that it was necessary to use fear of an economic Armageddon to stampede Congress into approving a virtual no-strings-attached package. A fear which would be exploited for similar aims just twelve years later.

Although the financial jargon, such as TARP, TALF, and repo was new, the modus operandi of those in charge bore an eerie resemblance to national security crises of times past. There is a striking similarity between Wall Street and War Street—the national security state—when they really need to get things done in a hurry. Bernanke's prediction of Armageddon if Congress did not give him and Paulson immediate *carte blanche* bears comparison with statements by national security officials in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. In order for policy-makers to accomplish their goals, the initial targets in both cases were American public opinion and the legislators who represented them. In the wake of 9/11, the national security state did its best to instill in the public the fear that a stateless group of terrorist criminals represented an existential threat to the United States, and that they were in league with a foreign government whose leader conveniently happened to be the hereditary enemy of the Bush clan. When fear is great enough, it justifies preemptive measures against anyone claimed to be a threat, even when the evidence of their wrongdoing is thin. The shock doctrine at work—and we never seem to learn.

Ever since the first ziggurats rose in ancient Babylonia, the so-called forces of order, stability, and tradition have feared a revolt from below. Beginning with Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre after the French Revolution, a whole library of political literature, some classical liberal, some conservative, some reactionary, has emphasized this theme. The title of Ortega y Gasset's most famous work, *The Revolt of the Masses*, tells us something about its mental atmosphere, a Freudian fear of defilement by

the great unwashed. But in our globalized postmodern America, what if this whole vision of order, stability, and who threatens those values is inverted? What if Christopher Lasch came closer to the truth in his book *The Revolt of the Elites*:

“In our time, the chief threat seems to come from those at the top of the social hierarchy, not the masses.”

Lasch held that the elites, by which he meant not just the superwealthy but also their managerial coat holders and professional apologists, were undermining the country’s promise as a constitutional republic with their prehensile greed, their asocial cultural values, and their absence of civic responsibility. Lasch wrote this in 1995. Now, over two decades later, the super-rich have at last achieved escape velocity from the gravitational pull of the society they control. They have been able to do this in part because laws were bent or reinterpreted in their favor.

“There is something wrong in this country; the judicial nets are so adjusted as to catch the minnows and let the whales slip through.”

The motto inscribed on the frieze of the United States Supreme Court Building says, “Equal Justice Under Law.” A stickler for semantics would say that the modifiers ‘equal’ and ‘under law’ are redundant, since justice by definition is equal treatment under a system of written and publicly accessible rules. It is a noble sentiment in any case. But perhaps a more accurate one would be:

“The strong do what they will, the weak suffer what they must.”

There is one law for the rich and another for the common clay. Practical, as opposed to explicit, inequality before the law is common in societies all over the world; it usually boils down to how legal procedures are applied as opposed to the letter of the law. Officials who pledged to uphold the law will always protest that they are neutral and unimpeachable executors of justice, and that it is insulting to suggest otherwise. But sometimes the truth slips out.

The ideology of national security persists not because it expresses empirically demonstrable truths but because it serves the interests of those who created the national security state and those who still benefit from its continued existence—the very people who are most responsible for the

increasingly maladroit character of US policy. These are the men, along with a few women, who comprise the self-selecting, self-perpetuating clique that, since World War II, has shaped and perverted national security policy. In a famous book published over a half century ago, the sociologist C. Wright Mills took a stab at describing this “power elite.” His depiction of an interlocking corporate, political, and military directorate remains valid today, although one might amend it to acknowledge the role played by insider journalists and policy intellectuals who serve as propagandists, gatekeepers, and packagers of the latest conventional wisdom.

Although analysts employed by the RAND Corporation or the Hudson Institute may not themselves qualify as full-fledged members of the national security elite, they facilitate its functioning. Much the same can be said about columnists who write for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the *Weekly Standard*, the research fellows busily organizing study groups at the Council on Foreign Relations or the American Enterprise Institute, and the policy-oriented academics who inhabit institutions like Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government or Princeton’s Wilson School.

To say that a power elite directs the affairs of state is not to suggest the existence of some dark conspiracy. It is simply to acknowledge the way Washington actually works. Especially on matters related to national security, policy-making has become oligarchic rather than democratic. The policy-making process is not open but closed, with the voices of privileged insiders carrying unimaginably greater weight than those of the unwashed masses.

According to Mills, the power elite and those trafficking in ideas useful to its core membership share a “cast of mind that defines international reality as basically military.” This was true when Mills wrote those words in the 1950s, and it is even truer today. For members of the policy elite, imperfect security is by definition inadequate security. Where gaps exist, they need to be filled. Defenses must be shored up. Yet ultimately absolute security cannot be negotiated; it can only be won. And winning implies the possession of military might along with a willingness to use it.

From the late 1940s to the present day, members of the power elite have shown an almost pathological tendency to misinterpret reality and inflate threats. The advisers to whom imperial presidents have turned for counsel have specialized not in cool judgment but in frenzied overreaction. Although the hawks have not always prevailed—in 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower deflected urgings to intervene in French Indochina, and in 1962, John F. Kennedy rejected the advice of those pressing to bomb Soviet military installations in Cuba—more often than not the proponents of action, whether advocating direct intervention, relying on covert means, or working

through proxies, have carried the day. The hawks may not always advocate immediate war per se, but they lean forward in the saddle, keeping sabers drawn and at the ready. The mantra of the hawks is the barely veiled threat:

“All options remain on the table.”

American strategists assumed that the Kremlin was prepared to risk all-out war in pursuit of its goals. In fact, given the Soviet Union’s huge losses in both World Wars and the enormous job of reconstruction that lay before it after 1945, it was equally likely that the Soviet leadership would do a great deal to avoid war. We now know that was, in fact, often the case. When Nikita Khrushchev put nuclear-tipped missiles into Cuba in 1962, part of his motive was to let the United States feel what it was like to fear direct attack and the devastation of its land, something the Soviets knew so well. And when he pulled them out, it was because he did not want to live through another, even more deadly war than the two he had already survived.

According to NSC 68, the Soviet program aimed at “the complete subversion and forcible destruction of the machinery of government and structure of society in the countries of the non-Soviet world and their replacement by an apparatus and structure subservient to and controlled by the Kremlin.” “Persistent crisis, conflict, and expansion” defined the essence of Soviet policy. All of this stood in sharp contrast to America’s benign posture, which expressed “the essential tolerance of our world outlook, our generous and constructive impulses, and the absence of covetousness in our international relations.”

The Red Army offered proof of the Kremlin’s nefarious intentions. NSC 68 professed alarm that “the Soviet Union actually possesses armed forces far in excess of those necessary to defend its national territory.” Yes, this does sound like a terribly bad thing for a country to do, good thing that sort of stuff isn’t happening anymore. According to Nitze’s analysis, the Soviet Union—actually a country leveled by World War II and barely in the recovery phase—already enjoyed a clear preponderance of power. Even so, day by day, it was “widening the gap between its preparedness for war and the unpreparedness of the free world for war.”

To respond to this unprecedented threat, Nitze could divine only three options: isolationism; preventive war (which implied a nuclear first strike against a country incapable of responding in kind); or simply “a more rapid build-up” of American power, especially military power. NSC 68 rejected the first option as tantamount to capitulation. It dismissed the second as “repugnant” and “morally corrosive.” That left only option number three.

Nitze's proposed buildup called for massively increased defense spending, with particular emphasis on accelerating the development of a hydrogen bomb; increased security assistance to train and equip the armies of friendly nations; efforts to enhance internal security and intelligence capabilities; and an intensification of covert operations aimed at "fomenting and supporting unrest and revolt" inside the Soviet bloc.

National security had to rank first among the nation's priorities, so NSC 68 called for curbing domestic expenditures. It also argued for higher taxes to make available the resources needed to fund rearmament. In effect, this 'Nitze Doctrine' offered a recipe for the permanent militarization of US policy.

Increased military spending need not imply belt-tightening by the average American, however. NSC 68 held out the prospect that "the economic effects of the program might be to increase the gross national product by more than the amount being absorbed for additional military and foreign assistance purposes." The United States, in other words, could afford both guns and butter—indeed, producing more guns might actually yield more butter.

For Nitze, this was a key selling point. Rather than being at odds with the nation's long-term economic well-being, high levels of military spending could actually provide the basis for continuing prosperity—an argument clearly designed to win over members of the administration, especially President Truman himself, worried about the domestic implications of pouring huge sums of money into defense. Here lay one source of the Nitze Doctrine's enduring appeal: Rearmament promised not only greater security but also ever-greater material abundance.

Yet Truman remained unconvinced, until fate intervened in the form of the Korean War. For an increasingly beleaguered president, the outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula came as yet another unwelcome surprise. For Nitze, it was a timely bit of good luck. Communist North Korea's invasion of the south seemingly affirmed the analysis contained in NSC 68: International communism, responding to directives issued by the Kremlin, was apparently on the march.

Not for the last time in recent American history—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 offers another example—Wise Men impulsively attributed earth-shattering significance to a development of middling importance. The result was to sweep aside remaining doubts about Nitze's prescription. NSC 68 became dogma. The defense budget more than tripled in size, most of the increased spending used not to fight in Korea but to fund the program of general rearmament that Nitze had proposed. The militarization of US policy began in earnest.

NSC 68 was much more than that. Although most Americans today

are unfamiliar with its contents, Nitze's masterwork stands in relation to contemporary US policy as Washington's Farewell Address or the Monroe Doctrine stood in relation to US policy in the nineteenth century. It provides the interpretive key that explains much that was to follow over subsequent decades.

In the mid-1950s, with Nitze himself leading the charge, there came reports of a dismaying "bomber gap," the Soviets said to be outstripping the United States in the production of strategic bombers. Soon thereafter, rumors of a "missile gap" made headlines, with the Soviets reportedly far ahead of the United States in long-range rocketry. The ubiquitous Nitze served as principal author of the Gaither Report that trumpeted this concern. By the end of the decade, insiders worried anxiously that Soviet strategic advantages were becoming so great as to undermine the "delicate balance of terror." The US ability to deter its adversary was eroding and might soon disappear.

In the mid-1970s, then CIA director George H. W. Bush convened a group of Wise Men, Nitze prominent among them, to investigate this concern. This so-called Team B exercise concluded that things were even worse than suspected: The United States was now lagging so far behind that a Soviet first strike loomed as a real possibility.

Hardly had the Soviet menace disappeared than the "Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States," chaired by Donald Rumsfeld in 1998, was warning that the United States was underestimating the dangers posed by the missile programs of such nations as Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. None of these, beginning with NSC 68's phantasmagoric description of Soviet capabilities and intentions in 1950, turned out to be accurate. In each and every case, proponents of the Nitze Doctrine garbled the facts and magnified the danger.

The bomber and missile gaps of the Eisenhower era were figments of overactive imaginations. Even as its nuclear arsenal grew in the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union never achieved anything remotely like a preemptive capability. As for the Rumsfeld Commission, its conclusions have proven entirely bogus. Yet in each of these cases, as with NSC 68, the hue and cry concocted by Wise Men produced the intended result.

In each case, as with NSC 68 itself, purportedly rigorous analysis actually served to disguise an exercise in group-think, yielding preconceived conclusions that reflected the prejudices, policy agendas, and career interests of the principals involved. George W. Bush's lieutenants did not invent the idea of "fixing" the facts to fit a particular policy. They merely elevated to new heights of audacity a technique that has played a central role in the politics of national security over the past seventy years.

When JFK became president, plans to overthrow Cuba's Fidel Castro using a small force of CIA-trained and -equipped Cuban exiles were well advanced. Kennedy just needed to give the signal to launch the invasion. The new president hesitated, however, directing General Lyman Lemnitzer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to evaluate the plan's feasibility. When the Chiefs endorsed the operation, Kennedy issued the order. An epic disaster ensued. It soon became apparent that the Chiefs had supported the mission less because they expected it to succeed than because they were counting on a CIA failure to pave the way for a conventional invasion, their preferred option for eliminating Castro. The Chiefs knew that Kennedy had no intention of ordering direct US intervention—he had said as much—but they were counting on a presidentially-ordered CIA disaster to force his hand. Rather than offering the president forthright professional advice, they had deceived him.

In the history of the national security state, the Bay of Pigs proved a turning point. A furious Kennedy, convinced—not without reason—that he had been set up and betrayed, drew two large conclusions from this experience. First, the Bay of Pigs convinced him that the CIA's reputation for tackling tough jobs quietly and economically was wildly overinflated. The hapless invasion scheme hatched by the agency never had even a remote chance of inciting a successful counterrevolution. The intelligence on which it was based had been at best defective, at worst simply invented. The slapdash exile force assembled to invade Cuba lacked numbers, training, discipline, competent leadership, and essential equipment, as well as adequate air and logistics support. From planning to execution, the entire operation was amateurish and harebrained. All this was evident even within the agency—although, needless to say, the CIA classified its own scathing internal investigation of the affair, thereby concealing it from the public.

Second, the Bay of Pigs convinced Kennedy that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, however many ribbons and medals they might have earned, were either stupid or untrustworthy.

“Those sons-of-bitches with all the fruit salad just sat there nodding, saying it would work.”

Whether the Chiefs were too dull or too clever by half, JFK concluded that allowing them any further say in the formulation of policy was a mistake. Although it might be necessary to go through the motions of consulting senior military leaders, never again would he defer to their collective judgment.

After the CIA hoodwinked his brother into launching the Bay of Pigs invasion, President Kennedy put the Attorney General on the White House

panel to find out what went wrong with Operation Zapata. The experienced lawyer found that, as his brother suspected, the CIA had deceived the president. They had lied to him about its possibility of success, and then banked on JFK ordering in the navy to avoid a humiliating defeat. When RFK confirmed this, with the advice of his father's friend Robert Lovett, the Attorney General recommended firing CIA Director Allen Dulles. But after listening to Lovett, the brothers went further and terminated the entire upper level of the Agency: Dulles, Deputy Director Charles Cabell, and Director of Plans Richard Bissell.

When is the last time something like that happened? Who was terminated over the catastrophe of 9/11? How accurate was Robert Kennedy about the Bay of Pigs? It's always nice for a prosecuting attorney to get a written confession. As later discovered in the Dulles archives at Princeton, Allen Dulles posthumously provided just that. In notes prepared for a magazine article, he admitted that such was his strategy: knowing the operation had little chance of success, he wanted President Kennedy to commit American military forces into Cuba. In 1984, when an article was published on the subject, Bissell also confessed to this hidden agenda.

And that's why the CIA—both current and former officials—helped kill JFK and RFK.

For those who occupy the inner circle of power, the national security state is an obstacle to be evaded rather than an asset to be harnessed. Viewed from the perspective of a defense secretary or national security adviser, professional military officers, career diplomats, or intelligence analysts are not partners but competitors. Rather than facilitating the exercise of executive power, the career professionals complicate or even obstruct it, pursuing the favored agendas of their own agencies instead. Yet because the institutions comprising the national security apparatus provide the foundation of executive power, the president-emperor is the person least inclined to acknowledge publicly the defects inherent in that apparatus.

As a consequence, the American people remain in the dark, persisting in the illusion that, whatever their faults, institutions like the Joint Chiefs and the CIA remain indispensable to the nation's safety and well-being. And so the national security state endures. It does so not because its activities enhance the security of the American people, but because, by its very existence, it provides a continuing rationale for political arrangements that are a source of status, influence, and considerable wealth.

Lapses in performance by this apparatus might logically raise questions about whether or not the United States would be better off without it. Instead, failures inspire new efforts to reorganize and reform, which almost invariably translate into further institutional expansion. The more the

national security state screws up, the more sprawling it becomes. In the meantime, presidents occupy themselves cultivating ways to work around, ignore, or subvert those institutions.

Although nominally serving the public, the institutions making up this apparatus go to great lengths to evade public scrutiny, performing their duties shielded behind multiple layers of secrecy. Ostensibly, this cult of secrecy exists to deny information to America's enemies. Its actual purpose is to control the information provided to the American people, releasing only what a particular agency or administration is eager to make known, while withholding (or providing in sanitized form) information that might embarrass the government or call into question its policies. One-way communication, the priestly monopoly of secret knowledge, the multiplication of secret agencies, the suppression of open discussion, and even the insulation of error against public criticism and exposure nullifies public reaction and makes rational dissent the equivalent of patriotic disaffection, if not treason.

The case of *United States v. Reynolds* provides an early, telling illustration of how the system works. In October 1948, a B-29 Superfortress bomber engaged in testing an electronic device crashed near Waycross, Georgia, killing several of those on board. Widows of the deceased crewmen, wanting to know what had caused the crash, petitioned the Air Force to release the accident investigation report. Air Force officials refused, claiming that they could not comply "without seriously hampering national security." When the widows sued, the Supreme Court found in favor of the Air Force.

Writing for the majority, Chief Justice Fred Vinson asserted that in "a time of vigorous preparation for national defense" the courts should steer clear of telling senior national security officials what information to release and what to withhold. Given the overriding importance of keeping secrets absolutely secret, wrote Vinson, courts needed to take officials at their word: "Insisting upon an examination of the evidence, even by the judge alone, in chambers," posed too great a risk. A half century later, when the Pentagon finally declassified the accident report, it held no sensitive information at all; rather, it showed that the aircraft had crashed due to poor maintenance and pilot error. The Air Force had used claims of national security to conceal garden-variety organizational ineptitude.

In May 2007, in a stinging critique of post-9/11 military leadership, Army Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling wrote in *Armed Forces Journal* that "a private who loses a rifle suffers far greater consequences than a general who loses a war." Yingling is correct—and one could easily broaden his indictment to include high-ranking civilians. A Pentagon file clerk who misplaces a classified document faces stiffer penalties than a defense secretary whose arrogant recklessness consumes thousands of lives.

Washington's explosive expansion and consolidation around the Beltway would seem to make a mockery of the frequent pronouncements that national governance is breaking down. The institutions of the visible state may be dysfunctional, but the machinery of the Deep State has been steadily expanding. That this secret and unaccountable shadow government floats freely above the gridlock between both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue is the paradox of American governance in the twenty-first century: drone strikes, data mining, secret prisons, and Panopticon-like control of citizens' private data thanks to the technology of Silicon Valley on the one hand; while the ordinary, visible institutions of self-government decline to the status of a banana republic.

The ruling structures of large and complex societies are never uniform. A coalition of dominant factions operates according to an unwritten (or even unspoken) agreement that wary cooperation is better than open strife, and that any clash of conflicting interests ought to be shelved—or at least hidden from public view—in favor of longer-term advantage. Critical analyses of the various components of the Deep State tend to view them as stand-alone entities rather than cooperating factions in a larger social environment.

The elites of this country have far more in common with their rich friends in London, Paris, and Tokyo than with their fellow American citizens.

Former Speaker Tip O'Neill described congressional meetings with Reagan as encounters with an actor on a set reading his lines and hitting his mark.

“He came into the room, read from note cards, and tuned out.”

No doubt Reagan's publicists would have described this behavior as focusing on the Big Picture, or choosing to remain above the fray. Some have retrospectively come to see Reagan's presidency as transformational in a more ominous sense:

“Reagan was the Trojan horse in which a regiment of eager strategists hid, peering through its eye-holes as they wheeled it surreptitiously into the White House. The people at the helm had their sights set on a total overhaul of the relationship between state, government, and capital. They were activists, people with a vision, steeped in emergent neoliberal economic theory and intent on revising the agenda.”

Secret agencies, clandestine programs, and hidden agendas have been a fact of life since the Manhattan Project. What was new in the Reagan

administration was the rise of the expertly choreographed presidency that eased the chief executive out of the messy business of formulating policy and into the realm of the ceremonial. During Watergate, there was no question where culpability and accountability lay. No one was in doubt that Nixon was in charge—that is why his denials rang so hollow. Iran-Contra was far more ambiguous. Who was really running the show? Was it Reagan or a rogue colonel in the West Wing? The Keystone Cops aspect of the affair—we remember National Security Adviser Bud McFarlane flying to Tehran with a cake and a Bible—may have obscured the larger truth that Iran-Contra was a conspiracy to subvert the Constitution.

Reagan may not have been much on policy, but when it came to the ceremonial presidency, he set the gold standard. His time in office coincided with the final triumph of presidential campaign packaging, where an artfully staged and likable persona is deemed more electable than a candidate who has mastered policy issues but does not possess a relatable backstory. It was in the 1980s that the focus group—an opinion survey that began during World War II as a way to gauge the effectiveness of propaganda films—came into its own in political campaigns. A new emphasis was put on subliminal and emotional reactions to candidates at the expense of any rational evaluation of their policy positions.

In the age of permanent national security crisis, serious issues are invariably taken up off-stage and behind closed doors. Here is where the real business of contemporary politics occurs. Here, the real action involves only a handful of players, for the most part unelected, their deliberations largely occurring behind a veil of secrecy. From the outset, two fundamental convictions have informed this practice.

The first is the belief that by consulting a cadre of handpicked Wise Men, presidents are likely to make better decisions. Although “the decider” may make the final call, the actual process of arriving at decisions proceeds collectively, with the president drawing on the counsel of smart, sophisticated, and worldly-wise advisers, who themselves tap the expertise of functionaries possessing more specialized knowledge.

The second conviction relates to the necessity of these advisers working exclusively for the chief executive and no one else. Only if assured that their counsel will remain shielded from the public will Wise Men speak with candor and honesty—here lies the basis for claims of “executive privilege.” Indeed, as a general proposition, Wise Men view popular—or even congressional—intrusion into policy formulation as distinctly unhelpful, if not downright dangerous. The intricacies of national security are said to lie beyond the ken of the average citizen, who is all too likely to be swayed by short-term, emotional considerations rather than taking a sober, long-term view. The

masses, being notoriously fickle, are incapable of grasping such matters. They can't see the big picture. They don't appreciate nuance. They lack resolve.

Public opinion is suspect; when it comes to national security, the public's anointed role is to defer. A president seeking a genuinely strategic approach will rely on seasoned insiders—rational, dispassionate, well-informed, well-connected, and guided by a common vocabulary and a common understanding of the way the world actually works.

This means taking their cues from the likes of Dean Acheson, who himself explained how senior officials manufacture deference: by relying on propaganda. As he wrote in his memoirs, when offering public explanations of policy, “qualification must give way to simplicity, nicety and nuance to bluntness, almost brutality, to carry the point home.” The idea is not to describe truth in all of its messy complexity, but to convey a point of view that is “clearer than truth.”

To judge by the reckless misjudgments that have characterized US policy since 9/11, presidents would be better served if they relied on the common sense of randomly chosen citizens rather than consulting sophisticated insiders. It is, after all, the children and grandchildren of ordinary citizens who end up fighting the wars that Wise Men concoct.

There has been a collapse of the assumption that major national security agencies actually adhere to a common definition of the national interest. The operative question becomes this: If neither the CIA nor the Joint Chiefs of Staff had existed when Osama bin Laden launched his attack, if Congress had not created the Department of Defense or the National Security Council back in 1947, would the United States find itself in any worse shape than it is? That is, if Bush had to rely upon the institutions that existed through World War II—a modest State Department for diplomacy and two small cabinet agencies to manage military affairs—would he have fucked up Iraq any more than he did?

To frame the question more broadly: When considering the national security state as it has evolved and grown over the past six decades, what exactly has been the value added? And if the answer is none—if, indeed, the return on investment has been essentially negative—then perhaps the time has come to consider dismantling an apparatus that demonstrably serves no useful purpose.

All complex societies have an establishment, a social network committed to its own enrichment and perpetuation. In terms of its scope, financial resources, and sheer global reach, the American hybrid state is in a class by itself: sheer quantity can achieve a quality all its own. That said, it is neither omniscient nor invincible. The institution is not so much sinister

(although it possesses menacing aspects) as it is relentlessly well entrenched. Far from being invincible, its failures—Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, et cetera; its manifest incapacity to anticipate, avert, or appropriately respond to the greatest financial crash since the Great Depression; even its curious blindness to the obvious potential for a hurricane to drown New Orleans—are routine enough that it is only its protectiveness toward its higher-ranking officials that allows them to escape the consequences of their frequent ineptitude.

Far from being brilliant conspirators, the prevalence of mediocre thinking is what frequently makes the system's operatives stand out. We had better debunk an erroneous popular notion which holds that structures that arise from evolutionary processes are qualitatively "better" than the ones preceding them. The Deep State is a wasteful and incompetent method of governance. But it persists because its perverse incentive structure frequently rewards failure and dresses it up as success. Its pervasive, largely commonplace corruption and creation of synthetic bogeymen and foreign scapegoats anesthetize the public into a state of mind variously composed of apathy, cynicism, and fear—the very antithesis of responsible citizenship.

Chapter Sixty-four

The 51st State

“If the Israeli government were the only Jews you knew, you would think Hitler was a hero.”

The problem with the Jewish race idea is there are no DNA sequences common to all Jews and absent from all non-Jews. There is nothing in the human genome that makes or diagnoses a person as a Jew. And even if there were some such sequences, there would be nothing that followed from them, nothing that counted as what we mean by an identity.

Mainstream Judaism solemnly maintains that the entire cosmos exists just so that Jewish rabbis can study their holy scriptures, and that if Jews cease this practice, the universe will come to an end. China, India, Australia, and even the distant galaxies will all be annihilated if the rabbis in Jerusalem and Brooklyn stop debating the Talmud. This is a central article of faith of Orthodox Jews, and anyone who dares doubt it is considered an ignorant fool. Secular Jews may be a bit more skeptical about this grandiose claim, but they too believe that the Jewish people are the central heroes of history and the ultimate wellspring of human morality, spirituality, and learning.

Israeli children usually finish twelve years of school without receiving any clear picture of global historical processes. They are taught almost nothing about China, India, or Africa, and though they learn about the Roman Empire, the French Revolution, and the Second World War, these isolated jigsaw pieces do not add up to any overarching narrative. Instead, the only coherent history offered by the Israeli educational system begins with the Hebrew Old Testament, continues to the Second Temple era, skips between various Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and culminates with the rise of Zionism, the Holocaust, and the establishment of the state of Israel.

Most students leave school convinced that this must be the main plotline of the entire human story. For even when pupils hear about the Roman Empire or the French Revolution, the discussion in class focuses on the way the Roman Empire treated the Jews or on the legal and political status of Jews in the French Republic. People fed on such a historical diet have a very hard time digesting the idea that Judaism had relatively little impact on the

world as a whole. Yet the truth is that Judaism played only a modest role in the annals of our species. Unlike such universal religions as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, Judaism has always been a tribal creed. It focuses on the fate of one small nation and one tiny land, and has little interest in the fate of all other people and all other countries. For example, it cares little about events in Japan or about the people of the Indian subcontinent. It is no wonder, therefore, that its historical role was limited.

Israelis often use the term ‘the three great religions,’ thinking that these religions are Christianity (2.3 billion adherents), Islam (1.8 billion) and Judaism (15 million). Hinduism, with its billion believers, and Buddhism, with its 500 million followers—not to mention the Shinto religion (50 million) and the Sikh religion (25 million)—don’t make the cut. This warped concept of ‘the three great religions’ often implies in the minds of Israelis that all major religious and ethical traditions emerged out of the womb of Judaism, which was the first religion to preach universal ethical rules. As if humans prior to the days of Abraham and Moses lived in a Hobbesian state of nature without any moral commitments, and as if all of contemporary morality derives from the Ten Commandments. This is a baseless and insolent idea, which ignores many of the world’s most important ethical traditions.

“Personally I like the idea of descending not from brutal world-conquerors, but from insignificant people who seldom poked their noses into other people’s business.”

When looking at the entire range of stories that seek to define my true identity and give meaning to my actions, it is striking to realize that scale matters very little. Some stories, such as Simba’s Circle of Life, seem to stretch for eternity. It is only against the backdrop of the entire universe that I can know who I am. Other stories, such as most nationalist and tribal myths, are puny by comparison. Zionism holds sacred the adventures of about 0.2 percent of humankind and 0.005 percent of the earth’s surface during a tiny fraction of the span of time. The Zionist story fails to ascribe any meaning to the Chinese empires, to the tribes of New Guinea, and to the Andromeda galaxy, as well as to the countless eons that passed before the existence of Moses, Abraham, and the evolution of apes. Such myopia can have serious repercussions.

One of the major obstacles for any peace treaty between Israelis and Palestinians is that Israelis are unwilling to divide the city of Jerusalem. They argue that this city is “the eternal capital of the Jewish people”—and surely you cannot compromise on something eternal. What are a few dead people compared to eternity? This is of course utter nonsense. Eternity is

at the very least 13.8 billion years—the current age of the universe. Planet Earth was formed about 4.5 billion years ago, and humans have existed for at least 2 million years. In contrast, the city of Jerusalem was established just 5,000 years ago and the Jewish people are at most 3,000 years old. This hardly qualifies as eternity. As for the future, the current understanding of physics tells us that planet Earth will be absorbed by an expanding sun about 7.5 billion years from now, and that our universe will continue to exist for at least 13 billion years more. Does anyone seriously believe that the Jewish people, the state of Israel, or the city of Jerusalem will still exist 13,000 years from now, let alone 13 billion years? Looking to the future, Zionism has a horizon of no more than a few centuries, yet it is enough to exhaust the imagination of most Israelis and somehow qualify as ‘eternity.’ And people are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of “the eternal city,” which they would probably refuse to make for an ephemeral collection of houses.

Luntz’s advice for Israel reflects the understanding that reasonableness in negotiations, undergirded by empathy for one’s negotiating partners, is the expected norm of public discourse. His documents attempt to explain how to feign reasonableness while communicating a message that undermines the reasonableness of one’s interlocutors in the eyes of third parties.

In November 2012, President Obama remarked:

“There’s no country on Earth that would tolerate missiles raining down on its citizens from outside its borders.”

He made the statement in defense of Israel’s attack on Gaza, which was launched in the name of protecting itself from Hamas missile attacks.

“We are fully supportive of Israel’s right to defend itself from missiles landing on people’s homes and workplaces and potentially killing civilians. And we will continue to support Israel’s right to defend itself.”

How would people living in areas of Yemen, Somalia, or Pakistan that have been regularly targeted by US drones or missile strikes view that statement?

In a very real sense, the Palestinians are paying the world’s price for the 2,000 years of oppression, even though they had little to do with it. This is reminiscent of ancient times when the Canaanites basically paid for what the Egyptians did. Israelis seem to have forgotten the commandment not to persecute the stranger because they have been strangers in someone else’s land. The slogan “Never again” has come to mean ‘Get them before they get you.’ Instead, it could mean:

“We know what it is to wander the earth at the mercy of other nations. Let us take no path which would increase the misery of displaced peoples and make sure no one else goes through a holocaust even vaguely approximating ours.”

One of the most stable political situations in the West is the use of charges of antisemitism to attack those who criticize Israel. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who championed Palestine in her primary run, was quickly broken by the pro-Israeli lobby, before she was even elected. The UK Labour party under Jeremy Corbyn has been under constant attack for “antisemitism” because Corbyn is sympathetic to Palestinians. And recently, Representative Ilhan Omar suggested that donation from AIPAC are why Congress supports Israel. I don’t think that’s mostly correct. They fear AIPAC for far more than monetary reasons. Anyway, like a typical liberal, Ilhan was forced into apologizing. Try that shit with us though and see what that gets you.

Let’s state this simply: Israel is a religious-ethnic apartheid settler state, where the land and homes of much of the people who lived there were seized by force. The problem is that criticism of Israel, a particularly evil state, is deliberately conflated with criticism of Jews, because Israel is an explicitly Jewish state.

Jews: average people—some kind, some assholes; don’t belong in camps (unless its a voluntary summer camp, say in Upstate New York or the Georgia mountains or the Sierra Nevadas)

Israelis: citizens of an apartheid colonial state running the world’s largest open-air prison; also don’t belong in camps.

Any Israeli who opposes the government’s Palestine policies is good in that regard. Any Israeli who supports the government is evil. It’s not hard. Extend this to whichever groups and situations you like.

People have responsibility exactly equal to their power. Nonetheless if you support evil, you are culpable. Most ethical situations are, in fact, black and white. We just like to pretend they aren’t. Let’s take another situation: Raising the price of Insulin 1,000% in a few years—evil. People who do it? Mass murderers. Correct punishment? Same as for any other murderers.

None of this is to say redemption is impossible. One of my friends supported the Iraq War. He quickly realized his mistake, reversed his position and has consistently opposed shitty American wars since then. George Bush wouldn’t get off so easy: since he had a lot of power his

responsibility is much greater and since he's no longer in power he can no longer "make it up."

The rule for redemption is as follows: First stop doing evil. Apologize. Make it up. Those insulin execs: drop the prices back down. Disgorge all the profits you made, with a priority to the families of those you killed. That's all it takes. But if you keep doing it or supporting it you are responsible or complicit. This isn't hard. Don't do evil. Don't support evil. If you do or support evil, then you are stained by that evil.

As for Israelis: it is not their fault they are Israelis. However if they support their government's policies against Palestinians, well, they're evil. But remember: still don't belong in camps. The same is true of Jews, as it is of individuals belonging to any identity-group you wish to name. With respect to Israel, well, all it has to do is offer all Palestinians full citizenship and give them reparations equal to what was stolen. This will probably mean the end of Israel as an religious-ethnic state, but are religious-ethnic states a good thing?

We all know what is required when we do wrong. Stop doing harm, apologize and recompense the victims as best one is able. While often what we should do as individuals isn't true of states, for redemption and forgiveness, it is. Stop doing evil. Say sorry. Make it up as best one can. But first, stop doing evil.

There is a peculiar phrase: 'people who disagree with you.' It's used to reduce the depth of political conflicts—they are mere "disagreements," things we shouldn't get too upset over. And it's true that it would be silly to get moralistic over things we simply disagree about. But when we actually remember the human stakes of politics, something seems strange about using the term 'disagreement' to describe these differences. I have a disagreement with Bari Weiss, it's true. I believe that the mass murder of unarmed protesters is something that must be loudly condemned. She disagrees with me. I disagree with George W. Bush over whether half a million Iraqis should be dead who would otherwise have been alive.

If politics are just a hobby, then it does indeed seem strange to hate Bari Weiss. After all, she's apparently a very nice person. But if politics are about the lives of people affected by power, then it doesn't matter at all that she's nice. It's not cute that she chatters about the pen marks on her boob. It is, in fact, rather disturbing, because it shows that she, like so many of her Times colleagues, is able to be completely detached from the reality of the subjects she is writing about. You have the luxury of obsessing over trivia when things that truly matter are invisible to you.

I do not become consumed by hatred casually. I am a reluctant hater. Nevertheless, when I see photos of Palestinian teenagers with blood gushing

from what is left of their faces, I cannot feel anything but rage at those who can use their prominent media platforms to dismiss pain of victims and confidently hold forth with their opinions on a world they know nothing about.

There is an effective debating trick called the Gish gallop, in which you bury your opponent in an avalanche of arguments. The point is to overwhelm them with sheer quantity of claims—disregarding the veracity or strength of the arguments advanced—so that they are unable to respond to everything, and the audience is left thinking that something in that onslaught must be accurate. In the *New York Times Sunday Review*, Bret Stephens runs through a litany of Israeli talking points and propaganda. None of them are particularly original, convincing, or true.

Given just how frequently the arguments Stephens advances are trotted out, it's worthwhile to try and dispel the most prominent ones. To avoid producing a narcolepsy-inducing exegesis, let me focus on the broad strokes of Stephens' arguments and not things like who violated the November 2008 ceasefire (It was Israel). First, Stephens summarizes what he claims to be the progressive narrative: More than a half-century of occupation of Palestinian territories is a massive injustice that fair-minded people can no longer ignore, especially given America's financial support for Israel. Continued settlement expansion in the West Bank proves Israel has no interest in making peace on equitable terms. And endless occupation makes Israel's vaunted democracy less about Jewish self-determination than it is about ethnic subjugation.

“This indictment would be damning if it were true, or even half-true. It's not.”

He then proceeds to lay out a welter of “facts” that supposedly undermine this progressive narrative. In reality, very little of what follows even approaches relevance to the progressive narrative, let alone disproves it. This is because the “narrative” is actually true, and almost impossible to escape if one looks at the facts honestly. Israel maintains an occupation and the settlements are illegal—it's quite clear and simple. One need only look at maps of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory to conclude that “peace on equitable terms” is not going to be offered willingly by a power engaged in a decades-long land theft.

Stephens does not actually refute, or even address, the “progressive narrative's” claim about settlement expansion. An honest presentation of the facts would make it clear that the progressives are right. He does, however, run through a laundry list of other ostensibly exculpatory talking points.

“Israel’s enemies were committed to its destruction long before it occupied a single inch of Gaza or the West Bank.”

Let’s remember what actually happened, and why there is a state of Israel in the first place. Like ICE, Israel is less eternal than it seems and was created within the lifetimes of still-living people. In 1948, approximately 750,000 Palestinians were uprooted, ethnically cleansed, and displaced from their homes. In the process, Israeli military forces perpetrated mass atrocities. Palestinians and neighboring Arabs fought back against the project to seize and encroach upon their lands. To frame Palestinian resistance as motivated by an irrational seething antisemitism—as Stephens does—and not by opposition to land theft is wildly disingenuous. Even Israeli Zionist historian Benny Morris writes in his sprawling work *Righteous Victims*:

“The fear of territorial displacement and dispossession was to be the chief motor of Arab antagonism to Zionism.”

It’s perfectly obvious why Palestinians would be resistant to the creation of a Jewish state on land they already inhabited.

Despite the initial injustice of Israel’s founding, much of mainstream Palestinian leadership has, for decades, backed a two-state solution, with the pre-June 1967 war borders as the basis for the states, meaning that the Palestinian state would consist of the West Bank and Gaza (East Jerusalem as the capital), only 22 percent of historic Palestine. Since then, Israelis have never accepted this immense compromise—with Palestinians giving up 78 percent of their land—because they have consistently hungered for even more land. And Israel has disregarded the international consensus which has coalesced around a solution, grounded in international law. Which brings us to Stephens’ next context-free fact:

“Israeli prime ministers offered a Palestinian state in 2000 and 2008; they were refused both times.”

And now with Trump’s latest proposal Stephens would argue it’s three times. Palestinian rejectionism is a theme in Israeli hasbara, and Stephens’ rendition is no exception. The recitation tends to go something like: Israelis have time and again bent over backwards to offer Palestinians a state of their own, but they are consistently unwilling to accept peace. Notably absent from Stephens’ assertion is any kind of objective assessment of the so-called “Palestinian states” offered in 2000 and 2008, and that’s for very good reason. Of the 2000 negotiations (Camp David), former foreign minister Shlomo Ben Ami states:

“If I were a Palestinian, I would have rejected Camp David, as well.”

What followed were the Taba negotiations—probably the closest a peace agreement has ever gotten to what international law and consensus dictate—which ended when Prime Minister Barak withdrew his negotiators. Stephens continues to thrash wildly about in the hopes of landing one good punch:

“In proportion to its size, Israel has voluntarily relinquished more territory taken in war than any state in the world.”

This point sounds convincing, until one realizes it’s utterly irrelevant and bizarre. UN Resolution 242 stresses “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.” This means that the territory Israel has taken in war must be returned. To frame Israel’s withdrawals as a magnanimous or benevolent gesture is to fundamentally distort what international law entails, and the nature of the conflict. You’re not supposed to seize territory, so relinquishing seized territory just means “ceasing to commit an ongoing crime.” If Mr. Stephens’ claim is true, consider what it also means: In order for Israel to claim that it “has voluntarily relinquished more territory taken in war than any state in the world,” it would also be necessary for Israel to steal more land than many (any?) other countries, relative to its size. Stephens and his ilk would no doubt reply that this is because the ever-victimized Israel faces an unceasing onslaught—besieged on all sides—from its hostile, Jew-hating neighbors. Without running through the full record here, none of the wars Israel has fought were wars of necessity. They were all wars of choice or wars of folly.

Consider, also, this brief review of recent Israeli wartime history: Israel cheered on the Iraq war in 2003; in 2006 Israel invaded Lebanon; in 2008–09 it attacked Gaza, then again in 2012, then again in 2014, and, then, during the overwhelmingly nonviolent Great March of Return, from March 2018–present, Israel has massacred well over 100 protesters and injured more than 10,000 others; Israel routinely threatens Iran with an attack (to cite one recent example); and Israel has fired airstrikes in Syria (not to mention given medical treatment to members of an al-Qaeda affiliate group). It is striking to compare Iran—the wellspring of evil, if you were to believe the Israeli government—and Israel’s record of military aggression. Iran fares relatively well, though not perfectly.

Many defenders of Israel will tell you that the country can’t possibly give up control over the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. They’ve tried that already, and it didn’t turn out well. Building on the theme of Israeli magnanimity, Stephens notes that:

“The government of Ariel Sharon removed every Israeli settlement and soldier from the Gaza Strip in 2005. The result of Israel’s withdrawal allowed Hamas to seize power two years later and spark three wars, causing ordinary Israelis to think twice about the wisdom of duplicating the experience in the West Bank.”

It’s tough to know where to start here, because there’s so much to unpack. Let’s begin with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s own justification for the withdrawal. He said that the disengagement from Gaza was done, in part, in an effort to strengthen Israel’s grip on the far more valuable primary settlement blocs in the West Bank. In other words, Sharon was admitting that he decided to end the illegal land grab in Gaza to focus on the illegal land grab in the West Bank. Some Israeli settler families, handsomely compensated, moved from illegal settlements in Gaza to illegal settlements in the West Bank. Indeed, in 2003, Sharon explained:

“The occupation is bad for Israel and bad for Palestinians, and bad for the Israeli economy. Controlling 3.5 million Palestinians cannot go on forever.”

But this is not to say, as blind supporters of Israel often do, that Israel had ended its occupation of Gaza. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert later clarified the nature of Israel’s relationship to Gaza:

“We will operate, enter, and pull out as needed.”

Despite protestations to the contrary, Gaza remains occupied territory because Israel continues to control the land borders, airspace, and sea in the Strip, according to the UN and ICRC. The extent of Israeli control over the small strip of land is tough to overstate, even though they have “left.” This is also why Trump’s proposal does nothing to end the occupation—if you don’t control your own borders, you’re in a prison camp, not a sovereign nation.

As for the election of Hamas, in 2006 the militant Islamist party won a majority of seats in parliament, a victory deemed fair and free by the Carter Center for Election Observation. In the wake of the election, senior leaders of Hamas were making moderating overtures towards peace. But Gazans had made the wrong decision, so the United States and Israel responded by backing an attempted coup. In response to Hamas’ subsequent consolidation of power, Israel imposed an illegal and inhumane blockade.

“Nearly 1,300 Israeli civilians have been killed in Palestinian terrorist attacks in this century: That’s the proportional equivalent of about 16 Sept. 11s in the United States.”

This is remarkable: To Stephens, the Palestinian dead are negligible. Not even worth noting. Stephens portrays it as a one-sided conflict in which the only deaths are peace-loving Israelis killed by bloodthirsty Palestinians, when in reality the number of Palestinian deaths outnumbers the number of Israeli deaths by 7:1. In Operation Protective Edge alone, which took place during the summer of 2014, the Israeli Defense Forces killed over 1,400 civilians in Gaza, of those about 550 were children, according to the United Nations. Six civilians in Israel were killed. Why the discrepancy? Israel has the most powerful military in the Middle East, in part thanks to generous aid packages from Uncle Sam. Your kids might be drinking leaded water but check out those well-equipped and -trained IDF women—Girl Power! The chief Palestinian resistance weapon is a rock, though in Gaza sometimes they fire rockets—which are more like glorified fireworks than sophisticated pieces of military hardware—or set fire to kites. The death ratio is precisely what you get when you have a resource-poor, desperate, occupied group up against one of the world’s most powerful militaries.

“Also: If the Jewish state is really so villainous, why doesn’t it behave more like Syria’s Bashar al-Assad or Russia’s Vladimir Putin—both of whom, curiously, continue to have prominent sympathizers and apologists on the anti-Israel left?”

It does! All of them are butchers who murder babies; all of them are led by authoritarian strongmen with a commitment to remain in power above nearly all else. The difference is, given the mainstream narrative’s hatred of Vlad and Bashar, they are given far less latitude to do things without criticism than shitheads like Netanyahu who hide behind a pile of holocaust victims.

“Next is the belief that anti-Zionism is a legitimate political position, and not another form of prejudice.”

Discussions about Zionism tend to take us away from Israel’s egregious record, but I have tried to remain focused on how Zionism in practice in Israel leads to a Jewish supremacist state. I shouldn’t be surprised, but the flagrancy of Stephens’ disingenuousness is truly shocking. Mr. Stephens can scream, gnash his teeth, throw a tantrum, and loudly assert this point until he is blue in the face, but it doesn’t make it true. Stephens

is ignoring the long history of anti-Zionist Jews, secular and religious, who opposed the creation of the state of Israel and now oppose a Jewish supremacist state that affords special privileges to Jews and discriminates against non-Jews. To dismiss them as anti-Semites or self-hating Jews is not just intellectually lazy, but it actually puts him at odds with a significant swath of the Jewish community. Without offering any evidence, Stephens' promulgation can be easily dismissed. In fact, Jewish Voice for Peace, an American anti-occupation organization comprised of thousands of Jews, recently formally declared itself anti-Zionist. Even President Jeremy Ben-Ami of the liberal-centrist J-Street, a pro-Israel lobbying organization, parted ways with Stephens, explaining:

“We do not accept the contention that all anti-Zionism should be automatically defined as antisemitism.”

Later, Stephens makes clear that he is fundamentally ignorant of what anti-Zionism actually is. He writes:

“Anti-Zionism proposes nothing less than the elimination of that identity and the political dispossession of those who cherish it, with no real thought of what would likely happen to the dispossessed. Do progressives expect the rights of Jews to be protected should Hamas someday assume the leadership of a reconstituted ‘Palestine’?”

To believe that a state shouldn't be explicitly Jewish is only “political dispossession” in the sense that having a democratic government deprives one ethnic group of the right to enshrine its identity in the state itself. Dispossessed of what? The notion that the result of Israel becoming a binational state with equal rights for all would be Jews thrown into the sea is pandering nonsense. What Stephens really seems to fear is that Jews might be treated like Palestinians already are. When he asks if progressives expect “the rights of Jews to be protected,” it's unclear what kinds of rights he's referring to. If he means ethnic supremacist rights like the right to demolish Palestinian homes, steal land with impunity, claim citizenship and all the exclusive privileges that go along with it, solely on the basis of your Jewish identity (the Law of Return), then, no, those rights should not be protected. As for basic civil rights, afforded to all citizens, I see no reason to believe that Palestinians would be unable to live alongside Jews in amity. Unlike Bret Stephens, I don't happen to believe Arabs are uniquely barbaric. As in South Africa and Northern Ireland, peace is possible.

Stephens shuffles on:

“Of course it’s theoretically possible to distinguish anti-Zionism from antisemitism, just as it’s theoretically possible to distinguish segregationism from racism. But the striking feature of anti-Zionist rhetoric is how broadly it overlaps with traditionally anti-Semitic tropes.”

This confused (and confusing) analogy scrambles the brain. Stephens has managed to turn reality on its head. It is Zionism in practice that has led to Jewish-only towns, segregated roads and schools. Anti-Zionists are opposed to this kind of segregation and racism prevalent in Israeli society. They are the ones calling for integration and equal rights for all, not fighting against it like Stephens is.

“To say, as progressives sometimes do, that Jews are ‘colonizers’ in Israel is anti-Semitic because it advances the lie that there is no ancestral or historic Jewish tie to the land.”

It is no contradiction to acknowledge Jewish historical, religious, and cultural ties to certain land areas and simultaneously acknowledge that Israel has engaged in ethnic cleansing and has seized and colonized Palestinian land. When the Zionist movement started its ethnic cleansing operations in Palestine, in early December 1947, the country had a “mixed” population of Palestinians and Jews. The indigenous Palestinians made up the two-third majority, down from ninety percent at the start of the Mandate. One third were Jewish newcomers: Zionist settlers and refugees from war torn Europe, most of whom had arrived in Palestine since the 1920s.

Imagine a white South African saying that it was anti-white to criticize white colonization of Africa, on the grounds that white people had ancestral ties to the land. Africa was, after all, the birthplace of humanity! This would be childish: The question is ‘What actually happened?’ Colonization here is the description of a process by which people came to a place and displaced those living there already. This happened—it was explicitly the point of the Zionist project. It doesn’t mean that Jews in Israel have no legitimate claims, it is simply an attempt to accurately describe the historical process that created the present-day demographic reality of Israel.

Stephens continues with another reckless accusation of antisemitism:

“To claim that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, when manifestly it is not, is anti-Semitic because it’s an attempt to Nazify the Jewish state.”

It remains unclear here whether Stephens believes that it is anti-Semitic to accuse Israel of committing genocide if it is committing genocide, or

whether it's only anti-Semitic because it's false. The arguments in favor of applicability of the G-word are straightforward enough. Gaza has been described as: "a prison camp," "the largest concentration camp ever to exist," and the "Gaza ghetto." One Israeli government official said that they intended to "put the Palestinians on a diet." Infrastructure is crumbling. Borders are strictly controlled by Israel and Egypt, and a harsh blockade has been imposed so things like fruits, vegetables, and construction materials have historically been prevented from entering. Every two years or so, Israel "mows the lawn," killing hundreds, injuring thousands, destroying sewage and power plants, mosques, schools, houses, and chicken farms. With only 2–4 hours a day of electricity, Gaza is unlivable. 97 percent of the water is undrinkable. What do you call an open-air prison in which the population is being poisoned?

One needs to be able to use accurate language. If use of phrases like 'concentration camp' would "Nazify" Israel and therefore definitionally be anti-Semitic, then Israel cannot, no matter what the actual facts are, ever be accused of creating a concentration camp. This gives an extraordinary license for abusive behavior: If Israel cannot be accused of anything that was also done by Nazi Germany, because to do so would be to compare it to Nazi Germany, then it will be impossible to speak honestly when the Israeli government commits particular crimes with historical precedents. Walling off particular allegations as impermissible—regardless of the facts—offers a dangerous kind of immunity from scrutiny.

"To insist that the only state in the world that has forfeited the moral right to exist just happens to be the Jewish state is anti-Semitic, too: Are Israel's purported crimes really worse than those of, say, Zimbabwe or China, whose rights to exist are never called into question?"

The phrase 'right to exist' should be critically examined, because it's used constantly in these discussions, but it's not quite clear what it means. It is designed to sound unobjectionable: Who could possibly deny the Right To Exist?—as if denial of this right would mean the endorsement of genocide. But when we think clearly about it, it's a peculiar expression: What does it mean for a state to have a "right to exist?" When supporters of Israel use the phrase, they want to imply that they are simply asking for something basic—the right not to be killed, the right to simple existence. But they are actually proposing something far more controversial: the right for Israel to exist as an ethnostate. If you deny that there is a right for states to have ethnic supremacy enshrined in their laws, then in a sense you are denying

Israel's right to exist. But you are not thereby denying that Jews should get to live peacefully and democratically in the territory currently governed by the state of Israel.

There is also an element of retroactive approval in the phrase. The 'right to exist' implies a 'right to come into existence'—i.e., if there were no Israel it would be permissible to create it, with the accompanying mass displacement. It is obvious why Palestinians cannot endorse a right to exist in this sense, because it requests legitimization of the original crime upon which the state was founded.

Ultimately, no state has a right to exist. It either does or it doesn't. The United States does not have the right to exist, though its people have the right to live under a democratic government. What Stephens is calling for is a special privilege afforded only to Israel.

“But the most toxic assumption is that Jews, whether in Israel or the US, can never really be thought of as victims or even as a minority because they are white, wealthy, powerful, and ‘privileged.’”

If someone did think Jews could “never really be thought of as victims,” they would have a simplistic conception of power. But of course Jews can be victims, a belief shared by every reasonable progressive.

“Martin Luther King Jr. preached nonviolent resistance; Yasir Arafat practiced terrorism. The civil rights movement was about getting America to live up its founding ideals; anti-Zionism is about destroying Israel's founding ideals.”

Yes, that's what the Palestinians and their supporters should practice: good old fashioned nonviolent resistance, like Martin Luther King. Tactics like boycotts, right? If Stephens cared even a whit about nonviolent resistance, he would be praising the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement as a welcome alternative to violent resistance. But, no, to supporters of nonviolent resistance, actual nonviolent resistance is off the table too. When asked what the BDS movement was all about, he answered simply:

“It's antisemitism.”

Bret Stephens doesn't want Palestinians to switch their tactics. He wants them to curl up and die.

Whatever your feelings about the goals of the BDS movement, their tactics are unimpeachable. There were plenty of white Southerners who decried Martin Luther King Jr., SNCC, and others in the civil rights movement as seeking to destroy America's founding ideals. King was a law-breaker, and many worried that his actions encouraged others to engage in delinquent behaviors. If one of America's founding ideals is white supremacy, then it should be rooted out. So too with Israel: If one of its founding ideals is Jewish supremacy, then it needs to change.

“As for the oft-cited apartheid analogy, black South Africans did not have a place in the old regime's Parliament, as Israeli Arabs have in the Knesset; nor were they admitted to white universities, as Israeli Arabs are to Israeli universities. Israel can do more to advance the rights of its Arab citizens (just as the United States, France, Britain, and other countries can for their own minorities). And Israel can also do more to ease the lives of Palestinians who are not citizens. But the comparison of Israel to apartheid South Africa is unfair to the former and an insult to the victims of the latter.”

Stephens should hold off on ventriloquizing the victims of South African apartheid. Many of the most prominent figures of the anti-Apartheid movement have compared the Palestinian struggle to their own and even used the A-word themselves. For those that will quickly dismiss such pronouncements as motivated by seething Jew Hatred, consider that former Prime Ministers David Ben Gurion, Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Olmert, and Ehud Barak have warned that if Israel didn't end its control over the Palestinians it would become an apartheid state. Other Israeli politicians have been more forthright, insisting that Israel is already an apartheid state. There are unquestionably differences between apartheid as practiced in South Africa and in the occupied territories. But the notion that the analogy is beyond the pale demonstrates a serious lack of familiarity with Israeli politics. The center-left Israeli newspaper Haaretz, for instance, routinely runs articles that use the term.

So what's the basis for its usage? Palestinians who live, in essence, under Israeli rule are unable to vote in Israeli elections. Stephens pointing to “Israeli Arabs” who are able to vote doesn't negate the fact that very many are unable, because it doesn't disprove discrimination. Consider grandfather clauses and voting tests under Jim Crow. All men are allowed to vote, provided they can pass a literacy test or constitutional quiz or pay this poll tax, and if they cannot meet those requirements, that is ok—

they're still allowed to vote, as long as their ancestors could vote! And the defenders of such a policy could note: We're not discriminating against African Americans, because, look, some African Americans are able to vote! Palestinians living in the West Bank, under Israeli rule, are still not allowed to vote in Israeli elections even though Jewish Israeli settlers living in the same territory are. That's not fair.

There are also all sorts of discriminatory land ownership and leasing policies, which favor Jewish Israelis. I've already mentioned the segregated housing and settlements above. And any Jew is able to immigrate, from anywhere in the world, to Israel and be granted citizenship, on the basis of the Law of Return. The same is not true for Palestinians.

Like the United States, Israel has a shockingly discriminatory criminal justice system. A teenage Palestinian girl was sentenced to eight months in prison for slapping an Israeli soldier who was trespassing on her property (shortly after her cousin had been shot). An Israeli soldier that shot a disarmed Palestinian in the head got a slap on the wrist and was celebrated as a hero. A Palestinian woman faced up to eight years in prison for her poetry, which she posted to Facebook, and ultimately served five months, while the Israeli military perpetrates war crimes with impunity. Palestinians are tried in Israeli military courts which have a 99.7 conviction rate. If this two-tiered legal system isn't enough to convince you, there's an actual (illegal) separation wall dividing the two peoples, one of which has a state and one of which does not.

Social discrimination is rampant. Take incidents like this: Hundreds of Israelis turned out to demonstrate against the sale of a home to a Palestinian family. The former mayor, who joined the protests in support, explained:

“The residents of Afula don't want a mixed city, but rather a Jewish city, and it's their right. That's not racism.”

Recently the country passed a law which declares that “the realization of the right to national self-determination in Israel is unique to the Jewish people” and contained other parts that favored Jewish Israelis. (Then there are all these other discriminatory laws.) It is helpful, in clarifying our thinking, to imagine how we would feel about every defense of Israel if it substituted the terms ‘white’ and ‘black’ for ‘Jewish’ or ‘Israeli’ and ‘Arab’ or ‘Palestinian.’ The reason the apartheid analogy is useful is because it allows us to see why things that have been normalized are actually so repugnant and absurd—the argument that destroying Israel as a Jewish state would destroy it altogether is like arguing that destroying South Africa as a white state would destroy it—only true if the nation's identity is bound up entirely with ethnic supremacy.

Hasbara is easy to refute but also easy to produce, and people like Bret Stephens deploy it in such endless barrages that it can feel futile to even begin to engage. The same thing happens with every ongoing human rights abuse—defenders of the powerful will expend every effort to prove that the victims brought it upon themselves, that the perpetrators are the real victims, that what looks like an obvious crime is actually either justice or an unavoidable tragedy with nobody to blame. It's important that we be prepared with the facts, and understand the various ways in which they are evaded, massaged, and manipulated in order to add the illusion of complexity to morally straightforward issues.

Life in the Arena

War! What Is It Good For?

“Liberty is a bitch who must be bedded on a mattress of corpses.”

There’s never been a true war that wasn’t fought between two sets of people who were certain they were in the right. The really dangerous people believe that they are doing whatever they are doing solely and only because it is without question the right thing to do. And that is what makes them dangerous.

For every war a motive—of safety or revenge, of honor or zeal, of right or convenience—may be readily found in the jurisprudence of conquerors.

There is something dangerous about the equation of military success and moral right; the argument favoring violence for the sake of an ideal can make us idealize violence, and gets people to forget what the actual costs of war are.

~~“A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic. The war? I can’t find it too terrible! The death of one man: that is a catastrophe. One-hundred-thousand deaths: That is a statistic!”~~

~~—Joseph Stalin~~ Kurt Tucholsky, *Französischer Witz*

“Of all the enemies of true liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few. In war, too, the discretionary power of the Executive is extended; its influence in dealing out offices, honors, and emoluments is multiplied; and all the means of

seducing the minds, are added to those of subduing the force, of the people. The same malignant aspect in republicanism may be traced in the inequality of fortunes, and the opportunities of fraud, growing out of a state of war, and in the degeneracy of manners and of morals engendered by both.”

“War is a racket. It always has been.

It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.

A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. Only a small ‘inside’ group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes.

In the World War a mere handful garnered the profits of the conflict. At least 21,000 new millionaires and billionaires were made in the United States during the World War. That many admitted their huge blood gains in their income tax returns. How many other war millionaires falsified their tax returns no one knows.

How many of these war millionaires shouldered a rifle? How many of them dug a trench? How many of them knew what it meant to go hungry in a rat-infested dug-out? How many of them spent sleepless, frightened nights, ducking shells and shrapnel and machine gun bullets? How many of them parried a bayonet thrust of an enemy? How many of them were wounded or killed in battle?

Out of war nations acquire additional territory, if they are victorious. They just take it. This newly acquired territory promptly is exploited by the few—the selfsame few who wrung dollars out of blood in the war. The general public shoulders the bill.

And what is this bill? This bill renders a horrible accounting. Newly placed gravestones. Mangled bodies. Shattered minds. Broken hearts and homes. Economic instability. Depression and all its attendant miseries. Back-breaking taxation for generations and generations.

For a great many years, as a soldier, I had a suspicion that war was a racket; not until I retired to civil life did I fully realize

it. Now that I see the international war clouds gathering, as they are today, I must face it and speak out.”

“The jet plane that roars over your head costs three quarter of a million dollars. That is more money than a man earning ten-thousand dollars every year is going to make in his lifetime. What world can afford this sort of thing for long? We are in an armaments race. Where will it lead us? At worst to atomic warfare. At best, to robbing every people and nation on earth of the fruits of their own toil.

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some fifty miles of concrete pavement. We pay for a single fighter plane with a half-million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people. This is, I repeat, the best way of life to be found on the road the world has been taking. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron. Is there no other way the world may live?”

—President Eisenhower, 1953

Göring: Why, of course, the people don't want war. Why would some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war when the best that he can get out of it is to come back to his farm in one piece? Naturally, the common people don't want war; neither in Russia nor in England nor in America, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy or a fascist dictatorship or a parliament or a communist dictatorship.

Gilbert: There is one difference. In a democracy, the people have some say in the matter through their elected representatives, and in the United States only Congress can declare wars.

Göring: Oh, that is all well and good, but, voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.

As Aeschylus, the illustrious Greek tragedian, noted in the fifth century BC:

“In war, truth is the first casualty.”

Ten-million soldiers to the war have gone,
 Who may never return again
 For the ones who died in vain
 I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier
 Who dares to put a musket on his shoulder,
 To shoot some other mother's darling boy?
 It's time to lay the sword and gun away.

“Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be that of water or of tears! Say firmly: We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience.”

The poor, ignorant serfs had been taught to revere their masters; to believe that when their masters declared war upon one another, it was their patriotic duty to fall upon one another and to cut one another's throats for the profit and glory of the lords and barons who held them in contempt. The working class who fight all the battles, the working class who make the supreme sacrifices, the working class who freely shed their blood and furnish the corpses, have never yet had a voice in either declaring war or making peace. It is the ruling class that invariably does both. They alone declare war and they alone make peace. You need at this time especially to know that you are fit for something better than slavery and cannon fodder.

It's a hell of a thing, killing a man. You take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation.

People may think of war as if it's a ballet, like it's choreographed ahead of time, and when the orchestra strikes up and starts playing, everyone goes out there and goes through a set piece. Well, it is choreographed, and what happens is the orchestra starts playing and some son of a bitch climbs out of the orchestra pit with a bayonet and starts chasing you around the stage. And the choreography goes right out the window.

War remains today what it has always been—elusive, untamed, costly, difficult to control, fraught with surprise, and sure to give rise to unexpected consequences. Only the truly demented will imagine otherwise.

“Fighting a war to fix something works about as good as going to a whorehouse to get rid of a clap.”

War is two old men throwing other people's children at each other until one of them gets tired. There's no glory or honor in war, there's nothing noble about it. People do heroic and extraordinary things under terrible circumstances but war itself is a bottomless pit that we shovel money, material, and young men into. There's only one truth in war: people die. A lot of them will be kids or civilians.

War is always about betrayal, betrayal of the young by the old, of idealists by cynics, and of troops by politicians.

It is the same in all wars; the soldiers do the fighting, the journalists do the shouting, and no true patriot ever gets near a front-line trench, except on the briefest of propaganda tours.

Teddy Roosevelt marketed wars as desirable means of building character and slaughtering lesser races. Barack Obama marketed wars as philanthropic assistance to the places being bombed. But both kill just the same.

The arena: It is a favorite concept, capturing a dangerous and seductive worldview when applied to war. The idea came from Theodore Roosevelt's famous speech, trashing critics and valuing the experience of risk over all else.

“It is not the critic who counts. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs, and who comes up short again and again.”

What mattered wasn't what the war was about, or what might or might not be accomplished; what mattered was that there was an inherent value in being a man, in going into action, in bleeding. There was little difference in victory or failure. The sacrifice of blood had an almost spiritual value beyond politics, beyond success, beyond good and evil; blood and sweat

and pain made up its own ideology, existing within its own moral universe of a very narrowly defined concept of honor and bravery. It was as brave and honorable to take a bullet for the brotherhood as it was to cover up a bullet's mistake. It didn't matter that in Afghanistan, the US military had come up short again and again. What mattered is that they tried.

The simple and terrifying reality, forbidden from discussion in America, was that despite spending \$600 billion a year on the military, despite having the best fighting force the world had ever known, they were getting their asses kicked by illiterate peasants who made bombs out of manure and wood. The arena acts as a barrier, protecting their sacrifices from the uncomfortable realities of the current war—that it might be a total waste of time and resources that historians would look back on, cringing, in the same way we looked back on the Soviets and the British misadventures there.

Permanent war is a proven way to degrade a democracy. A national security state resists transparency and democratic control.

When our manufacturing base is military, we produce things that don't produce any lasting benefit for our society. When we build a school or a bridge or a high-speed rail system, years, decades, sometimes even centuries of use and value come from it. They produce for us, over time, far more than they cost us. Even consumer goods—from homes to washing machines to computers—increase our personal ability to be productive, thus producing a return on investment (albeit not so visible in GDP as are infrastructure investments). But when we spend \$100 million on a bunker-buster bomb, and that bomb is dropped somewhere, that \$100 million just went up in smoke, never to be seen again. As the Romans and so many other empires before ours have found out, military spending is the least productive and sustainable way to build an economy. In fact, a quick inspection of previous world superpowers reveals that they all met their demise by economic collapse following binges of military adventurism—often after a desperate campaign was launched to protect the last vestiges of their empire.

Our military leaders and intelligence agencies are far too powerful and their playing politics has to be slowed if not stopped lest we continue to have to endure their rather open blackmailing of our political system.

Militarization is happening at the individual level, when a woman is persuaded that the best way she can be a good mother is to allow the military recruiter to recruit her son so her son will get off the couch. When she is persuaded to let him go, even if reluctantly, she's being militarized. She's not as militarized as somebody who is a Special Forces soldier, but she's being militarized all the same. Somebody who gets excited because a jet bomber flies over the football stadium to open the football season and is glad that he or she is in the stadium to see it, is being militarized.

So militarization is not just about the question ‘do you think the military is the most important part of the state?’—although obviously that matters. It’s not just ‘do you think that the use of collective violence is the most effective way to solve social problems?’—which is also a part of militarization. But it’s also about ordinary, daily culture, certainly in the United States.

Everyday life and the culture in general are damaged by ramped-up militarization, and this includes academia, particularly the social sciences, with psychologists and anthropologists being recruited as advisors to the military. Anthropology was born of European and US colonial wars. Today’s weaponization of anthropology and other social sciences has been a long time coming, and post-9/11 America’s climate of fear coupled with reductions in traditional academic funding provided the conditions of a sort of perfect storm for the militarization of the discipline and the academy as a whole.

American Heroes

“War is the great auditor of institutions.”

Since 9/11, the United States has undergone such an audit and been found wanting. That adverse judgment applies in full to America’s armed forces. Valor does not offer the measure of an army’s greatness, nor does fortitude, nor durability, nor technological sophistication. A great army is one that accomplishes its assigned mission. Since George W. Bush inaugurated his global war on terror, the armed forces of the United States have failed to meet that standard.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Bush conceived of a bold, offensive strategy, vowing to “take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge.” The military offered the principal means for undertaking this offensive, and US forces soon found themselves engaged on several fronts.

Two of those fronts—Afghanistan and Iraq—commanded priority attention. In each case, the assigned task was to deliver a knockout blow, leading to a quick, decisive, economical, politically meaningful victory. In each case, despite impressive displays of valor, fortitude, durability, and technological sophistication, America’s military came up short. The problem lay not with the level of exertion but with the results achieved.

In Afghanistan, US forces failed to eliminate the leadership of al-Qaeda. Although they toppled the Taliban regime that had ruled most of that country, they failed to eliminate the Taliban movement, which soon began to claw its way back. Intended as a brief campaign, the Afghan War became a protracted one. Nearly seven years after it began, there was no end in sight. If anything, America’s adversaries were gaining strength. The outcome remains much in doubt.

In Iraq, events followed a similar pattern, with the appearance of easy success belied by subsequent developments. The US invasion began on March 19, 2003. Six weeks later, against the backdrop of a White House–produced banner proclaiming “Mission Accomplished,” President Bush declared that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended.” This claim proved illusory.

Writing shortly after the fall of Baghdad, the influential neoconservatives David Frum and Richard Perle declared Operation Iraqi Freedom “a vivid and compelling demonstration of America’s ability to win swift and total victory.” General Tommy Franks, commanding the force that invaded Iraq, modestly characterized the results of his handiwork as “unequaled in its excellence by anything in the annals of war.” In retrospect, such judgments—and they were legion—can only be considered risible. A war thought to

have ended on April 9, 2003, in Baghdad's al-Firdos Square was only just beginning. Fighting dragged on for years, exacting a cruel toll. Iraq became a reprise of Vietnam, although in some respects at least on a blessedly smaller scale.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Just a few short years ago, observers were proclaiming that the United States possessed military power such as the world had never seen. Here was the nation's strong suit. "The troops" appeared unbeatable. Writing in 2002, for example, Max Boot attributed to the United States a level of martial excellence "that far surpasses the capabilities of such previous would-be hegemonies as Rome, Britain, and Napoleonic France." With US forces enjoying "unparalleled strength in every facet of warfare," allies, he wrote, had become an encumbrance:

"We just don't need anyone else's help very much."

Boot dubbed this the Doctrine of the Big Enchilada. Within a year, after US troops had occupied Baghdad, he went further: America's army even outclassed Germany's Wehrmacht. The mastery displayed in knocking off Saddam, Boot gushed, made "fabled generals such as Erwin Rommel and Heinz Guderian seem positively incompetent by comparison."

All of this turned out to be hot air. If the global war on terror has produced one undeniable conclusion, it is this: Estimates of US military capabilities have turned out to be wildly overstated. The Bush administration's misplaced confidence in the efficacy of American arms represents a strategic misjudgment that has cost the country dearly. Even in an age of stealth, precision weapons, and instant communications, armed force is not a panacea. Even in a supposedly unipolar era, American military power turns out to be quite limited.

How did it happen that Americans so utterly over-appraised the utility of military power? The answer to that question lies at the intersection of three great illusions.

According to the first illusion, the United States during the 1980s and 1990s had succeeded in reinventing armed conflict. The result was to make force more precise, more discriminating, and potentially more humane. The Pentagon had devised a new American Way of War, investing its forces with capabilities unlike any the world had ever seen. As President Bush exuberantly declared shortly after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003:

"We've applied the new powers of technology to strike an enemy force with speed and incredible precision. By a combination of creative strategies and advanced technologies, we are

redefining war on our terms. In this new era of warfare, we can target a regime, not a nation.”

The distinction between regime and nation was a crucial one. By employing these new military techniques, the United States could eliminate an obstreperous foreign leader and his cronies, while sparing the population over which that leader ruled. Putting a missile through the roof of a presidential palace made it unnecessary to incinerate an entire capital city, endowing force with hitherto undreamed-of political utility and easing ancient moral inhibitions on the use of force. Force had been a club; it now became a scalpel. By the time the president spoke, such sentiments had already become commonplace among many (although by no means all) military officers and national security experts.

Here lay a formula for certain victory. Confidence in military prowess both reflected and reinforced a post-Cold War confidence in the universality of American values. Harnessed together, they made a seemingly unstoppable one-two punch.

With that combination came expanded ambitions. In the 1990s, the very purpose of the Department of Defense changed. Sustaining American global preeminence, rather than mere national security, became its explicit function. In the most comprehensive articulation of this new American Way of War, the Joint Chiefs of Staff committed the armed services to achieving what they called “full spectrum dominance”—unambiguous supremacy in all forms of warfare, to be achieved by tapping the potential of two “enablers”—“technological innovation and information superiority.”

Full spectrum dominance stood in relation to military affairs as the political scientist Francis Fukuyama’s well-known proclamation of “the end of history” stood in relation to ideology: Each claimed to have unlocked ultimate truths. According to Fukuyama, democratic capitalism represented the final stage in political economic evolution. According to the proponents of full spectrum dominance, that concept represented the final stage in the evolution of modern warfare. In their first days and weeks, the successive invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq both seemed to affirm such claims.

According to the second illusion, American civilian and military leaders subscribed to a common set of principles for employing their now-dominant forces. Adherence to these principles promised to prevent any recurrence of the sort of disaster that had befallen the nation in Vietnam. If politicians went off half-cocked, as President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had back in the 1960s, generals who had correctly discerned and assimilated the lessons of modern war could be counted on to rein them in.

These principles found authoritative expression in the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine, which specified criteria for deciding when and how to use force. Caspar Weinberger, secretary of defense during most of the Reagan era, first articulated these principles in 1984. General Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the early 1990s, expanded on them. Yet the doctrine's real authors were the members of the post-Vietnam officer corps. The Weinberger-Powell principles expressed the military's own lessons taken from that war. Those principles also expressed the determination of senior officers to prevent any recurrence of Vietnam.

Henceforth, according to Weinberger and Powell, the United States would fight only when genuinely vital interests were at stake. It would do so in pursuit of concrete and attainable objectives. It would mobilize the necessary resources—political and moral as well as material—to win promptly and decisively. It would end conflicts expeditiously and then get out, leaving no loose ends. The spirit of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine was not permissive; its purpose was to curb the reckless or imprudent inclinations of bellicose civilians.

According to the third illusion, the military and American society had successfully patched up the differences that produced something akin to divorce during the divisive Vietnam years. By the 1990s, a reconciliation of sorts was under way. In the wake of Operation Desert Storm, “the American people fell in love again with their armed forces.” So, at least, General Colin Powell, one of that war's great heroes, believed. Out of this love affair a new civil-military compact had evolved, one based on the confidence that, in times of duress, Americans could be counted on to “support the troops.” Never again would the nation abandon its soldiers.

The All-Volunteer Force (AVF)—despite its name, a professional military establishment—represented the chief manifestation of this new compact. By the 1990s, Americans were celebrating the AVF as the one component of the federal government that actually worked as advertised. The AVF embodied the nation's claim to the status of sole superpower; it was “America's Team.” In the wake of the Cold War, the AVF sustained the global Pax Americana without interfering with the average American's pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. What was not to like?

Tom Brady makes millions playing quarterback in the NFL and rakes in millions more from endorsements. Pat Tillman quit professional football to become an army ranger and was killed in Afghanistan. Yet, of the two, Brady more fully embodies the contemporary understanding of the term ‘Patriot.’

An army composed of regulars is no longer a people's army—the people have little say in its use. In effect, the professional military has become

an extension of the imperial presidency. The troops fight when and where the president determines. A reliance on professional soldiers eviscerates the concept of civic duty, relieving citizens at large of any obligation to contribute to the nation's defense. Ending the draft during the waning days of the Vietnam War did nothing to heal the divisions created by that conflict; instead, it ratified the separation of army from society. Like mowing lawns and busing tables, fighting and perhaps dying to sustain the American way of life became something that Americans pay others to do.

Today, with the possible exception of conservative evangelicals, no significant segment of the electorate will concede to the federal government the authority to order their sons and daughters into uniform. Legislation mandating involuntary service would almost certainly elicit the same reaction that Prohibition induced back in the 1920s, only more quickly and on a larger scale: The law would be unenforceable.

Granted, arguments that a draft might correct the inequities inherent in our existing military system have indisputable merit. To anyone with a conscience, sending soldiers back for multiple combat tours while the rest of the country chills out can hardly seem an acceptable arrangement. It is unfair, unjust, and morally corrosive. Yet seldom in American history have questions of fairness or equability played a decisive role in shaping public policy. The present moment does not qualify as one of those occasions; if it were, we would not tolerate the gaping disparities between rich and poor in our society.

Relying on a small number of volunteers to bear the burden of waging an open-ended global war might make Americans uneasy, but uneasiness will not suffice to produce change. To salve the nation's conscience, the government might augment our hard-pressed troops with pricey contractor-mercenaries, but it won't actually trouble citizens to do anything. Indeed, the privatization of war—evident in the prominence achieved by armies-for-rent such as the notorious Blackwater or Xe or whatever the fuck they're called today—suggests a tacit willingness to transform military service from a civic function into an economic enterprise, with money rather than patriotism the motive. Americans may not like mercenaries, but many of them harbor an even greater dislike for the prospect of sending their loved ones to fight in some godforsaken country on the other side of the world.

Toward the end of the Vietnam War when Richard Nixon first proposed abolishing the draft, the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed the idea. Since then, with the partial exception of the Marine Corps, each of the services has become enamored with a force composed of highly skilled, long-service "warriors." When Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld dismissed the draftees of prior wars as having added "no value, no advantage, really," he

may have violated some canon of political correctness, but he accurately reflected prevailing Pentagon opinion. The truth is that the four-star generals and admirals view citizen-soldiers as more trouble than they're worth.

Depending on the context, the small word 'why' can be totally innocuous or it can be just about the most subversive and even sacrilegious word one can utter. This is probably why I love this word so much: its ability to unleash tremendous power against all sorts of sacred cows and unchallenged beliefs. So, today I want to ask everybody why so many people feel the need to thank veterans for their "service"?

But first, let's debunk a few myths:

First, let's begin by getting myth number one out of the way: the notion that Americans don't like wars. That is totally false. Americans hate losing wars, but if they win them, they absolutely love them. In other words, the typical US reaction to a war depends on the perceived outcome of that war. If it is a success they love it—even if it is a turkey-shoot like Desert Storm. If it is a deniable defeat—the US/NATO air operations against Serbian forces in Kosovo or the total clusterfuck in Grenada—they will simply forget it. And if it is an undeniable defeat—Iraq or Afghanistan—then, yes, indeed, many Americans will be opposed to it.

Next is myth number two: the truth is that no US serviceman or woman has fought a war in defense of the US since at least WWII—and even this one is very debatable considering that the US forced Japan to wage war and since the attack on Pearl Harbor was set-up as a pretext to then attack Japan. Since 1945 there has not been a single situation in which US soldiers defended their land, their towns, their families, or their friends from an aggressor. Not one! All the wars fought by the US since 1945 were wars of aggression, wars of choice and most of them were completely illegal to boot—including numerous subversive and covert operations. At most, one can make the argument that US veterans defended the so-called "American way of life," but only if one accepts that the American way of life requires and mandates imperialist wars of aggression and the wholesale abandonment of the key concepts of international law.

Finally, there is the ugly dirty little secret that everybody knows but, for some reason, very few dare to mention: the decision to join the all volunteer US military is one primarily based on financial considerations and absolutely not some kind of generous "service" to the motherland for pure, lofty, ideals. Yes, yes, I know—there were those who did join the US military after 9/11 thinking that the US had been attacked and that they needed to help bring the fight to those who attacked the US. One of them was even Adam Driver, who was discharged after suffering injuries bravely fighting a mountain bike. But these are not the norm.

Even if some folks did not see through the lies and even if *they* believed that they joined the US military to defend the US, why would the rest of us who by 2020 all know that the attack on Iraq was purely and solely based on lies, thank veterans for stupidly waging war for interests they cannot even identify? Since when do we thank people for making wrong and, frankly, immoral decisions?!

Now let's look at another basic thing: what is military service? The way I see it, military personnel can roughly be split into two categories: those who actually kill people and those who help those who kill people kill people. Right? If you are a machine gunner or a tank driver, then you personally get to kill people. If you are a communications specialist, or a truck driver, or an electrician, you don't get to kill people yourself, but your work is to make it easier for those who kill people to kill people. So I think that it would be fair to say that joining a military, any military, is to join an organization whose main purpose is to kill people. Of course, that killing can be morally justifiable and, say, in defense of your country and fellow citizens. But that can only be the case if you prepare for a defensive war and, as we all know, the US has not fought such a war for 70+ years now, which means that with a few increasingly rare exceptions—WWII veterans, and only possibly—all the veterans which get thanked for their service did what exactly? If we put it in plain English, what fundamental, crucial decision did all these veterans make?

In simple and plain English, veterans are those who signed up to kill people outside the US for money. Sorry, I know that this sounds offensive to many, but this is a fact. The fact that this decision—to join an organization whose primary purpose is to murder people in their own countries, hundreds and thousands of miles away from the US—could also have been taken for “patriotic” reasons (i.e. by those who believed in what is most likely the most dishonest propaganda machine in history) or to “see the world” and “become a real man” does not change the fact that if the US military offered no pay or benefits, no scholarships, no healthcare, then the vast majority of those who claim that they joined to “serve” would never have joined in the first place. We all know that, let's not pretend otherwise! Just look at the arguments recruiters use to convince people to join: they are all about money and benefits! Need more proof? Just look at the kind of social groups who compose the bulk of the US military: uneducated, poor, with minimal career prospects. The simple truth is that financially successful folks very rarely join the military and, when they do, they usually make a career out of it.

Folks join the military precisely for the same reasons they enter the police force or become correctional officers: because in all those endeavors there

is money to be made and benefits to enjoy. Of course, there must be some percentage who joined these violent careers for purely lofty and noble ideals. But these would be a small, tiny, minority. The overwhelming majority of cops, correctional officers, and soldiers joined primarily for material and/or financial reasons.

Since that is the case, is it not also true that the soldier—just like the cop or the correctional officers—has already received his/her gratitude from the society for their service in the form of a check? Why do folks then still feel the need to “thank them for their service”? We don’t thank air traffic controllers or logging workers—also very tough careers—for their service, do we? And that is in spite of the fact that air traffic controllers and logging workers did not choose to join an organization whose primary goal is to kill people in their own homes—whether private homes or national ones—which is what soldiers get paid for. And, well, I guess maybe the loggers did too, depending on how you want to look at it.

Let me repeat that truism once again, in an even more direct way: veterans are killers hired for money. Period. The rest is all propaganda.

The post-9/11 drive to get the American public to thank the troops endlessly for their service in distant conflicts amounts to stifling criticism of those wars by linking it to ingratitude.

Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori.
 For generations we’ve sold these goods
 To young boys who burn for glory.
 Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori.
 Indeed, how sweet,
 Pray tell
 Poppy covered warrior.
 Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori.
 How sweet was the Somme?
 Such little ground was gained
 With half a generation gone.
 Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori.
 When weapons far outpace the men
 What an empty word is glory.

“I hated them because they asked me to take other people’s lives in a manner that dishonored us both, me the killer and them the victim. Shame on all of us.”

“Have you ever reflected on the fact that, despite the horrors of war, it is at least a big thing? I mean to say that in it one is

brought face to face with realities. The follies, selfishness, luxury, and general pettiness of the vile commercial sort of existence led by nine-tenths of the people of the world in peacetime are replaced in war by a savagery that is at least more honest and outspoken. Look at it this way: in peacetime one just lives one's own little life, engaged in trivialities, worrying about one's own comfort, about money matters, and all that sort of thing—just living for one's own self. What a sordid life it is!

In war, on the other hand, even if you do get killed you only anticipate the inevitable by a few years in any case, and you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have 'pegged out' in the attempt to help your country. You have, in fact, realized an ideal, which, as far as I can see, you very rarely do in ordinary life. The reason is that ordinary life runs on a commercial and selfish basis; if you want to 'get on,' as the saying is, you can't keep your hands clean. Personally, I often rejoice that the War has come my way. It has made me realize what a petty thing life is. I think that the War has given to everyone a chance to 'get out of himself,' as I might say. Certainly, speaking for myself, I can say that I have never in all my life experienced such a wild exhilaration as on the commencement of a big stunt, like the last April one for example. The excitement for the last half-hour or so before it is like nothing on earth."

Entire American units in the Pacific openly boasted of a "take no prisoners" policy and the routine collection of body parts of Japanese soldiers as battlefield souvenirs. It is chilling reading for anyone who smugly assumes that war atrocities were a monopoly of the Nazi regime or the Axis Powers. Not too surprising though, if you're familiar with the treatment of Native Americans by the Army.

Many of the most notorious wartime atrocities—Oradour and Malmédy, the Japanese rampage through Manila, the American slaughter of prisoners and mutilation of corpses on many Pacific islands, and the massacre at My Lai—involved a kind of "battlefield frenzy." Soldiers who were inured to violence, numbed to the taking of human life, embittered over their own casualties, and frustrated by the tenacity of an insidious and seemingly inhuman enemy sometimes exploded and at other times grimly resolved to have their revenge at the first opportunity. Though atrocities of this kind were too often tolerated, condoned, or tacitly (sometimes even explicitly) encouraged by elements of the command structure, they did not represent official government policy. Despite the hate-filled propaganda of each nation

and the exterminatory rhetoric of many leaders and commanders, such atrocities still represented a breakdown in discipline and the chain of command. They were not “standard operating procedure.” The fire-bombing of German and Japanese cities, the enslavement and murderous maltreatment of foreign laborers in German camps and factories or along the Siam-Burma railroad, the reprisal shooting of a hundred civilians for every German soldier killed by partisan attack in Yugoslavia or elsewhere in eastern Europe—these were not the spontaneous explosions or cruel revenge of brutalized men but the methodically executed policies of government.

Both kinds of atrocities occur in the brutalizing context of war, but the men who carry out “atrocities by policy” are in a different state of mind. They act not out of frenzy, bitterness, and frustration but with calculation.

When the generation that remembers the last Great War has died out, a nation is set on course—some would say doomed—to have another war. While the horrors of war are forgotten, the monuments and heroes of war are everywhere.

“That’s the problem with heroes. Heroes aren’t people. Heroes don’t come home messed up, or needing help, or just wanting to live their fucking lives—whatever is left of it anyway. Heroes are symbols. Heroes are *property*. Their lives are not their own anymore. Heroes don’t need help and don’t have nightmares and don’t say anything that might be contrary to what you believe, whatever that is. Heroes are grateful always.”

Our memories—as a culture—are largely defined by the practical memories of those who participate in media and government, mostly people from their thirties to their sixties. So, at the most, we as a popular culture remember fifty or so years of history at a slice.

In the seventies, conservatives came to believe that the legacy of Vietnam was the “Vietnam syndrome,” a debilitating fear of sending in the troops lest lives (and votes) be lost. A more obvious legacy these days is the ferocious new militarism in which setbacks in the field are routinely blamed on liberals in Congress and in the media, and in which it is thought to be socially acceptable for old soldiers to revel in their brutalization and even to boast about their personal kill-skills. Example: the popular sniper bumper sticker that threatens, “Don’t run, you’ll only die tired.” All that a soldier wants to do is fight, according to this understanding, and the more violently the better. Training him and sending him off to battle isn’t a hideous imposition; it is natural and even noble. To support our men in uniform is to let them see combat. Such a viewpoint denies the age-old conflict between officers

and enlisted men that is documented by every war novel ever written, and instead identifies the lowliest of foot soldiers unproblematically with their commanders, who assuredly do pine to give their soldiers that chance to fight. Applied to the historical Vietnam War itself, this way of thinking implies that the army suffered no disobedience, no griping, not even any of the jolly countercultural troublemaking seen in feel-good war films like *Good Morning Vietnam*. Dissent was the sole province of the hippie traitors at home.

Until 1913 the Army actively discouraged its soldiers from marrying. A popular line has long said if the Army had wanted you to have a wife, it would have issued you one.

Numerous studies have taught the military that in order to get soldiers to shoot to kill, to actively participate in violence, the soldiers must be sufficiently desensitized to the act of killing. In other words, they have to learn to not feel—and to not feel responsible—for their actions. They must be taught to override their own conscience. Yet these studies also demonstrate that even in the face of immediate danger, in situations of extreme violence, most people are averse to killing. In other words, the vast majority of combatants throughout history, at the moment of truth when they could and should kill the enemy, have found themselves to be conscientious objectors.

Modern military training programs grapple with how to turn empathic people into killing machines, often instilling unquestioning obedience to authorities and a powerful sense of loyalty toward your comrades. If the commands of superiors do not move you, then you are moved by the knowledge that failing to shoot might spell death for your friends. Using social-psychological principles the American military also encourages the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by using words like ‘haji’ and ‘raghead’ to describe Muslims. Although these terms are dehumanizing, they are often seen as a necessary survival tactic, because a moment’s hesitation about the humanity of your enemy could be the difference between your life and death. Finally, these training programs automate killing, bending thoughts of the enemy away from mind perception and toward reflexive aggression.

Consider the murder of Michael Roberts, a fifty-three-year-old homeless man, by a group of teenagers. Their motive? Boredom. The boys were looking for amusement, and Roberts was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. The teens punched and kicked him and hit him with sticks. One boy even dropped a log onto Roberts’s ribs, which the boys then jumped on. They left Roberts’s body in a woods and the next day invited friends to come see the corpse of the man they had just killed. Who were they? Terrifyingly, they were just normal teenage boys together in a group. Just

as groups can strip perceived mind from members, they can also strip actual mind from members.

Losing one's individual mind to the group collective is called deindividuation, and though it may most easily affect young men, it can influence anyone, regardless of age, race, or gender. Whenever people assemble for a common purpose, whether a sporting event, a religious service, or a political protest, our minds seem to leave us and get taken up by the group. This heady experience, called "we-feeling," is a kind of altered state of consciousness that is not necessarily bad in itself. In fact, it can be a wonderful thing, as with the Allahabad pilgrims, who transcended their individual lives when spiritually connected to millions of like-minded others. This we-feeling is induced especially through synchrony, when your actions are closely matched to those of other group members. Examples of synchrony include platoons marching in step, concert fans swaying back and forth together, and prayers being jointly said by a congregation—each of which seems to bind people together into a coherent whole.

Synchrony facilitates not only group goodness but also group evil. The link between synchrony and destructive conformity explains why military groups march in step. Nazi goose-stepping may look odd, but it encouraged the soldiers to follow the cruel orders of their leaders.

Synchrony with group members is one way that groups encourage evil against outsiders, and anonymity is another. History has repeatedly shown that groups are especially destructive when members cannot be identified, whether because of masks or uniforms or even the firewalls of the Internet. This anonymity leads group members to identify more with the group and see outsiders as more bound to their rival groups. Cloaked in his uniform, a Nazi soldier sees himself not as an individual but instead as simply a Nazi, while also viewing his victims not as individual human beings but as members of an undesirable group to be exterminated.

That day on the ground, McChrystal's Delta Force commandos were lying in wait. Once the house was bombed, they swarmed the target, picking through the rubble, confirming Zarqawi's death and retrieving the body. There had been days, weeks, and even months of effort on the part of the so-called black special operators, the hero hunter-killers of a growing enterprise and the very human and heroic embodiment of millennia-old warfare. Yet in this new war no names were divulged, not even of the pilots. The general narrative isn't erroneous—it was indeed one team doggedly and bravely risking it all, vanguards of an entire nation even if they were all made into invisible and masked ninja warriors. In a world full of terrorists, the "good guys" have been made faceless, further enhancing the preeminence of the Machine. I know the justification: that the military is merely protecting the

fighters and their families from the repercussions of a globally transparent world that could place them at risk from terrorists even while at home. In this era of global targeting and surgical geolocation, the importance of the “sanctity of the home” has diminished. There is an erosion of the distinction for both sides as to what is military and what is civilian, and one can now be targeted while in the “safety” of one’s own home.

Wars are fought on physical terrain—deserts, mountains, et cetera—as well as on what they call “human terrain.” Human terrain is essentially the social aspect of war, in all its messy and contradictory forms. The ability to navigate human terrain gives you better intelligence, better bomb-targeting data, and access to what is essentially a public relations campaign for the allegiance of the populace. The Taliban burned down a school in the Korengal, for example, and by accident also burned a box full of Korans. The villagers were outraged, and the Taliban lost a minor battle in the human terrain of the valley. You can occupy a hilltop in human terrain much like you can in real terrain—hiring locals to work for you, for example—and that hilltop position may protect you from certain kinds of attack while exposing you to others.

Human terrain and physical terrain interact in such complex ways that commanders have a hard time calculating the effect of their actions more than a few moves out. You can dominate the physical terrain by putting an outpost in a village, but if the presence of foreign men means that local women can’t walk down certain paths to get to their fields in the morning, you have lost a small battle in the human terrain. Sometimes it’s worth it, sometimes it isn’t. Accidentally killing civilians is a sure way of losing the human terrain—this applies to both sides—and if you do that too many times, the locals will drive you out no matter how many hilltops you occupy. It has been suggested that one Taliban strategy is to lure NATO forces into accidentally killing so many civilians that they lose the fight for the human terrain. The physical terrain would inevitably follow.

One might marvel at the insane amount of firepower available to the Americans—they have a huge shoulder-fired rocket called a Javelin, for example, that can be steered into the window of a speeding car half a mile away. Each Javelin round costs \$80,000, and the idea that it’s fired by a guy who doesn’t make that in a year at a guy who doesn’t make that in a lifetime is somehow so outrageous it almost makes the war seem winnable.

“People have died, and often for that matter, because of the 15 minutes of analysis I put into a report. Some commander further down range trusted my judgment and used it as justification to drop steel on these people. That happened routinely. You

constantly question if you did everything you could, if you had the full picture, if you translated everything right. I spoke their language. I know what they were saying. I may not have been down range pulling the trigger, but I assure you it was intimate.”

These streets used to be nice; the houses were owned by upper-class families. Now every third house we enter is abandoned, the Iraqi families who once lived here having left the country or the city. It is an exodus of the educated—doctors, lawyers, professors, businessmen. Those with the resources and skills to play a role in rebuilding the country are gone.

“What didn’t you see? You didn’t see where those bullets landed. You didn’t see what happened when the mortar landed. A puff of smoke is not what a mortar looks like when it explodes, believe me. There are horrors that were completely left out of this war. It was a glorious, wonderful picture that had a lot of people watching and a lot of advertisers excited about cable news. But it wasn’t journalism, because I’m not so sure that we in America are hesitant to do this again, to fight another war, because it looked like a glorious and courageous and so successful, terrific endeavor, and we got rid of horrible leader: We got rid of a dictator, we got rid of a monster, but we didn’t see what it took to do that.

I think there were a lot of dissenting voices before this war about the horrors of war, but I’m very concerned about this three-week TV show and how it may have changed people’s opinions. It was very sanitized. War is ugly and it’s dangerous, and in this world, the way we are discussed on the Arab street, it feeds and fuels their hatred and their desire to kill themselves to take out Americans.”

“We may not necessarily be down to the grindstone like those whose boots are the ground, but we have our own stresses. We see what you see. We see what everyone sees, and its fucking horrific. I’ve seen feeds akin to innocent civilians executed with det-cord, of children ripped to shreds by a chainsaw, of some mass of meat having what I could only assume was their head mashed to a pulp by the buttstock of an AK-47.

Something inside you breaks a little each time. Some are better at dealing with it than others. Some, obviously, are not.

Humans are disgusting and I hate every single one of them. We're fucking monsters. We're fucking monsters, and that's one piece of information that I have no idea how to deal with."

"It is difficult once you become aware that you are killing children. By direct fire, by indirect fire, by directing fire. There was this one girl they brought to Camp Warehouse when I was on guard, legs gone, shrapnel all over her body, somehow still alive. They just dropped her out of a taxi and took off. You get closer to her and you realize she is alive. You see the damage, you want to help, yet you stay back because you remember the last time they lured you into a trap and rigged a corpse with explosives. She breathes and says something you don't understand. Someone yells orders to stand back and get EOD. You can't leave her there. You just move and pick her up while someone yells at you to not touch her. She looks at you with a face of innocence and pain. You turn around and carry her inside the camp to medical. Now everyone helps. You hand her over and stay outside. Your sergeant starts yelling at you but his words don't reach you.

You later learn that she died. At the briefing the next week the incident comes up again. She didn't step on a mine, she was hit by a 40mm round during fighting. The guys who dropped her off were too afraid we'd shoot them too. War just sucks man, there is nothing heroic about it, it is just a giant tragedy. And its coming home with you."

Mothers and fathers die with their dead children.

"We are gathered here, friends, to honor the victims of our monstrous leaders, children dead, all dead, all murdered in war. It is customary on days like this to call such lost children men. I am unable to call them men for this simple reason: that in the same war in which they died, my own son died. My soul insists that I mourn not a man but a child. I do not say that children at war do not die like men, if they have to die. To their everlasting honor and our everlasting shame, they do die like men, thus making possible the manly jubilation of patriotic holidays.

But they are murdered children all same.

And I propose to you that if we are to pay our sincere respects to the lost children, that we might best spend the day despising

what killed them; which is to say, the stupidity and viciousness of all mankind. Perhaps, when we remember wars, we should take off our clothes and paint ourselves blue and go on all fours all day long and grunt like pigs. That would surely be more appropriate than noble oratory and shows of flags and well-oiled guns. If today is really in honor of children murdered in war, is today a day for a thrilling show? The answer is yes, on one condition: that we, the celebrants, are working consciously and tirelessly to reduce the stupidity and viciousness of all mankind.”

Meet the world’s largest polluter and ruling titan in the industry of child murder: the US military.

At a typical forward operating base that was recently examined, 95 percent of the base’s electricity went to air condition, inefficiently, tents sitting in a hot sandy place. All of this electricity was produced by a diesel generator.

“We are getting people blown up in fuel convoys to deliver the fuel to be wasted in that way. Just connect the dots and obviously there is something wrong with this picture.”

The men were mostly in their early twenties, and many of them have known nothing but life at home with their parents and war. The moral basis of the war doesn’t seem to interest soldiers much, and its long-term success or failure has a relevance of almost zero. Soldiers worry about those things about as much as farmhands worry about the global economy, which is to say, they recognize stupidity when it’s right in front of them but they generally leave the big picture to others.

He has little capacity for what civilians refer to as “life skills”; for him, life skills literally keep you alive. Those are far simpler and more compelling than the skills required at home.

“In the Korengal, almost every problem could get settled by getting violent faster than the other guy. Do that at home and it’s not going to go so well.”

It’s a stressful way to live but once it’s blown out your levels almost everything else looks boring. He knows himself: when he gets bored he starts drinking and getting into fights, and then it’s only a matter of time until he’s back in the system. If that’s the case, he might as well stay in the system—a better one—and actually move upward. There are a few civilian jobs that offer a little adrenaline—wilderness trip guide, firefighter—but it’s

just not the same. He is at one of the most exposed outposts in the entire US military, and he's crawling out of his skin because there hasn't been a good firefight in a week. How do you bring a guy like that back into the world?

Civilians balk at recognizing that one of the most traumatic things about combat is having to give it up. War is so obviously evil and wrong that the idea there could be anything good to it almost feels like a profanity. And yet throughout history, men have come home to find themselves desperately missing what should have been the worst experience of their lives. To a combat vet, the civilian world can seem frivolous and dull, with very little at stake and all the wrong people in power. These men come home and quickly find themselves getting berated by a rear-base major who's never seen combat or arguing with their girlfriend about some domestic issue they don't even understand. When men say they miss combat, it's not that they actually miss getting shot at—you'd have to be deranged—it's that they miss being in a world where everything is important and nothing is taken for granted. They miss being in a world where human relations are entirely governed by whether you can trust the other person with your life.

War is a big and sprawling word that brings a lot of human suffering into the conversation, but combat is a different matter. Combat is the smaller game that young men fall in love with, and any solution to the human problem of war will have to take into account the psyches of these young men. For some reason there is a profound and mysterious gratification to the reciprocal agreement to protect another person with your life, and combat is virtually the only situation in which that happens regularly. These hillsides of loose shale and holly trees are where the men feel not most alive—that you can get skydiving—but the most utilized. The most necessary. The most clear and certain and purposeful. If young men could get that feeling at home, no one would ever want to go to war again, but they can't. So here he sits, one month before the end of deployment, seriously contemplating signing back up.

It's a foolish and embarrassing thought but worth owning up to. Perfectly sane, good men have been drawn back to combat over and over again, and anyone interested in the idea of world peace would do well to know what they're looking for. Not killing, necessarily—that couldn't have been clearer—but the other side of the equation: protecting. The defense of the tribe is an insanely compelling idea, and once you've been exposed to it, there's almost nothing else you'd rather do.

The willingness to die for another person is a form of love that even religions often fail to inspire, and the experience of it changes a person profoundly. Self-sacrifice in defense of one's community is virtually universal

among humans, extolled in myths and legends all over the world, and undoubtedly ancient. No community can protect itself unless a certain portion of its youth decide they are willing to risk their lives in its defense. That sentiment can be horribly manipulated by leaders and politicians, of course, but the underlying sentiment remains the same. Cheyenne Dog Soldiers wore long sashes that they staked to the ground in battle so that they couldn't retreat from the spot unless released by someone else. American militiamen at the Alamo were outnumbered ten to one and yet fought to the last man rather than surrender to Mexican forces trying to reclaim the territory of Texas. And soldiers in World War I ran headlong into heavy machine-gun fire not because many of them cared about the larger politics of the war but because that's what the man to the left and right of them was doing. The cause doesn't have to be righteous and battle doesn't have to be winnable; but over and over again throughout history, men have chosen to die in battle with their friends rather than to flee on their own and survive.

Considering the extreme nationalism of the Nazi era, one might expect that territorial ambition and a sense of racial superiority motivated most of the men on the German line. In fact, those concepts only helped men who were already part of a cohesive unit; for everyone else, such grand principles provided no motivation at all. A soldier needs to have his basic physical needs met and needs to feel valued and loved by others. If those things are provided by the group, a soldier requires virtually no rationale other than the defense of that group to continue fighting. Allied propaganda about the moral wrongfulness of the Nazi government had very little effect on these men because they weren't really fighting for that government anyway. As the German lines collapsed and the German army, the Wehrmacht, began to break up, the concerns of fighting began to give way to those of pure physical survival. At that point, Allied propaganda campaigns that guaranteed food, shelter, and safety to German deserters began to take a toll. But even then the men who deserted tended to be disgruntled loners who had never really fit into their unit. They were men who typically had trouble giving or receiving affection and had a history of difficult relations with friends and family back home. A significant number had criminal records. The majority of everyone else either fought and died as a unit or surrendered as a unit. Almost no one acted on their own to avoid a fate that was coming to the whole group.

“It's around this time that killing begins to make a kind of sense to me. It's tempting to view killing as a political act because that's where the repercussions play out, but that misses the point: a man behind a rock touched two wires to a

battery and tried to kill me—to kill us. There are other ways to understand what he did, but none of them overrides the raw fact that this man wanted to negate everything I'd ever done in my life or might ever do. It felt malicious and personal in a way that combat didn't. Combat theoretically gives you the chance to react well and survive; bombs don't allow for anything. The pressure cooker was probably bought in Kandigal, the market town we passed through half an hour earlier. The bomber built a campfire in the draw to keep himself warm that night while waiting for us. We could see his footprints in the sand. The relationship between him and me couldn't be clearer, and if I'd somehow had a chance to kill him before he touched the wires together I'm sure I would have. That's not a pretty thought to have in your head. That's not a thought that just sits there quietly and reassures you about things."

Society can give its young men almost any job and they'll figure how to do it. They'll suffer for it and die for it and watch their friends die for it, but in the end, it will get done. That only means that society should be careful about what it asks for. In a very crude sense the job of young men is to undertake the work that their fathers are too old for.

Soldiers themselves are reluctant to evaluate the costs of war, but someone must. That evaluation, ongoing and unadulterated by politics, may be the one thing a country absolutely owes the soldiers who defend its borders. There are other costs to war as well—vaguer ones that don't lend themselves to conventional math. What about the survivors? Is the territory worth the psychological cost of learning to cheer someone's death? It's an impossible question to answer but one that should keep getting asked.

War is supposed to feel bad because undeniably bad things happen in it, but for a nineteen-year-old at the working end of a .50 cal during a firefight that everyone comes out of okay, war is life multiplied by some number that no one has ever heard of. In some ways twenty minutes of combat is more life than you could scrape together in a lifetime of doing something else. Combat isn't where you might die—though that does happen—it's where you find out whether you get to keep on living. Don't underestimate the power of that revelation. Don't underestimate the things young men will wager in order to play that game one more time. The core psychological experiences of war are so primal and unadulterated, however, that they eclipse subtler feelings, like sorrow or remorse, that can gut you quietly for years.

Maybe the ultimate wound is the one that makes you miss the war you got it in.

In the civilian world almost nothing has lasting consequences, so you can blunder through life in a kind of daze. You never have to take inventory of the things in your possession and you never have to calculate the ways in which mundane circumstances can play out—can, in fact, kill you. As a result, you lose a sense of the importance of things, the gravity of things. Back home mundane details also have the power to destroy you, but the cause and effect are often spread so far apart that you don't even make the connection; in war, that connection is impossible to ignore. It is tedious but it gives the stuff of one's existence—the shoelaces and the water and the lost shirt—a riveting importance. Frankly, after you get used to living that way it is hard to go home.

We train a generation to be as violent as possible, then we expect them to come home and be OK. It's not mental illness. It's that we're doing something to a generation, and we're not responding to the needs they have.

“I did not kill myself, as several boys did during those years, nor did I kill my mind and soul, as some did so their body could survive.”

Military psychotherapists usually try to blend in and dedicate themselves to the service, largely because the professional ethics of psychology say critiquing institutions is outside their domain. They are supposed to serve whatever institution solicits their talents. The American Psychological Association secretly collaborated with the administration of President George W. Bush to bolster a legal and ethical justification for the torture of prisoners swept up in the post-9/11 war on terror. In conformity with professional ethics, if psychotherapists are working with active duty soldiers, their goal is to get them back on the front line; if they are treating veterans, their goal is to get them to overcome any remorse about those they shot or anything else they experienced while in the service. Again, the problem is seen to rest with the individual, not the institution. If you are in the military, psychotherapists are there to help you adjust to what might be the most pathological institution of all, one in which the most sane response may well be insanity. The institution itself may be so insane that there is no sane way to function within it.

There is a tendency to “psychologize the political,” that is, to deny the sociological imagination in order to prevent any recognition that the problem may rest with the institution, not the individual. Using psychological labels can be a way of transforming rational responses to inherently irrational

situations into diseases. We can infer that the way to cure the real diseases is to transform the entire society and possibly to abolish certain institutions: As a case of psychologizing the political, the construction of PTSD is a textbook case of how ‘badness’ can be reframed as ‘sickness.’ In no sense did the neo-Freudian perspective on shell shock imply that the illness of veterans needing to be understood was not real. Rather, it shifted the diagnostic gaze from causes external to the victim, like exploding shells, to causes that were internal to the mind and emotions of the veteran. What the patient was really afraid of was his own shortcomings. New stories about wartime atrocities that are couched as the failure of individual soldiers to meet the national standards, or reported as forms of personal “breakdown” are a kind of spin put on violations of human decency so as to shift the blame away from public policy and social norms.

From an evolutionary perspective, it’s exactly the response you want to have when your life is in danger: you want to be vigilant, you want to avoid situations where you are not in control, you want to react to strange noises, you want to sleep lightly and wake easily, you want to have flashbacks and nightmares that remind you of specific threats to your life, and you want to be, by turns, angry and depressed. Anger keeps you ready to fight, and depression keeps you from being too active and putting yourself in more danger. Flashbacks also serve to remind you of the danger that’s out there—they’re a highly efficient single-event survival-learning mechanism. All humans react to trauma in this way, and most mammals do as well. It may be unpleasant, but it’s preferable to getting killed.

What happens to all this grief? You put it away somewhere in the back of your mind, bury it under layers of calloused scarring from years of accumulated experiences. Soldiers are told to be tough, not to be crushed by experience, however painful those experiences may be. A soldier learns to use his or her grief as a motivator. But there is one thing soldiers rarely do. They never take the time to process the loss. They suck it up and move on, putting one foot in front of the other. Over time, the grief they’ve accumulated and buried becomes so great it can never be processed. Opening the door to those feelings would be like splitting the face of a dam. Once the water started to flow, there would be no way to stop it.

Moral injury takes place at the intersection of psychology and spirituality, and so is, in a sense, all in someone’s head. When experiencing moral injury, a person wields guilt and/or shame as a self-inflicted penalty for a choice made. PTSD is more physical, more fear-based, and often a more direct response to an event or events witnessed in war.

Think of it this way: PTSD is more likely to result from seeing something terrible, moral injury from doing something terrible.

What help can there be for something so human?

There are, of course, the bad answers, all too often including opioids and alcohol. But sufferers soon learn that such substances just send the pain off to ambush you at another moment, and yet, as many told me, you may still look forward to the morning's first throat-burning shot of something strong. Drinking and drugs have a way, however temporarily, of wiping out hours of pain that may stretch all the way back to the 1940s. You drink in the dark places, even after you understand that in the darkness you can see too much.

Tragically, suicide is never far from moral injury. The soul isn't that big a place. The psychic injuries of wartime don't end until the sufferers do. Moral injury turns out to be a debt that often can never be repaid.

“Like me, many Gulf War veterans battled health issues and struggled to stay in the workforce for years. As I have often said, if it weren't for the military, I wouldn't have been able to keep on struggling, but then again, if it weren't for the military, I wouldn't have had to.”

On the morning after the battle of Waterloo (1815), heaps of sawn-off hands and legs could be seen adjacent to the field hospitals. In those days, carpenters and butchers who enlisted to the army were often sent to serve in the medical corps, because surgery required little more than knowing your way with knives and saws.

A shy teenage boy called Saadullah survived a drone strike that killed three of his relatives, but he lost both legs, one eye, and his hope for the future:

“I wanted to be a doctor but I can't walk to school anymore. When I see others going, I wish I could join them.”

And, of course, he is not the only one:

“Sometimes I am so sad that my heart wants to explode. When your body is intact, your mind is different. You are content. But the moment you are wounded, your soul gets damaged. When your leg is torn off and your gait slows, it also burdens your spirit.”

Under the Chernenko regime, the Soviets increased the use of antipersonnel mines. Bombers sprinkled the countryside with tens of thousands of miniature booby traps made to resemble brightly colored toys. Such

mines were specifically created to attract very young Afghans; when the kids picked them up they would explode, maiming and killing the children. Toward this same end, Soviet Badgers also randomly scattered hundreds of thousands—some reports say millions—of so-called butterfly mines over vast areas. Designed to flutter gently to earth and then arm upon impact, these camouflaged plastic devices wouldn't detonate until Afghan herders happened to step on them. The mines' relatively small size was intended to blow off limbs but not necessarily cause fatal injuries, in the belief that forcing Afghan villagers to take care of gravely injured countrymen would cause more hardship than killing them outright.

Laos is on the list of least-developed nations. One reason for this is the cluster bombs littering the country that make it tricky to plough a field or build a road without painstaking and expensive mines clearance. One-third of the two-million tonnes of bombs dropped on Laos during nearly 600,000 US missions during the Secret War in the late 1960s failed to detonate. More than fifty years later, the bombs continue to kill and maim people especially during the sowing season when they are triggered by farmers turning the soil. The number of casualties is increasing, particularly among children who are seeking out the orange-sized bombs, because of the lucrative new market for scrap metal in China.

During the US-Indochina War, the Hmong became the front line of the US invasion of Laos. Recruited by General Vang Pao, whole villages gave up agriculture to subsist on CIA airdrops of food. The men called in US bombers, putting their bodies on the line so that Americans could destroy the country from the skies.

One Hmong elder whom I had asked about his life used the opportunity to tell me about how to throw back grenades and what to do if you are shot. The logistics of wartime survival were the substance of his life.

“I, too, am worried by our descent into pre-war hatred. I had a friend from Dubrovnik in the 80s. She was a typical Yugoslav—half Croatian, quarter Serbian, and a quarter Russian. She was full of hope, smart, pretty, and heartbreakingly naïve. If she survived the war, I'm pretty sure my friend lost what made her a beautiful human being. She haunts me. Civil wars seem implausible until they start and then they follow the devil's logic. People like my friend tend to die in them or turn into something less than they were in order to survive.”

“I am scared and sometimes I feel like my life is in danger. There are days when I am scared to even say a word to anyone.

I am afraid to wake up because I never know what is going to happen to me. . . I get so depressed here I wish my life by fast.”

Hoping for time to pass swiftly makes our lives seem small and unworthy.

“I would sleep beside Dad’s bed, wake up, go to school. I got to see a lot of dead bodies. That was the kind of life we were going through: you try to go to school, you get caught up in crossfire, you cannot pass over dead bodies, so you return to Dad’s side in the ward.

I never experienced any peace. I lost many of my cousins in that war and most of my friends didn’t make it. Part of me died and was dark.”

If killing won wars we’d still be using bows. A good soldier with a muzzle loader could fire three times a minute. I am a mediocre archer and I can fire twelve arrows a minute easily. Up until the early or mid-1800s, the bow was more accurate and had a much greater range than the firearms available. But they didn’t make smoke and fire and thunder. They didn’t scare men and terrify horses and wars are never won by killing people, they are won by breaking will.

Genocide, from the death camps of World War II to the slaughter of Tutsi in Rwanda or Sudanese in Darfur, does more than take innocent lives. Suffering on that scale shatters the familiar and makes it difficult for the living to cope.

“How much more grievous are the consequences of our anger than the acts which arouse it.”

—Marcus Aurelius

“It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.”

—Voltaire

On August 20, 1955, there were frenzied attacks on Europeans living around the port of Philippeville. In a nearby mining town, where 130 Europeans lived among 2,000 Muslims, FLN fellaghas (“bandits”) went from home to home during the noonday siesta, slaughtering everyone inside. French paratroopers who arrived shortly thereafter found a scene of horrors.

“When I saw children chopped up into pieces, with their throats slit or crushed to death, the women who had been

disemboweled or decapitated, I think I really forgot what having any pity meant. What was hardest to believe was that these people had been massacred and mutilated by their Algerian Muslim neighbors, who had been peacefully living with them until then.”

The troops found rebels mixed with civilians in the streets and “fired indiscriminately on the whole lot of them.”

“For two hours our submachine guys never stopped firing,” a para recalled. “The barrel of my P.M. [submachine gun] got so hot I couldn’t touch it.” Eventually orders were given to take prisoners. Hundreds of Arab men were rounded up. The next morning they were massacred by the regiment’s automatic rifles and machine guns. The French counted 1,273 dead Muslims—so many that they had to be buried with bulldozers.

“I was totally indifferent. We had to kill them and I did it. That was all.”

The trouble with Eichmann is precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality is much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together.

Where once soldiers were regular civilians who left their everyday lives to fight in defense of their societies, and were therefore worthy of the highest honour and gratitude, those civilians are now called ‘terrorists,’ ‘militants,’ and ‘unprivileged combatants’ and we are informed they have no right to fight in wars and are in fact war criminals for doing so. The people who deserve honour we are told, are professional paid killers, willing to do anything they are told, not in defense of their society but in offense to any country they are paid to attack. Our laws have been twisted to grant impunity to those we once reviled as mercenaries and make war criminals of those we once celebrated as heroes.

“‘That is so cool, unmanned aircraft. That’s really bad-ass,’ I thought when seeing recruitment posters for the drone program. I was under the impression that America was saving the world, like that we were Big Brother and we were helping everyone out.”

“When I first got into the military, I mean I was thinking it was a win-win. It was a force for good in the world. I thought I was going to be on the right side of history.”

As a general rule, the United States is considerably more forgiving of its war criminals than its whistleblowers and truth-tellers.

As it happened, the fifth anniversary of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam occurred at the time of the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee. It was difficult to miss the analogy between the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre and My Lai, 1968. Alongside the front-page news and photographs of the Wounded Knee siege that was taking place in real time were features with photos of the scene of mutilation and death at My Lai.

Lieutenant William “Rusty” Calley was then serving his twenty-year sentence under house arrest in luxurious officers’ quarters at Fort Benning, Georgia, near his hometown. Yet he remained a national hero who received hundreds of support letters weekly, who was lauded by some as a POW being held by the US military. One of Calley’s most ardent defenders was Jimmy Carter, then governor of Georgia. Three years later, as president, Carter would pardon Calley.

One of the documented acts, among many, that Calley committed and ordered others to carry out at My Lai took place when he saw a baby crawling from a ditch filled with mutilated, bloody bodies. He picked the baby up by a leg, threw the infant back into the pit, and then shot the baby point-blank. My Lai was one of thousands of such slaughters led by officers just like Calley, who a few weeks before My Lai had been observed throwing a stooped old man down a well and firing his automatic rifle down the shaft.

“One of the challenges of being a whistleblower is living with the knowledge that people continue to sit, just as you did, at those desks, in that unit, throughout the agency, who see what you saw and comply in silence, without resistance or complaint. They learn to live not just with untruths but with unnecessary untruths, dangerous untruths, corrosive untruths. It is a double tragedy: what begins as a survival strategy ends with the compromise of the human being it sought to preserve and the diminishing of the democracy meant to justify the sacrifice.”

The universe of people who will critically examine the goings-on at the institutions they work for is always going to be small. As Upton Sinclair said:

“It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.”

After years of disclosures by government investigations, media accounts, and reports from human rights organizations, there is no longer any doubt

as to whether the Bush administration committed war crimes. The only question that remains to be answered is whether those who ordered the use of torture will be held to account.

“I tell my folks they must be very careful. I say to them, ‘If you only saw what you think about you would think quite differently about it. It would give you a great shock.’ I did a very cruel thing once because I did not know what cruelty was like. I had not seen it, you know. That is the great thing: you must see it. And then you are redeemed and saved. It was not our Lord that redeemed me, but a young woman whom I saw actually burned to death. It was dreadful: oh, most dreadful. But it saved me. I have been a different man ever since.”

A gaunt twenty-year-old from Marin County, California, carrying a Koran in a cloth sack, squatted in a foxhole in Afghanistan, sipping tea. John Walker Lindh, or “The American Taliban,” as he became known, had traveled halfway around the world, and to another universe culturally and politically, to take up sentry duty on the Taliban’s front line in the Northeast Takhar Province on September 6, 2001. His guard post was atop a 2,000-foot-tall hill not far from the Tajikistan border. To the left was the Oxus River, which Alexander the Great had crossed; to the right were the snow-capped peaks of the Hindu Kush. In the distance lurked the remnants of the Northern Alliance, which before the CIA’s cash infusion reached it was close to losing Afghanistan’s civil war. What was left of the Northern Alliance’s defensive line was a battery of hulking Soviet tanks, mementos of the force’s former sponsor during the years of Soviet occupation.

The territory was so desolate, a private investigator from San Francisco who later traced Lindh’s footsteps said, “If there had been a sign saying, ‘World Ends Here,’ I would not have been surprised.” One could walk for days, in all directions, and see no lights, no cars, and no phones. “It felt to be about 500 BC,” said the detective, who was hired by Lindh’s legal defense team.

Lindh hoisted a rifle and carried two grenades, which he had been taught how to use that summer in an Afghan training camp called Al Farooq, a camp that was funded by Osama Bin Laden. A Muslim convert who had come to the region to study Arabic, Lindh had become convinced that a proper Muslim needed to do more than read and pray. “I believed it was the part of every good Muslim to train” for military jihad, he later said. His intention was to help the Taliban defeat the Northern Alliance, then create a “pure” Muslim state.

At the camp, Lindh had been taught how to shoot rocket-propelled grenades and guns. He had also personally met Bin Laden. The Saudi terrorist was a legend in the region, but Lindh said he'd only been vaguely aware of his reputation. He claimed that he had never heard of al-Qaeda, which terrorism experts found plausible.

“There were two kinds of training at Al Farooq—al-Qaeda training, to fight civilians, and military training, to fight the Northern Alliance. Lindh took only the military training. Seventy-thousand people were trained in general warfare at these camps, but perhaps only a tenth received advanced terrorist training.”

Lindh met Bin Laden, but it proved something of a letdown. Bin Laden gave an evening lecture at the camp. Arriving in a swirling, dusty motorcade of Land Rovers, he had been treated like a rock star. But Lindh had been less than enraptured. Asked what Bin Laden had been like, Lindh later told his defense team:

“To tell you the truth, he was really boring. I was so tired. The training was really grueling. I thought he seemed sick. Most of the speakers stood up when they spoke, but he sat down, and talked in a really soft voice about the history of Afghanistan, and how everyone had invaded it starting with the Greeks. I listened to the beginning, but it wasn't very interesting. So I fell asleep.”

Lindh professed to be oblivious to the terror plotting around him. But he admitted that he had been taken aside toward the end of his training by an Egyptian official at the camp named Abu Mohammed al-Masri, who was later identified as a confirmed member of al-Qaeda, for a private talk. “He asked me whether I'd like to do a martyrdom operation” in the United States or Israel, Lindh later admitted. “I said no, I'm not interested in that. I came to fight the Northern Alliance, not other countries.” The Egyptian accepted Lindh's demurrals but warned him that, whatever else he did, he was not to mention their conversation to anyone.

At his sentry post, Lindh had never had the occasion to use his weapons. But he had won something of a reputation among his fellow soldiers for another skill. He had a knack for cooking macaroni. A shipment of the dried pasta had arrived, but few of the other Taliban had known what to do with it.

News of the September 11 attacks took a while to reach Lindh. Details were sketchy. It wasn't clear who had perpetrated the violence. Lindh did notice, however, that just around September 11, a handful of the better-connected Arab fighters in his unit seemed to vanish from the front, as if perhaps they knew something.

Exactly what Lindh knew about Bin Laden and his attack plans, and how far the United States could go in trying to wring this and other precious intelligence out of him, were at the heart of a roiling debate back in Washington that had only just reached the Bush White House. The misfit son of a liberal upper-middle-class family, from a part of Northern California better known for hot tubs than mosques, would become the first experiment in detainee treatment in the war on terror, literally prisoner number "001."

As a test, Lindh's case was both unique, because of his American citizenship, and typical in the sense that the way that he was stripped, humiliated, and deliberately exposed to cold and hunger and other mistreatment would in time become quite familiar to the world after the photos of Abu Ghraib emerged. But in the furor immediately after 9/11, questions about his rough handling were seldom asked. At the time, photos that appeared of him naked, bound in duct tape to a stretcher, with a homemade sign reading "Shit Head" affixed to his blindfold, seemed funny to most Americans in a fittingly sadistic way.

Before the details of his case were known Hillary Clinton denounced him as a "traitor" in an interview on Meet the Press, a crime meriting the death penalty. Lindh's parents, who had supported the Clinton presidency, frantically tried to reach Senator Clinton without success, instead leaving a message with an aide asking her to withhold judgment.

Interestingly, among the few sympathetic words for him, after he was first captured, were those from President Bush. "I don't know what we're going to do with the poor fellow," the President said in an interview with Barbara Walters. His father, George Herbert Walker Bush, was less understanding, perhaps reflecting the difference between their roles in the family as patriarchal paragon and wayward son. "He's just despicable," said the elder President Bush on Good Morning America. "I thought of a unique penalty: Make him leave his hair the way it is and his face as dirty as it is, and let him go wandering around this country and see what kind of sympathy he would get."

Death threats and mock executions are considered war crimes under the Geneva Conventions, and felony offenses under US anti-torture laws.

Preempting what would become one of the fiercest debates dividing the administration during the rest of Bush's presidency, the memo nonchalantly dismissed international law, suggesting that the President could abide by

it or not, selectively. In a preview of Cheney's speech two days later, the memo also stated that terror suspects were not automatically entitled to "receive the protections of the Geneva Conventions or the rights that laws of war accord to lawful combatants." In saying so, the memo signaled a fundamental and egregious misunderstanding of the Geneva Conventions.

These laws of war, dating back centuries but codified first in 1864 and updated most recently in 1949, laid out civilized rules of treatment for all categories of people caught in international armed conflicts, not just regular soldiers—or, as they were called, "lawful combatants." There were rules for the treatment of citizens and other rules for the treatment of spies and saboteurs—or "unlawful" combatants. Drafted after World War II with the French Resistance in mind, these non-uniformed, "unlawful" combatants could be interrogated. If found guilty in brief hearings, they could be executed. But they still could not be subjected to "physical or moral coercion." Nor could they be tortured either physically or psychologically.

In 1949 at an international gathering in Geneva, humanitarian law was rewritten by several nations, including the United States. These new "Geneva Conventions" strove to close any loopholes, ensuring that all categories of people caught in international armed conflicts were protected from the shockingly inhumane abuse of captives practiced by the Nazis and the Japanese. America was at the forefront of this effort. US negotiators advocated that the rules be absolutely clear, even specifying food rations, barracks conditions, and athletic requirements—provisions later mocked by the Bush legal team. Having lived so recently through the horrors of war, the US Senate eagerly ratified the new conventions, making them binding US law.

In the Revolutionary War, George Washington and the Continental Army were regarded by the British as treasonous, "illegal combatants" undeserving of the protections of legitimate soldiers, the same category into which the Bush Administration was casting terror suspects. As a result, the British freely brutalized and killed American prisoners of war, in conditions considered scandalous even in that day. In contrast, Washington ordered American troops to take a higher road, in keeping with the ideals of the new republic. He insisted that enemy captives must be given food and medical attention and be housed in conditions that were no worse than those of the American soldiers. In directives still eloquent today, he ordered his troops to treat British war prisoners "with humanity, and let them have no reason to complain of us copying the brutal manner of the British Army. While we are contending for our own liberty we should be very cautious of violating the rights of conscience in others, ever considering that God alone is the judge of the hearts of men, and to Him only in this case, are they answerable."

Washington's orders, which became the backbone of American military doctrine until 2001, were not simply gestures of kindness or even morality. They sprang also from a shrewd calculation that brutality undermines military discipline and strengthens the enemy's resolve, while displays of humanity could be used to tactical advantage.

History provides a powerful counterargument to those who think that the laws of war coddle the enemy at the expense of domestic security. Any dilution of the Geneva Convention will end up having the very reverse effect of what is intended. Far from protecting Americans from terror, it will end up exposing them to it.

A military commission can try only violations of the laws of war. Under federal criminal statutes, for example, conspiring to commit terrorist acts is a crime. But, as the Nuremberg trials established, under the laws of war it is not, since all soldiers could be charged with conspiring to fight for their side. Yet a charge of conspiracy is the only thing there is in many cases at Guantánamo—guilt by association.

“Waterboarding in Guantanamo Bay sounds rad if you don't know what either of those things mean.”

Why did the Bush administration remain largely silent about the discoveries of old WMD stockpiles? The answer to that question might have proved even more embarrassing to the Bush dynasty. Because the shocking fact is that it was the United States and its allies that provided Iraq with the bulk of its weapons of mass destruction—the WMDs that American troops were now tracking down and which, indeed, were sickening some soldiers.

As the *New York Times* subsequently reported, during the Iraq-Iran War, when Saddam unleashed the horrors of chemical warfare:

“In five of six incidents in which troops were wounded by chemical agents, the munitions appeared to have been designed in the United States, manufactured in Europe, and filled in chemical agent production lines built in Iraq by Western companies.”

Thus, Saddam began building his WMD stockpiles back in the 1980s courtesy of the US government—which was then led by President Ronald Reagan, and, of course, by Vice President George Bush, father of the man who took the country to war over those very same WMDs.

Despite denials and explanations, to outsiders the attack on Al Jazeera looked absolutely intentional. The Arab network had become famous for reporting on civilian casualties from inside Afghanistan, a role similar to the one that Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) played in the 1999 Kosovo

war. Given that NATO intentionally bombed the Belgrade headquarters of the RTS during Operation Allied Force, it was easy to speculate that Al Jazeera was targeted simply for reporting a side of the war that the United States wanted suppressed.

On March 11, 1945, American B-52s with bellies full of napalm flew over Iwo Jima, headed north. LeMay launched the biggest air attack in history against Tokyo, killing around one-hundred-thousand civilians in about three hours. More Tokyo civilians died in a shorter time than in any previous military operation in any war.

“We scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo on that night of March 9–10 than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.”

LeMay exaggerated a bit, but his point was that the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki later overshadowed the powerful role of his groundbreaking napalm bombings, which reduced the majority of Japan’s cities to ash and made an astonishing fifteen-million urban Japanese homeless.

Only months after this weaponized toxin was introduced, both Vietnamese and American soldiers showed signs of dioxin’s insults to the body: fluid-filled cysts on the skin, and particularly on the face. But time would bring far worse problems: soldiers and airmen who had sprayed Agent Orange from aircraft or been exposed to it on the ground began to exhibit symptoms of everything from persistent numbness, dizziness, and memory loss to depression, violent rages, and suicidal tendencies. Many of these soldiers ultimately died of cancer. After the war, thousands of veterans would testify that they suffered neurological problems, impotence, miscarriages, and deformed babies.

There were no Purple Hearts awarded to those gravely injured by dioxin, but their wounds were real—and they never healed. The suffering inflicted on the people of Vietnam, North and South, combatant and noncombatant alike, was, for many years, an unacknowledged legacy of shame inherited by our country.

Over a period of sixty hours, from February 23 to 26, almost six-hundred parcels of retribution—more than half of all the projectiles fired during Desert Storm and nearly as many shells as American battleships fired during the last fifteen months of World War II—rained down on the coastal “defenders.” The official military justification was to deceive Iraqi troops into thinking an amphibious invasion was coming and thus pinning them in place. But the real purpose was a form of brutal housekeeping: away from TV cameras and

probing eyes, the battleships were pulled out of the old industrial closet and deployed. The United States was able to landfill the old ammunition abroad, rather than having to dispose of it back home. Faylakah was the perfect venue for our leftovers. In fact, fighters bombing Iraqi targets farther inland also dropped bombs on Faylakah Island upon returning to their aircraft carriers from unsatisfying missions—the planes couldn't land on the ships with external bombs still slung under their wings, so they had to go. They could have been jettisoned into the water, but why waste a bomb?

Many of the birth defects being seen in Iraqi hospitals are so rare that there is no medical term for them. Concerned about the birth defects plaguing her country, Dr. Alani met with physicians in Japan who are knowledgeable about the lingering health effects from the atomic bombs dropped by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. To her surprise, Dr. Alani learned that the birth defect rates in those two Japanese cities following the devastating nuclear attacks were between one and two percent, while her own case logs showed a far higher rate—almost 15 percent—for babies born in Fallujah.

Some medical experts, for instance, believe that ammunition containing depleted uranium—widely used by US forces in Iraq—bears major responsibility for the Iraqi health crisis. But others argue that the burn pits are the primary source of Iraq's health woes. Researchers found the same high levels of titanium and magnesium in the lung tissues of US soldiers stationed in Iraq as they did in the children of Hawijah, a city taken over by American forces in 2003.

And despite the 2010 withdrawal of US forces from Iraq and the end of conventional combat in Afghanistan, no one believes that the United States has really reduced its footprint overseas. The smaller number of troops is more indicative of a twenty-first-century reality, which is the end of the industrial era and the ability to generate even greater combat power than in yesteryear with fewer and fewer soldiers. But while fewer boots, fewer trainees, and fewer deaths and injuries are supposed to mean less human hassle (and less expenditure on people), the strategy is really a Washington bookkeeping trick. Machines do more of the work, but an invisible multitude of civilian contractors has quietly replaced soldiers.

Having Halliburton or Sodexo as its caterer may have improved the taste of the food, but that arrangement wouldn't work if the military were ever again to get into a really desperate slugging match like the Battle of the Bulge. The Pentagon and the State Department have even contracted out combat to soldiers for hire. The lack of training, discipline, and accountability of mercenary organizations is notorious, as became evident with Blackwater's shooting of seventeen innocent civilians in Nisour Square, Baghdad, in 2007.

The real story did not come out for another seven years. Even before the massacre, State Department investigators were probing the company's operation in Iraq, calling the firm's culture "an environment full of liability and negligence." But the probe ended when a top Blackwater manager threatened to kill a State Department investigator, saying that "no one could or would do anything about it as we were in Iraq." The American embassy in Baghdad, which had been all but taken over by intelligence operatives and contract personnel of various kinds, sided with Blackwater against the State Department, its own nominal superior.

If a crude and gangsterish upstart like Blackwater is able to back down the senior cabinet agency in the government with criminal threats of violence, it does not require much imagination to theorize why the Justice Department felt unable to bring criminal indictments against the executives of a half-dozen megabanks whose assets make up more than 50 percent of the country's GDP. To sum up, there is literally nothing that the Deep State does not contract out to the corporations that provide campaign donations to the political figureheads nominally in charge of the whole enterprise: the Arlington, Virginia-based contracting firm CACI is facing a federal lawsuit for its alleged involvement in torture at Abu Ghraib prison. Privatization has been great for contractors, not so good for the public.

Even after adjusting for inflation, the Pentagon spent more in the crash year of 2008 than during the peak of involvement in Korea and Vietnam. Both of those earlier conflicts were much larger wars than the current war on terrorism, and both wars occurred while the United States was simultaneously containing a peer competitor, the Soviet Union. Not only are we seeing unprecedented military spending, we are getting less for our money.

In 1991, William Anders, CEO of General Dynamics, told a group of industry executives:

"Most weapons manufacturers don't bring a competitive advantage to non-defense business. Frankly, sword makers don't make good and affordable plowshares."

A visitor to Washington, DC might be surprised to find ads in the city's Metro system selling a fighter plane, or spot a huge sign on a telecom building near the Southeast-Southwest Freeway extolling the virtues of an aerial tanker aircraft. A reader of *National Journal* or *Congressional Quarterly* or *Politico* will discover full-page ads for the littoral combat ship. A listener to WTOP news radio, the city's highest-rated radio station, will hear commercial spots hawking some homeland security gizmo that promises

to make our daily lives even more inconvenient, while other spots solicit persons possessing top-secret/SCI clearances—which give them access to the most sensitive “code word” information—to join this or that Beltway contractor for a unique and fulfilling career.

All of this weapon-mongering has become so ubiquitous that no one stops to think and ask one elementary question: why on earth? It is not as if the commuter from Reston or the soccer mom in Fairfax City is going to plunk down \$135 million to buy a shiny new F-35. The US government is a monopsony for the contractors: the sole customer for their wares. Even overseas contracts must be duly authorized, as Congress has the right to prohibit the sale. Government purchases must be made according to applicable statute and according to the Federal Acquisition Regulations, subject to the availability of funds appropriated expressly for the purpose. So why is public advertising necessary? Despite the formal ban on using contract revenues for advertising, the fungibility of money makes it difficult to interpret ads by a company that is dependent on the government for most of its revenue as anything other than the use of federal funds in a propaganda campaign for the purpose of pushing their wares in front of Washington’s so-called opinion leaders. Whether they intended it or not, the contractors have succeeded in normalizing the abnormal by transforming the sale of a killer drone into the ethical equivalent of a Mad Men pitch for a new mouthwash brand.

Digital Death Squads

On September 1, 2007, two IED bombers in northern Iraq were killed while lying in wait to detonate their roadside bomb the next time American soldiers passed by. The insurgents themselves were being watched by an Army Hunter drone flying high overhead. Without any noise or warning, a weapon came out of the sky and killed the men. It was the first Army weapon fired from one of its own drones in combat, organically able to spy and kill at the same time and all on its own.

But the missile wasn't Hellfire, Predator's aptly named hunter-killer, nor was it one of the half dozen weapons configured for delivery by Reaper, just then newly flying over the skies of the Middle East.

It was Viper Strike. A glide weapon modified from a Cold War invention intended to attack massed armored formations with swarms of what were then called "brilliant" munitions, the reconfigured Viper Strike was reoriented as a single weapon for the purpose of killing individuals. It weighs only a third of Predator's Hellfire, and has just 2.5 pounds of explosives, one-twentieth of even that small weapon's punch. Everything about Viper Strike is top-down. The weapon follows a trajectory that takes it directly over the target, setting itself up to make a steep dive nose-first, its warhead shaped and designed to explode with a focused downward-directed blast. With a laser seeker homing in on its quarry, it has a rated three-foot accuracy, meaning that friendly soldiers on the ground can be extremely close and still be safe in an attack.

Viper Strike was first tested in 2002—another "quick reaction capability," of course—conceived for combat in places like Kabul or Baghdad where "urban canyons" exist. A small munition like Viper Strike reduces risk to nearby friendly soldiers, in addition to minimizing harm to civilian bystanders. Viper Strike is a kind of cop on the beat, turning loitering not just into observation of what goes on in the corners of Everybad but also into its own SWAT team, the full cycle completed in turning everyday soldiers into assassins for the Machine.

GPS guidance and a data link were further added to Viper Strike's laser seeker in 2008, allowing the weapon to fly to the target vicinity, receive updates while in the air, and then use its laser seeker to home in on a designated spot. Like a satellite-guided JDAM, the forty-pound missile could be launched indirectly and off-axis from as high as 31,000 feet, with operators and commanders on the ground and in helicopters watching its flight path through a constant video feed, another one of those truly brilliant inventions where the drone itself is the least important part. Unseen,

unheard, and undetectable, Viper Strike offers a “covert capability.” The weapon “does not have a plume; it is a stealthy glide weapon. You don’t hear it coming,” the program manager said. As an Army briefing expounds, Viper Strike is perfect for picking off one car in a motorcade or as a six-kilometer-range sniper for “Golden Shot” missions, which it describes as taking out a bad guy on a roof while leaving the roof intact or killing two guys hiding without any further skin off the hide.

When the 15th Military Intelligence Battalion fired Viper Strike from one of its twenty-year-old Hunters in September 2007, the earth moved for those once-lowly geeks, collectors, and analysts previously relegated to combat support.

As there is with all new weapons, there are shortcomings: Viper Strike has to be launched from a canister, and it doesn’t operate in all weather conditions. And only about 1,200 Cold War BAT munitions could be converted into Viper Strikes, and even they have a limited shelf life. And, as with other spiral and ad hoc developments, the weapon, though approved by the Army vice chief in 2002, came about without any validated military requirement. But with Secretary Gates on a tear criticizing the endless search for perfect weapons while soldiers were dying, the potential for Viper Strike to join the black box cavalcade unfolded. As early as 2004, the Army was working on the Laser Homing Attack or Anti-Tank Missile (LAHAT), essentially an advanced follow-on to Hellfire at a third of the weight. The Air Force followed the Viper Strike path and took another Cold War antitank weapon—called Skeet—and started a program of test-firing it from a drone. The navy’s weapons laboratory at China Lake developed Spike, the world’s smallest guided missile. Weighing in at about 5.3 pounds and two feet in length, it could be fired from a small drone or from a shoulder launcher and travel two miles. And it could punch right through a window before exploding. Another weapon under development was the Miniature Guided Bomb Unit (MGBU), weighing less than four pounds and designed for urban use from Army Shadow and Marine Corps Blackjack/Integrator drones. Soon after, BAE Systems tested what it called the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS), doubling Viper Strike accuracy to half a meter (or 1.5 feet) by adding a laser seeker to a 2.5-inch rocket. The Lethal Miniature Aerial Munitions System (LMAMS) followed, a weapon that would fit on man-portable drones like Raven—“incapacitating effects using kinetic means,” in other words, making it sound almost like no explosion was involved. Next came Griffin and then Pyros, both weapons with even more advanced targeting techniques that allowed for increased accuracy.

In early 2009, Spike was fired from a drone, joining Viper Strike as another potential personal weapon and extending the possible number of armed

drones into the hundreds. In March 2012, APKWS went to Afghanistan, initially qualified on Marine Corps helicopters, attack and utility, but slated for drones as well. The Air Force acquired a LMAMS prototype that it called Anubis. The Army started shipping the tiny LMAMS, now called Switchblade, to Afghanistan in August 2012. It is described as the perfect hybrid of spying and killing—a “weapon designed for hand, tube, or aerial launch that could provide the warfighter with a rapid delivery to gather ISR information”—an expendable camera that goes beyond line of sight and gives the soldier the option to kill. When LMAMS reaches the target, its camera allows an individual soldier to have not only “eyes on” the target but also the ability to wave the weapon off if the situation demands or if the soldier thinks the person being targeted is the wrong one. And then Switchblade can loiter for up to an hour in the air while the user searches for another person to kill.

The Marine Corps also deployed Harvest Hawk in 2010, not a drone or a new weapon but another platform, this one a manned hybrid that could be called cousin to Global Hawk’s BACN. Harvest Hawk is a black box that fits onto Marine Corps aerial refueling aircraft, giving them intelligence collection and weapons capabilities all in one. It is a black box of the future: one platform doing everything, as Harvest Hawk doesn’t just collect—it also can carry Hellfire, Viper Strike, and Griffin.

It would be stretching things beyond the innovation of each development to say that any of these weapons made much of a difference beyond the immediate ability to just kill the same target in a different way and with seemingly less immediate danger and harm to others. Given the efforts expended to reach this level of seeming perfection and equality, the numbers still don’t support the image of a terrorist and insurgent class being eliminated.

Granted, the war in Iraq had ended and the war in Afghanistan was winding down when Harvest Hawk first deployed, but the advances in spying and killing didn’t and don’t stand still. The production lines for drones stay open not because of the need to ship more to the fight but because they are becoming the standard equipment of every unit. If every Army and Marine Corps division now needs its own complement of Predator-type drones, that is what determines the inventory. If every tactical unit is expected to go out with a Raven or a Puma, that is what establishes how many are required. If every base and every military police unit needs a certain number of drones or other unmanned surveillance gadgets in the form of balloons and towers and ground sensors for security and force protection, the number of bases in Afghanistan or Iraq or Djibouti or wherever determines how many. And none of this seemingly interferes with traditional missions or changes doctrine.

Harvest Hawk is of value precisely because it is, as they say, “platform agnostic”—a black box and a weapon fitted to an airplane up there and flying anyhow. The plane is manned, but its unmanned spying and killing black box is more tied to the larger Machine than to the refuelers on board.

The military has been wholly transformed by these black boxes, and yet the Army itself can’t see what it has become. Any notion of centralized intelligence—of a temple of information leading a nation in an actual strategy—has disappeared. Information belongs to everyone, and the assassin’s tool is increasingly at the beck and call of the decentralized god. The new aesthetic favored above all else is that no one puts their life at risk if a machine can do the job instead. And if soldiers have to work at the edge, they must be connected to the network and have personal ISR and weapons. Processing and bandwidth expand in service of the Data Machine, reachback continues because everyone serves the fighting man. No civilian leader or decision-maker seems to have the ability to see what has been created or question that the United States is stuck not just in this state of perpetual war but in a particular kind of war. No one has wrestled with the accumulated impact of the Data Machine and its erosion of distinction, nor the impact of its rampaging across cyberspace for five years or a decade, and more. Unmanned, “attack the network,” geolocation, reachback, a network for all, smaller and smaller weapons—each represents a huge but little-understood “advance” that stymies an understanding even of what is new and old, what is military and what is not. Harvest Hawk isn’t married to just any airplane: it is married to a KC-130J tanker, a version of the venerable four-engine propeller C-130 transport, which is itself one of the oldest airplanes in the US inventory, surpassing fifty years of continuous production and upgrade, now souped up with black boxes to make it nothing like its ancestors. We can no longer measure combat capability merely in numbers of troops or platforms and ignore the black boxes and networks. But the arithmetic of the enemy also confounds, seemingly demanding hundreds of billions of dollars’ worth of effort to merely keep a few thousand at bay.

Somewhere in the middle of all of this, a new president arrived in Washington. Everyone wants to believe that the Obama team decided to pursue some new tack against al-Qaeda. Critics from the left and right, even insiders, speak of “Obama’s drone war” almost in an attempt to personalize this wholly automated and detached effort driven by the Data Machine. Obama is labeled “assassin in chief,” making personal life-and-death calls from the White House, micromanaging the military and intelligence community in a style reminiscent of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Dick Cheney can both express his affection for drones and criticize the Obama administration for being so weak that it has given up on trying to

capture and interrogate the bad guys and instead just kills them.

It is true that drone activity over Pakistan accelerated in the year that overlapped the Bush-to-Obama transition, but in a historical sweep, it is the continuation of a policy predicated on a capability. On January 30, 2009, the new administration asked the military's Joint Chiefs of Staff to cut the defense budget submission for Fiscal Year 2010 by more than 10 percent. Two months later, General Atomics delivered its 200th Predator to the Air Force. Reaper, its eventual replacement, was moving steadily forward in production, deployed with Gilgamesh and Airhandler black boxes, and armed with its own wide-area sensor, called Gorgon Stare. Wide area widened even further with Constant Hawk, MAAS, Kestrel, and WAPS (the Wide Area Persistent Surveillance system), all coming off production lines in the new administration.

While Obama and his advisors debated Afghanistan surges and withdrawals, General Petraeus asked for more hyperspectral imagery, prompting Secretary Gates's ISR Task Force to search for an instrument "that was not a science project" and could be delivered quickly. The Advanced Responsive Tactically Effective Military Imaging Spectrometer (ARTEMIS) black box was launched into orbit barely four months after Obama was elected, collecting 480 different channels of data for each pixel in its view. But the capability was so secret and so obscure that six months later, when ACES HY was approved, it was called the first. Airborne Cueing and Exploitation System-Hyperspectral would fly on Predator in 2012, the thoroughbred successor to WARHORSE, a 100-pound marvel that could be integrated and enable the drone to also carry its standard electrooptical/infrared ball. Satellite-borne, unmanned, and even manned hyperspectral would join the Obama team: in 2010, U-2s incorporated SPIRITT, the Spectral Infrared Remote Imaging Transition Testbed, optimized for its high-altitude mission. Not one is an Obama initiative, not one is anything more than more.

Each ongoing emergency project, each quick-reaction capability, each experiment carried the most promising technology or black box forward. If there weren't enough drones and black boxes already in the fight, there was also each new discipline, like hyperspectral, that came on board. And then there were also "special communications" black boxes to support unmanned ground sensors and the x-men, some of the devices so secret-agent that they slip as much into the category of black bag as black box. In 2009, one company even touted an inflatable, airline-checkable, 2.4-meter satellite antenna system that would allow a secret agent to set up a remote high-bandwidth communications hub, perfect for infiltrating into a Pakistan or a Yemen or beyond. As one set of top secret briefing slides says, the goal is "holistic integrated solutions," the ability to differentiate between "terrorist"

and “indigenous activities” with the goal of “providing timely, actionable intelligence enabling disruption of terrorist kill chains.” The Data Machine drives an uninterrupted and never-ending search for novel techniques to detect and locate the signatures of terrorist activities, right down to their socks. Everybad is now reachable, and though we may debate “defense” as a set of choices of buying this or that industrial monster or pivoting to Asia, the reach to Everybad is political party and president agnostic.

In Obama’s first year, Predator and Reaper inventories peaked at 228—174 Predators and 54 Reapers. Two years later, at the height of all operations overseas, Predator-type drones had increased their daily schedules from three combat air patrols (orbits) to seventy-five-plus “caps” daily. And it wasn’t just Predator and Reaper—there were Global Hawk and all the other drones and dozens of different types of manned aircraft. After 9/11, the United States accumulated hundreds of different types of wide-area and hyperspectral sensors on thousands of platforms capable of creating countless images daily. And try to fathom this: the next generation of wide-area motion imagery sensors will be capable of collecting 2.2 petabytes of data per day, bringing 450 percent more data into the network than all of Facebook adds on a typical day. And the generation after that, “broad area” imaging, what is called persistent surveillance and is already happening, will demand twice that.

In Pakistan, after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, President Bush expanded the target list beyond al-Qaeda to the Taliban and other “nexus” targets and increased the tempo of attacks; by the end of 2008 there had been forty-six drone strikes over the border. Initially, Pakistani intelligence was consulted, but when US intelligence showed President Bush evidence that the targets might be receiving warnings, the United States started only to inform Pakistani officials concurrently. Bush also approved the employment of a more “attack the network” approach, bombing infrastructure and then tracking “squirters”—those who got away—to the next hideout. X-men operating as part of Joint Expeditionary SIGINT Tactical Reconnaissance (JESTR) teams would infiltrate and get as close to potential targets with their Swiss Army knife black box collection conducting “Charlie Ops” under the COHESIVE OVATION program. The operations were so successful that twenty additional ones were mounted between July and Obama’s election. When Obama took over the program, drones were flying out of Pakistan and there were extensive plans to expand the area of permitted strikes and increase operations on the ground in Pakistan. Deputy National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon told Bob Woodward that though Obama had campaigned against Bush’s ideas and approaches, he underestimated the extent to which he had inherited George W. Bush’s presidency—“the

apparatus, personnel and mind-set of war making.”

In other words, Obama didn't accelerate anything. He just assumed “command” of greater capabilities to hit targets. That means also that the pretense of fewer troops can be sold as deescalation of conflict or even success. The impression can be left behind that the American president himself sits at the joystick and the rest of the country has nothing to do with it. But that in itself is the triumph of the Machine. The unlaborers and the system are invisible, and so the Machine becomes platform agnostic—political platform agnostic as well.

When President Obama appeared before the cadets at West Point on graduation day 2014, his promise was a withdrawal from Afghanistan by a certain date, just as he had done in Iraq. The administration said that as the United States wound down its war in Afghanistan, it would keep a force of just 9,800 US service members in 2015. But “America's combat mission will be over,” Obama said. And the United States would “have to develop a strategy that matches” the diffuse terrorism threat—“one that expands our reach without sending forces that stretch our military too thin, or stir up local resentments.”

Commentary on the president's speech dissected every nuance about the American future, but black boxes are what makes that withdrawal possible, by allowing for a network that is less dependent on a human ground presence at the point of fighting. And because of the network, nearly ten-thousand troops on the ground equals some hundreds of thousands of yesteryear. The nature of the Data Machine, moreover, including all of its mystifying classifications of military, civilian, and contractor; of overt, covert, clandestine, invisible, and just special, obscures what is the true commitment and activity on the ground and presents the illusion of demobilization and pulling back, when in fact that is not the reality. Find a president or a political decision in the continuity from Desert Storm to the mid-1990s to 9/11 and beyond: Clinton inherited Bush; Bush inherited Clinton; Obama, Bush; Trump, Obama. Our foreign policy itself is unmanned.

The distinction between regime and nation was a crucial one. By employing these new military techniques, the United States could eliminate a non-compliant foreign leader and his cronies, while sparing the population over which that leader ruled. Putting a missile through the roof of a presidential palace made it unnecessary to incinerate an entire capital city, endowing force with hitherto undreamed-of political utility and easing ancient moral inhibitions on the use of force. Force had been a club; it now became a scalpel.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, and then in new battlefields in Yemen and Pakistan, everyone was told that this was going to be a new kind of war.

The United States wasn't going to win the fight against terrorism through defeating an army on the battlefield or attacking some set of traditional targets with bombers. The new mission was going out and hunting. Special operations forces and secret agents—that is, the small-scale and elite fighters like the Navy SEALs of the individual commando variety—would lead the fight, and more activity would take place in the shadows than in the light. Information would be as valuable as any bullet. Humans are engaged in this effort, and there are those individuals who actually go out there and risk their lives. But the irony is that this very humancentric design of hunter-killer special operations, these particular types of boots on the ground, require far more exhaustive preparation and microscopic-level intelligence information than industrial armies ever needed. Thus the technological effort and the human effort demand the same data, a circular requirement that has become the dominant activity.

Warfare hasn't completely transformed into an endeavor where everyone on the battlefield is merely there to sustain being on the battlefield, but the ratio of those actually doing the fighting to those processing the information and operating the Machine is at historical extremes. It is hard to quantify, but during the Afghanistan war, only 1.6% of the supplies shipped to the battlefield comprised ammunition, and less than 1% was repair parts. Fuel, on the other hand, constituted almost 39%; water, food, clothing, and personal items made up another 55.4%.

When you talk to military elders about their cadre of digital natives, they describe them as those who “want to do, not to be told.” With connectivity as their hallmark, they expect to jump right into a new piece of equipment, a new website, or a new game, learning the controls through trial and error. And not only that—digital natives value team learning, and they achieve and improve naturally through social media. When you visit a military unit or a command post these days, it's quite noticeable that the ubiquitous accoutrement of modern-day war-making is social media, from the common operating picture to the multiple open chat sessions connecting highly dispersed information workers. And yet this instant messaging, which has all of the immediacy, abbreviation, and fleetingness of teenage texting, goes on in a secure and hidden world and concerns matters of life and death.

The government effort costing hundreds of billions of dollars, constituting tens of thousands of sensors and hundreds of thousands of human operators and analysts, is barely able to keep up with the task of finding and monitoring a few thousand people. And that's the point: monumental leaps have occurred, both in technology and in the ways of war, but they have all been to achieve a very limited objective. The military has been transformed and become hyperprecise, but it also has become able to do only one thing: drill

down to the individual—a terrorist, a car, an armored vehicle, a window in an office, the most hidden or fragile heart or brain of a machine or a network. Data feeds this incredible targeting machine, which goes about its work with such economy that it is sometimes not even apparent what is being destroyed, let alone why. It is such a new way of warfare that every death—friendly and enemy—is enormously magnified. Ours is a numerically anomalous tragedy; theirs an exaggerated and overmagnified victory.

Some might say that these advances merely repeat the historical cycles of technological innovation that every war produces. But that is dangerous thinking. Every element of what has emerged in this increasingly unmanned world is dependent on civilian technology and, in fact, civilian infrastructure. Nothing happens in this world without the Internet, even if private pipelines and superencryption are the way that the military facilitates its own secure enclave within the network. As a result, private and public communications have become one. Developments in the processing and handling of big data, the use of the cloud, and information analysis move forward in parallel military and civilian worlds and at breakneck speed; the best of what is civilian is readily adapted for the military, whereas the robustness of what is military is desperately needed to protect networks that are no longer just civilian.

Given how much more lethal and exacting every weapon was also becoming, the numbers were turned upside down—that is, one bomber became equal to ten or fifty or a hundred of a half-century earlier; one Hellfire-type missile could do what thousands of bombs couldn't even do in the past: kill the target. The equation of how many people are needed to make war shifted from warriors to data processors and unlaborers. The changing of the doing itself thus also changed the very nature of war. There was a transition period between the Cold War and merely war, to an era of wars of policy rather than wars of necessity. And there were changes in society, coincident or as a consequence, whereby the assumption of universal military service was abandoned for a volunteer and professional military—though I would argue, and I have, that society overall has become much more militarized.

And, of course, there was just the reality of societies' movement to the information era and the age of the digital self. The shift to the unmanned is therefore not merely some post-9/11 phenomenon. The Data Machine wasn't the product of any diabolical mind or plans of the Bush administration. Predator was not some invention intended for al-Qaeda. Targeted killing is not just some macabre Obama pastime. Unmanned is warfare changed with society and then accelerated in more than a decade of warfare that was hardly ever industrial in nature.

Volumes would later be written as to whether terror is a crime or an act

of war, about the namby-pamby pre-9/11 reactions, about the failures of intelligence and government that led to the 2001 attacks, and then about the turnaround and all the supposed correctives that followed. But there is no denying in hindsight that by conferring warrior status upon al-Qaeda, the United States also conferred the age-old mantle of the military on a bunch of criminals, even if they were arch-criminals. Like the goddess Ishtar throwing a tantrum that resulted in Enkidu's death, the black box reared its mighty pencil and took on the role of judge and jury—and more, claimed the essential authority and power of the gods. None of it would have happened without unmanned systems—first the long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles that could be fired from the Indian Ocean deep into Afghanistan, and then Predator, which now proved that it could range anywhere, and also could soon do so with its own weapon.

One can almost hear the adolescent guffaws in the American telling of the first Gulf War, locker-room swagger that glosses over all the difficulties involved in preparing to fight the fourth-largest army in the world. Gone and forgotten are the many drills in anticipation of chemical weapons or worse, the thousands of body bags shipped to Saudi Arabia for the expected corpses, the fear that the new smart weapons would not work, and the many frustrations when the likes of Scud missiles stymied the best of plans. All was miraculously expunged at the end of forty-three days, and making fun of the hapless opponents, with their mismatched uniforms and meager supplies, became the new narrative.

Perhaps one of the saddest pretenses is in the urban legend of Iraqi soldiers being so stupid that they tried to surrender to a drone. It was on one of the last days of the conflict. An unmanned Pioneer, its snowmobile engine screeching away at about 2,000 feet, overflew Kuwait's Faylakah Island, taking video that included footage of Iraqi soldiers waving white flags in the air. The footage was beamed back to a US Navy battleship and went viral in military channels. The story, which was quickly embellished, became lore not just of Iraq's easy dispatch but also of the magic of the unmanned. Remote images of the enemy surrendering!

During the Battle of Tora Bora, Global Hawk dropped its planned imagery collection profile altogether and started tracking Taliban and al-Qaeda positions and cave entrances, either using its infrared camera to detect campfires or receiving tip-offs to take a closer look with its sensors into crevices and cracks off angle from satellites. Aircraft and AC-130 gunships in the area would undertake airstrikes, which Global Hawk could then instantly confirm via star-shaped infrared flashes, recording bomb explosions, the sparkle of success.

Such instant gratification made quite a contrast with doctrine and even

practice before the war: in old-fashioned war, the army corps commander, in charge of three to five divisions, would rely upon his own intelligence units—either field artillery radars or organic collection assets—out from the front. A fire support team would determine the best way to attack beyond the range of the divisions. If airstrikes were desired, a liaison would nominate the target through higher headquarters to the daily targeting board at the air command center, which would then task flying squadrons, which would fly the requested missions anywhere from one to three days later. If the target was mobile, the nominated target would have to be meticulously tracked and its position updated to the air guys as many as three times a day. The obvious question then asked in the fall of 2002 was “When we find a target, why not just kill it right then?” Capabilities and communications had certainly improved; what was needed was closer cooperation at the working level and a change in practice to reflect the new capabilities of the Data Machine.

“You know, if the Predator gets shot down, the pilot goes home and fucks his wife. It’s OK. There’s no POW issue here.”

No loss of American life, or so it seemed, meant there was no issue of any kind.

Every second of every day, over fifty of these Predator-type drones are airborne worldwide, over Afghanistan and Pakistan, quietly flying over Yemen or Syria, working in Africa and Latin America, patrolling the US border, monitoring the oceans, conducting civilian and scientific missions of all kinds.

Every drone consists of four distinct elements: the platform itself (whether aircraft, ground, or waterborne robot), the payload (the black box—that is, the sensor or weapon), the control station (where the flight is directed from, whether it is on the ground or not), and the communications network that is required to control the platform and receive its product. External to the drone world are the processors (analysts or computers) who scrutinize the product and then the users (political decision-makers, commanders, special operatives, soldiers) who take action, the manned element of the unmanned system, who are hardly trivial.

The ground presence was also substantial, not necessarily a flaw but a surprise to some who had a vision of one-man, one-joystick, one-vehicle operations. Cost, the Air Force found out, was ten times what many assumed. In fact, despite the term ‘unmanned,’ maintaining Predator proved more labor-intensive than manned operations, not even counting how many people

were needed to handle the incoming intelligence, which just kept increasing in volume.

The one characteristic that makes aerial drones so different from manned aircraft—a characteristic shared with robots and unmanned undersea vehicles—is that, relieved of the human being on board, they can loiter. They can linger aimlessly, moving about in a slow and idle manner and making purposeless stops in the course of a trip. Before the military started using the buzzphrases “persistent surveillance” and “perch and stare” to atomize intelligence and envelop the drone as just another one of the guys, they used the word ‘loiter’ thereby saying way more than was ever intended.

Now, the reader might think I bring up the term ‘loitering’ to suggest a metaphor for some sort of crime being committed, when in fact it is the aimlessness that I want to focus on. Loitering, drone war advocates say, provides “a clearer picture of the target and its surroundings, including the presence of innocent civilians.” The danger is that this very confidence in “surgical precision”—this “laser-like focus,” to use the words of drone war architect and former CIA director John Brennan—self-validates the use of drones. Proponents argue that because the United States is taking unprecedented measures to be both discriminating and meticulous in its pursuit of terrorists, it is therefore doing the right thing.

The goal is to deploy solar-powered drones that can loiter in the air for weeks without coming down. Once you can do that, and you put any typical signals-collection device on the bottom of it to monitor, unblinkingly, the emanations of, for example, the different network addresses of every laptop, smartphone, and IoT device, you know not just where a particular device is in what city, but you know what apartment each device lives in, where it goes at any particular time, and by what route. Once you know the devices, you know their owners. When you start doing this over several cities, you’re tracking the movements not just of individuals but of whole populations.

By preying on the modern necessity to stay connected, governments can reduce our dignity to something like that of tagged animals, the primary difference being that we paid for the tags and they’re in our pockets. It sounds like fantasist paranoia, but on the technical level it’s so trivial to implement that I cannot imagine a future in which it won’t be attempted. It will be limited to the war zones at first, in accordance with our customs, but surveillance technology has a tendency to follow us home.

From the first night of Afghanistan bombing in October 2001, when everyone boggled over the all-seeing eye for the first time, decision-makers at the CIA, the Pentagon, the White House, and command centers near and far were glued to their own DNN—the Drone News Network—everyone fully in thrall. Video was of course the simplest explanation, spawning epithets

of “Predator porn” and “CAOC crack,” but what really appealed to a television-watching and image-obsessed generation was persistence. General Jumper called it the buzzword of the decade in 2003. Arguably the most important strategy document that the Pentagon prepares, the Quadrennial Defense Review, in 2006 argued that future capabilities needed to favor “systems that have far greater range and persistence; larger and more flexible payloads for surveillance or strike; and the ability to penetrate and sustain operations in denied areas.” BACN is the facilitator of anywhere and always. Now all that was needed was all the time.

The concept of persistence requires yet another family of black box sensors. Predator is up there like no other, but it provided far less than the persistence that was envisioned, at least beyond extremely narrow individual targeting that came from looking through a soda straw. It’s an “immediate-time kind of reporting,” one Air Force officer said, “of viewing exactly what’s going on with whatever your selected target is—whether that’s a house, a building, a vehicle moving down the road, whatever that is—you are able to then sit there and watch that. It’s very small. So I just see one vehicle or two or three vehicles at the most, but my field of view just isn’t that big on the ground.” Not only did the Predator camera show a limited perspective, but the raw imagery from the moving platform proved not so easy to interpret, the thirty-to forty-five-degree angle constantly changing as the drone moved. Scientists went to work on better processing, developing software and hardware that would provide georeferences (what we today call metadata) and even a converted top-down perspective that matched a scene-based correlation, virtually all of the advances being borrowed from graphics processors used in gaming applications. The other two avenues of attack were increasing the breadth of the perspective (wide area) and providing higher resolution, thus allowing greater exploitation of each imaged scene by the naked eye.

Sonoma was the first experiment of widening the perspective, developed starting in 2003 by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. Using a novel mosaic-like sensor design that could view a wide area at high definition, the first prototype carried a 22-megapixel sensor (six times Predator’s resolution), the second a 66-megapixel sensor, and the third a 176-megapixel sensor, each capable of imaging a larger and larger area in a single frame. Where that normal sensor on Predator can image the area of a city block, Sonoma 2 could cover an area the size of downtown Washington, DC, and Sonoma 3 could see the entire metropolitan area. Such wide-area high-definition imaging exposes every corner. In one of the initial Sonoma experiments, an IED scenario was created—Red Team Intent—that assumed that any car that slowed down to five miles per hour for more than 100

feet was suspicious. Software was written that highlighted the path of all vehicles matching this signature. Then, once the pattern was triggered, an analyst could rewind the video and discover where a suspicious vehicle came from. And Sonoma could track 8,000 simultaneous moving objects.

It was truly persistence, but in order for surveillance to be useful, an analyst must be able to see the data in real time. As the Livermore laboratory explained, “all data processing for one frame must be completed before the next frame is captured.” With data being collected at two frames per second, Sonoma’s data exceeded the bandwidth of available communications by a factor of 100 to 10,000. So scientists applied various techniques, including data compression, to show only movement (or anomalies), while the georeferenced static background was only episodically transmitted to match what the sensor was seeing.

Sonoma turned into the Mohawk Stare experiment for the Army and then into Constant Hawk, and in 2006, a prototype Constant Hawk wide-area persistent surveillance (WAPS) system was quietly deployed in Iraq, owned and operated by contractors. Constant Hawk could record and archive sensor data that allowed for playback of incidents, such as roadside IED bomb blasts, to be reviewed. Once an event occurred, the data was downloaded, and analysts attempted to backtrack from the incident, tracing bomb-makers and insurgents who might have deployed the IED and, if possible, following them backward even to their points of origin. They call this method of going backward to pick up clues forensic analysis. This was warfare completely turned on its head. Constant Hawk was an immediate hit. But the experimental black box was integrated on a manned airplane and not a drone, giving it limited time in the air. And it still produced enormous amounts of data, much more than could be moved very far, and in formats useful only for demonstration.

Then, as these things go, the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico produced Angel Fire for the Marines—smaller and more user friendly—and other wide-area and persistent programs came knocking.

More black boxes meant more data. And the introduction of wide-area surveillance, and particularly high definition, exponentially increased the amount of information available. Collection outpaced the ability to move the information, store it, or process it. As a result, the Pentagon admitted in 2009 that it was drowning in data. It was now looking at hundreds of terabytes of new data coming in every day. That’s over 400 laptops with the typical 128-gigabyte solid state drive, and more than the total of all the terabytes collected by the Library of Congress Web teams. “We’re going to find ourselves in the not too distant future swimming in sensors and drowning in data,” said Lieutenant General David Deptula, head of Air

Force intelligence in January 2010. And within a couple of years, Reapers would be carrying their own wide-area black boxes that would be able to track up to twelve different targets simultaneously, delivering 84 million pixels twice a second. “The iteration after that will jump to 30 and there are plans to eventually reach 65. That’s an increase from 39 possible video feeds [from Predators and Reapers] to more than 3,000 with a 50 cap force,” Deptula said. Data pipes were filled and storage was approaching saturation levels.

The next month, BAE Systems announced successful flight tests of its ARGUS-IS, a 1.8-billion-pixel camera with a resolution of six inches that can see a minimum of sixty-five “Predator-like” video windows across more than 100 square kilometers. And ARGUS would transmit at five times the frame rate of Constant Hawk, ten times a second. One minute of high-definition video of a city block already demanded one gigabyte; an 800-megapixel image of a small city—required to extract intelligence information at specific locations—demanded half of a terabyte per minute; ARGUS-IS, operating at 1,800 megapixels, could image a large city demanding half a petabyte per minute of bandwidth if all of the data was transmitted.

BACN was pursued because everyone saw saturation coming, because there was a demand for far more bandwidth and data.

Part of the problem is the haystack itself. When 9/11 came, there were about 450 million Internet users and close to one-billion mobile connections in use around the globe, sending about 10 billion electronic messages daily, 10 percent of them text messages. By 2014, the planet was closing in on two-billion Internet users and the number of mobile connections was estimated at 7.5 trillion, with only about five percent of them in the United States. Internet use was no longer dominated by people sitting at computers; in most parts of the world, particularly in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, the vast majority of Internet access, including everything from communications to banking, was achieved using smartphones. By 2014, the number of electronic messages sent daily topped 500 billion. In the decade and a half after 9/11, the numbers multiplied many times over, with each development—digital DVDs replacing analog CDs, digital radio and television, high-definition, social media, and people living online—exerting greater and greater demands for bandwidth and presenting an infinite universe of data to be collected.

Everyone, including the custodians and residents of the Data Machine, is now drowning in information. The number of all kinds of manned and unmanned collection platforms tripled in the two years after 9/11 and continued to grow after the Iraq war started, increasing by over 200 percent from the end of the Bush administration until 2012. Just in terms of combat flight hours, drones increased from a total of around 22,000 in 2001 to over

550,000 in 2011. The demands for intelligence became so great, and the capacity to collect information proliferated so broadly, that by 2013 there were triple the number of platforms in Afghanistan than there had been at the height of operations in Iraq, despite the fact that the fighting force on the ground there was only one-fifth the number of troops that deployed to Iraq.

Those in the know describe just the amount of visual data collected every day as five seasons' worth of every professional football game played—thousands upon thousands of hours. The data moves around the globe multiple times, first for “actionable” purposes, which means in support of an immediate high-value mission. The data then moves to be processed for second-phase and multi-INT exploitation. It then moves to contribute to geospatial products. It then moves to park itself somewhere on the network. And it then moves whenever someone pulses the system, secret search engines that go under names like Stone Ghost, Gemini, and Hercules. On a daily basis, the Data Machine produces hundreds of thousands of reports, many of which require no human intervention whatsoever.

All of this data is now constantly on and fully dynamic and moving from desktops to handheld ROVERs and ginormous video walls in fusion centers, occupying chat, e-mail, and Web services for processors and users all along the way. It is a wholesale change in culture that had quietly taken hold in the military and intelligence communities, one where information—data—came to dominate, where it was seen as key to soldier safety and discriminate warfare. Yet despite the coming end of the big wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite the directive to stop buying platforms, and despite the saturation that was affecting movement and storage, no one could seem to find a limit, a point when or where information ended. Years later, when Edward Snowden brought to light the NSA's infinite collection of signals, the broader impact (and appetite) of the Data Machine was lost in discussions of the legality and privacy of eavesdropping and cyberdata interception. The way the Data Machine itself works also wields enormous demands of its own, not just the post-9/11 cult of connect the dots and the kill chain perfected, but also the human factors—user friendliness and interactivity that make the machine workable for a generation of digital natives, seamless production values that now mask the drivel of most of the content.

Though the systems available are an overwhelming word list of acronyms, there are basically two parts to the convention of getting through today and increasing the odds for tomorrow. In Everybad, wherever it is, pattern analysis has become the ubiquitous mission preparation: think all-news AM radio that provides traffic alerts ‘on the 8s’ transformed into an automobile-mounted GPS that magically ingests slowdowns and accidents and then

places it all in a life-and-death, no-mistakes instant navigator that not only provides warnings but also can assess the possibilities and dangers of alternate routes. Whether unit analysts input their SIGACTs into an older flattened Time/Event Plot Wheel or use the density plot software contained in the Distributed Common Ground System, the dual goal is not just to report bad traffic but to create a record of date, time, and location patterns to track enemy networks so as to know who is responsible for the jam and where they are at any given moment. And then the pseudoscience of this new type of warring is to predict where they will be next.

Any unit that ventures out into the unknown can create a mathematical grid: each kilometer of road is given a unique identifier within fixed named areas of interest, many of the latter as small as a two-block area; as many as 300 in a company area of operations may support about 180 infantrymen, masterminded by a handful of data gatherers. Every SIGACT is associated with a specific geographic point and instantly logged to show which grid is quiet, active, more active, and even more active; up to 10,000 SIGACTs at a time can be tracked at the unit level. With engagements plotted by location, and by hour and day of the week, and with percentages established by commanders for thresholds—say 15 percent to designate a high-risk area—windows of engagement with the highest probabilities of success are established: a location where indirect fire such as a mortar is known to have come from, a line of fire that snipers have consistently employed, IEDs that have been found and detonated.

When it all comes together, when the data is collected and entered properly, when the servers serve and all the knowns are collected, the probability of success is increased: one NCO describes his experiences with convoy operations, remarking that the data in his area of operations showed that only about five percent of the roadside bombings occurred between the hours of 2400 and 0400, not only determining the optimum time to conduct movements but also providing immeasurable psychological reassurance to his soldiers.

A shipment of plastic men's sandals stamped 'MADE IN CHINA' and common in South Asia goes on sale in Peshawar. A wafer-thin tagging device no bigger than a business card has been embedded during manufacture, China being only a stamp. Some of the tags are passive and will register when they pass by special readers, with the location of the shoe transmitted to a central tracker. Others are active and will transmit a signal that can be picked up from tuned receivers, even in space. It's a long shot, but the shoes will do the talking: when they cross the border or visit certain locations, the unknown wearer will be identified as a person of interest. A sensitive-site exploitation team moves to search suspect buildings, leaving behind tiny

motion-activated surveillance cameras. A grid of clandestine unattended motion-detecting ground sensors—eyes on the ground—is also left behind, blanketing the neighborhood with visual, acoustic, and seismic informants.

From more than one kilometer away, a close-access target reconnaissance team watches a suspect compound. A high-value individual on the target list has been followed off and on for weeks by Predator, and now a cell phone call locates an associate. Utilizing their long-range sensors, the team gets a decent biometrics profile of two individuals—height, estimated weight, 2-D facial, hyperspectral signature—and transmits the files to the tactical operations center, where it is relayed to the Biometrics Fusion Center in West Virginia for second-phase analysis and confirmation of identity.

Predators flying high overhead establish pattern of life, identifying a truck never before connected with any known bomb-making network. Predator footage, together with archival satellite imagery, feeds into geolocating software that determines the truck's coordinates with one-foot accuracy. A small drone is then launched, a very special drone with a classified name. It silently lands near the truck, dispensing its micro morphing air-land vehicle, which skitters to the truck and then crawls underneath. Its camera, which normally faces forward during flight, flips up and gathers images of a bomb that has been placed on the truck's underbelly.

Where mechanical eyes and ears fail, where the Data Machine stumbles, something akin to the dark arts begins. These are the most secret of all secrets: the how of how the United States and its allies find and confirm individuals, the individual, when satellites and drones overhead or intercepted digits just aren't enough. The starting point of such a mission could be a tip-off from sensors demanding positive ID and greater precision, or it could be just a name leading to a link leading to a link, and on and on and on, as the global hunt proceeds to find the body. This is the cutting edge of what is both manned and unmanned. And not only that, but this is also where the seams are: these black ops—military operations—exist in a gap where things are neither strictly military nor strictly covert, nor in the realm of law enforcement.

The lines separating those communities—soldiers, spies, cops—used to be clearly marked, and for good reason—military was military, civilian was civilian, war was war, and assassination was something that didn't happen within war's rules. Even if military special operations worked clandestinely, they weren't covert, that is, operations where the United States sought to hide its involvement (and those operations were once solely the domain of the CIA). And the CIA wasn't the military, that honor being reserved for those who operate in the open. Military special operators and CIA people might work together, and lawmen might even be brought into a hostage

rescue or an individual takedown, but the basic distinction of each of their roles pretty much held up until 9/11.

A conventional fighting force pursuing an unconventional foe just couldn't do things in the old ways in the hopes of stopping terror (or later, even just stopping IED attacks) before it occurred. Or more precisely, while conventional military forces fought in the light, another war went on in the dark.

Manned close-access target reconnaissance—combining the four main technical surveillance disciplines (electronics, video, audio, and TTL)—puts the x-men in the riskiest positions, whether in penetrating deep into the mountains of Pakistan on lone missions, or in going into the urban areas of today's conflict zones (or even into cities and places not yet on the public target lists). But the development of these technologies and the risk assumed can also obscure the true transformation here and the ultimate hallmark of the x-men: They cross the lines. They go where others can't. They are soldiers, policemen, and covert operators all rolled into one. No border holds them back, and similarly, no conventional law applies. They have ridden the wave of post-9/11 jingoism, of connect the dots, and they march forward on the simplest explanation of why those attacks came. They are armed with technologies that are only tangentially arms. They have access to nanotechnologies and MASINT and the sciences of biometrics and forensics, which previously were available only in the security and law enforcement domains.

And they are the answer machines: what used to be complementary and a mere adjunct to traditional intelligence is now more often than not the second source, the positive ID or the right-down-to-his-socks conclusion that decision-makers and x-men use to pull the trigger, acting as both intelligence collectors and executioners. These nonsoldiers, nonlawmen are all-in-one: a manned unmanned.

For all the talk of drones and black boxes, this hunt of the x-men is about as human as one could imagine. Yet when armed with so much information and so much power, remote and long-range begins to look pretty good in comparison. For to embody all of the attributes of military and civilian, soldier and policeman, surgeon and killer in one is essentially to create highly adaptive and essentially automated decision-making that leads to one answer, one continual answer.

Equipped with the greatest of real-world black boxes, sensors, communications, and weapons, with the Data Machine always at their beck and call, these x-men are the essence of imagined perfection—the x-men working at the edge also increase the level of confidence in the final decision. The willingness to make mortal sacrifices, the assumption of meticulous preparation,

and the magic of the special ensure that commanders and decision-makers start from the assumption that the target is the most dangerous and deadly to friendly forces (and to the World), thereby justifying all of the effort, but also that once the penetration is made, they know enough detail to satisfy the unspoken color-of-the-socks test. As former Air Force chief scientist Dr. Mark Maybury says of the combination of persistence and closeness, they have “a very positive impact on increasing knowledge because you have a chance to loiter and see more things,” bolstering with positive identification and reducing civilian casualties.

The Data Machine has changed everything and the warriors of special reconnaissance are valued more as collectors than killers, humans to be sure, but not valued for their cognitive abilities or language skills or even because they make a choice at the end whether to pull the trigger or not. No, here, ‘close’ is the key word: the human operative is valued because getting close, putting an RFID device on a car, tagging an individual to follow him or her, slipping an intercept chip into a phone, fiddling with someone’s computer or home router, picking up some cell phone call, or taking some picture; even just watching and listening to all of this activity peeping tom-style, is valued because it gains access and data that the central brain does not (yet) know.

Yet the close-access operator is also merely a new platform and data processor for the unmanned. The president and his advisors literally sit around the conference table at the White House Situation Room half a world away watching an operation unfold live because of these men. One might imagine that courageous political decisions are made in executing the mission that day, in taking whatever momentary risk there is in the willingness to take the heat for failure. But in approving the execution—We know the color of the socks! It’s a go!—the option of trial isn’t even seriously considered; and in military terms, capture isn’t even attempted.

All these decisions are made a little easier because Navy SEALs or other special operators are not quite soldiers. These are, after all, the elite of the elite, further obscuring all of the distinctions of military and civilian and just and unjust, a blurring that empowers other outlaw fighters to justify their own actions and their cause. From targeting Osama bin Laden down to designating the umpteenth al-Qaeda number three to be killed, the machine facilitates a corrosive blight. The military mission from Desert Storm through this post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan period of no-name war is ever more obsessed with perfecting the process of finding and killing the target. Only the imprecision of using such a euphemism is left.

Bush’s CIA and NSA chief Hayden said about Obama’s drone assassination of Anwar al Awlaki:

“We needed a court order to eavesdrop on him but we didn’t need a court order to kill him. Isn’t that something?”

Drones are a tool, not a policy. The policy is assassination. While every president since Gerald Ford has upheld an executive order banning assassinations by US personnel, Congress has avoided legislating the issue or even defining the word ‘assassination.’ This has allowed proponents of the drone wars to rebrand assassinations with more palatable characterizations, such as the term du jour, “targeted killings.”

The military is easily capable of adapting to change, but they don’t like to stop anything they feel is making their lives easier or is to their benefit. And this certainly is, in their eyes, a very quick, clean way of doing things. It’s a very slick, efficient way to conduct the war, without having to have the massive ground invasion mistakes of Iraq and Afghanistan. But at this point they have become so addicted to this machine, to this way of doing business, that it seems like it’s going to become harder and harder to pull them away from it the longer they’re allowed to continue operating in this way.

Members of the special operations community view the people being hunted by the United States for possible death by drone strike as if they have no rights, no dignity, no humanity to themselves. They’re just a “selector” to an analyst. You eventually get to a point in the target’s life cycle that you are following them, you don’t even refer to them by their actual name. This practice contributes to dehumanizing the people before you’ve even encountered the moral question ‘Is this a legitimate kill or not?’

Whatever the actual numbers of terrorists, the Muslim world—and much of the rest of the world—remains unpersuaded about the supposedly benign designs of American empire, even if the foot is smaller and the stomp is more of a grind.

Uncle Sam's Outposts

The opening words of a US Army War College study bluntly declare:

“US national security strategy requires access to overseas military bases.”

The policy underlying this deeply held belief is known as the “forward strategy.” These two words have had profound implications. Cold War policy held that the United States should maintain large concentrations of military forces and bases as close as possible to the Soviet Union, in order to hem in and “contain” supposed Soviet expansionism. Suddenly the security of the United States, in the minds of policymakers, lost much of its former inseparability from the concept of the territory of the United States.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the United States operated more than 900 military bases around the world, including 287 in Germany, 130 in Japan, 106 in South Korea, 89 in Italy, 57 in the British Isles, 21 in Portugal, and 19 in Turkey. The number also comprised additional bases or installations located in Aruba, Australia, Djibouti, Egypt, Israel, Singapore, Thailand, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Crete, Sicily, Iceland, Romania, Bulgaria, Honduras, Colombia, and Cuba (Guantánamo Bay), among many other locations in some 150 countries, along with those recently added in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

Even military resorts and recreation areas in places such as Tuscany and Seoul are bases of a kind; worldwide, the military runs more than 170 golf courses.

Americans may not know much about them but of course people living near US bases in countries worldwide pay them more attention. For many, US bases are one of the most prominent symbols of the United States, along with Hollywood movies, pop music, and fast food. Indeed, the prevalence of Burger Kings and Taco Bells on many of our bases abroad is telling: ours is a supersized collection of bases with franchises the world over. While there are no freestanding foreign bases on US soil, today there are around eight-hundred US bases in foreign countries, occupied by hundreds of thousands of US troops.

The presence of US bases can turn a country into a target for foreign powers or militants. On Guam, a dark Cold War joke said that Soviet nuclear missile targeters were just about the only people who could locate the island on a map; with a China-focused US military buildup under way, some are expressing similar concerns about Chinese missiles potentially targeting the island today.

While scholars generally identify Guantánamo Bay as the first US military base abroad, they strangely overlook bases created shortly after independence. Hundreds of frontier forts helped enable the westward expansion of the United States, and they were built on land that was very much abroad at the time. Fort Harmar, built in 1785 in the Northwest Territory, was the first. Others appeared in today's Ohio and Indiana, including Forts Deposit, Defiance, Hamilton, Wayne, Washington, and Knox. Each of these bases helped waves of US settlers move into the lands of Native American nations, pushing Indians progressively westward. By 1802, there was a chain of US forts from the Great Lakes to New Orleans

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was initially supposed to mark the “very western edge of civilization” and the “permanent Indian frontier.” However, by protecting the start of the Santa Fe and Oregon trails, it only furthered the westward migration of Euro-American settlers, miners, traders, and farmers. The Army soon became the “advance agent” and “pry bar” of US conquest.

The United States first took possession of Pearl Harbor in 1887, when officials coerced the indigenous monarchy into granting exclusive access to the protected bay. Half a century later, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the US Navy seized Kahoolawe, the smallest of Hawaii's eight major islands, and ordered its inhabitants to leave. The Navy turned the island, which is home to some 544 archaeological sites and other sacred places for indigenous Hawaiians, into a weapons testing range. It wasn't until 2003 that the Navy finally returned the island—now environmentally devastated—to the state.

In 1903, US officials pressured Cuban leaders into accepting thinly disguised US rule in exchange for Cuba's official independence and the withdrawal of most (though not all) US troops. The US-penned Platt Amendment allowed the United States to invade Cuba at will to ensure stability and so-called independence, prevented Cuba from making treaties with other governments, and permitted the construction of US “coaling or naval stations.” The two governments also signed a lease giving the US military “complete jurisdiction and control” over forty-five square miles of Guantánamo Bay—an area bigger than Washington, D.C. Tellingly, the “lease” had no termination date, which effectively meant that Cuba had ceded the territory to its northern neighbor. In exchange, the United States agreed to build a fence, prevent commercial or industrial activities within the base, and pay a meager yearly fee of \$2,000.

Cuban leaders would eventually annul the Platt Amendment, but US officials insisted on a new treaty to hold on to Guantánamo Bay. The treaty continued the terms of the original lease and stipulated that Cuba could

never force the United States to leave. Renters everywhere only wish they had such eviction-proof leases.

In 1903, the same year US officials secured access to Guantánamo Bay, they did much the same in Panama. A treaty imposed on the newly independent country gave the United States what amounted to sovereign rights in perpetuity across 553 square miles that became the Panama Canal Zone. The treaty also authorized other extensive powers, including land expropriation outside the Canal Zone and the authority to build bases. Panama would eventually host fourteen. As in Cuba, Panama's constitution allowed the United States to intervene militarily, and between 1856 and 1989, the US military invaded twenty-four times. With prominent US bases occupying their land and enabling easy intervention, Panama and Cuba were effectively colonies.

The base nation as we know it was born on September 2, 1940. It is a vastly underappreciated moment, generally treated as a small detail in World War II history books. But it was then, with the flash of a pen, that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt began the transformation of the United States from one of the world's major powers into a global superpower of unparalleled military might. On that momentous day, more than a year before the United States entered the war, Roosevelt informed Congress that he was authorizing an agreement with Britain: the country would provide its nearly bankrupt ally with fifty World War I-era destroyers in exchange for US control over a collection of air and naval bases in Britain's colonies. Although such a pact should have required congressional approval, Roosevelt simply declared it done. Under what became known as the "destroyers-for-bases" agreement, the United States acquired ninety-nine-year leases and near-sovereign powers over bases in the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Thomas, Antigua, Aruba-Curaçao, Trinidad, and British Guiana, plus temporary access to bases in Bermuda and Newfoundland. Roosevelt called the agreement "the most important action in the reinforcement of our national security since the Louisiana Purchase." The leases' ninety-nine-year length reflected similarly grand ambitions: President Roosevelt intended to cement the global power of the United States for at least a century to come.

Once the United States entered World War II, the military worked to expand its base collection as quickly as possible. The government signed new deals to station US forces in location after location: new bases were built or occupied in Mexico, Brazil, Panama, Northern Ireland, Iceland, Danish Greenland, Australia, Haiti, Cuba, Kenya, Senegal, Dutch Suriname, British and French Guiana, the Portuguese Azores, the Galápagos Islands, Britain's Ascension Island in the South Atlantic, and Palmyra Island near Hawaii. By war's end, the military was building base facilities at an average

rate of 112 a month. In five years, it built the largest collection of bases in world history.

Shortly before the war's conclusion, President Harry Truman addressed the issue of post-war bases during the "Big Three" meeting in Potsdam, Germany. "Though the United States wants no profit or selfish advantage out of this war," Truman declared, "we are going to maintain the military bases necessary for the complete protection of our interests and of world peace." And, he added pointedly:

"Bases which our military experts deem to be essential for our protection we will acquire."

The military felt especially justified in retaining captured Pacific islands because of the high human and financial costs of their acquisition. Having defeated or subordinated its former imperial rivals in the Pacific the United States military was in no mood to hand back occupied real estate. Many in Congress agreed. No one, they felt, had the right to give away land which had been bought and paid for with American lives:

"We fought for them, we've got them, we should keep them. They are necessary to our safety. I see no other course."

The maintenance of such an extensive collection of military bases was also rooted in a widely held strategic belief that the security of the nation and the prevention of future wars depended on dominating the Pacific through a combination of naval forces and island strongholds. This imperial solution to American anxieties about strategic security in the post-war Pacific exhibited itself in a bureaucratic consensus about turning the Pacific Basin into an American lake.

The buildup of US troops around the world was the result of a profound change in how US leaders thought about the very idea of 'defense,' as well as a newly expansive concept of 'national security.' Even before the United States entered World War II, Roosevelt and other leaders had started developing a vision of the world as intrinsically threatening, in which any instability and danger, no matter how small or how far removed from the United States, was seen as a vital threat. "No attack is so unlikely or impossible that it may be ignored," argued Roosevelt in 1939. In a world of "permanent danger," the military thus needed to be a "permanently mobilized force" ready to confront threats wherever they might appear. "If the United States is to have any defense," Roosevelt and others believed, "it must have total defense."

Since World War II, the United States has been inexorably acquiring permanent military enclaves whose sole purpose appears to be the domination of one of the most strategically important areas of the world.

But, a base that's reassuring for one power can look like a threat to another.

Calling a base "temporary" often provides benefits, whether abroad or at home. For instance, it provides a rhetorical mechanism to circumvent the Honduras constitution's prohibition against the permanent stationing of foreign troops on Honduran soil. If there was any doubt about who really controls the base, a 2008 incident was revealing. At the time, Honduran president Manuel Zelaya proposed using Soto Cano's runway as part of a new international airport for joint civilian and military use. An embassy staffer in the Honduran capital told me that the US response was: No problem. But US officials added, "Oh, by the way, all the power, all the water, all the sewage, all the lighting, all the air traffic control stuff, the radar, is all controlled by the US, and our laws prohibit US military funds supporting private enterprises. So, if you want to open up an international airport"—by building replacement facilities from scratch, that is—"by all means, go for it." The Honduran project went nowhere.

Bases are frequently established on the political margins of national territory, on lands occupied by ethnic or cultural minorities or otherwise disadvantaged populations. While the military is generally driven by strategic considerations when deciding what regions should have bases, within a given region the selection of specific base locations is heavily influenced by the ease of land acquisition. The ease with which the military can acquire land tends to be strongly linked to the relative powerlessness of that land's inhabitants, which in turn is usually linked to factors such as their nationality, skin color, and population size. Across history displacements and demolitions are the norm.

In a way, the idea for acquiring Diego Garcia dates to the winter of 1922, when eight-year-old Stuart Barber found himself sick and confined to bed at his family's home in New Haven, Connecticut. Stu, as he was known, was always a solitary boy, and he sought solace in a cherished geography book. He was particularly fascinated by the world's remote islands, and he developed a passion for collecting the stamps of far-flung island colonies. While the British-controlled Falkland Islands off the coast of Argentina was his favorite, Barber noticed that the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa was also dotted with islands claimed by Britain.

Thirty-six years later, Barber would once again be consulting lists of small, isolated colonial islands from every map, atlas, and nautical chart he could find. The year was 1958. Thin and spectacled, Barber was a civilian

working in the Navy's long-range planning office.

At this time of decolonization and Cold War confrontation between East and West, Barber and other officials in the growing national security bureaucracy were concerned about what would happen as colonized nations gained their independence.

Post-war independence movements were vocally opposed to foreign military facilities, and US, British, and French bases were also increasingly criticized by the Soviet Union and the United Nations. US officials were particularly worried that losing overseas bases would diminish American influence in the so-called Third World, where they predicted future military conflicts would likely take place.

"Within the next 5 to 10 years," Barber wrote to the Navy brass, "virtually all of Africa, and certain Middle Eastern and Far Eastern territories presently under Western control will gain either complete independence or a high degree of autonomy," making them likely to "drift from Western influence." The inevitable result, Barber predicted, would be the withdrawal of US and allied European military forces and "the denial or restriction" of Western bases in these areas. The Cold War's "forward strategy" was premised on maintaining large numbers of bases and troops as close as possible to the Soviet Union, but Barber and others feared that the United States would soon face eviction orders across much of the globe.

Barber's solution to this perceived threat was what he called the "Strategic Island Concept." Island bases near hot spots in the "Third World," he said, would increase the nation's ability to rapidly deploy military force wherever and whenever officials desired. His plan was to avoid traditional base sites located in populous mainland areas, where bases were vulnerable to local opposition. Instead, he wrote, "only relatively small, lightly populated islands, separated from major population masses, could be safely held under full control of the West." With the decolonization process unfolding rapidly, Barber argued that if the United States wanted to protect its "future freedom of military action," government officials would have to act fast to "stockpile" basing rights, grabbing as many islands as possible as quickly as possible to retain territorial sovereignty in perpetuity. Just as a sensible investor would "stockpile any material commodity which foreseeably will become unavailable in the future," Barber said, the United States had to find small, little-noticed colonial islands around the world and either buy them outright or ensure that Western allies maintained sovereignty over them. Otherwise the islands could be lost to decolonization forever. Once officials secured the islands, the military could then prepare them for base construction whenever future needs required.

So if you ever find yourself in possession of a time machine, perhaps skip

the cliché of baby Hitler and go to 1922 and steal this little fucker's atlas. Or, you know, it is 1922, sick kids die all the time. . .

The Chagos Archipelago comprises more than sixty small coral islands isolated in the Indian Ocean halfway between Africa and Indonesia, a thousand miles south of the nearest continent, India. In the late 1950s, Navy officials began developing a plan to build a new US base on the British-controlled island of Diego Garcia, in the Chagos Archipelago. During talks with their British counterparts, Pentagon and State Department negotiators insisted that the Chagos islands come under their “exclusive control (without local inhabitants).” This tiny parenthetical phrase amounted to an expulsion order. Between 1968 and 1973, the United States and Britain, the latter the colonial administrator, forcibly removed the indigenous inhabitants of the islands, the Chagossians.

Once British officials had agreed and base construction appeared imminent, any Chagossians who left Chagos after 1967 for medical treatment or a routine vacation in Mauritius were barred from returning home. Agents for the steamship company that connected the islands told the travelers that their islands had been sold and that they could never return. The Chagossians were marooned in Mauritius, separated from many of their family members and almost all their possessions. British officials soon began restricting the flow of food and medical supplies to Chagos. As conditions deteriorated, more Chagossians began leaving the islands, hoping to return when the situation improved. Meanwhile, British and US officials designed a public relations plan aimed, as a British bureaucrat wrote, at “maintaining the fiction” that Chagossians were migrant laborers rather than a people whose roots on Chagos stretched back across many generations. One British official called them “Tarzans” and, in a similarly racist reference, “Man Fridays.”

With the help of US Navy Seabees, British agents began the deportation process by rounding up the islanders' pet dogs. They gassed and burned them in sealed cargo sheds as Chagossians watched in horror. Never Forget™? Then the authorities ordered the remaining Chagossians onto overcrowded cargo ships. During the deportations, which took place in stages until May 1973, most of the Chagossians slept in the ship's hold atop guano—bird shit. Horses stayed on deck. By the end of the five-day journey, vomit, urine, and excrement were everywhere. At least one woman miscarried. Some compare conditions to those on slave ships. Upon arrival in Mauritius and the Seychelles, most Chagossians were literally left on the docks. They were homeless, jobless, and had little money. Most were able to bring only a single box of belongings and a sleeping mat. In 1975, two years after the last removals, the *Washington Post* exposed the story for the first time in

the Western press. A reporter found the people living in “abject poverty,” victims of what the paper called an “act of mass kidnapping.”

The exiled Chagossians received no resettlement assistance. Decades after their expulsion, they generally remain the poorest of the poor in Mauritius and the Seychelles, struggling to survive in places that outsiders know as exotic tourist and honeymoon destinations. The US military, having claimed the Chagossians’ former home, has nicknamed Diego Garcia “the Footprint of Freedom.”

“We were living like animals. Land? We had none. Work? We had none. Our children weren’t going to school.”

The Chagossians had lost almost everything, for no reason other than the happenstance of living on an island desired by the US Navy.

The Chagossians are not the only indigenous people around the world that the US military has displaced. The military established a pattern during and after the Vietnam War of forcibly removing indigenous peoples from sites deemed strategic for the placement of military bases. The peoples of the Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific and Puerto Rico’s Vieques Island are perhaps the best-known examples, but there were also the Inughuit of Thule, Greenland, and the thousands of Okinawans and Indigenous peoples of Micronesia.

During the harsh deportation of the Micronesians in the 1970s, the press took some notice. In response to one reporter’s question, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said of the Micronesians:

“There are only ninety-thousand people out there. Who gives a damn?”

This is a statement of permissive genocide. Now usually we don’t condone punching the elderly in the face, but Henry’s probably a good exception. Do it for the . . . well hell, how to choose, Henry’s got quite a bit of blood on his wrinkled old claws don’t he? Or is he dead now? Maybe the Wuhan Flu got him? That’d be nice.

Indigenous territories in New Mexico bristle with nuclear weapons storage, and Shoshone and Paiute territories in Nevada are scarred by decades of aboveground and underground nuclear weapons testing. The Navajo Nation and some New Mexico Pueblos have experienced decades of uranium strip mining, the pollution of water, and subsequent deadly health effects. The impact of the military on the world and on Native America is pervasive.

The displacement of Chagossians, Marshallese islanders, and other groups demonstrates the vulnerability of small, isolated populations whose forcible

relocation US officials have so often treated as a matter of negligible concern. The story of another group of islands underscores the decisive role that ideas about race have played in such decisions.

Before World War II, Japan's Bonin-Volcano (also known as Ogasawara) islands, which include Iwo Jima, had a population of roughly seven-thousand. The islanders were the descendants of nineteenth-century settlers, most of whom had come from Japan but also from the United States and Europe. In 1944, Japanese officials evacuated all the Bonin-Volcano islanders to Japan's main islands to protect them from impending US attack. After the US capture of the Bonin-Volcanos, American officials prohibited the locals from returning in order to give the military unhindered use of the islands.

In 1946, however, officials modified the decision: they would "permit the return of those residents of Caucasian extraction who had been forcibly removed to Japan during the war and who had petitioned the United States to return." US authorities subsequently assisted with the repatriation of approximately 130 Euro-American men and their families to the Bonin-Volcano islands. The Navy helped them establish self-government, allowed children to attend a Navy school, and created a cooperative trading company to market agricultural products on Guam and a Bonin-Volcano Trust Fund to provide financial support. The only differences between this community and the Chagossians were the color of their skin and their ties to the United States.

At the urging of the military after the war, the government maintained its control over possessions once called colonies, including Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands, as "territories" of the United States. These islands have neither full independence nor the full democratic rights that would come with incorporation into the United States. They highlight how, even in the twenty-first century, our base nation still relies on the perpetuation of colonial relationships, albeit under new guises and with new vocabulary. From the military's perspective, Guam and the other territories offer unmatched autonomy.

"This is not Okinawa. This is American soil in the midst of the Pacific. Guam is a US territory. We can do what we want here, and make huge investments without fear of being thrown out."

Guam has the paradoxical nature of being considered a tiny, insignificant footnote to the United States while sitting at the center of American power.

After World War II, Chamorros on Guam expected their bravery and loyalty during the war at least to be rewarded with citizenship and self-

rule. The Navy thought otherwise. Adding insult to an array of injuries, it reestablished military rule, and Chamorros had to struggle for years to win US citizenship. Only when State Department officials grew concerned that the policy was creating “an island of anti-American radicals,” and there were widespread acts of civil disobedience and threats of a general strike, did the Truman administration authorize the control over Guam to be transferred from the Navy to the Department of the Interior. In 1950, Guam became an “unincorporated territory,” giving the island limited rights to self-governance. The US Congress maintained ultimate control. To this day, Guam remains one of just seventeen non-self-governing territories in the world, as tracked by the UN. Others on the list include American Samoa and the US Virgin Islands, along with territories like French Polynesia and Gibraltar. In the words of the Department of the Interior, Guam became an “area in which the United States Congress has determined that only selected parts of the United States Constitution apply.”

Despite Guam's marginalization, the military enjoys almost unparalleled support on the island. Enlistment rates on Guam generally top those of nearly every US state and territory. This is in no small part because Guam's unemployment and poverty rates tend to top the nation's as well. At \$39,000 a year, median household income is less than three quarters of the US average. Nearly everyone on the island has a family member or close friend connected to the military in some way, whether as a member of the military, a veteran, or an employee on base or in a base-dependent industry.

In 2006, Pentagon officials announced a major multibillion-dollar buildup of new base infrastructure on Guam. The buildup would accommodate up to nine-thousand marines and tens of thousands of family members and civilians moving from Okinawa in the face of continued protests against the US base presence. Around the same time, the Air Force announced plans to increase its presence on the island by naming it one of four major global hubs for its strike forces, which it called “Guam Strike.”

Meanwhile, the Navy made plans to expand Apra Harbor's ability to host nuclear aircraft carriers and submarines; the Army National Guard planned new construction to accommodate its planned force expansion; and the Pentagon selected Guam as a key site for its ballistic missile defense system. The island thus became the centerpiece of the most significant transformation in the structure of US forces in Asia since at least the departure from the Philippines and perhaps since the end of the war in Vietnam.

Planners anticipated nearly eighty-thousand people, including almost twenty-thousand construction workers, moving to Guam in a four-year period. Since Guam's entire population is only around 160,000, that would mean an almost 50 percent population increase.

Given the island's high poverty and unemployment rates, there is little surprise that many on Guam expressed enthusiasm about the economic benefits anticipated from the buildup. Military representatives promised tens of millions of dollars in additional tax revenues, government aid, and infrastructure investments. For a time, at least, a gold rush atmosphere prevailed. Email solicitations with subject lines like "Opportunity of a Lifetime!" proclaimed, "The tiny little island of Guam is about to become a great big deal! There's Work to be Done and Money to be Made!"

The Guam Chamber of Commerce, among others, trumpeted both the economic benefits of the buildup and the security rationale for the move. To provide evidence of the need for the buildup, a 2011 Chamber report outlined a long list of threats ranging from North Korean missiles and China's cyberwar capabilities to violent extremism, transnational criminal organizations, pandemics, and natural disasters. In the face of these dangers, the business organization wrote, Guam offers "permanent sovereign facilities" to demonstrate US "strength, presence, [and] engagement" in Asia, thus helping to "avoid confrontation and conflict" by deterring potential adversaries.

Given such high levels of support for the military on Guam, many were surprised when growing numbers of people started expressing concerns about the buildup.

Along with established activists, some of the most prominent voices of opposition came from young people, mostly in their twenties. They formed a group called We Are Guåhan, after the Chamorro name for the island, to monitor the buildup. As the group and others scrutinized the plan, their work seemed to reveal just how much the military takes for granted the kind of nearly unchecked power it has enjoyed on the island since Guam became a US colony in 1898. We Are Guåhan and others pointed out the dangers of the planned population boom on an island with an already strained infrastructure. Guam's public school system was expected to have its student population grow by up to 26 percent. Demand for the island's sole public hospital was expected to increase by 20 percent.

The military's own assessment predicted that at its height the buildup would strain and exceed the island's wastewater treatment capacities. Given what the military called "the current poor state of the utilities infrastructure on Guam," civilians would also face a shortage of millions of gallons of drinking water per day, requiring the military to share some of its surplus. Opponents noted that while the military hadn't budgeted to expand Guam's civilian facilities, the buildup plan included money to build new military schools, a new military hospital, and other base infrastructure.

The military's offer to share water to meet civilian needs only underlined

the island's inequalities and many locals' feelings of being second-class citizens.

When the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) looked at the buildup plan, it had many of the same concerns. In a scathing report, the agency found the buildup would likely damage "Guam's existing substandard drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, which may result in significant adverse public health impacts." Dredging to expand Apra Harbor would cause "unacceptable impacts" to seventy-one acres of coral reef. The EPA deemed the buildup plan "environmentally unsatisfactory," saying it "should not proceed as proposed."

Many Chamorro activists were particularly upset that the Marines wanted to acquire 1,800 additional acres of Guam's land to build a gun range on the remains of Pãgat, a sacred indigenous village and burial ground dating to at least 900. We Are Guåhan spokesperson Cara Flores-Mays compared the Marines' plan for Pãgat to putting a firing range on Arlington Cemetery:

"You would never think to do that. We have a lot of responsibility for our ancestors and those who came before us, and so you can understand why some people would get angry."

While the military's brazenly poor planning of the buildup is far from unique to Guam, the carelessness also reflects something larger than decades of Pentagon profligacy. The major elements of the buildup that generated so much opposition—the idea of building a shooting range on sacred indigenous land without even considering an alternative; seizing 1,700 acres of additional private land; planning to increase Guam's population by 50 percent without the civilian infrastructure to handle the growth; embarking on a major buildup without a master plan—all come back to the same root cause: for more than a century, 'we can do what we want here' has been the military's core attitude toward Guam.

The military has frequently adopted a 'we can do what we want here' attitude in Guam, Diego Garcia, Okinawa, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Panama, Greenland, and well beyond. The attitude shows us how the base nation has relied on continuing colonial relationships in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, albeit under new guises and with new terminology. After all, in the post-World War II age of decolonization, with rare exceptions, maintaining large colonies became impossible. But as the Strategic Island Concept shows, the government and a few of its European allies found ways to maintain a handful of small, mostly island, colonies largely because of their strategic value as base sites. From the military's perspective, ongoing colonial relationships have allowed officials to "do what we want" without

many of the restrictions faced in the fifty states or in fully independent nations. From the perspective of the Chamorros on Guam and others trapped in similar colonial relationships today, the military's attachment to overseas bases means that they still lack the basic democratic rights and freedoms taken for granted by most of their fellow citizens.

This 'I'm king' attitude implies a hierarchy, of the kind that is fundamental to military training. Researchers have shown that one of the most difficult challenges militaries face is that of teaching human beings to kill other human beings, and that doing so requires dehumanizing others by promoting the belief that another human is somehow a "lesser" creature. One of the central forms of dehumanization promoted by military training and the culture of daily life in the military has been the supposed inferiority of women—that women are less than men. Institutionalized military prostitution provides one important source for this dehumanization of women and the militarized masculinity that helps perpetuate it. In places where there is an ethnic difference between GIs and sex workers, military prostitution can also reinforce societal beliefs about supposed racial and ethnic superiority, and the naturalness of some people serving and others being served.

A large-scale study of US bases created since 1898 confirms that autocratic states have been consistently attractive to US officials as base hosts. Due to the unpredictability of elections on the other hand, democratic states prove less attractive in terms of sustainability and duration. In some cases, US officials have reacted to this unpredictability by intervening in ostensibly democratic processes to produce outcomes to their liking and ensure ongoing base access. In the lead-up to Italy's crucial 1948 national elections, for instance, the CIA, the State Department, and other agencies of the US government used propaganda, smear campaigns, threats to withdraw aid, and the appearance of warships off Italy's coasts, among other tactics, to help the Christian Democracy party defeat Italy's favored communist and socialist parties. The Christian Democrats, who maintained a client relationship with the US government and provided widespread base access, then dominated Italian politics for the next five decades. Their rule ended only when a massive 1994 corruption scandal reshuffled all of Italian politics.

The US government also provided similar covert and overt support in the aftermath of World War II for the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party in Japan and for dictatorial governments in South Korea. This support ensured that of the four countries worldwide hosting the largest number of US bases, three saw virtually unbroken one-party rule for half a century or more. The other, Germany, had twenty years of one-party rule after the war.

The US basing presence may have diminished these host countries' overall

national sovereignty, but it also afforded their rulers significant private political benefits. The result has been a pattern of US support for violence and repression. Not surprisingly, this can also be a self-reinforcing cycle. As the protests at Soto Cano suggest, supporting repressive regimes builds resentment and opposition to the United States—which makes the eviction of US bases all the more likely when countries do transition to democratic rule. Knowing this, the US military has even more incentive to prevent that transition from taking place.

You know nothing good is coming when a Navy lawyer responds to a question about the destructive impacts of bombing practice with:

“It depends what you mean by ‘destroy.’”

It was 2011, and the Navy was holding a public meeting on Saipan, the largest of the Northern Mariana Islands, some 130 miles north of Guam. The meeting was part of an environmental impact statement process for proposed military training and testing around Guam and the Northern Marianas. Many locals were especially concerned about the bombing of Farallon de Medinilla, known as FDM, a two-hundred-acre uninhabited island in the Northern Marianas that is home to numerous species of migratory birds. When the Northern Marianas negotiated with the US government in the 1970s to end its UN trust territory status and become a US commonwealth (like Puerto Rico), part of the deal involved giving the military full use of FDM and two thirds of the island of Tinian. Much like at Puerto Rico's Vieques, the military then used FDM for years as a live-fire range to test two-thousand-pound bombs, precision-guided munitions, and various other large guns, cannons, mines, and missiles. In 2002, several environmental groups successfully sued to stop the bombing, but the Pentagon found exemptions to environmental regulations and was allowed to resume testing.

At the meeting on Saipan, a Navy video was playing in a loop behind the environmental lawyer for the Navy's Pacific Fleet. “For decades the Mariana Islands have provided a safe training and testing environment for the military,” a woman's voice intoned, as images of exotic birds, whales, coral reefs, and the Marianas' beaches alternated with photos of ships, submarines, fighter jets, troops, and weapons.

A sailor in uniform told the camera:

“If we can't train, then we would not be prepared for the real scenario.”

The narrator continued:

“The military is committed to protecting the islands’ natural and cultural resources and heritage and strives to minimize the effects of its training and testing activities on the environment.”

People inside and outside the military often laud the environmental record of the Pentagon and the armed services. Many point to the protection some large military bases and training ranges provide for wilderness areas and wildlife. With control over tens of millions of acres of land, bases indeed do in some cases (primarily in the contiguous United States) shield the nonhuman environment from the expansion of cities, suburbs, highways, and parking lots.

Since the George H. W. Bush administration, the Pentagon has also made progress in “greening” itself at home and abroad to lessen the military’s environmental footprint. In 1989, Secretary of Defense and future Vice President Dick Cheney noted the poor environmental conditions on bases and initiated a “Defense and the Environment” initiative to make the Pentagon “the federal leader in agency environmental compliance and protection.” By 1995, the Pentagon reported reducing energy usage on bases by an average of 14 percent and fuel usage by 20 percent over levels a decade earlier. In 1998, the Environmental Protection Agency gave the Pentagon an award for reducing its pesticide use by 50 percent; two years later, it credited the military with “significant decreases” in greenhouse gas emissions. In 1999, the military reported reducing toxic chemical disposal by 77 percent in five years. During the George W. Bush administration, the Pentagon reported reducing hazardous waste disposal by 68 percent since 1992 and diverting 41 percent of its solid waste to recycling.

While the downsizing of the military by almost one third during the 1990s contributed to these reductions, the Pentagon has shown an unusually high level of environmental awareness compared to most of the US government. Years ago, for example, long before many in the civilian world, the Pentagon identified global warming and climate change as serious threats to national security. The military has made investments in solar power and other alternative energy sources for everything from its bases to the Pentagon itself. According to the Army, the new US base in Vicenza, Italy, was the first base in the world to receive LEED Green Building certification. The armed services hold Earth Day events, the Pentagon mentors other federal agencies in environmental management, and even Guantánamo Bay has three wind turbines to produce clean energy.

Regardless of the progress the US military has made in improving its practices, there is no underestimating the profound environmental damage caused by most military bases and the significant risks they pose to humans

and the rest of the natural environment. By definition, most bases store large quantities of weapons, explosives, and other inherently dangerous tools of war; nearly all of them contain toxic chemicals and other hazardous waste. Pollution, contamination, and other forms of environmental harm are found at nearly every base. Any town, city, or other large concentration of people causes some degree of environmental harm, but bases magnify those effects, both inadvertently—through toxic leaks, accidental ordnance detonation, and other dangerous accidents—and through the intentional discharge of weapons and other environment damage caused during training. Bases storing nuclear weapons are especially dangerous.

Even the greenest military installation has a carbon footprint vastly disproportionate to the number of people living and working on base. Bases are, after all, usually home to large concentrations of extraordinarily fuel-inefficient trucks, tanks, aircraft, and naval vessels. All of these require massive supplies of fuel, oil, lubricants, and other petroleum products for frequent training and exercises, not to mention wartime activities. The military also uses huge amounts of energy to cool, heat, and power its bases' tens of thousands of buildings and structures. The military's thirst for petroleum is so great that on a worldwide basis, the US armed services consume more oil every day than the entire country of Sweden. This means that with the exception of a handful of countries, the US military probably produces more greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of pollution than almost any other organization, corporation, or entity on earth.

Before the introduction of national environmental legislation, the environmental damage caused by military bases was even worse than it is today. At home and abroad, bases regularly dumped toxic substances into rivers and streams, including asbestos, leaded paint, and other hazardous materials. Bases habitually oiled down dirt roads to contain dust. Some dumped hazardous waste at sea, including materials associated with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. An Army spokesperson admitted that in waters off eleven states around the country, the Army "secretly dumped 64 million pounds of nerve and mustard gas agent in the sea, along with 400,000 chemical-filled bombs, landmines, and rockets, and more than 500 tons of radioactive waste either tossed overboard or packed into the holds of scuttled vessels." By 2000, the military estimated that its bases in the United States alone contained 28,538 toxic waste sites, with nearly twenty-seven-million acres of contaminated property. The estimated cleanup costs are nearly \$50 billion.

The military offered no count of toxic sites abroad, but there is little reason to believe its record there is any better. In fact, it's likely that the situation overseas is considerably worse. After all, as we have seen, in

the minds of many military leaders, one of the advantages to having bases abroad is the freedom they offer—and part of that freedom is in not being constrained by environmental regulations. Some countries, such as Germany, have strict environmental protection laws and “status of forces” agreements requiring high levels of environmental compliance for US bases. But in most other host nations, environmental protection in local laws and status of forces agreements is often weak or nonexistent. In many cases, the military does not have to meet standards that would be required under US law. This is also sometimes true at domestic bases, as when courts have granted the Pentagon waivers from US environmental laws.

Foreign soil or not, places like Ramstein tend to resemble insulated, self-contained small American towns that allow their inhabitants to hardly ever leave the base. These Little Americas have become both a symbol of American life and an exaggerated version of it. In many ways they resemble gated communities, with sprawling grounds, shopping malls, fast food, golf, and a car-based lifestyle. Service members get their cars shipped overseas free of charge, and gasoline is heavily subsidized. These simulacrum of suburbia subtly and not so subtly shape life around them, presenting the host nation with their particular vision of American culture and transforming local economies to reflect the consumption habits of US troops. Even in Afghanistan and, previously, in Iraq, the biggest bases have been Little Americas, absent family members but complete with tens of thousands of troops, fast-food outlets, sports facilities, swimming pools, and shopping.

“It’s the purest application of socialism there is. It’s a really fair system, and a lot of thought has been put into it, and people respond to it really well.”

On many bases, a lower class of segregated housing exists for people termed “third country nationals.” These are the citizens of countries other than United States and the host nation of the base, who frequently cook, clean, and keep the physical infrastructure of bases running every day. Most often, they are Filipinos. At Gitmo, the Filipinos live in dormitories that usually have four bunk beds to a room; Jamaicans have slightly better housing, formerly occupied by US troops. At bases in Afghanistan and Iraq, many of the contractors have been from Nepal, Bangladesh, and as far away as Fiji. They are the Pentagon’s invisible army, the more than seventy-thousand cooks, cleaners, construction workers, fast-food clerks, electricians, and beauticians from the world’s poorest countries who service US military logistics. Filipinos launder soldiers’ uniforms, Kenyans truck frozen steaks and inflatable tents, Bosnians repair electrical grids, and Indians provide

iced mocha lattes. While the nationalities of the people who make up this invisible army tend to change from country to country—aside from the widespread presence of Filipinos—the amenities and services they provide and the facilities they maintain are remarkably similar at most bases. The comforts provided for the benefit of families help ensure that bases look and function like small American towns, making the adjustment to life overseas and from base to base as easy as possible.

A 2013 study of overseas bases showed that “despite substantial host-nation financial and in-kind support, stationing forces and maintaining bases overseas produces higher direct financial costs than basing forces in the United States.” In Europe, for example, the Air Force’s estimated average annual cost just for running a base (before adding the costs of having any personnel there) is more than \$200 million. That’s more than double the costs of an Air Force base in the United States. When it comes to personnel, the Air Force’s cost per person on an overseas base is almost \$40,000 per year more, on average, than on a domestic base. The Navy’s annual cost per person in Europe is almost \$30,000 more than domestically, while in Japan, the Army pays on average nearly \$25,000 more per person every year than at home. Even in the least expensive case, that of the Marines in Japan, it costs \$10,000 to \$15,000 more per year for every marine stationed there compared to locations in the continental United States. For eleven-thousand marines, that adds up to an extra \$110 million to \$165 million that we are spending every year to keep marine forces in Japan rather than in America. When one considers all the deployments globally, the numbers are staggering.

Another way to get a sense for the magnitude of the costs is this: because of the hundreds of bases overseas, the US military is probably the world’s largest international moving company. Why? Because when stationed abroad for any period other than a temporary assignment, every member of the military generally has the right to ship his or her entire household and a personal vehicle to and from an overseas station. With tours generally lasting between one and three years, about one third of the military moves in any given year. Among other things, this means the military is shipping tens of thousands of privately owned vehicles to and from bases overseas every year. Based on recent contracts, this is costing around \$200 million every year. And that’s in addition to shipping every last piece of furniture, every book, every television, every kitchen pot and pan, every fork and spoon, every bicycle and children’s toy, and every other item in a uniformed service member’s household, up to a weight limit of 5,000 to 18,000 pounds (depending on rank and on whether one has family members). Which is in addition to the long-term storage of household goods for troops overseas, for which the military also pays. Which is in addition to miscellaneous expenses

such as pet quarantine fees—which the military will also cover, up to \$550 per move. Overall, the total annual moving costs alone easily stretch into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

By law, the Pentagon must tell Congress what it spends on all the military's activities at bases, embassies, and other facilities abroad in an annual report called the "Overseas Cost Summary" (OCS). This means calculating all the costs of building, running, and maintaining every last base site, garrison, airfield, port, warehouse, ammunition dump, radar station, and drone base, plus the costs of paying for and maintaining every US service member and family member abroad, including all their salaries, housing, schools, teachers, hospitals, moving costs, lawn mowing, utilities, and much, much more. For the 2012 fiscal year, the Overseas Cost Summary put the total at \$22.7 billion. That's a considerable sum, roughly equal to the entire budget of the Department of Justice or the Department of Agriculture. It's also about half the entire 2012 budget of the Department of State—significant portions of which actually go to arms sales, foreign military training, and other military (rather than diplomatic) purposes overseas. At the same time, however, the Pentagon's official figure contrasts sharply with the only other recent estimate available. In 2009, an economist estimated total spending on bases and troops abroad at \$250 billion—a more than tenfold difference. Part of the discrepancy stems from including war spending in the total, whereas at Congress's direction, the OCS doesn't include the billions spent on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the globe. But even without war spending, the figure comes to around \$140 billion—still almost \$120 billion more than the Pentagon suggests.

Military spending creates fewer jobs per billion dollars expended than the same billion dollars invested in education, health care, or energy efficiency—less than half as many jobs as investing in schools, for example. In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower famously said:

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: A modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some 50 miles of concrete highway. We pay for a single fighter with a half-million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that

could have housed more than 8,000 people.”

So, too, every base that is built, maintained, and manned overseas signifies a theft from society. Today, Eisenhower might say the cost of one modern base is this: A college scholarship for a year for 63,000 students. It is 295,000 households with renewable solar energy for one year. It is 260,000 low-income children getting health care for one year. It is 63,000 children getting a year of Head Start. It is 64,000 veterans receiving health care for a year.

Proponents of outsourcing the work of building, running, and supplying bases overseas argue that contractors save the government money, and that they allow the military to focus on its combat duties. But research suggests that this is often not the case. On base and off, contractors tend to provide services at higher costs than the military itself. Around the globe, military bases have become an important source of corporate profit making, diverting hundreds of billions of federal dollars from domestic needs.

Once upon a time, the military, not contractors, built and ran US bases. Soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and airwomen built the barracks, cleaned the clothes, and peeled the potatoes. But this started changing during the Vietnam War, when Brown & Root began building major military installations in South Vietnam as part of a contractor consortium. Brown & Root enjoyed deep ties with President Lyndon Johnson dating back to the 1930s, leading to well-founded suspicions that Johnson personally steered contracts to the company.

During the first Gulf War in 1991, one out of every hundred deployed personnel was a contractor. Later in the 1990s, during military operations in Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and especially the Balkans, Brown & Root received more than \$2 billion in base support and logistics contracts, covering construction and maintenance, food services, waste removal, water production, transportation services, and much more. In the Balkans alone, Brown & Root built thirty-four bases. The largest, Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo, covered 955 acres and included two gyms, two movie theaters, extensive dining and entertainment facilities, coffee bars, and a PX for shopping. Speaking of off-duty soldiers, a US Army representative told USA Today:

“We need to get these guys pumping iron and licking ice cream cones, whatever they want to do.”

By contrast, military personnel from other NATO countries lived in existing apartments and factories.

Most of KBR's contracts to support bases and troops overseas have come under the multibillion-dollar Logistics Civilian Augmentation Program, known as LOGCAP.

In 2001, KBR won a one-year LOGCAP contract to provide an undefined quantity and an undefined value of "selected services in wartime." Thanks to a series of one-year contract extensions, the company then enjoyed nearly eight years of work without facing a competitor's bid. Overall, between 2001 and 2010, the number of Pentagon contracts issued without competitive bidding nearly tripled. "It's like a gigantic monopoly," a representative from Taxpayers for Common Sense said of LOGCAP.

The work KBR performed under LOGCAP also reflected the Pentagon's frequent use of "cost-plus" contracts. These reimburse a company for its expenses and then add a percentage of the costs on top of that as the company's fee. In other words, as the Congressional Research Service explains, "increased costs mean increased fees to the contractor," and therefore there is "no incentive for the contractor to limit the government's costs." As one Halliburton official bluntly told a congressional committee, the company's unofficial mantra in Iraq became:

"Don't worry about price. It's 'cost-plus.'"

Military facilities small and large alike all too often harm local communities in ways that locals do not easily forget.

A US military court once acquitted a sergeant who shot and killed a fifty-five-year-old Okinawan woman after he claimed he mistook her for a wild boar.

In Ansbach, residents say some of their discomfort comes not so much from the noise itself as from what it represents. The whoomp-whoomp of the whirling blades symbolizes the wars that those helicopters have helped wage, and hosting the helicopters in their city makes the locals feel complicit. For some, there is a painful irony in the garrison's motto, "We are all part of the fight."

The nature of the US presence in Vicenza has changed since the Cold War. In those days the Italian bases were strategically positioned to defend against 'Russian invaders,' but now it is an operative site. People from there—they don't stay there. They go to war and come back. They bring their damages back. They rest. They go to war again.

"Now we're talking about combat units being here. It's a bit different."

Russell Madden was a member of the 173rd Airborne brigade that's split between Vicenza and Germany. Madden died in Afghanistan on June 23, 2010, from blast injuries sustained when a rocket-propelled grenade tore through his vehicle. He grew up in Bellevue, Kentucky, a town of six-thousand, where he was a high school football star. At twenty-nine, he enlisted in the Army because he needed health insurance to cover treatment for his four-year-old son's cystic fibrosis. "He joined because he knew that Parker would be taken care of no matter what," Madden's sister said. His mother, Peggy Madden Davitt said that Russell had signed up for the Army soon after his son was turned away by the Mayo Clinic, where the family had hoped to get treatment. "No one will ever send my son away again," she remembers Russell saying.

After Russell's death, Peggy received a standard condolence letter from President Obama. "I am deeply saddened to learn of the loss of your son," the letter said. "Our Nation will not forget his sacrifice, and we can never repay our debt to your family." Turning over the presidential stationery, Peggy addressed a response to President Obama:

"If my son had found a decent employer and sufficient health insurance in this great land of ours my son would not have had to sacrifice his life for his son."

Peggy sent the letter back to the White House. She did not receive a reply. Russell Madden's story is a reminder of the life-and-death significance of the choices connected to our base nation. Unlike virtually all of the wealthy industrialized countries in which the United States maintains bases—Germany, Japan, South Korea, Britain, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Norway, and Belgium among them—the United States does not guarantee health care for all its citizens. The idea of doing so is often dismissed as too expensive. Meanwhile, the nation spends immense sums every year supporting a global base infrastructure largely born of a world war and a cold war that ended decades ago.

Health care, of course, is not the only area in which we have made a questionable trade-off. Consider the impressive public transportation systems found in some of the countries hosting our bases, such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea. Even in Italy, where many often criticize the train system and the public sector, the speed and efficiency of public transportation options are far superior to those in the United States. While countries such as Germany, Japan, South Korea, and Italy have spent large amounts supporting US bases on their soil, their military spending has been accompanied by impressive investments to improve their citizens' lives.

Meanwhile, US investments in bases have come at the cost of decades of neglecting transportation, health, education, housing, infrastructure, and other human necessities. Think about what just half of the \$70 billion or more going into the base world every year could do to improve lives.

When troops deploy for a humanitarian activity such as providing dental care or vaccinations, its primary purpose is not to treat poor people. It's not to train host nation medical people. It's not to train host nation military people. The primary purpose is for US personnel to practice, to get training in preparing for deployment. Pentagon budget documents explain that humanitarian operations help "maintain a robust overseas presence" and provide "access to regions important to US interests." Of course diplomacy goes on so Hondurans don't think you're coming to take advantage of them. You need to show them your people are going to get benefits. Your doctors are going to get benefits. Your local politicians are going to get benefits in the form of donated equipment or construction. But from the viewpoint of the US military, much of what troops need to do with their time is deploy to conduct training in realistic scenarios. That's why the US has been so good at wars. To be able to do it, you've got to practice it. And a place like Honduras provides a good place to practice. So you take units from the States you deploy, build something—whether a military facility or a school—and when you leave it behind, it's a sign of goodwill on our part. But again, you don't advertise the first part to the host nation. You say the primary purpose is to work together.

This included seventeen one-hundred-bed "Ebola treatment units" and a field hospital in Monrovia, Liberia, and an "intermediate staging base" in Dakar, Senegal. While many portrayed the military's reaction to Ebola as pure altruism, months before the Ebola deployment, the Pentagon already had plans to build three to five new bases on the continent as well as an intermediate staging base in West Africa—that is, like the one constructed in Dakar, Senegal.

The US has deployed around two dozen military advisers directly into Somalia to lead efforts to defeat the country's al-Qaeda-linked group, al-Shabab. The military has pursued a covert war in the country and launched raids to capture and extradite at least two al-Shabab fighters to the United States. The CIA has secretly had a permanent presence for several years. For operations in Somalia and Yemen, the military has also positioned an "afloat forward staging base" in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Djibouti and used nearby navy vessels to shell Somalia. There are likely several hundred special operations troops involved in undisclosed wars and conflicts throughout North Africa's Sahel-Sahara region. It may be reasonably assumed, that much more is happening than has yet been disclosed and

there will be more to come.

Forget full-scale invasions and large-footprint occupations on the Eurasian mainland, America has a new way of war. Instead, think special operations forces working on their own but also training or fighting beside allied militaries (if not outright proxy armies), the militarization of spying and intelligence, the use of drone aircraft, the launching of cyber-attacks, and joint Pentagon operations with increasingly militarized “civilian” government agencies. We can add to this list nominally humanitarian missions that clearly serve military intelligence, patrol, and “hearts and minds” functions; the rotating deployment of US forces around the globe coupled with port visits and other long-standing “showing the flag” demonstrations of US military might; expansion of joint military exercises; the growing use of military contractors; and regular training provided by permanently deployed special operations forces, who give the military *de facto* presence worldwide. Plus lots and lots of lily pads.

In the wake of September 11, 2001, many military strategists have come to believe the neoconservative mantra that “the whole world is a battlefield.” They anticipate a future of endless small-scale interventions in which a large, geographically dispersed collection of bases will always be primed for instant operational access. Pentagon officials dream of nearly limitless flexibility, the ability to react with remarkable rapidity to developments anywhere on earth, and thus something approaching complete military control over the entire planet.

Cyber weapons are now being added to this list of tools of control. Unfortunately, once a cyber weapon is released into the wild, it does not die, degrade, break. It can be repurposed. Unlike conventional bombs, which explode into a million parts when dropped on their targets, weaponized malware can be used over and over again. Though military and intelligence officials may spend millions of dollars secretly developing a particular weapon, computer code is easy to copy. Once released, it becomes available to hacktivists, crime groups, and terrorists to exploit for their own purposes, enabling new forms of cyber-weapons proliferation.

The training of Latin American military leaders at the infamous School of the Americas secured their collusion in US military and geopolitical strategy to a considerable degree. By building relationships with military leaders and exposing them to US doctrine and US power, the school bound them closer to the United States, opened them to greater manipulation and preempted military assistance from other states that might challenge US dominance. Relationships built around lily pads and other military activities do much the same, offering possibilities to sway foreign governmental decisions on matters far beyond things military alone. Much like the patrol bases that

helped “open” China to trade in the nineteenth century, lily pads can thus help advance US business interests. They provide privileged US access to overseas markets, resources, and investment opportunities. They create stability for the regular working of capitalism. And they solidify political alliances. A lily pad has an influence by virtue of its presence—a political impact. Through these intertwined and growing political, economic, and military ties, the US military ultimately helps to deepen the dependence of countries such as Honduras on the United States.

The US military now stands ready to flood the most obscure areas of the earth with troops at a moment’s notice. Visit lily pad bases and other obscure and remote locations around the globe and you’ll likely hear a consistent refrain:

“Welcome to Injun Country.”

These words, and the frequent descriptions of lily pads as “frontier forts” hosting a “global cavalry,” are deeply troubling—for their racial overtones, for their invocation of a Manifest Destiny-like “civilizing” mission, and for the suggestion of ever-expanding military operations. One doesn’t go to “Injun Country” just for the scenery. One goes looking for Injuns.

On Independence Day in 1821, John Quincy Adams, then the secretary of state, warned of the dangers of looking for enemies abroad. America, he said, “goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.” If it were to do so, Adams cautioned, the country “would involve herself, beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom.” For Adams, this did not mean neglecting other nations and the causes of freedom and independence. Rather, he said, America should support those causes, but through “the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example” rather than military power. If the country did involve itself in foreign wars, Adams said:

“The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. The frontlet upon her brows would no longer beam with the ineffable splendor of freedom and independence; but in its stead would soon be substituted an imperial diadem, flashing in false and tarnished lustre the murky radiance of dominion and power. She might become the dictatress of the world: she would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit.”

A succession of empires and world powers through the centuries have amassed and subsequently lost most if not all of their foreign bases, either

by force or divestment. Following in the footsteps of Portugal, Holland, Spain, and France, Britain had to shutter most of its foreign bases in the midst of an economic crisis in the 1960s and 1970s. The United States is headed in that same direction. The only questions are when and whether the country will close its bases and downsize its global mission by choice, or whether it will follow Britain's path as a fading power forced to give up its bases from a position of weakness.

Proclaiming that things can never change is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not making such proposals, not developing alternatives to the existing base nation, is the surest way to guarantee the continuation of a status quo that has hurt us all.

A Quest for Peace

“On the average, only those prisoners could keep alive who, after years of trekking from concentration camp to camp, had lost all scruples in their fight for existence; they were prepared to use every means, honest and otherwise, even brutal force, theft, and betrayal of their friends, in order to save themselves. We who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles—whatever one may choose to call them—we know: the best of us did not return.”

—Viktor E. Frankl

The good war was not for supporting the troops. In fact, lacking intense modern conditioning to prepare soldiers to engage in the unnatural act of murder, some 80 percent of US and other troops in World War II did not fire their weapons at the enemies. That those soldiers were treated better after the war than soldiers in other wars had been, or have been since, was the result of the pressure created by the Bonus Army after the previous war. That veterans were given free college was not due to the merits of the war or in some way a result of the war. Without the war, everyone could have been given free college for many years. If we provided free college to everyone today, it would take way more than World War II stories to get people into military recruiting stations.

Several times the number of people killed in German camps were killed outside of them in the war. The majority of those people were civilians. The scale of the killing, wounding, and destroying made this war the single worst thing humanity has ever done to itself in a short space of time. That it was somehow “opposed” to the far lesser killing in the camps—although, again, it actually wasn’t—can’t justify the cure that was worse than the disease.

Escalating the war to include the all-out destruction of civilian cities, culminating in the completely indefensible nuking of Hiroshima and Nagasaki took this war out of the realm of defensible projects for many who had defended its initiation—and rightly so. Demanding unconditional surrender and seeking to maximize death and suffering did immense damage and left a legacy that has continued.

Killing huge numbers of people is supposedly defensible for the “good” side in a war, but not the “bad.” The distinction between the two is never as stark as fantasized. The United States had an apartheid state for African Americans, camps for Japanese Americans, a tradition of genocide against Native Americans that inspired Nazis, programs of eugenics and human experimentation before, during, and after the war including giving syphilis

to people in Guatemala during the Nuremberg trials. The US granted immunity to scientists in Unit 731 in exchange for the experimentation results. The US military hired hundreds of top Nazis at the end of the war—they fit right in. The US aimed for a wider world empire, before the war, during it, and ever since.

The “good” side of the “good war,” the party that did most of the killing and dying for the winning side, was the communist Soviet Union. That doesn’t make the war a triumph for communism, but it does tarnish the tales of triumph for democracy.

World War II still hasn’t ended. The bases have never closed. The troops have never left Germany or Japan. There are over 100,000 US and British bombs still in the ground in Germany, still killing.

Going back 80 years to a nuclear-free, colonial, world of completely different structures, laws, and habits to justify what has been the greatest expense of the United States in each of the years since is a bizarre feat of self-deception that isn’t attempted in the justification of any lesser enterprise. Assume I’ve got this totally wrong—you’ve still got to explain how the world of the early 1940s justifies dumping into 2020 wars funding that could have fed, clothed, cured, and environmentally protected the earth.

“First: Let us examine our attitude toward peace itself. Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many think it unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable—that mankind is doomed—that we are gripped by forces we cannot control. We need not accept that view. Our problems are manmade—therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man’s reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable—and we believe they can do it again. I am not referring to the absolute, infinite concept of peace and good will of which some fantasies and fanatics dream. I do not deny the value of hopes and dreams but we merely invite discouragement and incredulity by making that our only and immediate goal. Let us focus instead on a more practical, more attainable peace—based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions—on a series of concrete actions and effective agreements which are in the interest of all concerned. There is no single, simple key to this peace—no grand or magic formula to be adopted by one or two powers. Genuine peace must be the product of many nations, the sum of many acts. It must be dynamic, not static, changing

to meet the challenge of each new generation. For peace is a process—a way of solving problems.

With such a peace, there will still be quarrels and conflicting interests, as there are within families and nations. World peace, like community peace, does not require that each man love his neighbor—it requires only that they live together in mutual tolerance, submitting their disputes to a just and peaceful settlement. And history teaches us that enmities between nations, as between individuals, do not last forever. However fixed our likes and dislikes may seem, the tide of time and events will often bring surprising changes in the relations between nations and neighbors. So let us persevere. Peace need not be impracticable, and war need not be inevitable. By defining our goal more clearly, by making it seem more manageable and less remote, we can help all peoples to see it, to draw hope from it, and to move irresistibly toward it.

Yet it is sad to read these Soviet statements—to realize the extent of the gulf between us. But it is also a warning—a warning to the American people not to fall into the same trap as the Soviets, not to see only a distorted and desperate view of the other side, not to see conflict as inevitable, accommodation as impossible, and communication as nothing more than an exchange of threats. No government or social system is so evil that its people must be considered as lacking in virtue. As Americans, we find communism profoundly repugnant as a negation of personal freedom and dignity. But we can still hail the Russian people for their many achievements—in science and space, in economic and industrial growth, in culture and in acts of courage. Among the many traits the peoples of our two countries have in common, none is stronger than our mutual abhorrence of war. Almost unique among the major world powers, we have never been at war with each other. And no nation in the history of battle ever suffered more than the Soviet Union suffered in the course of the Second World War. At least 20 million lost their lives. Countless millions of homes and farms were burned or sacked. A third of the nation's territory, including nearly two thirds of its industrial base, was turned into a wasteland—a loss equivalent to the devastation of this country east of Chicago.

Today, should total war ever break out again—no matter how—our two countries would become the primary targets. It is an ironic but accurate fact that the two strongest powers are

the two in the most danger of devastation. All we have built, all we have worked for, would be destroyed in the first 24 hours. And even in the cold war, which brings burdens and dangers to so many nations, including this Nation's closest allies—our two countries bear the heaviest burdens. For we are both devoting massive sums of money to weapons that could be better devoted to combating ignorance, poverty, and disease. We are both caught up in a vicious and dangerous cycle in which suspicion on one side breeds suspicion on the other, and new weapons beget counter-weapons. In short, both the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies, have a mutually deep interest in a just and genuine peace and in halting the arms race. Agreements to this end are in the interests of the Soviet Union as well as ours—and even the most hostile nations can be relied upon to accept and keep those treaty obligations, and only those treaty obligations, which are in their own interest.

So, let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.

Let us reexamine our attitude toward the cold war, remembering that we are not engaged in a debate, seeking to pile up debating points. We are not here distributing blame or pointing the finger of judgment. We must deal with the world as it is, and not as it might have been had the history of the last 18 years been different. We must, therefore, persevere in the search for peace in the hope that constructive changes within the Communist bloc might bring within reach solutions which now seem beyond us. We must conduct our affairs in such a way that it becomes in the Communists' interest to agree on a genuine peace. Above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy—or of a collective death-wish for the world.”

—JFK

“Just suppose with me for a moment that an Ivan and an Anya could find themselves, oh, say, in a waiting room or sharing a shelter from the rain or a storm with a Jim and Sally. And there was no language barrier to keep them from getting acquainted. Would they then debate the differences between their respective governments? Or would they find themselves comparing notes about their children and what each other did for a living? Before they parted company, they would probably have touched on ambitions and hobbies and what they wanted for the children and problems of making ends meet.

And as they went their separate ways, maybe Anya would be saying to Ivan: ‘Wasn’t she nice. She also teaches music.’ And Jim would be telling Sally what Ivan did or didn’t like about his boss. They might even have decided they were all going to get together for dinner some evening soon. Above all they would have proven that people don’t make wars. People want to raise their children in a world without fear and without war. They want to have some of the good things over and above bare subsistence that make life worth living. They want to work at some craft, trade, or profession that gives them satisfaction and a sense of worth. Their common interests cross all borders. If the Soviet Government wants peace, then there will be peace. Together we can strengthen peace, reduce the level of arms and know in doing so that we have helped fulfill the hopes and dreams of those we represent and, indeed, of people everywhere. Let us begin now.”

—Ronald Reagan

Let me tell you a story. A story about American bombers in World War II and the gallant men who flew them. American planes, full of holes and wounded men and corpses took off backwards from an airfield in England. Over France, a few German fighter planes flew at them backwards, sucked bullets and shell fragments from some of the planes and crewmen. They did the same for wrecked American bombers on the ground, and those planes flew up backwards to join the formation.

The formation flew backwards over a German city that was in flames. The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted them into the bellies of the planes. The containers were stored neatly in racks. The Germans below had miraculous devices of their own, which were long steel tubes. They used them to suck more fragments from the

crewmembers and planes. But there were still a few wounded Americans and some of the bombers were in bad repair. Over France though, German fighters came up again, made everything and everybody as good as new.

When the bombers got back to their base, the steel cylinders were taken from the racks and shipped back to the United States of America, where factories were operating night and day, dismantling the cylinders, separating the dangerous contents into minerals. Touchingly, it was mainly women who did this work. The minerals were then shipped to specialists in remote areas. It was their business to put them into the ground, to hide them cleverly, so they would never hurt anybody ever again.

Another: Once upon a time, in a far away world, there was born to the Allfather and the Goddess of Wisdom, a boy they named Balder.

Balder is called the Shining One, but what matters is that he was he was the gentlest of all the Gods, and the most beloved, for he was the God of Peace.

His mother, Frigg, loving him greatly, sought to ensure he could never die, and went to all the worlds and asked every living thing for its promise not to harm Balder. The only one she did not receive a promise from was mistletoe, for it was young.

And so, when Loki, the God of Mischief, decided to kill Balder, he tipped an arrow with Mistletoe and tricked a blind God into shooting Balder, and so died the Shining God, The God of Peace, the most beloved God of all.

His mother, Frigg, bereft, went to the Goddess of the Dead and asked that he be allowed to leave the land of the dead, and live again. Hel was willing to allow it, so long as everyone who lived agreed.

And so Frigg went, again, to all who lived on all the worlds, and asked their permission. All agreed save one, though none agree who that one was: Loki, or the Willow, whom he tricked, and who has wept ever since that it was so.

And so Balder stayed dead, the most beloved of all the Gods, and he will not live again, until after the final battle of Ragnarok.

Peace is the most precious and beloved of all things, and the most fragile. All it takes to kill peace, is one person who does not agree to keep the peace. And peace cannot be restored so long as even one person does not want it restored.

Obviously this is not quite true, but it nonetheless contains a great truth worth thinking on. We live in a world where we have de-mythologized and as such we rarely consider the truth behind many myths: what they were trying to say.

“They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their

spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.”

Cannot swords be turned to plowshares? Can we and all nations not live in peace? In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all the members of humanity. Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us recognize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences world-wide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world. And yet, I ask you, is not an alien force already among us? What could be more alien than war and the threat of war?

The Mohists, egalitarian rationalists whose social base seems to have been urban artisans, not only were philosophically opposed to war and militarism, but organized battalions of military engineers who would actively discourage conflicts by volunteering to fight in any war against the side of the aggressor.

What would that world be, a world without war? It would be the real world. Peace is the true life, the life of working and learning and bringing up children to work and learn. War, which devoured work, learning, and children, was the denial of reality. But my people know only how to deny. Born in the dark shadow of power misused, we set peace outside our world, a guiding and unattainable light. All we know to do is fight. Any peace one of us can make in our life is only a denial that the war is going on, a shadow of the shadow, a doubled unbelief.

Always, always, the young men are ready to rush out and kill whoever the old men tell them to kill—each other, women, old people, children; always there is a war to be fought in the name of Peace, Freedom, Justice, the Lord.

During the 1930s, a Peace Monument was erected on the Rollins campus in Winter Park, Florida. The monument was a German artillery shell from the First World War set atop a stone plinth. The inscription began:

“PAUSE, PASSER-BY, AND HANG YOUR HEAD IN SHAME...”

As the UNESCO slogan puts it:

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.”

You fight the war with guns, you fight the peace with stories.

No Second Chances

In the Roman Empire, during the Crisis of the Third Century, everything began falling apart. The army was swapping emperors out left and right, and the political system could no longer generate the legitimacy or stability that had prevailed in the two centuries prior. Chunks of the empire lost faith in the ability of the central authority to restore order, and began looking to their own defenses. It was bleak. During this period, there was a philosopher by the name of Plotinus, the progenitor of “Neoplatonism.” Plotinus didn’t try to solve the problems of the political system.

“He turned aside from the spectacle of ruin and misery in the actual world, to contemplate an eternal world of goodness and beauty. In this he was in harmony with all the most serious men of his age. To all of them, Christians and pagans alike, the world of practical affairs seemed to offer no hope, and only the Other World seemed worthy of allegiance. To the Christian, the Other World was the Kingdom of Heaven, to be enjoyed after death; to the Platonist, it was the eternal world of ideas, the real world as opposed to that of illusory appearance. Christian theologians combined these points of view, and embodied much of the philosophy of Plotinus.”

Today there are a large number of people who have been demoralized by our political system. Like Plotinus, they have sought out other ways of finding meaning in their lives. These forms of self-care psychologically protect the individual while contributing nothing to resolving the political problems of our age. They are forms of retreat. In our time, I see five of them:

1. The self-care, self-help, and mindfulness industries, all of which aim to give the user the power to cope with a distressing world rather than change it. Examples include stuff like Thrive Global or the work of Jordan Peterson.

2. Accelerationism, scientism, transhumanism, and other forms of techno-neoplatonism, in which faith in the science and technology of the future takes over the saviour role played by the one, the soul, or Jesus Christ in ancient religions and philosophies.
3. Consumer movements, oriented around primitivism, sustainability, or veganism, which encourage people to attempt to solve irreducibly global problems through trivial lifestyle changes. These changes are not sufficient to deal with the problems in question but enable the user to virtue signal, contributing to the user's self-esteem.
4. Discursive movements, which mistake interventions in the discourse for meaningful political action. These movements attempt to popularize new forms of language and to police out other forms, without at any point seriously challenging for institutional power. Again, those who use the "right" kinds of language receive a self-esteem buff.
5. Fandoms, in which people form identity attachments to particular canons of fiction, defining themselves in relation to the kinds of art they enjoy.

Individuals often mix and match these things. But they all divert energy away from politics. Some of them do this by pretending to be politics when they do not in fact produce any meaningful change, like the consumption and discourse movements. Others are more overtly and explicitly escapist, like those committed to fandoms or futurism. The self-care option is exceptionally defensive and more in the tradition of religious asceticism, though it lacks the comprehensive theology of something like Buddhism, Stoicism, or Christian existentialism.

If our civilization is destroyed, it will not be by barbarians from below or without. Our barbarians come from above or within.

In 1996, a platoon of light infantry spent days in the Puerto Rican jungle acclimatizing to stifling heat and humidity, cautiously monitoring their water intake before simulating a nighttime raid. The platoon included "some of the most fit and motivated soldiers in the battalion." When the evening of the raid came, the platoon leader began leading his troops through the jungle, machete-ing a path through the brush. Before long, he was felled by fatigue and delegated his leadership to an underling. When the second private failed to advance the platoon quickly enough, the platoon leader demanded to lead again. But soon he found himself hyperthermic and unable to walk. His soldiers had to douse him in cold water and supply him with intravenous infusions. Eventually four soldiers had to carry him. Before long, the extra

demands vitiated the entire platoon, all of whom began to fall prey to heat stress. The exercise had to be called off before it became a massacre.

So I look at that as, if it's nighttime, and acclimatized, fit people can just disintegrate into a pool of useless people on stretchers—that's what I see happening to society, to cultures. If you want to know how mass extinctions happen, that's how. So when people talk about the Pleistocene megafauna extinctions and Clovis people, sometimes they act like it's a mystery how these things happen. But it happens in exactly the same way. You have something tearing apart the strongest members, the weaker ones try to fill in the gaps, they're really not strong enough to take it, and the whole thing collapses. You want to know how societies collapse? That's how.

Each year the US population spends more money on diets than the amount needed to feed all the hungry people in the rest of the world.

The old proverb says if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together. Let's take that as a guide and dismiss the insane pursuit of "efficiency" at all costs. Yes we can get faster "advancement" with unlimited capitalism, but eventually the inequality stresses will break the system and the masses will flip over the monopoly board and refuse to play anymore.

The answer to my most gnawing, constant question dawned on me just the other day. Why don't They see that they're driving our nation over the cliff? Why don't They see that their rapacious greed is wrecking the very economy that made their own wealth possible? Why don't They see that they've killed the goose that laid the golden egg?

Then it dawned on me that you can visualize our economy in a certain sense, as a wave, a wave that the powers that be have been both shaping, and riding. They've worked very hard to build this thing, and they really succeeded in getting a tremendous amount of momentum going here.

Our masters of the universe are a crazed gang of hoodlum surfers, and they've caught a monstrous wave. It's all a matter of hysterical momentum. They are riding a mountainous wave of greed-fueled hubris, and they see some sort of illusory finish line ahead where the rest of us see a very real chasm.

They cannot stop, they would never in a million years think of stopping. As things are, there is virtually nothing standing in their way other than a terribly fragmented and uncoordinated public opinion, and that public has been so thoroughly convinced of it's own helplessness that so far, it's been mostly staring down the road in anticipation of the crash.

It is already too late, the tipping point is here. It is no longer possible to make believe that we can turn the Democratic party around, convince them to listen to our pleading. I've had my doubts, but those doubts have

disappeared; yes, They intend to take everything, and the Democrats as much as the Republicans are helping them carry it all away.

It's no longer necessary to list their crimes, we all know what they are. It's no longer necessary to convince anyone of the uselessness of petitioning our politicians to come to our aid before it's too late, everyone knows that. The tipping point is now.

For most of my adult life I've been hoping that so-called liberals were going to be the agents of the changes we so obviously need, and that has turned out to be a ridiculously foolish expectation, so I cannot bring myself to criticize the folks who have decided to place their hopes in a totally different direction.

We're experiencing cultural collapse. The very same collapse that was experienced by the Plains Indians when their way of life was destroyed and they were herded onto reservations. The very same collapse that was experienced by countless aboriginal peoples overrun by us in Africa, South America, Australia, New Guinea, and elsewhere. It matters not that the circumstances of the collapse were different for them and for us, the results were the same. For both of us, in just a few decades, shocking realities invalidated our vision of the world and made nonsense of a destiny that had always seemed self-evident. For both of us, the song we'd been singing from the beginning of time suddenly died in our throats. The outcome was the same for both of us: Things fell apart. It doesn't matter whether you live in tepees or skyscrapers, things fall apart. Order and purpose are replaced by chaos and bewilderment. People lose the will to live, become listless, become violent, become suicidal, and take to drink, drugs, and crime. The matrix that once held all in place is shattered, and laws, customs, and institutions fall into disuse and disrespect, especially among the young, who see that even their elders can no longer make sense of them.

Visions of imminent social collapse might be taking all this a bit too far. Or maybe not. Civilizations are fragile, impermanent things. Are modern societies vulnerable? It's a common belief that our technological capacity, energy resources, our knowledge of economics and history mean our civilization should be able to survive whatever crises ancient and simpler societies found insurmountable.

But as a corrective, we must recall one of the lessons of the Roman empire: Civilization can die, because it has already died before.

Nobody defines themselves as self-serving, greedy, and lacking in virtue. Everyone feels trapped in the system as it is, a swirling funhouse of smoke and mirrors in which everyone seeks to maximize their private gain at the expense of others or the system itself, all the while signaling their virtue with cheap, substance-free speech acts.

This precisely mirrors what the Romans were proclaiming as their empire crumbled around them. You can't rebuild a moral center with more regulations and legislation, or by trying to silence critics. Proliferating regulations and attempts to silence critics are simply proof that the disintegration is accelerating down the slide to disorder and collapse.

To think about it slightly more critically, Boston is the headquarters for two industries that are steadily bankrupting middle America: big learning and big medicine, both of them imposing costs that everyone else is basically required to pay and yet which increase at a pace far more rapid than wages or inflation. A thousand dollars a pill, forty-grand a semester: the debts that are gradually choking the life out of people where you live are what has made this city so very rich. Perhaps it makes sense, then, that another category in which Massachusetts leads the nation is inequality. Once the visitor leaves the brainy bustle of Boston, he discovers that this state is filled with wreckage—with former manufacturing towns, with workers watching their way of life drain away, with cities that are little more than warehouses for people on Medicare. According to one survey, Massachusetts has the eighth-worst rate of income inequality among the states; by another metric it ranks fourth. However you choose to measure the diverging fortunes of the Ten Percent and the rest, Massachusetts always seems to finish among the nation's most unequal places.

As an oldish millennial, what saddens and mystifies me most about my generation is the near universal, creepily personal obsession with people who appear in any media that their friends and family might see. The desire for some sort of recognition or connection to that world is disturbingly powerful.

I was once set upon by a whole group of somewhat younger millennials as if they'd just discovered a suitcase full of millions and were going to split it with me. The wondrous secret they presented to me was the opportunity to waste the next many hours for a slim opportunity to meet Michael Bay of Transformers fame. I was confused.

“Why do I want to do that? Wouldn't you guys rather relax here. I got some beer and whiskey?”

They all thought I was joking. When they finally realized I wasn't, shocked disbelief set in. “But it's Michael Bay!” “What's wrong with you!!!!” (literally shrieking) “You could actually touch him!” I told them they were being creepy, and that while I occasionally enjoy passing some time with his mediocre movies, they seem to indicate that he is a decidedly not-interesting person. Few other times did the class gap between their and my upbringings feel more salient. Not one of my HS dropout and frequently petty criminal friends I grew up with would ever have deigned to be so sycophantic.

The point of that whole lengthy aside is that a great many highly “educated” people under the age of 35 are so obsessed with some kind of media recognition and turning their lives into some TV show narrative because those identifications are the closest things to meaning and purpose and sense of self they know. The self-centered desperation this leads to makes it literally impossible for them to think deeply and independently. Everything about their tastes, thoughts, opinions, careers, social behavior, is filtered through ‘what will people think about me if I do/say/think/feel this.’

A recent study of pollen and animal remains on Easter Island concluded that it wasn’t humans who deforested the landscape; rather, it was the rats that came along for the ride and then bred unchecked. The native palms couldn’t produce seeds fast enough to keep up with their appetites.

Like all of us, I am a foot soldier of empire. It is the empire of *Sapiens* and it stretches from Tasmania to Baffin Island. Like all empires, it is built on expropriation and exploitation, and like all empires it dresses these things up in the language of morality and duty. When we turn wilderness over to agriculture, we speak of our duty to feed the poor. When we industrialize the wild places, we speak of our duty to stop the climate from changing. When we spear whales, we speak of our duty to science. When we raze forests, we speak of our duty to develop. We alter the atmospheric makeup of the entire world—half of us pretend it’s not happening, the other half immediately start looking for new machines that will reverse it. This is how empires work, particularly when they have started to decay. Denial, displacement, anger, fear.

The environment is the victim of this empire. But the ‘environment’—that distancing word, that empty concept—does not exist. It is the air, the waters, the creatures we make homeless or lifeless in flocks and legions, and it is us too. We are it; we are in it and of it, we make it and live it, we are fruit and soil and tree, and the things done to the roots and the leaves come back to us. We make ourselves slaves to make ourselves free, and when the shackles start to rub we confidently predict the emergence of new, more comfortable designs.

These stories failed us long ago, and it is increasingly common now to hear the claim that we need new stories to replace them. These new stories, it is said, will be stories of belonging again. They will be stories of returning to the earth, of understanding our true place in the great maelstrom of the universe, not as gods now but as family members. Our challenge is to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human. It is to transcend not only national limitations, but even our species isolation, to enter into the larger community of living species. This brings about a

completely new sense of reality and value. This is, it seems to me, essential. But it is not a new story. Rather, it is a very old one, being haltingly rediscovered by a culture that long ago forgot how to listen to it. Every indigenous culture recognizes this as the oldest of old tales. Once we peel back our failing narratives, we see it waiting patiently underneath. What we don't know is what to do with it. From the perspective of our modernity, enmeshed as we are in machines, in cities, in minds trapped by what we have built, we don't know how we might even start to live it again.

One thing is clear to me: any deep change is not going to come from intellectuals writing books or articles about why we need new stories. If that were going to save the world, the world would be fine by now. Deep change is going to come through a radical alteration in people's lived experience. And that is only going to come from a crisis that forces people up against the consequences of what we have done. It is going to come when economies start collapsing, when political systems crumble, when cities flood, when seas rise, when people are hungry or dying. New stories emerge from collapses that kill off the old ones.

Here in the West, we are deep into a centuries-long crisis of meaning. As we chase our goals, they drift farther away. If and when we reach them, they suck out our souls. Our material religion, like the transcendent religions it sprang from, aims for eternity. In the future, we will all be immortal millionaires. The goal of our religion is impossible to reach; and if it weren't, we would find ourselves in hell.

At the core of our animal beings, something is bleeding. If we stop and pay attention, we can feel the wound. In the wound lies the hope.

To employ a mathematical analogy, we can say that although the risk of extinction may be fractional, the stake is, humanly speaking, infinite, and a fraction of infinity is still infinity. In other words, once we learn that a holocaust might lead to extinction we have no right to gamble, because if we lose, the game will be over, and neither we nor anyone else will ever get a another chance.

Part VIII

Oppression Economics

I was eight years old and running with a dime in my hand
To the bus stop to pick up a paper for my old man
I'd sit on his lap in that big old Buick and steer as we drove through town
He'd tousle my hair and say son take a good look around
This is your hometown
This is your hometown
This is your hometown
This is your hometown

In '65 tension was running high at my high school
There was a lot of fights between the black and white
There was nothing you could do
Two cars at a light on a Saturday night, in the back seat there was a gun
Words were passed in a shotgun blast
Troubled times had come
To my hometown
To my hometown
To my hometown
To my hometown

Now Main street's whitewashed windows and vacant stores
Seems like there ain't nobody wants to come down here no more
They're closing down the textile mill across the railroad tracks
Foreman says these jobs are going boys and they ain't coming back
To your hometown
To your hometown
To your hometown
To your hometown

Last night me and Kate we laid in bed talking about getting out
Packing up our bags maybe heading south
I'm thirty-five we got a boy of our own now
Last night I sat him up behind the wheel and said son take a good look around
This is your hometown

EconoNonsense

There would be little to say on this subject, were it not for all the nonsense that has been talked about it.

Language gives access to a people's culture, and culture to its history. Its history tells us how it sees itself and others. Knowledge of languages should thus be an essential component of a historian's technical equipment. It is the key to understanding the past and future of international relations. But this belief in the fundamental importance of knowing particular languages has faded, even among historians. All social sciences, to a greater or lesser degree, start with a yearning for a universal language, into which they can fit such particulars as suit their view of things. Their model of knowledge thus aspires to the precision and generality of the natural sciences. Once we understand human behavior in terms of some universal and—crucially—ahistorical principle, we can aspire to control—and of course improve—it.

No social science has succumbed to this temptation more than economics. Its favored universal language is mathematics. Its models of human behavior are built not on close observation, but on hypotheses that, if not quite plucked from the air, are unconsciously plucked from economists' intellectual and political environments. These then form the premises of logical reasoning of the type, 'All sheep are white, therefore the next sheep I meet will be white.' In economics: 'All humans are rational utility maximizers. Therefore, in any situation, they will act in such a way as to maximize their utility.' This method gives economics a unique predictive power, especially as the utilities can all be expressed and manipulated quantitatively. It makes economics the "queen of the social sciences."

In principle, economists don't deny the need to test their conclusions. At this point, history, one might have thought, would be particularly useful. Is it really the case that all sheep are white, in every place and clime? But most economists disdain the evidence of history, regarding it as little better than anecdote. They approach history by one route: econometrics. At best, the past is a field for statistical inquiry.

"The best and brightest in the profession proceed as if

economics is the physics of society. There is a single universally valid model. It only needs to be applied. You could drop a modern economist from a time machine at any time, in any place, along with his or her personal computer; he or she could set up in business without even bothering to ask what time and which place.”

In short, much of the historical modeling economists do assumes that people in the past had essentially the same values and motives as we do today.

“The construction of a mechanical, artificial world, populated by interacting robots, that is capable of exhibiting behavior the gross features of which resemble those of the actual world.”

The goal of economics is to replace the particular languages that obstruct the discovery of general laws with the universal language of mathematics. Elon Musk takes the idea of interacting robots one step further, with his ambition to link the human brain directly to the world (which includes other human brains). Our thoughts will be directly socialized without the intermediation of any language. When you think ‘door, open!’ it does. Whereas economists dream of putting God in their models, the robotic utopians dream of reversing the fall of man by creating godlike humans.

To be clear, this is the apotheosis of a Western conceit. The West still views itself as the bearer of universal civilization, with the non-West no more than a lagging cultural indicator. In the West itself, the authority of economics has diminished, but this hasn’t dented the West’s propensity to export its civilization. “Good economics” has been partly replaced by a commitment to universal human rights as the means to save the world from itself, but the purpose is the same: to lecture everyone else on their shortcomings. Here, we encounter a paradox. The triumph of universalism has come just when Western power is collapsing. And it was that power which made Western thought seem universal in the first place. Conquest, not missionaries, spread Christianity around the world.

An economist would find it inefficient to maintain two lungs and two kidneys: consider the costs involved in transporting these heavy items across the savannah. Such optimization would, eventually, kill you, after the first accident, the first “outlier.” Also, consider that if we gave Mother Nature to economists, it would dispense with individual kidneys: since we do not need them all the time, it would be more efficient if we sold ours and used a central kidney on a time-share basis. You could also lend your eyes at night since you do not need them to dream.

“The theories of the universe that I developed so painstakingly in the seventies and eighties were but fantasies that arose directly from my peculiar perch in life. Here was I, a Mission Hills lad, growing up in one of the perfect regional arcadias of American capitalism, a place more like the grounds of Versailles than the average post-war suburb, and what I had managed to do was invent a romantic justification for precisely the system of social arrangements that had made Mission Hills possible. I had laboriously reinvented the wheel of laissez-faire thought, deciphered it painstakingly from the world around me, re-created the first principles of capitalist society by close observation of capitalist institutions, and had all the while imagined that what I was actually doing was discovering the timeless laws of nature and all human society.”

Suppose that I inherited from my rich parents a large plot of vacant land, and that you are my poor, landless neighbor. I offer you the following deal. You can work the land, doing all the hard labor of tilling, sowing, irrigating, and harvesting. I'll pay you \$1 a day for a year. After that, I'll sell the crop for \$50,000. You decide this is your best available option, and so take the deal. If I think of our bargain in terms of rational self-interest, then it is rational to offer you \$1 a day, knowing that you have no other prospects. But I am clearly not being reasonable. I am not imagining someone in your situation, and then asking what would seem fair from that perspective.

The title of Adam Smith's chair at the University of Edinburgh was 'Moral Philosophy.' This remained the name for economics courses taught in Britain and America through most of the nineteenth century. Another name was 'Political Economy,' and seventeenth-century writers used the term 'Political Arithmetic.' The common aim was to influence public policy: above all how to finance government, what best to tax, and what rules should govern banking and credit.

Economics as currently taught—like so many ideologies embraced and preached by the powerful throughout history—is simply a tool of manipulation and control. A tool to get one to accept—and in many cases defend—the existence of one's chains, of the massive inequality and injustice.

Rise, like lions after slumber
 In unvanquishable number!
 Shake your chains to earth like dew
 Which in sleep had fallen on you:
 Ye are many—they are few!

Remove your blinders, throw off your chains, fight for a future with true justice and equality.

Both ‘the Economy’ and ‘The Floor is Lava’ are games involving imaginary things we instill with power. They are quite similar, in both you accept a set of premises that are not actual reality but by accepting them influence how one perceives and interacts with actual reality. However, in order to make them truly similar, should a child step off, fall into the lava, the other children would have to douse them in lighter fluid and set them on fire, the equivalent of letting one die from despair, lack of care, et cetera—from not having money.

- The federal deficit is too high.
- Federal deficit spending (a.k.a. “printing money”) causes hyperinflation.
- The federal debt is “unsustainable.”
- Our children will pay for the federal debt.
- Federal taxes fund federal spending.
- The federal government can run short of dollars.
- The federal government should live within its means.
- Federal finances are like personal finances.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) benefits poor nations.
- Federal debt crowds out private debt.
- Federal spending crowds out private spending.
- The poor are lazy, dishonest “takers”; the rich are smart, energetic “makers.”
- The US government should be run like a business, by a businessperson.
- Austerity helps an economy grow.
- Some people don’t pay their “fair share” of federal taxes.
- Raising interest rates kills economic growth.
- There is no difference between monetary sovereignty and monetary non-sovereignty

- Money and debt are two different things.
- A growing economy does not need a growing supply of money.
- Federal surpluses help the economy grow.
- The federal debt is too large.
- The federal debt is the total of federal deficits.
- The federal debt ceiling has a beneficial function.
- The current level of deficits is unsustainable.
- Current federal debt growth is unsustainable.
- Federal taxes help pay for federal spending.
- The federal government cannot create money; only the Fed can.
- State, county, and city governments are financially similar to the federal government.
- Federal borrowing helps pay for federal spending.
- The federal government spends taxpayers' money.
- Our children and grandchildren will pay for today's federal deficits.
- A balanced federal budget is more prudent than a federal deficit.
- The federal debt/GDP ratio measures the government's ability to service its debts.
- The federal debt/GDP ratio measures the health of the economy.
- Each of us is liable for a share of the federal debt.
- Federal earmarks, pork barrel spending, and waste hurt the economy.
- The single biggest cause of inflation is excessive federal deficit spending.
- Inflation is too much money chasing too few goods.
- Consumer saving helps the economy grow.
- In fractional reserve banking, banks keep a fraction of deposits and lend the rest.

- The best way to cure inflation is to increase taxes and/or to cut federal spending.
- FICA taxes pay for Medicare and Social Security.
- The government cannot afford to fund Medicare or Social Security.
- The US, like the EU nations, can go bankrupt.
- Without increases in taxes or decreased spending, Medicare and Social Security will go bankrupt.
- Without tax increases, the federal government cannot afford to increase support for education; infrastructure improvements; bailouts for states, counties, and cities; the military; research; and local police.
- Gold is safer and more prudent than “paper” (fiat) money.
- The federal government needs to borrow to pay for deficit spending.
- Federal borrowing reduces the availability of lending funds.
- The two main reasons for the 2008 economic collapse were low interest rates and lack of federal credit supervision.
- Low interest rates stimulate the economy; high rates slow it.
- Taxing the rich does not hurt the poor.
- Cutting payments to doctors and/or taxing “Cadillac” health insurance plans, is one good way to help pay for improved health care.
- America should try to export more and import less, to achieve a positive balance of payments.
- The US states, counties, and cities should be self supporting via local taxes, and not rely on federal assistance.
- Rather than being a net borrower, the federal government should be a net lender.
- Greece, Ireland, and the other troubled euro nations need to exercise spending restraint and austerity.

How many of these myths do you believe? Do you understand why they are myths?

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.

The purpose of studying economics is not to acquire a set of ready-made answers to economic questions, but to learn how to avoid being deceived by economists.

So Hayek called freedom fascism, and he called fascism freedom. The first thing that the Chicago boys did in Chile was to close every economics department. Because they realized that you can't have a Hayek-style free market unless you're willing to kill everybody who disagrees with you. They had to kill labor leaders and tens of thousands of intellectuals. They closed every economics department in the country except for the Catholic University where they taught. There was mass murder. If you're not willing to kill everybody who has a different idea than yourself, you cannot have Hayek's free market. You cannot have Alan Greenspan or the Chicago School, you cannot have the economic freedom that is freedom for the rentiers and the FIRE sector to reduce the rest of the economy to serfdom.

Hayek's saying that the way to create serfdom is to make people think that freedom is serfdom. So we're back with Orwell: Freedom is slavery, war is peace. That is the Orwellian economics now taught by mainstream orthodoxy. You no longer have the history of economic thought being taught, as it was 50 years ago. It's been stripped out of the curriculum. If people really read what Adam Smith said after he traveled to France and met with the Physiocrats—and was convinced that there should be a land tax and that economies shouldn't have free riders—you realize that what he said is the exact opposite of today's ostensible free-market ideology. John Stuart Mill defined rent as what landlords make “in their sleep,” without working. These classical economists were on the road to socialism. Only half-way there, but on the road to it.

I think most people, without understanding economics, would instinctively tell you they think that's what's happening right now, in some way. As long as you can avoid studying economics you know what's happened. Once you take an economics course you step into brainwashing. It's an Orwellian world. It gets you locked into the wrong way of thinking as opposed to just basic common sense.

Finance has taken over the industrial economy, so that instead of finance becoming what it was expected to be in the nineteenth century, instead of

the banks evolving from usurious organizations that lent to governments, mainly to wage war, finance was going to be industrialized. They were going to mobilize savings and recycle it to finance the means of production, starting with heavy industry. This was actually happening in Germany in the late nineteenth century. You had the big banks working with government and industry in a triangular process. But that's not what's happening now. After WWI and especially after WWII, finance reverted to its preindustrial form. Instead of allying themselves with industry, as banks were expected to do, banks allied themselves with real estate and monopolies, realizing that they can make more money off real estate.

The bank spokesman David Ricardo argued against the landed interest in 1817, against land rent. Now the banks are all in favor of supporting land rent, knowing that today, when people buy and sell property, they need credit and pay interest for it. The banks are going to get all the rent. So you have the banks merge with real estate against industry, against the economy as a whole. The result is that they're part of the overhead process, not part of the production process.

Vested interests are the main endowers and backers of the higher learning in America. Hardly by surprise, they promote a bankers'-eye view of the world. Imperialists promote a similar self-serving worldview.

Economic theory, like history, is written by the winners. In today's world that means the financial sector. They depict banks as playing a productive role, as if loans are made to help borrowers earn the money to pay interest and still keep something for themselves. The pretense is that banks finance industrial capital formation, not asset stripping.

What else would you expect banks to promote? The classical distinction between productive and unproductive—that is, extractive—loans is not taught. The result has been to turn mainstream economics as a public-relations advertisement for the status quo, which meanwhile becomes more and more inequitable and polarizes the economy.

Economics is primarily a social science, rather than a physical science. Study of the physical sciences delves into the mechanics of cause and effect. Study of the social sciences requires understanding motivation.

Economics' effects cannot be foretold by charts—though so-called “chartists” devote their lives trying to refute that fact—because charts do not take into consideration motive.

A sociologist would not begin a discussion of socioeconomic inequality with tax policy. But an economist would, and therein lies the problem. Control over arguments regarding political economy in the public sphere has to be wrested from economists, so that we can start to talk about what

actually matters. We must take control of the argument and lay bare the absurdities of those who benefit from the status quo.

I say we boycott economists. Sure some of them are not terrible, but the discipline needs to be torn down and rebuilt from the ground up.

One of the most powerful and effective tools in the hands of capitalist economists is the suggestion that economics in general and capitalism in particular is some sort of science. This illusion—and illusion it is—is strongly assisted by the fact that modern economics is taught with the aid of impressive-looking mathematical equations and “proofs.” Economic textbooks are cluttered with tables, statistics, and graphs which make the books look like physics textbooks—or math books even. Therefore economics must also be a science, right?

Well, no, actually. For the very simple reason that real sciences, such as physics and chemistry, demand a standard of proof and intellectual rigour that not only doesn’t exist in modern economics, it has never existed at all since the earliest days when some sort of economic theory could be perceived. Early economic principles were conceived in religion, and religion strongly influenced economic practices for at least two-thousand years. Capitalism, the dominant economic belief of today, is still more of a religion than a science, because it demands from its adherents a level of blind faith which is little different from any other religious fanatic.

“Let’s form a global economy guided by ideas of economic liberalism where we put the economy first over the interests of people.”

Results:

1980s	boom
Early 1990s	bust
Late 1990s	boom
Early 2000s	bust
Mid 2000s	boom
Late 2000s	bust
2008 on	stagnation

Unfortunately, no one really understood how the economy worked. 2008: “How did that happen?” What more evidence do we need?

What is wrong with economics when science can successfully send spacecraft to the outer edges of the solar system? Science has been allowed to develop successfully as it cannot be modified to suit certain vested interests to make them richer. Economics is not like this. There is something wrong with economics that was first spotted at the end of the nineteenth century and pretending it is a real science today is little more than wishful thinking. Thorstein Veblen wrote an essay in 1898 titled “Why is economics not an evolutionary science?”

Real sciences are evolutionary and old theory is replaced as new theory comes along and proves the old ideas wrong—not always in practice but the ideal is there. Economics jumps about like a cat on a hot tin roof and is not evolutionary, in the late 1970s Keynesian ideas were ditched for the ideas of Milton Friedman. We threw out the old Keynesian economics and brought in something new and untested just as we are about to embark on globalization, it was asking for trouble. Milton Friedman hadn’t realized—or didn’t care—that real science is evolutionary.

Looking back we can see other problems. Malthus came up with an economics that worked for the vested interests of the land owning class. Ricardo came up with an economics that worked for the vested interests of the financial class. Marx came up with an economics that worked for the ideology he was trying to put forward. It’s complex, quite fuzzy, and can be easily biased to suit vested interests. Early on it became very apparent to the wealthy and powerful that economics needed to be biased in the right direction for their interests.

As Classical Economics reached its zenith in the nineteenth century it had come to some unfortunate conclusions that powerful, vested interests didn’t like so they backed a new, neoclassical economics that missed out on—or simply ignored—the undesirable conclusions from Classical Economics like the differentiation of ‘earned’ and ‘unearned’ income. Most of the UK and US now dreams of giving up work and living off the unearned income from a portfolio, extracting the earned income of generation rent. The dream is to be like the idle rich, rentier, living off unearned income and doing nothing productive. This distinction between ‘earned’ and ‘unearned’ income has been buried ever since.

Neoclassical economics led to the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, where its ideas just made things worse. Keynes came up with some new ideas that were incorporated into the New Deal and the recovery began in the US. Keynes’ ideas had some unpleasant conclusions as well and so economists molded some of Keynes’ ideas into neoclassical economics ready to use after the Second World War. Keynes had said that capitalism was inherently unstable and recognized the dangers from financial

asset investing, not the sort of ideas that were desirable.

The Golden Age of the 1950s and 1960s followed. The new hybrid Keynesian ideas went wrong in the 1970s and its ideas did not lead to recovery. The powerful vested interests sought an opportunity to bring back their really biased pure neoclassical economics and use it as the basis for a global economy. It was improved, but still had all the old problems:

- **1920s/2000s:** high inequality, high banker pay, low regulation, low taxes for the wealthy, robber barons (CEOs), reckless bankers, globalization phase
- **1929/2008:** Wall Street crash
- **1930s/2010s:** Global recession, currency wars, rising nationalism and extremism
- **1940s/2020s:** World War?

Left to their own devices, powerful vested interests will develop an economics that is so biased the economic system will collapse due to the polarization of wealth at the personal and national level (like now).

Lots of other inconvenient stuff is missing too, which has led to many of the recent mistakes, including 2008 and its aftermath. Stuff like:

- The true nature of money and how it is created and destroyed on bank balance sheets.
- Debt inflated asset bubbles; their inflation, bursting, and the debt deflation that follows.
- Balance sheet recessions.

You can bias economics to suit vested interests but you can't make that biased economics work. Economics needs to be rebuilt from the bottom up in an evolutionary, scientific manner not missing the bits that are inconvenient for wealthy and powerful vested interests.

You can't put the economy first without good economics.

Let's get busy.

Every branch of knowledge benefits from a process of occasionally stepping back from itself and scrutinizing itself objectively for anomalies and absurdities. If a glaring anomaly or absurdity becomes apparent and remains unquestioned, that discipline is in danger of being seen as floundering in the midst of its own technicalities.

I once tried, unsuccessfully, to explain to an econ professor of mine that insisting that economics be purely positive—focused on what is—rather than normative—focused on what should be—is itself a normative stance. It makes a claim about what economics *should* be: devoid of ethical considerations.

Economists, by and large, would like to think they can avoid ethical quandaries simply by stating that they are doing so. Unfortunately for them—and for us—that is not how ethics works.

Economics is nothing but politics in disguise.

To refer to economists as a priesthood has become a commonplace. Economists practice a religion couched in the language of mathematics and statistics. Their church, to carry the symbolism further, has a magnificent gold and marble altar where they offer praise to Capital. And, as in the magnificent centuries-old churches of Europe, there are chapels off to the sides of the main altar.

The economics profession always pushes that population must always grow and simply assumes the economy can always accommodate any population increase. One can imagine a Native American economist in the 1600s telling his tribal elders not to worry about the new arrivals, as the large American continent could handle the population increase without any problems.

The concept of a limited carrying capacity of an environment is not in the economics playbook, as human ingenuity will always solve any problem. In a finite world of diminishing resources the freedom of individuals will not lead hopefully to progress but fatalistically to destruction.

Another blind economist wandering through the zoo, stumbling upon an elephant's trunk, and conjuring up ideas to make it grow longer. Sustained exponential growth is mathematically impossible. At any rate of growth, the end result is that humans and their things end up occupying every square inch of territory, using every joule of energy, and consuming every natural resource until collapse intervenes.

Natural capital—the physical characteristics of the biosphere—is the foundation of all life including that of homo sapiens. Any economic theory that fails to build from this fundamental fact is mere econobabble.

Modern humans are a tribal species who have devoted much of their “human capital” to warfare. Any discussion of contemporary capitalism in the USA that fails to examine the pivotal role of the military-industrial state is fatally flawed.

The goal of economic policy should be the maximization of quality of life for a population level that can live in harmony with the billions of other inhabitants of the biosphere—a goal diametrically opposed to Sapiens' goal of growth in ability to dominate it.

But obviously I'm just a Luddite and my responses can simply be dismissed as unserious. Though, let's turn it around for a moment. The assumption behind your 'serious point' is that technological evolution is a kind of natural law, that it occurs independent of people, therefore it is the task of people to adapt to technology.

Obviously, as someone who has benefited greatly from antibiotics and enjoyed the convenience of air travel, I'm not opposed to all technological development; that said, with every advance comes a setback. Antibiotics have saved millions of lives, but they've also strengthened bacteria. The aeroplane gets us to Australia quicker, but it has also increased global warming and spread of disease, with potentially catastrophic consequences, and, by allowing mass-tourism, has effectively helped to destroy the habitats and ways of life of many indigenous cultures and peoples. And all for what? So we can say we've seen the pyramids or the Sydney Opera House?

My serious point is that convenience is not an unalloyed good. If these devices are for the benefit of humanity, then we should really look deeply at the consequences of their development, particularly now when the pace of technological change is so rapid and is having such profound effects on our societies, greater even than the industrial revolution, in my opinion. We need to slow down and assess all this stuff that is being rammed down our throats. I'm not sure that Homo Digitalis is a step forward, for us or for the universe.

The spinning jenny, the aeroplane, and the car, were all mass-produced in the name of profit and convenience, not with an eye to their effects. Well, the jenny led to the mass-exploitation of the poor and the "Dark, Satanic Mills," and the mass-usage of the car and plane are destroying the environment. I think it's time we really attempted to look at what the net effect of these "conveniences" is on human (and animal) well-being.

Technology should be the handmaid of people, not the other way round. To paraphrase Upton Sinclair;

"It's very difficult to get someone to see that something is bad for them when they believe that their happiness depends on not seeing it."

Now, I didn't say that 'new conveniences are the cause' of those things. I was responding to the contention that conveniences are necessarily good. We have more labour-saving devices than we did in 1950 yet people work far longer hours, are more indebted—often as a result of buying those conveniences with money they don't have—and suffer more mental illness because of the lifestyles that we need to adopt in order to afford the conveniences.

We have more cars on the road because people want the convenience of motor travel and are prepared to use debt to buy them.

In reality there is no such “demand” except where artificially juiced by propaganda and retail prices kept deceptively low by hiding most of the costs and simply refusing to pay the environmental costs. But this environmental debt is vastly greater than the national debt. National debts are denominated in money and owed to other money-mongers—or often no one at all—and therefore can be written off without much trouble. But civilization’s mounting debt to Gaia is existential, biological, not financial; and it cannot be written off. On the contrary the Earth, perhaps at first slowly but all the more surely, will insist on payment in full, with interest.

Capitalism does not see its limits as limits at all, only as barriers to be overcome.

The idea that “the profits of production must be reinvested in increasing production” sounds trivial. Yet it was alien to most people throughout history.

There’s something fundamentally flawed about a system that has a prime directive to churn nature and humans into capital, and do it more and more each year, regardless of the costs to human well-being and to the environment we depend on. What becomes clear here is that ours is a system that is programmed to subordinate life to the imperative of profit.

I have come to the conclusion that capitalism is successful primarily because it can impose the majority of the costs associated with its economic activities on outside parties and on the environment. In other words, capitalists make profits because their costs are externalized and borne by others. In the US, society and the environment have to pick up the tab produced by capitalist activity.

Capitalism is a system for concentrating wealth, which makes possible new investments, which further concentrate wealth. This process is accumulation. Classic models take us to the factory: factory owners concentrate wealth by paying workers less than the value of the goods that the workers produce each day. Owners “accumulate” investment assets from this extra value. Even in factories, however, there are other elements of accumulation. In the nineteenth century, when capitalism first became an object of inquiry, raw materials were imagined as an infinite bequest from Nature to Man. Raw materials can no longer be taken for granted. In our food procurement system, for example, capitalists exploit ecologies not only by reshaping them but also by taking advantage of their capacities. Even in industrial farms, farmers depend on life processes outside their control, such as photosynthesis and animal digestion. In capitalist farms, living things made within ecological processes are co-opted for the concentration of wealth. This is what

some call “salvage,” that is, taking advantage of value produced without capitalist control. Many capitalist raw materials (consider coal and oil) came into existence long before capitalism. Capitalists also cannot produce human life, the prerequisite of labor. “Salvage accumulation” is the process through which lead firms amass capital without controlling the conditions under which commodities are produced. Salvage is not an ornament on ordinary capitalist processes; it is a feature of how capitalism works.

Salvage accumulation through global supply chains is not new, and some well-known earlier examples can clarify how it works. Consider the nineteenth-century ivory supply chain connecting central Africa and Europe as told in Joseph Conrad’s novel *Heart of Darkness*. The story turns around the narrator’s discovery that the European trader he much admired has turned to savagery to procure his ivory. The savagery is a surprise because everyone expects the European presence in Africa to be a force for civilization and progress. Instead, civilization and progress turn out to be cover-ups and translation mechanisms for getting access to value procured through violence: classic salvage.

For a brighter view of supply-chain translation, consider Herman Melville’s account of the nineteenth-century procurement of whale oil for Yankee investors. *Moby Dick* tells of a ship of whalers whose rowdy cosmopolitanism contrasts sharply with our stereotypes of factory discipline; yet the oil they obtain from killing whales around the world enters a US-based capitalist supply chain. Strangely, all the harpooners on the *Pequod* are unassimilated indigenous people from Asia, Africa, America, and the Pacific. The ship is unable to kill a single whale without the expertise of people who are completely untrained in US industrial discipline. But the products of this work must eventually be translated into capitalist value forms; the ship sails only because of capitalist financing. The conversion of indigenous knowledge into capitalist returns is salvage accumulation. So too is the conversion of whale life into investments.

Savage and salvage are often twins: Salvage translates violence and pollution into profit.

Global supply chains ended expectations of progress because they allowed lead corporations to let go of their commitment to controlling labor. Standardizing labor required education and regularized jobs, thus connecting profits and progress. In supply chains, in contrast, goods gathered from many arrangements can lead to profits for the lead firm; commitments to jobs, education, and well-being are no longer even rhetorically necessary. Supply chains require a particular kind of salvage accumulation, involving translation across patches.

One can suggest the future for humans could be viewed through the

mind's eye of all life on this planet. For other species are already seeing a shrinking resource world, habitat-wise, be they butterflies, bees, large mammals, fish, or trees. The "science" of economics has a hand in this as human economists seem to promote the idea that remaking the world for human comfort is the only important goal. An animal economist would be very troubled by what has already occurred as the future is not "up and to the right" as they see numerous species struggling, and failing, to survive.

For economics to become a science—in the old sense of a study based on observation rather than theory based on a priori fantasy—it would have to put the biosphere at the center of its investigation. The biosphere is the source of all human life and all human activities. Without it, humans can do nothing, and in fact are nothing and won't exist. This truth is too archaic for the modern mind to accept, and yet is obvious.

Pollinating insects of all kinds—not just honeybees, which are actually fine since they're a mass produced, semi-domesticated industrial tool bred by people largely for use in for-profit enterprise—are facing population declines and threats of extinction. Our modern response to that is to fantasize replacing them with pollinating robots. Robots that in the first place we do not know how to design, nor build, nor program. The idea that we have—in any sense of the word—the ability to replace the essential parts of the biosphere we destroy, is pure delusion and a sign that our modern world has finally entered the realm of straight out insanity and senility. Haven't they seen *Black Mirror*?

Once you start looking at externalities, you find they are everywhere, and neither capitalism nor modern socialism can exist without them. Capitalism is—as it has always been—a scheme for shifting costs onto others, including the biosphere, and without that, capitalism makes no profit. Ever.

Merely noticing externalities is very preliminary groping, when what we need is understanding. It will always be too slow until we recognize that the field of economics is essentially bogus—containing tricks that work under specialized conditions but with no deep understanding of why the specialized conditions are specialized and what their limits are.

Once you see the primacy of the biosphere, then you can look at how it makes possible particular human activities of production of goods and services. This is secondary. It is also worth studying, but the point is it only exists in the context of a functioning biosphere that allows it to happen.

When people talk about technological revolution, they often fail to consider the additional complexity that comes with these technological changes. It is this complexity, and our inability to fully comprehend our place in that complexity, or its feedback on our lives, that will likely provide the ultimate limits to growth or advancement. Complexity will result in diminishing

returns—it will limit growth. The complex solutions to old problems typically generate new and more complex problems that are more difficult to solve. For example, the technological innovation of fracking to obtain tight oil/gas has resulted in groundwater pollution and has exacerbated climate change—problems that are orders of magnitude more difficult to solve.

As the Fed attempts more and more elaborate, innovative schemes to prop up the house of cards, the house of debt, the shakier the entire economic system becomes. Our new innovation-driven growth is not based on simple principles of useful product development, but rather on marketing to create desire for unnecessary consumption and on riskier and riskier financial bets that create bubble economies ripe for collapse. In addition, the glue that holds the system together is based on faith and myths that are more difficult to sell as the financial cracks become fissures; soon to become crevasses. The economy has lost its way—forgotten why it was created—morphed into a profit-driven machine rather than a needs-driven social exchange.

Complexity hinders our ability to see the big picture since complexity forces us to focus on narrow problems and solutions which we can comprehend with our finite consciousness. Complexity blinds us—we can't see the forest for the trees. We don't even understand how our unconscious desires control and overrule our conscious. As we attempt more and more complex solutions to problems driven by desires, not by need, we create a whole new set of problems—blowback from our inability to see the bigger picture. The demand to innovate and show movement, defined as a growth of knowledge, is all that seems to matter in our capitalist culture—even when no one pays attention to that new knowledge—much like all the other garbage we discard. I think we are rapidly approaching the saturation point in our ability to use this new complex information in a beneficial way.

In my own narrow sub-field of physics, I used to be able to at least skim the journals and find those articles of interest and worth reading to contemplate and discuss with others. But the demand for growth—growth of publications (publish or perish)—and growth of people in my field (grad student production) has transformed the journals into masses of information with incremental results that lack placement in the broader understanding. Most of this new knowledge is useless. Fewer and fewer scientists see the bigger picture. Scientists are so driven to generate new results, to produce, that the journals are too thick to parse unless you do nothing else. And the articles that scientists recommend to others are often their own publications in the hope that someone else might read them. The internet tools help—I can now download an article much faster than going to the library—but on the other hand I can't read and digest that article any faster, and the increased number of articles published has reached the point where it is

difficult to even find that useful article. The volume of information is growing too fast, and the older insights in the field are becoming lost to the newer generation of scientists who must attempt to rapidly innovate—or mimic what was already done—just to show progress. There is no time to develop wisdom.

Don't be too proud of this technological terror you've constructed.

The underlying theme that makes Single Payer, a Post Office Bank, and Paper Ballots so unattractive to the ruling liberal elite is that all three reduce complexity by orders of magnitude.

Liberalism today believes that complex problems require ever-escalating complex solutions, and it is almost an embedded trait to reflexively believe that anything else is “oversimplifying.” If a simple solution doesn't ignore supposedly critical aspects of the needs of a program, it certainly ignores some element of the political path required to get there. We all know that a desire to be “reasonable” leads many liberal leaders to begin negotiations by absorbing 50% of the hits from the adversary in advance.

When all else fails, it's also possible to create new needs through identity politics in terms of who gets what and when. In order to provide for poor urban populations without rankling white suburbanites, we create hoops. Means test everything! Even if it means that in 15 years that shiny new progressive program will be viewed as another layer of Welfare to be cut.

Ultimately, though, the underlying value set is that the ultimate merit in our society is the ability—mentally, financially, temporally—to navigate complexity. Those who can't, well they won't pass the means test and they don't deserve it. Having a complex playing field where you can get screwed if you don't do your homework and rewarded if you do is paramount to reinforcing that value set. Giving people single payer healthcare, post office banks, and paper ballots would just reward laziness!

The fact that all three also have fundraising and electoral implications is just gravy. While it is a feature, and not a bug, it's not the main reason behind the objection. The main reason is that the cultural value of innovation has captured our elite in a way not seen since the Victorian concepts of the deserving and undeserving poor, now wrapped up in an iPhone case.

The end of growth exposes the stupidity and ignorance of all but (and even that's a maybe) a precious few “leaders.” There is no other way this could have run, because an era of growth simply selects for different people to float to the top of the pond than a period of contraction does. Can we agree on that?

‘Growth leaders’ only have to seduce voters into believing that they can keep growth going, and create more of it (though in reality they have no

control over it at all). Anyone can do that. So anyone who's sufficiently hooked on power games will apply. 'Contraction leaders' have a much harder time; they must convince voters that they can minimize the suffering of the herd. Which is invariably a herd that no-one wants to belong to. A tough sell.

The claim that no income is unearned defines all economic activities as being productive in proportion to how much income they obtain. No one way of making money is deemed more or less productive than any other. Everyone earns just what he or she deserves. Natural law will proportion income and wealth to their recipients' contribution to production, if not interfered with.

There also is no measure of criminal income, smuggling, or fictitious accounting for tax avoidance. No category of spending is counted as overhead, not even pollution cleanup costs or crime prevention, not to mention financial bailouts. Economists dismiss these as "externalities," meaning external to the statistics deemed relevant. Yet despite the rising proportion of spending that takes the form of rent extraction, environmental pollution cleanup costs, debt pollution and its bailout costs, GDP is treated as an accurate measure of economic welfare. The result confuses healthy growth with that of a tumor on the body politic. Taken together, these omissions deter the kind of systemic analysis that would have alerted policy-makers and voters to the distortions leading up to the 2008 crash.

GDP is a poor measure of universal or even widespread thriving and prosperity, economic security and economic well-being.

Judging the health of our society by looking at stock prices is like judging the health of a dying man by looking at the leeches on his skin. 'Wow, those leeches are *very* happy. This man is in peak condition!'

Government deficits, the money supply, and GDP are abstractions that obscure the issues of power and distribution of wealth that are the consequence of a given political system. These abstractions make no sense as ends in themselves. A public deficit just means that a sovereign has spent money into the economy that it hasn't taxed back. It doesn't say whether that money was spent on bombs or schools or pure graft. A country can have a high GDP because a small subset of the population sells tons of luxury goods and financial instruments to each other while everyone else starves. Ultimately, what matters is the quality and distribution of resources.

If it cost a worker \$100 to make \$10, we would clearly see that as flawed, not worth it. But what is the real cost of our GDP growth? While the GDP is certainly a large number, the cost to get there is never noted, perhaps—likely certainly—this number is much higher.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is so flawed that we do not know whether

the increased output costs more to produce than it is worth. GDP is really a measure of what has been looted without reference to the cost of the looting. Environmental deregulation means that capitalists can treat the environment as a garbage dump. The planet can become so toxic that it cannot recover.

A property right is not a factor in production. If you sell off a road—a federal or local road—and you put up a toll booth and make it into a toll road, all of a sudden GDP goes up. If you go to war abroad, and you spend more money on the military, the military-industrial complex, all this is counted as increased production. None of this is really part of the production system of capital and labor building more and more factories, and producing more things that people need to live, and to do business. All of this is overhead. But there's no distinction between wealth and overhead.

And failing to draw that distinction means that the host doesn't realize that there is a parasite there. The host economy, the industrial economy, doesn't realize what the industrialists realize from the nineteenth century: that if you want to be an efficient economy and be low-priced, and sell, under-sell competitors, you have to cut your price by having the public sector provide roads freely; medical care freely; education freely. If you charge for all of these then you get to the point that the US economy is in today. Where if American workers, who work for factories, were to get all of their consumer goods for nothing—all of their food, transportation, clothing, furniture, everything for nothing—they still couldn't compete with Asians or other producers, because they have to pay up to 40% of their income for rent or mortgage interests, 10% or more of their income for student loans, credit card debt, 15% of their paycheck is automatic withholding to pay social security, to cut taxes on the rich, or to pay for medical care.

So Americans, you built into the economy all of this overhead. And there's no distinction between growth and overhead, and it's all made America so high-priced that we're priced out of the market, regardless of what trade policy we have.

In mainstream textbooks there is no exploitation. Even fraudulent banks, landlords, and monopolists are reported as earning whatever they take—as if they are contributing to GDP. In the 1960s there was still an emphasis on the history of economic thought, and also on economic history. That's gone now.

One can easily see why. Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and other classical economists sought to free their societies from the legacy of feudalism: landlordism and predatory finance, as well as from the monopolies that bondholders had demanded that governments create as a means of paying their war debts.

Back in the 1960s, just like today, university courses did not give any training in actual statistics. Academic courses didn't even make reference to accounting—so there was no conceptualization of 'money,' for instance, in terms of the liabilities side of the balance sheet.

New York University's money and banking course was a travesty. It was about helicopters dropping money down—to be spent on goods and services, increasing prices. There was no understanding that the Federal Reserve's helicopter only flies over Wall Street, or that banks create money on their own computers. It was not even recognized that banks lend to customers mainly to buy real estate, or speculate in stocks and bonds, or raid companies.

Economics is taught like English literature. Teachers explain the principle of "suspension of disbelief." Readers of novels are supposed to accept the author's characters and setting. In economics, students are told to accept just-pretend parallel universe assumptions, and then treat economic theory as a purely logical exercise, without any reference to the world.

The switch from fiction to reality occurs by taking the policy conclusions of these unrealistic assumptions as if they do apply to the real world: austerity, trickle-down economics shifting taxes off the wealthy, and treating government spending as deadweight even when it is on infrastructure. The most fictitious assumption is that Wall Street and the FIRE sector add to output, rather than extracting revenue from the rest of the economy.

The history of economic thought has been replaced by mathematics, to mathematize a fictitious parallel universe model. The result is what computer operators call 'Garbage In, Garbage Out' (GIGO). You're mathematizing something fictitious. If you look at the introductions to Paul Samuelson's or Bill Vickery's textbooks, they won the Not-a-Nobel prize for writings that came right out and said that economics is not about reality. It's about the internal consistency of assumptions. It's to build a beautiful system that, if it really worked, would be so appealing that students will be willing to suspend disbelief. That is what a good science fiction writer would do. The trick is to make readers willing to accept the assumptions that they're given at the outset. Free-market tunnel vision is simply about logical consistency of unrealistic assumptions.

These people are idiot savants. They're very smart in an abstract, autistic way, but they don't know what to be smart about. They're willing to use their smartness to be deceptive, to become financial lobbyists. Their work is then turned over to focus groups to find out what kind of rhetoric is best going to trick people into thinking that poverty is wealth. The aim is to convince people that they can get rich from going into debt to buy a house and become part of the middle class economic treadmill, and to believe:

‘Only the rich can save us.’ If you can get people to believe that, you’ve won their hearts and minds

Financial systems tend to develop into Ponzi schemes if unchecked. The main issue is the exponential overgrowth and instability inherent in the “miracle of compound interest,” underlying such schemes and financialized economies. For the economy at large, such growth sucks revenue and wealth from the broad base to the narrow top, impoverishing the many to enrich the few.

Compound interest takes from the weak and gives to the strong; makes the rich richer and the poor poorer; builds palaces for the idle and hovels for the diligent. Only the wealthy are able to save up significant amounts and let sums simply accumulate and accrue interest over time. Small savers must live off their savings, drawing them down long before the mathematics of compound interest become truly significant.

What is remarkable is that this principle of compound interest has come to be viewed as a way to make populations richer rather than poorer. It is as if workers can ride the exponential growth of financial debt claims, by saving in mutual funds or investing in pension funds to financialize the economy. This rosy scenario assumes that the increase in debt does not dry up the growth in markets, investment, and employment.

J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller are said to have called the principle of compound interest the Eighth Wonder of the World. For them it meant concentrating financial fortunes in the hands of an emerging oligarchy indebting the economy to itself at an exponential rate. This has been the key factor in polarizing the distribution of wealth and political power in societies that do not take steps to cope with this dynamic.

After 2008, for instance, banks innovated a new financial “product” called reverse mortgages. Retirees and other homeowners signed agreements with banks or insurance companies to receive a given annuity payment each month, based on the owner’s expected lifetime. The annuity was charged against the homeowner’s equity as prepayment for taking possession upon the owner-debtor’s death. The banks or insurance companies ended up with the property, not the children of the debtors. In some cases the husband died and the wife received an eviction notice, on the ground that her name was not on the ownership deed. Capitalism!

The moral is that what is inherited in today’s financialized economy is creditor power, not widespread home ownership. So we are brought back to the fact that compound interest does not merely increase the flow of income to the rentier One Percent, but also transfers property into its hands.

Few global managers today are drawn from industry. Most economic decision-makers have been trained in business schools to view companies

primarily as vehicles to produce financial gains.

In the first three decades after World War II, major American corporations typically retained and reinvested their earnings. But beginning in the 1980s, a steadily increasing portion of corporate earnings went to share buybacks. Between 1934 and 1982, the Securities and Exchange Commission regarded stock buybacks as potential vehicles for stock manipulation and fraud. It required companies to disclose the volume of their buybacks and prohibited companies from repurchasing more than 15 percent of the value of their stock on any given day. But in 1982, John Shad, the new chairman of the SEC, appointed by Ronald Reagan, removed these restrictions. Henceforth, CEOs could use buybacks to manipulate the prices of their companies' shares.

Adding to the allure of stock options was a subsequent decision by the SEC, in 1991, to permit top executives, even though technically company insiders with knowledge of the timing of their company's stock buybacks, to quietly cash in their stock options without public disclosure. Then, in 1993, the Clinton administration decided to allow companies to deduct from their taxable income executive pay in excess of \$1 million if that pay was linked to corporate performance—that is, if it came in the form of stock options and awards linked to share prices. Not surprisingly, stock options thereafter boomed.

The financial sector is the major endower of business schools. They have become training grounds for Chief Financial Officers. At Harvard, one professor reasoned that managers should aim at serving stockholders, not the company as such. The result was an incentive system tying management bonuses to the stock price. So naturally, CFOs used corporate earnings for stock buybacks and dividend payouts that provided a short-term jump in the stock price.

The ideological foundation of today's business schools is that economic control should be shifted out of government hands into those of financial managers—that is, Wall Street. That is their idea of free enterprise. Its inevitable tendency is to end in more centralized planning by Wall Street than in Washington.

The aim of this financial planning is quite different from that of governments. The euro and the ECB were designed in a way that blocks government money creation for any purpose other than to support the banks and bondholders. The financial sector takes over the role of economic planner, putting its technicians in charge of monetary and fiscal policy without democratic voice or referendums over debt and tax policies.

Financial planning always has been short-term. That is why planning should not be consigned to banks and bondholders. Their mentality is

extractive, and that ends up hit-and-run. What passes for mainstream financial analysis is simply to add up how much is owed and demand payment, not help the economy grow. To financial managers, economic prosperity and unemployment is an externality—that is, not part of the equation that they are concerned with.

The vocabulary taught to students today in economics—and used by the mass media and by government spokesmen—is basically a set of euphemisms. If you look at the television reports on the market, they say that any loss in the stock market isn't a loss, it's "profit taking." And when they talk about money. Or the stock market rises—"Oh that's good news." But it's awful news for the short sellers it wipes out. Almost all the words we get are kind of euphemisms to conceal the actual dynamics that are happening. For instance, "secular stagnation" means it's all a cycle. Even the idea of "business cycles": Nobody in the nineteenth century used the words 'business cycle.' They spoke about "crashes". They knew that things go up slowly and then they plunge very quickly. It was a crash. It's not the sine curve that you have in Josef Schumpeter's book on business cycles. It's a ratchet effect: slow up, quick down. A cycle is something that is automatic, and if it's a cycle and you have leading and lagging indicators as the National Bureau of Economic Research has. Then you'd think 'Oh, okay, everything that goes up will come down, and everything that goes down will come up, just wait your turn.' And that means governments should be passive.

Well, that is the opposite of everything that's said in classical economics and the Progressive Era, when they realized that economies don't recover by themselves. You need the government to step in, you need something "exogenous," as economists say. You need something from outside the system to revive it. The covert idea of this business cycle analysis is to leave out the role of government. If you look at neoliberal and Austrian theory, there's no role for government spending, and no role of public investment. The whole argument for privatization, for instance, is the opposite of what was taught in American business schools in the nineteenth century. The first professor of economics at the Wharton School of Business, which was the first business school, was Simon Patten. He said that public infrastructure is a fourth factor of production. But its role isn't to make a profit. It's to lower the cost of public services and basic inputs to lower the cost of living and lower the cost of doing business to make the economy more competitive. But privatization adds interest payments, dividends, managerial payments, stock buybacks, and mergers and acquisitions. Obviously these financialized charges are factored into the price system and raise the cost of living and doing business.

The classical concept of economic rent has been censored by calling

finance, real estate and, monopolies “industries.” The result is that about half of what the media report as “industrial profits” are FIRE-sector rents, that is, finance, insurance, and real estate rents—and most of the remaining “profits” are monopoly rents for patents (headed by pharmaceuticals and information technology) and other legal privileges. Rents are conflated with profit. This is the terminology of financial intruders and rentiers seeking to erase the language and concepts of Adam Smith, Ricardo, and their contemporaries depicting rents as parasitic.

Obliterating the logic that led society to regulate and tax rentiers in the first place, think tanks and business schools favor economists who portray rentier takings as a contribution to the economy rather than a burden on it. By 2012, over 60 percent of the value of homes in the United States is owed to creditors, so that most rental value is paid as interest to banks, not to the community.

Home ownership has been democratized on credit. Yet banks have succeeded in promoting the illusion that the government is the predator, not bankers. The rising proportion of owner-occupied housing has made the real estate tax the most unpopular of all taxes, as if property tax cuts do not simply leave more rental income available to pay mortgage lenders.

Today’s banks don’t finance tangible investment in factories, new means of production, or research and development—the “productive lending” that is supposed to provide borrowers with the means to pay off their debt. Banks largely lend against collateral already in place, mainly real estate (80 percent of bank loans), stocks, and bonds. The effect is to transfer ownership of these assets, not produce more.

So basically you have the financial sector ending up with much more of the gains. And the name of the game if you’re on Wall Street isn’t profits. It’s capital gains. And that’s something that wasn’t even a part of classical economics. They didn’t anticipate that the price of assets would go up for any other reason than earning more money and capitalizing on income. And actually, what you have in the last 50 years, really since WWII, has been asset price inflation, that most families have—middle-class families—have gotten the wealth that they’ve got since 1945 not really by saving what they’ve earned by working, but by the price of their house going up. They’ve benefited by the price of the house. And they think that that’s somehow made them rich.

And the reason the price of the house has gone up is that a house is worth whatever a bank is going to lend against it. And if banks made easier and easier credit, lower down payments, then you’re going to have a financial bubble. And so now, you have, indeed, real estate having gone up as high as it can, I don’t think it’ll take more than 40% of somebody’s income to buy it.

But now, if you, imagine if you're joining the labor force. You're not going to be able to buy a house at today's prices, putting down a little bit of your money, and then somehow end up getting rich just on the house investment. All of this money you pay the bank is now going to be subtracted from the amount of money that you have to spend on goods and services.

So we've turned the post-war economy that made America prosperous and rich, we've turned it inside out, and somehow the most people believe that you could get rich by going into debt to borrow something that's going to rise in price. And you can't get rich, ultimately, by going into debt. In the end, the creditors always win, and that's why every society since Sumer and Babylonia have had to either cancel the debts, or you come to a society like Rome that didn't cancel the debts, and then you have a dark age. Everything collapses.

Yes. The head of Goldman Sachs came out and said: Goldman Sachs workers are the most productive in the world. That's why they're paid what they are. And the concept of productivity in America is the income divided by the labor. So if you're Goldman Sachs and you pay yourself \$20 million a year in salary and bonuses, you're considered to have added \$20 million to GDP, and that's enormously productive. So we're talking with tautology. We're talking with circular reasoning here.

So the issue is whether Goldman Sachs, Wall Street, predatory pharmaceutical firms, actually add a product or whether they're just exploiting other people. People think of the parasite as simply taking money, taking blood out of the host, or taking money out of the economy. But in nature, it's much more complicated. The parasite can't simply come in and take something. First of all, it needs to numb. It has an enzyme that numbs the host so the host doesn't even realize the parasite's there. And then the parasites have another enzyme that makes the host—it takes over the host's brain. And it makes the host imagine that the parasite is part of the body, actually part of itself, to be protected.

Well, that's basically what Wall Street has done. It depicts itself as part of the economy. Not as a wrapping around it. Not as external to it. But actually is the part that's helping the body grow, and that actually is responsible for most of the growth, when in fact it's the parasite that is taking over the growth.

So the result is an inversion of classical economics. It turns Adam Smith upside down. It says what the classical economists said was unproductive, parasitism, actually is the real economy, and the parasites are labor and industry, that get in the way of what the parasite wants, which is to reproduce itself, not help the host.

The "free market" has been redefined to mean freedom for the rentier

class to create a tollbooth economy, not freedom from their predatory incursions to extract unearned income in today's New Enclosure Movement. Its advocates trumpet this not as class war, but as "the end of history," as if it is inevitable and There Is No Alternative. As if austerity is a fact of nature instead of a tactic in class warfare.

The assumption that no government spending can take the form of capital investment, and that all budget deficits are simply a deadweight drain on the economy, inverts the direction in which civilization has been traveling for thousands of years. There is no accounting offset for public investment as an asset, reducing the deficit from "current" spending. It is as if only the private sector has a balance sheet with assets and productive spending on it. The irony is that account keeping and profit-and-loss statements were innovated in the temples and palaces of Mesopotamia some five-thousand years ago!

For thousands of years, from ancient Mesopotamia through classical Greece and Rome, temples and palaces were the major creditors, coining and providing money, creating basic infrastructure and receiving user fees as well as taxes. The Templars and Hospitallers led the revival of banking in medieval Europe, whose Renaissance and Progressive Era economies integrated public investment productively with private financing.

To make this symbiosis successful and immune to special privilege and corruption, nineteenth-century economists sought to free parliaments from control by the propertied classes that dominated their upper houses. Britain's House of Lords and senates throughout the world defend the vested interests against the more democratic regulations and taxes proposed by the lower house. Parliamentary reform extending the vote to all citizens was expected to elect governments that would act in society's long-term interest. Public authorities would take the lead in major capital investments in roads, ports, and other transportation, communications, power production and other basic utilities, including banking, without private rent-extractors intruding into the process. The alternative was for infrastructure to be owned in a pattern much like absentee landlordship, enabling rent-extracting owners to set up tollbooths to charge society whatever the market would bear.

Such privatization is contrary to what classical economists meant by a free market. They envisioned a market free from rent paid to a hereditary landlord class, and free from interest and monopoly rent paid to private owners. The ideal system was a morally fair market in which people would be rewarded for their labor and enterprise, but would not receive income without making a positive contribution to production and related social needs. Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, and their contemporaries warned that rent extraction threatened to siphon off income and bid up prices above

the necessary cost of production. Their major aim was to prevent landlords from “reaping where they have not sown,” as Smith put it. Toward this end their labor theory of value aimed at deterring landlords, natural resource owners and monopolists from charging prices above cost-value. Opposing governments controlled by rentiers.

If you read Adam Smith and subsequent classical economists, you see that their main concern was to distinguish between productive and unproductive economic activity. They wanted to isolate unproductive rentier income, and unproductive spending and credit.

To do this, they developed the labor theory of value to distinguish value from price—with “economic rent” being the excess of price over socially necessary costs of production. They wanted to free industrial capitalism from the legacy of feudalism: tax-like ground rent paid to a hereditary landed aristocracy. They also opposed the monopolies that bondholders had insisted that governments create to sell off to pay the public debt. That was why the East India Company and the South Sea Company were created with their special privileges.

Smith and his followers are applauded as the founding fathers of “free market” economics. But they defined free markets in a diametrically opposite way from today’s self-proclaimed neoliberals. Smith and other classical economists urged markets free from economic rent.

These classical reformers realized that progressive taxation to stop favoring rentiers required a government strong enough to take on society’s most powerful and entrenched vested interests. The nineteenth-century drive for Parliamentary reform in Britain aimed at enabling the House of Commons to override the House of Lords and tax the landlords. This rule finally passed in 1910 after a constitutional crisis. Now there has been a fight by creditors to nullify democratic politics, most notoriously in Greece.

Today’s neoliberals define free markets as those that free rent-seekers and predatory bankers from government regulation and taxes. No wonder the history of economic thought has been stripped away from the curriculum. Reading the great classical economists would show how the Enlightenment’s reform program has been inverted. The world is now racing down a road to the Counter-Enlightenment, a neo-rentier economy that is bringing economic growth to a halt.

In 2015, studies estimate that US renters paid \$535 billion to landlords in residential rents. To put this in perspective, \$535 billion is about enough to give \$15,000 to every human being in the US state of California. It would also be enough to replace every page of every book in the US Library of Congress with \$100 bills. And if a person stood outside of Walt Disney World every day from open to close, handing \$30,000 in cash to each individual

visitor, it would take a year to hand out \$535 billion. But what exactly did this massive sum of money actually pay for? Why did people start paying landlords in the first place? And do lands really need lords?

Long before the blossoming of modern technology and the dawn of the industrial era, humanity occupied only a fraction of the lands it does today. Between the hubs of ancient commerce, an immense wilderness existed that, legally speaking, was the property of no one and even land that had already been settled was likely to be managed communally. In parts of West Europe, wild and communal lands were—and are still are—called “commons” and those who could not or did not wish to make a living in the town often had the option to subsist by farming common land or to join a communal farming-village that was already established. Similar forms of non-private, custom-based and communal systems of land-use existed across the globe in the preindustrial ages for tens-of-thousands of years—until a few centuries ago.

Before modern notions of private-property arose alongside the full development of capitalism in the eighteenth century, social and economic life in medieval Europe was organized within a system that today is known as feudalism. Under the preindustrial conditions of feudalism, the central focus of economic activity was agriculture and, since land was the main thing needed for production, landholdings were the most important form of wealth in feudal society. In the same sense that money is power in capitalist societies today, land is power in feudal society.

Feudalism appears in different forms, depending on time and place. In feudal England, all land belonged to a king who strategically granted titles to powerful members of the nobility that allowed them to rule over large estates in exchange for pledges to provide knights or soldiers for the king’s military. In turn, the “lords” of these estates—none of whom could possibly use so much land—leased parts of the land to their aristocratic peers and important allies, many of whom also sublet parts of their land, often for similar pledges of military-aid, for rents, or as payment for services.

Noble landholders were considered to be the lords of their sub-tenants, as well as the peasants and serfs inhabiting the land, and most lords were also considered a tenant (also known as a vassal) of the overlord who granted the land to them. A lord whose land was given directly by the king was known as a tenant-in-chief and held the title of baron, in addition to attending the king’s councils. Altogether, such arrangements added up to form a kind of “military-agrarian complex” that reinforced the monarchic regime’s ability to control land through a complex bureaucracy of landholders that enforced the rigid hierarchy of feudal society.

While the warlords, aristocrats, and Church officials who made up the

landholding class mostly occupied political, military, and religious roles, it was the peasants who did the work in feudal society. Unlike the nobility, few peasants had their own land and many were considered serfs (an Old French word related to servant and slave) who were legally prohibited from leaving the land they cultivated without their lord's permission due to laws dating from the late Roman empire. In most cases, serfs were bound to work the same land as their ancestors, which meant that serfs were essentially leased along with the land by one landed lord to another. While free peasants at least could move or be married without permission slips, their circumstances were rarely better. Since most were landless, landed lords demanded rents from peasants in exchange for the right to work the soil, often paid with daily labor or with a hefty part of the peasant's own harvest.

Because the Church had forbidden usury (issuing loans with interest), landed lords started to buy and sell leases of land and, by the year 1500, the leasehold had become a common and lucrative way to circumvent the Church's ban. The practice of transferring land in the form of leaseholds—which naturally included the feudal right to exploit the labor of serfs and extract rent from its tenants—is what forms the legal foundation for the residential leases that exist across the world today.

Unlike the hereditary rights of kings to rule or the institutions of serfdom, which had already been largely eroded by the time of the industrial age, the feudal relationships of landlord and tenant were never really abolished. As factory-based industry spread, the market-economics that would come to characterize the emerging capitalist societies took hold around the world, much of which—thanks to colonialism—had not just been colonized by Europe but also by European legal systems, along with the feudal property laws they codified. The English system was transplanted everywhere from the Americas and Pacific Islands to Africa, India, and Australia, while similar feudal systems were exported by France, Spain, and other colonial and imperialist nations.

Over the next few hundred years, feudal leaseholds, as well as the land in general, were gradually privatized through acquisitions, settlement, and processes of enclosure pushed by governments that were often led by the same wealthy lords in shiny, new capitalist hats.

Even setting aside the social and legal history that traces the origins of rent collection to feudal entitlements that granted hereditary rights to inbred clans of medieval warlords, there is still the question—why should landlords be entitled to payment at all?

Before continuing the discussion, an important distinction needs to be drawn between the small-time mom-and-pop landlord and the big-time tycoons and corporate landlords. The key point of difference is that small-

time landlords tend to act as groundskeepers who perform labor, such as landscaping and maintenance, whereas the tycoon and corporate landlords act as shareholders, hiring others to perform the labor of maintaining their properties. Of course there will always be exceptions, and perhaps outside forces are even pushing more and more small-time landlords into exploitative roles. However, in the interest of fairness, the following discussion will consider small-time landlords to be groundskeepers and exclusively address the large-scale landlords.

The rental of residential land and living-space is a strange commodity. Broadly speaking, commodities—whether physical products like food and cars, services like repair and healthcare, or information like research and iPhone apps—are the results of some kind of production. Or in other words, commodities are made by people using other things. Cars are made by people using factory machinery and steel, things are repaired by people using tools and parts, and apps are created by software-developers with knowledge gained from education and the value of each is determined by how much labor is needed to produce them. But who produces land and space, with what materials, and how many labor-hours on average is needed to produce them?

If a thing is produced, it is reasonable to argue that the person who labored to make the thing has a right to control its use, whether she wants to use it herself, lend or sell it to others, or give it away because she created it. That, in fact, is exactly the reasoning used by classical-liberal philosophers like John Locke to support the idea of a natural right to property, which was fairly radical at the time because it opposed the feudal entitlements to land held by a ruling minority of aristocrats. Things like land and space, along with springs, oyster-beds, or other forms of “natural capital,” are non-produced. And if neither the landlord’s nor anyone’s labor is a factor of land’s existence, why should society’s laws entitle landlords to payments from anyone too poor to buy property?

The absurdity of entitlements to rent is clearest in cases of unimproved land with no structures, utilities, or other bells and whistles added. Extracting rent for the use of idle soil and empty living-spaces is nothing but a legalized act of extortion. Since the basis of society (and human survival) is availability of living-space and cultivation of land, to keep others, human or non-human, from occupying living space or using land productively is not just violent but anti-social in the most literal sense of the word.

In cases of improved land, rent collection seems more defensible at first. It may be argued, for instance, that a landlord who buys an apartment complex and pays for its upkeep has a right to collect rents to recover his investment and in reward for assuming the risk. But this accounts only for

the landlord's personal interest without considering the deficit to society overall. After the costs to build the complex, the only real costs left are to maintain it. Since these costs must be less than a landlord's revenue to create income, rents must always exceed the real cost to maintain the property and rent collectors must always be less efficient than if tenants had simply paid such costs directly.

The real cost to build and maintain housing is unavoidable because society depends on housing to exist and, while small-time landlords often provide at least some real labor and materials, rent collection in itself contributes nothing to this endeavor. If small-time landlords who maintain properties are considered as workers like the grounds-keepers and other workers who are paid for similar labor, the remaining landlords' only labor is to manage the rent-collecting business. And business is booming. Because everyone needs a place to live.

According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), this rental business raked in an average \$11,232 per unit yearly for about 43.9 million housing units in 2015—but what does the business provide in return? The US Census Bureau's Rental Housing Finance Survey shows landlords spend an average of 10 hours per month managing properties overall, while half of them spend just 3 hours per month or less, and that is according to landlords' own responses. The average expenses were \$4,751 per unit and most of it covered property tax and business activity—insurance, payroll, professional and legal services—while maintenance, grounds, and landscaping accounted for just \$1,906. This means that, aside from the necessary costs to continue providing housing to a renter, the landlord collects. . .

$$\$11,232 - 1,906 = \$9,326$$

After settling property taxes (coincidentally also \$1,906 per unit on average), the landlord is essentially siphoning \$7,420 from the wages of each of their tenants. For \$11,232, a US tenant can expect \$1,906 in maintenance and landscaping services on average, in addition to not having to pay the property tax—and that's it. In return for arranging those services, the average landlord can expect to be free from the kinds of wage-labor that most renters have no choice but to perform if they wish to enjoy the privilege of a roof over their heads.

The alternatives to this medieval system of land tenure are only limited by the imagination. One of the more straightforward options would be to transform private residential properties into housing cooperatives, grouped

by neighborhood, building, or community. Instead of rent, funds for maintenance costs would be pooled together through the cooperatives and paid out as needed and surpluses could be re-distributed as dividends to residents to incentivize efficient repairs or re-invested in improvements—community gardens, pools, shared tool-libraries, cooperative wifi-zones, et cetera.

Depending on how the transition to cooperative housing was handled, it might even be plausible to preserve the jobs of small-time landlords as groundskeepers who are compensated for labor rather than property ownership. The process of changing residence would remain mostly the same except that cooperatives would manage applications rather than landlords and the major consideration would be the average maintenance-costs at different housing cooperatives rather than rental agreements.

Of course, the real problem lies in overcoming political obstacles to land reform. Though rental-property owners make up just 3% of the US population, the rental-housing market is stuffed with nearly as much capital as the US defense budget and so it may be fair to say that a successful US land-reform movement would be about as hard to build as a successful US anti-war movement. Not impossible, of course, but pretty damned challenging.

The good news is that virtually everyone in society stands to benefit from ditching this outdated model and, if the historical record is any indication, the chance of revolutionary action is likely to rise pretty quickly once enough of the peasants are miffed about unfair land-distribution. And if history teaches us anything, it is that nothing—not kings nor even gods—can hold the united wrath of the peasants in abeyance for long.

What is at work is an Orwellian strategy of rhetorical deception to represent finance and other rentier sectors as being part of the economy, not external to it. This is precisely the strategy that parasites in nature use to deceive their hosts that they are not free riders but part of the host's own body, deserving protection and nourishment.

The idea of parasitism as a positive symbiosis is epitomized by the term 'host economy'—one that welcomes foreign investment. Governments invite bankers and investors to buy or finance infrastructure, natural resources, and industry. Local elites and public officials in these economies typically are sent to the imperial or financial core for their education and ideological indoctrination to accept this dependency system as mutually beneficial and natural. The home country's educational cum ideological apparatus is molded to reflect this creditor/debtor relationship as one of mutual gain.

The financial sector's strategy to dominate labor, industry, and government involves disabling the economy's 'brain'—the government—and behind it, democratic reforms to regulate banks and bondholders. Financial

lobbyists mount attacks on public planning, accusing public investment and taxes of being a deadweight burden, not as steering economies to maximize prosperity, competitiveness, rising productivity and living standards. Banks become the economy's central planners, and their plan is for industry and labor to serve finance, not the other way around. Even without so conscious an aim, the mathematics of compound interest turns the financial sector into a wedge to push large sectors of the population into distress. The buildup of savings accruing through interest that is recycled into new lending seeks out ever-new fields for indebtedness, far beyond the ability of productive industrial investment to absorb

In 2008, we watched a dress rehearsal for this road show when Wall Street convinced Congress that the economy could not survive without bailing out bankers and bondholders, whose solvency was deemed a precondition for the real economy to function. The banks were saved, not the economy. The debt tumor was left in place. Homeowners, pension funds, city and state finances were sacrificed as markets shrank, and investment and employment followed suit. "Saving" since 2008 has taken the form of paying down debts to the financial sector, not to invest to help the economy grow. This kind of zombie saving depletes the economy's circular flow between producers and consumers. It bleeds the economy while claiming to save it, much like medieval doctors.

To siphon off a free lunch without triggering resistance, the parasite needs to take control of the host's brain, at first to dull its awareness that an invader has attached itself, and then to make the host believe that the free rider is helping rather than depleting it and is temperate in its demands, only asking for the necessary expenses of providing its services. In that spirit bankers depict their interest charges as a necessary and benevolent part of the economy, providing credit to facilitate production and thus deserving to share in the surplus it helps create. Insurance companies, stockbrokers, and underwriters join bankers in aiming to erase the economy's ability to distinguish financial claims on wealth from real wealth creation. Their interest charges and fees typically eat into the circular flow of payments and income between producers and consumers. To deter protective regulations to limit this incursion, high finance promotes a "value-free" view that no sector exploits any other part. Whatever creditors and their financial managers take is deemed to be fair value for the services they provide

The most lethal policy sedative in today's mainstream orthodoxy is the mantra that "All income is earned." This illusion distracts attention from how the financial sector diverts the economy's nourishment to feed monopolies and rent-extracting sectors surviving from past centuries, now supplemented by yet new sources of monopoly rent, above all in the financial

and money management sectors.

The self-portrait that today's economies draw to describe their circulation of spending and production is the National Income and Product Accounts (NIPA). As presently designed, the NIPA neglect the distinction between productive activities and zero-sum transfer payments where no overall production or real gain takes place, but income is paid to one party at another's expense. The NIPA duly report the revenue of the Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (FIRE) sector and monopolies as "earnings." These accounts have no category for what classical economists called economic rent—a free lunch in the form of income siphoned off without a corresponding cost of labor or enterprise. Yet a rising proportion of what the NIPA report as earnings actually derive from such rents.

Milton Friedman adopted the rentier motto as a cloak of invisibility: "There Is No Such Thing As A Free Lunch" (TINSTAAFL). That means there are no parasites taking without giving an equivalent value in return—at least, no private sector parasites. Only government regulation is condemned, not rent-extraction. In fact, taxation of rentiers—the recipients of free-lunch income, "coupon clippers" living off government bonds or rental properties or monopolies—is denounced rather than endorsed, as was the case for Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and their nineteenth-century free market followers.

In short, the NIPA are not really a model of how economies work and how fortunes are made in today's world. Instead, the NIPA provide a cloak of invisibility for rent-extracting activities. The vested interests have won the fight against creating more relevant statistical categories. Their hope evidently is that if exploitative activities are not seen or quantified, they are less likely to be taxed or regulated.

Today's major rentier sector is banking and high finance. Most bank loans are geared not to produce goods and services, but to transfer ownership rights for real estate, stocks (including those of entire companies), and bonds.

What a realistic set of national accounts should show is that instead of using their wealth to invest in producing more to raise living standards, the One Percent lend out their savings at interest to extract revenue from wage earners, real estate, industry, and government, shrinking the economy instead of expanding it. Most financial transactions now take place with other financial institutions, largely in the form of computerized bets ("derivatives") calculating risks on which way interest rates and exchange rates or stock and bond prices will move. One party's gain is another's loss, and the overall system ends up needing to be bailed out by government. But instead of simply creating the money to pay everyone off, central bank managers insist that labor and industry must pay, by raising taxes on the real economy

to pay for the financial sector's losses, on the pretense that the financial sector is what is making the economy richer, not poorer, and that austerity (poverty for the 99 Percent) will be a cure—a cure mainly for the fact that the One Percent do not yet control all the wealth.

Here again we find the basic rentier demand:

“Your money, or your life.”

At the generally accepted creation of the concept ‘free markets,’ it largely meant free from predatory landlords and other powerful rentiers implementing and influencing things in such a way as they could harm “the people.”

Unfortunately their desire to throw off the aristocracy has been forgotten or manipulated into the modern day version most of us are familiar with. Like many banned chemicals, they simply tweaked the formulation of their oppression and exploitation slightly and kept on going, becoming better and better at it as they went.

And here we are. Yay progress.

The illusion of progress is much more marketable than actual progress. As in fake robot cars are so much better, cooler, awesome than viable public transportation where you might have to ride around with the dirty, smelly poors. Even though increasing public transportation is the sane response to climate change and limiting emissions, there is no profit in it, or the expectation of profit—which is the Uber/Amazon game—so our visionary politicians choose the least sane and rational option. Plus, public transit doesn't fund political campaigns.

If humanity survives to twenty-second century, there will surely be some great economist who will eviscerate capitalism's ability to routinely and grandly misallocate resources, in between his or her time spent harvesting and growing the O₂ producing algae keeping him or her barely alive.

Falling on your face is a state of equilibrium. So is death—and each moment of dying. Equilibrium is simply a cross section in time. Water levels 20 or 30 feet higher would be another form of equilibrium. But to the oil industry, ‘equilibrium’ means their earnings continuing to grow at the present rate, year after year. This involves selling more and more oil, even if this raises sea levels and floods continents. That is simply ignored as not relevant to earnings. By the time that flooding occurs, today's executives will have taken their bonuses and capital gains and retired.

That kind of short-termism is the essence of junk economics. It is tunnel-visioned. What also makes economics junky is assuming that any “disturbance” sets in motion countervailing forces that return the economy

to its “original” state—as if this were stable, not moving down the road to debt peonage and similar economic polarization.

The reality is what systems analysts call positive feedback: When an economy gets out of balance, especially as a result of financial predators, the feedback and self-reinforcing tendencies push it further and further out of balance. Once a class or economy falls into debt, the debt overhead tends to grow steadily until it stifles market demand and subjects the economy to debt deflation. Income is sucked upward to the creditors, who then foreclose on the assets of debtors. This shrinks tax revenue, forcing public budgets into deficit. And when governments are indebted, they become more subject to pressure to privatize public enterprises. Assets are turned over to monopolists, who further shrink the economy by predatory rent seeking.

An economy going bankrupt such as Greece and having to sell off its land, gas rights, ports, and public utilities is in equilibrium at any given moment that its working-age population is emigrating, people are losing their pensions and suffering.

When economists treat depressions merely as self-curing “business downturns,” they are really saying that no government action is required from “outside the market” to rectify matters and put the economy back on track to prosperity. So equilibrium thinking is basically anti-government libertarian theory.

But when banks are subjected to equilibrium by writing down debts in keeping with the ability of borrowers to pay, Wall Street’s pet politicians and economic journalists call this a crisis and insist that the banks and bondholders must be saved or there will be an even worse crisis. This is not a solution. It makes the problem worse and worse.

There is an alternative, of course. That is to understand the dynamics at work transforming economic and social structures. That’s what classical economics was about. The post-classical revolution was marginalist. That means that economists only look at small changes, not structural changes. That is another way of saying that reforms are not necessary—because reforms change structures, not merely redistribute a little bit of income as a bandage.

What used to be ‘political economy’ gave way to just plain ‘economics’ by World War I. As it became increasingly abstract and mathematical, students who studied the subject because they wanted to make the world better were driven out, into other disciplines.

Our societal epitaph will read: ‘The most destructive species on the planet; decided to kill all complex life because people needed jobs.’

“You have all the right moral things to say but absolutely no idea how economies work. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution British workers weren’t being paid an amazing wage. But as the country developed and traded with other countries we attracted more customers. This meant businesses made more money, they built more factories, and the economy grew.

As the skilled workmanship from the time could demand a higher price abroad the staff began to demand more wages. This along with unionization and laws pushed workers rights and pay upwards.

But you can’t just start out with a high pay rates and workers’ rights. The economy underneath it has to be there to support and sustain it. Many developing nations are still in these stages of developing an economy. Attracting business and educating their staff are the first steps. Their only incentive currently to attract business is usually their cheap cost. If you remove that incentive and impose high costs why would anyone invest there. They could go to a developed country where the staff are better trained and their money is safer.

Your ideals are right but if you remove the low cost of workers in developing nations you cut the legs out of an economy trying to get moving. It feels cold to disregard the suffering of individual workers, the long hours for little pay. But I don’t think we can impose our system directly. We have to let these countries grow organically as ours did. If we can help out by investing there then I think we should.”

This seems to reflect the usual assumption that people are supposed to serve “the economy,” a convenient abstraction masking the interests of the wealthy. A social organization that creates losers is plainly wrong: people don’t just need rudimentary sustenance but respect.

The aim of academic trade theory is to tell students, ‘Look at the model, not at how nations actually develop.’ So of all the branches of economic theory, trade theory is the most wrongheaded.

For lead nations, the objective of free trade theory is to persuade other countries not to protect their own markets. That means not developing in the way that Britain did under its mercantilist policies that made it the first home of the Industrial Revolution. It means not protecting domestic industry, as the United States and Germany did in order to catch up with British industry in the nineteenth century and overtake it in the early twentieth century.

Trade theorists start with a conclusion: either free trade or protectionism. Free trade theory as expounded by Paul Samuelson and others starts by telling students to assume a parallel universe—one that doesn't really exist. The conclusion they start with is that free trade makes everyone's income distribution between capital and labor similar. And because the world has a common price for raw materials and dollar credit, as well as for machinery, the similar proportions turn out to mean equality. All the subsequent assumptions are designed to lead to this unrealistic conclusion.

But if you start with the real world instead of academic assumptions, you see that the world economy is polarizing. Academic trade theory can't explain this. In fact, it denies that today's reality can be happening at all!

A major reason why the world is polarizing is because of financial dynamics between creditor and debtor economies. But trade theory starts by assuming a world of barter. Finally, when the transition from trade theory to international finance is made, the assumption is that countries running trade deficits can "stabilize" by imposing austerity, by lowering wages, wiping out pension funds and joining the class war against labor.

All these assumptions were repudiated already in the eighteenth century, when Britain sought to build up its empire by pursuing mercantilist policies. The protectionist American School of Economics in the nineteenth century put forth the Economy of High Wages doctrine to counter free-trade theory. None of this historical background appears in today's mainstream textbooks.

In the 1920s, free-trade theory was used to insist that Germany could pay reparations far beyond its ability to earn foreign exchange. Keynes, Harold Moulton, and other economists controverted that theory. In fact, already in 1844, John Stuart Mill described how paying foreign debts lowered the exchange rate. When that happens, what is lowered is basically wages. So what passes for today's mainstream trade theory is basically an argument for reducing wages and fighting a class war against labor.

You can see this quite clearly in the eurozone, above all in the austerity imposed on Greece. You can see it in the austerity programs that the IMF imposed on Third World debtors from the 1960s onward. It looks like a dress rehearsal to provide a cover story for the same kind of "equilibrium economics" we may see in the United States.

That always amazes me. The elite argument is: 'How dare you complain when there are starving workers in the third world?' Yet those who say this are often those who essentially do no productive work, and are living high on the fiat currency hog, benefiting from the extreme domestic *and* global inequality they pretend is inevitable and in some mysterious way just.

Their argument would hold true if the United States had instituted strong redistributive policies so that all American citizens shared in the

wealth created by globalized capital and production flows. If the standard of living for all Americans sank slightly as the rest of world rose, that argument would at least be factually accurate and morally valid. But that's not at all what happened. Instead, a thin layer of Americans at the top radically increased their share of the wealth, without adding any value at all, merely by being structurally advantaged based on various forms of theft. The current regime has several protected classes—doctors, who are protected in numerous ways from competition and regulation, for one. The upper middle class that had its hand on the neoliberal steering wheel made sure to aim away from the careers their own children would seek.

It is absolutely maddening seeing people like the Vox boys get rich claiming to be wonky when the simplest, middle-school-level evaluation of the data shows they're arguing in extremely bad faith.

First, tax land rent and other economic rent. Make it the tax base. Otherwise, this rental value will end up being pledged to banks as interest on credit borrowed to buy rent-yielding assets.

Second, make banks into public utilities. Credit creation is like land or air: a monopoly created by society. As organs of public policy they would not play the derivatives casino, or make corporate takeover loans to raiders, or falsify mortgage documents.

Third, do not privatize basic utilities. Public ownership enables basic services to be provided at cost, on a subsidized basis, or freely. That will make the economy more competitive. The cost of upgrading public infrastructure can be defrayed by basing the tax system on economic rent, not wages.

It doesn't matter how much your government spends, simply what it spends it on. \$1 spent on blowing up children is too much waste; \$1 trillion on education isn't necessarily.

A federal budget is not 'healthy' when it is in surplus and 'sick' when it is in deficit. A federal budget deficit due to the automatic stabilizers' powerful response to the Great Recession is a sign of health. An even larger (short-run) budget deficit through a stimulus program is an even greater sign of economic health that should be celebrated. People who seek to inflict austerity on the people in such circumstances are not "fiscal conservatives." They may be well meaning, but ignorant of economics. However, they also may want to enrich their wealthy donors and themselves

Austerity is to economics as bleeding a patient is to medicine. That's the best summary of the argument, and should be repeated often, perhaps in similar form: Austerity for an economy in recession is like bleeding an anemic patient.

I love the language of fragility around the economy. If touched, all will fall to pieces. The idea of fragility now seems to extend to every single institution we have: government is fragile and can fall apart with the wrong administration; churches are shrinking and can't react to the changing religious attitudes; healthcare cannot be changed because the costs would be too great; bureaucracies need to function the way they always have or we will face destruction.

The flip side of this is that actually fragile things are ignored: the ecosystems influenced by human behavior can fall apart in an instant; water can be ruined through energy extraction; technology, especially the internet, relies on cables laid across the ocean floor, ever more electricity, and international cooperation; learning is a process that needs care and attention and instead is managed by school reform boards.

It's a weird world we live in.

The most ancient and fundamental economy is the gift economy. All economies derive from this. I help you to the best of my ability as you need, you help me to the best of your ability as I need—around and around the cycle goes until we're dead. This is the type of economy—though few would refer to it as such—that you and your immediate family participated in. A cycle imbalanced towards the child at the beginning and towards the parent at the end. A cycle embedded within ever-widening circles, each with their own independent and interconnected cycles. Strip away all the added complexities, obfuscation, propaganda, and this is precisely what you will find, not exactly replicated, with different imbalances, but still easily recognizable.

How do we re-establish credence and trust in economics as a science? Five changes are absolutely required.

1. Stop pretending that we have exact and rigorous answers on everything. Because we don't. We build models and theories and tell people that we can calculate and foresee the future. But we do this based on mathematical and statistical assumptions that often have little or nothing to do with reality. By pretending that there is no really important difference between model and reality we lull people into thinking that we have things under control. We haven't! This false feeling of security was one of the factors that contributed to the financial crisis of 2008.
2. Stop the childish and exaggerated belief in mathematics giving answers to important economic questions. Mathematics gives exact answers to exact questions. But the relevant and interesting questions we

face in the economic realm are rarely of that kind. Questions like ‘Does $2 + 2 = 4$?’ are never posed in real economies. Instead of a fundamentally misplaced reliance on abstract mathematical-deductive-axiomatic models having anything of substance to contribute to our knowledge of real economies, it would be far better if we pursued ‘thicker’ models and relevant empirical studies and observations.

3. Stop pretending that there are laws in economics. There are no universal laws in economics. Economies are not like planetary systems or physics labs. The most we can aspire to in real economies is establishing possible tendencies with varying degrees of generalizability.
4. Stop treating other social sciences as poor relatives. Economics has long suffered from hubris. A more broad-minded and multifarious science would enrich economics.
5. Stop building models and making forecasts of the future based on totally unreal micro-founded macromodels with intertemporally optimizing robot-like representative actors equipped with rational expectations. This is pure nonsense. We have to build our models on assumptions that are not blatantly in contradiction to reality. Assuming that people are “lightning calculators of pleasures and pains” is not a good—not even as a “successive approximation”—modeling strategy

Everyday Communism

Without goods and services, mostly the product of human labour, money would be worthless. In a way, our current economic crisis is one in which this basic truth has been forgotten and people have imagined that money can be made just from money.

Most basically, we need to remember something that has been forgotten in modern mainstream economics: economics is about provisioning. As anthropologists have reminded us, it's about how societies provide themselves with the wherewithal to live. Provisioning requires work—producing goods, from food and shelter through to clothes and newspapers, and services, such as teaching, providing advice and information, and care work. Almost all provisioning involves social relations between people, as producers, consumers, owners, lenders, borrowers, and so on. It's through these relations that provisioning is organized. Some kinds of provisioning take place through markets; some do not. The market/non-market boundary does not define the edge of the economy: unpaid work in preparing a meal for someone is as much an economic act as preparing pizzas for sale—or selling computers or insurance.

Most economists and political theorists think of economic actors only as independent, able-bodied adults, forgetting that they all started off as helpless babies, unable to provide for themselves and dependent on others, and who sooner or later reach a stage where, whether for reasons of illness, disability, or age, they become unable to contribute to provisioning themselves and others. There is nothing exceptional about these conditions. We all go through them: they are universals. We can never pay back our parents for all the work they did for us, just as future generations will never be able to pay their parents back. Dependence on others, particularly across generations, is part of being human; it derives from the fact that we are social animals, dependent rational animals—we cannot survive on our own. Robinson Crusoe depended on having been brought up in society; the newborn Crusoe wouldn't have lasted more than a few hours on his own. And like Crusoe we depend on the resources of the earth to survive; we cannot flourish if we damage the planet.

Communism is not some magical utopia, and neither does it have anything to do with ownership of the means of production. It is something that exists right now—that exists, to some degree, in any human society, although there has never been one in which everything has been organized in that way, and it would be difficult to imagine how there could be. All of us act like communists a good deal of the time. None of us acts like a communist consistently. ‘Communist society’—in the sense of a society organized exclusively on that single principle—could never exist. But all social systems, even economic systems like capitalism, have always been built on top of a bedrock of actually-existing communism. Starting from the principle of “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” allows us to look past the question of individual or private ownership—which is often little more than formal legality anyway—and at much more immediate and practical questions of who has access to what sorts of things and under what conditions. Whenever it is the operative principle, even if it’s just two people who are interacting, we can say we are in the presence of a sort of communism. Almost everyone follows this principle if they are collaborating on some common project. If someone fixing a broken water pipe says, ‘Hand me the wrench,’ his co-worker will not, generally speaking, say, ‘And what do I get for it?’—even if they are working for Exxon-Mobil, Burger King, or Goldman Sachs. The reason is simple efficiency, ironically enough, considering the conventional wisdom that “communism just doesn’t work”—if you really care about getting something done, the most efficient way to go about it is obviously to allocate tasks by ability and give people whatever they need to do them.

This is presumably also why in the immediate wake of great disasters—a flood, a blackout, or an economic collapse—people tend to behave the same way, reverting to a rough-and-ready communism. However briefly, hierarchies and markets and the like become luxuries that no one can afford. Anyone who has lived through such a moment can speak to their peculiar qualities, the way that strangers become sisters and brothers and human society itself seems to be reborn. This is important, because it shows that we are not simply talking about cooperation. In fact, communism is the foundation of all human sociability. It is what makes society possible. There is always an assumption that anyone who is not actually an enemy can be expected on the principle of “from each according to their abilities,” at least to an extent: for example, if one needs to figure out how to get somewhere, and the other knows the way.

This same logic can be, and is, extended within groups: not only cooperative work groups, but almost any in-group will define itself by creating its own sort of baseline communism. There will be certain things shared or

made freely available within the group, others that anyone will be expected to provide for other members on request, that one would never share with or provide to outsiders: help in repairing one's nets in an association of fisherman, stationery supplies in an office, certain sorts of information among commodity traders, and so forth. Also, certain categories of people we can always call on in certain situations, such as harvesting or moving house. One could go on from here to various forms of sharing, pooling, who gets to call on whom for help with certain tasks: moving, or harvesting, or even, if one is in trouble, providing an interest-free loan. Finally, there are the different sorts of 'commons,' the collective administration of common resources. The sociology of everyday communism is a potentially enormous field, but one which, owing to our peculiar ideological blinkers, we have been unable to write about because we have been largely unable to see it.

We are not really dealing with reciprocity here—or at best, only with reciprocity in the broadest sense. What is equal on both sides is the knowledge that the other person would do the same for you, not that they necessarily will. The Iroquois example brings home clearly what makes this possible: that such relations are based on a presumption of eternity. Society will always exist. Therefore, there will always be a north and a south side of the village. This is why no accounts need be taken. In a similar way, people tend to treat their mothers and best friends as if they will always exist, however well they know it isn't true.

If the needs (for instance, dire poverty), or the abilities (for instance, wealth beyond imagination), are sufficiently dramatic, then unless there is a complete absence of sociality, some degree of communistic morality will almost inevitably enter into the way people take accounts.

A Turkish folktale about the Medieval Sufi mystic Nasruddin Hodja illustrates the complexities thus introduced into the very concept of supply and demand: One day when Nasruddin was left in charge of the local teahouse, the king and some retainers, who had been hunting nearby, stopped in for breakfast. "Do you have quail eggs?" asked the king. "I'm sure I can find some," answered Nasruddin. The king ordered an omelet of a dozen quail eggs, and Nasruddin hurried out to look for them. After the king and his party had eaten, he charged them a hundred gold pieces. The king was puzzled. "Are quail eggs really that rare in this part of the country?" "It's not so much quail eggs that are rare around here," Nasruddin replied. "It's more visits from kings."

The element of competition can work in completely different ways. In cases of barter or commercial exchange, when both parties to the transaction are only interested in the value of goods being transacted, they may well—as economists insist they should—try to seek the maximum material advantage.

On the other hand, as anthropologists have long pointed out, when the exchange is of gifts, that is, the objects passing back and forth are mainly considered interesting in how they reflect on and rearrange relations between the people carrying out the transaction, then insofar as competition enters in, it is likely to work precisely the other way around—to become a matter of contests of generosity, of people showing off who can give more away.

Exchange allows us to cancel out our debts. It gives us a way to call it even: hence, to end the relationship. With vendors, one is usually only pretending to have a relationship at all. With neighbors, one might for this very reason prefer not to pay one's debts.

An anthropologist writes about arriving in a Tiv community in rural Nigeria; neighbors immediately began arriving bearing little gifts: "two ears corn, one vegetable marrow, one chicken, five tomatoes, one handful peanuts." Having no idea what was expected of her, she thanked them and wrote down in a notebook their names and what they had brought. Eventually, two women adopted her and explained that all such gifts did have to be returned. It would be entirely inappropriate to simply accept three eggs from a neighbor and never bring anything back. One did not have to bring back eggs, but one should bring something back of approximately the same value. One could even bring money—there was nothing inappropriate in that—provided one did so at a discreet interval, and above all, that one did not bring the exact cost of the eggs. It had to be either a bit more or a bit less. To bring back nothing at all would be to cast oneself as an exploiter or a parasite. To bring back an exact equivalent would be to suggest that one no longer wishes to have anything to do with the neighbor.

Tiv women, she learned, might spend a good part of the day walking for miles to distant homesteads to return a handful of okra or a tiny bit of change, "in an endless circle of gifts to which no one ever handed over the precise value of the object last received"—and in doing so, they were continually creating their society. There was certainly a trace of communism here—neighbors on good terms could also be trusted to help each other out in emergencies—but unlike communistic relations, which are assumed to be permanent, this sort of neighborliness had to be constantly created and maintained, because any link can be broken off at any time.

Any system of exchange is always necessarily founded on something else, something that, in its social manifestation at least, is ultimately communism. With all those things that we treat as eternal, that we assume will always be there—our mother's love, true friendship, sociality, humanity, belonging, the existence of the cosmos—no calculation is necessary, or even ultimately possible; insofar as there is give and take, they follow completely different principles. What, then, happens to such absolute and unlimited phenomena

when one tries to imagine the world as a set of transactions—as exchange? Generally, one of two things. We either ignore or deify them. Mothers, and caregiving women in general, are a classic case in point. Or we do both. What we treat as eternal in our actual relations with one another vanishes and reappears as an abstraction, an absolute. In the case of Buddhism, this was framed as the inexhaustible merit of bodhisattvas, who exist, in a certain sense, outside of time. They are at once the model for the Inexhaustible Treasuries, and also their practical foundation: one can only repay one's endless karmic debt, or one's infinite milk-debt, by drawing on this equally infinite pool of redemption, which, in turn, becomes the basis for the actual material funds of the monasteries, which are equally eternal—a pragmatic form of communism, in fact, since they were vast pools of wealth collectively owned and collectively managed: the center of vast projects of human cooperation, which were assumed to be similarly eternal. Yet at the same time this communism became the basis, in turn, of something very much like capitalism. The reason was, above all, the need for constant expansion. Everything—even charity—was an opportunity to proselytize; the Dharma had to grow, ultimately, to encompass everyone and everything, in order to effect the salvation of all living beings.

Religious traditions often insist that the only true charity is anonymous—in other words, not meant to place the recipient in one's debt. One extreme form of this, documented in various parts of the world, is the gift by stealth, in a kind of reverse burglary: to literally sneak into the recipient's house at night and plant one's present so no one can know for sure who has left it. The figure of Santa Claus, or Saint Nicholas—who, it must be remembered, was not just the patron saint of children, but also the patron saint of thieves—would appear to be the mythological version of the same principle: a benevolent burglar with whom no social relations are possible and therefore to whom no one could possibly owe anything, in his case, above all, because he does not actually exist.

All human interactions are not forms of exchange. Only some are. Exchange encourages a particular way of conceiving human relations. This is because exchange implies equality, but it also implies separation. It's precisely when the money changes hands, when the debt is canceled, that equality is restored and both parties can walk away and have nothing further to do with each other. Debt is what happens in between: when the two parties cannot yet walk away from each other, because they are not yet equal. But it is carried out in the shadow of eventual equality. Because achieving that equality, however, destroys the very reason for having a relationship, just about everything interesting happens in between. In fact, just about everything human happens in between—even if this means that all such

human relations bear with them at least a tiny element of criminality, guilt, or shame.

Consider the custom, in American society, of constantly saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’ To do so is often treated as basic morality: we are constantly chiding children for forgetting to do it, just as the moral guardians of our society—teachers and ministers, for instance—do to everybody else. We often assume that the habit is universal but it is not. Like so many of our everyday courtesies, it is a kind of democratization of what was once a habit of feudal deference: the insistence on treating absolutely everyone the way that one used only to have to treat a lord or similar hierarchical superior.

Of course one could argue that some equivalent of ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ could be identified in any human language, if one were determined to find them, but then the terms you find are often used so differently—for instance, only in ritual contexts, or to hierarchical superiors—that it’s hard to attach much significance to the fact. It is significant that over the last century or so just about every human language that is used in offices or to make transactions in shops has had to create terms that do function as an exact equivalent of the English ‘please,’ ‘thank you,’ and ‘you’re welcome.’

In fact, the English ‘please’ is short for ‘if you please,’ ‘if it pleases you to do this’—it is the same in most European languages (French: *si il vous plait*; Spanish: *por favor*). Its literal meaning is “you are under no obligation to do this.” ‘Hand me the salt. Not that I am saying that you have to!’ This is not true; there is a social obligation, and it would be almost impossible not to comply. But etiquette largely consists of the exchange of polite fictions, or, to use less polite language, lies. When you ask someone to pass the salt, you are also giving them an order; by attaching the word ‘please,’ you are saying that it is not an order. But, in fact, it is.

In English, ‘thank you’ derives from ‘think,’ it originally meant, “I will remember what you did for me”—which is usually not true either—but in other languages (the Portuguese *obrigado* is a good example) the standard term follows the form of the English ‘much obliged’—it actually does mean “I am in your debt.” The French *merci* is even more graphic: it derives from ‘mercy,’ as in begging for mercy; by saying it you are symbolically placing yourself in your benefactor’s power—since a debtor is, after all, a criminal.

Saying ‘you’re welcome,’ or ‘it’s nothing’ (French: *de rien*; Spanish: *de nada*)—the latter has at least the advantage of often being literally true—is a way of reassuring the one to whom one has passed the salt that you are not actually inscribing a debit in your imaginary moral account book. So is saying ‘my pleasure’—you are saying, ‘No, actually, it’s a credit, not a debit—you did me a favor because in asking me to pass the salt, you gave me the opportunity to do something I found rewarding in itself!’

Decoding the tacit calculus of debt, ‘I owe you one,’ ‘No, you don’t owe me anything,’ ‘Actually, if anything, it’s me who owes you,’ as if inscribing and then scratching off so many infinitesimal entries in an endless ledger, makes it easy to understand why this sort of thing is often viewed not as the quintessence of morality, but as the quintessence of middle-class morality. True, by now middle-class sensibilities dominate society. But there are still those who find the practice odd. Those at the very top of society often still feel that deference is owed primarily to hierarchical superiors and find it slightly idiotic to watch postmen and pastry cooks taking turns pretending to treat each other like little feudal lords. At the other extreme, those who grew up in what in Europe are called “popular” environments—small towns, poor neighborhoods, anyplace where there is still an assumption that people who are not enemies will, ordinarily, take care of one another—will often find it insulting to be constantly told, in effect, that there is some chance they might not do their job as a waiter or taxi driver correctly, or provide houseguests with tea.

In other words, middle-class etiquette insists that we are all equals, but it does so in a very particular way. On the one hand, it pretends that nobody is giving anybody orders (think here of the burly security guard at the mall who appears before someone walking into a restricted area and says, “Can I help you?”); on the other, it treats every gesture between people as if it were really a form of exchange. As a result, like Tiv neighborhoods, middle-class society has to be endlessly recreated, as a kind of constant flickering game of shadows, the crisscrossing of an infinity of momentary debt relations, each one almost instantly canceled out. All of this is a relatively recent innovation. The habit of always saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ first began to take hold during the commercial revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—among those very middle classes who were largely responsible for it. It is the language of bureaus, shops, and offices, and over the course of the last five-hundred years it has spread across the world along with them. It is also merely one token of a much larger philosophy, a set of assumptions of what humans are and what they owe one another, that have by now become so deeply ingrained that we cannot see them.

If human beings owed nothing to one another, life would be a mere unruly brawl. Amongst human beings none will save another; it will do no good, a man shouting ‘Help!’ ‘Fire!’ ‘I’m drowning!’ ‘Murder!’—nobody will come and help him. Why? Because he has lent nothing: and no one owes him anything. No one has anything to lose by his fire, his shipwreck, his fall, or his death. He has lent nothing. And: he would lend nothing either hereafter. In short, Faith, Hope, and Charity would be banished from this world.

Reducing all human life to exchange means not only shunting aside all other forms of economic experience, but also ensuring that the vast majority of the human race who are not adult males, and therefore whose day-to-day existence is relatively difficult to reduce to a matter of swapping things in such a way as to seek mutual advantage, melt away into the background. As a result, we end up with a sanitized view of the way actual business is conducted. The tidy world of shops and malls is the quintessential middle-class environment, but at either the top or the bottom of the system, the world of financiers or of gangsters, deals are often made in ways not so completely different from ways that the Gunwinggu or Nambikwara make them—at least in that sex, drugs, music, extravagant displays of food, and the potential for violence do often play parts. The economists' insistence that economic life begins with barter, the innocent exchange of arrows for tepee frames, with no one in a position to rape, humiliate, or torture anyone else, and that it continues in this way, is touchingly utopian.

Cannibal Capitalism

We don't go into a state of shock when something big and bad happens; it has to be something big and bad that we do not yet understand. A state of shock is what results when a gap opens up between events and our initial ability to explain them. When we find ourselves in that position, without a story, without our moorings, a great many people become vulnerable to authority figures telling us to fear one another and relinquish our rights for the greater good.

Friedman articulated contemporary capitalism's core tactical nostrum, what some have come to understand as the shock doctrine:

“Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.”

Friedman was a key adviser to successive Republican administrations and held tremendous influence over many officials in the Bush White House. He had mentored Rumsfeld early in his career, and Cheney and the leading neocons in the administration regularly sought his counsel.

The bottom line is that while Friedman's economic model is capable of being partially imposed under democracy, authoritarian conditions are required for the implementation of its true vision.

And it wanted more than that—it wanted to expropriate what workers and governments had built during those decades of frenetic public works. The assets that Friedman urged government to sell were the end products of the years of investment of public money and know-how that had built them and made them valuable. As far as Friedman was concerned, all this shared wealth should be transferred into private hands, on principle.

The theories of Milton Friedman gave him the Not-a-Nobel Prize; they gave Chile General Pinochet.

The aim of a financialized economy is to make money for a narrow financial layer by establishing a credit stranglehold on industry and labor, and on the government itself. This reverses the direction in which classical political economy seemed to be moving to propel governments out of the feudal era by reforming the way society employs and accumulates wealth. In a modern version of the feudal epoch's "primitive accumulation" by military seizure, financial dynamics serve to concentrate wealth by means of debt leveraging and privatization loading down industry, real estate, and infrastructure with debt.

Speculators may do no harm as bubbles on a steady stream of enterprise. But the position is serious when enterprise becomes the bubble on a whirlpool of speculation. When the capital development of a country becomes a by-product of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done.

The economy's ability to produce and earn enough of a surplus to pay exponentially rising interest charges is limited. The more it is stripped to pay creditors, the less able it is to produce and pay as a result of unemployment, underutilization of resources, emigration, and capital flight.

The aim of predatory lending in much of the world is to obtain labor to work off debts (debt peonage), to foreclose on the land of debtors, and in modern times to force debt-strapped governments to privatize natural resources and public infrastructure.

To simple people it is clear that the nearest cause of the enslavement of one class of men by another is money. They know that it is possible to cause more trouble with a dollar than with a club; it is only political economy that does not want to know it.

The financial sector has the same objective as military conquest: to gain control of land and basic infrastructure, and collect tribute. To update von Clausewitz, finance has become war by other means. What formerly took blood and arms is now obtained by debt leverage. Direct ownership is not necessary. If a country's economic surplus can be taken financially, it is not necessary to conquer or even to own its land, natural resources and infrastructure. Debt leverage saves the cost of having to mount an invasion and suffer casualties. Who needs an expensive occupation against unwilling hosts when you can obtain assets willingly by financial means—as long as debt-strapped nations permit bankers and bondholders to dictate their laws and control their planning and politics?

The creditor's objective is to obtain wealth by indebting populations and even governments, and forcing them to pay by relinquishing their property or its income. Such financial conquest is less overtly brutal than warfare waged with guns and missiles, but its demographic effect is just as lethal. For debt-strapped Greece and Latvia, creditor-imposed austerity has caused

falling marriage, family formation, and birth rates; shortened life spans and rising suicide rates; and emigration.

The financial fiction is that economies can extricate themselves from debt by borrowing yet more from banks—presumably to make new debt-leveraged gains from rising asset prices being inflated by this credit. So we are plunged back in the bubble economy's game plan.

Neoliberal privatization capped the Cold War by dismantling the Soviet Union's public sector and reducing it to a neofeudal society. Post-Soviet economies were free of public debt, business debt, real estate and personal debt or other bank loans when they obtained their political independence in 1991. Their residential and commercial real estate, transportation facilities, and highly educated population could have provided the foundation for a competitive low-cost modern economy. Every family could have been given its home at a nominal price. Prime real estate and infrastructure monopolies were turned over to insiders on such terms. But by the time most families started to buy into home ownership, prices were soaring.

Baghdad, New Orleans, and Sandy Springs provide glimpses of a kind of gated future built and run by the disaster capitalism complex. It is in Israel, however, that this process is most advanced: an entire country has turned itself into a fortified gated community, surrounded by locked-out people living in permanently excluded red zones. This is what a society looks like when it has lost its economic incentive for peace and is heavily invested in fighting and profiting from an endless and unwinnable War on Terror. One part looks like Israel; the other part looks like Gaza.

Just as mortgage lenders view rental income as a flow to be turned into payment of interest, international banks view the hard-currency earnings of foreign countries as potential revenue to be capitalized into loans and paid as interest. The implicit aim of bank marketing departments—and of creditors in general—is to attach the entire economic surplus for payment of debt service.

The moral of Latvia's and Ireland's economic plunge is thus the opposite of what neoliberals depict. Banking should be a public utility. Otherwise, its lending preferences will thwart industrial growth, employment, and living standards. Credit will be created mainly to buy or take over existing properties, infrastructure, and companies, bidding up their cost to make basic needs more expensive rather than competitive.

The idea that the euro has "failed" is dangerously naïve. The euro is doing exactly what its progenitor—and the wealthy one-percenters who adopted it—predicted and planned for it to do: Removing a government's control over currency would prevent nasty little elected officials from using Keynesian monetary and fiscal juice to pull a nation out of recession.

“It puts monetary policy out of the reach of politicians. Without fiscal policy, the only way nations can keep jobs is by the competitive reduction of rules on business.”

Hence, currency union is class war by other means.

The pretense is that money is technocratic and requires professional—defined as suitably tunnel-visioned—anti-government ideologues. Ever since the establishment of the modern nation-state in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the creation of the euro was perhaps the first significant experiment in modern times in which there was an attempt to separate money from the state, that is, to denationalize currency, as some right-wing ideologues and founders of modern neoliberalism, such as Hayek, had defended. The denationalization or “supra-nationalization” of money with the establishment that happened in the Eurozone took away from elected national governments the capacity to meaningfully manage their economies. Unless governments in the Eurozone are able to renegotiate a significant control and access money from their own central banks, the system will be continually plagued with crisis and will probably collapse in the longer term.

To make matters worse, the hands of central banks in Europe and the United States are tied by the impression (sponsored by financial lobbyists) that governments should not run deficits but maintain surpluses that drain the economy’s circular flow and oblige it to rely on commercial banks and bondholders. Instead of public credit financing economic growth, bank debt is monetized in ways that benefit creditors at the expense of their host economies.

Corporate takeovers, management buyouts, and company share buybacks typically are bought with borrowed credit. The theory is simplicity itself: Borrow cheap to buy companies with a higher yield. If the interest rate is lower than the profit or dividend rate, it pays raiders to buy these companies on credit—and companies themselves to borrow cheap and buy up their own higher-paying shares. At least, that is the theory. The logical end of this process is for companies (or speculators) to buy up all the real estate and industry, mines and public utilities in the world that yield more than the going interest rate. And interest rates have plunged steadily to only nominal levels today.

Given the ability of banks to create credit electronically, why should they not create enough credit to buy up every stock in the world—and for that matter, all the housing and commercial real estate—and pocket the excessive typical yield of real estate (about six percent) or of dividend-paying stocks (three to seven percent) over this borrowing rate? The end result would replace equity with debt, which would be backed by the income of

industry and real estate. Along the way, leveraged buyouts would bid up stock market and property prices, generating enormous capital gains up to the point where companies and other properties were so high-priced that interest charges would totally absorb their profits and rents.

This debt-for-equity arbitrage would make the world's corporate raiders rich, along with their bankers. But it would not leave revenue available for new direct investment, research and development, or other expenses that are not quickly reflected in profit streams. Hiring would slow, consumer spending and hence markets would shrink, causing profits to fall—resulting in defaults on the debt service that is owed. This is the bubble economy's financialization dynamic along which the world's economies were moving until 2008. The trend is now being resumed. Economies throughout the world are moving back into debt, corporate buyouts and stock buybacks are accelerating and a veritable bubble is re-inflating in junk bond financing.

Selling assets is different from taxing rentiers and other well to do players. Asset sales do not reduce deficits; they merely finance them. They reflect the failure to tax wealth or create central bank money.

On an economy-wide level, asset-stripping can be sustained mainly by asset-price inflation, that is, increasing prices for real estate, stocks, and bonds simply by lending more bank credit against them, at a falling interest rate and on easier (more reckless) credit terms. This debt leveraging ends up increasing the break-even cost of doing business, until the corporate sector collapses under the debt burden.

During the financial upswing the financial sector receives interest and capital gains. In the fallback period after the crisis, the economy's private- and public-sector assets are expropriated to pay the debts that remain in place.

Such austerity is the creditor's idea of a well-run economy. Prices and wages fall, increasing the difficulty of paying back debts taken on at the higher "old" prices. Unemployment suppresses wages, leading to defaults that transfer property to creditors. When bankers depict this debt and price deflation as "stability," they simply mean increasing their power over labor and industry.

The advice of central bankers is the same everywhere: Don't interfere with lending, and make sure that all creditors get paid in full, even speculators. That is how financial "free markets" preserve "confidence." It ends up meaning bailouts.

What is still missing, in many quarters, is recognition by bureaucrats and bankers that failure is an inevitable part of the market system, and that it sometimes pays to wipe the slate clean rather than endlessly sweep problems under the carpet. Letting borrowers run away from bad loans may

not be healthy; but it is even less healthy to leave a chunk of the population trapped in the virtual prison of debt that can never be repaid.

How much more clearly early economists recognized the problems of governments (or others) relying on creditors for policy advice. As Adam Smith explained, a creditor of the public, considered merely as such, has no interest in the good condition of any particular portion of land, or in the good management of any particular portion of capital stock. He has no inspection of it. He can have no care about it. Its ruin may in some cases be unknown to him, and cannot directly affect him. The bondholders' interest is solely to extricate as much as they can as quickly as possible with little concern for the social devastation they cause. Yet they have managed to sell the idea that sovereign nations as well as individuals have a moral obligation to pay debts, even to act on behalf of creditors instead of their domestic populations.

Although Wall Street bankers usually see the handwriting on the wall, their lobbyists insist that all debts can be paid, so that they can blame countries for not "tightening their belts."

A common tactic to sell anti-labor "reforms" is to blame the US and European budget deficits on populations aging and receiving more expensive health care, and on social programs benefiting low-income families rather than on the financial minority getting richer by shifting the tax burden onto labor to cause austerity leading to falling tax revenues and deeper budget deficits. Blame is placed on the victims, not their financial victimizers.

Indeed, as tax revenues fall in response to rising debt service and the tax burden shifts onto labor (along with higher rake-off of prices for privatized hitherto public services), financial lobbyists use fiscal deficits as an opportunity to call for auctioning off public infrastructure. Creditor leverage over public deficits (especially in foreign currency) is wielded to turn public roads into toll roads. Other public investments are financialized as similar tollbooth opportunities. These privatizations increase the cost of living and doing business, making the economy higher-cost even as it is being impoverished. That is how democracy devolves into neofeudal oligarchy.

The end stages of capitalism, Marx wrote, would be marked by developments that are intimately familiar to Scranton. Unable to expand and generate profits at past levels, the capitalist system would begin to consume the structures that sustained it. It would prey upon, in the name of austerity, the working class and the poor, driving them ever deeper into debt and poverty and diminishing the capacity of the state to serve the basic needs of ordinary citizens. It would, as it has, increasingly automate or relocate jobs, including both manufacturing and professional positions, to countries with cheap pools of laborers. This would trigger an economic assault on

not only the working class but the middle class—the bulwark of a capitalist democracy—that would be disguised by massive personal debt as incomes declined or remained stagnant and borrowing soared. Politics would, in the late stages of capitalism, become subordinate to economics, leading to political parties hollowed out of any real political content and abjectly subservient to the dictates of corporations.

But as Marx warned, there is a limit to an economy built on austerity and the scaffolding of debt expansion. There comes a moment, Marx knew, when there would be no new markets available and no new pools of people who could take on more debt. This is what happened with the subprime mortgage crisis. Once the banks could not conjure up new subprime borrowers, the scheme fell apart and the system crashed. Capitalist oligarchs, meanwhile, hoard huge sums of wealth—\$7.6 trillion stashed in overseas tax havens—exacted as tribute from those they dominate, indebted, and impoverish. Capitalism would, in the end, Marx said, turn on the so-called free market, along with the values and traditions it claims to defend. It would in its final stages pillage the systems and structures that made capitalism possible. It would resort, as it causes widespread suffering, to harsher forms of repression to maintain social control. It would attempt, in a frantic last stand, to extract profit by looting and pillaging state institutions, contradicting its stated nature.

To the financial sector, the most important privatization is that of money creation. The aim is for economies to become dependent on bank credit rather than government spending to provide the money and credit needed to grow. This dream was realized during Bill Clinton's administration, which ended the 1990s by running a budget surplus—that is, by taxing more out of the economy than spending into it. The money supply grew solely by expanding the economy's debt overhead, not by government money creation.

Prosperity was the ultimate political trump card. Played the right way, prosperity could negate any concerns, could override any objections, could even make policies seem like their opposites. Prosperity meant that, for years, Clinton associates like Hillary and Rahm Emanuel could pose as mystic prophets of affluence—they had worked with Bill, after all. They knew what it took to make a country rich. Prosperity made Clinton himself into a respected elder statesman, a champion of the little guy, and a towering economic success whose every move needed to be emulated by future Democrats.

Its eager adoption by liberal politicians tells us something important about the modern Democratic Party and its attitudes toward equality. In its quest for prosperity, the Party of the People declared itself wholeheartedly in favor of a social theory that forthrightly exalted the rich—the all-powerful

creative class. For many cities and states, this was the economic strategy; this was what our leaders came up with to revive the urban wastelands and restore the de-industrialized zones. The Democratic idea was no longer to confront privilege but to flatter privilege, to sing the praises of our tasteful new master class. True, this was all done with an eye toward rebuilding the crumbling cities where the rest of us lived and worked, but the consequences of all this “creative class” bootlicking will take a long time to wear off.

Wall Street was an ideal constituency for a party reorienting itself as a representative of the professional class. The industry in question was supremely wealthy, of course. And financiers tended to be well-graduated people of a certain cultural liberalism; the prospect of gay marriage, for example, never seemed to send them into a moral panic the way it did so many others. Wall Street didn’t pollute either, at least not in a way that cameras can see. The industry’s operations were always coated in a thick patina of expert-talk, which the professional mind finds irresistibly beguiling. Furthermore, any distasteful results of Wall Street’s operations could be easily ignored and were always far removed from the thrilling precincts of lower Manhattan.

The final great accomplishment of Bill Clinton’s presidency was another act of sweeping bank deregulation, the 1999 repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, which had separated commercial from investment banking since 1933. Treasury Secretary Rubin had long argued that the old law had to go so that Wall Street could achieve “revenue diversification” and stay competitive with foreign banking establishments. Banking lobbyists agreed with him, as did lobbyists for the insurance industry and—well, lobbyists for just about everyone with money. In fact, among members of the professional class, the cancellation of Glass-Steagall was another no-brainer, what with globalization and the New Economy and all. The term of art this time around was ‘Depression-era’—as in “Depression-era barriers” or “Depression-era rules” or “Depression-era walls”—which cast the old law’s repeal in the familiar terms of political rejuvenation, with the Democratic party symbolically casting off the conditions of its New Deal heyday.

As with NAFTA, every expert who mattered was on the same page. A retrospective on the banking law published by the Minneapolis Fed in 2000 casually referred to it as “the now infamous Glass-Steagall Act of 1933.” “Almost everybody agreed that Glass-Steagall was an anachronism in a global economy,” proclaimed a 1995 New York Times news story on the effort to repeal the law. “Enacted in 1933 to prevent a recurrence of financial skulduggery that many believed touched off the Great Depression, the act is widely viewed today as a drag on the economy.” Not only did everybody agree on what was widely viewed, but repealing it was a bridge

to the future itself.

“At the end of the twentieth century, we will at last be replacing an archaic set of restrictions with a legislative foundation for a twenty-first-century financial system.”

Some foundation. Nine years later, after the greatest wave of insider looting ever seen, the deregulated twenty-first-century financial system had to be rescued almost in its entirety. To say this was a system built on sand would be charitable. Its foundations actually lay upon a speculative bubble, pumped up by the prospect of a bigger sucker who everyone believed could be found a little ways down the line.

The virtue of the old Glass-Steagall Act, which regulated the banking industry from 1933 until its final repeal in the Clinton era, was its simplicity: It structurally separated investment banking from commercial banking and forced those parts to compete with one another. The 2010 Dodd-Frank Act, which was supposed to re-regulate the business, uses a different method—it instructs federal agencies to make detailed new rules for the industry. When they had finished about two-thirds of that task their regulatory work consisted of a staggering 22,000 pages of rules, loopholes, and exceptions. Neoliberals love complexity.

In November 1999, Texas Republican Senator Phil Gramm, Iowa Republican Congressman Jim Leach, and Virginia Republican Congressman Tom Bliley sponsored the Financial Services Modernization Act of 1999. It was an Orwellian euphemism to characterize disabling the New Deal as “modernization.” In the wake of the 1929–31 financial crisis, the idea of modernizing finance was to insulate retail consumer banking from Wall Street speculation. It took only a decade for the deregulation of mortgage credit and commercial lending to become tangled in a web of interbank speculation in casino “derivatives.”

In 2004 the FBI announced that it had identified mortgage fraud as an epidemic. It identified two kinds of mortgage fraud. One involved people who borrowed money to buy a house they could not afford, hoping they could flip it for a profit before their inability to pay became apparent. The other involved people borrowing to live in a house they could not afford until they were evicted. The FBI also announced that its partner in identifying such frauds was the Mortgage Bankers Association. What the FBI missed was that it was banks that were creating the frauds, including some members of the MBA. The fox got the watchdog to look at the eggs instead of watching the chickens, which were being eaten by the fox family. Bank agents were helping buyers fabricate loan documents.

After 2008, new lending dried up. Consumers had to start paying down their credit card balances. Homeowners had to pay down their mortgages rather than “cashing out” on the debt-inflated “equity” value of their homes. This net repayment has become the new definition of “saving.” It increases net worth not by building up assets and real wealth, but by paying down the debts that have been taken on. In accounting terms, it is a negation of a negation. But it is not debtors that enjoy the liquidity from this saving; it is the creditors who receive the loan amortizations.

Leading up to 2008, the US saving rate fell to zero. The much-discussed number seemed to suggest that no saving was taking place—as if the entire economy were making a choice to be profligate and live for today, not tomorrow. There actually was as much overall saving as ever. Gross savings remained high—about 18 percent of national income. But the rise in debt was keeping pace. Homebuyers, industrial companies, consumers, and even local and federal government had run so deeply into debt that their borrowing fully absorbed the savings, producing a zero net saving rate. In fact, the domestic US savings rate was actually a negative 2%. The overall rate was rescued from negative territory by foreign central banks (mainly in China, Japan, and Germany) recycling their export surpluses into US Treasury bonds. This “foreign savings inflow” is counted as part of the US savings rate.

When the banks stopped lending in 2008, the savings rate rose to seven percent of GDP by May 2009. The New York Times applauded that “many people were putting that money away instead of spending it.” The Wall Street Journal reported that Social Security recipients of one-time government payments “seem unwilling to spend right away.” But this saving was not taking the form that most people think of as saving. It did not mean that prudent behavior had returned and people were keeping more money in the bank to withdraw on a rainy day. It took the form of paying down debts, not liquid money available for spending by the former debtors, who found that they needed to run down whatever liquid savings they had. They simply were spending their income to pay down the debt they had taken on earlier. The “saving” in question was an accounting entry in the national income accounts—a negation of a negation, and hence a positive. The only way these savings were “money in the bank” was that they were paid by debtors to their banks and credit card companies.

This debt deflation shows how false the image is of using one’s home like the proverbial piggy bank. Running up a debt is not at all like withdrawing cash from a savings account. Bankers euphemize taking out equity loans (borrowing more against the property’s rising market price) as “cashing out” on one’s equity, as if this does not leave a legacy of debts, which constrain

future spending by diverting more income to pay creditors. The more the “savings rate” rose in the post-2008 world, the less money “savers” had to spend. Debtors ate cheaper foods and ran down whatever liquid savings they had. This “upside down” saving led to debt deflation.

Western economies entered a period of debt deflation hitherto suffered only by Third World countries under IMF destabilization plans. Opportunities for upward mobility gave way to a debt-ridden austerity, shrinking markets, and leaving even less income available to pay debts.

The key to understanding how Asset-Price Inflation leads inexorably to Debt Deflation is to recognize that there are, in fact, two economies. Wall Street pretends that its financial gains are infused into the economy (much as Malthus described British landlords two centuries ago), creating jobs and financing new factories and other means of production. The reality is that bank loans do not fund direct investment and employment. They extract debt service while inflating asset prices to provide capital gains. This makes homes more expensive to buy, requiring new owners to take out larger mortgage loans. That is the Asset-Price Inflation phase of the financial cycle. At some point, repayment time arrives. Paying off debts absorbs income that otherwise would be available for spending on the goods and services that labor produces. This is the Debt Deflation phase. Each business upswing leaves a higher level of debt, diverting a rising proportion of income to pay debt service. The post-2008 bailout and imposition of austerity aimed to squeeze out enough income to carry the debt claims. But austerity generates even more defaults and a deeper crash.

The term ‘Debt Deflation’ was coined in 1933 by Irving Fisher to explain how bankruptcies stemming from the inability to pay debts were wiping out bank credit and spending power, and hence the ability of economies to invest and hire new workers. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke failed to understand this. In his view, debt service simply transfers purchasing power from debtors to creditors, with no effect on overall spending on current output. This assumes that creditors will spend the debt service they receive on consuming as much as indebted consumers and workers would have done. No economist prior to the 1980s anticipated that government budget deficits would take the form of transfer payments to the banks in the form of bailouts and cheap Federal Reserve credit. But since 2008 the rise in public debt and central bank credit has not been created to increase employment or consumer demand. The aim is to help Wall Street’s liquidity, not that of consumers. Chairman Ben Bernanke’s helicopter dropped money only over Wall Street, for banks to lend yet more to the already debt-ridden economy. The Fed’s idea of “recovery” has been to fund a new financial bubble and bid prices back up for existing real estate, stocks, and bonds, as if this will

revive the industrial economy instead of simply weighing it down with yet more debt.

If creditors (or real estate moguls) spend the same proportion of their income and capital gains on consumer goods and investment goods as do average wage earners, there would be no debt deflation or general spending shortfall, but simply a transfer of purchasing power from debtors to creditors and their fellow rentiers. But the whole point is that “spending propensities” do differ between the One Percent and the 99 Percent, between rentiers on the one hand, and consumers and producers on the other. Wealthier people spend a lower proportion of their income on consumption. And when today’s Wall Street financiers do spend their multi-million dollar salaries and bonuses money on themselves, it is largely on fine art trophies, luxury apartments that already have been built, on yachts and high fashion—largely imported, as was noted already in Malthus’s day. But most important, the super-rich lend out most of their gains, indebting the rest of the economy to themselves.

Until 2008, financial crashes had a silver lining: to wipe away the debt overhead so that economies can recover. Debt relief through bankruptcy traditionally forced housing prices to fall back to more affordable levels. But the Fed’s aim was (and remains) to preserve the economic power of the One Percent and revive bank balance sheets by preventing housing, stock market, or bond prices from falling. Instead of the bad debts built up prior to 2008 being wiped out, they have been kept in place. In conjunction with cutting back public spending programs, this shrinks the domestic market, and wages fall instead of the housing and other asset prices being supported. The banks were bailed out, not the economy.

The Federal Reserve and Treasury provided credit under the guise that recovery requires banks to rebuild their depleted net worth so that they can make yet more interest-bearing loans to the already debt-ridden economy—pushing housing and stock prices back up, as if this is what prosperity means. And by year-end 2010 the financial sector did indeed recoup its heavy losses from 2008 to register “about 30% of all operating profits” despite accounting “for less than 10% of the value added in the economy.” By mid-2013 the banking system’s share of corporate profits had risen “to 42 percent and the Fed expects them to keep rising.”

In October 2008, Paulson invested \$10 billion on behalf of the federal government into Goldman. He made the deal three weeks after Warren Buffett had also invested in Goldman. How did the deals compare? Buffett got a \$500 million annual dividend. The federal government invested twice as much, but got the same dividend. Buffett got the right to buy 11% of Goldman for \$115 per share. The government bought the right, for almost

\$7 more per share, to buy just 2% of Goldman. That was obviously a bad deal—a disguised handout—but just how bad?

Using textbook valuation techniques, in plain English, the federal government made a gift to Goldman Sachs worth \$5 billion. It amounted to more than \$16 for every American, \$64 for a family of four. Later the Obama administration let Goldman buy back the securities. Goldman issued a statement saying the government made a 22 percent annualized return on their money. That figure is correct, but it ignores three key facts. One, Goldman got to pick when to buy out the federal government's investment, which would not be when it reached maximum gain. Two, the 22 percent return was not commensurate with the risks taken, especially compared to the deal Buffett made. Three, it ignored the \$13 billion Goldman got from the government when they paid off Goldman's bad—and possibly worthless—bets with AIG. All in all the government saved Goldman from facing the rigors of the market for its mismanagement, and average people were left with less while Goldman enjoyed more. And Goldman did not even thank you for your generosity.

Instead of buying mortgage-related securities—the program's “troubled assets”—the Treasury helped recapitalize bank balance sheets directly by buying \$25 billion senior “preferred” non-voting stock and warrants from each of the ten largest American banks. The label ‘preferred’ confuses many casual readers. Bailing out the banks by buying preferred shares—instead of directly taking over the most reckless lenders—set the Treasury and Fed at odds with the FDIC's ability to protect depositors. An FDIC takeover would have wiped out the value of the government's preferred stock along with that of common stockholders. Although preferred stockholders are paid dividends before normal stockholders get their turn, they do not have legal priority over bondholders, or even over speculators in collateralized swaps (CDOs) in case of bankruptcy. To preserve the government's investment position in bank preferred stock, Paulson's ploy hooked it into continuing support rather than letting the FDIC do its job. The non-voting character of the TARP shares prevented the Treasury from exerting management policy over the banks that received funding. It also did not use its controlling creditor position to ask for seats on the bank boards, or for any voice in what the banks did with the TARP money, or with their deposits and credit-creating power.

The modified TARP's Capital Purchase Program provided banks with money at a concessionary rate of only 5%. Government loans are not supposed to be made to insolvent institutions, or on easy terms that enable banks to use the funds for speculation in a period of economic distress. But this is precisely what happened. The Congressional Budget Office estimated

that the first \$247 billion of securities purchased represented so large a premium over actual market valuation that it amounted to a 26 percent (\$64 billion) subsidy to the banks receiving funds. They were rewarded rather than punished for their reckless and even fraudulent lending. While some of you reading this were rewarded with homelessness. Seems fair.

The obvious question that government regulators sought to prevent the public from asking was why not nationalize the reckless banks whose entire net worth was less than the government's \$25 billion TARP loan? Citigroup and Bank of America (and very nearly Goldman and other investment banks) were insolvent without the government giveaways. Taking over ownership and operating them as a public financial option would have enabled the government to fire the officers responsible for the bad, often crooked, loans, and recoup what they had paid themselves in salaries and bonuses on the deception that their management was making money, not losing it. After all, bank managers of such institutions did not provide productive management but just the opposite: They acted in a predatory way that poisoned the financial system with toxic waste. The government's failure to take ownership gave managers, stockholders, and bondholders a free lunch.

The government imposed tougher terms on AIG than on bailed-out banks. The government, for example, took a controlling equity stake in AIG, largely wiping out shareholders. In contrast, it left shareholders at bailed-out banks intact, even at arguably insolvent institutions like Bank of America and Citigroup. The injustice in that disparate treatment, however, is not that AIG was treated too harshly, but that the banks got off too easy. If the government had taken control of, say, Bank of America, citizens would have shared directly in its recovery. Instead, the subsequent gains flowed to shareholders who, but for the bailouts, would have been ruined. The government also took control over how the AIG bailout money was spent. The bank bailouts, in contrast, had virtually no strings attached. That harmed the public because there was no way for the government to force the banks to increase lending and help homeowners, even though officials had said that the bailouts would foster lending and foreclosure relief. It's certainly true that the government deserves criticism for how it spent the AIG bailout money: It funneled the money to the banks to make them whole on deals they had done with AIG, instead of requiring them to absorb some of the losses. But again, the real victim of the overly generous treatment of the banks is the American public.

Wall Street's casino—"the financial system"—profits from the illusion that defaults can somehow be covered by private-sector insurance. It is as if everyone can buy options to avoid the systemic risk that results from over-lending. This illusion helped Wall Street shut its eyes to the looming

convulsion that cost far more than any insurance company reserves ever would be able to pay for. Wall Street, the City of London, and other financial centers had simply pretended to insure against the uninsurable.

The reality is that insuring against any economy's overall debt overhead is impossible in principle, because in the end the debts cannot be paid. It is magical to believe that money can be lent out as debts grow exponentially without limit. The Magic of Compound Interest leads in due course to debt deflation. The insurance obligation to 'make losers whole' becomes unlimited, far beyond the ability of default swaps or other financial insurance to cover the losses that stemmed from deregulation and financial fraud. Any scheme to protect against debt defaults is bound to be underinsured in the absence of regulatory agencies to prevent fraud. The only way for these gambles to be paid in full when the insurance companies acting as "bookies" lack sufficient reserves is for the government to make up the gap. This is what happened in 2008. The Treasury and Fed picked up the tab, claiming that this was a necessary price to pay to "restore stability." By "stability" they meant preserving the fiction that much of the economy was not insolvent.

In the ordinary course of business, the well-established rules of bankruptcy would have led AIG's counterparties to write down their claims. Instead, "rescuing" AIG transformed Wall Street's risky derivative wagers into government-guaranteed obligations. It was as if the high-risk trade in default insurance derivatives deserved the same backstop as FDIC-insured savings deposits and checking accounts.

Neoliberal economists claim that debt is not a problem and can be ignored because (as the saying goes) "we owe it to ourselves." According to this chop-logic, it all cancels out into a net zero balance in which one person's debt is treated as another's asset. This simplistic and misleading view neglects the who/whom dimension: Most of the net debt is owed by the 99 Percent to the One Percent (Wall Street's "ourselves"). The credit that banks create adds to rentier charges, not to price and income stability. Thirty years of neoliberal junk economics has prepared the ground for imposing mass unemployment, emigration, and privatization selloffs. The pretense is that public budget deficits cause inflation. But inflation has largely remained in check for the past few decades. What critics of government spending really oppose is public funding of Social Security, Medicare, and other social programs out of the general budget. The hypocrisy becomes apparent when Wall Street praises public "debt" creation as governments create money to bail out banks.

Retail savings and checking accounts were never threatened by the bad gambles that banks made. But this myth had to be promoted in order for Paulson, Geithner, Bernanke, and other bank protectors to persuade

Congress to overrule Bair and make government pay. Their aim was to save the banks from being nationalized, and to protect bankers from being prosecuted for fraud or reining in the exorbitant salaries and bonuses they had given themselves. No attempt was made to change the system that had led to the crash.

If the traditional bank reforms had been preserved, then the FDIC would have closed down Citigroup and the government would have regulated the derivatives market. If the legal system had worked, chief executives of Wall Street's major investment banks and the crooked brokerage companies that promoted and sold liars' loans would have landed in jail. Instead, banks paid civil fees—often covered by insurance policies—without their executives being prosecuted. Instead of “saving the system,” the financial oligarchy made its move to end economic democracy. It saved its own future, not the existing status quo.

The real burden of Wall Street's near meltdown fell on small investors and homeowners. As home prices plummeted, many homeowners found themselves owing more on their mortgages than their homes were worth and unable to refinance. Yet Chapter 13 of the bankruptcy code (whose drafting was largely the work of the financial industry) prevents homeowners from declaring bankruptcy on mortgage loans for their primary residence.

When the financial crisis hit, some members of Congress, led by Illinois senator Dick Durbin, tried to amend the code to allow distressed homeowners to use bankruptcy. That would give them a powerful bargaining chip for preventing the banks and others servicing their loans from foreclosing on their homes. If the creditors didn't agree, their cases would go to a bankruptcy judge, who presumably would reduce the amount to be repaid rather than automatically force people out of their homes. The bill passed the House, but when in late April 2009 Durbin offered his amendment in the Senate, the financial industry flexed its muscles to prevent its passage, arguing that it would greatly increase the cost of home loans. No convincing evidence showed this to be the case. The bill garnered only forty-five Senate votes, even though Democrats were in the majority. Partly as a result, distressed homeowners had no bargaining power. More than five-million of them lost their homes, and by 2014 another two-million were near foreclosure. So much for shared sacrifice.

The ten-million homeowners whose debt soared in excess of the market price of their homes (“negative equity”) received no leniency such as the banks received. They were subjected to a wave of foreclosures by robo-signed documents hitherto illegal under US law, but which were permitted simply because the practice was so pervasive that to have enforced the law would have brought down the system. ‘The system’ was precisely what should have

been brought down! The financial high-jinks on Wall Street was not ‘the economy.’ It was the banksters, pretending that their interest coincided with that of the economy at large. It was as if keeping debts in place preserved real wealth and employment rather than destroying them.

Things didn’t go down this way because helping average citizens during hard times is a utopian dream, but rather because those citizens’ interests conflicted with the interests of the upper strata. A choice between the two had to be made, and Obama made it. The most notorious example was the Democratic proposal that would have allowed judges to modify homeowners’ mortgage debt when they filed for bankruptcy—a process called “cramdown” that would have been extremely helpful to millions of homeowners but would also have had unpleasant consequences for whoever it was who owned the mortgages. In 2008, Obama had announced he was in favor of cramdown, but when it came up in the Senate in April of 2009, the president and his team wouldn’t lift a finger to help. With the banks lobbying energetically against it, the measure naturally failed.

Under the pretense of restoring normalcy, the new financial oligarchy achieved a political coup to insure payment of debts owed mainly to the banks, bondholders, and the One Percent behind them. Most people hardly realized that Congress, the Treasury, and Federal Reserve had joined to endow bankers, bondholders, and speculators with massive fortunes. The closest parallel is Alexander Hamilton’s commitment to pay off the “Continental”—the paper money the American colonies fighting for their independence had used to pay militiamen and suppliers. The currency had lost nearly all its value, but was bought up by speculators, the “vulture funds” of their day. Treasury Secretary Hamilton paid them off in full, ostensibly to show the fiscal dependability of the new US Government. Speculators used their gains to buy up land in a follow-up series of frauds. Many of the nation’s early fortunes thus were created at a stroke of the pen.

The ethic of walking away from underwater real estate deals is practiced more cynically by the wealthy. Wall Street investors call this “strategic default.” But mortgage bankers urge less affluent homeowners to take an uneconomic view of debt in terms of a personal ethic of responsibility, a moral obligation to pay debts. While manipulating the moral bias of homeowners to stay put and keep paying the banks for loans in excess of the home’s still-falling market price, the Mortgage Banking Association was walking away from its own underwater headquarters. It had bought the 10-story glass building in Washington DC in 2007 with a \$75 million mortgage.

“Like millions of American households,” the Wall Street Journal noted, the association “found itself stuck with real estate whose market value has plunged far below the amount it owed its lenders.” The story is one

of hilarious hypocrisy. Having put down only 5% of the purchase price, the trade group decided to strategically default on its mortgage when the property lost \$34 million (45%) in the declining market. The association rented offices five blocks away, announcing “that continued ownership of the building, which was financed with \$75 million of variable-rate debt, would be economically imprudent.” It ended up being sold for just \$41.3 million.

The Association’s CEO John Courson refused to confirm just how much money it saved by walking away from the property, but he urged homeowners to “keep paying their loans even if that no longer seemed to be in their economic interest,” because “defaults hurt neighborhoods by lowering property values.”

“What about the message they will send to their family and their kids and their friends?”

That is the banks’ marketing plan: to siphon off the benefits of rising wages and salaries as debt service, preventing this income from being used to raise living standards. Without “jingle mail,” banks will lend beyond the value of the collateral being pledged, intending to come after the debtor’s overall income (and that of co-signers, as in the case of many student loans), and failing that, to make “taxpayers” pay for their losses. This public liability for bad bank loans is what helped wreck Ireland and other Eurozone countries.

Today, years after the 2008 financial crisis, the most pressing task for economic theory should be to explain why employment and consumption spending have not recovered. The Federal Reserve has given banks \$4 trillion and the European Central Bank has given €1 trillion in Quantitative Easing to help the financial layer atop the economic pyramid, not to write down debts or revive the real economy by public spending. This enormous act of money creation could have enabled debtors to free themselves of debt so that they could resume spending to keep the circular flow of production and consumption in motion. Instead, governments have left the economy debt-strapped, creating money only to give to financial institutions. Orwellian rhetoric is invoked to describe governments running budget deficits and creating central bank credit to help banks and bondholders but not employment and production.

This is called “preserving the system.” However, what is intended to be preserved is not the indebted economy, but the debt overhead owed to the financial sector. Central banks assiduously avoid any attempt to quantify how far wages, profits, and tax revenue can be diverted to pay creditors without causing economic collapse and insolvency. Today’s crisis

is dismissed as an anomaly, ruled out by assumptions made at the outset. This blind spot is a precondition for steering economies down the road to debt deflation.

It should not be surprising that an economy 70 percent dependent on consumer spending stalls when creditors, monopolists, and property owners extract tribute from indebted borrowers, renters, students, and users of public infrastructure services. In effect, these groups are paying reparations for losing the financial and class war that they didn't even realize was being waged.

This rationale that saving the people required saving the banks—the trickle-down idea that saving the 99 Percent required enriching the One Percent even more—became the umbrella for unlimited giveaways and concessions to the Treasury's and Fed's Wall Street constituency, much as bondholders used to hide behind “widows and orphans” whose trust funds presumably would be eroded by inflation resulting from wage increases for the population having to work for a living.

For the Treasury, Federal Reserve, and much of Congress, Wall Street *is* the economy. At least it is the sector from where financial officials are drawn, and from which politicians derive their largest campaign contributions. This makes it easy to believe that giving banks special tax breaks and privileges to “earn their way out of debt” is synonymous with saving the economy. The reality is that bailouts are being done at the expense of business, consumers, and industry.

Just two months after taking office the new president invited the executives of thirteen leading Wall Street institutions to the White House. After listening to their arguments for why banks had to continue paying bonuses—ostensibly to get the best talent to manage their money—Obama told them:

“Be careful how you make those statements, gentlemen. The public isn't buying that.”

He explained that only he could provide them with the political shield needed to forestall public pressure for reform, not to mention prosecution of financial fraud.

“My administration is the only thing between you and the pitchforks.”

One leading banker attending the meeting:

“The sense of everyone after the meeting was relief. The president had us at a moment of real vulnerability. At that

point, he could have ordered us to do just about anything and we would have rolled over. But he didn't—he mostly wanted to help us out, to quell the mob.”

Obama had them scared and ready to do almost anything he said. An hour later, they were upbeat, ready to fly home and commence business as usual. Obama in a nutshell.

This piece of shit, not only does he bail out Wall Street, not only does he fuck over average people for eight years, not only does he cash in with the largest book deal ever done immediately after leaving office, but he then goes on to create a production studio, and on the cover art for his shit, he's fucking “Executive Producer President Barack Obama.” Not only is it ridiculous that certain people who have held certain positions retain that title when being addressed by others, but this fucker uses it himself. Don't believe us? Take a look at the poster for his latest film, *Crip Camp*—shithead, you ain't president no more, I'm sure you miss *Terror Tuesdays* but you're just going to have to find some other way to make that tiny dick hard—maybe a three-way with Georgie, Michelle, and some candies. Oh, and while we're on the topic: Start packing for The Hague motherfucker. But really, we should be thanking you Barack, I mean, short of you coming straight out and saying, ‘I'm a narcissistic douchebag and a whore for capitalism,’ you couldn't make it any more clear: that's exactly what you are.

No business sector can do more damage to an economy and a society than finance. The potential losses are virtually unlimited, as shown by the simple fact that in 2008 the stated value of all derivatives far exceeded the net worth of the entire planet. By wrapping unsound financial products in fancy names like credit default swap and collateralized mortgage-backed securities, the wizards of Wall Street can practice modern alchemy—until one of their formulations blows up. But just as the philosopher's stone never turned lead into gold, the mortgage-backed securities turned out to be as toxic as lead, and the implications for the average person very real. The 2008 meltdown cost every thirty-fourth person in America his or her job. Then the federal government compounded the irresponsible greed of the financiers by committing what, in the worst case, would have been the entire economic output of the nation for an entire year to rescuing the very same derivatives trading houses and failed commercial banks whose alchemy had just been exposed as bankrupt.

Although having run on a populist platform, Obama's role was to deliver his Democratic Party's liberal constituency of urban labor, racial and ethnic minorities, environmentalists, and anti-war advocates to his campaign contributors. Over the past half-century the Democratic Party's strategy

has been to create a menu of promises in two columns. Column A reflects the hopes and changes that voters want. That is the platform on which the Democrats run. Column B represent what the party's major contributors and lobbyists want. Obama won the election by verbalizing the hopes of the 99 Percent, but did in practice what his campaign backers from the One Percent wanted. His language was populist, his policies oligarchic and aimed to prevent change.

To say "the center held," as one of his biographers does, is an optimistic way to describe Barack Obama's accomplishment. Another would be to say he saved a bankrupt system that by all rights should have met its end. America came through an economic debacle, an earthquake that shook people's faith to the ground. Yet out of it, the system emerged largely unchanged. The predators resumed operations. Everything pretty much stayed the same.

What the sprawling stimulus measure did not include was the obvious thing, the most effective thing, the thing Americans of all ages remember that Franklin Roosevelt did—direct federal job-creation in the WPA manner. Obama was careful to avoid such things, because they would have expanded the federal workforce. Instead, his New New Deal—much like the proposed Green New Deal—merely sent money to others; on its own it built no tunnels in national parks, constructed no Art Deco county courthouses, painted no murals on post office walls, published no guidebooks to the states. As a result, it missed out on another achievement of the Roosevelt era: the creation of spectacular and unmistakable monuments to activist government.

Like FDR, Obama saved capitalism, yet unlike FDR, Obama felt no need to do anything to soften the blows upon the people.

Thus did the "Party of the People" turn the government over to Wall Street in the years after Wall Street had done such lasting damage to the People. The classic explanation for this perverse act is the donations the banks made to Obama's campaign in 2008. But there's another, and it takes us deep into the shared predilections of the liberal class: Obama deferred to Wall Street in so many ways because investment banking signifies professional status like almost nothing else. For the kind of achievement-conscious people who filled the administration, investment bankers were more than friends—they were fellow professionals; people of subtle minds, sophisticated jargon, and extraordinary innovativeness. They were the "creative class" that Democrats revere.

They were often people of dazzling credentials as scholars but not necessarily as reformers, regulators, and law enforcers. They had successfully internalized mainstream thinking in their respective disciplines, maybe, but that was not enough for the challenges of the moment. Reform often comes

from the margins of American life, but marginal is not a term anyone would use to describe the satisfied, conventionally-minded people of the Obama administration. This team was limited by its excellence, restrained by its orthodoxy.

Seriousness is the coin of the realm in Washington, a city that finds Wall Street's simulation of professional solemnity to be highly convincing, what with its impenetrable technical dialect and its advanced financial instruments. So complex are the latter, one deputy US attorney general complained in 2014, that when examining them, "we are dealing with financial rocket science." The economic expertise of Wall Street's analysts, strategists, and traders is taken for granted in Washington. This belief seeps into all corners of life in the capital.

Consider the words of White House Press Secretary Jay Carney, who advocated for a payroll tax cut in 2011 by referencing "responsible economists," by which he meant "not adjuncts of one party or the other, or people from partisan think tanks, but economists on Wall Street, economists out in the country and academic economists who are not affiliated with a party or a position." What is interesting here is Carney's assumption, three years after the financial crisis, that Wall Street shares the high ground of respectability with academia. It is not a synonym for 'criminal,' but the opposite: a signifier of legitimacy.

Whichever way economies go from here, they cannot return to the pre-2008 normalcy. So there can be no talk of "recovery" of the past, given the overgrowth of debts that cannot be paid. Going forward, there are two alternatives: (1) banks and bondholders will lose if debts are written down; or (2) the economy will face a generation of austerity as debt deflation and privatization smother growth and upward mobility. In that case the One Percent will inherit wealth, while the 99 Percent inherit debt bondage.

From F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* to Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*, novelists have symbolized the very rich as irresponsible auto drivers killing innocent pedestrians.

"They were careless people, Tom and Daisy, they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made."

That is what makes the rich different. The collateral damage from their attacks is as irresponsible as it is devastating. They are insensitive to how their actions impact the life of others.

Posing as "job creators," rentiers claim to be proxies acting like shepherds as a virtual government. Their wealth is supposed to trickle down, somehow,

as if by helping themselves financially, they also will help economies grow. So today's creditors call financialization "wealth creators," whom Goldman Sachs describes as "doing God's work."

This is financial warfare—and not all wars end with the victory of the most progressive parties. The end of history is not necessarily utopia. The financial mode of conquest against labor and industry is as devastating today as in the Roman Republic's Social War that marked its transition to Empire in the first century BC. It was the dynamics of debt above all that turned the empire into a wasteland, reducing the population to debt bondage and outright slavery. Livy, Plutarch, and other Roman historians placed the blame for their epoch's collapse on creditors. Tacitus reports the words of the Celtic chieftain Calgacus, circa 83 AD, rousing his troops by describing the empire they were to fight against:

"Robbers of the world, having by their universal plunder exhausted the land. If the enemy is rich, they are rapacious; if he is poor, they lust for dominion; neither the east nor the west has been able to satisfy them. To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire. They make a wasteland and call it peace."

The peace brought by Rome turned out to be a world reverting to subsistence production on the land as cities became deserted. Rome became the model of what happens to economies that do not annul their debts but instead polarize between creditors and debtors. Its history—and hence, antiquity—ended in a convulsion of depopulation and a Dark Age for Europe.

We are living today in a transition period much like that of Athens circa 330 BC when Aristotle wrote his *Politics*. Seeing inequality widen as his city-state became an empire, he described how wealthy families tend to emerge within democracies to become a financial oligarchy. Book V of *Politics* traces how these oligarchies indebt a rising proportion of the population to themselves, creating hereditary estates on which to found aristocratic dynasties. In time, rivalries develop within the leading aristocratic families, and some decide to overthrow other elites of the old order by "taking the multitude into their camp."

In the seventh century BC, populist tyrants gained power in Corinth and other wealthy Greek cities by canceling the debts, redistributing the land and driving the old ruling elites into exile. Democracy was introduced more peacefully by reformers in sixth-century Athens. Solon banned debt bondage in 594, and Kleisthenes locked in political democracy in 508. But an oligarchy emerged once again, to be followed by aristocracy, democracy, and

so on in Aristotle's eternal political triangle. Destruction of democracy by the creditors and property owners who make up the One Percent thus is not a new phenomenon. The leading Roman historians blamed the destruction of Republican liberty on the rising power of creditors overpowering democracies. Using violence to block the reforms proposed by the Gracchi brothers in 133 BC, Senate leaders initiated a century of social war that ended in debt deflation and, in due course, serfdom.

From Greece and Rome to today's world, the driving force in the transition from democracy to oligarchy has been the fight by creditors against debtors. From the United States to Europe, creditors are taking over government agencies to control public policy and the tax system to undermine debtor rights, privatize public property in their own hands, and impose the modern equivalent of debt serfdom.

Financial strategists in nations subject to democratic ratification of policies face a challenge over how to get voters to elect governments that impose austerity, regressive tax policies, and anti-debtor bankruptcy laws of the sort that authoritarian Third World oligarchies and military dictatorships imposed from the 1960s onward. Financial tacticians start by limiting the sphere over which democratic choice is allowed. Control over the Executive Branch of government is shifted to central banks and Treasuries staffed by bank apparatchiks. The cover story for this regulatory capture is that central bank "independence" from partisan politics is a "hallmark of democracy"—as if making financial policy independent from oversight by elected legislators is democratic! Bankers trot out neoliberal professors to preach that only professionals drawn from the ranks of leading financial institutions (i.e., to act as their lobbyists) have the expertise needed to set monetary policy. This ideology denies that there is any such thing as careers in public service to check the potentially predatory behavior of high finance. The only entrance path to regulatory agencies is held to be the revolving door between the large financial institutions and government.

Opposition to a true central bank to monetize public budget deficits is based on the fantasy that this would cause hyperinflation, such as the Weimar Republic suffered in the early 1920s. The reality is that nearly all hyperinflations result from paying foreign debt or shortages of real resources. The highly political effect of a "hard money" policy blocking central banks from financing budget deficits is to leave credit and money creation for private bankers.

When global bankers wring their hands about the financial system melting down, what they really mean is that the top One Percent may lose some of the astounding amount of wealth they have accumulated since the Bubble years.

The events of 2011 showed that “confidence” meant whistling in the dark and refraining from measuring the debtor’s realistic ability to pay. This suspension of disbelief was politically necessary because once it is recognized that debts can’t be paid out of tax revenues and austerity, basic moral principles call for debts to be nullified. No debtor nation should be obliged to commit economic suicide, dismantle its public domain and force 5, 10, or 20 percent of its population to emigrate, as did “success story” Latvia, duly followed by Greece. At issue is what interest should take priority: creditor demands, or the economic growth and employment of sovereign nations.

Europe’s elites are behaving today as if they understand neither the nature of the crisis that they are presiding over, nor its implications for the future of European civilization. They are choosing to plunder the diminishing stocks of the weak and the dispossessed in order to plug the gaping holes of the financial sector, refusing to come to terms with the unsustainability of the task.

The formerly left-wing parties have let themselves be co-opted to limit democratic politics to innocuous social lifestyle choices that do not threaten financial interests, while accepting austerity leading to perpetual fiscal emergency and debt serfdom. The great objective behind nineteenth-century liberalism was, as Marx never tired of pointing out, to separate the economic sphere from the political sphere and to confine politics to the latter while leaving the economic sphere to capital.

Referendums are regularly overturned, if they cross the will of rulers. Voters whose views are scorned by elites shun the assembly that nominally represents them, turnout falling with each successive election. Bureaucrats who have never been elected police the budgets of national parliaments dispossessed even of spending powers. Parties lose members; voters lose belief that they count, as political choices narrow and promises of difference dwindle or vanish in office.

The classical idea of a post-industrial leisure economy was to free nations from rent and interest overhead to bring prices in line with necessary direct costs of production, with governments subsidizing basic services out of progressive taxes or new money creation.

By contrast, today’s financialized version of free markets obliges families to spend their life working mainly to pay banks for the credit needed to survive in today’s world. Saddling students and homebuyers with debt has turned their hopes and ambition into a road to insolvency. People can choose which bank to borrow from, which home to buy with a 30-year working-life mortgage, and which college to take out an education loan to attend. But whatever their choice, they are subjected to a financialized version of the Company Store, a deregulated and predatory economy. Something must

give way when earnings are unable to cover the stipulated debt service. If banks do not write down their loans, foreclosure time arrives and assets will be forfeited.

By imposing an access fee on the entry point into the middle class job market, privatizing and financializing the educational system raises the cost of living. This reverses the policy long followed by the United States, Germany, and other successful nations that made their economies more competitive by providing education and other basic services freely or at subsidized rates. Creating a need for loans at the educational choke point turns universities into vehicles for banks to earn government-guaranteed interest. Much as interest charges on home mortgages end up giving banks a larger sum than the sales price received by the sellers, student loan payments often give the bank as much interest income over time as the college or trade school has received as tuition. Consumer credit, home mortgages, and education loans thus treat the labor force much as feudal landlords treated the land and its occupants: as a source of tribute.

Debt leveraging is a major reason why the United States and Britain have lost their industrial advantage. Debt-inflated costs for housing, education, and other basic needs have priced their labor out of markets abroad and at home.

Neoliberal financialization is not how to create a viable economy. Academic theories must be mistrusted if they do not explain why financial and industrial objectives are diverging, not converging. FIRE-sector lobbyists have censored economic theory so as to misrepresent Adam Smith and the anti-rentier spirit of classical economists who believed that a free market required public regulation to keep predatory finance and rent seeking in check, and to keep basic infrastructure in the public domain.

Only by such intellectual clear-cutting to wipe out history could so much of the public come to believe what no generation ever before has believed: that the financial and related rent-extracting sectors are an intrinsic part of the real economy of production and consumption, not external to it and predatory on it, and that they can get money fastest by borrowing to buy assets being inflated by bank credit.

This predatory financial dynamic stifles industrial potential, raising the specter of lapsing back into ancient usury. Much like creditors in ancient Rome, today's financial power seeks to replace democracy with oligarchy. We are seeing a resurgence of "primitive accumulation" by exponentially accruing debt dependency, foreclosure, and privatization, whose effects threaten to be as devastating as the brutal military conquests of past epochs that reduced populations to serfdom.

The aim is to transfer ownership of the vast capital expenditure sunk in

the hitherto public domain—from roads to education, ports, power systems medical care and communications—to buyers on credit, with the revenue going to bankers, bondholders, and stockholders. Labor is cornered onto a virtual reservation, driven into debt by being obliged to buy essential goods and services and obtain housing and an education at the proverbial Company Store.

The financial crisis now plaguing Western economies is age-old. Throughout history the greatest fortunes have been obtained by lending and foreclosing, above all by privatizing the Commons (the public domain) by indebting governments to force sell-offs, or simply via insider dealings and fraud. It would be a travesty of language to say that the resulting privatization rents, financial extraction, and “capital” gains are “earned.”

Today’s passivity by the 99 Percent in the face of a rentier counter-Enlightenment reflects the degree to which voters have come to accept the neoliberal financial and tax system as part of the natural environment, as if there indeed is no alternative.

Restructuring the financial system is hard to do when people are engulfed in a crisis, especially when they imagine that they can recover by borrowing more—and fear that there is no alternative. The reality is that history is rife with possible remedies. These remedies almost always involve debt writedowns.

Hayek’s hyperbole in *The Road to Serfdom* characterizes public planning, taxation, and regulation as metaphoric serfdom. This reflects the One Percent’s fear and even hatred of democracy, progressive taxation, and public enterprise and social spending programs. In their place, Hayek’s acolytes would set economies on the road to literal debt serfdom, a state of dependency in which access to housing and education requires taking on a lifetime of debt.

The way that history was supposed to unfold was that banking would provide credit for capital investment. Public services were to be offered at falling prices—ultimately freely—to a widening population. But instead of evolving toward such socialism, bankers and wealthy elites found rent extraction to be their major source of gain. Calling their opposition to a government strong enough to keep them in check “libertarian,” their aim is simply to replace democratic government with planning by bankers and bondholders. To call their rent extraction and debt-financed asset-price inflation “wealth creation,” is to adopt the vocabulary of rentiers.

Chapter Seventy

Human Hamster Wheels

“To separate labor from other activities of life and subject it to the laws of the market was to annihilate all organic forms of existence and to replace them by a different type of organization, an atomistic and individualistic one.”

The Mysterious Case of the Missing Surplus Value of Labor:

Jack wants to open a factory. Jack possesses capital in the form of money and so he buys some land and has a factory built. Since nobody can run an entire factory, Jack agrees to pay Mary to run the factory machine while he fills out the paperwork and arranges the sale of the products. In this scenario, Jack pays himself and Mary for their labor as a manager and a machinist with what is left after factory upkeep—nothing problematic yet. But now business is going well and Jack realizes the factory makes enough money to pay the bills, Mary, himself, and a third person. Jack begins to pay Omar to do the paperwork and arrange the sales. Even though Jack spends most days playing Pokémon GO and relaxing, he continues to pay himself each month. Eventually, Jack replenishes his capital enough to buy a second factory. Now, Jack is paid enough to live comfortably and invest in more factories without needing to work himself. In this scenario, Jack is “earning” wealth by exploiting the value of labor provided by Mary and Omar—Jack has become a capitalist dog.

Some frame inequality in terms of fairness, luck, and pluck and treats money as some form of prize in an economic game. I suppose this way of looking at things works up to a point as long as we look to those below us and congratulate ourselves on our merit while accepting some greater luck of those above us which help rationalize our merit. But any concepts of fairness or justice rapidly fracture if we look past those in our own neighborhood.

Riding a bubble through the slums here and elsewhere in the world it becomes very difficult to rationalize justice and merit. Looking in the other direction toward the high rises and gated estates and manifestations of wealth I can't even imagine and the fragments of the fairness or justice of things evaporates completely.

In our society money and wealth is equated with merit. It packages demand for automatic respect and deference. This one-size-fits all measure for character, intellect, excellence, creativity, leadership, even physical attractiveness, undermines all these values reducing them to commodities of the marketplace. But the ability of money and wealth to control and command the lives of others and the collective resources of society is far more pernicious. What concept of fairness or justice can justify this aspect of inequality?

There can never be a pure meritocracy because high-status parents will invariably seek to pass on their positions, either through the use of influence or simply by the cultural advantages that their children inevitably possess. See: Felicity Huffman

A neoliberal meritocracy would have us believe that success depends on individual effort and talents, meaning responsibility lies entirely with the individual and authorities should give people as much freedom as possible to achieve this goal. For those who believe in the fairy tale of unrestricted choice, self-government and self-management are the preeminent political messages, especially if they appear to promise freedom. Along with the idea of the perfectible individual, the freedom we perceive ourselves as having in the West is the greatest untruth of this day and age.

Today my friends I wish to speak about a cursed tree and it's evil fruit. No, not an apple and Eve, though the parallels will be obvious to many. There once was a tree, it had twenty-dollar bills for leaves, its flowers were government bonds, its fruit diamonds. It attracted human beings who killed each other around the roots and made very good fertilizer.

The true violence isn't when a police officer brings his baton down on a protester's skull or throws a sting grenade. It is the deep-rooted, institutional forms of violence such as educational failure and the promise of shitty wages for dead-end jobs.

A lot of people forget that having debt you can't pay back really sucks. Debt is not just a credit instrument, it is an instrument of political and economic control.

It's actually baked into our culture. The phrase 'the man,' as in 'fight the man,' referred originally to creditors. 'The man' in the nineteenth century stood for 'furnishing man,' the merchant that sold nineteenth century sharecroppers and Southern farmers their supplies for the year, usually on

credit. Farmers, often illiterate and certainly unable to understand the arrangements into which they were entering, were charged interest rates of 80–100 percent a year, with a lien placed on their crops. When approaching a furnishing agent, who could grant them credit for seeds, equipment, even food itself, a farmer would meekly look down nervously as his debts were marked down in a notebook. At the end of a year, due to deflation and usury, farmers usually owed more than they started the year owing. Their land was often forfeit, and eventually most of them became tenant farmers.

They were in hock to the man, and eventually became slaves to him. This structure, of sharecropping and usury, held together by political violence, continued into the 1960s in some areas of the South. As late as the 1960s, Kennedy would see rural poverty in Arkansas and pronounce it “shocking.” These were the fruits of usury, a society built on unsustainable debt peonage.

Today, we are in the midst of creating a second sharecropper society. Today, the debts do not involve liens against crops. People in modern America carry student loans, credit card debt, and mortgages. All of these are hard to pay back, often bringing with them impenetrable contracts and illegal fees. Credit card debt is difficult to discharge in bankruptcy and a default on a home loan can leave you homeless. A student loan debt is literally a claim against a life—you cannot discharge it in bankruptcy, and if you die, your parents are obligated to pay it. If the banks have their way, mortgages and deficiency judgments will follow you around forever, as they do in Spain.

Young people and what only cynics might call ‘homeowners’ have no choice but to jump on the treadmill of debt, as debtcroppers. The goal is not to have them pay off their debts, but to owe forever—an utter perversion of the tribal gift economy. Whatever a debtcropper owes, a wealthy creditor owns. And as a bonus, the heavier the debt burden of American citizenry, the less able we are to organize and claim our democratic rights as citizens. Debtcroppers don’t start companies and innovate, they don’t take chances, and they don’t claim their political rights. Think about this when you hear the calls from ex-Morgan Stanley bankers and current World Bank Presidents pining for the gold standard. Or when you hear Warren Buffett partner Charlie Munger talk about how the bailouts of the wealthy were patriotic, but we mustn’t bail out homeowners for fear of “moral hazard.” Or when you hear Pete Peterson Foundation President and former Comptroller General David Walker yearn nostalgically for debtor’s prisons.

Professional-class liberals aren’t really alarmed by oversized rewards for society’s winners. On the contrary, this seems natural to them—because they are society’s winners. The liberalism of professionals just does not extend to matters of inequality; this is the area where soft hearts abruptly

turn hard.

Innovation liberalism is a liberalism of the rich. This doctrine has no patience with the idea that everyone should share in society's wealth. What Massachusetts liberals pine for, by and large, is a more perfect meritocracy—a system where the essential thing is to ensure that the truly talented get into the right schools and then get to rise through the ranks of society. Unfortunately, however, as the blue-state model makes painfully clear, there is no solidarity in a meritocracy. The ideology of educational achievement conveniently negates any esteem we might feel for the poorly graduated.

This is a curious phenomenon, is it not? A blue state where the Democrats maintain transparent connections to high finance and big pharma; where they have deliberately chosen distant software barons over working-class members of their own society; and where their chief economic proposals have to do with promoting innovation, a grand and promising idea that remains suspiciously vague. Nor can these innovation Democrats claim that their hands were forced by Republicans. They came up with this program all on their own.

Their intellectual dishonesty stems from their inability to step outside their credentialed class echo chamber and recognize that it is the credentialed class policies of neoconservative foreign policy and neoliberal economic policy that have proven disastrous for the majority of Americans. Intellectuals like them are *the* major problem for progressives because they serve up seemingly cogent arguments that only serve to distract attention from the truth of the failed world view they espouse and provide cover for the arrogant meritocracy, for which they are card carrying members. They are apologists for 16 years of Clinton/Obama neocon/neoliberal governance that abandoned 90% of American citizens.

At a key moment in the history of neoliberal thought, its advocates shifted from defending markets as competitive arenas amongst many, to viewing society-as-a-whole as one big competitive arena. Under the latter model, there is no distinction between arenas of politics, economics, and society. To convert money into political power, or into legal muscle, or into media influence, or into educational advantage, is justifiable, within this more brutal, capitalist model of neoliberalism. The problem that we now know as the '1%' is, as has been argued of America recently, a problem of oligarchy.

Underlying it is the problem that there are no longer any external, separate, or higher principles to appeal to, through which oligarchs might be challenged. Legitimate powers need other powers through which their legitimacy can be tested; this is the basic principle on which the separation of executive, legislature, and judiciary is based. The same thing holds true

with respect to economic power, but this is what has been lost.

Regulators, accountants, tax collectors, lawyers, public institutions have been drawn into the economic contest, and become available to buy. To use the sort of sporting metaphor much-loved by business leaders: it's as if the top football team has bought not only the best coaches, physios, and facilities, but also bought the referee and the journalists as well. The bodies responsible for judging economic competition have lost all authority, which leaves the dream of meritocracy or a 'level playing field'—crucial ideals within the neoliberal imagination—in tatters. Politically speaking, this is as much a failure of legitimacy as it is a problem of spiraling material inequality.

The result is a condition of “contingent neoliberalism,” contingent in the sense that it no longer operates with any spirit of fairness or inclusiveness. The priority is simply to prop it up at all costs. If people are irrational, then nudge them. If banks don't lend money, then inflate their balance sheets through artificial means. If a currency is no longer taken seriously, political leaders must repeatedly guarantee it as a sovereign priority. If people protest, buy a water cannon. This is a system whose own conditions are constantly falling apart, and which governments must do constant repair work on.

The outrage with the one percent (and, more accurately, with the 0.1%), the sense that even the rich are scarcely benefiting, is to be welcomed. It is also overdue. For several years, we have operated with a cultural and moral worldview which finds value only in winners. Our cities must be “world-leading” to matter. Universities must be “excellent,” or else they dwindle. This is a philosophy which condemns the majority of spaces, people and organizations to the status of losers. It also seems entirely unable to live up to its own meritocratic ideal any longer—if it ever did. The discovery that, if you cut a winner enough slack, eventually they'll try to close down the game once and for all, should throw our obsession with competitiveness into question. And then we can consider how else to find value in things, other than their being “better” than something else.

Another paradox of neoliberalism is that universal competition relies upon universal quantification and comparison. The result is that workers, job-seekers, and public services of every kind are subject to a stifling regime of assessment and monitoring, designed to identify the winners and punish the losers. The doctrine that Von Mises proposed would free us from the bureaucratic nightmare of central planning has instead created one.

Constant evaluations at work cause a decline in autonomy and a growing dependence on external—often shifting—norms. This results in the infantilization of the workers. Adults display childish outbursts of temper and

are jealous about trivialities—‘She got a new office chair and I didn’t’—tell white lies, resort to deceit, delight in the downfall of others, cherish petty feelings of revenge. This is the consequence of a system that prevents people from thinking independently and that fails to treat employees as adults.

More important, though, is the serious damage to people’s self-respect. Self-respect largely depends on the recognition that we receive from the other. The main question for employees these days is: ‘Who needs me?’ For a growing group of people, the answer is: no one.

There is a very interesting debate raging at the moment about the nature of sin, morality—And what do they think? Against it, are they?

No, they say, ‘It’s not as simple as that. It’s not a black and white issue. There are so many shades of gray.’

Nope. There’s no grays, only white that’s got grubby. And sin, my friends, is when you treat people as things. Including yourself. That’s what sin is. But wait they say, ‘It’s a lot more complicated than that...’

No. It ain’t. When people say things are a lot more complicated than that, they mean they’re getting worried that they won’t like the truth. People as things, that’s where it starts. You may claim that there are certainly worse crimes, but they all start out with thinking about others as things.

Some societies behave with brutal exploitation. Worst example: Western capitalism. Other societies do not and did not. They were or are cooperative, supportive, and lived sustainably. Many indigenous cultures were absolutely astounded by the Europeans’ greed and lack of ethics.

Reminds me of a favorite story. The Englishman said to the Pacific Islander:

“Get a job! Work as hard as you can, for as long as you can. Send your kids to school in England for a good education so they can know the right people and get good jobs. Then, if you’re lucky, you can retire, buy a vacation property here, and fish.”

The Pacific Islander knows he’s being lectured by a crazy person.

I think as humans we are also hardwired to behave cooperatively. Otherwise we would never survive.

Funnily enough, it seems that bees love stimulants, even cocaine. When I was growing *nicotiana rustica*, both for smoking and to boil up and spray other plants with, it was by far the local bees’ favorite plant in my yard. New hives even formed nearby. It got to the point where I stopped watering the tobacco plants because there were so many god damn bees. Had to have a guy come out and collect them at one point. Now I realize that I

accidentally created several societies of addicts and then had them forcibly removed because I didn't like them there. Humans are dicks. Or, at least, I am.

It's the human way—'kill what you don't like,' whereas it should be 'live with what belongs here.'

An indigenous chief was tied with a noose around his neck, and his feet in a wood pile for a fire to burn him alive—Christians can't even kill their victims humanely. He was one of the last of up to 20 million people who inhabited Hispaniola before the Christians came and massacred them. A preacher came to him, and tried to get him to convert to Christianity "to save him" before he was burned alive—he would still be burned alive regardless, since that's how Christians roll. The preacher told him about heaven and hell. The chief asked, "Do all Christians go to heaven?" The preacher replied, "Yes." The chief stated, "I think I would rather prefer hell.

When states pretend to respect indigenous governance, they respect indigenous rights to govern within the limits of the state and corporate box they are placed in. Even uncontacted tribes are placed in a state controlled box where they are considered consensual citizens of a government they have never heard of. Ecuador claims the Yasuni as its property to sign mining contracts for despite the government warning Ecuadorians of the dangers of traveling too far into uncontacted tribal land. Supposedly autonomous governance for some involves councils governing allocation of funds and property in formerly moneyless, gifting, commons cultures. It is not autonomy if people cannot choose their own economy, membership, and method of governance. Telling formerly borderless nations that they can govern as they wish within borders is ridiculous as the governance they wish is borderless. Living and fluid societies that used continual shunning and adopting, joining and leaving, for their economic and cultural health, have been converted to dead cages and economic markets, an architected global caste system. Declaring autonomy within those borders is akin to declaring freedom within prison walls.

The tough reality of economic development is that it will always be easier to move people to jobs than the jobs to people. Which is akin to telling many, many voters the only possible way they can live an even modest lifestyle is to abandon their roots for the uniformity of urban life. They must sacrifice their identities to survive. You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile. Follow the Brooklyn hipsters to the Promised Land.

This is a bitter pill for many to swallow. To just sit back and accept the collapse of your communities. And I suspect the white working class resents being told to swallow that pill when the Democrats eagerly celebrate the identities of everyone else

Former Australian prime minister Tony Abbott said of the proposed closure of 150 remote Indigenous communities:

“What we can’t do is endlessly subsidize lifestyle choices if those lifestyle choices are not conducive to the kind of full participation in Australian society that everyone should have. If people choose to live miles away from where there’s a school, if people choose not to access the school of the air, if people choose to live where there’s no jobs, obviously it’s very, very difficult to close the gap.”

If you want to live, get out of your traditional lands. The similarities are not coincidental.

In both cases, the argument accepts capital accumulation as the touchstone for human relations, the sole legitimator of social good. If the customs of Indigenous Australia don’t fit the priorities of modern capitalism, then, by definition, they’re dysfunctional and so the custodians of the oldest living culture in the world should embrace a different “lifestyle,” one more compatible with free market principles.

The traditions of Garbutt, NY, aren’t nearly as ancient. Yet, in a way, the relative novelty of what’s being demolished merely highlights the cruelty of the process.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, American capitalism depended upon working people faithfully serving their local mill or mine or factory. Hence the importance attached to so-called “small town” values: civic pride, steadiness, family, and so on. Such ideals that suited employers but that were also embraced by workers, who often built their lives around them.

Now many tell them they were suckers. Twenty-first century capitalism requires, it seems, a nimble, high-tech workforce, capable of relocating anywhere that business might temporarily settle. You believed your town and your church and your local football team counted for something? Tough luck, feller. The market’s moved on. If you don’t follow, the ruination that will befall you—unemployment, crime, drug abuse, et cetera—will be entirely your own fault.

On the coast of Siberia near Plover Bay, Hooper called at a tiny settlement of thirty Chukchi natives. He and his men were invited into one of the hovels half-buried in the ground, its roof little more than a network of bones and driftwood logs covered in walrus skins. Inside, Muir was surprised to find “a number of very snug, clean, luxurious bedrooms, whose sides, ceiling, and floor were made of fur; they were lighted by means of a pan of whale-oil with a bit of moss for a wick.” Muir found these people happy, well fed, and seemingly living in equilibrium with their world.

“After being out all day hunting in the stormy weather, the Chukchi withdraws into this furry sanctum, takes off all his clothing, and spreads his wearied limbs in luxurious ease, sleeping perfectly nude in the severest weather.”

To know how to live in and with such purportedly “savage” environments—to have the skills to vary, extend, enrich, or interact with them without simply reducing them to resources for infinite growth—has frequently been assumed to diminish your humanity.

Among European colonialist thinkers like John Locke, Native Americans were not felt to be capable of adding any human ingredients to land at all. In colonial India, “waste” lands were seen to be occupied by “criminal” people. Today, the Asian Development Bank is on record claiming that it is only by removing people from forested mountain areas that they can be brought to “normal life.”

The Zápara had survived into the twenty-first century, but they had entered it tipsy, and stayed that way. They still hunted, but men now walked for days without finding tapirs or even quail. They had resorted to shooting spider monkeys, whose flesh was formerly taboo. Again, Ana María pushed away the bowl proffered by her granddaughters, which contained chocolate-colored meat with a tiny, thumbless paw jutting over its side. She raised her knotted chin toward the rejected boiled monkey:

“When we’re down to eating our ancestors, what is left?”

What humanity came up with and held on to during its first three-million years was a social organization that worked well for people. It didn’t work well for products, for motorboats and can openers and operettas. It didn’t work well for the greedy, the ruthless, the power hungry. That’s what we have, a social organization that works beautifully for products—which just keep getting better and better every year—but very poorly for people, except for the greedy, the ruthless, the power hungry. Many of our ancestors lived in societies that every anthropologist agrees were non-hierarchical and markedly egalitarian. They weren’t structured so that a few at the top lived lives of luxury, a few more lived in the middle in comfort, and the masses at the bottom lived in poverty or near poverty, just struggling to survive. They weren’t riddled with crime, depression, madness, suicide, addiction. And when we came along with invitations to join our glorious civilization, they fought to the death to hold on to the life they had.

It was the outgrowth of human intelligence and experience. What didn’t work (and one has to suppose that things were tried that didn’t work) was abandoned—and abandoned by people who knew it wasn’t working.

What was left after all the trials was the tribe, which was evolutionarily stable, meaning not that it was perfect but that hundreds of thousands of years of natural selection—on a social level—was unable to produce an organization that worked better. To my mind the evolution of the tribe was an accomplishment of greater importance to the human race than all the advances of the Industrial Revolution put together. If we were still living tribally, we'd be facing a future measured in millions of years. As it is, we've walked on the moon but are now facing a future that can be measured in decades, if we go on living the way we're presently living.

In general, their societies are vastly superior to the ones Western people are running. For several reasons.

First, poverty. Western society is a big producer of poverty. This is especially true in Amazon countries like Brazil and Peru. Indigenous people entering industrial society will be left at the bottom of the bottom, socially and economically. Statistically, they frequently end up homeless and addicted to alcohol.

Second, environmental destruction. It is healthier to live in the forest than to live outside of it and destroy it for hydropower and gold mining and oil drilling and cattle ranching. People who grow up in the forest understand this. It is normal to choose a healthy society, where money is unnecessary and all your basic needs are met, than an unhealthy one where you sleep on concrete, or in boxes if you're rich, and spend your life toiling away in wage slavery. Or regular slavery. It is Brazil after all.

Third, freedom. People in our society spend thousands of dollars on camping equipment and air tickets just to spend a few days living lives that indigenous people have access to. Younger people in the tribe are free to leave and join Washichu culture, yet they generally don't. It's because industrial people don't know how to live. They work and work in jobs they hate, and destroy everything to support lifestyles that ultimately make them unhealthy and unhappy. Leaving the forest to become someone who destroys the forest is simply not appealing.

If you have a chance, go to Google Street View and look at Manaus in Brazil. The place is a shithole. It's a suburb in the middle of the forest, but all the trees have been cut down and there is no shade. People walking in the streets are obviously hot and unhappy.

It's arrogant to assume indigenous people want to become like us. They don't. They have no reason to. Our society doesn't treat human beings with respect. Our society is full of unnecessary stressful and semi-impossible bullshit, like finding a career or spending your life paycheck-to-paycheck in a minimum wage job. Check out Survival International's website and look at their interviews and travels with indigenous people. They are happy.

They like the forest. They have lived in the forest for tens of thousands of years, and it is not their responsibility to destroy the forest and go to the city because some alien culture has decided they don't have the right to live as they choose.

The forest is home to ancient hunter-gatherer communities as well as subsistence rice and vegetable farmers. But in recent years, the Laos government has been systematically seeking out and expelling hunter-gatherers and housing them in villages, where they are given some land to farm. Government officials find the presence of hunter-gatherers a national embarrassment that doesn't fit well with its desired image of a modern developed nation. But once removed from the forest, most of these people become sick and die. Entire tribes have been lost in this way. They believe that their protective spirits stay on in the forest, too far to provide protection.

Too bad they're in the way of capitalism.

A village that sustains itself and doesn't trade much is worth absolutely nothing to a capitalist economy. But if you drive them off their lands, you have land and potential resources, while the villagers need to join the work force and sell their labor power for money. They will need to compete with the other workers and this way lower the wages, and what little they receive as a wage will all flow back into the economy as they live their new wage slave life from paycheck to paycheck.

Welcome to the great capitalist system, where we make technological leaps only to employ them to maintain the system through artificial shortages. Where it is more economical to throw away half the food than to feed the poor. Where we employ tens of thousands of smart workers to monetize health care as salesmen and insurance workers, doing nothing but trying to extract as much money from each other as possible, while we let doctors and nurses work 20-hour shifts.

The great efficiency of capitalism is in its ability to sustain itself on the back of the working class, and that's it.

People with land and strong tribal bonds do not need money which is just an artificial, dissociated form of societal approval. Once people no longer have land, they are at the mercy of the trade economy and they have no choice but to use currency as a dissociated form of approval. This currency can buy them a simulation of everything their tribe once brought them, from acceptance to a comfortable home and food security. Removing people from their land cripples their resistance as the resulting dissociated nation, even when intact, is beset by the social problems which accompany grief, poverty, and racism from the wider society and struggling to meet the demands of the trade economy. States then depict nations as ethnic groupings, which they never were, instead of a network of dependencies

which was their true nature.

A world in which people are valued by the shit they own and not what they've done, know, or think. A world filled with commercialism that says every minute of the day: 'You are only as good as the product you buy.' And then proceeds to constantly try to fill that self sustaining void by shoving more products into it. Imagine if you actually could live off of how good a friend you were, how strong a role model you are, how many people love you and respect you, how much effort you put into making the world a better place than when you arrived. We all know these things and shove them to the very bottom of our mind in an effort to agree, en masse, that this lie of shit consumerism is actually as good as it gets. We don't want to admit we've been doing it wrong for a very long time. So that truth manifests in depression and abhorrent behaviors. Just because we're ignoring it doesn't mean it's going away. An uncleaned wound only festers into pus, it doesn't just fade away.

This is a story of fishermen in Palau, an island country in Micronesia. Seafood was once abundant there. The Palauan fisherman never had trouble finding enough fish to satisfy their own and their village's needs. The fisherman gave away the fish they didn't eat to other villagers. They lived in a state of 'subsistence affluence.'

After Japan colonized Palau in the 1920s the fishermen began to sell their fish to obtain attractive and exotic goods offered by the Japanese. The fishermen bought nets and motorized boats with the money, allowing them to catch more fish to sell in order to obtain more goods. They fished harder to harvest more fish and visited more distant areas of the reef to find them. Over the years, the fish abundance dropped.

The fishermen bought even bigger boats to catch the vanishing fish, but to do that they had to borrow money. They had to sell all their fish to pay off their loans. They stopped giving them away in the villages; instead they sold them to the outsiders and to other villagers. Now the people in the village had to work for the money to buy their food.

Pretty soon, there were not enough fish over the reefs for the fishermen to make payments on their loans, so the village sold their customary access rights to the fishing grounds. The people in the village began to eat imported fish in cans.

In a nutshell, that is the superhighway. Here are a few simple observations:

1. The superhighway is driven by trade.
2. Trade seduces local people to transform a local resource into a commodity which they exchange for commodities from other localities.

3. Transforming local resources into commodities—which can be sold to much larger communities (i.e. markets)—seduces the local people into over-harvesting or over-utilizing the local natural resource.
4. As the local resource-commodity becomes more difficult to obtain, local people are further seduced into adopting new and more aggressive technologies to harvest it—resulting in a further over-harvesting or over-utilization of the resource.
5. As the technologies required to harvest the local resource-commodity become more complex and expensive, the local people are forced to go into debt to acquire and operate those technologies.
6. To service their debt, the local people eventually are forced to consign to their creditors their natural ownership of the local resource itself. The local people are now the tenants and employees of the new owner—which, in one personification or another, is the superhighway.
7. The new tenants and employees now work for wages—which are set by the superhighway—and must use their wages to buy their subsistence in the form of commodities produced by the superhighway from the global network of local resources it now owns and controls.
8. In the end:
 - a) The superhighway literally owns the earth's resources.
 - b) Everyone in the world is a working tenant and employee (except for the 1% of the people in the world who are the creditors who own the superhighway itself).
 - c) Every local resource has been over-harvested or spoiled to the point of collapse or depletion.

It is this last point, of course, which is ultimately Rachael Carson's warning: Whether you're a creditor or debtor, an owner or employee, a landlord or tenant, when the local resources—and all resources are "local"—are spoiled, depleted, and cannot be restored or renewed, the pavement of the superhighway comes to an end. There is nothing left to exploit, nothing left to trade. Long before that point is reached, however, life stops being fun—first for the 99%, then, finally, for the 1%, which is basically everybody still traveling the superhighway

Most people enjoy helping others and few people enjoy abusing others. That is why the trade economy had to be invented and pretend its system

of global slavery was helping others. The old adage ‘Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime’ was co-opted by the trade economy to pretend it was helping people around the world become self-sufficient by creating jobs when it was doing the exact opposite. No one on earth has ever needed to have jobs created for them, we have all always found plenty to do. While waged labour has been considered lazy by its masters since its beginning—as have slaves—there has never been a free society that died from lack of industry to feed and shelter itself or care for its young. Human history is a history of industry as long as there is autonomy and free will over one’s own work.

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Dismantle the corporations destroying his river and home and he can catch his own fish.

A brutally endless cycle of printing replacement parts—this is how the economy works. If things don’t break and people didn’t screw up, more than half the jobs out there would be gone. The economy is mostly just sustaining itself while a very small percentage of people make technological progress.

“There’s the true agenda. Socialism, and the control of all means of production by the elite. We can’t be trusted to own the means of production, because we might do something harmful, so a very few ‘enlightened’ rulers need to make all of the decisions for us.”

Socialism does not mean transferring the means of production to the elite or to just a small group of “enlightened rulers.” Get that McCarthyist propaganda bullshit out of your head and read what Socialism is actually about. Government control of the means of production is just one potential outcome of a socialist society, the other is a democratic, or social ownership, of the means of production.

I recommend you read Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* as well, since I doubt you know what a pure capitalist society is either. The mongrel economic system that we have in this country right now that we loosely define as “capitalism” has already led to a society where the means of production are mostly owned by the elites. Have you not noticed that the only area of real economic growth and expansion that first world countries are experiencing right now is within the tech industry? And even then, this growth has resulted in the creation of even more useless jobs in providing services.

“The rest of humanity, the plebs, the slaves, should just shut up and do what they’re told. So, what, that we all have to live

in low energy poverty? It's what's necessary for the elite to have a nice place to live. Isn't that the most important thing?"

The irony is that this is the state of society that we are *already* living in. The only difference is that we have energy abundance and are ludicrously wasteful with it.

So the issue that critics of capitalism have is not that even feudalism and slavery would be better, but that there is still too much of feudalism and slavery within capitalism. Especially three points:

1. **The Class Society:** While individuals may rise and fall between the ranks—which was possible even in feudalism—there still is a strong class society under capitalism. The capitalists have the financial capital, social connections, and knowledge to lead the economy. They privately own the means of production. Therefore the working class is dependent on the capitalists, as they need access to means of production to work and survive.
2. **Exploitation:** Exploitation describes the simple fact that an employee does not receive all the value they create, because a part of it is taken by their employer. This is the easiest understood in a slave society: It is only economical to keep a slave if they create more value than it costs to maintain them. All the additional value is taken away by the slave master as a profit. And the slave has no say in what happens to that surplus value. This same exploitation is a cornerstone of capitalism. A wage worker may have some choice in which capitalist will exploit them, but they must be exploited or they wouldn't find a job.
3. **Alienation:** To understand alienation it's best to look at the original classless tribal society, like a hunter-gatherer tribe, or even a non-human animal. For the original living being, work is a natural part of their life. The horse needs to eat grass, the wolf needs to hunt, the humans need to sustain their tribe. Even though they cannot freely determine their work—because natural circumstances like hunger and the seasons will force them, or because they need to work and share with a tribe—this is still their very own natural labor. The wage worker's work in contrast is alienated in several ways:
 - a) The product of their work belongs to their employer, not themselves.

- b) The process of work is dictated to the worker. You're told to be there at some time, you're given specific tools, and tight guidelines on how to do your job.
- c) Alienation of the workers from their peers by the laws of competition.

Maybe you see from this why socialism is *not* the state ownership over the means of production, which effectively just boils down to some form of either state capitalism or bureaucratic feudalism.

The problems of exploitation can be eliminated by changing the concept of property to place the means of production under the control of a working-class democracy. Means of production are the land, resources, and machinery used to produce a society's wealth. The means are stuffs nobody personally needs to use—steel mills, freight trains, and vast tracts of farmland, for example, are means of production, while the tools in someone's garage, a Honda Civic, and a garden are not means of production.

Rights of private property under capitalism ensure the wealth produced by a society is controlled by a ruling minority that perpetuates its advantage over an exploited class of workers denied access to the means of producing their own wealth. With no access to the means, the working classes are subject to the terms and conditions dictated by the ruling class which owns them. Putting the means under democratic control would end this cycle of exploitation and the systemic inequality and poverty it produces.

And this is socialism—control over the means of production by the people, for the people.

“They were, simply, totally free. They were financially free, and secure, not because of their means but because of their wants. Ironically by being beggars, they had the equivalent of ‘fuck you’ money, which one can get more easily by being at the lowest rung than by being member of the income dependent class.”

Complete freedom is the last thing you would want if you have an organized religion to run. Total freedom is also a very, very bad thing for you if you have a firm to run.

As we can see, economists stopped one or two inches short of the notion of skin in the game. They never thought in risk terms to realize that an employee is a risk management strategy. Had economists had any interest in the ancients, they would have discovered the risk management strategy relied upon by Roman families who customarily had a slave for treasurer, the

person responsible for the finances of the household and the estate. Why? Because you can inflict a much higher punishment on a slave than a free person or a freedman—and you do not need to rely on the mechanism of the law for that. You can be bankrupted by an irresponsible or dishonest steward who can divert your estate's funds to Bithynia. You run a lower financial risk by having the steward function fulfilled by a slave.

In short, every organization wants a certain number of people associated with it to be deprived of a certain share of their freedom. How do you own these people? First, by conditioning and psychological manipulation; second by tweaking them to have some skin in the game, forcing them to have something significant to lose if they were to disobey authority—something hard to do with beggars who flaunted scorn of material possessions. In the orders of the mafia, things are simple: 'made men' can be whacked if the capo suspects lack of allegiance, with a transitory stay in the trunk of a car—and a guaranteed presence of the boss at their funerals. For other professions, skin in the game comes in more subtle form.

Slave ownership by companies has traditionally taken very curious forms. The best slave is someone you overpay and who knows it, terrified of losing his status. Multinational companies created the expat category, a sort of diplomat with a higher standard of living representing the firm far away and running its business there. A bank in New York sends a married employee with his family to a foreign location, say a tropical country with cheap labor, with perks and privileges such as country club membership, a driver, a nice company villa with a gardener, a yearly trip back home with the family in first class.

It keeps him there for a few years, enough to be addicted. He earns much more than the "locals," in a hierarchy reminiscent of colonial days. He builds a social life with other expats. He progressively wants to stay in the location much longer but he is far from headquarters and has no idea of his minute-to-minute standing in the firm except through signals. Eventually, like a diplomat, he begs for another location when time comes for a reshuffle.

Returning to the home office means loss of perks, having to revert to the unchanged base salary, and the person is now a total slave; a return to lower middle class life in the suburbs of New York City taking the commuter train, perhaps, god forbid, a bus, and eating a sandwich for lunch! The person is terrified when the big boss snubs him. Ninety five percent of the employee's mind will be on company politics which is exactly what the company wants. The big boss in the board room will have a supporter in the event of some intrigue.

All large corporations had employees with expat status and, in spite of its costs, it was an extremely effective strategy. Why? Because the further

from headquarters an employee is located, the more autonomous his unit, the more you want him to be a slave so he does nothing strange on his own.

At IBM, a corporation that embodied the ideal of the company man, the sales force gathered each morning to belt out the company anthem, “Ever Onward,” and to harmonize on the “Selling IBM” song, set to the tune of “Singin’ in the Rain.” “Selling IBM,” it began, “we’re selling IBM. What a glorious feeling, the world is our friend.” The ditty built to a stirring close:

“We’re always in trim, we work with a vim. We’re selling,
just selling, IBM.”

Then they went off to make their sales calls, proving that the admissions people at Harvard and Yale were probably right: only a certain type of fellow could possibly have been interested in kicking off his mornings this way.

A company man is someone who feels that he has something huge to lose if he doesn’t behave as a company man—that is, he has skin in the game. If the company man is, sort of, gone, he has been replaced by the companies person, thanks to both an expansion of the gender and a generalization of the function. For the person is no longer owned by a company but by something worse: the idea that he needs to be employable.

A companies person is someone who feels that he has something huge to lose if he loses his employability—that is, he or she has skin in the game. The employable person is embedded in an industry, with fear of upsetting not just their employer, but other potential employers. An employee is—by design—more valuable inside a firm than outside of it, that is more valuable to the employer than the market

Perhaps by definition an employable person is the one that you will never find in a history book because these people are designed to never leave their mark on the course of events. They are, by design, uninteresting to historians.

The trade economy promised that slavery could be abolished as work could be freely accepted or refused and those who worked hardest or best would receive the greatest reward. By making autonomy and social acceptance available only with currency and currency available to the lower classes only through jobs, the merchant class was able to equate slavery with freedom. Instead of managing a lower class of slaves who demanded freedom, they gave the lower class their freedom and convinced them to demand slavery. People who would never argue that slaves were better off under slavery as they had food and housing would spend the next centuries arguing exactly that for wage slavery.

“Every level of the contracting food chain is grotesquely overfed except the bottom rung where the actual work is carried out.”

True, a contractor (the real kind, not the Uber-kind) has downside, a financial penalty that can be built-into the contract, in addition to reputational costs. But consider that an employee will always have more risk. And conditional on someone being an employee such a person will be risk averse. By having been employees they signal a certain type of domestication.

Someone who has been employed for a while is giving you the evidence of submission. Submission is displayed by having gone through years of the ritual of giving up his personal freedom for nine hours every day, punctual arrival at an office, denying himself his own schedule, and not having beaten up anyone. You have an obedient, housebroken dog.

Employees are more risk averse, they fear being fired more than contractors do being sued. Even when the employees ceases to be an employee, they will remain diligent. The longer the person stays with a company, the more emotional investment they will have in staying and, when leaving, are guaranteed in doing an “honorable exit.”

It’s not about deciding to be a cab driver. It’s about accepting the low pay and complete lack of any financial stability. 66% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck—a fragile existence—meaning they’re one check away from homelessness. You would think they’d be marching in the streets demanding change. They’re not. Another phrase comes to mind: quiet desperation.

See, if you’re gonna live like that you need something to keep you going. Something to let you ignore just how terrifyingly precarious your entire life is. Stupidity only goes so far. Logic won’t get you out of that. If you start thinking logically you’ll demand better condition. That’s where the Job Creator narrative (among others) comes in. You can’t sustain your blind faith in capitalism—not shared by the capitalists, who rely heavily on the government to bail them out every 10–15 years when they tank the economy with their gambling—without a powerful narrative that shifts your self image away from the reality of your one-major-expense-away-from-disaster life and to one of an upper middle class working man who’s just a little down on his luck.

They can’t legally kill the people they deem worthless so they starve them and dehumanize them and mistreat them in other ways. This ensures the best goes to their and their friends’ offspring. Have to start breaking down your children’s future servants early on. How else could you get a psychologically, emotionally, and socially healthy child to stand in a box for

30+ hours a week 5–10 years later serving people who get to play and run free and explore outside?

“The problem with that view is the ‘lifestyle’ of the guy making \$30k a year is currently ‘living without healthcare and eating poorly.’ The 15 years you spend avoiding the doctor might cost you a lot of years of that supposedly exciting retirement. I make substantially more than the \$30k/year person. But I keep finding things to spend money on. Like when my catalytic converter breaks in my car and needs a \$2500 repair or I can’t drive to work. Or like when I have to decide between a \$6000 surgery this year or a potential irreparable situation down the road. My allergy medicines cost me \$60/month. The alternative is expensive ER visits for an epipen when it finally triggers an asthma attack. My job causes a lethargic lifestyle that will either cost me medical bills 20 years from now or require significant investment in exercise today to mitigate. That leads to a crippling lack of free time which is part of why I end up paying a therapist monthly. The other part is the knowledge that at any time, I can be terminated with no severance because this is a ‘right to work’ state, so somehow I also always need to be networking to be ready to change jobs at the drop of a hat. Then the rent goes up. Every year, 10%. Renting is for suckers, I should have a house, right? That’s going up 10% every year, too, including the down payment. So I have to move further out. Which makes the gas cost more, and the commute takes more of my free time.

I spend my time at my job to pay for the things I need to make sure I get to the job on time. I’d be bankrupt if I were doing the things that actually make me happy in life. \$30k is twice what I made when I had a job I was happy with. Every article talking about how terrible my generation is at saving? I’ve got twice the money of the ‘average’ member of my generation. Every article talking about where I should be for my age? I’m not even halfway. But they bitch anyway that I’m not buying new cars or having children to feed their industry. My great-grandfather got to retire at 50, buy an RV, and travel the country. I’m going to be lucky if I’ve got a house by then. Because I’m not ‘hustling’ enough? Please. I’ve got more education than the last five generations of my family combined. Somehow that hasn’t translated into wealth like it did for them. I guess I just expect handouts?”

There's a Walmart employee event down in Bentonville, Arkansas every year. It's by invitation only. I think we had one person from our store go in the three years I worked for them. He described the entire experience as somewhere between cult and bat shit fucking insane. Apparently, those who get to go have generally been absolutely brainwashed into thinking this is some kind of major honor. For example: The lady next to him on the bus was super excited and talking about how long she'd worked for the company and how long she's waited to go on this trip. He says he's only worked for the company for about three months.

Not only did she get angry and refuse to interact with him the rest of the drive down, she told everyone else and they all decided he hadn't earned the right to be there either. He became a social pariah because he wasn't fully indoctrinated into the Walmart cult. At the actual event people rabidly cheered for everything. The cult leadership got applause like they were Tom Cruise. But wait, turns out the leadership got more screaming and cheering than Tom Cruise, who actually got paraded out on stage to talk to the workers about how awesome they are for working at Walmart. And these people just ate it all up.

I don't do the story justice though. The way he tells it, it's kind of a frightening, surreal trip through the psyche of a mob of ignorant people, and really makes you worry about the future in general.

Hierarchies aren't natural phenomena within the human race. Outside of parenting, human beings aren't born with the inclination to be ruled, controlled, managed, and supervised by other human beings. Hierarchies are artificial constructs designed to serve a purpose. They are a necessity within any society that boasts high degrees of wealth and power inequities. They are a necessity for maintaining these inequities and ensuring they are not challenged from below.

If you go to the city of Washington, and you examine the pages of the congressional directory you will find that almost all of them claim—these corporation lawyers and cowardly politicians, members of Congress and misrepresentatives of the masses—in glowing terms that they have risen from the ranks to places of eminence and distinction. I am very glad I cannot make that claim for myself. I would be ashamed to admit that I had risen from the ranks. When I rise it will be with the ranks, and not from the ranks.

Our house was outside the city, off one of the blacktop roads. We had us a big dog my daddy would keep on a chain in the front yard. A big part German shepherd. I hated the chain but we didn't have a fence—we were right off the road there. But he had dignity. What he'd do, he'd never go out to the length of the chain. He'd never even get out to where the chain

got tight. Even if the mailman pulled up, or a salesman. Out of dignity, this dog pretended like he chose this one area to stay in that just happened to be inside the length of the chain. Nothing outside of that area right there interested him. He just had zero interest. So he never noticed the chain. He didn't hate it. The chain. He just up and made it not relevant. Maybe he wasn't pretending—maybe he really up and chose that little circle for his own world. He had a power to him. All of his life on that chain. I loved that damn dog.

To enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold, for there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself. If you flatter yourself that you are all over comfortable, and have been so a long time, then you cannot be said to be comfortable any more.

We have been bribed with privileges. Bought off, conned. Our comfort has become our chains, the rabbit we chase around the track. Never satisfied, never satiated.

“For those of us on the inside, we don't deserve any sympathy. But I'd like to offer a glimmer of insight into the conflict that those of us with any sort of conscience wrestle with because it is a conflict which is going to shape our societies over the next generation. Increasingly, if you want to get and hang on to a middle class job, that job will involve dishonesty or exploitation of others in some way.”

We must be grateful that good and decent people sometimes start out believing Orwellian tales. Dull, cowardly, and servile people never blow whistles.

“The basic point is that ‘ordinary men’ can find themselves committing heinous acts because their fear of ostracism and humiliation is greater than their fear of dying or killing.”

Please accept the fact that you have painted yourself into a corner, and that you have to leave promptly—with an apology and a payment plan—in order to avoid any further destruction to your professional and personal world. Your itinerary of self-destruction is a stellar one.

“If they are given the labor it is theirs. My grandfather owns a refrigeration company that employs 10 people. They give him the labor so that they get paid. They are not slaves.”

They are not slaves in the sense that your grandfather owns them, but when your choice is between a subsistence wage and starvation, you are essentially left with no choice. How and why is it that your grandfather is the one that owns his business, and not one of his employees for example? I'm sure he works very hard, but working hard isn't in and of itself a prerequisite for success. Firstly, he would need to be of a sound mind and body. You can't run a refrigerator company if you are mentally impaired or missing a limb. Secondly, he would need to be in the right place and the right time to succeed. If he were born 1,000 years in the past I doubt many people would need his services, likewise if he were born in Mongolia, where most people don't have refrigeration or even electricity, I doubt he would be able to succeed. Thirdly, he needs to have capital, or access to the capital necessary to found a company. To get this he needs to have cultural capital (be a person who is trusted enough by banks to be loaned money). Above all, he needs the intelligence and the drive to succeed.

Obviously, not everyone has these. Does this make them less intrinsically valuable people? Is it just that a person born in Somalia, surrounded by famine and civil war, should die of starvation, while your grandfather succeeds, just because your grandfather was lucky enough to be born where he was? Again, I'm sure your grandfather worked very hard to get where he is, and I'm not trying to take that away from him. The problem is that one's success is predicated on chance and circumstance. Can you really say that he has more of a right to the life that he lives than someone else?

But you can never actually prioritize workers when social relations are premised on the idea that in order to eat, most people must sell their work for a price set by capitalists, and then those capitalists get to keep all the value produced by that labor in excess of wages and other overhead—what we call profits—as a reward for owning the business. That setup prioritizes bosses by nature, and leaves workers fighting over scraps.

A Profound Violence

A report comparing employment in the US between 1910 and 2000 gives us a clear picture—one pretty much exactly echoed in the UK. Over the course of the last century, the number of workers employed as domestic servants, in industry, and in the farm sector has collapsed dramatically. At the same time, “professional, managerial, clerical, sales, and service workers” tripled, growing “from one-quarter to three-quarters of total employment.” In other words, productive jobs have, just as predicted, been largely automated away. Even if you count industrial workers globally, including the toiling masses in India and China, such workers are still not nearly so large a percentage of the world population as they used to be.

But rather than allowing a massive reduction of working hours to free the world’s population to pursue their own projects, pleasures, visions, and ideas, we have seen the ballooning not even so much of the service sector as of the administrative sector, up to and including the creation of whole new industries like financial services or telemarketing, or the unprecedented expansion of sectors like corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources, and public relations. And these numbers do not even reflect on all those people whose job is to provide administrative, technical, or security support for these industries, or for that matter the whole host of ancillary industries—dog-washers, all-night pizza deliverymen, et cetera—that only exist because everyone else is spending so much of their time working in all the other ones.

These are bullshit jobs.

It’s as if someone were out there making up pointless jobs just for the sake of keeping us all working. And here, precisely, lies the mystery. In capitalism, this is precisely what is not supposed to happen. Sure, in the old inefficient Socialist states like the Soviet Union, where employment was considered both a right and a sacred duty, the system made up as many jobs as it had to. This is why in Soviet department stores it took three clerks to sell a piece of meat. But, of course, this is the very sort of problem market competition is supposed to fix. According to economic theory, at least, the last thing a profit-seeking firm is going to do is shell out money to

workers they don't really need to employ. Still, somehow, it happens. While corporations may engage in ruthless downsizing, the layoffs and speed-ups invariably fall on that class of people who are actually making, moving, fixing, and maintaining things. Through some strange alchemy no one can quite explain, the number of salaried paper pushers ultimately seems to expand, and more and more employees find themselves—not unlike Soviet workers, actually—working forty- or even fifty-hour weeks on paper but effectively working fifteen hours just as Keynes predicted, since the rest of their time is spent organizing or attending motivational seminars, updating their Facebook profiles, or downloading TV box sets.

The answer clearly isn't economic: it's moral and political. The ruling class has figured out that a happy and productive population with free time on their hands is a mortal danger. Think of what started to happen when this even began to be approximated in the sixties. And, on the other hand, the feeling that work is a moral value in itself, and that anyone not willing to submit themselves to some kind of intense work discipline for most of their waking hours deserves nothing, is extraordinarily convenient for them.

And what does it say about our society that it seems to generate an extremely limited demand for talented poet-musicians but an apparently infinite demand for specialists in corporate law? Answer: If one percent of the population controls most of the disposable wealth, what we call "the market" reflects what they think is useful or important, not anybody else.

There is a profound psychological violence here. How can one even begin to speak of dignity in labor when one secretly feels one's job should not exist? How can it not create a sense of deep rage and resentment? Yet it is the peculiar genius of our society that its rulers have figured out a way to ensure that rage is directed precisely against those who actually do get to do meaningful work. For instance: in our society, there seems to be a general rule that, the more obviously one's work benefits other people, the less one is likely to be paid for it. Again, an objective measure is hard to find, but one easy way to get a sense is to ask: What would happen were this entire class of people to simply disappear? Say what you like about nurses, garbage collectors, or mechanics, it's obvious that were they to vanish in a puff of smoke, the results would be immediate and catastrophic. A world without teachers or dockworkers would soon be in trouble, and even one without science-fiction writers or ska musicians would clearly be a lesser place. It's not entirely clear how humanity would suffer were all private equity CEOs, lobbyists, PR researchers, actuaries, telemarketers, bailiffs, or legal consultants to similarly vanish. Many suspect it might improve markedly. Yet apart from a handful of well-touted exceptions—doctors, engineers, et cetera—the rule holds surprisingly well.

If someone had designed a work regime perfectly suited to maintaining the power of finance capital, it's hard to see how he or she could have done a better job. Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited. The remainder are divided between a terrorized stratum of the universally reviled unemployed and a larger stratum who are basically paid to do nothing, in positions designed to make them identify with the perspectives and sensibilities of the ruling class (managers, administrators, et cetera)—particularly its financial avatars—but, at the same time, foster a simmering resentment against anyone whose work has clear and undeniable social value. Clearly, the system was never consciously designed. It emerged from almost a century of trial and error. But it is the only explanation for why, despite our technological capacities, we are not all working three- to four-hour days.

I would like this book to be an arrow aimed at the heart of our civilization. There is something very wrong with what we have made ourselves. We have become a civilization based on work—not even productive work but work as an end and meaning in itself. We have come to believe that men and women who do not work harder than they wish at jobs they do not particularly enjoy are bad people unworthy of love, care, or assistance from their communities. It is as if we have collectively acquiesced to our own enslavement. The main political reaction to our awareness that half the time we are engaged in utterly meaningless or even counterproductive activities—usually under the orders of a person we dislike—is to rankle with resentment over the fact there might be others out there who are not in the same trap. As a result, hatred, resentment, and suspicion have become the glue that holds society together. This is a disastrous state of affairs. I wish it to end. If this book can in any way contribute to that end, it will have been worth whatever the costs.

When our own definitions produce results that seem intuitively wrong to us—it's because we're not aware of what we really think. The label 'bullshit jobs' clearly strikes a chord with many people. It makes sense to them in some way. This means they have, at least on some sort of tacit intuitive level, criteria in their minds that allow them to say 'That was such a bullshit job' or 'That one was bad, but I wouldn't say it was exactly bullshit.' Many people with pernicious jobs feel the label fits them; others clearly don't.

Feudal overlord is not a bullshit job. Kings, earls, emperors, pashas, emirs, squires, zamindars, landlords, and the like might, arguably, be useless people; many of us would insist (and I would be inclined to agree) that they play pernicious roles in human affairs. But they don't think so. So unless the king is secretly a Marxist, or a Republican, one can say confidently that 'king' is not a bullshit job. This is a useful point to bear in mind

because most people who do a great deal of harm in the world are protected against the knowledge that they do so. Or they allow themselves to believe the endless accretion of paid flunkies and yes-men that inevitably assemble around them to come up with reasons why they are really doing good. Nowadays, these are sometimes referred to as think tanks. This is just as true of financial-speculating investment bank CEOs as it is of military strongmen in countries such as North Korea and Azerbaijan. It would appear to be a general truth that the more harm a category of powerful people do in the world, the more yes-men and propagandists will tend to accumulate around them, coming up with reasons why they are really doing good—and the more likely it is that at least some of those powerful people will believe them.

There are three broad categories of jobs: useful jobs (which may or may not be shit jobs), bullshit jobs, and a small but ugly penumbra of jobs such as gangsters, slumlords, top corporate lawyers, or hedge fund CEOs, made up of people who are basically just selfish bastards and don't really pretend to be anything else. This three-part list is not meant to be comprehensive. For instance, it leaves out the category of what's often referred to as "guard labor," some of which (unnecessary supervisors) is bullshit, but much of which is simply obnoxious or bad.

The Iron Law of Liberalism: any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs.

Just as Socialist regimes had created millions of dummy proletarian jobs, capitalist regimes somehow ended up presiding over the creation of millions of dummy white-collar jobs instead.

If 37 percent to 40 percent of jobs are completely pointless, and at least 50 percent of the work done in non-pointless office jobs is equally pointless, we can probably conclude that at least half of all work being done in our society could be eliminated without making any real negative effects at all. Actually, the number is almost certainly higher, because this would not even be taking into consideration second-order bullshit jobs: real jobs done in support of those engaged in bullshit. We could easily become societies of leisure and institute a twenty-hour workweek. Maybe even a ten-hour week. Instead, we find ourselves, as a society, condemned to spending most of our time at work, performing tasks that we feel make no difference in the world

whatsoever. Perhaps a benefit of the Wuhan Flu overreaction is that we might be able to prove this fact more concretely.

Just as a thought experiment: imagine you are a feudal class extracting 50 percent of every peasant household's product. If so, you are in possession of an awful lot of food. Enough, in fact, to support a population exactly as large as that of peasant food producers. You have to do something with it—and there are only so many people any given feudal lord can keep around as chefs, wine stewards, scullery maids, harem eunuchs, musicians, jewelers, and the like. Even after you've taken care to ensure you have enough men trained in the use of weapons to suppress any potential rebellion, there's likely to be a great deal left over. As a result, indigents, runaways, orphans, criminals, women in desperate situations, and other dislocated people will inevitably begin to accumulate around your mansion (because, after all, that's where all the food is). You can drive them away, but then they're likely to form a dangerous vagabond class that might become a political threat. The obvious thing to do is to slap a uniform on them and assign them some minor or unnecessary task. It makes you look good, and at least that way, you can keep an eye on them.

“They had this thing about us not being able to just do nothing, even if the shop was empty. So we couldn't just sit at the till and read a magazine. Instead, the manager made up utterly meaningless work for us to do, like going round the whole shop and checking that things were in date (even though we knew for a fact they were because of the turnover rate) or rearranging products on shelves in even more pristine order than they already were. The very, very worst thing about the job was that it gave you so much time to think, because the work was so lacking in any intellectual demand. So I just thought so much about how bullshit my job was, how it could be done by a machine, how much I couldn't wait for full communism, and just endlessly theorized the alternatives to a system where millions of human beings have to do that kind of work for their whole lives in order to survive. I couldn't stop thinking about how miserable it made me.”

This is what happens, of course, when you first open the entire world of social and political possibility to a young mind and then tell it to stop thinking and tidy up already tidy shelves.

Experiments have shown that if one first allows a child to discover and experience the delight in being able to cause a certain effect, and then

suddenly denies it to them, the results are dramatic: first rage, refusal to engage, and then a kind of catatonic folding in on oneself and withdrawing from the world entirely. This is the trauma of failed influence and some suspect that such traumatic experiences might lie behind many mental health issues later in life.

According to classical economic theory, *homo economicus*, or “economic man”—that is, the model human being that lies behind every prediction made by the discipline—is assumed to be motivated above all by a calculus of costs and benefits. All the mathematical equations by which economists bedazzle their clients, or the public, are founded on one simple assumption: that everyone, left to his own devices, will choose the course of action that provides the most of what he wants for the least expenditure of resources and effort. It is the simplicity of the formula that makes the equations possible: if one were to admit that humans have complicated motivations, there would be too many factors to take into account, it would be impossible to properly weight them, and predictions could not be made. Therefore, while an economist will say that while of course everyone is aware that human beings are not really selfish, calculating machines, assuming that they are makes it possible to explain a very large proportion of what humans do, and this proportion—and only this—is the subject matter of economic science. This is a reasonable statement as far as it goes. The problem is there are many domains of human life where the assumption clearly doesn’t hold—and some of them are precisely in the domain of what we like to call the economy.

The underlying assumption is that if humans are offered the option to be parasites, of course they’ll take it. In fact, almost every bit of available evidence indicates that this is not the case. Human beings certainly tend to rankle over what they consider excessive or degrading work; few may be inclined to work at the pace or intensity that “scientific managers” have, since the 1920s, decided they should; people also have a particular aversion to being humiliated. But leave them to their own devices, and they almost invariably rankle even more at the prospect of having nothing useful to do.

Most people who have ever existed have assumed that normal human work patterns take the form of periodic intense bursts of energy, followed by relaxation, followed by slowly picking up again toward another intense bout. This is what farming is like, for instance: all-hands-on-deck mobilization around planting and harvest, but otherwise, whole seasons taken up largely by minding and mending things, minor projects, and puttering around. But even daily tasks, or projects such as building a house or preparing for a feast, tend to take roughly this form. In other words, the traditional student’s pattern of lackadaisical study leading up to intense cramming before exams

and then slacking off again—a punctuated hysteria—is typical of how human beings have always tended to go about necessary tasks if no one forces them to act otherwise. Some students may engage in cartoonishly exaggerated versions of this pattern. But good students figure out how to get the pace roughly right. Not only is it what humans will do if left to their own devices, but there is no reason to believe that forcing them to act otherwise is likely to cause greater efficiency or productivity. Often it will have precisely the opposite effect.

Obviously, some tasks are more dramatic and therefore lend themselves better to alternating intense, frenetic bursts of activity and relative torpor. This has always been true. Hunting animals is more demanding than gathering vegetables, even if the latter is done in sporadic bursts; building houses better lends itself to heroic efforts than cleaning them. As these examples imply, in most human societies, men tend to try—and usually succeed—to monopolize the most exciting, dramatic kinds of work; they'll set the fires that burn down the forest on which they plant their fields, for example, and, if they can, relegate to women the more monotonous and time-consuming tasks, such as weeding. One might say that men will always take for themselves the kind of jobs one can tell stories about afterward, and try to assign women the kind you tell stories during.

“Idle fingers knit sweaters for the devil,” my great-grandmother used to warn her daughter back in Poland. But this kind of traditional moralizing is actually quite different from the modern “If you have time to lean, you have time to clean,” because its underlying message is not that you should be working but that you shouldn't be doing anything else. Essentially, my great-grandmother was saying that anything a teenage girl in a Polish shtetl might be getting up to when she wasn't knitting was likely to cause trouble. Similarly, one can find occasional warnings by nineteenth-century plantation owners in the American South or the Caribbean that it's better to keep slaves busy even at made-up tasks than to allow them to idle about in the off-season; the reason given always being that if slaves were left with time on their hands, they were likely to start plotting to flee or revolt. The modern morality of “You're on my time; I'm not paying you to lounge around” is very different. It is the indignity of a man who feels he's being robbed. A worker's time is not his own; it belongs to the person who bought it. Insofar as an employee is not working, she is stealing something for which the employer paid good money (or, anyway, has promised to pay good money for at the end of the week). By this moral logic, it's not that idleness is dangerous. Idleness is theft.

Historically speaking, the institution of wage labor is a sophisticated latecomer. The very idea of wage labor involves two difficult conceptual steps.

First, it requires the abstraction of man's labor from both his person and his work. When one purchases an object from an ancient craftsman, one has not bought his labor but the object, which he has produced under his own time and his own conditions of work. But when one purchases an abstraction, labor power, which the purchaser then uses it at a time and under conditions which he, the purchaser, not the "owner" of the labor power, determines (and for which he normally pays after he has consumed it). Second, the wage-labor system requires the establishment of a method of measuring the labor one has purchased, for purposes of payment, commonly by introducing a second abstraction, labor time. We should not underestimate the magnitude, speaking socially rather than intellectually, of these two conceptual steps; even the Roman jurists found them difficult.

To be a slave, to be forced to surrender one's free will and become the mere instrument of another, even temporarily, was considered the most degrading thing that could possibly befall a human being. As a result, the overwhelming majority of examples of wage labor that we do encounter in the ancient world are of people who are already slaves: a slave potter might indeed arrange with his master to work in a ceramics factory, sending half the wages to his master and keeping the rest for himself. Slaves might occasionally do free contract work as well—say, working as porters at the docks. Free men and women would not. And this remained true until fairly recently: wage labor, when it did occur in the Middle Ages, was typical of commercial port cities such as Venice, or Malacca, or Zanzibar, where it was carried out almost entirely by unfree labor.

The only notable exception to this rule is that free citizens in democracies were often willing to hire themselves out to the government for public works: but this is because the government being seen as a collective of which the citizen was a member, it was essentially seen as working for oneself.

“He is not the sort of a man who looks at a clock merely to see what time it is. Not that he lacks interest in the content of clocks, which is of concern to everyone from moment to moment, but he is far more interested in how a clock creates the idea of ‘moment to moment.’ He attends to the philosophy of clocks, to clocks as metaphor, about which our education has had little to say and clock makers nothing at all.”

The clock is a piece of power machinery whose product is seconds and minutes. In manufacturing such a product, the clock has the effect of disassociating time from human events and thus nourishes the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences. Moment

to moment, it turns out, is not God's conception, or nature's. It is man conversing with himself about and through a piece of machinery he created. Beginning in the fourteenth century, the clock made us into time-keepers, and then time-savers, and now time-servers.

Human beings have long been acquainted with the notion of absolute, or sidereal, time by observing the heavens, where celestial events happen with exact and predictable regularity. But the skies are typically treated as the domain of perfection. Priests or monks might organize their lives around celestial time, but life on earth was typically assumed to be messier. Below the heavens, there is no absolute yardstick to apply. To give an obvious example: if there are twelve hours from dawn to dusk, there's little point saying a place is three hours' walk away when you don't know the season when someone is traveling, since winter hours will be half the length of summer ones. In Madagascar, rural people—who have little use for clocks—still often describe distance the old-fashioned way and say that to walk to another village would take two cookings of a pot of rice. In medieval Europe, people spoke similarly of something as taking “three paternosters,” or two boilings of an egg. This sort of thing is extremely common. In places without clocks, time is measured by actions rather than action being measured by time.

There is a classic statement on the subject by an anthropologist; he's speaking of the Nuer, a pastoral people of East Africa:

“The Nuer have no expression equivalent to ‘time’ in our language, and they cannot, therefore, as we can, speak of time as though it were something actual, which passes, can be wasted, can be saved, and so forth. I do not think that they ever experience the same feeling of fighting against time or having to coordinate activities with an abstract passage of time, because their points of reference are mainly the activities themselves, which are generally of a leisurely character. Events follow a logical order, but they are not controlled by an abstract system, there being no autonomous points of reference to which activities have to conform with precision. Nuer are fortunate.”

By the fourteenth century, most European towns had created clock towers—usually funded and encouraged by the local merchant guild. It was these same merchants who developed the habit of placing human skulls on their desks as *memento mori*, to remind themselves that they should make good use of their time because each chime of the clock brought them one hour closer to death. The dissemination of domestic clocks and then

pocket watches took much longer, coinciding largely with the advent of the industrial revolution beginning in the late 1700s, but once it did happen, it allowed for similar attitudes to diffuse among the middle classes more generally. Sidereal time, the absolute time of the heavens, had to come to earth and began to regulate even the most intimate daily affairs. But time was simultaneously a fixed grid, and a possession. Everyone was encouraged to see time as did the medieval merchant: as a finite property to be carefully budgeted and disposed of, much like money. What's more, the new technologies also allowed any person's fixed time on earth to be chopped up into uniform units that could be bought and sold for money.

What I want to underline here is that this was both a technological and a moral change. It is usually laid at the feet of Puritanism, and Puritanism certainly had something to do with it; but one could argue equally compellingly that the more dramatic forms of Calvinist asceticism were just overblown versions of a new time sense that was, in one way or another, reshaping the sensibilities of the middle classes across the Christian world. As a result, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, starting in England, the old episodic style of working came increasingly to be viewed as a social problem. The middle classes came to see the poor as poor largely because they lacked time discipline; they spent their time recklessly, just as they gambled away their money.

Meanwhile, workers rebelling against oppressive conditions began adopting the same language. Many early factories didn't allow workers to bring their own timepieces, since the owner regularly played fast and loose with the factory clock. Before long, however, workers were arguing with employers about hourly rates, demanding fixed-hour contracts, overtime, time-and-a-half, the twelve-hour day, and then the eight-hour day. But the very act of demanding "free time," however understandable under the circumstances, had the effect of subtly reinforcing the idea that when a worker was "on the clock," his time truly did belong to the person who had bought it—a concept that would have seemed perverse and outrageous to their great-grandparents, as, indeed, to most people who have ever lived.

The official line is that we all have rights and live in a democracy. Other unfortunates who aren't free like we are have to live in police states. These victims obey orders or else, no matter how arbitrary. The authorities keep them under regular surveillance. State bureaucrats control even the smallest details of everyday life. The officials who push them around are answerable only to higher-ups, public or private. Either way, dissent or disobedience are punished. Informers report regularly to the authorities. All this is supposed to be a very bad thing. And so it is, although it is nothing but a description of the modern workplace—or life during the Wuhan Flu panic.

While it is quite rare for supervisors to tell workers directly they are supposed to pretend to work, it does happen occasionally. One car salesman says:

“According to my superiors, if I’m being paid a salary, I have to be doing ‘something’ and ‘pretend’ to be productive even though there’s no real value to the work. So, I spend several hours a day making phone calls to nobody. Does that make any sense?”

Too much honesty in such matters appears to be a profound taboo almost anywhere. I remember once in graduate school, I had a gig doing research for a Marxist professor who among many other things specialized in the politics of workplace resistance. I figured if I could be honest with anyone, it would be him, so after he had explained to me how the timesheet worked I asked, “So how much can I lie? How many hours is it okay to just make up?” He looked at me as if I’d just said I was a starseed from another galaxy so I quickly changed the subject and assumed the answer was ‘a discreet amount.’

If being forced to pretend to work is so infuriating because it makes clear the degree to which you are entirely under another person’s power, then bullshit jobs are, as noted above, entire jobs organized on that same principle. You’re working, or pretending to work—not for any good reason, at least any good reason you can find—but just for the sake of working. Hardly surprising it should rankle. But there’s one obvious difference, too, between bullshit jobs and a dishwasher being made to clean the baseboards in a restaurant. In the latter case, there is a demonstrable bully. You know exactly who is pushing you around. In the case of bullshit jobs, it’s rarely so clear-cut. Who exactly is forcing you to pretend to work? The company? Society? Some strange confluence of social convention and economic forces that insist no one should be given the means of life without working, even if there is not enough real work to go around? At least in the traditional workplace, there was someone against whom you could direct your rage. There is something terrible, ridiculous, outrageous going on, but it’s not clear whether you are even allowed to acknowledge it, and it’s usually even less clear who or what can be blamed.

Psychologists sometimes refer to these kind of dilemmas as “scriptlessness.” Psychological studies, for instance, find that men or women who had experienced unrequited love during adolescence were in most cases eventually able to come to terms with the experience and showed few permanent emotional scars. But for those who had been the objects of unrequited love,

it was quite another matter. Many still struggled with guilt and confusion. One major reason, researchers concluded, was precisely the lack of cultural models. Anyone who falls in love with someone who does not return their affections has thousands of years' worth of romantic literature to tell them exactly how they are supposed to feel; however, while this literature provides detailed insight on the experience of being Cyrano, it generally tells you very little about how you are supposed to feel—let alone what you're supposed to do—if you're Roxanne. Many, probably most, bullshit jobs involve a similar agonizing scriptlessness. Not only are the codes of behavior ambiguous, no one is even sure what they are supposed to say or how they are supposed to feel about their situation.

Or you could be like Nouri. Nouri had the misfortune to stumble through a series of relentlessly absurd and/or abusive corporate environments. He managed to keep himself sane—at least to the degree of fending off complete mental and physical breakdown—by finding a different sense of purpose: he began to carry out a detailed analysis of the social and institutional dynamics that lie behind failed corporate projects. Effectively, he became an anthropologist. Then he discovered politics, and began diverting time and resources toward plotting to destroy the very system that created such ridiculous jobs. At this point, he reports, his health began to markedly improve.

There are a million ways to make a human feel unworthy. The United States, so often a pioneer in such areas, has, among other things, perfected a quintessentially American mode of political discourse that consists in lecturing others about what jerks they are to think they have a right to something. Call it 'rights-scolding.' Rights-scolding has many forms and manifestations. There is a right-wing version, which centers on excoriating others for thinking the world owes them a living, or owes them medical treatment when they are gravely ill, or maternity leave, or workplace safety, or equal protection under the law. But there is also a left-wing version, which consists of telling people to "check their privilege" when they feel they are entitled to pretty much anything that some poorer or more oppressed person does not have. According to these standards, even if one is beaten over the head by a truncheon and dragged off to jail for no reason, one can only complain about the injustice if one first specifies all the categories of people to which this is more likely to occur.

Rights-scolding may have seen its most baroque development in North America, but it has spread all over the world with the rise of neoliberal market ideologies. Under such conditions, it's totally understandable that demanding an entirely new, unfamiliar, right—such as the right to meaningful employment—might seem a hopeless project. It's hard enough nowadays

being taken seriously when asking for things you're already supposed to have. The burden of rights-scolding falls above all on the younger generations. In most wealthy countries, the current crop of people in their twenties and thirties represents the first generation in more than a century that can, on the whole, expect opportunities and living standards substantially worse than those enjoyed by their parents. Yet at the same time, they are lectured relentlessly from both left and right on their sense of entitlement for feeling they might deserve anything else. This makes it especially difficult for younger people to complain about meaningless employment.

One might imagine that leaving millions of well-educated young men and women without any real work responsibilities but with access to the internet—which is, potentially, at least, a repository of almost all human knowledge and cultural achievement—might spark some sort of Renaissance. Nothing remotely along these lines has taken place. Instead, the situation has sparked an efflorescence of social media—Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter; basically, of forms of electronic media that lend themselves to being produced and consumed while pretending to do something else.

The question of why one player won a game rather than another is different from the question of how hard the game is to play. Or why people are playing the game to begin with. That's a third question. Similarly, in cases like these, where one is looking at a broad pattern of social change, such as the rise of bullshit jobs, I would propose we really need to look not at two but at three different levels of explanation:

1. The particular reasons any given individual ends up homeless
2. The larger social and economic forces that lead to increased levels of homelessness (say, a rise in rents, or changes in the family structure)
3. The reasons why no one intervened

We might refer to this last as the political and cultural level. It's also the easiest to overlook, since it often deals specifically with things people are not doing.

“I well remember the first time I discussed the phenomenon of homelessness in America with friends in Madagascar. They were flabbergasted to discover that in the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, there were people sleeping on the streets. ‘But aren't Americans ashamed?’ one friend asked me. ‘They're so rich! Doesn't it bother them to know everyone else in the world will see it as a national embarrassment?’ I had

to concede it was a good question. Why didn't Americans see people sleeping on the streets as a national embarrassment?"

In certain periods of US history, they certainly would have. If large numbers of people were living on the streets in major cities in the 1820s, or even the 1940s, there would have been an outcry and some kind of action would have been taken. It might not have been very nice action. At some points, it would probably have meant rounding up vagrants and placing them in workhouses; at other times, it might have involved building public housing; but whatever it might have been, they would not have been left to languish in cardboard boxes on public thoroughfares. Since the 1980s, the same American was more likely to react not with outrage at how social conditions could have come to this pass, but by appeal to explanations of the first level—and conclude that homelessness was nothing more than the inevitable result of human weakness. Humans are fickle beings. They always have been. There's nothing anyone can do to change this fact.

Much of the confusion that surrounds debate about social issues in general can be traced back to the fact that people will regularly take these different explanations as alternatives rather than seeing them as factors that all operate at the same time. For example, people sometimes tell me that any attempt to explain bullshit jobs in political terms is wrongheaded; such jobs, they insist, exist because people need the money—as if this consideration had somehow never occurred to me before. Looking at the subjective motives of those who take such jobs is then treated as an alternative to asking why so many people find themselves in a position where the only way they can get money is by taking such jobs to begin with.

It's even worse on the cultural-political level. There has come to be a tacit understanding in polite circles that you can ascribe motives to people only when speaking about the individual level. Therefore, any suggestion that powerful people ever do anything they don't say they're doing, or even do what they can be publicly observed to be doing for reasons other than what they say, is immediately denounced as a "paranoid conspiracy theory" to be rejected instantly. Thus, to suggest that some "law and order" politicians or social service providers might not feel it's in their best interest to do much about the underlying causes of homelessness, is treated as equivalent to saying homelessness itself exists only because of the machinations of a secret cabal. Or that the banking system is run by lizard-people.

What was the unemployment level in ancient Greece? Or medieval China? The answer, of course, is zero. Having a large proportion of the population who wish to work, but cannot, appears to be peculiar to what Marx liked to call "the capitalist mode of production." But it appears to be,

like public debt, a structural feature of the system which must nonetheless be treated as if it were a problem to be solved.

Some see the increase in the numbers and power of university administrators as a simple power grab—one which has resulted in a profound shift in assumptions about the very nature of universities and the reasons for their existence. Back in the 1950s or 1960s, one could still say that universities were one of the few European institutions that had survived more or less intact from the Middle Ages. Crucially, they were still run on the old medieval principle that only those involved in a certain form of production—whether this be the production of stonework or leather gloves or mathematical equations—had the right to organize their own affairs; indeed that they were also the only people qualified to do so. Universities were basically craft guilds run for and by scholars, and their most important business was considered to be producing scholarship, their second-most, training new generations of scholars. True, since the nineteenth century, universities had maintained a kind of gentleman’s pact with government, that they would also train civil servants (and later, corporate bureaucrats) in exchange for otherwise being largely left alone. But since the eighties university administrators have effectively staged a coup. They wrested control of the university from the faculty and oriented the institution itself toward entirely different purposes. It is now commonplace for major universities to put out “strategic vision documents” that barely mention scholarship or teaching but go on at length about “the student experience,” “research excellence” (getting grants), collaboration with business or government, and so forth.

The upper quintile is growing in size and income because all the value created by actual productive workers in the lower quintiles gets extracted by those at the top. When the top classes rob everybody else, they need a lot more guard labor to keep their stolen loot secure.

It makes little sense to speak of separate spheres of ‘politics’ and ‘the economy’ because the goods are extracted through political means and distributed for political purposes. In fact, it was only with the first stirrings of industrial capitalism that anyone started talking about the economy as an autonomous sphere of human activity in the first place.

Under capitalism, in the classic sense of the term, profits derive from the management of production: capitalists hire people to make or build or fix or maintain things, and they cannot take home a profit unless their total overhead—including the money they pay their workers and contractors—comes out less than the value of the income they receive from their clients or customers. Under classic capitalist conditions of this sort it does indeed make no sense to hire unnecessary workers. Maximizing profits means

paying the least number of workers the least amount of money possible; in a very competitive market, those who hire unnecessary workers are not likely to survive. Of course, this is why doctrinaire libertarians, or, for that matter, orthodox Marxists, will always insist that our economy can't really be riddled with bullshit jobs; that all this must be some sort of illusion. But by a feudal logic, where economic and political considerations overlap, the same behavior makes perfect sense.

The whole point is to grab a pot of loot, either by stealing it from one's enemies or extracting it from commoners by means of fees, tolls, rents, and levies, and then redistributing it. In the process, one creates an entourage of followers that is both the visible measure of one's pomp and magnificence, and at the same time, a means of distributing political favor: for instance, by buying off potential malcontents, rewarding faithful allies (goons), or creating an elaborate hierarchy of honors and titles for lower-ranking nobles to squabble over. If all of this very much resembles the inner workings of a large corporation, I would suggest that this is no coincidence: such corporations are less and less about making, building, fixing, or maintaining things and more and more about political processes of appropriating, distributing, and allocating money and resources.

This means that, once again, it's increasingly difficult to distinguish politics and economics, as we have seen with the advent of "too-big-to-fail" banks, whose lobbyists typically write the very laws by which government supposedly regulates them, but even more, by the fact that financial profits themselves are gathered largely through direct juro-political means. JPMorgan Chase & Co., for example, one of the largest banks in America, reported in 2006 that roughly two-thirds of its profits were derived from "fees and penalties," and "finance" in general really refers to trading in other people's debts—debts which, of course, are enforceable in courts of law.

The rule of finance has seen the insertion of competitive games of this sort at every level of corporate life, or, for that matter, within institutions such as universities or charities that had previously been seen as the very antithesis of corporations. Perhaps in some it hasn't reached that zenith of bullshit which is Hollywood. But everywhere, managerial feudalism ensures that thousands of hours of creative effort will literally come to nothing. Take the domain of scientific research, or higher education once again. If a grant agency funds only 10 percent of all applications, that means that 90 percent of the work that went into preparing applications was just as pointless as the work that went into making the promo video for the doomed reality TV show *Too Fat to Fuck*. Even more so, really, since one can rarely make such an amusing anecdote out of it afterward. This is an extraordinary squandering of human creative energy.

At the height of the Greek debt crisis, public opinion in Germany was almost unanimous that Greek debt should not be forgiven because Greek workers were entitled and lazy. This was countered by statistics showing Greek workers actually put in longer hours than German ones; which, in turn, was countered by the argument that this might be true on paper but Greek workers slacked off on the job. At no point did anyone suggest that German workers were working too hard, creating an overproduction problem that could only be solved by lending foreign countries money to be able to import their goods, let alone that the Greek ability to enjoy life was in any way admirable or a model for others.

To take another example, when, in the 1990s, the French Socialist Party ran on the platform of a thirty-five-hour workweek, I remember being struck by the fact that no American news source I was able to find that deigned to mention this fact suggested that reducing working hours might be seen as, let alone be, good in itself, but only presented it as a tactic for reducing unemployment. In other words, allowing people to work less could only be treated as a social good if it allowed more people to be working.

Opinion writers are the moralists of our day. They are the secular equivalent of preachers, and when they write about work, their arguments reflect a very long theological tradition of valorizing work as a sacred duty, at once curse and blessing, and seeing humans as inherently sinful, lazy beings who can be expected to shirk that duty if they can. The discipline of economics itself emerged out of moral philosophy—Adam Smith was a professor of moral philosophy—and moral philosophy, in turn, was originally a branch of theology. Many economic concepts trace back directly to religious ideas. As a result, arguments about value always have something of a theological tinge.

Some originally theological notions about work are so universally accepted that they simply can't be questioned. One cannot assert that hardworking people are not, generally speaking, admirable—regardless of what they might be working hard at—or that those who avoid work are not in any way contemptible, and expect to be taken seriously in public debate. If someone says a policy creates jobs, it is not considered acceptable to reply that some jobs aren't worth having. I know this because I have occasionally done so to policy wonks, partly just to observe the shocked confusion that ensues. Say any of these things, and anything else you might say will be written off as well, as the effusions of a provocateur, a comedian, a lunatic—anyway, someone whose further arguments can now be automatically dismissed.

A case could be made for equality of income for all members of society, based on the following logic: Why might one pay certain people more than others? Normally, the justification is that some produce more or benefit

society more than others. But then we must ask why they do so:

1. If some people are more talented than others (for example, have a beautiful singing voice, are a comic genius, or a math whiz), we say they are “gifted.” If someone has already received a benefit (a “gift”), then it makes no sense to give them an additional benefit (more money) for that reason.
2. If some people work harder than others, it is usually impossible to establish the degree to which this is because they have a greater capacity for work (a gift again), and the degree to which it is because they choose to work harder. In the former case, it would again make no sense to reward them further for having an innate advantage over others.
3. Even if it could be proved that some work harder than others purely out of choice, one would then have to establish whether they did so out of altruistic motives—that is, they produced more because they wished to benefit society—or out of selfish motives, because they sought a larger proportion for themselves.
4. In the former case, if they produced more because they were striving to increase social wealth, then giving them a disproportionate share of that wealth would contradict their purpose. It would only make moral sense to reward those driven by selfish motives.
5. Since human motives are generally shifting and confused, one cannot simply divide the workforce into egoists and altruists. One is left with the choice of either rewarding everyone who makes greater efforts, or not doing so. Either option means that some people’s intentions will be frustrated. Altruists will be frustrated in their attempts to benefit society, while egoists will be frustrated in their attempts to benefit themselves. If one is forced to choose one or the other, it makes better moral sense to frustrate the egoists.
6. Therefore, people should not be paid more or otherwise rewarded for greater effort or productivity at work.

Many of the underlying assumptions could no doubt be challenged on a variety of grounds, but I’m not so much interested in whether there is, in fact, a moral case for equal distribution of income, as much as observing that in many ways, our society seems to have embraced in points 3 and 4—just without 1, 2, 5, or 6. Critically, it rejects the premise that it is impossible

to sort workers by motives. One need only look at what sorts of careers a worker has chosen. Is there any reason a person might be doing this job other than the money? If so, then that person should be treated as if point 4 applies. As a result, there is a sense that those who choose to benefit society, and especially those who have the gratification of knowing they benefit society, really have no business also expecting middle-class salaries, paid vacations, and generous retirement packages. By the same token, there is also a feeling that those who have to suffer from the knowledge they are doing pointless or even harmful work just for the sake of the money ought to be rewarded with more money for exactly that reason.

“What is work? Work is of two kinds: first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth’s surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so. The first kind is unpleasant and ill paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid.”

Work, Aristotle insisted, in no sense makes you a better person; in fact, it makes you a worse one, since it takes up so much time, thus making it difficult to fulfill one’s social and political obligations. As a result, the punishment aspect of work tended to be emphasized in classical literature, while the creative and godlike aspect was largely seen as falling to those male heads of household rich enough that they didn’t actually have to get their hands dirty but could tell others what to do. In Northern Europe in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, almost everyone was expected to get their hands dirty at some point or another. As a result, work, especially paid work, was seen as transformative. This is important because it means that certain key aspects of what was to become known as the ‘Protestant work ethic’ were already there, long before the emergence of Protestantism.

“In the glorification of ‘work’ and the never-ceasing talk about the ‘blessing of labor’ I see fear of everything individual. For at the sight of work—that is to say, severe toil from morning till night—we have the feeling that it is the best police, viz, that it holds everyone in check and effectively hinders the development of reason, of greed, and of desire for independence. For work uses up an extraordinary proportion of nervous force, withdrawing it from reflection, meditation, dreams, cares, love, and hatred”

The reality is that most working-class labor, whether carried out by men or women, actually more resembles what we archetypically think of as women’s work, looking after people, seeing to their wants and needs,

explaining, reassuring, anticipating what the boss wants or is thinking, not to mention caring for, monitoring, and maintaining plants, animals, machines, and other objects, than it involves hammering, carving, hoisting, or harvesting things.

What tube workers actually do, then, is something much closer to what feminists have termed “caring labor.” It has more in common with a nurse’s work than a bricklayer’s. It’s just that, in the same way as women’s unpaid caring labor is made to disappear from our accounts of “the economy,” so are the caring aspects of other working-class jobs made to disappear as well. One might make a case, perhaps, that British working-class traditions of caring labor do make themselves known in popular culture, which is largely a working-class product, with all the characteristic gestures, manners, and cadences by which working-class people cheer one another up reflected in British music, British comedy, and British children’s literature. But it is not recognized as value-creating labor in itself.

‘Caring labor’ is generally seen as work directed at other people, and it always involves a certain labor of interpretation, empathy, and understanding. To some degree, one might argue that this is not really work at all, it’s just life, or life lived properly—humans are naturally empathetic creatures, and to communicate with one another at all, we must constantly cast ourselves imaginatively into each other’s shoes and try to understand what others are thinking and feeling, which usually means caring about them at least a little—but it very much becomes work when all the empathy and imaginative identification is on one side. The key to caring labor as a commodity is not that some people care but that others don’t; that those paying for services—note how the old feudal term is still retained—feel no need to engage in interpretive labor themselves. This is even true of a bricklayer, if that bricklayer is working for someone else. Underlings have to constantly monitor what the boss is thinking; the boss doesn’t have to care.

That, in turn, is one reason, I believe, why psychological studies regularly find that people of working-class background are more accurate at reading other people’s feelings, and more empathetic and caring, than those of middle-class, let alone wealthy, backgrounds. To some degree, the skill at reading others’ emotions is just an effect of what working-class work actually consists of: rich people don’t have to learn how to do interpretive labor nearly as well because they can hire other people to do it for them. Those hirelings, on the other hand, who have to develop a habit of understanding other’s points of view, will also tend to care about them.

As a result underlings will also tend to care more about their superiors than their superiors will care about them, and this extends to almost any relation of structural inequality: men and women, rich and poor, black and

white, and so on. It has always seemed to me this is one of the main forces that allows such inequalities to continue.

In the immediate wake of the Civil War the first stirrings of large-scale bureaucratic, corporate capitalism appeared. The “Robber Barons,” as the new tycoons came to be called, were at first met (as the name given them implies) with extraordinary hostility. But by the 1890s they embarked on an intellectual counteroffensive, proposing a Gospel of Wealth. The fledgling corporate giants, their bankers, and their political allies objected to producerist moral claims and, starting in the 1890s, reached out with a new ideology that claimed, to the contrary, that capital, not labor, creates wealth and prosperity. Powerful coalitions of corporate interests made concerted efforts to transform the message of schools, universities, churches, and civic groups, claiming that “business had solved the fundamental ethical and political problems of industrial society.” Steel magnate Andrew Carnegie was a leader of this cultural campaign. To the masses, Carnegie argued for what we’d now call consumerism: the productivity of “concentrated” capital, under the wise stewardship of the fit, would so lower the price of commodities that the workers of tomorrow would live as well as the kings of the past. To the elite, he argued that coddling the poor with high wages was not good for “the race.”

The promulgation of consumerism also coincided with the beginnings of the managerial revolution, which was, especially at first, largely an attack on popular knowledge. Where once hoopers and wainwrights and seamstresses saw themselves as heirs to a proud tradition, each with its secret knowledge, the new bureaucratically organized corporations and their “scientific management” sought as far as possible to literally turn workers into extensions of the machinery, their every move predetermined by someone else. The real question to be asked here, it seems to me, is: ‘Why was this campaign so successful?’ Because it cannot be denied that, within a generation, “producerism” had given way to “consumerism,” the source of status no longer the ability to make things but simply the ability to purchase them. And the labor theory of value—which had, meanwhile, been knocked out of economic theory by the “marginal revolution”—had so fallen away from popular common sense that nowadays, only graduate students or small circles of revolutionary Marxist theorists are likely to have heard of it. Nowadays, if one speaks of “wealth producers,” people will automatically assume one is referring not to workers but to capitalists.

Most economists nowadays see the labor theory of value as a curiosity from the formative days of the discipline; and it’s probably true that, if one’s primary interest is to understand patterns of price formation, there are better tools available. But for the worker’s movement—and arguably,

for revolutionaries like Karl Marx—that was never the real point. The real point is philosophical. It is a recognition that the world we inhabit is something we made, collectively, as a society, and therefore, that we could also have made differently. This is true of almost any physical object likely to be within reach of us at any given moment. Every one was grown or manufactured by someone on the basis of what someone imagined we might be like, and what they thought we might want or need. It's even more true of abstractions like 'capitalism,' 'society,' or 'the government.' They only exist because we produce them every day.

Perhaps it's as simple as enough of us deciding to stop making capitalism. After all, even though we all act as if capitalism is some kind of behemoth towering over us, it's really just something we produce. Every morning we wake up and re-create capitalism. If one morning we woke up and all decided to create something else, then there wouldn't be capitalism anymore. There would be something else. One might even say that this is the core question—perhaps ultimately the only question—of all social theory and all revolutionary thought. Together we create the world we inhabit. Yet if any one of us tried to imagine a world we'd like to live in, who would come up with one exactly like the one that currently exists? We can all imagine a better world. Why can't we just create one? Why does it seem so inconceivable to just stop making capitalism? Or government? Or at the very least bad service providers and annoying bureaucratic red tape?

It strikes me that recognizing that a great deal of work is not strictly speaking productive but caring, and that there is always a caring aspect even to the most apparently impersonal work, does suggest one reason why it's so difficult to simply create a different society with a different set of rules. Even if we don't like what the world looks like, the fact remains that the conscious aim of most of our actions, productive or otherwise, is to do well by others; often, very specific others. Our actions are caught up in relations of caring. But most caring relations require we leave the world more or less as we found it. In the same way that teenage idealists regularly abandon their dreams of creating a better world and come to accept the compromises of adult life at precisely the moment they marry and have children, caring for others, especially over the long-term, requires maintaining a world that's relatively predictable as the grounds on which caring can take place. One cannot save to ensure a college education for one's children unless one is sure in twenty years there will still be colleges—or for that matter, money. And that, in turn, means that love for others—people, animals, landscapes—regularly requires the maintenance of institutional structures one might otherwise despise.

How are workers supposed to find meaning and purpose in jobs where

they are effectively being turned into robots? Where they are actually being told they are little better than robots, even as at the same time they are increasingly expected to organize their lives around their work? Even when they might be forced to work alongside the same robots training to take their jobs? The obvious answer is to fall back on the old idea that work forms character; and this is precisely what seems to have happened. One could call it a revival of Puritanism, but as we've seen this idea goes much further back: to a fusion of the Christian doctrine of the curse of Adam with the Northern European notion that paid labor under a master's discipline is the only way to become a genuine adult. This history made it very easy to encourage workers to see their work not so much as wealth-creation, or helping others, or at least not primarily so, but as self-abnegation, a kind of secular hair-shirt, a sacrifice of joy and pleasure that allows us to become an adult worthy of our consumerist toys.

What appears to hold true, with only minor variations, for both blue- and white-collar workers virtually anywhere in the world—might be summarized as follows:

1. Most people's sense of dignity and self-worth is caught up in working for a living.
2. Most people hate their jobs.

If work is a form of self-sacrifice or self-abnegation, then the very awfulness of modern work is what makes it possible to see it as an end in itself. Work should be painful, the misery of the job is itself what forms character. Workers gain feelings of dignity and self-worth because they hate their jobs. This is the attitude that seems to remain in the air all around us, implicit in office small-talk. The pressure to value ourselves and others on the basis of how hard we work at something we'd rather not be doing. If you're not destroying your mind and body via paid work, you're not living right. It is, to be sure, more common among middle-class office workers than among migrant farm workers, parking lot attendants, or short-order chefs. But even in working-class environments, the attitude can be observed through its negation, since even those who do not feel they have to validate their existence, on a day-to-day basis, by boasting how overworked they are will nonetheless agree that those who avoid work entirely should probably drop dead.

Bullshit jobs proliferate today in large part because of the peculiar nature of managerial feudalism that has come to dominate wealthy economies—but to an increasing degree, all economies. They cause misery because human happiness is always caught up in a sense of having effects on the world; a

feeling which most people, when they speak of their work, express through a language of social value. Yet at the same time they are aware that the greater the social value produced by a job, the less one is likely to be paid to do it. They are faced with the choice between doing useful and important work like taking care of children but being effectively told that the gratification of helping others should be its own reward, and it's up to them to figure out how to pay their bills, or accepting pointless and degrading work that destroys their mind and body for no particular reason, other than a widespread feeling that if one does not engage in labor that destroys the mind and body, whether or not there is a reason to be doing it, one does not deserve to live.

The more the economy becomes a matter of the mere distribution of loot, the more inefficiency and unnecessary chains of command actually make sense, since these are the forms of organization best suited to soaking up as much of that loot as possible. The less the value of work is seen to lie either in what it produces, or the benefits it provides to others, the more work comes to be seen as valuable primarily as a form of self-sacrifice, which means that anything that makes that work less onerous or more enjoyable, even the gratification of knowing that one's work benefits others, is actually seen to lower its value—and as a result, to justify lower levels of pay. All this is genuinely perverse.

In a sense, those critics who claim we are not working a fifteen-hour week because we have chosen consumerism over leisure are not entirely off the mark. They just got the mechanisms wrong. We're not working harder because we're spending all our time manufacturing PlayStations and serving one another sushi. Industry is being increasingly robotized, and the real service sector remains flat at roughly 20 percent of overall employment. Instead, it is because we have invented a bizarre sadomasochistic dialectic whereby we feel that pain in the workplace is the only possible justification for our furtive consumer pleasures, and, at the same time, the fact that our jobs thus come to eat up more and more of our waking existence means that we do not have the luxury of a life, and that, in turn, means that furtive consumer pleasures are the only ones we have time to afford. Sitting around in cafés all day arguing about politics or gossiping about our friends' complex polyamorous love affairs takes time (all day, in fact); in contrast pumping iron or attending a yoga class at the local gym, ordering out for Deliveroo, watching an episode of *Game of Thrones*, or shopping for hand creams or consumer electronics can all be placed in the kind of self-contained predictable time-slots one is likely to have left over between spates of work, or else while recovering from it. All these are examples of what I like to call 'compensatory consumerism.' They are the sorts of things you can do to

make up for the fact that you don't have a life, or not very much of one.

Conservative voters, I would suggest, tend to resent intellectuals more than they resent rich people, because they can imagine a scenario in which they or their children might become rich, but cannot possibly imagine one in which they could ever become a member of the cultural elite. If you think about it that's not an unreasonable assessment. A truck driver's daughter from Nebraska might not have very much chance of becoming a millionaire—America now has the lowest social mobility in the developed world—but it could happen. There's virtually no way that same daughter will ever become an international human rights lawyer, or drama critic for the New York Times. Even if she could get into the right schools, there would certainly be no possible way for her to then go on to live in New York or San Francisco for the requisite years of unpaid internships.

Even if the son of glazier got a toehold in a well-positioned bullshit job, he would likely, be unable or unwilling to transform it into a platform for the obligatory networking. There are a thousand invisible barriers. If we return to the opposition of 'value' versus 'values' we might put it this way: if you just want to make a lot of money, there might be a way to do it; on the other hand, if your aim is to pursue any other sort of value—whether that be truth (journalism, academia), beauty (the art world, publishing), justice (activism, human rights), charity, and so forth—and you actually want to be paid a living wage for it, then if you do not possess a certain degree of family wealth, social networks, and cultural capital, there's simply no way in. The "liberal elite," then, are those who have placed an effective lock on any position where it's possible to get paid to do anything that one might do for any reason other than the money. They are seen as trying, and largely succeeding, in constituting themselves as a new American nobility—in the same sense as the Hollywood aristocracy, monopolizing the hereditary right to all those jobs where one can live well, and still feel one is serving some higher purpose—which is to say, feel noble.

If that truck driver's daughter was absolutely determined to find a job that would allow her to pursue something unselfish and high-minded, but still paid the rent and guaranteed access to adequate dental care, what options does she really have? If she's of a religious temperament there might be some possibility in her local church. But such jobs are hard to come by. Mainly, she can join the military. An anthropologist who has been carrying out a project studying the archipelago of US overseas military bases made the fascinating observation that almost all of these bases organize outreach programs, in which soldiers venture out to repair schoolrooms or to perform free dental checkups in nearby towns and villages. The ostensible reason for the programs was to improve relations with local

communities, but they rarely have much impact in that regard; still, even after the military discovered this, they kept the programs up because they had such an enormous psychological impact on the soldiers, many of whom would wax euphoric when describing them:

“This is why I joined the army. This is what military service is really all about—not just defending your country, it’s about helping people!”

Soldiers allowed to perform public service duties, they found, were two or three times more likely to reenlist. You might be thinking, ‘Wait, so most of these people really want to be in the Peace Corps?’ And if you look it up you’ll discover, sure enough, to be accepted into the Peace Corps, you need to already have a college degree. The US military is a haven for frustrated altruists.

It’s hard to imagine a surer sign that one is dealing with an irrational economic system than the fact that the prospect of eliminating drudgery is considered to be a problem. Star Trek solved the problem with replicators, and young radicals sometimes talk about a future of “fully automated luxury communism,” which is basically the same thing. A case could easily be made that any future robots and replicators should be the common property of humanity as a whole, since they would be the fruit of a collective mechanical intelligence that goes back centuries, in much the same way as a national culture is the creation of, and thus belongs to, everyone. Automated public factories would make life easier. Still, they wouldn’t actually eliminate the need for Drudgelings. Too many still assume that ‘work’ means factory work, or, anyway, “productive” work, and ignore what most working-class jobs actually consist of—for instance, the fact that workers in “ticket offices” in the London Underground aren’t there to take tickets but to find lost children and talk down drunks. Not only are robots that could perform such functions very far away, but even if they did exist, most of us would not want such tasks performed in the way a robot would perform them anyway. So the more automation proceeds, the more it should be obvious that actual value emerges from the caring element of work. Yet this leads to another problem. The caring value of work would appear to be precisely that element in labor that cannot be quantified.

Since at least the Great Depression, we’ve been hearing warnings that automation was or was about to be throwing millions out of work—Keynes at the time coined the term ‘technological unemployment,’ and many assumed the mass unemployment of the 1930s was just a sign of things to come—and while this might make it seem such claims have always been somewhat

alarmist, what I suggest is that the opposite was the case. They were entirely accurate. Automation did, in fact, lead to mass unemployment. We have simply stopped the gap by adding dummy jobs that are effectively made up. A combination of political pressure from both right and left, a deeply held popular feeling that paid employment alone can make one a full moral person, and finally, a fear on the part of the upper classes, already noted by George Orwell in 1933, of what the laboring masses might get up to if they had too much leisure on their hands, has ensured that whatever the underlying reality, when it comes to official unemployment figures in wealthy countries, the needle should never jump too far from the range of three to eight percent. But if one eliminates bullshit jobs from the picture, and the real jobs that only exist to support them, one could say that the catastrophe predicted in the 1930s really did happen. Upward of 50 percent to 60 percent of the population has, in fact, been thrown out of work.

Except of course, there's absolutely no reason it should have been a catastrophe. Over the course of the last several thousand years there have been untold thousands of human groups that might be referred to as "societies," and the overwhelming majority of them managed to figure out ways to distribute those tasks that needed to be done to keep them alive in the style to which they were accustomed in such a fashion that most everyone had some way to contribute, and no one had to spend the majority of their waking hours performing tasks they would rather not be doing, in the way that people do today. What's more, faced with the "problem" of abundant leisure time, people in those societies seem to have had little trouble figuring out ways to entertain themselves or otherwise pass the time. From the perspective of anyone born in one of those past societies, we'd probably look just as irrational as the Phools to Ijon Tichy.

The reason the current allocation of labor looks the way it does, then, has nothing to do with economics or even human nature. It's ultimately political. There was no reason we had to try to quantify the value of caring labor. There is no real reason we have to continue to do so. We could stop. But before we launch a campaign to reconstitute work and how we value it, I think we would do well to once again consider carefully the political forces at play.

The Mythology of Work

Why Should I?

If you had to find a single statement that Americans from across the political spectrum can agree on, you might settle on ‘we need good jobs to give people a crucial sense of self-worth.’ Fight-for-\$15 activists assert the right to a higher wage, partly so they can stop taking government “handouts” like food stamps. Policy commentators, worried that automation could bring a loss of jobs, prescribe everything from subsidized corporate hiring to federal make-work programs. The congressional leadership’s pitch for its policies hinges almost entirely on encouraging work—and reducing public benefits. But here’s the thing: In historical terms, the pride we take in working for a paycheck is really new. Just 150 years ago, when people talked about the shame of dependency, they were referring to the reality of being forced to hold a job.

Speaking at the Wisconsin State Fair in Milwaukee in 1859, Abraham Lincoln described wage labor as an unfortunate necessity only for the “penniless beginner in the world.”

“If any continue through life in the condition of the hired laborer, it is not the fault of the system, but because of either a dependent nature which prefers it, or improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune.”

In contrast, Lincoln laid out a vision of respectability that required avoiding a job:

“In these free States, a large majority are neither hirers nor hired. Men, with their families—wives, sons, and daughters—work for themselves, on their farms, in their houses and their shops, taking the whole product to themselves, and asking no favors of capital on the one hand, nor of hirelings or slaves on the other.”

Farmers and craftsmen valued this independence in part because their time was their own, as it had been for skilled workers for generations. High piece-rates could provide good wages for skilled men, but they more often elected to take a moderate wage and extensive leisure. Leisure meant time in the alehouse, time eating, drinking, playing marbles, or watching cockfights. Even less-skilled workers and apprentices observed the informal weekly holiday known as Saint Monday if they could afford it, much to the dismay of elites and government officials. One observer in 1864 complained:

“An enormous amount of time is lost, not only by want of punctuality in coming to work in the morning and beginning again after meals, but still more by the general observance of ‘Saint Monday.’”

That was the kind of life craftsmen in Lincoln’s day might have expected for themselves. But, rising industrialization in the late nineteenth century forced many skilled artisans to work for a factory owner rather than for themselves. The Knights of Labor, an early labor union, saw this dependence on an employer—regardless of how much or how little was paid—as “wage slavery,” a condition literally comparable to chattel slavery, which the country had only recently abolished. These unionists argued that working for wages was repugnant because capitalists siphoned off part of the wealth produced by the workers and told them when and how to do their jobs. The only solution:

“The complete emancipation of wealth producers from the thralldom and loss of wage slavery.”

Workers and their unions interpreted that goal in many different ways over the next several decades, sometimes trying to return production to independent craftsmen, other times creating cooperative worker-owned enterprises, or advocating a socialist revolution.

Some workers saw more logic than others in harkening back to a pre-industrial independence. For example, to young, working-class white women, heading to a mill town to work for a wage might have sounded better than staying home on the farm. These women organized strikes to get better pay, but, to many of them, wage work itself was more liberating than not. They knew as farm wives they would have little control over the farm’s profits and little disposable income. These women explicitly rejected the label of “white slaves” that some political reformers and male unionists applied to them. Millworker Harriet Farley mocked the notion that “to put ourselves under the influence and restraints of corporate bodies is contrary to the spirit of our institutions and to the love of independence we ought to cherish.”

“There is a spirit of independence which is adverse to social life itself. And I would advise all those who wish to cherish it to go beyond the Rocky Mountains and hold communion with none but the untamed Indian and the wild beast of the forest.”

Even for skilled white male workers, rhetoric identifying wage labor as wage slavery mostly dried up in the final decades of the century, as large-scale industry came to dominate manufacturing. By 1900, both the Knights of Labor and the ascendant American Federation of Labor (AFL) generally used the phrase ‘wage slavery’ to refer only to particularly awful jobs, especially those held by immigrant and black workers.

While some unionists still held out hope for the abolition of the capitalist system, many turned their practical attention to improving wage work. That required a dramatic shift in focus. Mid-nineteenth-century skilled white male workers had believed that wage work not only degraded their economic status but undermined the independence that lay at the root of republican manhood and republican citizenship. As wage workers, they needed to regain pride and status. For some white, male unionists—particularly those in the relatively conservative AFL—there were two intertwined ways to do that. One was winning higher wages and using the money to construct a respectable life—a carpeted parlor, ornaments on the mantle, a wife who could stay home to care for the family. The other lay in contrasting themselves with female, black, and immigrant workers, who, in their view, lacked both the power and the desire to push for better pay.

“The Caucasian must add to his own individual needs the cost of maintaining a wife and family. There is rent to pay, clothing to be provided, books to buy, and, added to all this, the many little wants that arise out of the condition of a Christian civilization. In contrast Chinamen are content with a fractional interest in the body of a female slave.”

Through the early twentieth century, unionists—including not just skilled white men, but also workers of other backgrounds, who organized in spite of the barriers erected by some white male union leaders—pushed for better jobs. This required not only strikes and demonstrations but also a new economic vision. In an age of big factories, workers recognized that it was no longer possible to reimburse any one individual for the value they added to a product. At the same time, they rejected the emerging economic consensus that supply and demand in the labor market would produce a “correct” wage. Instead, they created a new concept: the “living wage,” amounting to their rightful “share in the products of common toil.”

The labor movement achieved a great deal in this era. Working hours lessened, working conditions improved, and wages rose. By the end of the 1940s, unions and management had essentially reached a truce. Workers repudiated socialism and stopped trying to win a say in how companies were managed. Companies provided pensions and health insurance to many employees and worked to keep employment rates high. For a few decades, things generally went quite well for workers, particularly white, male union members in urban industrial areas. In recent years, of course, things have changed. A concerted political attack has hobbled unions, while globalization and automation have reshaped the economy. Wages for all but the best-paid workers have stagnated, and employee benefits have evaporated, while returns to capital have swelled.

Economists and policy analysts have a lot of different ideas about how we might respond to the conditions of laborers. Some suggest reinstating the post-war social contract. Others argue that the government should expand programs that subsidize the incomes of low-paid workers into a European-style welfare state, or even provide a universal basic income to everyone. With that in mind, here are a few lessons we might draw from the history of workers' opposition to—and then acceptance of—the wage system:

- There's nothing inherently fair about how we get paid. Factory workers won good pay in the twentieth century by rejecting the idea that a particular worker's contribution to a product could be isolated and reimbursed, instead demanding enough pay to live well. With the technological changes of the past century, this idea seems even clearer. In a world—like the one we live in—of mammoth increasing returns to unowned knowledge and to networks, no individual and no community is especially valuable. Those who receive good livings are those who are lucky.
- When we talk about workers' pride, which workers do we mean? Craftsmen who had previously controlled their workplaces and hours were likely to see working in a factory as a loss of independence. Women whose alternative was working for a husband on the family farm weren't. Workers who have never experienced a good factory job may be less likely to be horrified at policies that supplement their wages.
- Worker ownership of the means of production is an American tradition. When union radicals tried to take over factories or foment revolution, they were drawing on a longstanding assumption that people should

keep the returns to their work. Even if the idea now evokes Soviet-themed hipster t-shirts, it stands behind real institutions like sovereign wealth funds and employee-owned companies that we could support and expand.

- To make a new economic paradigm successful, make it comfortable. Working for a wage became a standard part of a good life, rather than a source of shame, to the extent that wages rose. A more comprehensive, European-style set of government benefits might achieve the same success.
- Racism is a very hard problem. As long as white workers can identify “slave wages” or “welfare dependency” with a racial underclass, it’s difficult to fight for broad changes.
- Hard work can be overrated. From the alehouses of the 1860s to the video-game-equipped basements of today, slackers have never gotten a lot of respect from economic and political thinkers. There’s certainly a case to be made for norms that encourage useful work, but there are a lot of holes in the theory that wage labor is the singular key to happiness. For instance, although unemployed people tend to be quite miserable, the same doesn’t hold true for retirees, who have a social mandate to slack off.
- The biggest lesson, though, might be this one: things change. Whether we like it or not, technological advances and geopolitical shifts will alter the ways we work, probably in radical ways. Our values, and the places we find pride and shame, will change with them. There’s no guarantee about what any of this will look like, partly because it will depend on the choices we make about what we’re willing to fight for.

What if nobody worked? Sweatshops would empty out and assembly lines would grind to a halt, at least the ones producing things no one would make voluntarily. Telemarketing would cease. Despicable individuals who only hold sway over others because of wealth and title would have to learn better social skills. Traffic jams would come to an end; so would oil spills. Paper money and job applications would be used as fire starter as people reverted to barter, sharing, or the gift economy. Grass and flowers would grow from the cracks in the sidewalk, eventually making way for fruit trees.

And we would all starve to death. But we’re not exactly subsisting on paperwork and performance evaluations, are we? Most of the things we make and do for money are patently irrelevant to our survival—and to what

gives life meaning. It depends on what you mean by ‘work.’ Think about how many people enjoy gardening, fishing, carpentry, cooking, and even computer programming just for their own sake. What if that kind of activity could provide for all our needs?

For hundreds of years, people have claimed that technological progress would soon liberate humanity from the need to work. Today we have capabilities our ancestors couldn’t have imagined, but those predictions still haven’t come true. In the US we actually work longer hours than we did a couple generations ago—the poor in order to survive, the rich in order to compete. Others desperately seek employment, hardly enjoying the comfortable leisure all this progress should provide. Despite the talk of recession and the need for austerity measures, corporations are reporting record earnings, the wealthiest are wealthier than ever, and tremendous quantities of goods are produced just to be thrown away. There’s plenty of wealth, but it’s not being used to liberate humanity.

What kind of system simultaneously produces abundance and prevents us from making the most of it? The defenders of the free market argue that there’s no other option—and so long as our society is organized this way, there isn’t.

Yet once upon a time, before time cards and power lunches, everything got done without work. The natural world that provided for our needs hadn’t yet been carved up and privatized. Knowledge and skills weren’t the exclusive domains of licensed experts, held hostage by expensive institutions; time wasn’t divided into productive work and consumptive leisure. We know this because work was invented only a few thousand years ago, but human beings have been around for hundreds of thousands of years. We’re told that life was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” back then—but that narrative comes to us from the ones who stamped out that way of life, not the ones who practiced it.

This isn’t to say we should go back to the way things used to be, or that we could—only that things don’t have to be the way they are right now. If our distant ancestors could see us today, they’d probably be excited about some of our inventions and horrified by others, but they’d surely be shocked by how we apply them. We built this world with our labor, and without certain obstacles we could surely build a better one. That wouldn’t mean abandoning everything we’ve learned. It would just mean abandoning everything we’ve learned doesn’t work.

One can hardly deny that work is productive. Just a couple thousand years of it have dramatically transformed the surface of the earth. But what exactly does it produce? Disposable chopsticks by the billion; laptops and cell phones that are obsolete within a couple years. Miles of waste dumps

and tons upon tons of chlorofluorocarbons. Factories that will rust as soon as labor is cheaper elsewhere. Dumpsters full of overstock, while a billion suffer malnutrition; medical treatments only the wealthy can afford; novels and philosophies and art movements most of us just don't have time for in a society that subordinates desires to profit motives and needs to property rights.

And where do the resources for all this production come from? What happens to the ecosystems and communities that are pillaged and exploited? If work is productive, it's even more destructive. Work doesn't produce goods out of thin air; it's not a conjuring act. Rather, it takes raw materials from the biosphere—a common treasury shared by all living things—and transforms them into products animated by the logic of market. For those who see the world in terms of balance sheets, this is an improvement, but the rest of us shouldn't take their word for it.

Capitalists and socialists have always taken it for granted that work produces value. Workers have to consider a different possibility—that working uses up value. That's why the forests and polar ice caps are being consumed alongside the hours of our lives: the aches in our bodies when we come home from work parallel the damage taking place on a global scale.

What should we be producing, if not all this stuff? Well, how about happiness itself? Can we imagine a society in which the primary goal of our activity was to make the most of life, to explore its mysteries, rather than to amass wealth or outflank competition? We would still make material goods in such a society, of course, but not in order to compete for profit. Festivals, feasts, philosophy, romance, creative pursuits, child-rearing, friendship, adventure—can we picture these as the center of life, rather than packed into our spare time? Today things are the other way around—our conception of happiness is constructed as a means to stimulate production. Small wonder products are crowding us out of the world.

Work doesn't simply create wealth where there was only poverty before. On the contrary, so long as it enriches some at others' expense, work creates poverty, too, in direct proportion to profit. Poverty is not an objective condition, but a relationship produced by unequal distribution of resources. There's no such thing as poverty in societies in which people share everything. There may be scarcity, but no one is subjected to the indignity of having to go without while others have more than they know what to do with. As profit is accumulated and the minimum threshold of wealth necessary to exert influence in society rises higher and higher, poverty becomes more and more debilitating. It is a form of exile—the cruelest form of exile, for you stay within society while being excluded from it. You can neither participate nor go anywhere else.

Work doesn't just create poverty alongside wealth—it concentrates wealth in the hands of a few while spreading poverty far and wide. For every Bill Gates, a million people must live below the poverty line; for every Shell Oil, there has to be a Nigeria. The more we work, the more profit is accumulated from our labor, and the poorer we are compared to our exploiters. So in addition to creating wealth, work makes people poor. This is clear even before we factor in all the other ways work makes us poor: poor in self-determination, poor in free time, poor in health, poor in sense of self beyond our careers and bank accounts, poor in spirit.

“Cost of living” estimates are misleading—there's little living going on at all! ‘Cost of working’ is more like it, and it's not cheap. Everyone knows what house-cleaners and dishwashers pay for being the backbone of our economy. All the scourges of poverty—addiction, broken families, poor health—are par for the course; the ones who survive these and somehow go on showing up on time are working miracles. Think what they could accomplish if they were free to apply that power to something other than earning profits for their employers.

What about their employers, fortunate to be higher on the pyramid? You would think earning a higher salary would mean having more money and thus more freedom, but it's not that simple. Every job entails hidden costs: just as a dishwasher has to pay bus fare to and from work every day, a corporate lawyer has to be able to fly anywhere at a moment's notice, to maintain a country club membership for informal business meetings, to own a small mansion in which to entertain dinner guests that double as clients. This is why it's so difficult for middle-class workers to save up enough money to quit while they're ahead and get out of the rat race: trying to get ahead in the economy basically means running in place. At best, you might advance to a fancier treadmill, but you'll have to run faster to stay on it.

And these merely financial costs of working are the least expensive. In one survey, people of all walks of life were asked how much money they would need to live the life they wanted; from pauper to patrician, they all answered approximately double their current income. So not only is money costly to obtain, but, like any addictive drug, it's less and less fulfilling. And the further up you get in the hierarchy, the more you have to fight to hold your place. The wealthy executive must abandon his unruly passions and his conscience, must convince himself that he deserves more than the unfortunates whose labor provides for his comfort, must smother his every impulse to question, to share, to imagine himself in others' shoes; if he doesn't, sooner or later some more ruthless contender replaces him. Both blue-collar and white-collar workers have to kill themselves to keep the jobs that keep them alive; it's just a question of physical or spiritual destruction.

Those are the costs we pay individually, but there's also a global price to pay for all this working. Alongside the environmental costs, there are work-related illnesses, injuries, and deaths: every year we kill people by the thousand to sell hamburgers and health club memberships to the survivors. The US Department of Labor reported that twice as many people suffered fatal work injuries in 2001 as died in the September 11 attacks, and that doesn't begin to take into account work-related illnesses. Above all, more exorbitant than any other price, there is the cost of never learning how to direct our own lives, never getting the chance to answer or even ask the question of what we would do with our time on this planet if it was up to us. We can never know how much we are giving up by settling for a world in which people are too busy, too poor, or too beaten down to do so.

Why work, if it's so expensive? Everyone knows the answer—there's no other way to acquire the resources we need to survive, or for that matter to participate in society at all. All the earlier social forms that made other ways of life possible have been eradicated—they were stamped out by conquistadors, slave traders, corporations, that left neither tribe nor tradition nor ecosystem intact. Contrary to capitalist propaganda, free human beings don't crowd into factories for a pittance if they have other options, not even in return for name brand shoes and software. In working and shopping and paying bills, each of us helps perpetuate the conditions that necessitate these activities. Capitalism exists because we invest everything in it: all our energy and ingenuity in the marketplace, all our resources at the supermarket and in the stock market, all our attention in the media. To be more precise, capitalism exists because our daily activities are it. But would we continue to reproduce it if we felt we had another choice?

Instead of enabling people to achieve happiness, work fosters the worst kind of self-denial. Obeying teachers, bosses, the demands of the market—not to mention laws, parents' expectations, religious scriptures, social norms—we're conditioned from infancy to put our desires on hold. Following orders becomes an unconscious reflex, whether or not they are in our best interest; deferring to experts becomes second nature.

Selling our time rather than doing things for their own sake, we come to evaluate our lives on the basis of how much we can get in exchange for them, not what we get out of them. As freelance slaves hawking our lives hour by hour, we think of ourselves as each having a price; the amount of the price becomes our measure of value. In that sense, we become commodities, just like toothpaste and toilet paper. What once was a human being is now an employee, in the same way that what once was a pig is now a pork chop. Our lives disappear, spent like the money for which we trade them.

Most of us have become so used to giving up things that are precious to

us that sacrifice has become our only way of expressing that we care about something. We martyr ourselves for ideas, causes, love of one another, even when these are supposed to help us find happiness. There are families, for example, in which people show affection by competing to be the one who gives up the most for the others. Gratification isn't just delayed, it's passed on from one generation to the next. The responsibility of finally enjoying all the happiness presumably saved up over years of thankless toil is deferred to the children; yet when they come of age, if they are to be seen as responsible adults, they too must begin working their fingers to the bone.

But the buck has to stop somewhere. People work hard nowadays, that's for sure. Tying access to resources to market performance has caused unprecedented production and technological progress. Indeed, the market has monopolized access to our own creative capacities to such an extent that many people work not only to survive but also to have something to do. But what kind of initiative does this instill?

Let's go back to global warming, one of the most serious crises facing the planet. After decades of denial, politicians and businessmen have finally swung into action to do something about it. And what are they doing? Casting about for ways to cash in! Carbon credits, "clean" coal, "green" investment firms—who believes that these are the most effective way to curb the production of greenhouse gases? It's ironic that a catastrophe caused by capitalist consumerism can be used to spur more consumption, but it reveals a lot about the kind of initiative work instills. What kind of person, confronted with the task of preventing the end of life on earth, responds, 'Sure, but what's in it for me?'

If everything in our society has to be driven by a profit motive to succeed, that might not be initiative after all, but something else. Really taking initiative, initiating new values and new modes of behavior—this is as unthinkable to the enterprising businessman as it is to his most listless employee. What if working—that is, leasing your creative powers to others, whether managers or customers—actually erodes initiative?

The evidence for this extends beyond the workplace. How many people who never miss a day of work can't show up on time for band practice? We can't keep up with the reading for our book clubs even when we can finish papers for school on time; we can remember countless details of arbitrary corporate policy yet forget our loved ones' important events; the things we really want to do with our lives end up at the bottom of the to-do list. The ability to follow through on commitments becomes something outside ourselves, associated with external rewards or punishments.

Imagine a world in which everything people do, they do because they want to, because they are personally invested in bringing it about. For

any boss who has struggled to motivate indifferent employees, the idea of working with people who are equally invested in the same projects sounds utopian. But this isn't proof that nothing would get done without bosses and salaries—it just shows how work saps us of initiative.

Let's say your job never injures, poisons, or sickens you. Let's also take it for granted that the economy doesn't crash and take your job and savings with it, and that no one who got a worse deal than you manages to hurt or rob you. You still can't be sure you won't be downsized. Nowadays nobody works for the same employer his whole life; you work somewhere a few years until they let you go for someone younger and cheaper or outsource your job overseas. You can break your back to prove you're the best in your field and still end up hung out to dry.

You have to count on your employers to make shrewd decisions so they can write your paycheck—they can't just fritter money away or they won't have it to pay you. But you never know when that shrewdness will turn against you: the ones you depend on for your livelihood didn't get where they are by being sentimental. If you're self-employed, you probably know how fickle the market can be, too. What could provide real security? Perhaps being part of a long-term community in which people looked out for each other, a community based on mutual assistance rather than financial incentives. And what is one of the chief obstacles to building that kind of community today? Work.

Who carried out most of the injustices in history? Employees. This is not necessarily to say they are responsible for them—as they would be the first to tell you! Does receiving a wage absolve you of responsibility for your actions? Working seems to foster the impression that it does. The Nuremberg defense—"I was just following orders"—has been the anthem and alibi of millions of employees. This willingness to check one's conscience at the workplace door—to be, in fact, a mercenary—lies at the root of many of the troubles plaguing our species.

People have done horrible things without orders, too—but not nearly so many horrible things. You can reason with a person who is acting for herself; she acknowledges that she is accountable for her decisions. Employees, on the other hand, can do unimaginably dumb and destructive things while refusing to think about the consequences. The real problem, of course, isn't employees refusing to take responsibility for their actions—it's the economic system that makes taking responsibility so prohibitively expensive.

Employees dump toxic waste into rivers and oceans.

Employees slaughter cows and perform experiments on monkeys.

Employees throw away truckloads of food.

Employees are destroying the ozone layer.

They watch your every move through security cameras.

They evict you when you don't pay your rent.

They imprison you when you don't pay your taxes.

They humiliate you when you don't do your homework or show up to work on time.

They enter information about your private life into credit reports and FBI files.

They give you speeding tickets and tow your car.

They administer standardized exams, juvenile detention centers, and lethal injections.

The soldiers who herded people into gas chambers were employees.

Just like the soldiers occupying Syria and Afghanistan.

Just like the suicide bombers who target them—they are employees of God, hoping to be paid in paradise.

Let's be clear about this: critiquing work doesn't mean rejecting labor, effort, ambition, or commitment. It doesn't mean demanding that everything be fun or easy. Fighting against the forces that compel us to work is hard work. Laziness is not the alternative to work, though it might be a byproduct of it.

The bottom line is simple: all of us deserve to make the most of our potential as we see fit, to be the masters of our own destinies. Being forced to sell these things away to survive is tragic and humiliating. We don't have to live like this.

“Pay as a remission of taxes to every poor family, out of the surplus taxes, and in room of poor-rates, four pounds a year for every child under fourteen years of age.”

—*Rights of Man*

“It is painful to see old age working itself to death, in what are called civilized countries, for daily bread. Pay to every such person of the age of fifty years the sum of six pounds per annum out of the surplus taxes, and ten pounds per annum during life after the age of sixty. This support, as already remarked, is not of the nature of a charity but of a right.”

—*Rights of Man*

“There could be no such thing as landed property originally. Man did not make the earth, and, though he had a natural right to occupy it, he had no right to locate as his property in perpetuity any part of it.”

—*Agrarian Justice*

“Create a national fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property.”

—*Agrarian Justice*

President Roosevelt brought in the New Deal not only to address the desperation of the Great Depression but to undercut a powerful movement of US citizens who, having been dealt a savage blow by the unregulated free market, were demanding a different economic model. Some wanted a radically different one: in the 1932 presidential elections, one-million Americans voted for Socialist or Communist candidates. Growing numbers of Americans were also paying close attention to Huey Long, the populist senator from Louisiana who believed that all Americans should receive a guaranteed annual income of \$2,500. Explaining why he had added more social welfare benefits to the New Deal in 1935, FDR said he wanted to “steal Long’s thunder.”

In many respects, Hayek was a throwback, romanticizing a lost golden age of idealized unfettered capitalism that arguably never existed for much of the population. But Hayek’s views were more nuanced than many American adherents understood. Many reactionary Americans know only the distorted translation of Hayek’s work that had appeared in *Reader’s Digest*. The conservative publication omitted Hayek’s politically inconvenient support for a minimum standard of living for the poor, environmental and workplace safety regulations, and price controls to prevent monopolies from taking undue profits.

On April 17, 1970, the House of Representatives voted 243 to 155 for legislation that would install a guaranteed annual income for all American citizens in need. In so many words, a substantial majority of Congress said, ‘Fuck work!’ Well, almost. These congressmen weren’t utopians fresh from the commune or the campus, nor bumpkins just off the turnip truck. They were serious citizens with good reasons for their votes. They could read the recommendations of three weighty presidential commissions on dealing with the question of unemployment. And they had empirical grounds for supporting Richard Nixon’s agenda for welfare reform, what he called his Family Assistance Program (FAP). Most important, they could rely on the report of an ongoing income-maintenance study supervised by the Office of Economic Opportunity—where Nixon’s young guns, Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, presided.

The archconservatives of our time, Rumsfeld and Cheney, spearheaded the effort to install a guaranteed annual income. What novelist could make this up? In fact, this was the logical endpoint of a long and tortured debate. From 1910, when William James published *The Moral Equivalent of War*, until the 1990s, American writers, artists, and intellectuals studied, celebrated, and worried over the impending end of work; meanwhile politicians wondered what to do about it. The lyrical Left and the political mainstream pondered the same problem, or promise: what happens when the work runs out?

Today the Left, broadly construed to include socialists, liberals, and all manner of intermediate positions, has just one answer: full employment. So does the Right, broadly construed to include libertarians, conservatives, evangelicals, and the ample bandwidth in between. All parties want, above all, to create more jobs. But fifty years ago, the Left and the Right agreed on the other answer. To repeat, on April 17, 1970, the House of Representatives voted decisively for legislation that would install a guaranteed annual income for all American citizens in need. Those members of Congress were finally persuaded by a report from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), where Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney presided.

By the time the House of Representatives voted for Nixon's FAP in April 1970, a bipartisan, practically universal consensus was composed of these assumptions:

1. The end of work was in sight because private enterprise could not create enough jobs to sustain anything approaching full employment, and thus could not maintain aggregate consumer demand for a growing output of goods and services.
2. Any transparent or intelligible relation between work and income, between the production and the consumption of goods, had been erased by technological innovation.
3. One way or another, public spending would have to make up the deficit in aggregate demand, and recreate a transparent or intelligible relation between production and consumption, by means of:
 - a) existing welfare programs, and/or
 - b) direct employment by government, and/or
 - c) income maintenance (transfer) payments to households or individuals.

4. Income maintenance (c), or a guaranteed annual income, was the best alternative to existing welfare programs.
5. Any income-maintenance program would have to include both strong incentives to work and robust provisions for child care if it were to pass the test of public opinion and the vote of elected representatives.

Full employment was not the uniform answer to the moral questions and economic issues attending the problem. Journalists, academics, intellectuals, and legislators agreed instead that neither private enterprise nor the government could create enough remunerative jobs. So they searched for alternatives to work—they tried to decouple income from occupations.

We ought to be in the same hunt. Of course we can (a) try to create more jobs by whatever means, public or private, and move toward “full employment”—meanwhile hoping that a more intelligible, more justifiable relation between work performed and income received is created as a result. Or we can (b) acknowledge some obvious facts, as did the people who either conducted those social experiments or voted for Nixon’s FAP in 1970.

Plan A is unrealistic for two reasons. First, private investment can’t serve the purpose of job creation on the scale necessary, no matter what contemporary economists say about its importance. There aren’t enough tax incentives to get the banks and their corporate clients off their asses, and the combined capital/labor-saving quality of recent technological innovation will limit the employment effects of whatever private investments do get made. Second, public investment on the scale necessary can’t be mustered by a gridlocked Congress—or by any Congress. Third, Plan A is punitive, in the sense that it requires everyone to get up and go to work when we can already produce more than we need with less and less labor time.

Plan B proposes that everyone will work less, not more, in keeping with the steady increase of labor productivity and the correlative tendency toward the zero marginal cost of labor. So it guarantees a minimum annual income to every citizen, on the assumption that there’s no way to calculate a justifiable relation between hours worked and dollars earned. Plan A presumes that work must continue to create the character and determine the income of each individual, regardless of how few “good jobs” have survived the past hundred years of technological innovation. Plan B acknowledges that work can’t serve these purposes because there’s just not enough of it, and that we need, accordingly, to look elsewhere for the sources of these essential elements of personal identity and social standing. There’s not enough work to employ most adults at a living wage because we’ve become so productive that the relation between work and income is arbitrary in any

case. As a result, we need to find new ways to justify and new means to enable the consumption of goods—ways and means that aren't determined by the money we make from our jobs. In other words: ***Fuck Work***

How did this once mainstream idea become the exclusive property of left-wing radicals—the so-called Autonomists in Italy or Silicon Valley futurists—to the point where, by now, it appears as a utopian program with no intellectual purchase on the real world?

Nixon's FAP stalled in the Senate because liberals were suspicious of its supposed work requirements. On these grounds, for example, social workers, the most liberal of interest groups, became the most outspoken critics of the legislation. These work requirements were in fact minimal. But they were a necessary part of the ideological package Nixon was selling; for a substantial bloc of voters—not just the Chamber of Commerce—worried that the working poor would quit their jobs and loaf around all day if given the chance. A Gallup Poll in 1968, for example, showed that 58 percent of Americans opposed a guaranteed annual income of \$3,200 to a family of four; the typical sentiment reported by this majority was “nobody should get something for nothing.”

George Shultz, the secretary of the Treasury, addressed these issues in testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee in October 1969. He began by saying that “Work is a major feature of this program.” But he quickly moved to head off liberal objections by explaining that only a third of recipients would have to register with the local public employment office, and that less than one percent of those who did would be “disqualified” from Family Assistance Program eligibility. He emphasized throughout his testimony that poor people wanted to work, anyway. And the data from an ongoing New Jersey experiment would validate this claim. In a follow-up letter to Wilbur Mills, the all-powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee—it's a letter that is both astonishing and poignant in view of today's parochial attitudes toward the issue—Shultz insisted that to get people off welfare and into the workforce, the federal government had to subsidize “quality child care,” exactly as Nixon's FAP proposed to do. Otherwise, he explained, any incentives to get up and go to work would be canceled by the costs of private-sector daycare.

Many believe that work is self-evidently good for us. Why? Why are we stuck in this punitive place from which reality has departed—the place where there must be a job for every “able-bodied individual,” even though we don't know how to create enough of them, and where having a job is a good thing, no matter how pointless, dangerous, or demeaning it is? The short answer is the great romance of work, which I mean as metaphor but not hyperbole—after all, we love to work, and we prove it every day by

showing up at shitty jobs, where we can demonstrate that we're willing to make our own way in this cruel world. It's not just external, economic necessity that drives us. Something else is at stake. What else is there? It's not very complicated. We work because as we do so we can see the changes we're making in the world, on the world, and this vision, derived from an infantile but nonetheless indispensable notion, is what we call freedom—the ability to be causative, to reshape the inherited conditions we didn't choose, to remake ourselves and the world at once.

But if that is true, if work means freedom as well as bondage, I can't just say, well, socially necessary labor is receding—jobs that pay a living wage are disappearing—so let's all forget about work and its pleasures, its rewards, its benefits. I have to explain that something else, that surplus of meaning we find in our jobs and vocations. How, then, to diagnose the psychological imperatives that keep us at work, proceeding on the assumption that every symptom is an attempted cure? And, more to the point, how to imagine an alternative set of imperatives that would let us relax and be less productive? That question boils down to a big one: Can we imagine a different human nature?

The rental of a person is no less fraudulent and absurd than the ownership of one. In the employment contract the employee is rented. In theory and in legal terms the employee is treated as a thing, an instrument—like a rented car. But actually a person cannot be turned into an instrument—cannot be rented by someone else any more than he or she can be owned by someone else. In more theoretical terms, autonomy is inalienable. That is not a normative statement about how things ought to be, but a factual one about how things are. It follows that the employment contract is in fact a fraud.

The liberal and left-wing advocates of full employment assume that the bargaining power of workers, and thus their inclination to organize, will increase as the supply of jobs does. Meanwhile the advocates of labor republicanism and workers' self-management via employee-owned enterprise assume that everybody's identity is necessarily a function of his or her role in the production of goods and services. And the even more left-leaning, avowedly socialist advocates of a labor movement galvanized by new organizing drives assume that only a militant working class can change things for the better. They're all unlikely prisoners—or is it guardians?—of the Protestant work ethic.

Once upon a time, the Protestant work ethic was a leveling, democratizing attitude and social force. It served as a critique of aristocratic exemption from necessary labor because it insisted that everybody had to justify their consumption of goods by their prior production of value—everybody. But from the beginning, with Luther's insistence on a "calling," it was a kind of

“slave morality.” It justified renunciation and abstention from the present in the name of the future: “saving for a rainy day,” in the vernacular, storing up those sacrificed possibilities in the hope that redemption—sacred or secular, entering heaven or cashing out—would follow.

So, when I say Fuck Work, I mean that it no longer functions as either a moral calendar or an economic calculator. You will learn nothing about character by going to work at the minimum wage because the gangsters or the morons at corporate headquarters control your opportunities; you will learn nothing about the rationality of the market because the same people determine your income. I also mean that the slave morality of renunciation and abstention has outlived its usefulness. It’s obsolete for the obvious reason that if we keep working as hard as we can, producing as much as do, we’ll incinerate the planet. Beyond that—is there such a thing?—the deferment of gratification that we call work has by now become more repression than sublimation. It doesn’t merely delay and redirect our desires into socially useful channels; it mutilates them. Once upon a time, going or getting to work was a way of discovering and developing your capacities. By now it’s become a way to avoid yourself.

By saying Fuck Work, I mean—finally—to say that since the correlation of income and work is already incomprehensible and unjustifiable, we need to decouple them, in accordance with what transfer payments, “entitlements,” Wall Street bonuses, and real-life experiments with a guaranteed income have taught us—that, for better or worse, getting something for nothing has no measurable effect on the character of the recipients. That empirical fact propels us into a moral universe where work can’t serve as a reliable index of anything about you. Except that, you have to.

How can we provide incomes for:

1. People who work hard but don’t produce value that has a marketable numerator, by which I mean a return on their investment of labor time—fast-food workers, journalists, academics, filmmakers, and musicians, and the like—and also people whose labor time has been historically undervalued or red-lined due to race or gender.
2. People who don’t work because they can’t, for example elderly men and women, who constitute a growing proportion of every developed nation’s population.
3. People who don’t work—they don’t produce value the labor market might recognize—because they’ve got better things to do.

So conceived, the breakdown of the labor market is not just an economic crisis; it's a moral opportunity to rethink our relation to work, and to think anew about what, and who, we can love.

How can we derive satisfaction from our work if it diminishes ourselves and helps destroy civilization? Good work is not working for a living or to support a family. Good work is living. And the place to perform such work is often not in an office or factory but in our own home. If we do not live where we work, when we work we are wasting our lives, and our work, too.

In Western democracies, we are no longer governed by absolute rulers, but by people 'in authority.' In other words, authority is temporarily vested in an individual, making the person distinct from the function. And such functions are embedded in a broader symbolic structure that collectively sets out rights and obligations. It's not for nothing that authority figures are traditionally assigned external badges of office—a mayor's chain, a judge's wig—so that they can be publicly held to account. The fact that these badges nowadays come across as slightly ridiculous shows how we have lost the ability to distinguish between authority and those who hold it. These days, they tend to be conflated, so that traditional authority, with its symbolic underpinning, is lapsing into brute force. We respond very ambiguously to this trend.

Either we find power suspect and oppose it with might and main, or we go to the other extreme and call for a strong leader who will take action to solve our problems. Often, we do both at once: people want more authority, but get incensed when a teacher punishes their child. 'Who does she think she is?' we might ask, whereas that is actually the key issue; teachers are vested with the authority to teach. If a teacher abuses her position, she must be called to account. But the function itself must be exempt from criticism; otherwise, teaching will become impossible. The loss of a distinction between power and authority, between rulers and those in authority, means that nowadays things too often come down to power struggles. We end up in situations where 'might is right.' Ironically, people seize on this to justify the notion of the survival of the fittest. And, at present, this struggle for survival is particularly apparent in the workplace.

Our politicians are constantly singing hymns to democracy as the best system—this is simply the extension of democracy to the place where we spend most of our time. It's an amazing victory for their propaganda system—to make you work in an environment you often can't stand, and to do it for most of your waking life, and see the proceeds of your labor get siphoned off by somebody at the top, and then to make you think of yourself as a free person.

“People are constantly amazed—they don’t understand how you could possibly run a business like this. But everyone’s been in a group environment. Everyone’s been in a family, or on a team. You know how it works. It’s just all of a sudden, when you think about it in the context of making money or running a business, everyone’s head explodes about it. But I don’t feel like it’s that complicated. People want it to be a lot more complicated than it really is. They can’t even imagine how people would work together to make simple decisions. I like to explain that it’s a democratic organization. This isn’t a foreign concept. You live in America. We say we’re a democracy, but people are so far removed from the concept.”

Beyond a certain level of income, extrinsic rewards have scarcely any effect. Financial stimuli increase motivation only in jobs that don’t involve any thought. As soon as thinking is involved, especially creativity, intrinsic motivation proves far more effective. In fact, in such cases extrinsic motivation—that’s to say, bonuses—has a negative effect, causing people to perform worse than those who are intrinsically motivated. In this region of the world, where the focus is on the knowledge economy, the majority of jobs fall into the second category. Jobs that entail little thought—for example, conveyor-belt work, are largely a thing of the past. In that sector, bonuses do have a positive effect, but ironically enough are rarely awarded. So politicians and captains of industry have everything to gain by dismantling the extrinsic-motivation model as fast as possible. Introducing intrinsic motivation becomes even more of a priority when one considers that the current system of bonuses heightens income inequality—an inequality that has been linked to almost every kind of negative psychosocial effect. Politicians aspiring to represent the interests of the entire community must take account of this fact. The key question is: what constitutes intrinsic motivation? Autonomy, mastery, purpose.

Autonomy and mastery are closely related. Having a say over the organization and content of one’s work enormously increases motivation and commitment. This, in turn, leads to greater mastery and expertise, thereby increasing job satisfaction even more. Its purpose must be perceived as a contribution to something that transcends ourselves; something that we cannot achieve in isolation. This gives us the feeling of belonging to a community, yet still having an individual role to play. This is the balance between sameness and difference, between being part of a greater whole and yet being autonomous.

Many readers will dismiss this with a shrug, and urge me to ‘get real.’

The above approach sounds very nice, they will argue, but the bottom line is that people are in it for the money. And even if this model works, it can only be applied in a limited number of cases involving highly creative work. Both criticisms can easily be countered, as plenty of reliable studies and examples show. People are in it for the money because that's how the system is organized. I have already stressed elsewhere that the current reality is the consequence of a certain economic and social organization; it should not be confused with an absolute reality. Very many people these days derive job satisfaction, and more broadly, self-respect and a feeling of belonging, from work for which they receive little or no pay. Every single voluntary organization bears witness to this.

In childhood, I had no insight whatsoever into my father's consciousness, nor any awareness of what it might have felt like, inside, to do what he had to sit there at his desk and do every day. In this respect, it was not until many years after his death that I felt I truly knew him. I do not believe I knew or could even imagine, as a child, that for almost 30 years, 51 weeks a year, my father sat all day at a metal desk in a silent, fluorescent lit room, reading forms and making calculations and filling out further forms on the results of those calculations, breaking only occasionally to answer his telephone or meet with other actuaries in other bright, quiet rooms. With only a small and sunless north window that looked out on other small office windows in other grey buildings.

Bear in mind that, averaged over a year, even medieval serfs did not work even close to a forty-hour week.

When people are asked why they work what was their uniform answer? A reason to live, which typically translates as a reason to get out of bed and to do the right thing while awake. They wanted something to do, somewhere to go, a place—more than that, actually, an emotional destination—that would help them translate their inchoate, inarticulate desires into a coherent, regular, recognizable set of meanings, and that would, accordingly, give their humdrum, everyday lives some durable shape, some significance. The answer was never 'just for the money,' not even when questioning the morticians and the prostitutes. The job always appeared as a means to other ends, as it must be in a market society, but the ends were invariably an escape from a previous life or a commitment to a different life. Their regulative desire was to become somebody else, to find a future that wasn't already determined by their social origins or inscribed in their own bad decisions.

We work, we engage in social labor, for the same reasons we try to love each other as ourselves—we think it will make a difference.

Work is how we give our lives meaning when religion, party politics and community fall away.

It is easy to explain why evidence shows people who are unemployed feel even worse than people in meaningless jobs. The primary way in which meaningless work causes depression is through a lack of control—and unemployed people have even less control over their lives. They have no financial resources, no social status, and no choices about their lives.

Between 2011 and 2012 the polling company Gallup conducted the most detailed study ever carried out of how people across the world feel about their work. They studied millions of workers across 142 countries. They found that 13 percent of people say they are “engaged” in their jobs—which means they are “enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and contribute to their organization in a positive manner.” Against them, 63 percent say they are “not engaged,” which is defined as “sleepwalking through their workday, putting time—but not energy or passion—into their work.” And a further 24 percent are “actively disengaged.”

“They aren’t just unhappy at work; they’re busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish. Actively disengaged employees are more or less out to damage their company.”

The progressive advocates of full employment, for example, from Dean Baker and Jared Bernstein to Thomas Edsall and Mike Konczal, frame their proposals as alternatives to working-class dependence on the dole—in other words, as a way of balancing the budget, heading off the growth of entitlements, and quieting popular (not just Republican) fears of a “nanny state.” If people have jobs, the argument goes, they’re not on welfare, so they’re not just absorbing tax dollars taken from hardworking citizens. Instead, they’re in a stronger position to bargain for better wages and working conditions on their own account. Here is how Edsall summarized the progressive political morality of full employment in December 2013:

“The economics of survival have forced millions of men, women, and children to rely on ‘pity-charity liberal capitalism’ [Edsall is here quoting Konczal]. The state has now become the resource of last resort, consigning just the people progressives would like to turn into a powerful force for reform to a condition of subjugation—living out their lives on government subsidies like Medicaid, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and now Obamacare.”

The only alternative to this vaguely, benignly fascistic version of liberalism, according to Edsall and Konczal, is a “bold” public policy commitment

to full employment, presumably because more jobs mean less dependence on the state for income supplements, a.k.a. transfer payments, entitlements, and government subsidies.

Now, Edsall and Konczal are no reactionaries. Neither are Baker and Bernstein. By any political measure, these are genuine progressives—they're center-left-wingers all. And yet the implications of their argument are profoundly conservative, because they suggest that income without work, whether that means getting an old-fashioned transfer payment like Social Security or a guaranteed income, is of dubious moral value. Notice, to begin with, how the welfare state appears in Edsall's paragraph exactly as it does in Paul Ryan's Republican dream world, as the oppressor of the poor—an insatiable bureaucracy that produces dependence. Then notice how a potential "force for reform" is made pliant, docile, and inert because it doesn't just receive, it relies on government subsidies. If you didn't know any better, you'd think a Tea Party enthusiast wrote this paragraph after finishing *Atlas Shrugged*, particularly in view of the reference to Obamacare as a government subsidy that will subjugate the poor, to be sure, but also create a permanent constituency for the Democrats, the party of "pity-charity liberal capitalism." From this standpoint, there's no middle ground between work, on the one hand, and dependence on the other—between having a job and being subjugated by the state (or the party).

During the 80s, the aggressively pro-business governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan strengthened the power of employers, and used welfare cuts and moralistic rhetoric to create a much harsher environment for people without jobs. These policies were motivated by a desire for social control. After the political turbulence of the 60s and 70s, Conservatives freaked out at the prospect of everyone becoming hippies and abandoning work. They thought: 'What will become of the social order?' There is a fear of freedom—a fear among the powerful that people might find something better to do than create profits for capitalism.

The ruling class has figured out that a happy and productive population with free time on their hands is a mortal danger. And the widespread feeling that work is a moral value in itself, and that anyone not willing to submit themselves to some kind of intense work discipline for most of their waking hours deserves nothing, is extraordinarily convenient for them.

You can't have all these people working less!

They'd be less tired, less anxious, happier, more content. They'd vote more, they'd think more, they'd demonstrate more, they'd write their politicians, they'd party more and write more poetry. Why, they may even wake up and see the mess the one percent and their politicians have created!

We can't have any of that! As a matter of fact we want them working

more, not less, so they can think only to the next bill they have to pay. What's the matter with you?

Culture is not your friend. The glorification of work is a cultural construct perpetuated by a sociopathic and narcissistic elite. Everyone in charge says work is ennobling and necessary. They just think you should do it. Or die.

“Labor is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.”

Don't think of it as human labor per se. As beings that form a society—free beings in a free society—we do business by trading favors. We universalized the representation of owed favors in the form of currency. I do you a favor—in many cases this is in the form of labor, production, or service—and you either return the favor or give me money, which I can trade to any other member of my society in return for favors.

Right now it works thus. I go work a shift at the Pepsi plant, I do Pepsi a favor, they give me money. I give my money to Pizza Hut, Pizza Hut does me a favor. Pizza Hut gives some of my money to Pepsi to buy soda to sell, some to companies that make pizza ingredients, et cetera—just a big circle of favors.

Now even when all labor is performed by robots, humans will still need favors from one another, and we could hang on to currency if we wish to maintain the universalization of favor relations, meaning the system wherein if I do a favor for any random person and receive currency in exchange to represent the performance of the favor then I can in turn exchange said currency for a favor offered by anyone else.

This is how we are one big society: we have one currency that in sum represents an index of all the favors we owe each other. Once all labor is replaced by robots, we'll still need favors from one another. So it comes down to who will own the favors owed to the robots? The owner of the robots? And who will own all the robots? We might have the robot king to whom everyone owes favors if they want food and clothes and whatever else is made by robots. And of course there will be few favors that the masses could perform for this one guy that could not be performed by robots.

So you'll either have a universal basic income with nationalized robots or some weird system where robot god men are sort of emperors of humanity, or some distributed and scattered tribal system.

Not only would work be eliminated or vastly reduced by technology, Keynes predicted, but we would also be unburdened spiritually. Devotion to

work was, he deemed, one of many “pseudo-moral principles” that “exalted some of the most distasteful of human qualities into the position of the highest virtues.”

We should do away with the absolutely specious notion that everybody has to earn a living. It is a fact today that one in ten-thousand of us can make a technological breakthrough capable of supporting all the rest. The youth of today are absolutely right in recognizing this nonsense of earning a living. We keep inventing jobs because of this false idea that everybody has to be employed at some kind of drudgery because, according to Malthusian Darwinian theory he must justify his right to exist. So we have inspectors of inspectors and people making instruments for inspectors to inspect inspectors. But why should I inflict more pain upon the world by inventing more tech gadgets, making up more economic theories, and uncovering more knowledge about how the brain can be manipulated through brain research? The true business of people should be to go back to school and think about whatever it was they were thinking about before somebody came along and told them they had to earn a living.

Detach or Die

There is a seemingly endless conflation of work, good, with being a wage slave, not so good. Progressives would do well to focus on justice and that does not include making victims work for restitution. One would think Progressives would wish to end wage slavery, not perpetuate it.

Some people might argue: ‘Humans are social animals. Work provides a community. If you are extroverted and need to be around people during the day, it’s hard to create enough opportunities for interaction on your own.’

I solve that problem with volunteer labor at a local laundry. I do it *only* when my favorite worker is there because I like her, she has a family to support, she is overworked, she is in constant pain from fibromyalgia, has carpal tunnel syndrome and because of the interesting people I get to see there.

How can I afford to do meaningful work for free? Because I’m retired and have a guaranteed income from Social Security and a small pension.

And let’s be honest. A guaranteed job as opposed to a guaranteed income is meant to boost wages by withholding labor from the private sector. But who needs wages with an adequate guaranteed income?

The good have always suffered for the bad. for me, however, this just shows the values of our society are so warped that any concept of societal good is shamed lest someone game the system. Dare we conceive of anything that might help the rest or encourage those who are willing to partake of a better, humane society. I would never expect Republicans to conceive of higher taxes, but does that mean I should give up on the that idea?

Obviously, we all must accept the idea that we have to continue to suffer lest those losers might get something they don’t deserve. As I get closer to retirement I can’t even imagine why people would want to work at a job that doesn’t fulfill themselves. Sadism seems to be highly valued. I won’t sell out my joy so that “loser” doesn’t get that “extra” he/she doesn’t deserve. In my opinion, I ‘lose-lose’ with that kind of mindset.

What a society this is when we have to keep such mean-spirited values.

The goal of humanity never has been to have a job. The real, basic goals of humanity are food, shelter, clothing, health, pleasure, and some measure of freedom. Having a job is not a goal. It wrongly has been assumed to be the only means to obtaining the real goals.

Why do we focus on a means rather than on the real goals, especially when the means may not really be a means to our real goals at all? Does having a job at McDonald’s provide people with the means to their life’s goals? Do most jobs satisfy our life’s goals?

Do you think Bill Gates's goal is to have a job? The British royal family's goal? The Saudi princes' goal? Do you think my goal is to have a job? I want food, clothing, shelter, health, pleasure, and freedom, but I sure don't want a job. I would love for the government to help provide those things.

Why can't more American's have the same benefits as the rich? Answer: Because the rich have convinced the rest of us that such benefits only come with labor "Work sets you free." The rich don't want you to have the same benefits they do. If you did, they wouldn't be rich. You are told that if you don't work, you are a lazy taker—unless you are rich, in which case it's OK to be idle rich, just donate to a charity every now and then. The federal government can provide many of our goals, but the rich have us convinced we should not even expect those goals unless we labor.

Yes, yes, I know, if no one worked, those goals couldn't be accomplished. But that's a diversion. We're not talking about no one working. We're talking about the government paying people enough to accomplish goals for themselves and for others.

Answer me this: How will a Jobs Guarantee accomplish Medicare for All? How will JG accomplish free education for all? How will a minimum wage JG job—that's what is often proposed—allow anyone to accomplish their life's goals?

A JG asks you to settle for poverty or a step above. A JG tells you to forget about climbing the ladder. JG tells you to work 'til you drop. By focusing on JG, we lose focus on what's important and play right into the hands of the rich, who want you to labor and serve them, forever.

Wrong focus; wrong outcome.

As a disabled person myself I would argue it's not jobs that disabled people are necessarily after, it's being able to actively participate in society in a contributing, meaningful and productive way, to be included in something with a purpose, a purpose you believe in. If income is not an issue, most people would still engage in projects. Your son would watch movies all day only because there is no better role to play, we are at a transition stage where disabled people, still considered invalids, are being discovered to be not so invalid.

But I take issue with the notion that disabled people would be happy to do any dead end work. We deserve more and better than that, everyone does.

I'm a deaf person with a talent which tech wants and needs, which just so happens to be ensuring our tech is accessible, inclusive, making it so much better. So disabled people can truly participate in society, to do all the same things tech supposedly does to liberate while making it truly liberating for all.

But we are also socially responsible for finding meaningful and significant work for the talents disabled people actually have, as opposed to getting them to do something stupid because it's something to do and they're disabled and so should be satisfied with whatever they get. We're not vegetables, nobody is. So that goes for non-disabled folks too.

Which brings us to the heart of this UBI/JG discussion, either you're coming to this from a perspective of people should have jobs, any job, because they're basically vegetables or some kind of autonomous machination which goes through motions and capitalism doesn't work without those machinations so there's some kind of moral imperative to labour or wage slavery, and the measure or class of a person is whether they are jobbed machinations/slaves, or UBI/JG is secondary to the question of are people as a whole happy and doing what they'd rather be doing, are they truly participating in society, as part of the human project.

That's the reality most corporations are facing at the moment. The meaning and nature of 'work' itself is undergoing change, becoming 'play,' as capitalism shoots itself in the foot and in the drive for profit either necessitates socialism and classlessness, or mass social upheaval and less profits.

Some think it would take a long time, as in many generations, to begin to know who we are, what we would do and be without a Protestant work ethic. It's almost impossible for most to imagine life in some other form just as it's impossible for most to imagine a democratic process, even within just one party. Idle time scares the beejesus out of so many people I know. I've watched people retire and move to these beautiful Ozark mountains for decades... and do nothing but destroy them, over and over again, out of boredom and idle guilt. I can't remember the last time I cut down a live tree for firewood since there are always mountains of forest being laid to waste.

But we must face the fact most work is useless, crap, BS, and/or outright destructive. The MIC, Health Insurance, and Wall Street come to mind immediately. To enforce human work for the sake of it is to perhaps destroy the big blue marble host at an accelerated rate. If we keep making ourselves act like drones our world will continue to look like it's what we are doing and who we are. Just drive down any street America built post-1960 looking for something aesthetically pleasing, somewhat unique, that isn't either mass produced or designed to fall apart in a few decades or less.

Maybe with a jobs guarantee we should just outlaw bulldozers, chainsaws, 18-wheelers, private jets, dwellings and offices with more than four units, and large farm equipment. If we are going to force labor then give every man and woman a shovel or a hoe with their HS diploma—not a gun, not

an office for predatory FIRE purposes. That way we wont destroy ourselves so quickly.

Joni sang: You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone. What about the people who never knew what was there to begin with?

The problem with a JG and that line of argument, is that JG does not propose to engage people more in public life than a Universal Basic Income, as a UBI is by definition, far more inclusive of all kinds of work that people may do for others. You may even do things that nobody in a society approves of, with an Unconditional Income, like trying to prove that the world is flat, not round.

JG has nothing on enabling people to be active citizens. It's a policy to look backwards, or it's so inclusive that it's basically an unconditional income to everyone. You gotta be willing to take a long shot sometimes—increasingly often, looking at the world as it is today and might increasingly be tomorrow—to properly empower people so they can be active citizens.

So let's say I want to foster rescue dogs, grow most of my own food on a small plot of land, and provide educational support to struggling kids. I could apply for a private grant to cover the dog expenses, but that might also involve oversight, reporting metrics, re-certification, et cetera. I could apply for a government grant to support the tutoring costs, which again is likely to have overhead, approval, reporting metrics, et cetera. In both cases there is an increase in resource cost completely unrelated to the main goal of the tasks.

With a UBI system, none of that exists. I simply support myself and the costs of my projects using that completely string-free money which involves no paperwork, no bureaucrats. How is this not clearly the better system?

A basic income might seem like it is a vast expansion of state power, since presumably it's the government that would be creating and distributing the money, but, in fact, it's the exactly the reverse. Huge sections of government—and precisely, the most intrusive and obnoxious ones, since they are most deeply involved in the moral surveillance of ordinary citizens—would be instantly made unnecessary and could be simply closed down. Yes, millions of minor government officials and benefit advisors would be thrown out of their current jobs, but they'd all receive basic income too. Maybe some of them will come up with something genuinely important to do, like installing solar panels or discovering the cure for cancer. But it wouldn't matter if they instead formed jug bands, devoted themselves to restoring antique furniture, spelunking, translating Mayan hieroglyphics, or trying to set the world record for having sex at an advanced age. Let them do what they like! Whatever they end up doing, they will almost certainly be happier than they are now, imposing sanctions on the unemployed for

arriving late at CV-building seminars or checking to see if the homeless are in possession of three forms of ID; and everybody else will be better off for their newfound happiness. Even a modest basic income program could become a stepping-stone toward the most profound transformation of all: to unlatch work from livelihood entirely.

This is also why conditional versions of the same program, or guaranteed jobs programs, are in no sense variations on—let alone “improved versions of”—the same thing. The key to UBI is the unconditional element, which allows for a massive reduction of the role of government intrusion in citizens’ lives. These supposedly “modified” or “improved” versions either will not do this, or will have the opposite effect.

The current financial system functions as a means to tie the work that is done for corporations to basic essentials such as food and housing in an entirely artificial relationship. Despite an abundance of basic essentials, individuals or entire countries can be deprived of them based on the labour or rights they are providing to corporations. A system where banks, governments, and many other valueless institutions also stand between individuals and basic needs and demand payment completes the creation of true wage slavery where no worker can survive outside the system.

The jobs that corporations and governments have chosen to value are almost entirely busywork, pointless jobs that would not exist in another system, jobs including but not limited to everything in sales, finance, management, politics, and more. The end result of corporate work is far too much product; and products and services that are detrimental to society and the environment. Any attempts to stop corporate work are met with the cry that to do so would cause job loss, which is promoted as a great evil as under this system jobs equal basic essentials. Jobs are always touted as being in short supply, valuable, and difficult to obtain, especially the ‘good’ jobs that pay the most money. Jobs are, of course, not remotely scarce, any child can find hundreds of valuable things to do at any time, but these valuable jobs have not had an artificial monetary value associated with them.

There is little difference, in the real world, between sitting on a park bench all day and sitting in a cubicle filling out spreadsheets, because most jobs are already busy-work. So most people are already doing corvee labor in a totalitarian civilization—digging holes and filling them up again. In a typical office building, the only people who are doing real, productive work are the janitors and maintenance engineers.

Once you realize that most—or, at least, many—government-funded and -forced “bullshit jobs” programs aren’t needed—or wouldn’t be needed if we weren’t irrationally wed to the concept of jobs—the ugly side effects and

torment they cause really leave no option but to call for end of any and all of such nonsense. Yes, Virginia, we really do need to get quite a lot of work done, but this doesn't mean brutalizing lower classes into horrific conditions over the concern that we might experience inflation.

How does that even work? How does UBI cause inflation of food and other real products, but bullshit forced employment—which produces nothing, or at best something that shouldn't need to be produced—which is UBI in everything but name magically doesn't? Concern trolling about inflation has got to be one of the best ideological tools the Western plutocracy has in its arsenal today.

One could make the argument UBI wouldn't work with a rent-based economy because, say, if most homes were rented, landlords would just double rents to grab the additional income. At the very least controls would have to be imposed. And really goes to show you that the problem of “inflation,” absent a shortage of actual goods, is simply the result of greed.

It doesn't matter whether the government chooses to implement a UBI or a JG, if they do so without gutting the FIRE sector and its influence, all these items will do is funnel money to the top—just like Bernie's proposed Wuhan Flu crisis responses. That is not necessarily a sufficient argument against implementing it without those other safeguards in place, but it is certainly something to consider, especially when determining the ultimate scope of the radical change necessary.

In a world where one is going to give money to the rich one way or another, it is of course better to do so via the people, so that they too receive some meager benefit. But this benefit will come at the cost of further empowering the few.

Make no mistake, I'm all in favour of providing that “great experience” of being a “member of the society” to all who like it, but not as a mandatory, no opt-out programme; remember, nymphomaniacs would very much like to see if the government helped people by forcing them to have sex regularly, everywhere and with everyone, and they would claim how much it improves the lives of “beneficiaries.” Everyone else would recognize this as sex-slavery; how about we do this for other, more subtle forms of abuse—and I think ‘rape’ would not be too strong of a word here either.

I implore the ‘work is great,’ ‘society is great’ crowd to wake up and finally recognize the true nature of their demands: you're calling for horrific, hellish, nightmare conditions for those who don't share your enthusiasm.

There are arguments put forward in some quarters that reducing hours of employment will lead to an increase in crime, unhealthy practices, or other negative social effects. It was once considered inconceivable that the world could run without slavery for the exact same reasons people are now

putting forward for retaining wages, our modern slavery. I see them as having an equivalent moral standing. How is arguing that people should be forced to work forty hours a week they would not otherwise have to work because they might otherwise drink, smoke, or commit crimes any different from arguing that the entire population should be placed in prison for an equivalent amount of time as a form of preventative detention?

To hammer on the point: there's no reason why 'work and stay in poverty' should be preferred as an outcome over 'don't work and stay in poverty.'

If a person cannot find work attractive enough to be willing to give time to do it, it is perfectly possible it's the case that labor is currently over-supplied; the marginal disutility of working more exceeds the wage. Using basic survival to threaten them into the labor force is just going to make the problem worse, potentially a lot worse because labor supply does not follow the law of supply when wages are low and basic survival is at stake, so them entering the labor force will expand supply even further as other people start needing to work more to achieve survival as their wages drop.

There are other things people can use their time for, like leisure, skill-building, child-rearing, and improvement of their properties. At a certain point it really might be better for people to willingly choose not to participate and focus on those, at least until the price of labor goes up.

Any for profit system is not going to have social or environmental goals as its mandate—even if it says it does—and a wage paying system is a for-profit system. If profit were removed, all decisions would be made for social goals, prison systems would be trying to rehabilitate prisoners or study to find why they were in violation of the law instead of just warehousing as many as possible, medical research would be trying to improve health instead of selling pharmaceuticals, and agriculture would be devoted to producing the most nutritious food in the most environmentally responsible way. Removing profit would also remove a great deal of the reason for competitiveness, secrecy, and spying within organizations, along with a great deal of the redundancy of competing companies providing identical goods and services.

What seems to be missed by so many critics is the fact that under the current system there are numerous socially beneficial tasks which are done with no compensation whatsoever.

If I make a healthy lunch for my kids I get no acknowledgment or reward; if I make trash food for your kids at McDonald's I'm rewarded. If I take care of my sick parents, again no compensation; take care of others' sick parents in a nursing home and I'm rewarded. Grow my own food sustainably without toxic industrial inputs and runoff? No reward. Do it on an industrial scale

with all the environmental damage that goes with it and I get rewarded.

UBI provides a benefit, compensation, for all of these things and more without the policy having to go into every little detail and possible situation. It increases democracy in that it gives more power to individuals to decide how best to utilize their time, effort, resources. A JG on the other hand involves others deciding.

UBI can discourage consumption as well. How much infrastructure, products, resource extraction exists to support those working jobs they have no desire to do—and do so only so they can eat, have a roof, et cetera—jobs that are not socially beneficial but in fact actually harm society and the environment?

UBI alone is of course not the magic solution that will cure all ills, but it is certainly on the path to ensuring a more just and equal world for both humans and non-humans alike. Less work, less GDP, less extraction, and degrowth. It's either that or societal and environmental collapse with immense harms to both humans and non-humans on the way down. It really couldn't be any more clear. While making people work shitty jobs to 'earn' a living has always been spiteful, it's now starting to seem suicidal.

Remember, if they do not recognize that the federal government is monetarily sovereign or do not advocate putting that power to use to benefit the masses, then it does not matter what they call themselves—Democrat, Republican, Democratic Socialist, Green, Progressive, Conservative—they are a threat to you, your family, your neighbors.

The US government cannot run out of money. This is not some fringe belief but precisely how the government functions today. The issue is that the power to create unlimited money out of thin air is *only* used for things like weapons of war and handouts to the wealthy, powerful few. Those in power absolutely embrace the fact that the US federal government cannot run out of dollars, they're just not interested in using it to help *you*. The only path to an equitable future lies in using the power over the dollar to provide for the masses.

The cult of jobs at any cost will continue to cause suffering for countless individuals. Many people should have no traditional job—we don't need them to. At least 50% of all jobs in this country are either unnecessary or only made necessary in order to support all of the unnecessary jobs.

As long as survival and jobs are linked we will be in ecological overshoot, we will encourage exploitation, pollution, production for production's sake, we will continue to enrich and comfort a few at the expense of the many. An ecological concept of efficiency needs to replace the economic one. Perhaps money can still drive such a system but healthier environments would define

the objective of wage labor. In such a framework, most of what we call laziness would be seen as resource efficiency.

If robots are a problem there is something wrong with the system.

Everyone in the 1970s and 1980s believed automation would lead to increased leisure time as robots would be doing so much of the work. Many boring, dull, and repetitive jobs could be done by robots freeing human beings up for better things. As this has started to come true we are starting to realize how the capitalist system turns this into a massive problem.

Capitalism had started to run into difficulties with over-production by the 1920s and extensive advertising became necessary to shift all the stuff the system could produce. Demand for the goods had to be manufactured along with the goods themselves, which no one really needed.

Consumerism had to be actively encouraged in the thrifty population of the time as they were not used to wasting money on things they didn't really need. Today we have to build storage units to house the surplus stuff from the private sector that people can't fit in their houses. As natural resource limits become apparent such a wasteful system looks as though it's approaching the end of the line.

In the 1950s John Kenneth Galbraith wrote *The Affluent Society*, discussing how they were still bound by pre-1920s ideas where increasing productivity and efficiency were seen as essential although they lived in a land of plenty. By the 1950s the only problem was shifting all the stuff the system produced and advertisers faced an uphill struggle. He also noted how a world of private luxury co-existed with a world of public squalor and there were no advertising campaigns for better schools and hospitals.

We still think in terms of those pre-1920s worries today: productivity and efficiency. Larry Summers and the IMF have noted that demand is the problem that even today's ubiquitous advertising can't overcome.

Capitalism is a way of organizing society. The lower class does the manual work, the middle class does the managerial and administrative work and the upper class live a life of luxury and leisure. Since the dawn of human civilization nearly all societies have been organized along these lines.

The UK Aristocracy were there for the transition from feudalism to capitalism and barely noticed the difference as their life of luxury and leisure continued as before. They are still living the same life of luxury and leisure today as nothing has really changed.

Adam Smith observed:

“The Labour and time of the poor is in civilized countries sacrificed to the maintaining of the rich in ease and luxury. The Landlord is maintained in idleness and luxury by the labour of

his tenants. The moneyed man is supported by his extractions from the industrious merchant and the needy who are obliged to support him in ease by a return for the use of his money. But every savage has the full fruits of his own labours; there are no landlords, no usurers and no tax gatherers.”

It was all much easier to see in the early days of capitalism. In the early nineteenth century things were much the same and the great wealth of the British Empire was claimed by those at the top. The men, women, and children at the bottom of society were housed in slums, worked almost every hour they were awake in the factories of the wealthy and still lived a bare subsistence existence. It was only organized labor movements that brought an end to the “natural” order of 5,000 years of human civilization and those at the bottom had a mechanism for getting a larger slice of the pie.

This internal welfare state to look after the lords of the manor was just the norm in the days when capitalism came into being, today we have moved on and expect everyone to do their bit, even the descendants of feudal warlords (a.k.a. the aristocracy).

We need a system that is efficient and doesn't use advertising to shift the massive excess it produces. Natural resources are approaching their limits. We also need a system that can use improvements in technology like robots to benefit all. A system like capitalism, that makes robots a problem, obviously has fundamental flaws.

It's time for something new, a finite earth cannot cope with this wasteful system. It's time for something new as robots prevent capitalism from being a way to organize society. Either over-production becomes so excessive that even advertising can't cope or far too many members of society become surplus to requirements.

It's time for something new, a system without an internal welfare state for the lords of the manor—it's the twenty-first century. It's working at the moment but its end is near. A better future awaits when we can think of a new system.

There can be no UBI because of “reality”? What bullshit.

There is no reality. Society can be organized in a multitude of systems but we are told we must adhere to a system where the benefits must accrue to the few. Every human is entitled to a base level of the resources that society has, a base level of housing, a base level of food, a base level of water, a base level of income and wealth.

“Demanding a no-strings-attached welfare system, the left seeks to cut government out of social provisioning while at the

same time relying on government for regular financial support. This position, which fails to rethink the structure of social participation as a whole, leaves disquieting political questions unanswered: How will we provide adequate human and material resources for our growing elderly populations? How can we meaningfully restructure social production to address climate change? How do we preserve a place for the arts outside of competitive MFA programs and speculative art markets?”

Ah yes, here we go again, the masses are stupid and lazy and need their meritocratic betters to design a system to keep them in their proper place.

If your goal is that the elderly must be monetized and a product of the capitalist system to profit off of, UBI isn't your solution. People are impoverished *now* taking care of the elderly. A UBI solves the 'taking care of the elderly' for all of those people. Climate change is carbon burning, consumerism, over consumption, over population. Switching to a UBI offers the opportunity to shift to community service and leisure activities. If you desire to have the privilege to select and crush artists, you will want a private patronage system, but the UBI is specifically useful for the arts. People will have time not just to participate in the communities at schools and libraries, and care for pets, children, and the elderly, but the UBI is also the patronage for many genres of artists—painting, music, theater, writing.

This idea that people are lazy and stupid still persists amongst the credentialed class. Get out of your own neighborhoods. I can merely go for a walk and see those lazy stupid people acting in their communities for free. The person that scrapes weeds not just in front of their own space but continues down the sidewalk, volunteers at the thrift store, volunteers at the school. There are people sitting home alone with no mechanism to contribute.

The real issue is that it is apparent that a dozen individuals could pool a meager UBI and do shameful things like grow produce on a tiny plot and start a grocery store together (reducing corporate power to extract tax reductions) or a 'library of things' (reducing Amazon's ability to extract tax deductions). Public schools would have assistants in the classroom, and—horror of horrors—there would be those that would step up and run art, computer, shop, crafts, gardening, et cetera. And the public resources would be the basis of a community instead of corporate rule and the bureaucratic hierarchies controlled by the meritocrats.

When I ask people, 'What would you personally do with a basic income?' about 99 percent of people say: 'I have dreams, I have ambitions, I'm going to do something ambitious and useful.' But when you ask them what they

think other people would do with a basic income, they say—oh, they’ll become lifeless zombies, they’ll binge-watch Netflix all day, smoke pot, fuck and shit out babies.

This program does trigger a big change—but not the one most people imagine. The biggest change will be in how people think about work. When you ask people what they actually do at work, and whether they think it is worthwhile, many people readily volunteer that the work they do is pointless and adds nothing to the world. The key to a guaranteed income is that it empowers people to say no. For the first time, they will be able to leave jobs that are degrading, or humiliating, or excruciating. Obviously, some boring things will still have to be done. That means those employers will have to offer either better wages, or better working conditions. In one swoop, the worst jobs, the ones that cause the most depression and anxiety, will have to radically improve, to attract workers.

Economists have long assumed that there would be a free-rider problem with respect to public goods: if people could partake in public goods without paying for them, they would. But then a number of studies conclusively demonstrated that this hypothesis held true only when the subjects were economists.

“What if we predicated social critique on terms that are not defined by the neoliberal ideology that we wish to circumvent?”

To do this, I propose that we give everyone, unconditionally, an income, as expression of their potential—and natural desire—to contribute to society, and all the prerequisite time that goes into that, and for the very contributions themselves. An unconditional labor value derived income, for all. An income that both enables all kinds of work, and pays that labor value in the same stroke.

From there, additional earned income becomes a matter of how much respect you command, how well you utilize monopolies, and how much you hate your job and require compensation for how much you hate it. But the labor value would be accounted for, unconditionally.

In a world where there’s superstars—and superbrands—who command respect and natural monopolies to make a lot of money, and people writing open source for the greater benefit of everyone else predominantly, it makes sense to make a statement such as that, about labor value, and to pay it to everyone. Mothers and fathers in active care of their children too, could agree, I’d imagine.

But making a list of things that you think might be cool for society, and trying to have tangible compensations for only those, seems problematic, if not to say, counterproductive. Rather recognize *all* the time that people spend, to be decent people among fellow people, to educate themselves formally and informally, be it in the process of being an entrepreneur or in a broader sense. A sense of justice that can only be achieved by the state deciding for its people what is purposeful, will fall flat on its face when it comes to practicality, unless we have artificial super-intelligence. Because you will have to literally know better than the people, what they will appreciate to what extent. And you don't know that. Neither do I."

A basic income and the job guarantee are actually natural complements. In terms of the rules that any sovereign state must comply with—the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—you have the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of self and of family, and the right to free choice of employment. Two different rights. That means work should be an option.

The idea is, you're not on the treadmill, it's the state that's on the treadmill working continually to fulfill your economic and social rights. It's the state that bears duties, you have rights. So if you want to do something and you need structure, knock yourself out, work for the state or some customer or boss. If you want to spend all the time you can with your kid before the mass extinction starves her, that's fine too.

When you ask people: Do you exist for the state, or does the state exist for you? People are quick to say, I don't exist for the state, that's totalitarianism! But people seem to accept that they exist for the economy. They accept that their life depends on acceptable service to the labor market. Just like I don't exist for the state, I don't exist for the economy. The economy exists for me. That is the revolutionary import of the ICESCR and that's why the US strangled Venezuela when Chavez committed the state to it.

Human rights is a complete, consistent, and coherent alternative to neo-liberal market worship. The idea sounds so strange because the neoliberals use an old trick to get people to hold still for exploitation. In the old days, the parasitic class invented god's will to legitimize an accidental accretion of predatory institutions and customs. Everybody nodded and said, 'I see, it's not some greedy assholes, it's god's will.' After a while everybody said, 'Wait a minute.' The parasitic class had to think fast, so they invented the

economy to legitimize an accidental accretion of predatory institutions and customs. So now you submit to that. Suckers!

“There will be a political reckoning revolving around a 3 day work week with a 6 hour day. We have only so much need for direct human labor input to keep the productive levels of civilization providing for the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter plus advanced medicine and education for culture transmission from one generation to the next. As we went from the 6 day work week with a 12–14 hour work day, to the 5 day, 40 hour work week, we will need to face the fact that are able to get everything we need from less work activity. Not no work at all, just less.

Currently, we are enmeshed in the capitalist mode of production which is coming apart at the seams and the purpose of profit making is being obsoleted by MMT and higher industrial and agricultural productivity. We throw away a lot of food in the advanced nations and do not know what to do with so much stuff—so much ends up in auction houses, eBay, and thrift stores.

Our lives can not be taken up with tribute to corporate capitalism with excessive time given over to commuting and waste of time cubicle sitting. At home, if you have one, there is plenty of work to be done, particularly in taking care of one another from becoming alienated husks of a human being riddled with mental and emotional problems and then other diseases from stress and pollution. Imagine, staying home with your kids and helping them grow up rather than ignoring them—because you love them so much, you will throw your life away to keep health insurance, build up a college fund, a 401k and a house as far away from crime and drugs that you can afford. What used to sound like a plan for many Americans has slipped away from all but the top 20% or so of the income strata.

A political reckoning has begun, and one way or another it will be resolved, because the chaos and volatility will be ended, deliberately. All processes eventually end and our current political construct is no different. It will end and will be replaced with something that does work, is stable and stops the pain of not knowing that spinning out of control from the old order and traditions is finally over, replaced with a predictable set of expectations that most of us can live with.

We can't go on living in a unsustainable manner.”

The answer is not perpetual “job retraining.” The assholes who benefit from trade deals simply keep outsourcing and offshoring job after job after job, or automate them, so there are increasingly no more jobs worth doing to be retrained into. It is not acceptable to tell working people that they must permanently keep retraining as jobs are pulled out from under them.

UBI. Period. Why work if robots are doing it? Work for work’s sake is Puritan bullshit. Time to lose that nonsense. The trust fund rich don’t ever have to actually work a day in their lives. If that’s OK for them, then it’s good for everyone and anyone else. If a trustfunder gets to get paid to party and not work a day in their lives, then that’s good for displaced “losers” of globalization too. Or we force the rich to actually work. Labor, make things and do work that hurts their backs, makes their muscles ache. Force trustfunders to be door greeters at Walmart. Force them to bag groceries, stock Ace Hardware shelves.

What’s good for the goose is good for the gander. If it’s fine for the rich to be “paid” to be idle if they so choose, then it must be made available to *all* people to be idle yet still be paid to live.

It’s really weird. Over a century of increases in productivity, and yet people have to keep working ridiculously long hours for society to meet its basic needs.

Where is all that extra productivity going to?

Most people like to complain about their jobs, but I’m trying to complain about this whole workaday world—this blinkered trek down some career path towards a diabolically mundane vision of the earth as a grab-bag of minerals, and life as a frantic search for status and distraction. It’s hard to complain about something that all-encompassing.

But that’s probably because something this overwhelming begins to look “only natural.” And adults like to pretend they’re serious enough to face reality and not drift off into Utopian fantasies. However, the workaday world is also a fantasy: not a fact of nature, but an artifact of indoctrination. And an inability to question—and bitch at—this dumbed-down way of life is collusion.

The lesson here is that just how important material incentives are to people will depend on how the human workplace is structured. And if we structure it in keeping with the false idea that people work only for pay, we’ll create workplaces that make this false idea true. Thus, it’s not true that “you just can’t get good help anymore.” It is true that you just can’t get good help anymore when you only give people work to do that is deadening and soulless. What it takes to “get good help” is jobs that people want to do. And we’ll see that this aspiration for good work is not “pie-in-the-sky” idealism. It is well within our grasp.

Working hard for the sake of hard work is just dumb if it won't get you food or a comfortable way of life. It's tough not to give up with the system stacked against you.

Once, when contemplating the apparently endless growth of administrative responsibilities in academic departments, I came up with one possible vision of hell. Hell is a collection of individuals who are spending the bulk of their time working on a task they don't like and are not especially good at. Say they were hired because they were excellent cabinet-makers, and then discover they are expected to spend a great deal of their time frying fish. Neither does the task really need to be done—at least, there's only a very limited number of fish that need to be fried. Yet somehow, they all become so obsessed with resentment at the thought that some of their co-workers might be spending more time making cabinets, and not doing their fair share of the fish-frying responsibilities, that before long there's endless piles of useless badly cooked fish piling up all over the workshop and it's all that anyone really does.

I think this is actually a pretty accurate description of the moral dynamics of our own economy.

If the Treasury were to fill old bottles with banknotes, bury them at suitable depths in disused coalmines which are then filled up to the surface with town rubbish, and leave it to private enterprise on well-tryed principles of *laissez-faire* to dig the notes up again—the right to do so being obtained, of course, by tendering for leases of the note-bearing territory—there need be no more unemployment and, with the help of the repercussions, the real income of the community, and its capital wealth also, would probably become a good deal greater than it actually is.

It would, indeed, be more sensible to build houses and the like; but if there are political and practical difficulties in the way of this, the above would be better than nothing.

Good data drive out bad theories. But there's a crucial difference between theories about planets, atoms, genes, and diseases and theories about at least some aspects of human nature. Planets don't care what scientists say about their behavior. They move around the sun with complete indifference to how physicists and astronomers theorize about them. Genes are indifferent to our theories about them also. But this is not true of people. Theories about human nature can actually produce changes in how people behave. What this means is that a theory that is false can become true simply by people believing it's true. The result is that, instead of good data driving out bad data and theories, bad data change social practices until the data become good data, and the theories are validated.

So is a theory about human nature a discovery, or is it an invention? I

believe that often, it is more invention than discovery. I think that ideas, like Adam Smith's, about what motivates people to work have shaped the nature of the workplace. I think they have shaped the workplace in directions that are unfortunate. What this means is that instead of walking around thinking that 'well, work just is what it is, and we have to deal with it,' we should be asking whether the way work is is the way it should be. Like fish that don't know they live in water, we live with such ideas about human nature that are so pervasive that we don't even realize there's another way to look at ourselves.

Ideas or theories about human nature have a unique place in the sciences. We don't have to worry that the cosmos will be changed by our theories about the cosmos. The planets really don't care what we think or how we theorize about them. But we do have to worry that human nature will be changed by our theories of human nature. Human beings are unfinished animals. It is human nature to have a nature that is very much the product of the society that surrounds us. That human nature is more created than discovered. We design human nature, by designing the institutions within which people live. So we must ask ourselves just what kind of a human nature we want to help design.

If we want to help design a human nature that seeks and finds challenge, engagement, meaning, and satisfaction from work, we have to start building our way out of a deep hole that almost three centuries of misconceptions about human motivation and human nature have put us in, and help foster workplaces in which challenge, engagement, meaning, and satisfaction are possible.

Businesses which are organized around a principle of dialogue and co-operative control would be another starting point for a critical mind turned outwards upon the world, and not inwards upon itself. One of the advantages of employee-owned businesses is that they are far less reliant on the forms of psychological control that managers of corporations have relied on since the 1920s. There is no need for somewhat ironic HR rhetoric about the 'staff being the number one asset' in firms where that is constitutionally recognized. It is only under conditions of ownership and management which render most people expendable that so much 'soft' rhetorical effort has to be undertaken to reassure them that they are not. Any faintly realistic account of organizations must recognize that there is an optimal amount of dialogue and consultation, between zero at one end (the Frederick Taylor position) and constant deliberation. Arguing for democratic business structures cannot plausibly mean the democratization of every single decision, at every moment in time. But it is not clear that the case for a dictatorship of management still works either, even on its own terms. If the argument for hierarchies is

that they are efficient, that they cut costs, that they get things done, a more nuanced reading of much of the research on unhappiness, stress, depression, and absence in the workplace would suggest that current organizational structures are failing even in this limited aim.

Consultation or dialogue which is purely there to make employees feel valued is useless and repeats the same error yet again. The goal is not to make employees *feel* valued, but to rearrange power relations such that they *are* valued, a state of affairs that will most likely influence how they feel as a side effect. The practice of democratic dialogue is something people may need help learning so it can be imported into the management of businesses and local communities. This is the real power of institutions: that they actively teach particular ways of feeling, and we have not nearly enough institutions which practically teach democracy. It is a telling indicator of our political culture that instead we teach resilience and mindfulness: silent relationships to the self, rather than vocal relationships to each other.

Anything that offers success in our unjust society without trying to change it is not revolutionary—it just helps people cope. In fact, it could also be making things worse. Instead of encouraging radical action, mindfulness says the causes of suffering are disproportionately inside us, not in the political and economic frameworks that shape how we live. And yet mindfulness zealots believe that paying closer attention to the present moment without passing judgment has the revolutionary power to transform the whole world. It's magical thinking on steroids.

To a large degree, the effects of ideology on how people act will depend on how broadly, how pervasively and how saliently it is purveyed in a culture. When it lives in isolated places, its effects will likely be small and correctable. But when it's in the water supply—when it is everywhere—its effects will likely be much more profound. Entire cultures can be differentiated from one another by the extent to which they are guided by the belief that either intelligence is fixed or that it grows. And studies of intellectual development across these different cultures show that kids living in a culture with a 'growth mindset' exhibit more intellectual development than kids living in a culture with a 'fixed mindset.'

There is another mechanism by which ideology can have an influence. This mechanism—the one that I believe has the most profound effects on our working environments and beyond—operates to change institutional structures in a way that is consistent with the ideology. The industrialist believes that workers are only motivated to work by wages and then constructs an assembly line that reduces work to such meaningless bits that there is no reason to work aside from the wages. The politician believes that self-interest motivates all behavior, that people are entitled to keep the

spoils of their labors, and that people deserve what they get and get what they deserve. Said politician helps enact policies that erode or destroy the social safety net. As a result, people start acting exclusively as self-interested individuals.

“If it’s up to me to put a roof over our heads, put food on the table, and make sure there’s money to pay the doctor and the kids’ college tuition bills, then I’d better make sure I take care of myself.”

When social structures are shaped by ideology, ideology can change the world, sometimes in devastating, far-reaching ways.

It is not hard to imagine how, guided by the ideology fostered by Adam Smith and then elaborated and extended by others, people would come to understand virtually all their behavior, including their relations with their work, and their relations and responsibilities to others, in terms of operative incentives. And as a result, the nature of people’s relation to their work and to others would change. In a world like this, we would not have to worry that financial motives would crowd out moral ones as people thought about when to pick up their kids from daycare, or whether to allow nuclear waste dumps in their communities, because the moral ones would already have disappeared.

There is a norm of self-interest in American society. College students assume, incorrectly, that women will have stronger views about abortion issues than men and that students under the age of twenty-one will have stronger views about the legal drinking age than those over twenty-one, because women and minors have a stake in those issues that men and older students do not. The possibility that one’s views could be shaped by conceptions of justice or fairness, rather than self-interest, does not occur to most people. And yet they are. Empathy, and care and concern for the well-being of others, are routine parts of most people’s character. Yet they are in danger of being crowded out by exclusive concern for self-interest—a concern that is encouraged by the incentive-based structure of the workplace.

Even Adam Smith understood that there was more to human nature than self-interest. *The Wealth of Nations* followed another book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which he suggested that a certain natural sympathy for one’s fellow human beings provided needed restraints on what people would do if they were left free to “barter, truck, and exchange one thing for another.” Smith’s view, largely forgotten by modernity, was that efficient market transactions were parasitic on aspects of character developed through non-market social relations. Smith was right about the importance of “moral

sentiments” but wrong about how “natural” they are. In a market-dominated society, in which every aspect of what people do is “incentivized,” these “moral sentiments” may disappear so that nothing can rein in self-interest.

According to some, standards of living began to improve in the late eighteenth century because the development of science led to improved productivity and we learned how to work together, through institutions like the rule of law and democracies with checks and balances.

“Key to both were systems of assessing and verifying the truth. The real and long-lasting danger of the Trump presidency is the risk it poses to these pillars of our economy, its attack on the very idea of knowledge and expertise, and its hostility to institutions that help us discover and assess the truth.”

It would take more space than we have available here to deal with this nonsense, based on the claim that development of the capitalist economy is the result of the application of sweet reason and that the individual Donald Trump has suddenly emerged, as if out of nowhere, to threaten the very pillars of a rational society.

Let us merely point to some historical facts: that in settler capitalist economies such as the US and Australia, capitalist property and market relations were established on the basis of a genocidal war against the indigenous population; that the accumulation of wealth, above all in the birthplace of industrial capitalism, England, and then elsewhere, depended on the intensified exploitation of the working population; that the free market and the system of capitalist property established its global dominance through imperialist wars of conquest, leading to two world wars and a cold war filled with proxy wars in the twentieth century. Moreover, the establishment of the political framework for the profit system was accomplished in the United States by two revolutions—the War of Independence of 1776–83 and the even more bloody Civil War of 1861–65.

Reforms in the interests of the mass of the population in the US and other major capitalist countries were not made to establish a social contract, as some maintain, but were the result of vast social struggles, inspired by and taking their lead from the Russian Revolution of October 1917, and only enacted because of the deep-seated and well-founded fears in the ruling classes that it would spark social upheaval around the globe. This was a political fact of life Roosevelt knew well as he implemented his New Deal, even if many have forgotten it.

As for Trump, his rise to the presidency and the establishment of authoritarian forms of rule, together with the promotion of fascistic ideology,

is the expression of a deep-seated disease of the entire social and economic order. Trump is not an “outsider” but a veritable product of the historical development of American capitalism.

The centrepiece of Stiglitz’s analysis of the ills of the capitalist economy is that they arise from the “adoption of the neoliberal fantasy that unfettered markets can deliver prosperity to everyone.” This view, he continues, must now be put to rest in order that “progressive capitalism,” based on a “new social contract between voters and elected officials, between workers and corporations, between rich and poor, and between those with jobs and those who are un- or underemployed,” can be established.

This view, advanced in various forms by a slew of would-be reformers, from neo-Keynesian economists to the so-called “left” of the Democratic party, is that if only there is a return to some form of the “social compact” of the post-war period, then American capitalist society can enjoy a new lease on life.

But the question none of them ever addresses, let alone answers in any meaningful sense, is why did this so-called social compact—itsself more a fantasy than a reality because post-war America was riven with class and social conflicts—collapse?

It is as if suddenly one morning, around the end of the 1970s, political leaders in the US and around the world woke up on the wrong side of the bed and decided that the ideology of the unfettered free market had to be adopted, destroying the very social order that they had so carefully constructed in order to maintain capitalist rule after the turbulent, and at times revolutionary, struggles of the previous period.

There is no trace of science, economic or otherwise, in such a method. It seeks the source of changes in the capitalist economy in the mindset of politicians, such as Reagan or Thatcher in the 1980s, or in the shifts in the theories of economics from Keynesian state regulation to the free market doctrines of Milton Friedman.

A scientific explanation for the ending of the post-war boom must be sought in the internal, material, objective processes of the capitalist economy, which were the source of the adoption of neoliberalism based on the unfettered domination of the market and finance capital.

In an effort to boost his assertion of the possibility of “progressive capitalism,” Stiglitz harks back to the period following World War II when it appeared that the American Dream, after the devastation of the 1930s, was finally being realized.

“As an economist, I am always being asked: Can we afford to provide this middle class life for most, let alone all, Americans?”

Somehow, we did when we were a much poorer society after World War II.”

The implication is that since America today is a much richer country in terms of the production of material wealth than the post-war period, then it must be possible, under capitalism, to provide the rising living standards that characterized the three decades following the war. Such assertions are based on a fundamental flaw. The driving force of the capitalist economy, its inherent dynamic, is not the provision of more material wealth. Capitalism is driven by the accumulation of profit, the source of which is the surplus value extracted from the working class in the process of production. And here the key question is the rate at which this accumulation takes place, measured by the rate of profit.

The historical development of the post-war boom, its demise, and the evolution of the capitalist economy in the period since then must be examined from this standpoint. America was a “poorer” country in the post-war period in the sense that it produced less material wealth both on an absolute and per capita basis than today. But in that period American capitalism enjoyed stable and even rising profit rates.

This upswing, following the disasters of the 1930s, was the result of global processes. It was the outcome of the extension of the more productive methods of American industrial capitalism to the other major economies—Germany and Western Europe, the UK, Japan, and lesser capitalist powers such as Australia and New Zealand—which significantly increased the mass of surplus value extracted from the working class.

From the standpoint of the capital accumulation process, all reforms and concessions to the working class—rising wages and improved social conditions—represent a deduction from the mass of surplus value available to capital for its expansion. But such was the expansion of the available surplus value in the post-war boom that both rising profit rates and rising living standards were possible. As the saying had it: a rising tide lifted all boats.

To the short-sighted bourgeois academy, it appeared that the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, laid bare by Marx, contradictions that had produced two world wars, fascism, and the Great Depression in the space of just three decades, had been overcome. But the expansion of the post-war boom could not continue indefinitely. By the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, profit rates began to turn down. The law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, characterized by Marx as the most important law of political economy from the historical point of view, had begun to reassert itself. In essence, this meant that the concessions made

to the working class now came into direct conflict with the requirements of capital accumulation, that is, with the motive force of the profit system.

All attempts to resolve this situation within the framework of the post-war social and economic order failed. Efforts to step up the exploitation of the working class within the existing system of industrial production only produced ever more militant struggles. At the same time, the methods of Keynesian economics, based on the stimulation of the economy through government intervention, only resulted in stagflation. That is, a rise in unemployment coupled with accelerating inflation, which the Keynesian doctrine had ruled out.

Faced with this intractable situation, the ruling classes in the US and the other major economies, now espousing the doctrines of neoliberalism, organized a fundamental restructuring of the capitalist economy. It comprised a series of interconnected components including: the destruction of vast areas of post-war industry; the organization of global production to utilize cheaper sources of labour; and the employment of new computer-based technologies and information systems to slash production costs and intensify the exploitation of labour.

These measures were accompanied by the unleashing of finance capital from the constraints that had been imposed on it during the post-war boom. This enabled it to play a central role in the complete reorganization of industry through takeovers, mergers, and acquisitions, often via the so-called junk bond market, as well as creating the conditions for the accumulation of profit via the stock market and other forms of speculation. The upshot was to institutionalize a system in which the wealth created by the labour of the working class was siphoned up to the heights of society, leading to the stagnation and outright decline in real wages and the creation of the greatest level of social inequality seen at any point in history, in the US and around the world.

Sweeping changes were required in the legal framework to facilitate this domination of finance capital. In an article, Stiglitz points to the key role played by the Reagan administration in beginning this process. But he stops there. The measures adopted under Reagan were only the start. They were continued and deepened under the Clinton administration, of which Stiglitz himself was a part as chairman of the president's Council of Economic Advisers from 1995–97. It was the Clinton administration, with Robert Rubin taking the helm as treasury secretary after 26 years at Goldman Sachs, which ended "welfare as we know it" and repealed the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999, removing the last remnants of the restrictions imposed on finance capital in the 1930s.

While the measures enacted over the past three decades have enabled

an increase in profit rates, there has been no return to the conditions of the post-war boom. The US economy is no longer characterized, as it was in that period, by the growth of investment and the expansion of decent-paying jobs, but by the rise and rise of parasitism and speculation. This has been accompanied by new forms of exploitation, ever-present job insecurity, two-tier wage systems and the growth of casual and just-in-time employment conditions, coupled with the worsening conditions for public employees, above all, teachers.

The US economy is no longer driven by the investment in new production facilities but has become increasingly dependent on the injection of trillions of dollars into the financial system to fund speculation, starting with the decision of the then chairman of the US Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, to open the spigots for the banks and finance house following the October 1987 stock market crash.

All of these tendencies and processes have reached new levels in the decade since the financial crash of 2008 such that the US economy and financial system cannot tolerate any return to what were once considered “normal” monetary policies lest this produce a new and even more devastating crisis.

The practical question can't be how to put people back to work, but how to detach income from employment.

The industrial revolution lifted millions of people in the Western world out of poverty. And now that it has spread to people and places that missed the first wave of industrialization, it is relieving the poverty of many millions more. Industrialization has been a spectacular human achievement. But as it has relieved material poverty, it has done so at the price of poverty of spirit. Perhaps this was a necessary price to pay at earlier stages of economic development. But that is no longer the case. When it comes to the transformation of the human workplace, there is really no time like the present.

The impending end of work raises the most fundamental questions about what it means to be human. To begin with, what purposes could we choose if the job—economic necessity—didn't consume most of our waking hours and creative energies? What evident yet unknown possibilities would then appear? How would human nature itself change if the ancient, aristocratic privilege of leisure becomes the birthright of human beings as such?

What is missing is the perspective of the Poor. The people for whom a job is simply something they do to pay the rent, not a central part of their identity. It has not escaped notice that most of the people writing these articles, especially those against a UBI, are of the Professional Class—the bourgeoisie. They are professionals who are valued for their skills and paid

accordingly. The Rich and the Professional Classes both fear that a UBI will be a disincentive to work. But I can say clearly that work is a disincentive to work. People who talk about the ‘nobility and dignity’ of a job have never been the monkeys who work the cash register—or at the very least are so far removed that they can craft a nostalgic picture of simpler times, fewer responsibilities, which completely obscures the soul-crushing drudgery of the task.

Andrew Yang’s UBI proposal is \$1,000 a month, adding up to \$12,000 a year. I have survived off this this amount (this is not an endorsement of Yang’s plan nor his candidacy). It isn’t easy and many sacrifices must be made, but if I’m going to do it, I would rather take a UBI check than rent my life away to some petty tyrant for \$10 or even \$15 an hour. This also dovetails into the idea that even many proponents of a UBI have stated: It should not be so high that someone can live comfortably off of it. With these simple words those comfortable Professional Class writers have stated that the Poor do not deserve the comforts of life without selling off so many of their waking hours. This is nothing more than a restatement of Arthur Young’s words from 1771:

“Everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept as poor as possible, or they will never be industrious.”

It has taken about three centuries of browbeating, brainwashing, shaming, abuse, and outright theft to get us to accept wage labor. And it has not really taken hold too deeply. When the money was good we were more willing to accept it. However since neoliberalism has become dominant, the “job creators” have kept more money to themselves. The people, especially the Poor and Working Classes, who hold full time jobs and still cannot get by are beginning to say out loud what we subconsciously have always known: No one gets ahead by working. That’s why the Rich make most of their money off of their investments. In those three centuries, we have allowed the Rich to build a Work Society where all our social relations are based around jobs and employment. This serves the Rich and their needs before anyone else, rather than society as a whole. We see it everyday when professions like corporate lawyers and hedge fund managers earn so much more money than farmers or teachers.

But, in service to their insatiable greed for profits, the Rich are destroying the very Work Society they created. Labor is one of the bigger expenses in any business, and where owners try to cut costs whenever possible. While the Professional Classes like to downplay the impact of automation, “unskilled” workers can see its impact with every self-checkout station and Kiva robot.

But there is a bigger factor in the decay of the Work Society. Long-term careers—and the pensions that come with them—are falling by the wayside, being replaced by the ‘gig economy’ and temp work which does not allow for the formation of social bonds like those careers once did. As the Work Society breaks down, some of the Rich realize they must do something to prevent desperate people with a lot of time on their hands from thinking about how society could be run better. So they came up with their stopgap: the UBI, to keep the people pacified. It is a gamble on their part to keep their privilege, and like all gambling it is not guaranteed to go their way.

We can turn this to our advantage. Once jobs and income are divorced, if we no longer need to depend on their paltry wages to survive, if they want their jobs filled, we can demand several things, including they pay well enough to make people actually want to work for them and treat their employees like human beings. I have known people who stated when a UBI is passed so many businesses will close overnight because none of the employees would show up the next day. While I doubt things will be that drastic, it illustrates why they don’t want the UBI to be too high or too comfortable: so that we will continue to be industrious, as everyone but an idiot knows.

Looking beyond those short-term goals, however, we all know there is so much more to life than work. Not wasting the best parts of our lives at a job will also free us to ask questions, the serious deep questions we need to be asking ourselves now. As late capitalism is destroying the planet in our constant need for production and consumption, we can ask: Can we live without consumerism and planned obsolescence? How do we live without the tyranny of the boss? We can begin to think about what exactly we were put on Earth to do with our lives. Lives that are not relegated to evenings and weekends.

Think of all the people we met over the years. There’s that guy who plays guitar in the bars a few evenings a week and on Saturdays. The woman who is a gifted painter. The armchair historian who can answer any question one may have about the Napoleonic Wars. The little old lady (who still works to cover the gap in her Social Security) who is always crocheting cool little things on her break. We’ve all met these people, they’ve been working alongside us for years for the same crap wages we got.

Many years ago I met an artist who managed to eke out a living selling his stone sculptures. It was not luxurious, but he was happy. When the topic of jobs came up he gave me some of the best wisdom I ever received:

“You don’t want to spend your life doing someone else’s work, do you?”

A UBI is not a perfect solution, and there is still much to be worked out. But it is the first stepping stone. So when the UBI comes, I will gladly take advantage of it. And I won't be the only one.

A full Basic Income would eliminate the compulsion to work, by offering a reasonable standard of living to all, and then either leaving it up to each individual to decide whether they wished to pursue further wealth—by doing a paying job, or selling something—or whether they wished to do something else with their time. Alternately, it might open the way to developing better ways of distributing goods entirely. Money is after all a rationing ticket, and in an ideal world, one would presumably wish to do as little rationing as possible. Obviously, all this depends on the assumption that human beings don't have to be compelled to work, or at least, to do something that they feel is useful or beneficial to others. This is a reasonable assumption. Most people would prefer not to spend their days sitting around watching TV and the handful who really are inclined to be total 'parasites' are not going to be a significant burden on society, since the total amount of work required to maintain people in comfort and security is not that formidable. The compulsive workaholics who insist on doing far more than they really have to would more than compensate for the occasional slackers.

Obviously, moral philosophy tends to assume that the free rider problem is a fundamental question of social justice, outweighing considerations of human freedom, and therefore usually concludes that it would be justifiable to set up a system of surveillance and coercion so as to ensure that not even a small number of people live off of others' work—unless they're rich, in which case that's usually somehow totally okay. My own position is: So what if they do if the alternative is those tools of oppression?

Any UBI payment would have to be enough to live on, all by itself, and it would have to be completely unqualified. Everyone has to get it. Even people who don't need it. It's worth it, just to establish the principle that when it comes to what's required to live, everyone deserves that, equally, without qualification. This makes it a human right, not just charity or duct tape for lack of other forms of income. Then if there are further needs on top of that, say someone is disabled, well, then you address that, too. But only after you establish the right of material existence for all people.

The second, more serious objection raised when someone suggests guaranteeing everyone a livelihood regardless of work is that most will work, but many will choose work that's of interest only to themselves. The streets would fill up with bad poets, annoying street mimes, and promoters of crank scientific theories, and nothing would get done. What the phenomenon of bullshit jobs really brings home is the foolishness of such assumptions. No doubt a certain proportion of the population of a free society would spend

their lives on projects most others would consider to be silly or pointless; but it's hard to imagine how it would go much over 10 or 20 percent.

Already right now, 37 to 40 percent of workers in rich countries feel their jobs are pointless. Roughly half the economy—at a minimum—consists of, or exists in support of, bullshit. And it's not even particularly interesting bullshit! If we let everyone decide for themselves how they were best fit to benefit humanity, with no restrictions at all, how could they possibly end up with a distribution of labor more inefficient than the one we already have? This is a powerful argument for human freedom. Most of us like to talk about freedom in the abstract—even claim that it's the most important thing for anyone to fight or die for—but we don't think a lot about what being free or practicing freedom might actually mean. We need to start thinking and arguing about what a genuine free society might actually be like.

Either we detach income from work, or we kill ourselves, figuratively and literally. Either we guarantee everyone an income, regardless of their productivity, or we declare ourselves brain-dead.

Prior to the industrial revolution, it never seems to have occurred to anyone to write a book asking what conditions would create the most overall wealth. Many, however, wrote books about what conditions would create the best people—that is, how should society be best arranged to produce the sort of human beings one would like to have around, as friends, lovers, neighbors, relatives, or fellow citizens? This is the kind of question that concerned Aristotle, Confucius, and Ibn Khaldun, and in the final analysis it's still the only really important one. Human life is a process by which we, as humans, create one another; even the most extreme individualists only become individuals through the care and support of their fellows; and 'the economy' is ultimately just the way we provide ourselves with the necessary material provisions with which to do so. If so, talking about 'values'—which are valuable because they can't be reduced to numbers—is the way that we have traditionally talked about the process of mutual creation and caring.

I guess I've been asking whether love can replace work—whether socially beneficial labor, the love of our neighbors, can replace socially necessary labor as the criterion we use in calculating the distribution of income and the development of character.

The most basic good in a postindustrial society like ours is information, and it is now free. In other words, the labor market can't assign a remunerative value to the socially necessary labor of producing and distributing information. It's socially beneficial—but it's more or less worthless. The work goes on, but the income you might have accrued from it doesn't. Ask a journalist or a freelance writer, or a musician whose band doesn't tour. So

the question is not how to put us all back to work for a minimum wage—fuck that—it’s how to detach income from time spent on the job. But look, we’ve already done that, too. Wall Street bankers don’t do much of anything except peddle bad paper, but they get paid millions of dollars. Teachers, professors, novelists, journalists, carpenters, musicians, and janitors do everything we say we value—they educate, entertain, they build things, and they clean up after us—but they get paid almost nothing.

It’s been almost a century since we started hearing this lament, this warning, about the end of men as a result of the end of work. John Maynard Keynes wrote in 1930 predicting a leisure society. How did he get it so wrong, predicting increased leisure, less labor time, more pleasure. You might ask, what was he thinking? But the great irony is not that that he predicted less socially necessary labor time—he turns out to have been right about that, regardless of what we’ve done with the time left over—but that he wrote in the throes of the Great Depression, when the sheer brutality of economic necessity was reasserting its social and psychological hold on working people. Keynes rightly worried that we’d let that brutality govern our thinking about the future.

“But, chiefly, do not let us overestimate the importance of the economic problem, or sacrifice to its supposed necessities other matters of greater and more permanent significance.”

His more fundamental concern, though, was that we wouldn’t know what to do with the leisure time that came of labor-saving and capital-saving innovations.

“Thus for the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem—how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well.”

Keynes knew the deviants, miscreants, and malcontents would be the ones to address this problem.

“The strenuous purposeful money-makers may carry all of us along with them into the lap of economic abundance. But it will be those people, who can keep alive, and cultivate into fuller perfection, the art of life itself, and do not sell themselves for the means of life, who will be able to enjoy the abundance when it comes.”

He was a great deal more pessimistic, or less utopian, than his recent interlocutors have suggested.

“Yet there is no country and no people, I think, who can look forward to the age of leisure and of abundance without a dread. For we have been trained too long to strive and not to enjoy.”

We still fear emancipation from the fear regime imposed by thousands of years of scarcity. We still want to go to work.

Inherited Errors

Fantasy Worlds

The fundamental theories on which the modern science of political economy is based are these:

- That under primitive conditions men lived and live by barter.
- That as life becomes more complex barter no longer suffices as a method of exchanging commodities, and by common consent one particular commodity is fixed on which is generally acceptable and which therefore, everyone will take in exchange for the things he produces or the services he renders and which each in turn can equally pass on to others in exchange for whatever he may want.
- That this commodity thus becomes a “medium of exchange and measure of value.”
- That a sale is the exchange of a commodity for this intermediate commodity which is called “money.”
- That many different commodities have at various times and places served as this medium of exchange—cattle, iron, salt, shells, dried cod, tobacco, sugar, nails, et cetera.
- That gradually the metals, gold, silver, copper—especially the first two—came to be regarded as being by their inherent qualities more suitable for this purpose than any other commodities and these metals early became by common consent the only medium of exchange.
- That a certain fixed weight of one of these metals of a known fineness became a standard of value, and to guarantee this weight and quality it became incumbent on governments to issue pieces of metal stamped with their peculiar sign, the forging of which was punishable with severe penalties.

- That Emperors, Kings, Princes, and their advisers vied with each other in the middle ages in swindling the people by debasing their coins, so that those who thought that they were obtaining a certain weight of gold or silver for their produce were, in reality, getting less, and that this situation produced serious evils among which were a depreciation of the value of money and a consequent rise of prices in proportion as the coinage became more and more debased in quality or light in weight.
- That to economize the use of the metals and to prevent their constant transport a machinery called 'credit' has grown up in modern days, by means of which, instead of handing over a certain weight of metal at each transaction, a promise to do so is given, which under favorable circumstances has the same value as the metal itself. Credit is called a substitute for gold.

Some appealed to alchemy to argue that the monetary status of gold and silver had a natural basis: gold (which partook of the sun) and silver (which partook of the moon) were the perfected, eternal forms of metal toward which all baser metals tend to evolve. When we attribute value to gold, then, we simply recognize this. The same argument was usually invoked to solve the old Medieval puzzle about diamonds and water: Why is it that diamonds are so expensive, though useless, and water, which is useful in all sorts of ways, hardly worth anything at all? Remember, this was long before corporations like Nestlé started buying it all up. The usual solution was: diamonds are the eternal form of water. Galileo, who objected to the entire premise, at one point suggested that those who make such claims should really be turned into statues. That way, he suggested, in inimitable Renaissance style, everyone would be happy, since (1) they would be eternal, and (2) the rest of us would no longer have to listen to their stupid arguments.

Interestingly, most European governments employed alchemists in the seventeenth century in order to manufacture gold and silver for coins; it's only when these schemes definitively failed that the governments moved to paper currency.

All our modern legislation fixing the price of gold is merely a survival of the late-medieval theory that the disastrous variability of the monetary unit had some mysterious connection with the price of the precious metals, and that, if only that price could be controlled and made invariable, the monetary unit also would remain fixed. It is hard for us to realize the situation of those times. The people often saw the prices of the necessities of life rise with

great rapidity, so that from day to day no one knew what his income might be worth in commodities. At the same time, they saw the precious metals rising, and coins made of a high grade of gold or silver going to a premium, while those that circulated at their former value were reduced in weight by clipping. They saw an evident connection between these phenomena, and very naturally attributed the fall in the value of money to the rise of the value of the metals and the consequent deplorable condition of the coinage. They mistook effect for cause, and we have inherited their error. Many attempts were made to regulate the price of the precious metals, but until the nineteenth century, always unsuccessfully.

The governments of the world have, in fact, conspired together to make a corner in gold and to hold it up at a prohibitive price, to the great profit of the mine owners and the loss of the rest of mankind. The result of this policy is that billions of dollars worth of gold are stored in the vaults of banks and treasuries, from the recesses of which they will never emerge, until a more rational policy is adopted.

Future ages will laugh at their forefathers of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, who gravely bought gold to imprison in dungeons in the belief that they were thereby obeying a high economic law and increasing the wealth and prosperity of the world.

“A strange delusion, my masters, for a generation which prides itself on its knowledge of Economy and Finance and one which, let us hope, will not long survive. When once the precious metal has been freed from the shackles of laws which are unworthy of the age in which we live, who knows what uses may not be in store for it to benefit the whole world?”

Just about every economics textbook employed today sets out the problem the same way. Historically, they note, we know that there was a time when there was no money. What must it have been like? Well, let us imagine an economy something like today's, except with no money. That would have been decidedly inconvenient! Surely, people must have invented money for the sake of efficiency. The story of money for economists always begins with a fantasy world of barter. The problem is where to locate this fantasy in time and space: Are we talking about cave men, Pacific Islanders, the American frontier?

One can imagine an old-style farmer bartering with the blacksmith, the tailor, the grocer, and the doctor in his small town. For simple barter to work, however, there must be a double coincidence of wants. Henry has potatoes and wants shoes, Joshua has an extra pair of shoes and wants

potatoes. Bartering can make them both happier. But if Henry has firewood and Joshua does not need any of that, then bartering for Joshua's shoes requires one or both of them to go searching for more people in the hope of making a multilateral exchange. Money provides a way to make multilateral exchange much simpler. Henry sells his firewood to someone else for money and uses the money to buy Joshua's shoes. Again this is just a make-believe land much like the present, except with money somehow plucked away. As a result it makes no sense: Who in their right mind would set up a grocery in such a place? And how would they get supplies?

But let's leave that aside. There is a simple reason why everyone who writes an economics textbook feels they have to tell us the same story. For economists, it is in a very real sense the most important story ever told. It was by telling it, in the significant year of 1776, that Adam Smith, professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow, effectively brought the discipline of economics into being.

Adam Smith was determined to overturn the conventional wisdom of his day. Above all, he objected to the notion that money was a creation of government. In this, Smith was the intellectual heir of the Liberal tradition of philosophers like John Locke, who had argued that government begins in the need to protect private property and operated best when it tried to limit itself to that function. Smith expanded on the argument, insisting that property, money, and markets not only existed before political institutions but were the very foundation of human society. It followed that insofar as government should play any role in monetary affairs, it should limit itself to guaranteeing the soundness of the currency. It was only by making such an argument that he could insist that economics is itself a field of human inquiry with its own principles and laws—that is, as distinct from, say ethics or politics.

If we assume that in prehistoric ages, man lived by barter, what is the development that would naturally have taken place, whereby he grew to his present knowledge of the methods of commerce? The situation is thus explained by Adam Smith:

“But when the division of labor first began to take place, this power of exchanging must frequently have been very much clogged and embarrassed in its operations. One man, we shall suppose, has more of a certain commodity than, he himself has occasion for, while another has less. The former consequently would be glad to dispose of, and the latter to purchase, a part of this superfluity. But if this latter should chance to have nothing that for former stands in need of, no exchange can be made

between them. The butcher has more meat in his shop than he himself can consume, and the brewer and the baker would each of them be willing to purchase a part of it. But they have nothing to offer in exchange, except the different productions of their respective trades, and the butcher is already provided with all the bread and beer which he has immediate occasion for. No change can in this case be made between them. He cannot offer to be their merchant nor they his customers; and they are all of them thus mutually less serviceable to one another.

In order to avoid the inconveniency of such situations, every prudent man in every period of society, after the first establishment of the division of labor, must naturally have endeavored to manage his affairs in such a manner, as to have at all times by him, besides the peculiar produce of his own industry, a certain quantity of some one commodity or other, such as, he imagined that few people would be likely to refuse in exchange for the produce of their industry.

Many different commodities, it is probable, were successively both thought of and employed for this purpose. In all countries, however, men seem at last to have been determined by irresistible reasons to give the preference, for this employment, to metals above every other commodity.”

Adam Smith’s position depends on the truth of the proposition that, if the baker or the brewer wants meat from the butcher, but has (the latter being sufficiently provided with bread and beer) nothing to offer in exchange, no exchange can be made between them. If this were true, the doctrine of a medium of exchange would, perhaps, be correct. But is it true?

Assuming the baker and the brewer to be honest men, and honesty is no modern virtue, the butcher could take from them an acknowledgment that they had bought from him so much meat, and all we have to assume is that the community would recognize the obligation of the baker and the brewer to redeem these acknowledgments in bread or beer at the relative values current in the village market, whenever they might be presented to them, and we at once have a good and sufficient currency. A sale, according to this theory, is not the exchange of a commodity for some intermediate commodity called the “medium of exchange,” but the exchange of a commodity for a credit.

There is absolutely no reason for assuming the existence of so clumsy a device as a medium of exchange when so simple a system would do all that was required. What we have to prove is not a strange general agreement to accept gold and silver, but a general sense of the sanctity of an obligation.

In other words, the present theory is based on the antiquity of the law of debt.

The idea of a historical sequence from barter to money to credit actually seems to appear first in the lectures of an Italian banker named Bernardo Davanzati; it was developed as an explicit theory by German economic historians: Bruno Hildebrand (1864), who posited a prehistoric stage of barter, an ancient stage of coinage, and then, after some reversion to barter in the Middle Ages, a modern stage of credit economy. It took canonical form in the work of his student, Karl Bücher (1907). The sequence has now become universally accepted common sense, and it reappears in at least tacit form in Marx, and explicitly in Simmel—again, despite the fact that almost all subsequent historical research has proved it wrong.

The crucial thing, though, is that by now, this story has become simple common sense for most people. We teach it to children in schoolbooks and museums. Everybody knows it:

“Once upon a time, there was barter. It was difficult. So people invented money. Then came the development of banking and credit.”

It all forms a perfectly simple, straightforward progression, a process of increasing sophistication and abstraction that has carried humanity, logically and inexorably, from the Stone Age exchange of mastodon tusks to stock markets, hedge funds, and securitized derivatives.

Anthropologists have been complaining about the Myth of Barter for almost a century. Occasionally, economists point out with slight exasperation that there’s a fairly simple reason why they’re still telling the same story despite all the evidence against it: anthropologists have never come up with a better one. This is an understandable objection, but there’s a simple answer to it. The reasons why anthropologists haven’t been able to come up with a simple, compelling story for the origins of money is because there’s no reason to believe there could be one. Money was no more ever ‘invented’ than music or mathematics or jewelry. What we call ‘money’ isn’t a ‘thing’ at all, it’s a way of comparing things mathematically, as proportions: of saying one of X is equivalent to six of Y. As such it is probably as old as human thought. The moment we try to get any more specific, we discover that there are any number of different habits and practices that have converged in the stuff we now call ‘money,’ and this is precisely the reason why economists, historians, and the rest have found it so difficult to come up with a single definition.

Our standard account of monetary history is precisely backwards. We did not begin with barter, discover money, and then eventually develop

credit systems. It happened precisely the other way around. What we now call virtual money came first. Coins came much later, and their use spread only unevenly, never completely replacing credit systems. Barter, in turn, appears to be largely a kind of accidental byproduct of the use of coinage or paper money: historically, it has mainly been what people who are used to cash transactions do when for one reason or another they have no access to currency.

Textbooks did not change their story—even if all the evidence made clear that the story was simply wrong. People still write histories of money that are actually histories of coinage, on the assumption that in the past, these were necessarily the same thing; periods when coinage largely vanished are still described as times when the economy “reverted to barter,” as if the meaning of this phrase is self-evident, even though no one actually knows what it means. As a result we have next-to-no idea how, say, the inhabitant of a Dutch town in 950 actually went about acquiring cheese or spoons or hiring musicians to play at his daughter’s wedding—let alone how any of this was likely to be arranged in Pemba or Samarkand.

Consider Western Arnhem Land in Australia, where the Gunwinggu people are famous for entertaining neighbors in rituals of ceremonial barter called the dzamalag. Here the threat of actual violence seems much more distant. Partly, this is because things are made easier by the existence of a moiety system that embraces the whole region: no one is allowed to marry, or even have sex with, people of their own moiety, no matter where they come from, but anyone from the other is technically a potential match. Therefore, for a man, even in distant communities, half the women are strictly forbidden, half of them fair game. The region is also united by local specialization: each people has its own trade product to be bartered with the others. What follows is from a description of a dzamalag held in the 1940s, as observed by an anthropologist:

“Once again, it begins as strangers, after some initial negotiations, are invited into the hosts’ main camp. The visitors in this particular example were famous for their ‘much-prized serrated spears’—their hosts had access to good European cloth. The trading begins when the visiting party, which consisted of both men and women, enters the camp’s dancing ground of ‘ring place,’ and three of them began to entertain their hosts with music. Two men start singing, a third accompanies them on the didgeridoo. Before long, women from the hosts’ side come and attack the musicians: Men and women rise and begin to dance.

The dzamalag opens when two Gunwinggu women of the opposite moiety to the singing men 'give dzamalag' to the latter. They present each man with a piece of cloth, and hit or touch him, pulling him down on the ground, calling him a dzamalag husband, and joking with him in an erotic vein. Then another woman of the opposite moiety to the pipe player gives him cloth, hits and jokes with him. This sets in motion the dzamalag exchange. Men from the visiting group sit quietly while women of the opposite moiety come over and give them cloth, hit them, and invite them to copulate; they take any liberty they choose with the men, amid amusement and applause, while the singing and dancing continue.

Women try to undo the men's loin coverings or touch their penises, and to drag them from the 'ring place' for coitus. The men go with their dzamalag partners, with a show of reluctance, to copulate in the bushes away from the fires which light up the dancers. They may give the women tobacco or beads. When the women return, they give part of this tobacco to their own husbands, who have encouraged them to go dzamalag. The husbands, in turn, use the tobacco to pay their own female dzamalag partners.

New singers and musicians appear, are again assaulted and dragged off to the bushes; men encourage their wives 'not to be shy,' so as to maintain the Gunwinggu reputation for hospitality; eventually those men also take the initiative with the visitors' wives, offering cloth, hitting them, and leading them off into the bushes. Beads and tobacco circulate. Finally, once participants have all paired off at least once, and the guests are satisfied with the cloth they have acquired, the women stop dancing and stand in two rows and the visitors line up to repay them.

Then visiting men of one moiety dance towards the women of the opposite moiety, in order to 'give them dzamalag.' They hold shovel-nosed spears poised, pretending to spear the women, but instead hit them with the flat of the blade. 'We will not spear you, for we have already speared you with our penises.' They present the spears to the women. Then visiting men of the other moiety go through the same actions with the women of their opposite moiety, giving them spears with serrated points. This terminates the ceremony, which is followed by a large distribution of food."

This is a particularly dramatic case, but dramatic cases are revealing. What the Gunwinggu hosts appear to have been able to do here, owing to the relatively amicable relations between neighboring peoples in Western Arnhem Land, is to take all the elements in Nambikwara barter—the music and dancing, the potential hostility, the sexual intrigue—and turn it all into a kind of festive game. One not, perhaps, without its dangers, but—as the ethnographer emphasizes—considered enormous fun by everyone concerned.

What all such cases of trade through barter have in common is that they are meetings with strangers who will, likely as not, never meet again, and with whom one certainly will not enter into any ongoing relations. This is why a direct one-on-one exchange is appropriate: each side makes their trade and walks away. It's all made possible by laying down an initial mantle of sociability, in the form of shared pleasures, music and dance—the usual base of conviviality on which trade must always be built. Then comes the actual trading, where both sides make a great display of the latent hostility that necessarily exists in any exchange of material goods between strangers—where neither party has no particular reason not to take advantage of the other—by playful mock aggression, though in the Nambikwara case, where the mantle of sociability is extremely thin, mock aggression is in constant danger of slipping over into the real thing. The Gunwinggu, with their more relaxed attitude toward sexuality, have quite ingeniously managed to make the shared pleasures and aggression into exactly the same thing.

Remember the language of the economics textbooks?

“Imagine a society without money. Imagine a barter economy.”

One thing these examples make abundantly clear is just how limited the imaginative powers of most economists turn out to be.

The Myth of Barter cannot go away, because it is central to the entire discourse of economics. Recall here what Smith was trying to do when he wrote *The Wealth of Nations*. Above all, the book was an attempt to establish the newfound discipline of economics as a science. This meant that not only did economics have its own peculiar domain of study—what we now call ‘the economy,’ though the idea that there even was something called an ‘economy’ was very new in Smith’s day—but that this economy operated according to laws of much the same sort as Sir Isaac Newton had so recently identified as governing the physical world. Newton had represented God as a cosmic watchmaker who had created the physical machinery of the universe in such a way that it would operate for the ultimate benefit of humans, and then let it run on its own. Smith was trying to make a similar, Newtonian

argument. God—or Divine Providence, as he put it—had arranged matters in such a way that our pursuit of self-interest would nonetheless, given an unfettered market, be guided “as if by an invisible hand” to promote the general welfare. Smith’s famous invisible hand was, as he says in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the agent of Divine Providence. It was literally the hand of God.

It’s money that has made it possible for us to imagine ourselves in the way economists encourage us to do: as a collection of individuals and nations whose main business is swapping things. It’s also clear that the mere existence of money, in itself, is not enough to allow us see the world this way. If it were, the discipline of economics would have been created in ancient Sumer, or anyway, far earlier than 1776 when Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* appeared. The missing element is in fact exactly the thing Smith was attempting to downplay: the role of government policy. In England, in Smith’s day, it became possible to see the market, the world of butchers, ironmongers, and haberdashers, as its own entirely independent sphere of human activity because the British government was actively engaged in fostering it. This required laws and police, but also, specific monetary policies, which liberals like Smith were advocating.

For example, he believed that the relative success of the Bank of England and Bank of Scotland had been due to their policy of pegging paper money firmly to precious metals. This became the mainstream economic view, so much so that alternative theories of money as credit were quickly relegated to the margins, their proponents written off as cranks, and the very sort of thinking that led to bad banks and speculative bubbles in the first place.

For there to even be a discipline called ‘economics,’ a discipline that concerns itself first and foremost with how individuals seek the most advantageous arrangement for the exchange of shoes for potatoes, or cloth for spears, it must assume that the exchange of such goods need have nothing to do with war, passion, adventure, mystery, sex, or death. Economics assumes a division between different spheres of human behavior that, among people like the Gunwinggu and the Nambikwara, simply does not exist. These divisions in turn are made possible by very specific institutional arrangements: the existence of lawyers, prisons, and police to ensure that even people who don’t like each other very much, who have no interest in developing any kind of ongoing relationship, but are simply interested in getting their hands on as much of the others’ possessions as possible, will nonetheless refrain from the most obvious expedient (theft). This in turn allows us to assume that life is neatly divided between the marketplace, where we do our shopping, and the “sphere of consumption,” where we concern ourselves with music, feasts, and seduction. In other words, the vision of the world that forms the

basis of the economics textbooks, which Adam Smith played so large a part in promulgating, has by now become so much a part of our common sense that we find it hard to imagine any other possible arrangement.

It should be clear why there are no societies based on barter. Such a society could only be one in which everybody was an inch away from everybody else's throat; but nonetheless hovering there, poised to strike but never actually striking, forever. True, barter does sometimes occur between people who do not consider each other strangers, but they're usually people who might as well be strangers—that is, who feel no sense of mutual responsibility or trust, or the desire to develop ongoing relations.

Before the advent of money, economic life within a community was a web of mutual debts. People did not behave as self-interested individuals—at least not from the perspective of a single transaction; rather, they would share food, clothes, and luxuries, and trust that their peers would repay the favor in return. When we consider these origins of debt and credit—as a system of mutual aid between people who trust each other—it's no surprise that so many cultures viewed charging interest as morally wrong.

A Persian proverb tells of a Shah who wished to reward a subject who had invented chess, and asked what he would like. The man asked only “that the Shah would give him a single grain of corn, which was to be put on the first square of the chess-board, and to be doubled on each successive square,” until all sixty-four squares were filled with grain. At first the compounding of grain remained well within the physical ability of the kingdom to pay, even after twenty squares were passed. But by the time the hypothetical chessboard was filled halfway, the compounding was growing by leaps and bounds. The Shah realized that this he had promised “an amount larger than what the treasures of his whole kingdom could buy.”

We don't know precisely when and how interest-bearing loans originated, since they appear to predate writing. Most likely, Temple administrators invented the idea as a way of financing the caravan trade. This trade was crucial because while the river valley of ancient Mesopotamia was extraordinarily fertile and produced huge surpluses of grain and other foodstuffs, and supported enormous numbers of livestock, which in turn supported a vast wool and leather industry, it was almost completely lacking in anything else. Stone, wood, metal, even the silver used as money, all had to be imported. From quite early times, then, Temple administrators developed the habit of advancing goods to local merchants—some of them private, others themselves Temple functionaries—who would then go off and sell it. Interest was just a way for the Temples to take their share of the resulting profits.

However, once established, the principle seems to have quickly spread.

Before long, we find not only commercial loans, but also consumer loans—usury in the classical sense of the term. By around 2400 BC it already appears to have been common practice on the part of local officials, or wealthy merchants, to advance loans to peasants who were in financial trouble on collateral and begin to appropriate their possessions if they were unable to pay. It usually started with grain, sheep, goats, and furniture, then moved on to fields and houses, or, alternately or ultimately, family members. Servants, if any, went quickly, followed by children, wives, and in some extreme occasions, even the borrower himself. These would be reduced to debt-peons: not quite slaves, but very close to that, forced into perpetual service in the lender's household—or, sometimes, in the Temples or Palaces themselves. In theory, of course, any of them could be redeemed whenever the borrower repaid the money, but for obvious reasons, the more a peasant's resources were stripped away from him, the harder that became.

It's common to think that charging interest on loans is only fair, and also a good way of encouraging people to lend. But in many ways it's economically dysfunctional, and arguably socially unjust: indeed, the two problems are linked. What's more, it's widely assumed that when we borrow from banks or use our credit cards, we're borrowing existing money that others have deposited there. This is far from the truth, for the money the banks lend is created by them, out of nothing—yet of course they still charge us interest on it. The media and most conventional economists are quick to criticize when a state-controlled central bank 'prints more money,' and to raise the alarm about stoking inflation, but they either don't know or don't want to admit that most new money is routinely created by private banks, with little regulation and public accountability.

The pragmatic defense of interest might apply to lending out and borrowing existing money, but, given that most of us borrow from banks that create credit money out of nothing, it has limited relevance. Whatever we think about the justifications, they are beside the point when it comes to explaining what happens here: lenders charge interest because they can, not because they can show that they deserve it or because it's good for the economy as a whole. And of course the lenders usually charge as much as the market will bear. Whatever the justifications, it fits the definition of unearned income.

For most people, it's natural to think of interest in terms of their own savings and debts, and to assume that loans are always loans of someone else's savings. Banks, it's imagined, lend out our savings to others and make money on the difference between the interest they pay on deposits and the interest they charge on loans. In this view, banks are intermediaries, linking hard-working, prudent savers to investors in the economy's future. This

picture is seriously misleading. It is not just that banks lend out much more than they borrow from us, on the assumption that we and other savers will not draw out our savings all at once. This is the widely taught story of ‘fractional reserve banking.’ The important point is that they have the power to create electronic money in the form of interest-bearing credit (or debt, from the point of view of the borrower) simply by typing the figures into the borrower’s account. They create such deposits rather than wait for them to come in. When we borrow from a bank, or from a credit card company, we are not drawing upon existing money that they already have. In fact ‘lending’ money is hardly the right word, inasmuch as that implies that they’ve already got the thing they’re lending!

Conventional economic theory may claim that investment (lending) is determined by saving, but that is nonsense; it is mostly dependent on the creation of credit money. The prime consideration in assessing whether to make a loan is the risk of default and whether the borrower has sufficient collateral. The costs of production of this credit money are negligible, and so, in this case it is clear that the principal as well as the interest are unearned. Rather than the bank doing the borrower a favour by lending other people’s savings to the borrower, the borrower is doing the bank a favour by allowing it to create money—and a source of unearned income in the form of interest. Banks extract money from the productive sector in a manner that can fairly be described as parasitic. Their interest charges are a private tax on borrowers.

The very fact that one group of people’s debts can be treated by another group as assets—as a reliable source of income—should give us pause.

When economists speak of money, they neglect that all money and credit is debt. That is the essence of bookkeeping and accounting. There are always two sides to the balance sheet. And one party’s money or savings is another party’s debt.

Mainstream economic models describe a world that operates on barter, not on credit. The basic characteristic of credit and debt is that it bears interest. Any rate of interest can be thought of as a doubling time. Already in Babylonia circa 1900 BC, scribes were taught to calculate compound interest, and how long it took a sum to double (5 years), quadruple (10 years), or multiply 64 times (30 years). Martin Luther called usury Cacus, the monster that absorbs everything. And in Volume III of *Capital* and also his *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx collected the classical writings about how debts mount up at interest by purely mathematical laws, without regard for the economy’s ability to pay.

The problem with debt is not only interest. Shylock’s loan against a pound of flesh was a zero-interest loan. When crops fail, farmers cannot even

pay the principal. They then may lose their land, which is their livelihood. Forfeiture is a key part of the credit/debt dynamic. But the motto of mainstream neoliberal economics is: ‘If the eye offends thee, pluck it out.’ Discussing the unpayability of debt is offensive to creditors.

Anyone who sets out to calculate the ability pay quickly recognizes that the overall volume of debts cannot be paid. Keynes made that point in the 1920s regarding Germany’s inability to pay reparations.

Needless to say, banks and bondholders do not want to promote any arguments explaining the limits to how much can be paid without pushing economies into depression. It is the direction in which the Eurozone is now going, and the United States also is suffering debt deflation.

Paul Krugman and others say that debt doesn’t matter because “we owe it to ourselves.” But the ‘we’ who owe it are the 99 Percent; the people who are ‘ourselves’ are the One Percent. So the 99 Percent Owe the One Percent. And they owe more and more, thanks to the magic of compound interest.

Krugman has a blind spot when it comes to understanding money. In his famous debate with Steve Keen, he denied that banks create money or credit. He insists that commercial banks only lend out deposits. But Keen and the Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) school show that loans create deposits, not the other way around. When a banker writes a loan on his computer keyboard, he creates a deposit as the counterpart.

Endogenous money is easily created electronically. That privilege enables banks to charge interest. Governments could just as easily create money on their own computers. Neoliberal privatizers want to block governments from doing this, so that economies will have to rely on commercial banks for the money and credit they need to grow.

The mathematics of compound interest means that economies can only pay their debts by creating a financial bubble—more and more credit to bid up asset prices for real estate, stocks, and bonds, enabling banks to make larger loans. Today’s economies are obliged to develop into Ponzi schemes to keep going—until they collapse in a crash.

The models of the macroeconomy—to forecast the future and to develop policy at institutions like the IMF—often consider finance and banking as just another sector of industry, like construction or manufacturing. How do these institutions consider their model of the financial sector?

The IMF acts as the collection agent for global bondholders. Its projections begin by assuming that all debts can be paid, if economies will cut wages and wipe out pension funds so as to pay banks and bondholders.

As long as creditors remain in control, they are quite willing to sacrifice the 99 Percent to pay the One Percent. When IMF “stabilization” programs end up destabilizing their hapless victims, mainstream media blame the

collapse on the debtor country for not shedding enough blood to impose even more austerity.

Economists often define their discipline as “the allocation of scarce resources among competing ends.” But when resources or money really become scarce, economists call it a crisis and say that it’s a question for politicians, not their own department. Economic models are only marginal—meaning, small changes, not structural.

The only trend that does grow inexorably is that of debt. The more it grows, the more it slows the real economy of production and consumption. So something must give: either the economy, or creditor claims. And that does indeed change the structure of the economy. It is a political as well as an economic change.

When creditor institutions model the financial sector, when they look at prices they only consider wages and consumer prices, not asset prices. Yet most bank credit is tied to asset prices, because loans are made to buy homes or commercial real estate, stocks or bonds, not bread and butter.

Not looking at what is obviously important requires a great effort of tunnel vision. But as Upton Sinclair noted, there are some jobs—like being a central banker, or a New York Times editorial writer—that require the applicant not to understand the topic they are assigned to study. Hence, you have Paul Krugman on money and banking, the IMF on economic stabilization, and Rubinomics politicians on bailing out the banks instead of saving the economy.

If I can add a technical answer: The IMF does not recognize that the “budget problem”—squeezing domestic currency out of the economy by taxing wages and industry—is quite different from the “transfer problem” of converting this money into foreign exchange. That distinction was the essence of the German reparations debate in the 1920s.

Drawing this distinction shows why austerity programs do not help countries pay their foreign debt, but instead tear them apart and induce emigration and capital flight.

Debt is the most fundamental lie in our economy. Money is only supposed to be a tool to move goods efficiently around a market, but for money itself to be a wealth engine is a Ponzi scheme. And we all know how that ends for many participants.

Every economy is a credit economy. Let’s start in Ancient Mesopotamia. Suppose you’re a Babylonian in the time of Hammurabi, circa 1750 BC, and you’re a cultivator. How do you buy things during the year? Well, if you go to the bar, to an ale woman, what she’d do is write down the debt that you owe. It was to be paid on the threshing floor. The debts were basically paid once a year when the income was there, on the threshing floor when

the harvest was in. If the palace or the temples would advance animals or inputs or other public services, this would be as a debt. It was all paid in grain, which was monetized for paying debts to the palace, temples, and other creditors.

The IMF has this Austrian theory that pretends that money began as barter and that capitalism basically operates on barter. This always is a disinformation campaign. Nobody believed this in times past, and it is a very modern theory that basically is used to say: ‘Oh, debt is bad.’ What they really mean is that public debt is bad. The government shouldn’t create money, the government shouldn’t run budget deficits but should leave the economy to rely on the banks. So the banks should run and indebt the economy.

You’re dealing with a public relations mythology that’s used as a means of deception for most people. You can usually ignore just about everything the IMF says. If you understand money you’re not going to be hired by the IMF. The precondition for being hired by the IMF is *not* to understand finance. If you do understand finance, you’re fired and blacklisted. That’s why they impose austerity programs that they call “stabilization programs” that actually are destabilization programs almost wherever they’re imposed.

Money is debt. Being a claim on a debtor, money does not necessarily need a functioning economy. It can be part of a foreclosure process, transferring property to creditors. A financialized economy tends to strip the economy of money, by sucking up to the creditor One Percent on top. That is what happened in Rome, and the result was the Dark Age.

There are two ways not to pay debts: either by annulling or repudiating them, or by foreclosure when creditors take or demand property in lieu of monetary payment.

The first way not to pay is to default or proclaim a Clean Slate. The most successful example in modern times is the German Economic Miracle—the Allied Monetary Reform of 1948. That canceled Germany’s internal debts except for wages owed by employers and minimum working balances.

The United States Government has fought against creation of an international court to adjudicate the ability of national economies to pay debts. If such a court is not created, the global economy will fracture. That is occurring in what looks like a New Cold War pitting the United States and its NATO satellites against the BRICS (China, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, and India) along with Iran and other debtors. The US preferred policy is for countries to sell off whatever is in their public domain when they lack the money to pay their debts. This is the “foreclosure” stage.

Short of these two ways of not paying debts, economies are submitting to debt deflation. That strips income from producers and consumers, businesses

and governments to pay creditors. As the debtor economy weakens, the debt arrears mount up—often at rising interest rates to reflect the risk of non-payment as creditors realize that there is no ‘business as usual’ way in which the debts can be paid.

Debtor countries may postpone the inevitable by borrowing from the IMF or US Treasury to buy out bondholders. This saves the latter from taking a loss—leaving the debtor country with debts that are even harder to annul, because they are to foreign governments and international institutions. That is why it is a very bad policy for countries to move from owing money to private bondholders to owing the IMF or European Central Bank, whose demands are unforgiving.

In the long-term, debts won’t be paid in the way that Rome’s debts were not paid. The money economy itself was stripped, and the empire fell into a prolonged Dark Age. That is the fate that will befall the West if it continues to support the “rights” of creditors over the right of nations and economies to survive.

“From the earliest days of which we have historical records, we are in the presence of a law of debt, and when we shall find, as we surely shall, records of ages still earlier than that of the great king Hammurabi, who compiled his code of the laws of Babylonia in 2000 BC, we shall, I doubt not, still find traces of the same law. The sanctity of an obligation is, indeed, the foundation of all societies not only in all times, but at all stages of civilization; and the idea that to those whom we are accustomed to call savages, credit is unknown and only barter is used, is without foundation. From the merchant of China to the Redskin of America; from the Arab of the desert to the Hottentot of South Africa or the Maori of New Zealand, debts and credits are equally familiar to all, and the breaking of the pledged word, or the refusal to carry put an obligation is held equally disgraceful.”

It is here necessary to explain the primitive and the only true commercial or economic meaning of the word ‘credit.’ It is simply the correlative of debt. What A owes to B is A’s debt to B and B’s credit on A. A is B’s debtor and B is A’s creditor. The words ‘credit’ and ‘debt’ express a legal relationship between two parties, and they express the same legal relationship seen from two opposite sides. A will speak of this relationship as a debt, while B will speak of it as a credit. As I shall have frequent occasion to use these two words, it is necessary that the reader should familiarize himself with this conception which, though simple enough to the banker or financial

expert, is apt to be confusing to the ordinary reader, owing to the many derivative meanings which are with the word 'credit.' Whether, therefore, in the following pages, the word 'credit' or 'debt' is used, the thing spoken of is precisely the same in both cases, the one or the other word being used according as the situation is being looked at from the point of view of the creditor or of the debtor.

A first class credit is the most valuable kind of property. Having no corporeal existence, it has no weight and takes no room. It can easily be transferred, often without any formality whatever. It is movable at will from place to place by a simple order with nothing but the cost of a letter or a telegram. It can be immediately used to supply any material want, and it can be guarded against destruction and theft at little expense. It is the most easily handled of all forms of property and is one of the most permanent. It lives with the debtor and shares his fortunes, and when he dies, it passes to the heirs of his estate. As long as the estate exists, the obligation continues, and under favorable circumstances and in a healthy state of commerce there seems to be no reason why it should ever suffer deterioration.

Credit is the purchasing power so often mentioned in economic works as being one of the principal attributes of money, and, as I shall try to show, credit and credit alone is money. Credit and not gold or silver is the one property which all men seek, the acquisition of which is the aim and object of all commerce.

The word 'credit' is generally technically defined as being the right to demand and sue for payment of a debt, and this no doubt is the legal aspect of a credit today; while we are so accustomed to paying a multitude of small purchases in coin that we have come to adopt the idea, fostered by the laws of legal tender, that the right to payment of a debt means the right to payment in coin or its equivalent. And further, owing to our modern systems of coinage, we have been led to the notion that payment in coin means payment in a certain weight of gold.

Before we can understand the principles of commerce we must wholly divest our minds of this false idea. The root meaning of the verb 'to pay' is: that of "to appease," "to pacify," "to satisfy," and while a debtor must be in a position to satisfy his creditor, the really important characteristic of a credit is not the right which it gives to payment of a debt, but the right that it confers on the holder to liberate himself from debt by its means—a right recognized by all societies. By buying we become debtors and by selling we become creditors, and being all both buyers and sellers we are all debtors and creditors. As debtor we can compel our creditor to cancel our obligation to him by handing to him his own acknowledgment of a debt to an equivalent amount which he, in his turn, has incurred. For example,

A having bought goods from B to the value of \$100, is B's debtor for that amount. A can rid himself of his obligation to B by selling to C goods of an equivalent value and taking from him in payment an acknowledgment of debt which he (C, that is to say) has received from B. By presenting this acknowledgment to B, A can compel him to cancel the debt due to him. A has used the credit which he has procured to release himself from his debt. It is his privilege.

This is the primitive law of commerce. The constant creation of credits and debts, and their extinction by being canceled against one another, forms the whole mechanism of commerce and it is so simple that there is no one who cannot understand it.

But what are the facts? Let us take the situation here in the United States. The government accepts all the gold of standard fineness and gives in exchange gold coins weight for weight, or paper certificates representing such coins. Now the general impression is that the only effect of transforming the gold into coins is to cut it into pieces of a certain weight and to stamp these pieces with the government mark guaranteeing their weight and fineness. But is this really all that has been done? By no means. What has really happened is that the government has put upon the pieces of gold a stamp which conveys the promise that they will be received by the government in payment of taxes or other debts due to it. By issuing a coin, the government has incurred a liability towards its possessor just as it would have done had it made a purchase; has incurred, that is to say, an obligation to provide a credit by taxation, or otherwise for the redemption of the coin and thus enable its possessor to get value for his money.

In virtue of the stamp it bears, the gold has changed its character from that of a mere commodity to that of a token of indebtedness. In England, the Bank of England buys the gold and gives in exchange coin, or bank-notes, or a credit on its books. In the United States, the gold is deposited with the Mint and the depositor receives either coin or paper certificates in exchange. The seller and the depositor alike receive a credit, the one on the official bank and the other direct on the government treasury. The effect is precisely the same in both cases. The coin, the paper certificates, the bank-notes and the credit on the books of the bank, are all identical in their nature, whatever the difference of form or of intrinsic value. A priceless gem or a worthless bit of paper may equally be a token of debt, so long as the receiver knows what it stands for and the giver acknowledges his obligation to take it back in payment of a debt due.

Money, then, is credit and nothing but credit. A's money is B's debt to him, and when B pays his debt, A's money disappears. This is the whole theory of money.

Debts and credits are perpetually trying to get into touch with one another, so that they may be written off against each other, and it is the business of the banker to bring them together. This is done in two ways: either by discounting bills, or by making loans. The first is the more old fashioned method and in Europe the bulk of the banking business consists in discounts while in the United States the more usual procedure is by way of loans.

The process of discounting bills is as follows: A sells goods to B, C, and D, who thereby become A's debtors and give him their acknowledgments of indebtedness, which are technically called bills of exchange, or more shortly bills. That is to say A acquires a credit on B, C, and D. A buys goods from E, F, and G and gives his bill to each in payment. That is to say E, F, and G have acquired credits on A. If B, C, and D could sell goods to E, F, and G and take in payment the bills given by A, they could then present these bills to A and by so doing release themselves from their debt. So long as trade takes place in a small circle, say in one village or in a small group of nearby villages, B, C, and D might be able to get hold of the bills in the possession of E, F, and G. But as soon as commerce widened out, and the various debtors and creditors lived far apart and were unacquainted with one another, it is obvious that without some system of centralizing debts and credits commerce would not go on.

Then arose the merchant or banker, the latter being merely a more specialized variety of the former. The banker buys from A the bills held by him on B, C, and D, and A now becomes the creditor of the banker, the latter in his turn becoming the creditor of B, C, and D. A's credit on the banker is called his deposit and he is called a depositor. E, F, and G also sell to the banker the bills which they hold on A, and when they become due the banker debits A with the amount thus canceling his former credit. A's debts and credits have been "cleared," and his name drops out, leaving B, C, and D as debtors to the bank and E, F, and G as the corresponding creditors. Meanwhile B, C, and D have been doing business and in payment of sales which they have made, they receive bills on H, I, and K. When their original bills held by the banker become due, they sell to him the bills which H, I, and K have given them, and which balance their debt. Thus their debts and credits are "cleared" in their turn, and their names drop out, leaving H, I, and K as debtors and E, F, and G as creditors of the bank and so on. The modern bill is the lineal descendant of the medieval tally, and the more ancient Babylonian clay tablet.

Now let us see how the same result is reached by means of a loan instead of by taking the purchaser's bill and selling it to the banker. In this case the banking operation, instead of following the sale and purchase, anticipates it.

B, C, and D, before buying the goods they require, make an agreement with the banker by which he undertakes to become the debtor of A in their place, while they at the same time agree to become the debtors of the banker. Having made this agreement B, C, and D make their purchases from A and instead of giving him their bills which he sells to the banker, they give him a bill direct on the banker. These bills of exchange on a banker are called cheques or drafts.

It is evident that the situation thus created is precisely the same whichever procedure is adopted, and the debts and credits are cleared in the same manner. There is a slight difference in the details of the mechanism, that is all. There is thus a constant circulation of debts and credits through the medium of the banker who brings them together and clears them as the debts fall due. This is the whole science of banking as it was three-thousand years before Christ, and as it is today. It is a common error among economic writers to suppose that a bank was originally a place of safe deposit for gold and silver, which the owner could take out as he required it. The idea is wholly erroneous and can be shown to be so from the study of the ancient banks.

Whatever commercial or financial transaction we examine, whether it be the purchase of a pennyworth of vegetables in the market or the issue of a billion dollar loan by a government, we find in each and all of them the same principle involved; either an old credit is transferred or new ones are created, and a State or a banker or a peasant is prosperous or bankrupt according as the principle is observed or not, that debts, as they fall due, must be met by credits available, at the same moment.

The object of every good banker is to see that at the end of each day's operations, his debts to other bankers do not exceed his credits on those bankers, and in addition, the amount of the "lawful money" or credits on the government in his possession. This requirement limits the amount of money he has to lend. He knows by experience pretty accurately the amount of the cheques he will have to present for payment to other bankers and the amount of those which will be presented for his payment, and he will refuse to buy bills or to lend money—that is to say, he will refuse to incur present obligations in return for future payments—if by so doing he is going to risk having more debts due by him on a certain day than he will have credits on that day to set against them. It must be remembered that a credit due for payment at a future time cannot be set off against a debt due to another banker immediately. Debts and credits to be set off against each other must be due at the same time

The value of a credit depends not on the existence of any gold or silver or other property behind it, but solely on the solvency of the debtor, and that

depends solely on whether, when the debt becomes due, he in his turn has sufficient credits on others to set off against his debts. If the debtor neither possesses nor can acquire credits which can be offset against his debts, then the possession of those debts is of no value to the creditors who own them. It is by selling, I repeat, and by selling alone—whether it be by the sale of property or the sale of the use of our talents or of our land—that we acquire the credits by which we liberate ourselves from debt, and it is by his selling power that a prudent banker estimates his client's value as a debtor.

Debts due at a certain moment can only be canceled by being offset against credits which become available at that moment; that is to say that a creditor cannot be compelled to accept in payment of a debt due to him an acknowledgment of indebtedness which he himself has given and which only falls due at a later time. Hence it follows that a man is only solvent if he has immediately available credits at least equal to the amount of his debts immediately due and presented for payment. If, therefore, the sum of his immediate debts exceeds the sum of his immediate credits, the real value of these debts to his creditors will fall to an amount which will make them equal to the amount of his credits. This is one of the most important principles of commerce.

Another important point to remember is that when a seller has delivered the commodity bought and has accepted an acknowledgment of debt from the purchaser, the transaction is complete, the payment of the purchase is final; and the new relationship which arises between the seller and the purchaser, the creditor and the debtor, is distinct from the sale and purchase.

One of the popular fallacies in connection with commerce is that in modern days a money-saving device has been introduced called credit and that, before this device was known, all purchases were paid for in cash—in other words, in coins. A careful investigation shows that the precise reverse is true. In olden days coins played a far smaller part in commerce than they do today. Indeed so small was the quantity of coins, that they did not even suffice for the needs of the Royal household and estates which regularly used tokens of various kinds for the purpose of making small payments. So unimportant indeed was the coinage that sometimes Kings did not hesitate to call it all in for re-minting and re-issue and still commerce went on just the same.

The modern practice of selling coins to the public seems to have been quite unknown in old days. The metal was bought by the Mint and the coins were issued by the King in payment of the expenses of the Government, largely I gather from contemporary documents, for the payment of the King's soldiers. One of the most difficult things to understand is the extraordinary differences in the price which was paid for the precious metal by the French

Mint, even on the same day. The fact that the price often, if not always, bore no relation to the market value of the metal has been remarked on by writers; but there is nothing in any record to show on what it was based. The probable explanation is that the purchase and sale of gold and silver was in the hands of a very few great bankers who were large creditors of the Treasury and the purchase of the metals by the Mint involved a financial transaction by which part payment of the debt was made in the guise of an exorbitant price for the metal.

The method by which governments carry on their finance by means of debts and credits is particularly interesting. Just like any private individual, the government pays by giving acknowledgments of indebtedness—drafts on the Royal Treasury, or on some other branch of the government or on the government bank. This is well seen in medieval England, where the regular method used by the government for paying a creditor was by “raising a tally” on the Customs or on some other revenue-getting department, that is to say by giving to the creditor, as an acknowledgment of indebtedness, a wooden tally. The Exchequer accounts are full of entries such as the following:

“To Thomas de Bello Campo, Earl of Warwick, by divers tallies raised this day, containing 500 marks delivered to the same Earl.”

“To... by one tally raised this day in the name of the Collectors of the small customs in the Port of London containing £40.”

The system was not finally abandoned until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

I have already explained how such acknowledgments acquire a value in the case of private persons. We are all engaged in buying and selling, we manufacture commodities for sale, we cultivate the ground and sell the produce, we sell the labor of our hands or the work of our intelligence or the use of our property, and the only way in which we can be paid for the services we thus render is by receiving back from our purchasers the tallies which we ourselves have given in payment of like services which we have received from others.

But a government produces nothing for sale, and owns little or no property; of what value, then, are these tallies to the creditors of the government? They acquire their value in this way. The government by law obliges certain selected persons to become its debtors. It declares that so-and-so, who imports goods from abroad, shall owe the government so much

on all that he imports, or that so-and-so, who owns land, shall owe to the government so much per acre. This procedure is called levying a tax, and the persons thus forced into the position of debtors to the government must in theory seek out the holders of the tallies or other instrument acknowledging a debt due by the government, and acquire from them the tallies by selling to them some commodity or in doing them some service, in exchange for which they may be induced to part with their tallies. When these are returned to the government treasury, the taxes are paid.

How literally true this is can be seen by examining the accounts of the sheriffs in England in olden days. They were the collectors of inland taxes, and had to bring their revenues to London periodically. The bulk of their collections always consisted of exchequer tallies, and though, of course, there was often a certain quantity of coin, just as often there was none at all, the whole consisting of tallies.

The general belief that the Exchequer was a place where gold or silver was received, stored, and paid out is wholly false. Practically the entire business of the English Exchequer consisted in the issuing and receiving of tallies, in comparing the tallies and the counter-tallies, the stock and the stub, as the two parts of the tally were popularly called, in keeping the accounts of the government debtors and creditors, and in canceling the tallies when returned to the Exchequer. It was, in fact, the great clearing house for government credits and debts.

For many centuries, how many we do not know, the principal instrument of commerce was neither the coin nor the private token, but the tally, a stick of squared hazel-wood, notched in a certain manner to indicate the amount of the purchase or, debt. The name of the debtor and the date of the transaction were written on two opposite sides of the stick, which was then split down the middle in such a way that the notches were cut in half, and the name and date appeared on both pieces of the tally. The split was stopped by a cross-cut about an inch from the base of the stick, so that one of the pieces was shorter than the other. One piece, called the "stock," was issued to the seller or creditor, while the other, called the "stub" or "counter-stock," was kept by the buyer or debtor. Both halves were thus a complete record of the credit and debt and the debtor was protected by his stub from the fraudulent imitation of or tampering with his tally.

Tax assessors used such twigs to calculate amounts owed by local sheriffs. Often, though, rather than wait for the taxes to come due, Henry's exchequer would often sell the tallies at a discount, and they would circulate, as tokens of debt owed to the government, to anyone willing to trade for them.

The reader might have noticed one puzzling aspect of the equation: the tallies can operate as money only as long as Henry never pays his

debt. In fact this is precisely the logic on which the Bank of England—the first successful modern central bank—was originally founded. In 1694, a consortium of English bankers made a loan of £1,200,000 to the king. In return they received a royal monopoly on the issuance of banknotes. What this meant in practice was they had the right to advance IOUs for a portion of the money the king now owed them to any inhabitant of the kingdom willing to borrow from them, or willing to deposit their own money in the bank—in effect, to circulate or ‘monetize’ the newly created royal debt. This was a great deal for the bankers (they got to charge the king 8% annual interest for the original loan and simultaneously charge interest on the same money to the clients who borrowed it), but it only worked as long as the original loan remained outstanding. To this day, this loan has never been paid back. It cannot be. If it ever were, the entire monetary system of Great Britain would cease to exist.

Fuck the Debt

The problem is the prevailing myths about the virtues of austerity and fears about easy money. Polls and focus groups regularly find that the story that the government budget is like a family budget has enormous appeal, but few people have a clear enough understanding of the economy to recognize that this analogy is inappropriate. Everyone understands that using credit cards to balance income and spending each month will lead to trouble. The idea that the government's finances are qualitatively different—that the government does not face the same constraints as a family—strikes most people as bizarre and fanciful. The same attitudes apply to expansionary monetary policy. The notion that the government can print money and thereby create wealth seems crazy. Everyone has heard stories of Weimar Germany, or more recently Zimbabwe, where governments facing economic crises sought to resolve their problems by printing money. It is difficult to distinguish the idea of printing money when demand is weak and printing money when the government can't pay its bills. If these two situations look similar to people, it is understandable that they would prefer to be on the safe side and avoid the risk of hyperinflation. This preference for security probably explains the continuing appeal of the gold standard.

There is no simple route for circumventing the large-scale confusion people have about the basics of macroeconomic policy. The public's conservatism on these issues is deeply held and believed to be common sense. Few people spend their time contemplating the dynamics of the economy or studying the history of instances of successful fiscal and monetary stimulus. Unless the public deepens its economic understanding, it will be difficult to overcome the fear of "easy money." This task is not made any easier by the fact that there is a whole industry devoted to fanning these fears.

What is perhaps most incredible is their notion of 'irresponsible.' Their sole measure of responsibility is the size of the government budget deficit and debt, which are for all practical purposes meaningless numbers. If the government puts in place patent protection that requires us to pay an extra \$400 billion a year for prescription drugs, this adds zero to the budget deficit or debt and therefore doesn't concern them. However if it "borrowed" an extra \$400 billion a year to pay for developing new drugs, they would be furious.

The key to understanding the economy for average people is to look at debt. The economy has to spend more and more money on debt service. The reason the economy is not recovering isn't simply because this is a normal cycle. And it's not because labour is paid too much. It's because

people are diverting more and more of their income to paying their debts, so they can't afford to buy goods. Markets are shrinking—and if markets are shrinking, then real estate rents are shrinking, profits are shrinking. Instead of using their earnings to reinvest and hire more labour to increase production, companies are using their earnings for stock buybacks and dividend payouts to raise the share price so that the managers can take their revenue in the form of bonuses and stocks and live in the short-run. They're leaving their companies as bankrupt shells, which is pretty much what hedge funds do when they take over companies.

So the financialization of companies is the reverse of everything Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and everyone you think of as a classical economist was saying. Banks wrap themselves in a cloak of classical economics by dropping the history of economic thought from the curriculum, which is pretty much what's happened. And in Canada, my experience there was that the banks have a huge lobbying power over government. In 1979 the provinces of Canada were borrowing money from Switzerland and Germany because they could borrow it at much lower interest rates. I said that this was going to be a disaster, and one that was completely unnecessary. If Canadian provinces borrow in Francs or any other foreign currency, this money goes into the central bank, which then creates Canadian dollars to spend. Why not have the central bank simply create these dollars without having Swiss francs, without having German marks? It's unnecessary to have an intermediary. But the more thuggish banks, like the Bank of Nova Scotia, said, 'Oh, that way's the road to serfdom.' It's not. Following the banks and the Austrian School of the banks' philosophy, that's the road to serfdom. That's the road to debt serfdom. It should not be taken now. It lets universities and the government be run by neoliberals. They're a travesty of what real economics is all about.

Money always has been a public creation. The paper money in our pocket is a form of government debt. The government created it as a kind of IOU when it paid for goods and services. That is how governments supply economies with money. The holders of such currency in turn are in the position of being creditors to the rest of the economy—and pay with this credit (which is given value by the government accepting as payment for taxes).

The public debt—including the money supply—would not exist if the government did not run up debts century after century, just like other countries. The deficit is what creates the economy's monetary base, which rises each year in proportion to the increase in public debt. Unlike personal debts, public debts are not expected to be repaid. To do so would extinguish the money supply. That is what happened in the late nineteenth century in

the United States, and it imposed a serious deflation.

The role of central banks is to create money electronically to spend into the economy to spur economic growth without entailing interest-bearing debt owed to commercial banks and bondholders. That is why financial elites oppose central bank financing of deficits. Bondholders prefer to keep governments on a taut financial leash, with central banks creating money only to bail out banks, not the economy. Bankers accuse governments of depreciating the currency and creating hyperinflation, yet over the past thirty years banks have financed the largest inflation of real estate, stock, and bond prices in history. This certainly is not a more morally responsible form of inflation than government spending.

Wall Street has mounted a propaganda campaign to convince voters that government budgets should be run like household budgets: in balance or even surplus. The difference is that households cannot create money. Removing the constraint of silver or gold backing for money has enabled banks to create credit without limit, except for government regulation and capital reserve requirements. Disabling public regulatory power has left credit creation to the commercial banks, which inflate asset prices on credit, adding interest charges to the economy's ownership structure. Asset-price inflation became the focus of bank lending—and seemed to justify yet more bank lending in an economy-wide Ponzi scheme.

It is mainly anti-labor austerity advocates who urge balancing the budget, and even to run surpluses to pay down the national debt. The effect must be austerity. A false parallel is drawn with private saving. Of course individuals should get out of debt by saving what they can. But governments are different. Governments create money and spend it into the economy by running budget deficits. The paper currency in your pocket is technically a government debt. It appears on the liabilities side of the public balance sheet.

When President Clinton ran a budget surplus in the late 1990s, doing so sucked revenue out of the US economy. When governments do not run deficits, the economy is obliged to rely on banks—which charge interest for providing credit. Governments can create money on their own computers just as well. They can do this without having to pay bondholders or banks.

If the government were to pay off its debts permanently, there would be no money—except for what banks create. That has never been the case in history, going all the way back to ancient Mesopotamia. All money is a government debt, accepted in payment of taxes

This government money creation does not mean that governments can pay foreign debts. The danger comes when debts are owed in a foreign currency. Governments are unable to tax foreigners. Paying foreign debts

puts downward pressure on exchange rates. This leads to crises, which often end by relinquishing political control to the IMF and foreign banks. They demand “conditionalities” in the form of anti-labor legislation and privatization.

In cases where national economies cannot pay foreign debts out of current balance-of-payments revenue, debts should be written down, not paid off. If they are not written down, you have the kind of austerity that is tearing Greece apart today.

Money is literally an imaginary thing. So where does the money come from? Where does most of the money come from when you get a mortgage? Money should be used for social good, not social harms.

It’s pretty simple, if one can’t eat, one might kill you in order to do so; if your society has convinced most that they must consume products to be happy and successful, don’t be surprised when many become desperate and resort to violence in order to achieve those goals. Problematic cultural structures. Violence is not your nature, though much of your written history paints it as such. Violence is a sign of illness in your societies, of broken beings.

Money is only real when it comes to poor people. But money still isn’t real when it comes to blowing them up, imprisoning them, terrorizing them, no, it only becomes real when talking about things that help them.

We didn’t have the trillions to fight the Iraq war. And we didn’t raise taxes—we did the opposite, we cut taxes. And somehow it happened. I’ll be convinced we don’t have money for UBI when I see a war not fought because we don’t have the money.

When it comes to paying contractors, the sky is the limit; when it comes to financing the basic functions of the state, the coffers are empty.

The Citigroup and AIG bailouts were financed with a stroke of the pen. Social Security, Medicare, and other social spending likewise can be financed by the central bank creating money, just as it has created money to bail out Wall Street. Even worse, FICA wage withholding pays for these programs in advance, lending this forced saving to the US Treasury so that taxes can be slashed further for the highest wealth brackets. The difference between public money creation and bank credit is that the public purpose is to promote the public good, not asset-price inflation. National prosperity requires spending money into the economy—for instance, for new capital infrastructure investment, health care, and retirement pensions. Budget surpluses would oblige such spending to be privately financed—which means much higher prices for their services.

In the beginning, sovereign Men created the Laws of America. Now America was formless and empty.

So the Men said, “Let there be money,” and there was money. The Men saw that this was good, so the Men created as much money as they wished, and named the money “Dollars,” and the Men gave the Dollars whatever value they wished.

And the Men commanded the Dollars: “Go forth and multiply.”

In the years that followed, the Men changed the Laws many times. Dollars were commanded to multiply and the value of the Dollars was commanded to change. Many times.

Today, sovereign Men continue to create new Laws, and the new Laws continue to determine the number of Dollars and the value of Dollars. And whenever more Dollars are needed, Men say, “Let the laws change and let there be more Dollars.” And there are more Dollars.

“If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks will deprive the people of all property until their children wake-up homeless on the continent their fathers conquered. The issuing power should be taken from the banks and restored to the people, to whom it properly belongs.”

—Thomas Jefferson

“I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies.”

—Thomas Jefferson

“The modern theory of the perpetuation of debt has drenched the earth with blood, and crushed its inhabitants under burdens ever accumulating.”

—Thomas Jefferson

“History records that the money changers have used every form of abuse, intrigue, deceit, and violent means possible to maintain their control over governments by controlling money and its issuance.”

—James Madison

Why Private Banking Is Bad:

- It drives systemic inequality by allowing those with more money than they need to exploit those who need money.
- It drives unsustainable, exponential debt growth because the interest cost rises faster than society can create wealth to pay it.

- It discounts the future, driving environmental destruction—it makes a forest worth more as sawed timber than as an ecosystem preserved for future generations.
- It demands exponential GDP growth, rapidly depleting finite natural resources—3% GDP growth means the economy doubles every 24 years which means extracting resources at twice the rate and throwing twice as much away.
- It drives inflation.

The FDIC is a federally funded program. It may be inadequately funded now. Heck, Social Security is “inadequately funded.” But government programs aren’t funded by tax revenues. Where would tax payers get the dollars with which they pay taxes if government didn’t spend them out into the economy first?

People are getting wise to this. According to its own audit, the Fed produced \$16–\$29 trillion to cure the frauds of the financial sector. The public outcry if we couldn’t cover the FDIC’s bets is really our protection against any excuses that FDIC might manufacture.

We can’t run out of money. We make the stuff.

I would argue the basic flaw is treating money as a store of value, when it is an accounting device, essentially a voucher system. We think of it as some commodity to mine from society and the environment, when it actually functions as a social contract. Basically a promise. As such, it is a medium of exchange, but all that is really saved are promises. So we make lots of promises to each other, but we don’t actually trust each other. The only way it really works is to store value in tangible assets, like healthy communities and environments, but that level of social responsibility seems remote in our current culture.

It’s an error to confuse money, which only the government creates, with value, which is created in the social economy. Monetary policy should be designed to facilitate the exchange of values produced, and encourage the production of new value. Money circulates as oil in the gears of the productive economy. Too much, and it floods the process; too little, and the process seizes up.

“MMT makes it sound as if money exists just because the government wills it to exist.”

No, this is inaccurate, MMT says that the government must *spend* money into existence, not just issue a legal fiat. Collecting taxes in the currency

creates a need for the currency. This is historically accurate and can be seen in British colonial history. They imposed taxes on the colonies in pound sterling, which compelled the colonies to find something to export to Britain in order to generate the foreign exchange to pay the taxes.

The debate is over how to get the currency in people's hands. Should the government just cut checks and let citizens spend as they see fit? Or should the government directly employ resources to improve society where the private sector isn't interested? How about where they are?

Someone is going to do the planning, whether it's the public sector or the private sector, planning must be done. When government does the planning, then it's decided democratically—at least in theory. If the government doesn't do the planning, then the private sector is left to do it on its own. This gets chaotic if the private sector doesn't coordinate, or can get parasitic if the private sector colludes against public interest.

Where do the tax payments go? Nowhere—a bank account is debited, the end.

All of this was recognized by Beardsley Ruml, a New Dealer who chaired the Federal Reserve Bank in the 1940s; he was also the “father” of income tax withholding and wrote two important papers on the role of taxes (“Taxes for Revenue are Obsolete” in 1946, and “Tax Policies for Prosperity” in 1964). Let's first examine his cogent argument that sovereign government does not need taxes for revenue, and turn to his views on the role of taxes.

In his 1964 article, he emphasizes:

“We must recognize that the objective of national fiscal policy is above all to maintain a sound currency and efficient financial institutions; but consistent with the basic purpose, fiscal policy should and can contribute a great deal toward obtaining a high level of productive employment and prosperity.”

He goes on to say that the US government gained the ability to pursue these goals after WWII due to two developments. The first was the creation of “a modern central bank” and the second was the sovereign issue of a currency that “is not convertible into gold or into some other commodity.” With those two conditions, “it follows that our federal government has final freedom from the money market in meeting its financial requirements. National states no longer need taxes to get the wherewithal to meet their expenses.”

Why, then, does the national government need taxes? He counts four reasons:

1. As an instrument of fiscal policy to help stabilize the purchasing power of the dollar.
2. To express public policy in the distribution of wealth and of income as in the case of the progressive income and estate taxes.
3. To express public policy in subsidizing or in penalizing various industries and economic groups.
4. To isolate and assess directly the costs of certain national benefits, such as highways and social security.

Highly progressive taxation gives workers more to spend and gives the rich an incentive to pay their workers better to maintain a stable workplace—since if they took the money themselves, it would just mostly go to taxes—thus stimulating demand for more goods and services.

The second effect of a high top income tax rate is to bring stability to the economy. Taxes can be very destructive if kept too low. There seems to be a relationship between tax cuts and economic bubbles. Whenever top marginal tax rates were relatively high—above 60 percent usually—the economy was at its most stable. Economic bubbles were kept in check since the super-wealthy didn't have enormous amounts of hot money to go speculate in the market and working people's wages grew steadily. As a result, the economy as a whole saw sustained growth. But when those top marginal tax rates dropped, the opposite happened. The very wealthy had a lot of extra money with which to go play in the markets and to place enormous bets on everything—start-up tech companies, oil and food commodities, real estate, et cetera—setting up boom-bust cycles that made some people mindbogglingly rich during the boom, but left most Americans holding an empty bag when the bust happened. This was the lesson we thought we learned after Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon cut the top rate from 73 percent to 25 percent in the 1920s, setting up a frenzy of market speculation and the eventual Great Crash of 1929.

The worship of the golden calf of old has found a new and heartless image in the cult of money and the dictatorship of financial markets, which are faceless and lacking any humane goal. Money has to serve, not rule.

Money is power, influence, control. The argument for taxes is not to take money, but to put an upper limit on power, influence, control. There is no reason why single individuals should wield such power, influence, and control without democratic checks.

The federal government is monetarily sovereign, it creates out of thin air any money it needs to pay for things, it does not use the dollars you

pay in taxes. It simply tells Bank X to credit Y account \$Z and the bank does, those dollars are not transferred from the federal government's bank account, they simply appear.

The government of California is monetarily non-sovereign, it cannot create every dollar it needs, it does rely upon and use the tax dollars you pay in order to cover any costs. It makes no sense for states to pay for anything that could be considered a public good because such money must come from a limited pool of dollars. The federal government has an unlimited pool of dollars to pay for any necessary public good.

Federal government spending increases the money supply, federal taxes reduce the money supply. Inflation is a result of supply not matching demand, not simply the unfettered creation of dollars, there will be no Zimbabwe or any other scary story those with great power, status, wealth want to tell you so that they may continue to have great power, status, wealth.

Every death from despair is a result of the federal government not using its power to create unlimited dollars in ways that benefit the masses.

Put the transaction sequence on a timeline: Before taxes (income taxes) can accrue, someone has to earn income. In order to earn income, someone else has to spend, which is a necessary condition for income. If spending must precede income which must precede taxation, how can taxation fund spending?

Last year's taxes? National Accounts budgeting defines a deficit as this years spending less this year's taxes.

Taxes are a means to force users to use the currency of issue and to control inflation. Taxes can incentivize or disincentivize behavior.

What is it people give to pay these taxes? Dollars. Who holds the patent on dollar production? The Federal government. Why does the Federal government need to take or borrow dollars if it owns the patent on dollar production? It doesn't.

There is a widespread myth that hyperinflations are caused by excessive government money "printing." Perhaps you are among the vast majority who believe this pernicious myth—Wikipedia does. Well, it simply isn't so, and the belief alone is responsible for great misery, worldwide.

Consider these excerpts from the following article: "Fed analysis warns of 'economic ruin' when governments print money to pay off debt":

"St. Louis Fed economists warn in a paper of potential 'economic ruin' if policies that advocate money-printing to pay off government debts are ever adopted."

Immediately, the article provides us with a misunderstanding. “Money-printing” never is used for paying off US federal debt. The federal debt is the total of net deposits into Treasury security accounts. When you buy a T-bill, T-note, or T-bond (a.k.a. “federal debt”), you open a T-security account, and into that account, you deposit the price of the T-security. There, your dollars remain, collecting interest, until the T-security matures, at which time, your dollars—the dollars you deposited plus the interest in the account—are returned to you.

During that entire round trip—you depositing dollars and those same dollars being returned to you—the only so-called money “printing” has occurred daily over a period of years, as your account accumulates interest. The US federal government could pay off the entire US debt today, if it wished, simply by returning the \$20 trillion or so that currently exist in T-security accounts. No money printing or taxes involved.

“A solution some countries with high levels of unsustainable debt have tried is printing money.

‘In this scenario, the government borrows money by issuing bonds and then orders the central bank to buy those bonds by creating (printing) money,’ wrote Scott A. Wolla and Kaitlyn Frerking.

History has taught us, however, that this type of policy leads to extremely high rates of inflation (hyperinflation) and often ends in economic ruin.”

They cite Zimbabwe in the 2007–09 period, Venezuela currently, and Weimar-era Germany, claiming all three faced massive deficits that led to hyperinflation due to money printing. In fact, all three nations provide examples of the real cause of hyperinflation, and it isn’t money printing.

As an aside, money is not printed; it is created via bookkeeping. Money has no physical existence. A dollar bill actually is a title to a dollar. Just as the paper title to a car is not a car, and the paper title to a house is not a house, the paper dollar bill, is not in itself a dollar. The actual dollar is nothing more than a non-physical accounting notation on the government’s books.

The cause of general price increases, i.e. inflation, is shortages. Usually, these are shortages of food or energy. It is shortages, not money “printing” or full employment or excessive demand (as some people claim), that makes prices go up.

Hyperinflation in Zimbabwe began in February 2007. In the late 1990s, the Robert Mugabe government evicted white landowners and gave their

farms to blacks. Many of these “farmers” had no experience or training in farming. As a result, from 1999 to 2009, the country experienced a sharp drop in food production, creating massive food shortages. The non-farmers were unable to obtain loans for capital development (money shortage). Food output capacity fell 45%, manufacturing output 29% in 2005, 26% in 2006 and 28% in 2007, and unemployment rose to 80%. Everything, especially food, was in shortage, which is what caused the Zimbabwean hyperinflation.

Hyperinflation in Venezuela began in November 2016 during the country’s ongoing socioeconomic and political crisis. Since the 1990s, food production had dropped precipitously, with the government beginning to rely upon imported food using the country’s then-large oil profits. In 2003, the government created a currency control board that placed currency limits on individuals, and that caused widespread shortages of goods. In 2005, the government announced the initiation of Venezuela’s own “great leap forward,” following the example of Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward. An increase in shortages began to occur that year as 5% of items became unavailable. In January 2008, 24.7% of goods were reported to be unavailable in Venezuela, with the scarcity of goods remaining high until May 2008, when there was a shortage of 16.3% of goods. Shortages increased again in January 2012 to nearly the same rate as in 2008. In 2013, shortage rates continued to increase and reached a record high of 28% in February 2014. In January 2015, the hashtag *#AnaquelesVaciosEnVenezuela* (or *#EmptyShelvesInVenezuela*) was the number one trending topic on Twitter in Venezuela

General shortages caused the Venezuelan hyperinflation. To a large extent these shortages are a result of US sanctions or the actions of the wealthy few in Venezuela along with multinationals attempting to foment unrest resulting in regime change.

The Weimar Republic experienced hyperinflation between 1921 and 1923, primarily in 1923. In April 1921, the Germany Reparations Commission announced the “London payment plan,” under which Germany would pay reparations in gold or foreign currency in annual installments of two-billion gold marks, plus 26% of the value of Germany’s exports. Since reparations were required to be repaid in hard currency, one strategy that Germany used was the mass printing of banknotes to buy foreign currency, which was then used to pay reparations, greatly exacerbating the inflation of the paper mark. The brief German hyperinflation was caused by shortages of hard currency with which to pay for imports of goods, especially food and food production. The resultant shortages caused the general increase in prices, i.e. the German hyperinflation.

In summary, prices rise not because the people have too much money—Germans, Zimbabweans, and Venezuelans certainly didn’t—but because

needed products, mostly food and/or oil, are in short supply.

MMT supporters argue that a country that runs up debts in its own currency can never default, and as long as inflation remains tame, there really are no problems with government deficit spending. They further say that public spending can be used to stimulate the economy, that essentially a deficit in the public sector can be a surplus in the private sector. In this, MMT is absolutely correct, and mainstream economists agree.

Alan Greenspan:

“A government cannot become insolvent with respect to obligations in its own currency.”

Ben Bernanke:

“The US government has a technology, called a printing press (or, today, its electronic equivalent), that allows it to produce as many US dollars as it wishes at essentially no cost.”

St. Louis Federal Reserve:

“As the sole manufacturer of dollars, whose debt is denominated in dollars, the US government can never become insolvent, i.e., unable to pay its bills. In this sense, the government is not dependent on credit markets to remain operational.”

The article continues:

“The total federal government debt is just over \$23 trillion, or 103.2% of GDP.

The Fed itself has come under criticism for ‘money printing,’ which it did in three rounds of quantitative easing during and after the Great Recession.

This came along with keeping its short-term lending rate anchored near zero for seven years.

However, the central bank’s stated aims were to bring down long-term interest rates and stimulate economic growth, not to finance the national debt.

And that is exactly what happened. Despite all the hand-wringing from the deficit hawks, inflation stayed low, the economy grew, and the national debt was not financed.”

Nothing “finances” the national debt if the word ‘finance’ means pays off. The national debt is not like your debt, my debt, business debt, or

state/local government debt. The national debt is just the net total of deposits into T-security accounts, that are paid off by simply returning the money in those accounts.

Some of the most prominent advocates for MMT are Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, both of whom identify as democratic socialists. Too bad Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez do not really believe what MMT has told them. They continue to search for ways to “pay for” Medicare for All, when the solution hangs right before their eyes: The federal government can and should pay for Medicare for All via deficit spending. And contrary to what Ocasio-Cortez claims, this does not require more borrowing. Most mainstream economists and Wall Street authorities, however, reject the basis that deficits don’t matter absent inflation. Bond market “guru” Jeffrey Gundlach at DoubleLine Capital has called MMT “a crackpot idea,” while former White House economist and Treasury Secretary Larry Summers has labeled it “dangerous.” Just fuck off and die already, Larry.

Most mainstream economists and “Wall Street authorities” do not understand the truth of Monetary Sovereignty. They still disseminate the Big Lie, that federal financing is similar to personal financing, where debt is a burden on the debtor. Federal debt (deposits) is not a burden on anyone—not on the federal government and not on future taxpayers. It is a benefit to the economy and to taxpayers, and does not cause inflation.

Inflation is caused by shortages. In the 1970s in the United States there was a shortage of oil caused by the Arab oil embargoes. During the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, several Arab nations decided to slap the United States for supporting Israel. They cut oil production for four months. Huge public alarm ensued. Passions boiled over as people waited for hours in gas lines; line-jumpers got into fistfights. To a few at the time, the oil shocks seemed to presage the end of the Oil Age. Today most historians and economists instead view the oil shock as a product of mistaken government policies. Arab petro-states could not target individual nations because national oil companies sell oil and gas to what is, in effect, a single worldwide pool controlled by middlemen. Any embargo thus could only raise prices equally across the planet, rather than striking at a single nation.

Or, rather, the Arabs couldn’t have targeted a single nation if President Richard Nixon had not imposed price caps on US oil and gas two years before as an inflation-fighting measure. The embargo cut global oil output by about a quarter, pushing up petroleum prices worldwide. Middlemen could take advantage of the higher prices only if they sold their oil to nations other than the United States, with its price caps. Doing just that transformed a modest global shortfall into a US-specific oil drought.

Because oil is so intrinsic to so many parts of our economy, that caused

shortages, and the resulting increase in the price of oil led to inflation. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, when President Robert Mugabe took away farmland from farmers and passed it out to his cronies, most of them had no farming expertise. Because they didn't know how to farm, the crops failed, and there was a countrywide food shortage. The shortage of food drove up the price of food, which produced a general inflation, which devastated their economy. In fact, the United States regularly brings money into being from nothing. During the banking crisis of 2008–09, the Federal Reserve created tens of trillions of dollars out of thin air, and distributed it to banks, corporations, and even wealthy individuals worldwide. It produced no inflation.

Not a single one of the 56 cases of hyperinflation documented by a Cato study were caused by a central bank that ran amok. In virtually every case, the inflation was not caused by too much money but too few goods. For example, farming collapsed in Zimbabwe, France annexed the Ruhr depriving Weimar Germany of goods. In addition to depriving Germany of 13 percent of its European territories and population, the treaty split wide open two of Germany's three major industrial areas and gave French and Polish industrialists 19 percent of Germany's coke, 17 percent of its blast furnaces, 60 percent of its zinc foundries, and 75 percent of its iron ore.

Inflation is overwhelmingly driven by cost-push variables. Printing money just doesn't do it. If it did, Japan would have exploded decades ago, because they've been trying quantitative easing for nearly 20 years, and they can't move the needle on inflation. And if that's not convincing, remember that according to its own audit, the Fed pushed \$16–\$29 trillion out the door in 2007–08. Where was the inflation then?

So the concern about inflation remains hypothetical, but certainly a useful boogeyman to trot out when we need to tell the poors why they can't have something.

Inflation happens to prices, not money, and it is caused by markets, not by money. Whether the money is gold or paper, if the total that people are spending is more than the total goods and services available to buy, the result is inflation and it happens because demand is greater than what is available. Whatever the currency, spending more money than production can handle will inflate market-prices. Spending is ultimately restrained only by the idle labor and resources available.

If a government continuously spent money into the system without doing anything else, it would result in inflation because the total economic value in the system is unchanged but with a higher total buying power. One of the cool things about money, however, is that it can convince people to do and make things and it is also able to buy materials and tools that people do and make things with. That means, if idle labor and resources are available,

money can be spent without much inflation so long as spending activates that idle labor and resources to add economic value to the society.

In other words, there is no reason to fear deficit spending if that spending employs people who were jobless or provides capital to workers to employ themselves with to develop its value because, when money and value are added simultaneously, inflation does not result. Public infrastructure projects, universal healthcare, a universal basic income, a workers' self-managed jobs guarantee, and tuition-free public universities—programs like these could be tomorrow's reality.

“I'm sadly ignorant when it comes to economics, so answer me this. I understand that if supply is lower than demand, then sellers will jack up prices and this will lead to inflation. But it also seems reasonable to me that if the Fed starts printing dollars to pay for everything, then the market will be flooded with currency and sellers will see this as an opportunity to jack up the prices, thus also leading to inflation.

What you said would imply I'm wrong, but I don't understand why. Mind enlightening me?”

Economics as taught is nonsense propaganda, consider your ignorance a benefit.

The key here is that the federal government has the ability to create unlimited money as well as destroy it (via taxation). Absent price controls, short-term one could theoretically try to gorge themselves at the trough of newly created money, but any excessive profit and income can easily be taxed out of existence, limiting its harm. But possible instability resulting from this greed grab would of course be harmful, so price controls on essential goods would certainly be a good idea, if not a requirement. Please do learn something from the 70s oil embargo though.

However, we currently operate in an environment where the government does not acknowledge their ability to create unlimited money when it comes to public goods, but does so—though behind a smokescreen—when it comes to military expenditures or bank bailouts. We have also allowed private banks to add huge amounts of money into the economy with no inflationary effect. So the threat of inflation is completely overblown.

The possible negative situation you outline is of course also an argument for removing the profit motive, the greed, from the creation and provision of anything deemed essential to survival or what could be described as a public good. Why stop at single payer? Why not an NHS system like the UK—properly funded of course? Why not electricity generation and

transmission? Why not transportation of both people and freight by air, rail, road, water? Why should we allow our communities, our environment, to be influenced so heavily by an unelected few trying to make themselves a profit? Especially when, in event of problems, like the 2008 crash or the 2020 Wuhan Flu panic, government will be stepping in to bail them out—socializing the losses, privatizing the profits, again and again.

The argument against is often that the federal government is inefficient, the profit motive makes one more efficient, this is of course nonsense since at the federal level the resources that matter are real resources, not money. One should certainly press the government to be efficient in its use of finite, real, environmentally impactful resources, but the only concern one need have about monetary efficiency is if the overall monetary policy is widening or shrinking the gap between the richest and the poorest.

Globalization as we know it is unsustainable, not necessarily from a monetary perspective but an environmental one. So you are correct that the massive amount of importation is problematic. In much the same way as some encourage supporting local businesses to keep money and resources flowing within one's own community, we should strive to limit the importation of any resources or goods and encourage every other country to do the same.

As it currently stands, we print huge sums of money to pay for goods from other countries, so far they have been perfectly content to continue accepting the currency—like all fiat currency its value ultimately relies on the faith of those utilizing it. This faith and value is created domestically by being the currency required to pay one's taxes, thereby incentivizing its use. Internationally we incentivize the 'sending back' of dollars with Treasury bonds—temporary removal from circulation—or through exported goods—currency returns and some can be destroyed via existing corporate or income taxes.

More importantly, I think, is that we are not necessarily talking about a massive influx of new currency but a reorganization of where it's coming from. Take healthcare for instance, in a fully government-run system rather than some private insurer or hospital paying \$X for Y widget it's instead the government paying—less since it is the largest and only market in town for such items and has the ability to legislatively dictate prices if need be. Now, of course, the private hospital is using existing dollars while the government hospital is using newly created ones, but provided you have proper monetary policy elsewhere, then taxation is destroying dollars at the same time, limiting the overall growth of the money supply. And were the government to manufacture the essential materials required itself, then you have even less money entering circulation as more of the supply chain would

exist within the government's control and lack the need for a profit motive or even using dollars at all.

If one aims to simply create whatever money is required to fund necessary public goods and no more, combined with a reduction of income inequality, it should be quite an easy feat to stabilize the monetary system and supply. It is the creation of money to fund things that are not in the public interest, whether real estate speculation, CDOs, other derivatives, fidget spinners, et cetera that is a danger to stability, not the government responsibly providing for its citizens.

We must remember that our real limits are finite real resources on a finite planet. Working towards a degrowth economy—the only way we will achieve climate stability—will over time decrease the overall money supply that exists, held both domestically and abroad.

People are largely uninformed when it comes to economics and their country's monetary system. They are way too prone to accept simple nostrums. They don't understand three basic facts:

1. Except in boom times the private sector doesn't optimize employment and therefore demand because of the risk uncertainty inherent in investment.
2. Unlike a private sector clearing bank, a sovereign government doesn't create a liability when it creates money from thin air and this means it can make up for the normal under-optimized investment of the private sector either directly by public investment in goods and services, by issuing tax credits, or reducing taxation.
3. Both clearing banks and government can create too much money from thin air relative to real resources and financial assets and cause abnormal inflation. Only government can regulate to avoid this or take emergency action to mitigate its effects if the source of inflation is outside its country's control.

Just think of how many of our seemingly intractable local and national and global problems could be solved if only America had its own sovereign fiat-money system! Unfortunately, most Americans can't even think about that question because they've never heard a proper explanation of what 'fiat-money' actually is. Here, then, is quick and dirty solution to that problem.

An American Fiat-Money System in Eight Easy Steps:

1. The sovereign US government declares that every citizen and business must, on a regular and recurring basis, pay taxes to the government (or incur a harsh penalty).
2. The government next declares that the only thing it will accept as a tax payment is a particular kind of “fiat-money” which only the government, itself, shall have the right to issue.
3. After these declarations, US citizens and businesses find themselves, instantaneously, with a strong desire to acquire the government’s fiat-money to avoid the harsh penalties of being tax delinquent.
4. In order to satisfy this desire, the government then exercises its declared right and issues the fiat-money—either electronically or with a printing press—and then spends the fiat-money into the private economy so the citizens and businesses can acquire it.
5. The sovereign government can spend its created fiat-money into the private economy in three ways:
 - a) It can directly purchase goods and services from the US citizens and businesses. The government could, for example, purchase the services of the citizens to build a highway or a bridge—or it could pay the citizens to teach children to read.
 - b) The government can mail a check to, or electronically deposit fiat-money directly into the bank accounts of, citizens who because of disability or old-age, are unable to work to obtain the fiat-money they need.
 - c) The government can direct its central bank—which manages the creation of the fiat-money—to automatically, at the end of each business day, issue and make available to the private banking industry whatever new fiat-money is necessary to monetize the profits private industry has generated during that business day.
6. After it has spent enough of its fiat-money into the private economy, the government then makes good on its declared intent: it collects taxes from the citizens and businesses. Now they know the government means business, and will continue to want to earn the fiat-money it issues so they can pay their taxes next time around as well.

7. The difference between the amount of fiat-money the government issues and spends and the amount of fiat-money it collects in taxes would be called the ‘Citizen’s Net Gain’ (CNG) because it is the amount of fiat-money the citizens get to keep after they’ve paid their taxes.
8. If the citizens and businesses begin to acquire more CNG fiat-money than they know what to do with, that could cause the price of everything in the private economy to go up—inflation—which, if not controlled, is undesirable and destabilizing. The sovereign government can control this inflation by a combination of three strategies:
 - a) It can increase the amount of fiat-money it collects in taxes, thus draining more of the excess CNG out of the economy.
 - b) The government can create special interest-bearing savings accounts which the citizens and businesses can put their excess CNG into, thus removing a large quantity of fiat-money from chasing goods and services, and replacing it with a much smaller quantity of fiat-money (the interest payments on the savings accounts).
 - c) The government can direct its central bank to discourage the borrowing of money through the banking industry, which will reduce the amount of private sector profits needing to be monetized.

That’s it. Those eight steps would be the basic workings of an American fiat-money system.

Now that it’s been properly explained, just imagine for a moment what this fiat-money system is able to do. If you’re a business, the system can create fiat-money, as needed, to monetize your profits. If you’re a citizen, the system can create fiat-money to pay you to provide all kinds of useful goods and services to your local community. If you’re a politician, you can propose the government should undertake the accomplishment of some grand and important task—such as providing every citizen with a free and complete education, or providing every citizen with free health-maintenance—without having to explain how you’re going to pay for it, because issuing and spending fiat-money for those kinds of things is what the sovereign government is supposed to do in order for the fiat-money system to properly work. It really does send tingles of exciting possibilities up and down your spine, doesn’t it?

But now let’s stop day-dreaming. Let’s wake-up to the hard-nosed reality that the American fiat-money system we’ve just imagined is the American fiat-money system we already have. The only difference between the money

system we've imagined and the one we are actually using is the terminology we apply to it. We call the government's particular fiat-money 'US dollars.' We call the 'Citizen's Net Gain' our federal budget 'deficit.' We call the savings accounts the government makes available to citizens and businesses 'Treasury bonds'—and we imagine the government is "borrowing" the dollars being deposited in them. Finally, we call the amount of fiat-money that has been sequestered in the Treasury bond savings accounts our 'national debt.' Other than these minor differences in terminology, our American money system is exactly the fiat-money we've just imagined.

The terminology differences, however, have an extraordinary impact: They make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to rationally use our fiat-money system to accomplish the things we need accomplishing. It's like trying to drive a car with all the pedals mislabeled and the steering gearbox turned upside down: the accelerator is called the brake, the brake is called the accelerator, if you turn the steering wheel counter clock-wise, the car veers to the right, if you push the gear shift to 'D,' the car shoots backward. And meanwhile, the backseat is filled with car-experts and pundits explaining why all the misleading labels are correct, and how everything is supposed to work in the confusing, dysfunctional way that it does.

To restate my question, then: Wouldn't it be great if we had an American fiat-money system that our politicians and economic pundits actually knew how to drive?

It is literally painful to watch our political leaders' efforts to rethink and restructure how we are going levy taxes on ourselves as a collective society. It is like watching a family member struggling with mental illness: the demons being wrestled with are imaginary—yet they have the palpable force somehow of a granite wall. And as the struggle with this palpable monolith unfolds, even we—the clear observers of reality—forget that it is imaginary; when we do remember, the pain becomes excruciating for the simple reason that we know it is completely unnecessary.

Why does our political system choose to believe and struggle with the imaginary constraint that taxes must pay for sovereign spending? How can we explain to ourselves, in the face of this rock-solid demon, that the simple logic of fiat money demonstrates that sovereign spending must occur first, with taxes collected after? How can we reassure our terrified and confused representatives in congress that if our sovereign government collects back fewer dollars than it issues and spends, the difference is not our collective "debt"—it is, in fact, our collective surplus, savings? But the demon will not allow us these explanations.

As is the case with every mental illness, the cruelest aspect to observe is how vulnerable our delusion is to being manipulated and taken advantage of

by those who are self-serving and greedy. We actually believe the rich fat-cat when he tells us that if we choose to make him richer we, the poor strugglers, will be better off! How, we are told, can the rich fat-cat give us a new job if he is not made richer and fatter? We cannot, after all, give ourselves jobs—can we? Our sovereign government—which we cannot seem to understand represents our collective selves—can and must issue and spend fiat-currency. True! But that currency—our demons are whispering—cannot be spent by our collective selves to pay our individual selves wages to accomplish useful things for our families and local communities. The currency instead must be spent to fatten the fat-cat so that he can pay us wages to accomplish useful things for him. The pain of this logic makes you numb.

Our case is made all the more desperate by the fact that our therapists—the economic pundits and budget analyzers—are actively in collusion with the rich fat-cat. We lie down on the couch and are told that we have a deficit. The deficit we have arises from the fact that our sovereign government—which is not really us but, instead, is a conspiring other who wishes nothing more than to confiscate our tax dollars—insists on spending more of those dollars than it can confiscate. So we therefore have a deficit which, even though it is not our fault, we will be forced to somehow make up and repay. Our simple hope that perhaps our tax dollars might provide us with beneficial public goods and services are dashed and trampled by mathematical calculations demonstrating there can never be enough tax dollars to pay for all the public goods we clearly need.

Our only hope is to further fatten the fat-cat so he can accomplish everything for us. If we fatten the fat-cat, he will educate us; he will grow our food; he will build our houses; he will cure our aches and pains; he will put gasoline in our fuel tank. All we have to do is give him everything we have: our farmland, our national parks and forests, our wildlife preserves, our streams and estuaries, our mountain tops. All we have to do is give him our air and our water to do with as he needs. All we have to do is make sure he is rich, because only if he is rich can we hope that he'll give us a job and pay us to do something. We cannot expect him to hire us if he is not rich, can we? No. And we cannot expect him to hire even more of us if we do not make him fatter and richer still. This is all very logical, we are told, as we lie on the couch.

Finally, our prognosis is greatly diminished by the fact that there are influential people—leaders—who know very well that we are delusional, that taxes do not pay for federal spending, that our fiat-money deficit is not a debt that we owe to anyone, that fattening the profits of global corporations neither creates meaningful jobs or causes anything useful to be accomplished for our local communities. They know all these things, yet they

are required—by what?—to remain silent or, at the very least, dissembling in their objections. They cannot come straight out and say: ‘Look here, this tax and deficit calculation is sheer nonsense. It is delusional gobbledygook! The sovereign government has to issue and spend its fiat money before it can collect it back in taxes. And that issuing and spending of fiat money is precisely how the sovereign government can pay us to accomplish everything we agree needs to be collectively accomplished.’ The fat-cat needs to be put in his place. He just gets one vote, like all the rest of us. He doesn’t get to run the whole show. Unless we let him. Which we surely will as long as we suffer our monetary mental illness.

One of the classic fallacies of logic is to believe that what works for one person, will naturally work for everybody, and that therefore surely all of us can do the same thing at the same time and expect a beneficial outcome.

In economics, this is highly unlikely to be true. If everybody tried to sell GM stock at the same time for example, probably really, really bad things are going to happen to the GM stock. It’s going to get pushed downwards, essentially to zero.

Likewise, when a government analogizes its budget to that of a household, bad, bad things happen. It is this very logic of composition that contributed to this terrifying moment in history. The bid to balance the budget has sucked trillions of dollars out of the economy, destroyed productivity, put downward pressure on wages and employment, encouraged unprecedented levels of private and household debt and has encouraged financial deregulation which has led to inflated property, equity, and auto-loan bubbles in a desperate bid to keep the economy afloat.

Contrary to popular opinion, government spending does not leave a debt that future generations must repay, at least not if you use your own currency and are not on a gold standard. This is because a government budget is not the same as a household budget.

A household does not print or issue its own currency. When funds are running low and rent or mortgage payments are coming up, we can’t just put in a phone call to our mates at the RBH (Royal Bank of Households—not a real thing) and tell them to issue more money. But the government can. And does. In fact every time the government spends on public services, it does so by pumping newly created dollars into the economy.

Whether a government can run out of money depends on what kind of government it is, and what kind of money it issues. A Federal Government that issues its own currency—what is known as sovereign currency—and only borrows in its own sovereign currency along with a floating exchange cannot run out of money.

Only the US Federal Government can issue American Dollars. Only the

Australian Government can issue Australian dollars. Only the UK Government can issue pounds. These are what are known as sovereign currencies. A sovereign currency is a currency issued by a Federal Government with the power to create and issue its own legal tender, which it spends into circulation, and then takes back from the private sector in the form of taxes and other compulsory payments to itself. If you or I tried to print US dollars or Australian dollars or pounds we would be counterfeiting. If the US government began issuing Australian dollars, it too would be counterfeiting.

A central bank usually controls the supply of money and sets interest rates. Every time the Federal Government spends, it creates money. It does so by crediting the reserves of commercial bank accounts held at the central bank. In the US, this is The Federal Reserve, known colloquially as The Fed. In Australia it is the Reserve Bank of Australia, in the UK the Bank of England, and so on. The commercial banks in question then credit the bank account of whoever is the beneficiary of that spending. For example: state and local governments or councils and the services they administer: police, hospitals, fire, et cetera. It does this with the assistance of the central bank, which does not control any measure of the supply of money in the economy, but instead controls the rate of interest at which commercial banks can obtain additional reserves when they need them.

On the other hand, state and local governments can run out of money because although their budgets are often largely financed by federal spending, it is the Federal government which limits that funding. State and local taxes along with borrowing by state and local governments are then applied to make up any shortfalls. So if a state government raises its spending without an increase in its funding from the Federal government, it must also raise state taxes, or issue debt, which it will later need to repay. It is not a currency issuer. The Federal Government is in a very different position.

Of course, a federal government can also choose to run out of money by forbidding itself to make any: for example the US debt ceiling. The imposition of this ceiling in the US was originally a political gesture—100 years ago—and has no economic justification or motivation. It has always been lifted when reached and could be scrapped by Congress at any time. So-called debt ceilings are not to be found in most other monetary sovereigns. They are artificial limits.

You can simply say you cannot have more money, in which case you would be putting artificial limit on yourself. Governments can choose to default. Russia, for example, chose to default in 1998, even though it had a sovereign currency. This is the only default on a monetarily sovereign government's debt in modern times. Periodically Republicans in the US context have tried to make us default, by refusing to pass the debt ceiling,

even though the debt is going to go above the ceiling. If they succeeded long enough the US Government would have defaulted on its debt. It would be the stupidest thing in the Western world, but it could be done.

One might liken the US debt ceiling to the infamous scene in cult film *Blazing Saddles* where the newly appointed black sheriff in a confederate town avoids a lynching by threatening to shoot himself in the head. The whole idea of that being funny is that it's nuts. But that is actually what they try to do with the debt ceiling. 'Ok, we'll shoot the US economy in the head.'

Countries that do not have sovereign currencies can run out of money, because they are essentially borrowing in foreign currency. In this context, it makes sense to have a debt ceiling. Then you can default. You can get in lots and lots of trouble if you behave like you have a sovereign currency when you don't.

Countries that could potentially run out of money include Argentina, some of the smaller countries which use the Euro including Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Probably less likely if you're France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Portugal, Finland, or the Republic of Ireland but it's not impossible. Any government with obligations in a foreign currency, or in a currency it does not issue, can run out of that currency. The lesson is to keep your own currency, have a floating exchange rate, and not borrow in foreign currency.

Governments which issue currency, which only borrow in that currency, and allow those currencies to float, cannot run out of money. Indeed, in a sense they are not borrowing at all. How can you meaningfully borrow something you create and which in principle you could create at zero cost and without limit?

Countries with sovereign currencies include America, Australia, the UK, New Zealand, China, Canada, and Japan. Argentina for a while had a sovereign currency, but effectively gave away that sovereignty by its actions.

Of course, it is possible to take seemingly sovereign currencies and make them behave as though they are not sovereign, which is generally not a good idea, as Argentina recently found out.

Eventually governments will be forced to confront the truth which is that by treating its budgets like that of a household, they have starved their economies of precious resources, creating global insecurity which have contributed even further to rising social and political tensions. To avoid another financial crisis, governments must, finally, address the health of their economies.

To do this, they will have to change the narrative on government debt and government deficits, and accept that government debt is an essential

substitute for household debt and that government deficits support private incomes and allow for private saving. The question now is whether it will take another crisis for governments to unlearn the lessons they've been getting wrong on the economy for the better part of 30 years.

In saying that taxation is not a funding source for government spending, this analysis puts the focus on taxation as a matter of political and social decision—a decision made from a position of power, not dependence. It allows us to make spending decisions without asking the rich for a damn thing. Imagine we're in a meeting to decide on a new social program and there are two possible ways to set the agenda:

1. Let's figure out how much tax we'll have to collect from the rich.
2. Let's ignore those fuckers and do what we want.

Which is more radical? To answer that question, you have to understand that the second agenda is possible.

“It's not whether or not MMT works, it's a matter of understanding it. Much like the theory of gravity—which was in operation a long time before Isaac Newton formulated his basic tenets describing it—MMT describes how money has been working since the first money systems were in operation. The question is whether or not we're going to acknowledge its workings and use it to build a better society or whether we're going to stay—financially and politically speaking—in a pre-Newtonian world.”

When you're not really sure whether something is right, then belonging to a community that is sure it is right makes you feel confident about it. No one wants to be the only one to believe something they're not certain about. Hence the various schools of economics—perhaps we should call them churches of economics—are all cults, including MMT. Anyone who disagrees with the cult is a threat to the confidence of the cult's beliefs and is liable to be attacked.

Capitalism is a choice, based on values. Fiat money is a choice, based on values. The laws that regulate fiat money, banks, property rights, and so forth are choices, based on values. Or at least, *someone* made those choices somewhere along the way—the rest of us were born into this system and never had any say in the matter, so we may not be aware that the system is a choice and that there are alternatives.

Since the economic system is a choice based on values, there are no natural laws of economics like there are natural laws of physics. MMT cannot be a neutral description of how fiat money works in a capitalist system because there is nothing neutral about fiat money or capitalism. There is nothing wrong with making choices based on values, but let's be honest about it.

For the past four decades, it's been fiat currency for the .01% and gold standard straitjacket ideology for everyone else.

The mainstream view is no longer valid for countries issuing their own non-convertible currencies and only has meaning for those operating under fixed exchange rate regimes,

The two monetary systems are very different. You cannot apply the economics of the gold standard (or USD convertibility) to the modern monetary system. Unfortunately, most commentators and professors and politicians continue to use the old logic when discussing the current policy options. It is a basic fallacy and prevents us from having a sensible discussion about what the government should be doing. All the fear-mongering about the size of the deficit and the size of the borrowings—and the logic of borrowing in the first place—are all based on the old paradigm. They are totally inapplicable to the fiat monetary system.

We might now consider the opportunity afforded by the new monetary reality. A new sociopolitical reality is possible which throws off the shackles of the old. The government can now act as a currency issuer and pursue public purpose. Functional finance is now the order of the day. For most nations issuing their own fiat currency under floating exchange rates the situation is different to the days of fixed exchange rates. Since the gold window closed a different core reality exists—one which, potentially at least, provides governments with significantly more scope to enact policies which benefit society.

However, the political layer—in the way it interacts with monetary reality—has a detrimental effect on the power of democratic governments to pursue public purpose. In the new monetary reality, political arrangements that sprang up under the old regimes are no longer necessary or beneficial. They can largely be considered as self-imposed constraints on the system; in short the political layer contains elements which are out-of-date, ideologically biased and unnecessary. However, mainstream economists have not grasped this situation—or perhaps they cannot allow themselves to—because of the vice-like grip that their ethics and 'traditional' training has on them.

MMT provides one of the best monetary models out there and highlights the existence of additional policy space acquired by sovereign states since Nixon closed the gold window and most nations adopted floating exchange

rates. We just need to encourage the use of the space to enhance the living standards of ordinary people.

The federal debt will not bankrupt the country, or us, or our grandchildren. The federal government cannot default on obligations denominated in its own currency. It can and will create all the dollars needed to pay dollar-denominated debt.

Nor does the federal government have to borrow money to fund spending. The government is not required to borrow by economic necessity, but by laws and policies—political demands—that require it to “borrow” the difference between what’s spent in the budget and what’s collected in taxes by selling Treasury Bonds. That’s another relic of an obsolete monetary regime, which is designed to make it seem like there’s a relation between the money in those Treasury Securities and government spending when there is not. The “borrowed” money in those securities accounts—dollars that were already in circulation—just sits there; it is not used to “pay for” government programs.

Could the Treasury skip the rigamarole and pay its bills without bonds? Economically, sure. Why doesn’t it? Well, the Fed has regulations governing “overdrafts”—but apart from these, the answer is plain: to do so would expose the ‘public debt’ as a fiction, and the debt ceiling as a sham.

- Federal debt **deposits or investments**
- Federal deficit **economic input**

If the correct words were used, the public would not be deceived. One doubts whether there would be a demand to reduce deposits in the Federal Reserve Bank or cut investments in T-securities. And why would anyone want to stop necessary, beneficial economic input?

The rich run America by bribing politicians via campaign contributions, the media via ownership and advertising, and the economists via university endowments and think tanks. The rich want to widen the gap between the rich and the rest. They do this partly by convincing the American voter that the poor are undeserving and can be helped only by denying them benefits—while the rich continue to reap benefits. The people, believing the euphemisms, have voted against themselves, and they will fight you if you try to tell them the truth. The power of euphemisms is greater than the power of facts.

In science, language is important, partly because language draws a mental picture based on common experience. And if that common experience is not appropriate to the science, the result can be bad science.

Consider the word ‘spin.’ You can visualize a top spinning, or the earth spinning, or even a galaxy spinning, but did you know that electrons have

spin? They do, but they do not spin. According to Scientific American Magazine:

“It is misleading to conjure up an image of the electron as a small spinning object. Instead we have learned simply to accept the observed fact that the electron is deflected by magnetic fields.

If one insists on the image of a spinning object, then real paradoxes arise; unlike a tossed softball, for instance, the spin of an electron never changes, and it has only two possible orientations.

In addition, the very notion that electrons and protons are solid ‘objects’ that can ‘rotate’ in space is itself difficult to sustain, given what we know about the rules of quantum mechanics.”

The term ‘spin,’ however, still remains. If you have been educated to believe that electrons have something termed spin, your understanding of electrons will be wrong if you think of a spinning object, at least according to the latest hypotheses.

The point is that many words have common meanings that are inappropriate and confusing for certain situations in science.

Economics has such words. Here is a short glossary of misleading words in economics:

Federal debt is not debt as you know it. More accurately it is net, all-time deposits into Treasury Security accounts, which are similar to interest-paying, bank savings accounts.

Because ‘debt’ often has negative connotations, banks do not boast about the size of their debt, but they do boast about the size of their deposits, which has positive connotations.

In ordinary language, debt is a burden on the debtor. So, when you hear the federal debt is \$20 trillion, you may visualize this as a huge burden on the federal government and/or on taxpayers. It is neither. Federal debt burdens no one.

Paying off federal debt is not like paying off a mortgage or a car loan. To pay off personal debt, one must have income or assets from which to draw dollars, then transfer those dollars to the creditor.

To pay off federal debt, the federal government needs neither income nor assets. It merely returns the dollars that reside in Treasury Security accounts. The dollars are returned to the account owners.

No tax dollars are involved. Dollars deposited in T-security accounts never leave the accounts. They are not used by the government. They

merely stay in the accounts, accumulating interest until maturity, at which time they and the interest are returned.

The government pays interest into the accounts by creating new dollars, ad hoc.

Because the federal government never takes the dollars from the accounts, returning the dollars is no burden on the government or on taxpayers. It is a simple dollar transfer.

Debt/GDP ratio This ratio is a classic apples/oranges ratio. It attempts to establish a mathematical relationship between two dissimilar things. While federal debt is the net total of deposits into T-security accounts, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a measure of spending in the US. The formula is: **GDP = Federal Spending + Non-federal Spending + Net Imports**

Those who decry the amount of total deposits into T-security accounts, often also decry some specific comparisons with total spending. In years past, warnings were issued that if the ratio ever were to reach 60%, then 80%, then 100% and other unsubstantiated and arbitrary figures, horror would befall the economy.

As each level is reached, a new, nearby level is claimed to be the line between fiscal prudence and fiscal disaster.

Today, the US ratio has passed 100% and rising, and the economy is healthy by most measures. One can expect claims that if it ever reaches 110%, surely doom would ensue. The fact that the Debt/GDP ratio has no relationship to economic health, as this table demonstrates, does not seem to restrain the debt hand-wringers.

The Federal “deficit” is the annual difference between federal spending and federal taxing. This does not imply that federal taxes pay for federal spending. They do not.

The federal government creates new dollars, ad hoc, every time it pays a creditor, which it does by sending instructions to the creditor’s bank. The instructions (in the form of checks or wires) tell the bank to increase the balance in the creditor’s checking account.

The instant the bank does as instructed, dollars are created and instantly added to the money supply measures.

The instructions then are routed to the Federal Reserve where, unlike your personal checks), they always are cleared (approved), because

unlike you, your state and your business, the federal government is a large Monetary Sovereign.

Even if the federal government collected \$0 taxes, it still could continue spending, forever. Even with zero income, the federal government never unintentionally can run short of dollars.

Unsustainable is a term sometimes applied to the federal debt, to indicate that the debt is so high, it cannot be sustained. But specifically, what does it mean?

Does ‘unsustainable’ mean the federal government somehow cannot sustain the increasing deposits into T-security accounts? No, that cannot be. Those deposits place no financial burden on the federal government, other than paying interest. And being monetarily sovereign, the US federal government has the unlimited ability to create the US dollars used to pay interest.

Does it mean the economy somehow cannot sustain the deposits? No, that cannot be. Those deposits reflect the addition of growth dollars into the economy, which benefits the economy.

Does ‘unsustainable’ mean the deposits, reflecting growth dollars, also portend hyperinflation? No, contrary to the popular myth, hyperinflation is not caused by an increase in dollars. Rather, hyperinflation (an extreme, general increase in prices) is caused by shortages, usually shortages of food and/or energy (currently, oil).

The myth persists because hyperinflations precipitate government currency printing, with its memorable “wheelbarrows-filled-with-currency” visuals. Ironically, hyperinflations are cured when shortages are cured, which generally requires the government to buy and pay for the scarce food and/or energy. Rather than causing hyperinflations, money creation is necessary to cure hyperinflations.

By contrast, small inflations, of the single-digit variety, can be caused by a decrease in the value of money. A large, monetarily sovereign government exerts total control over the value of its sovereign currency, by controlling the Supply/Demand relationship or by fiat.

The government controls the money Supply by taxing and spending. The government controls money Demand via interest rates. (Raising rates increases the Demand for money, also called “strengthening the currency.”)

Finally, the government controls the value of its currency by fiat, that is by unilaterally lowering or raising the value (also known as “devaluation” and “revaluation”).

In short, no level of federal T-security deposits (“debt”) is unsustainable for a large, monetarily sovereign government.

Balanced budget has a pleasing ring, and many who are ignorant about federal finances often demand that the federal government run a balanced budget. These people claim the federal government should “live within its means” (i.e its income).

However, the federal government, being monetarily sovereign, needs no income, and when it receives income (taxes), that income is destroyed. The federal government has the unlimited ability to create dollars, at will.

People achieve personal balanced budgets by ‘living within their means,’ which is considered prudent.

A federal balanced budget indicates that because federal taxes equal federal spending, the federal government pumps zero net growth dollars into the economy. Thus, a federal balanced budget yields economic stagnation, recessions, and depressions, which historically only are cured by federal budget deficits.

A federal balanced budget (a.k.a. austerity) is the least prudent financial activity a monetarily sovereign government can implement.

Trust funds The federal government operates several bookkeeping accounts that wrongly are termed “trust funds,” among which are Social Security, Medicare Part A, the Highway “trust fund,” and federal pension “trust funds.”

Federal trust funds bear little resemblance to their private-sector counterparts, and therefore the name can be misleading. A ‘trust fund’ implies a secure source of funding. However, a federal trust fund is simply a bookkeeping mechanism used to track inflows and outflows for specific programs.

In private-sector trust funds, receipts are deposited and assets are held and invested by trustees on behalf of the stated beneficiaries. In federal trust funds, the federal government does not set aside the receipts or invest them in private assets.

Rather, the receipts are recorded as accounting credits in the trust funds. The federal government owns the accounts and can, by changing

the law, unilaterally alter the purposes of the accounts and raise or lower collections and expenditures.

More importantly, the monetarily sovereign federal government can increase or decrease the balances of any federal trust funds at the tap of a computer key.

Insolvent, bankrupt, and break the bank are terms used for personal, business and even state/local government accounts. Sadly, these terms also are misleadingly used to describe federal accounts, which cannot become unintentionally insolvent or bankrupt, and the federal “bank” cannot be broken.

Ever since August of 1971, when President Nixon took the US off its last gold standard, the federal government has had the unlimited ability to fund anything—*anything*—merely by deciding to do so.

Organizations like the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB) are paid by wealthy donors to make Americans believe federal finances are like personal finances. The purpose is to prevent the middle- and lower-income groups from complaining about cuts to Medicare, Social Security, and other beneficial programs.

Most recently, Medicare for All has been proposed, but its future is uncertain because of false implanted concerns about federal insolvency.

Costs taxpayers Among the most pernicious myths in all of economics is the oft-repeated notion that federal taxes fund federal spending.

While it is true that state and local taxes fund state and local spending, federal taxes do not fund federal spending. Even if all federal tax collections totaled \$0, the federal government could continue to spend as much as it wished, forever.

The fundamental difference is that while the federal government is monetarily sovereign, state and local governments are monetarily non-sovereign. As the word ‘sovereign’ indicates, the federal government is the issuer and absolute rule over all aspects of its sovereign currency, the US dollar.

By contrast, state and local government are mere users of the dollar; they do not share the federal government’s unlimited ability to create, devalue, or revalue the dollar.

Because the federal government has no need for taxes, federal spending does not cost federal taxpayers anything. All federal taxes are arbitrary penalties on the private sector.

Why then does the federal government collect taxes?

- To control the economy by taxing things it wishes to minimize and by offering tax reductions to things it wishes to encourage.
- To propagate the myth that federal taxes are necessary to fund the government so that the public willingly will pay taxes.
- To please the very rich political donors, who control the government, by helping to widen the Gap between the rich and the rest.

What we know actually is what we believe. And what we believe is heavily influenced by intuition, personal experience, and what we are told.

None of us has the time or ability to research everything, so we believe and even promulgate what ‘feels right,’ without relying on strict proof. So, for instance, Obama said:

“This is my vision for America: A vision where we live within our means while still investing in our future, where everyone makes sacrifices, but no one bears all the burden, where we provide a basic measure of security for our citizens and we provide rising opportunity for our children.”

To most of us, that sounds quite reasonable, even though he really was telling you:

“The federal government finances are limited just like your finances. So be prepared to make sacrifices and don’t complain if you have to bear a burden. The government can give you basic security, but not much more, and don’t expect anything more than just an opportunity, but you’ll have to make sacrifices, work like hell, and still be lucky to escape things like student debt, unaffordable medical bills, inferior housing and transportation, and overall poverty. And don’t expect much from your government except a tax bill.”

Obama, and many others, have told you the Big Lie based on the misleading language of economics.

“The system—and economic theory—is rational and takes into account social and environmental costs.”

People tend to think someone somewhere is regulating things to keep us safe. They look around and see sophisticated technology, gleaming towers in the sky, and what they believe to be is a complex intelligent world. But in truth no one is running the show. The world functions as a mad cash grab driven by neoliberal ideology. Our leaders are driven by power, fame, and money, and exhibit strong psychopathic, sociopathic, and narcissistic traits.

The problems of modern industrial capitalism and its impact on the world is clear—our exploitation of the resources, people, and other species are a direct result of our consumer-based infinite growth model. Just a few of the problems we face are species extinction, climate change, ocean acidification, and a toxic carcinogen-filled trash dump of a planet that reached population overshoot decades ago.

If the system was rational, we would begin planning to lower birth rates to decrease the world's population, and voluntarily provide education, decent, dignified jobs, as well as birth control and contraception to women worldwide.

We live by money values, and think in money terminology. When we discuss healthcare the topic arises about how to pay for it before nearly anything else. The priority isn't on saving lives but how to pay for things. Yes, how will we pay for healthcare when banks can create money on a computer through the magic of fractional reserve banking, which they often use to bail out their crony friends. The money isn't real but the implications of restricting it from the populace are. Money is created out of thin air by the magic of the Federal Reserve, yet we have all heard our bosses, and the pricks in Washington complaining that 'we don't have enough money for that' when it comes to healthcare, improving schools, and humanitarian relief for the poorest parts of the world.

Again, if the system was rational, world poverty would be solved within a few short years. Money destined for weapons and "defense" could be used domestically as well as abroad in Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, and there is more than enough money to pay for a good home, clothing, and food for every family worldwide, with an all-renewable powered energy grid.

The revelation that the rules of money are not immutable laws of nature but are instead created and constantly modified by people opens up possibilities beyond the scope of our current political imagination. The questions become: What sort of society do we want? Do we have the physical resources to support that society? And finally, how the hell do we muster the political will to get there?

Your Brain on FIRE

Wall Street Muggers

Homo homini lupus est Man is a wolf to his fellow man.

I have realized that in order for people to understand a wrong they need to have suffered from that wrong in some way or at least investigated the wrong to its roots. You cannot tell Obamabots or Clintonistas or Bidenites the story of Glass Steagall and Robert Rubin and expect them to understand it. They are of that ilk because they have not suffered from it or they have not taken the time to investigate their suffering and trace it to its source. It takes a hell of a lot of reading to understand how Wall Street manipulates governance. A very large majority of teachers and professors fall into this category—especially if they are the tenured bubble world type. Their lot has kept improving so they think everything is hunky dory. Some who had the misfortune to lose a ton of money via 401Ks in the 2008 crash understand it to some extent. The mischief that Wall Street does is well hidden and opaque and defies translation to layman’s language. This is their strength.

A man took his young daughter to open a savings account. He was excited to begin her training as a saver and wanted to show her the magic of compound interest.

“I remember the thrill of watching my own bank account grow—the money I earned just by leaving it there. We put in fifty dollars, and I had the idea that once a month we would go to the bank and make a deposit. Then we would watch the money grow, along with interest. The next month we went back to make the next deposit, and lo and behold, there was only forty-five dollars in the account. Turned out that the bank was charging for low balances in savings accounts. End of lesson.”

The little girl was crestfallen and the father was angry. He got the bank to return the five dollars and closed her account—and his own.

Banks got big for two main reasons. First, they were allowed to do more than just maintain depository accounts. After the Great Crash of 1929, Congress passed the Glass-Steagall Act, which prevented banks from engaging in both investment banking (what Wall Street does) and commercial banking (what smaller, more local banks that take deposits typically do). Risky investment had led to the crash, and the law was designed to minimize banks' ability to take such risks. Seventy years later, in 1999, Congress passed the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, permitting banks once again to engage in both commercial and investment activities. This legislation effectively nullified Glass-Steagall. It allowed commercial banks, investment banks, securities firms, and insurance companies to merge and grow, and the industry became increasingly consolidated. Individual depositors are protected by deposit insurance, which was created in 1933. But as the recent crisis has shown, the consequences of banks' high-risk investment strategies can affect consumers in many different ways.

The second reason banks got so big is that they are no longer extremely restricted in terms of where they can do business. Walking the streets of any major city, where outlets of the largest banks seem to populate virtually every corner, you might find it hard to imagine a time when banks weren't allowed to open branches. But nearly all states restricted branching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to protect consumers from monopolies. Most of these laws remained in place until the early 1980s. Once banks were allowed to branch, they expanded by opening in new locations and, like giant Pac-Man characters, by gobbling up small banks.

As banks grew and became more removed from the day-to-day needs of their customers, their business models also changed. Over time, they made more and more of their money from fees instead of interest. The larger banks also became more complex. Historically, banks made their money by borrowing and lending, which generated interest income. But events like the savings and loan crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when so many banks failed, illustrated how disastrous that model could be. In order to make banks less vulnerable to volatile interest rates, bank examiners encouraged them to find other ways to make a profit. That's when banks discovered fees—the fees that anger and frustrate nearly everyone I've spoken with.

So-called free checking, the ability to overdraw an account, and variable interest rates on credit cards initially seemed to be good for consumers. But once banks began to see that these products and services could be profitable bad things started happening. The average charge per overdraft went from \$21.57 in 1998 to \$31.26 in 2012. Similarly, average ATM fees more than doubled between 2001 and 2014. Some banks began to charge one or two dollars for paper statements and up to twenty-five dollars for

a replacement debit card. In the past, lower use of alternative financial services and increased use of banks was seen as a measure of success. Not anymore.

“When I sat down and looked at my clients’ bank statements and saw that they had paid \$110 in fees, I often ended up sending them to the check casher instead.

Many consumers have become overly reliant on overdrafts. Some who lack other sources of funds use overdrafts like a short-term loan. Unfortunately, a single overdraft can result in cascading bad checks and hundreds of dollars in charges. Let’s take a look at exactly how this works: Say you have \$100 in your account, and today you have an automatic student-loan payment of \$110 scheduled. The automatic payment will result in a deficit of \$10. The bank will charge a \$34 overdraft fee, which is typical for big banks. You now have a deficit of \$44. Imagine you also use your checking-account debit card that day to purchase \$25 worth of groceries. That purchase will trigger another overdraft, and you will be charged another \$34. For \$135 worth of transactions, you have been charged \$78. But it may not stop there. If the account balance remains overdrawn for five consecutive business days, the bank will charge an extended overdraft fee per item, typically between \$15 and \$35.

It’s quite possible that the chain reaction started with a common miscalculation: you presumed that a check you’d deposited into your account would clear before the student-loan payment came due. But your check took a day longer than usual to clear. Banks depend on these miscalculations. In 2014, Americans paid nearly \$32 billion in overdraft fees, and \$6 billion of it went to the three biggest banks (Chase, Bank of America, and Wells Fargo). That’s just one reason why more than twelve-million Americans manage their money without a bank. A sizable chunk of the consumers who began to depend on overdrafts couldn’t pay them back. The banks eventually closed their accounts. The consumers then ended up in one of the databases, like ChexSystems, that banks use to screen new customers and decide whether they can open an account.

For years, regulators did nothing about banks’ increasing generation of overdraft fees. Dodd-Frank, the 2010 legislation passed in the wake of the financial crisis, took a big bite out of banks’ ability to generate overdraft and other fees, but banks have figured out how to get around it. In May 2014, Haberfeld Associates presented a webinar showing participants how overdraft protection could continue to function as an income stream for banks, even after Dodd-Frank required banks to get customers to opt in

to the service. The paperwork for setting up an account is so opaque that nearly half of all consumers who overdrew their accounts didn't remember opting in to overdraft protection. That's because the paperwork is designed to be unclear. This lack of transparency is one of the primary reasons many check-casher customers don't like going to the bank. In February 2015 the CEO of Habersfeld, wrote an article titled "Add Customers, Grow Profits," in which he advised banks to market free checking accounts to customers and then turn those customers into fee generators.

"Checking accounts are the gateway to a range of other bank products—debit cards, paper checks, overdraft protection—that generate fee income. Having a checking account is typically a consumer's main reason for working with a bank. Sixty-four percent of consumers exclusively use a debit card from that account, and free-checking customers use an average of 4.75 products and services, all of which generate fee income."

Another big-bank practice is called "debit resequencing"—the bank processes the debits and credits to an account in a way that causes account balances to fall faster, thereby boosting potential overdraft fees. In February 2012, Chase settled a class-action suit accusing the bank of charging excessive overdraft fees. In November 2011, Bank of America was ordered to pay \$410 million to customers for wrongfully charging excessive overdraft fees resulting from debit resequencing. Despite these two huge suits and subsequent regulatory action, 44 percent of banks included in a recent study still engage in this practice. The numbers are decreasing, but not enough.

Here's how debit resequencing works. Let's say that on a given date you send two checks—one to your credit card company for \$150 and another to your local electric company for \$75; the credit card company and the electric company try to get their money from your account on the same date. An automatic withdrawal you've set up to pay your rent also hits your account; your rent is \$500. On the date that those three things hit your account, you have a balance of \$100. The bank could clear the \$75 charge first, resulting in two overdraft fees. Instead, many use software that reorders the transactions. This software presents the \$500 charge first, then the \$150 charge, and finally the \$75 charge, and you end up paying three overdraft fees instead of two. Banks make this choice to maximize profit rather than to do right by their customers.

The practice of charging interest, and the upward creep in interest rates, hasn't always been a given. 'Usury,' a word that has come to mean exorbitant or predatory interest rates, originally referred to the practice of charging

any interest at all. The medieval Catholic thinker Thomas Aquinas believed it was wrong to make money from the lending of money, that doing so went against “moral and natural law” and led to inequality. And in *Inferno*, the Italian poet Dante put usurers on the lowest ledge of the seventh circle of hell—lower even than murderers. Times have changed. Arguments now focus not on whether it’s okay to charge interest, but what interest rate is acceptable. But ethics and morality continue to enter the debate.

“Interest caps are more than numbers: they are reflections of society’s collective judgment about moral and ethical behavior, as well as business and personal responsibility. Interest rates embody fundamental values.”

Today, the four largest banks—Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and Citigroup—collectively hold about half of all US bank assets, a total of \$6.8 trillion, while the remaining 6,395 banks share the other half. The smallest banks—those with less than \$100 million in assets and more likely to be closely tied to their communities—declined by 85 percent from 1985 to 2013. The dramatic drop in the number of banks over the past few decades gives individual consumers fewer choices and banks less incentive to compete to serve customers best. As banks have grown larger and their overall numbers have dwindled, they’ve become less responsive to the needs of consumers. They’ve focused so single-mindedly on profit that they’ve sacrificed the well-being of their customers.

It is impossible to buy a toaster that has a one-in-five chance of bursting into flames and burning down your house. But it is possible to refinance an existing home with a mortgage that has the same one-in-five chance of putting the family out on the street—and the mortgage won’t even carry a disclosure of that fact to the homeowner. Similarly, it’s impossible to change the price on a toaster once it has been purchased. But long after the papers have been signed, it is possible to triple the price of the credit used to finance the purchase of that appliance, even if the customer meets all the credit terms, in full and on time. Why are consumers safe when they purchase tangible consumer products with cash, but when they sign up for routine financial products like mortgages and credit cards they are left at the mercy of their creditors?

There are many parallels between finance and Big Data. Both industries gobble up the same pool of talent, much of it from elite universities like MIT, Princeton, or Stanford. These new hires are ravenous for success and have been focused on external metrics—like grades and SAT scores and college admissions—their entire lives. Whether in finance or tech, the message

they've received is that they will be rich, that they will run the world. Their productivity indicates that they're on the right track, and it translates into dollars. This leads to the fallacious conclusion that whatever they're doing to bring in more money is good. It "adds value." Otherwise, why would the market reward it? In both cultures, wealth is no longer a means to get by. It becomes directly tied to personal worth. A young suburbanite with every advantage—the prep school education, the exhaustive coaching for college admissions tests, the overseas semester in Paris or Shanghai—still flatters himself that it is his skill, hard work, and prodigious problem-solving abilities that have lifted him into a world of privilege. Money vindicates all doubts. And the rest of his circle plays along, forming a mutual admiration society. They're eager to convince us all that Darwinism is at work, when it looks very much to the outside like a combination of gaming a system and dumb luck. In both of these industries, the real world, with all of its messiness, sits apart. The inclination is to replace people with data trails, turning them into more effective shoppers, voters, or workers to optimize some objective. This is easy to do, and to justify, when success comes back as an anonymous score and when the people affected remain every bit as abstract as the numbers dancing across the screen.

Hedge funds have become notorious for stripping assets and loading companies down with debt, leaving bankrupt shells in their wake. Looting is only demonized when it's dark-skinned people looting cheap physical goods.

"The real problem came from a nasty feeling I started to have in my stomach. I had grown accustomed to playing in these oceans of currency, bonds, and equities, the trillions of dollars flowing through international markets. But unlike the numbers in my academic models, the figures in my models at the hedge fund stood for something. They were people's retirement funds and mortgages. In retrospect, this seems blindingly obvious. And of course, I knew it all along, but I hadn't truly appreciated the nature of the nickels, dimes, and quarters that we pried loose with our mathematical tools. It wasn't found money, like nuggets from a mine or coins from a sunken Spanish galleon. This wealth was coming out of people's pockets. For hedge funds, the smuggest of the players on Wall Street, this was dumb money."

To understand how hedge funds operate at the margins, picture a World Series game at Chicago's Wrigley Field. With a dramatic home run in the bottom of the ninth inning, the Cubs win their first championship since

1908, back when Teddy Roosevelt was president. The stadium explodes in celebration. But a single row of fans stays seated, quietly analyzing a slew of results. These gamblers don't hold the traditional win-or-lose bets. Instead they may have bet that Yankees relievers would give up more walks than strikeouts, that the game would feature at least one bunt but no more than two, or that the Cubs' starter would last at least six innings. They even hold bets that other gamblers will win or lose their own bets. These people wager on many movements associated with the game, but not as much on the game itself. In this, they behave like hedge funds.

By 2008, actual commodity sellers and buyers were completely marginalized in the market by speculators, who accounted for 80 percent of all futures purchases. And with their price manipulations, these derivative bombs cratered our economy with high gas prices. Then there were food prices. Started toward the end of the first Bush administration, the Goldman Sachs Commodity Index is the signature derivatives market in the world. And the betting lines for speculators include energy resources such as oil and gas and food such as cattle, wheat, corn, and soybeans, among other things. Food wasn't immune from the speculator frenzy. Nothing had changed about the wheat, but something had changed about the wheat market. Robber barons, gold bugs, and financiers of every stripe had long dreamed of controlling all of something everybody needed or desired, then holding back the supply as demand drove up prices. That's exactly what speculators were doing—buying up huge amounts of wheat contracts and holding on to them until they could be sold at a higher price. This had catastrophic effects on the global food supply. The global speculative frenzy sparked riots in more than thirty countries and drove the number of the world's food insecure to more than a billion. The ranks of the hungry had increased by 250 million in a single year, the most abysmal increase in all of human history.

Collateralized debt obligations, or CDOs, were a weapon of mass financial destruction that helped blow up the residential mortgage market in 2008. Since then, financial engineers have launched a strikingly similar instrument, the collateralized loan obligation, or CLO. With Wall Street having already wrecked the housing market and thrown millions of properties into foreclosure, private equity groups are now snapping up those houses and renting them. The rental streams are then bundled into financial instruments and sold in an unregulated market—paralleling the financial industry's behavior with CDOs a few years before, merely substituting rents for mortgage payments.

Derivatives: Complex financial instruments that allow banks and wealthy investors to make bets worth trillions of dollars on such events as

whether or not a company's bonds will fail. If these bets were considered insurance policies, which they obviously are, then they would be subject to regulations insuring that buyers and sellers had enough reserves to cover losses, just like any insurance company.

The Quarterly Report on Bank Trading and Derivatives Activities—a little-known report from the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) came out recently. I am sure 99% of our population has never heard of it. However, doesn't the title alone pique some interest: Banks do trading? They trade derivatives? There's a report on it? By our government? Every quarter? I spent some time looking through the report. I share four scary points about it and banking:

1. US banks held \$172 trillion in derivatives at the end of 2017. This amount is 11 times the value of all the assets all the US banks own.

So, the banks are placing \$172 trillion in bets on these “instruments” called derivatives, but they don't have the reserves to cover them. To be fair, that \$172 trillion is called the “notional value” of the derivatives, the amount banks would have to come up with if they actually had to buy or sell the underlying asset or debt of every derivative they hold at full value. Under normal circumstances that is unlikely. So the OCC tried to come up with a more realistic way to quantify risk. They call it “Value at Risk” (VaR), a figure much lower than the notional value. Its definition still mystifies me. However, an earlier OCC Report indicates it still mystifies them too! It states:

“Banks use VaR to quantify the maximum expected loss over a specified time period and at a certain confidence level in normal markets. VaR is not the maximum potential loss. In the 1929 and 2008 crashes, banks counted on a certain confidence level in normal markets.”

Who knew markets would be abnormal and “confidence” way out of whack? (Actually, some did, and they profited immensely from it!) Further, banks are supposed to be depositories who keep our money safe, and who make loans based on that money. Why are they doing all this gambling? They are hedging their bets. Playing in derivatives is no longer investing, but trading. In other words, banks are not lending money to create goods or services, but trading it with each other to try to win from each other. If they win their bets, it adds nothing to the real economy, or to depositors—only to bigger profits

for the bank owners—\$5 billion in the 4th quarter of 2017. Trading is non-productive money. It adds no goods or services to the economy.

2. The four largest US banks—JPMorgan Chase, Citibank, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America—hold 90% of all derivatives traded by US banks. The largest 25 banks account for nearly 100%.

So, the derivatives game is one banks play solely with each other. What's wrong with this picture? They are using the public's deposits as security to gamble for their own profit. This gambling has nothing to do with helping the economy, depositors, or borrowers. Have you tried getting a mortgage or business loan from one of the big four lately? Isn't that why we gave banks the privilege of being able to lend up to nine times the capital they actually have in the first place—to facilitate the exchange of goods and services among people by making loans?

3. According to the Bankruptcy Act of 2005, in a bank crash, derivative holders stand in front of depositors to be paid off.

In other words, if a bank makes enough bad bets and it crashes, it can take what's in our checking or savings accounts to pay off its derivative debts—which would be to other banks. It can even legally take what is in our safe deposit boxes! In short, banks can take our money to pay off their gambling debts to each other! Not only does bank gambling add nothing to depositors; it actually puts us at risk.

4. Financial institutions prefer derivative strategies using swaps and options to achieve the targeted returns, since derivatives are recorded off balance sheet and do not require as much capital as borrowings.

Gambling by the banking casino is unproductive money; it produces no goods or services for us. So, yes, the problem of money actually is political, going back to how the Fed and banking was set up in 1913, and the laws enacted by subsequent Congresses to legitimize bank gambling.

In 2014, after hedge fund Level Global Investors made \$54 million by shorting Dell Computer stock based on insider information from a Dell employee, Global Investors' co-founder Anthony Chiasson claimed he didn't know where the tip came from or whether the leaker benefited from the leak, and that few traders on Wall Street ever know where the inside tips they use come from because confidential information is, according to Chiasson's lawyer, the "coin of the realm in securities markets." Chiasson

was convicted nonetheless. But in December 2014, the court of appeals overturned Chiasson's conviction, ruling that Chiasson was so far removed from the leak that he could not possibly have known the source of the information or whether the tipper received a "substantial benefit" in return.

The court thereby made official what had been the unofficial law on the Street: It's all about who you know. If, for example, the CEO of a company gives his golfing buddy a confidential tip about what the company is about to do, and the buddy tells a hedge-fund manager who then makes a fortune off that confidential information, the winnings are perfectly legal. Because confidential information is the "coin of the realm" on Wall Street, it's likely that a significant portion of what is earned on the Street is based on information unavailable to average investors. Insiders fix the market for their own benefit.

Founded in 1977, Apple required funds to invest in more production facilities and to buy companies with complementary patents that it needed to expand. However, Apple only received a portion of the proceeds of this stock issue. Its underwriters, headed by Morgan Stanley and Hambrecht & Quist, initially priced the stock at only \$14 a share, but enough orders poured in to price it at \$22 by the opening bell. Being oversubscribed (given the underwriters' low pricing), Apple's price rose by 32 percent to \$29 a share, valuing the company at \$1.8 billion by the end of the day. A first-day jump means that a company's stock is worth more than the underwriter promises to raise. This underestimation of the market enables early subscribers—so-called preferred customers, usually institutional investors and a few prominent individual players—to make a killing. Giving them a chance to buy low-priced shares to turn around and sell at a price gain during the first few hours of hectic trading helps the underwriter attract a loyal following of investors. The bigger the hit-and-run windfall the underwriter can offer these clients, the larger a client base it builds up for future offerings. This investor base is permanent; most companies issuing new stock are only one-time hits, so underwriters low-ball their promises to companies going public. The result is that financial speculators make more than the companies that actually create real value.

Underwriters thus have a conflict of interest with the companies whose stock they float. In addition to charging their underwriting fee (as high as seven percent for new businesses), the more they understate what a company is worth, the bigger the gains they and their favored customers quickly make by flipping its shares to a later buyer at the more reasonable market price established by the end of the first trading day or week. A "successful" issue is one where the stock price may double from the opening to the closing bell. Company officers, venture capitalists and other initial long-term holders will

see the value of their shares rise, but the company itself receives only the opening sales price. The underwriter and its clients may end up making as much on the sale that it orchestrates as the company and its founders receive for all the years of effort that they put into creating the business.

By 2010, the richest one percent of Americans owned 35 percent of the value of American-owned shares, both directly and indirectly through their pension plans. The richest 10 percent owned more than 80 percent. Yet most Americans did not benefit from the bull market because they were not able to save enough to invest much, if anything, in stocks. The bottom 90 percent owned just 19.2 percent, directly or indirectly. In 2014, more than two-thirds of Americans were living from paycheck to paycheck.

Employees who invest part of their paychecks into the stock market through corporate-sponsored pension funds are harmed when, for example, the funds charge them higher than normal fees and then rebate the excess to the corporation in the form of discounts on other financial services. The information the corporation does not share with its employees amounts to a conflict of interest, tantamount to fraud. But this practice has been found to be perfectly legal.

One of the great lies being spread in our time is that at big companies like General Motors and Ford there are not enough workers on the job today to sustain the pension benefits of those already retired. Current workers are not supposed to benefit those who came before. Each worker forgoes part of his or her current pay for a benefit in the future. Federal law requires that a pension be funded in advance by setting aside money for that benefit. Thus, over the life cycle of a company, as it grows from a single worker to a giant enterprise, and then passes into history, the number of workers on the payroll at any moment is not relevant to whether each worker collects the benefits deferred until old age.

If it is possible to make large profits by finding devious ways to trick customers, then banks and other corporations will devote substantial resources to finding devious ways to trick customers. Instead of devoting resources to figuring out how to better serve customers, banks will devote resources to finding ways to put rules in contracts that allow them to profit at their customers' expense. The 'buyer beware' argument means that consumers would have to spend much more time reviewing contracts and that firms would devote more resources to deceiving customers. That is hardly an economically optimal outcome.

The Greatest Ponzi Scheme on Earth

“I suspect that we are throwing more and more of our resources, including the cream of our youth, into financial activities remote from the production of goods and services, into activities that generate high private rewards disproportionate to their social productivity. I suspect that the immense power of the computer is being harnessed to this ‘paper economy,’ not to do the same transactions more economically but to balloon the quantity and variety of financial exchanges.”

“In many deceits, the victim overlooks the liar’s mistakes, giving ambiguous behavior the best reading, collusively helping to maintain the lie, to avoid the terrible consequences of uncovering the lie.”

“The things that are legal in finance are far more destructive than what is illegal in finance.”

“All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as self-evident.”

Proposal One: A business owner approaches a group of investors and says:

“I’m selling shares of my company. If you invest in my business, you’ll receive a note that says you own a piece of the company, and if the business makes money, you’ll receive a share of the profits. The note is transferable, so you can also sell it to other investors. If you’re lucky, you might even receive more than you paid.”

Proposal Two: A business owner approaches a group of investors and says:

“I’m selling shares of my company. When you invest, you’ll receive a note that says you own a piece of the company. However, you won’t receive any money from the business, and the company is not obligated to pay you anything, ever. But, you can make money by selling the note to other people. You might get lucky and get more than you paid.”

Now, which proposal do you think early investors would have considered, and which do you think they would have avoided? Which one sounds like a legitimate business investment, and which one sounds like a shady scam? History shows that when stocks were first introduced to investors, they were designed to perform like the first proposal, where companies paid dividends and shared profits with investors. But today, the common stocks that are being issued to investors behave like the second proposal, where shareholders receive nothing from the business, and the only realistic way investors can make money is by selling their shares to other investors.

One of the biggest myths about stocks is the idea that profits from stocks come from the earnings and growth of the underlying company. The assumption is, when a company makes money, they share the profits with their investors. But in practice, most public companies never pay dividends, and when they make money, which can be millions or even billions, they keep everything. The reality is, profits from stocks come from other investors who are buying and selling stocks. When an investor buys a stock for \$10 and sells it for \$11, that \$11 comes from another investor, someone who will then start hunting for yet another investor who will give him or her \$12, and so on. This is actually a negative-sum situation because the underlying company isn't involved in the transaction. The investors are just cannibalizing each other for profits, and there are fees attached to every transaction. It's one thing if everyone acknowledges this negative-sum gambling scenario and people just want to gamble. But the stock market is sold as a positive-sum investment system, and investors believe the system produces more money than they contribute. This is why most of the money that goes into the stock market comes from pension plans and retirement funds, and why 18-year-old kids are allowed to open online trading accounts.

Investment finance is different from other businesses because everyone involved—from the bankers to the analysts, to the advisors, to the investors and the companies that need investments—all want one thing and one thing only: cash. This is not the case when we look at a normal business like a restaurant. The restaurant that sells food wants cash, but the people who give the restaurant cash are end-users who want food in return, not more cash. This simple and essential fact is why the logic of investing is incredibly illogical. When it comes to stock transactions, the person selling the stock wants cash, but so does the person who is buying the stock. There are no end-users. Everyone involved wants more money back than they contribute, and no one pays attention to where the money is coming from. It's probably because no one wants to know where the money is really coming from. The problem is, the money investors take out of the system is coming from other investors who are putting money into the system, and the stock market is

just a system that shuffles cash between investors. It is a system where current investors' profits are strictly dependent on the inflow of money from new investors. Such a system is also known as a 'Ponzi scheme.'

Most people understand that a Ponzi scheme is a scam, but what most people don't realize is that a Ponzi scheme can also produce a lot of winners. It's not a scam where everyone loses money. A lot of investors who are involved—and unaware of the scam—can make money too. Bernard Madoff ran the biggest Ponzi scheme to date. After his \$50 billion scam was exposed in 2008, investigators found that more than half of his accounts showed a profit. The total amount of money lost in his scam was greater of course, but as far as the accounts were concerned, more than half of them actually showed a net profit—as in, those accounts withdrew more than they contributed. The fraudulent aspect of a Ponzi scheme is not its inability to produce winners. The issue is in the mechanics and where that money comes from, and how investors who make money are taking it from other investors who also want to make money.

If the stock market is a giant ponzi scheme, then why are there so many textbooks on stock analysis? Why is it taught in schools, and why do finance academics and professionals treat it as something legitimate? Do not underestimate the power of fallacies. The sad truth is, falsehoods and immoral practices can be treated as normal and routine, and persist for centuries before corrections are made. Remember that it took humanity thousands of years to realize that human slavery is a barbaric practice that is not essential to a functioning economic system—and even then we've not really managed to eradicate it. The investment finance industry, especially the portion that deals with stocks, is primarily built on fallacies. The reason why finance professionals do not see the stock market as a Ponzi scheme is because they believe the credibility for an idea rests on repetition, tradition, and people who recite it, rather than proof, logic, or facts.

The first fallacy and I believe the most fundamental falsehood that leads to other false ideas, is the notion that stocks are equity instruments that represent ownership. Finance professionals will argue:

“The stock market can't be a Ponzi scheme because the value of a stock represents value in a company, and ownership instruments are being exchanged in the transactions.”

But, there's practically no truth to this idea because the value of a stock has no legitimacy. It is just an arbitrary number derived from a Ponzi-exchange process, and the value is not backed by anything. A share of Google can trade around \$900, but Google explicitly states in writing

that the par value of their stock is only \$0.001. Google also says they do not pay their investors any dividends, and their Class C shareholders have no voting rights. So, if you own a share of GOOG, you won't receive any money from Google's business activities, you won't be allowed to vote on any corporate issues, and Google isn't obligated to pay you anything more than \$0.001 for that share you bought for \$900. Does that really sound like a legitimate ownership instrument?

Before the 1900s, stocks paid dividends. History shows that stocks were designed to be legitimate equity instruments with a profit-sharing agreement between the shareholders and the companies they owned. Capital gains, the Ponzi profits from other investors in the 'buy low and sell high' gamble was meant to be a secondary form of profit. It was never meant to be the primary or only way for investors to make money. Stocks were not intended to be Ponzi assets that are destined to be shuffled between investors indefinitely, but they mutated in a very disturbing way over the past century. Finance people refer to stocks as "equity" instruments, but it's nothing more than an artificial label. Today's stocks are fundamentally different things from the equity instruments they once were.

The second fallacy, which is a product of the first fallacy, is the idea that the asset value of a stock is the same thing as cash. When people see a share of Google that's trading at \$900, they'll just assume that's \$900 in real money. However, cash and asset value are nothing alike. They are from two entirely different worlds of our reality.

As of September 2017, the NASDAQ and NYSE had a combined value of over \$30 trillion and growing—and here I am, talking about the imminent demise of the stock market. The reason why this astronomical number and potential future market growth doesn't concern me is that a \$30 trillion market value means investors believe they are entitled to possess \$30 trillion in real money. But there is only \$1.6 trillion of cash circulating in the US economy, and \$3.8 trillion in existence in the entire US economic system, which includes the money in your wallet right now. If the \$30 trillion of market value, or even a fraction of it, had any truth to it, we should be able to close the market tomorrow and send investors home happy with their stocks and all that value. But, we all know what would really happen. If the market closed tomorrow, every investor holding stocks would be in a world of hurt trying to realize the value of their stocks without the inflow of cash from new investors. Stocks are priced in terms of cash, but they are virtually worthless unless they can be converted into cash.

The third fallacy is the idea that the stock market is positive-sum for investors and the system produces more wins than losses. This idea is essential to the existence of the investment finance industry because it lets

finance firms label their products and services as investing rather than gambling.

If you look at the SEC's website, you will find blatantly contradictory information. In one area, they define a Ponzi scheme as:

“An investment fraud that involves the payment of purported returns to existing investors from funds contributed by new investors.”

But in another area they advertise the following as a way for investors to make money with stocks:

“Capital appreciation, which occurs when a stock rises in price.”

For people who are unfamiliar with stocks and missed the irony: What the SEC defines as capital appreciation can only be realized through the process of investors buying and selling stocks and exchanging money with each other—which is exactly how the SEC defined a Ponzi scheme.

The biggest scams are legal in practice. It's the stuff that regulators and newspapers do not focus on because they are constructed from the ideas taught at universities and treated as quotidian positions in the job market. Those who engage in these activities do not look or sound like criminals. They have beautiful offices in prime locations and advanced degrees from respected schools like Harvard, UC Berkeley, MIT, and the like. They are female, male, young, old, Asian, White, Black, Hispanic, Middle Eastern. They have great work ethics, and most of them are not bad people. But good people can do bad things without realizing it—and intelligent people can choose to remain ignorant of their own reality.

The thing that really hit home was knowing that there was someone else out there who didn't think like the rest of the industry did—and realizing that sometimes the entire world really is crazy. Just because you think differently doesn't mean you are wrong. My critics will say this is the work of a conspiracy theorist, and my words are more likely to bring trouble than success. But, the annoying thing about truth is, it's hard to ignore after you see it. And, it really bothers me when our world's biggest scam artists are lauded as the world's wisest investors and innovators. Now, the nice thing about truth is, it's not concerned with criticism. Truth is grounded in logic, and logic will transcend the test of time. Whether people realize the truth today, tomorrow, or centuries from now, the truth in these pages will be realized because knowledge evolves towards what is true.

“HB had been reporting 18% annual returns. Their performance chart looked like a smooth, upward slope with no volatility, jumps, or dips. But where was this profit coming from? They issued loans rolled up with fees, but all they were doing was lending out money. Nothing was paid back. They started financing policies in late 2006, so when I went to work there in 2007, the two-year loans had not come due yet. How could they be reporting these fantastic profits when none of the loans had been paid back?”

The answer is: it was recorded with a process called accrual accounting. HB was reporting unrealized phantom profits in real time on the assumption that it would materialize in the future. It turns out that such a smooth, upward-sloping line on a performance chart can only be created with accrual accounting, as the profits reported are assumed, and therefore, are not subject to any real gains and losses. Applying the accrual accounting process to a more transparent business would be like a restaurant that reports profits every month for two years without selling any food. Then, on the last day, expects to sell enough food to make up for what they reported over the two-year period. It seems ludicrous when we apply this accounting process to a real business, but it is the norm for convoluted investment transactions, like premium financing and other esoteric financial strategies.

Accrual accounting lets firms account for imaginary profits in real time, even when there is no guarantee it will ever materialize in the future. Two essential conditions make this type of accounting possible: One, the asset has to be illiquid, and two, the asset has to be difficult to price. This makes the assumed value of the asset impossible to validate and refute, which essentially allows the fund manager to mark the value of the asset according to his or her imagination.

“The lines between investing and gambling are artificial and thin. Maybe the best definition of investing is gambling with the odds in your favor.”

Investing: A scenario where the odds are quantitatively defined and favorable for the investor (favorable meaning greater than 50% success rate).

Gambling: A scenario where the odds are quantitatively defined and not favorable for the investor (equal to or less than 50% success rate), or a scenario where the odds cannot be quantitatively defined at all.

There is no definitive way of calculating the odds of success in the stock market, and therefore, stocks and stock-related instruments are all different forms of gambling.

At one point, Deutsche Bank wanted to set up a synthetic life settlement market that cut out the insurance companies altogether. They tried to construct a portfolio that tracked the lives of a few thousand people and let investors bet on when they were going to die. As ridiculous as this idea sounds, it would be a good thing in the sense that it would give financial institutions a way to gamble on artificial insurance products and keep them away from real insurance products that affect those who need insurance. But like most financial innovations, it's all just another way for people to shuffle money. It gives people in finance something to do, but it serves no purpose for society as a whole.

“Everything we did felt like gambling . The stuff I learned in school was only good for coming up with intelligent-sounding bullshit that made it sound like we knew what we were talking about: ‘Yes, the equity market is acting a little funny right now. But stocks tend to behave a little strange when we’re looking at an inverted yield curve in the bond market. But that’s all right. The important thing is what’s happening in commodities. We’re not seeing any contango, and as long as oil is moving inversely against stocks, it’ll act as a nice hedge for any portfolio.’ It sounds intelligent, which is why the monkeys on CNBC can debate these points all day, but it’s all bullshit.

The analysis techniques from school were useless. The biggest problem with the information in textbooks is that they all had fixed assumptions. Factors like the interest rates, discount rates, and correlation were all fixed values that were given to you. If you plug those things into a formula and execute a process the right way, you’ll get a definitive answer. But in the real world, those fixed assumptions are not fixed . At any given moment, the Federal Reserve can announce a change in the interest rate and the correlation between two assets can move from positive to negative.”

The reason why people keep throwing money into Wall Street is because they believe in the ‘Idea of Investing,’ which basically says that it’s possible to make money with money—let your money work for you—and it can be done in an intelligent way that is safe and fundamentally different from gambling. The idea of investing creates a demand for investment services,

but this idea is also entirely artificial and unproven. As a society, we've learned to accept the idea of investing as a normal part of life—we work; we save; we invest for retirement, college, et cetera—but if we traced the origin of investment profits, we would also see that the idea is extremely illogical. We can break down the stock investment process with a physical example because cash, the only thing investors care about, can be physical and, for the most part, is finite.

Think of the investment system as a bucket and common stocks as paper napkins. Throw the napkins into the bucket with \$100 of real cash. Spin the bucket around, mix it up, shake it up, and ask, 'How can we get \$110 of cash out of that bucket?' The simple answer is, we can't. The paper that makes contact with cash doesn't miraculously turn into cash, and the cash inside the bucket won't magically multiply. The only way to get \$110 out of that bucket is if someone else puts in another \$10—and that someone else is pretty much always another investor who wants to get back more money than they put in.

Stock value appreciation strategies—buy low, sell high—assume that the source of profits come from an infinite pool of money created by the stock market and that it is available to anyone with the right tools. But the stock market is not an infinite pool of money that people can draw from. Money that is taken out of the market comes from the pockets of other investors. There is no such thing as a magic bucket that can turn synthetic instruments into real cash. The money that people see in their stock investment accounts is not real; it does not exist, which is why those balances can rise and fall sharply at any given moment.

The obvious way to investigate the positive-sum assumption for stocks is to add up all the cash profits and losses from investors over the years and see if the net balance is positive. This is also where we run into a big problem: no one knows how much money investors have lost in the stock market. There is no database that keeps track of investor losses, and from what I understand, the industry doesn't want to track such data either.

“Are you kidding me? Wall Street would never let it happen. That would make everything we're doing look extremely questionable.”

It's obvious that people in finance have made a lot of money from the stock market, and so have the companies that issue the stocks. But what we don't know is whether or not investors—the ones who are contributing all the money—have made money from the stock market, or if the system is even positive-sum. The burden of proving the positive-sum assumption

rests with the finance professionals and academics. They are the ones who make money from selling stocks and stock-related services, so they have the responsibility of showing why it is favorable for the investors who are paying their fees. This is also something they have never done before. On the other hand, critics of the stock market do not have to show why the system is illegitimate or negative-sum because it is an artificial system that shuffles cash and ambiguous promises, something that is extremely questionable to begin with—and something that remains false until proven true. This clarification of responsibility for the burden of proof is obvious but necessary. Finance professionals tend to ignore the obvious.

“Long hours in finance don’t mean shit. All the extra hours we work are spent thinking up ways to gamble, ways to shuffle other people’s money, and new ways to take other people’s money.”

The published works in math and physics have helped advance our understanding of technology and medicine with tangible results. The published works in finance are developed to help the industry shuffle other people’s money and collect fees, at best, or create economic, societal, environmental disasters, at worst.

Finance professionals are some of the most “productive” and “industrious” people in the world, but unlike other industries, there is little evidence their efforts will lead to anything of value. If you give a janitor or dentist an extra hour to work, they will provide a more sanitary environment or a happier patient. If you give a financial analyst extra time to work, they might come up with a scheme that leads to the next financial crisis. Make no mistake about it: the collapse of 2008 and every financial crisis before it and after it could not have happened without an army of financial professionals working overtime in the years leading up to it.

“So if you got a client who bought stock at \$8 and now sits at \$16, and he’s all fucking happy. He wants to cash in. Liquidate. Take his fucking money and run home. YOU DON’T LET HIM DO THAT! Because that would make it REAL! NO! What do you do? You get another brilliant idea. A special idea. Another ‘situation,’ another stock—to reinvest his earnings and then some. And he will, every single time, because they are fucking addicted. And you just keep doing this, again and again and again. Meanwhile, he thinks he’s getting shit rich, which he is—on paper. But you and me, the brokers. We’re taking home cold-hard cash via commission, motherfucker.”

“Education makes the wise slightly wiser, but it makes the fool vastly more dangerous.”

A few years ago, I watched a finance professor at the University of Chicago start his Introduction to Asset Pricing class by showing a graph:

“This is if you invested one dollar in 1926 in stocks and how much money you would have at each date (without inflation). If your great-grandfather or grandmother put one dollar in stocks in 1926, you would have about \$250 Real Dollars today.”

This is a common example used in many Introduction to Finance courses. It's meant to show how people can make money from stocks and make the stock market appear positive-sum. But this example is also entirely flawed. The first problem is how the professor did not consider all the investors that are involved. He describes how an early investor in 1926 can buy into the market for \$1 and cash out for \$250 a little less than a century later, and live happily ever after. However, he does not consider the fact that a new investor is also going to be down \$250. The professor's technique of concluding stories prematurely on a high note, and focusing on the winners, is common in finance and it can make any shady scenario look positive-sum.

The second problem, and the more important one, is the universal error of assuming asset value as a cash equivalent. The professor says “money” and “real dollars” when he is referring to an assumed asset value and not ‘money’ or ‘real dollars’ at all. His chart does not represent “how much money you would have at each given date.” It represents how much money the early investor from 1926 thinks he is entitled to at each given date. But in reality, the investor is really down \$1 because that is how much he paid for the stock. The universal error of not distinguishing the difference between an assumed asset value and cash gives people a false perception of reality.

Tangible goods like a house take time, labor, and resources to reproduce. They are difficult to replicate and finite in quantity. On the other hand, imaginary things like stocks can be issued by anyone. They are easy to replicate and can be infinite in quantity. Ultimately, it's all about legitimacy. A real estate transaction has legitimacy because the value of the property is backed by the physical value of the property itself. The value of a dollar has legitimacy because the value is backed by the United States government (and you need it to pay taxes to that government). The value of a bond is also legitimate because there is a defined entity that is responsible for repaying the face value of the bond. However, the value of stocks has no legitimacy because neither the underlying company or anyone else has any obligations to repay the shareholders anything.

Bubbles are positive feedback loops. It starts when any group of stocks begin to rise. The updraft encourages more people to buy the stocks, which causes more media coverage, which causes even more people to buy, which creates big profits for early stockholders. The successful investors tell you at cocktail parties how easy it is to get rich, which causes the stocks to rise further, which pulls in larger and larger groups of investors. But the whole mechanism is a kind of Ponzi scheme. People in finance will agree that bubble scenarios are created with a Ponzi-like process. But what is the real difference between a bubble scenario and what finance professionals call normal growth? What is actually causing the appreciation in stock prices? The only difference between the bubble and growth scenario is speed—how fast the prices are rising. But speed does not cause the inflation in stock prices. It just implies that the inflation is happening quickly. The thing responsible for the rising stock prices in both bubble and growth scenarios is additional cash from new investors.

The majority of the stock market is made up of common stocks, which are basically notes with the company's name on them, but they don't guarantee any dividends or payments. In some cases, like with Google's class C shares, which make up the majority of the company's shares, they don't even come with voting rights. Common stock shareholders are not entitled to any operational profits from the business, and the only practical way investors can make money is by selling their shares to other investors using the Ponzi process. There are exceptions, of course. Companies like Microsoft and McDonald's have a history of paying regular dividends—whether the amounts paid are reasonable compared to the profits the companies earn can be subjective, but they do pay their investors on a regular basis. However, these are exceptions, and we can't use exceptions to generalize what is the norm for common stocks in the overall market.

Finance people will argue that all common stockholders do have a "claim" to dividends, but this is not a legitimate claim. There is a difference between something that can happen versus something that is legitimately likely to happen. In practice, most public companies never pay dividends because they are not obligated to. They can always make up an excuse for why they can't pay, and there are enough fine print and legal loopholes in their documents to let them get away with it. This is why companies like Google, which is about as mature and successful as a public company can get, have never paid dividends. A shareholder's "claim" to dividends is meaningless because the normal practice is: public companies do not pay dividends, and shareholders receive nothing from the business.

A common stock in the open market is treated like a game of hot potato among investors. It gets passed around from player to player, no one wants

to hold it as an end product, and every player wants more money back than they put in. The companies that issued the stocks often won't contribute any money to the game, but they'll encourage the frenzy from the sidelines with phrases like 'We're going to make our share value grow and our shareholders happy!' This is why I refer to common stocks as Ponzi assets.

According to historians, the first stocks came into existence in the early 1600s in Europe, and the first joint-stock companies were in the shipping and trade business. The fact that the first stocks were related to the shipping industry was not a coincidence. If you think about it, shipping was an expensive and risky business that also had very low hands-on work involvement by owners. The owners secured the financing, but they didn't have to go on the long voyages themselves. It was a situation where ownership and operation were divorced. It was an ideal situation for silent investors—people who want to own a business without getting their hands dirty. And naturally, in return, investors also expected to receive a portion of the business profits.

Back then, people didn't get involved in something that didn't pay dividends. It is documented that companies like the Dutch East India Company—which was also believed to be the first joint-stock company to issue stocks—and the South Seas Company paid annual dividends that yielded between 12%–62%. This means if the stock was \$100 a share, the investor would receive anywhere between \$12–\$62 for every share he or she owned every year. This shows that the first public companies didn't just pay dividends, but they paid reasonable and regular dividends. Those companies didn't pay something unscheduled and trivial, they shared a reasonable amount of profits with their investors and paid them on a regular basis. It shows how vital dividends were for the investors. And, it also shows how much the underlying companies respected their investors' participation, ownership, and profit-sharing agreement.

The practice of paying dividends was not unique to early European stocks; it was also the norm for American companies until the twentieth century. Virtually all stock returns during the 1800s came from dividends, not capital gains. The behavior of financial markets in the 1800s, because of the returns to investors, was fundamentally different before and after 1914. One reason why dividends were important was that most people invested in bonds at the time and thought stocks were risky. Dividends weren't just important to the early European investors; they were an intrinsic part of early US stocks as well.

There are two ways investors can make money with stocks: dividends and capital gains. These two profiteering methods are fundamentally different. Profits from dividends come from the business, whereas profits from

capital gains come from other investors. This is a material difference that regulators and people in finance ignore, but it is literally the difference between legitimate investment profits and Ponzi profits, and the difference between a real equity instrument and a gambling instrument. If you eliminate dividends from stocks, the stock becomes a fundamentally different financial instrument. History clearly shows that stocks were designed to pay dividends. But today, the common stocks that are being sold to investors behave nothing like the way stocks are supposed to function. The early stocks before the 1900s were indeed real equity instruments because they paid dividends. They had a legitimate connection to the business because investors' profits came from the business. The early stocks were not just Ponzi assets that investors traded; the money investors made was directly dependent on the success of the underlying businesses. There's even evidence that says the very first stock market crash, which took place in London in 1720, was triggered after the South Seas Company missed its dividend payment.

Sure, investors at the time also made money speculating on capital gains; however, their profit was not entirely dependent on the Ponzi process like it is now. Dividends were not just a source of profit for investors—they were not just an ornamental accessory when the idea of the stock was first conceived. Dividends were an essential component that legitimized stocks as real equity instruments in a company. It established a connection between stocks and the underlying businesses through a profit-sharing agreement. History shows that dividends made stocks legitimate investment instruments. Dividends were the primary source of profits for investors, and the only reason the first investors invested in stocks. The presence of dividends in an investment is also in-line with what we expect from basic intuition and logic: If people invest in a company, then they should expect to receive a share of the profits from the business they own. Frankly, it would be a little disturbing if the investors didn't expect it.

Stocks are transferable securities, so there's always the possibility of making money through capital gains. But capital gains were meant to be a secondary source of profit for the investment—a side bet from selling legitimate equity instruments that paid dividends. The possibility of earning capital gains does not bridge a connection between the stock and the underlying company. It does not legitimize stocks as real equity instruments because it does not establish a genuine investment and profit-sharing relationship between the shareholders and the business. The legitimacy of stocks as an equity instrument is dependent on dividends, not capital gains. There is nothing in history that shows stocks were designed around the idea of capital gains, nor is it logical to think that an owner of a company is not

entitled to any profits from the underlying business. Investors back then weren't stupid. They wouldn't have gambled on the new stock investment instrument if there was no profit sharing agreement or legitimate promise of repayment from the underlying company. Investors would have invested in government bonds, which they were familiar with and the idea of stocks would have been dead on arrival. Stocks came into existence because of dividends, and stocks without dividends are nothing more than Ponzi assets.

The common stocks that dominate the stock market today are not equity instruments—they are a mutated form of what legitimate equity instruments once were. When people refer to stocks as equity instruments now, it is nothing more than a false, artificial label. The same people who think common stocks are legitimate equity instruments are also the same people who know nothing about the real history of stocks. They are unaware of the fundamental differences between the early stocks when the idea of the joint-stock company was first conceived, and the common stocks that dominate the market now. The early stocks were legitimate equity instruments because they paid dividends, and the common stocks today are Ponzi assets because they don't.

If, when discussing retirement plans with Mom and Dad, Dad were to pull out a dusty binder full of baseball cards and say, 'This should get us through,' you'd look at him with horror. Yet if he were to pull out the latest statement from his broker, you'd be relieved. You shouldn't be.

Regulating the current system properly is easy. All we have to do is apply some common sense:

Dividends: If companies are profitable, they have to share the profits with their investors. If a company is not profitable and cannot pay dividends, then their stocks cannot be transferred and traded for Ponzi profits.

Vocabulary: Firms cannot be allowed to use the word 'invest' when they are selling unproven gambles.

Clawbacks: Finance professionals cannot be allowed to keep the money they never earned. If they lose money for their clients, they have to give back all the money they took in the process—all fees and commissions. From the CEOs to the analysts, everyone has to give back everything they took.

The clawback idea is meant to place the finance industry under the same logical principle that applies to other industries, by not rewarding incompetence and failure. If you hire a plumber to fix the sink, and he ends

up destroying your entire kitchen, chances are you won't owe the plumber any money, and he will be liable for the damages. Without clawbacks, finance professionals can destroy a lot of kitchens, get paid, get new clients and destroy more kitchens. The former CEO of Bear Sterns, Alan Schwartz, received a total compensation of \$37.3 million in 2006 and he was listed as one of Fortune's 25 Highest-paid men. After his firm collapsed in 2008, Alan admitted to a Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission:

“I believe that we've never believed we had the ability to predict the next market movement.”

Alan is now a managing partner at the financial services firm Guggenheim Partners. Some people will say, ‘But clawbacks can seriously deter people from working in the finance industry.’ And yes, that is exactly what clawbacks are meant to do. It is a rule that is designed to deter people from stockjobbing and gambling away other people's money. If a service cannot provide something of value to the consumer, then that service has no reason to exist. When people sell unproven gambles as investments it becomes a scam. Gambling is not a fraudulent activity, it's just a risky one. Gambling is only fraudulent when it is sold as an investment, and this type of sales is the backbone of the investment finance industry.

Dividends, gambling, and clawbacks are ideas that can help reform the current system. However, these ideas aren't new, and will probably only have a temporary effect even if they are implemented. Of course, these ideas are worth trying again, especially now with the awareness of the universal error. But, I'm more in favor of abolishing the stock market system altogether. My conclusion, which may not be the correct or best conclusion, is that a meaningful way to reform the system might not exist. On one hand, there's nothing wrong with the idea of breaking up a company into smaller shares of equity, and I don't think the idea of a joint-stock company will ever disappear. However, history clearly shows us that the existence of this simple and pure idea will breed people who will devise ways to game the system for their own benefit, and in the process, diminish the economic benefits the system is designed to produce. Even if Wall Street goes through major reforms, with enough time, people will find loopholes and ways to corrupt it.

On the other hand, it is clear that no one can pull \$30 trillion out of their ass to bail out the current investors, and this bomb is only going to get bigger over time. The stock market is built on fallacies and imagination. There is nothing logical or sustainable about it, and I can't see the current system surviving another millennium. I do not see all the details on the

path to its destruction, but I believe it will implode and vanish at some point in the future. I did not write this to criticize the investment system. I wrote it to show how the features of the stock market meet the definition of a Ponzi scheme, and make a case for why the biggest scam in the history of our species should be dismantled. An economy without a stock market might sound inconceivable right now, but I think it's a reality we will have to face sooner or later. One way or another, investors will realize the stocks they are holding will never yield its cash equivalent. Despite how tranquil and nice things seem right now—and possibly for years or even decades to come—the messy business of dealing with the trillions in imaginary value will reveal itself. If Ponzi schemes are destined to collapse, then so will the market systems that share the same mechanics and logic.

One thing even finance people will agree with is that it's not a matter of 'if' the stock market will crash again but 'when.' I don't know when the next crash will happen or what the experts will blame it on, but I'm certain the crashes we've witnessed thus far are just symptoms of a disease—foreshadowing something far more destructive. At some point there will be one magnificent crash that will end the stock market permanently. The market will not be able to bounce back from it because unlike the dot-com crash or the housing bubble—which were blamed on indirect issues like failing businesses and bad loans—this last unrecoverable crash will be the result of something direct and fundamental: investors pulling their money out of the system as they realize the reality and how their wealth is tied to the massive Ponzi scheme we now call the stock market. Little by little, the reality of it all will sink in, and over time, it will become impossible to ignore. This final crash will change the face of our economic and financial system. Its destruction is unimaginable, but we will evolve from it. Hopefully.

There is something fundamentally wrong with an industry that has convinced investors they are entitled to \$30 trillion that doesn't exist. There is something fundamentally wrong with an industry that sells imaginary products without any proof of their legitimacy or value. And there is something fundamentally wrong with an industry that pays people unimaginable amounts of money for creating absolutely nothing. I have no doubt that centuries from now, kids in middle school will study our history and say:

“People didn't know the difference between \$30 trillion of imaginary money and real currency? They actually believed colorful charts on screens could help them gamble? They just completely ignored the history of stocks, all the market crashes, and the lack of academic proofs? Were people really that stupid?”

Looking back, we now realize that a functioning economy is not dependent on the barbaric practice of trading people like property. Over time, we will also realize that it is not dependent on trading cash for unaccountable promises.

Junk Economics

A society's analytic concepts determine the kind of reality it creates. That is why parasites start by taking control of their host's brain. Neoliberal enzymes aim to sedate the industrial host into believing that the financial sector is part of the real economy, not external to it and extractive. That is the first myth. Modern national income and GDP accounting formats treat tollbooth systems and other rent seeking as "output." Bankers claim to obtain their salaries and bonuses by "creating wealth" (adding to GDP). But they demand to be rescued by taxpayer bailouts (or new central bank money creation) when the bubble that they finance bursts, dispelling the economic fictions they have created. The "service" that bankers claim to provide—managing the economy's money in ways that increase prosperity—turns out to be a neo-rentier economy based on unearned wealth and income.

A second myth is that all debts can be paid without deranging social values and polarizing economies by transferring property to creditors. This fiction is maintained by denying the tendency for debts to grow exponentially beyond the ability to be paid out of current income. An illusion is fostered that paying creditors by selling off public infrastructure will add to productivity and efficiency. The reality is rent seeking.

A parallel financial myth is that corporate raiders "create wealth" by pump-and-dump tactics of stock buybacks and higher dividend payouts instead of long-term investment. Financial lobbyists use these myths to numb popular awareness that today's overgrowth of debts can be paid only by imposing widespread poverty. As a cover story for their asset grabs, creditor elites cloak themselves in a libertarian denunciation of governments as being reckless by running budget deficits and central banks for monetizing public spending into the economy. Public investment, regulatory checks, and progressive taxation are accused of being deadweight overhead. By ignoring the degree to which banks lend to inflate prices for real estate, stocks, and bonds, this ideology aims to persuade voters to let rentiers dismantle progressive government and reverse centuries of democratic reform. High finance seeks to appoint its representatives to run the central bank, Treasury, and key regulatory agencies instead of elected administrators governing in the economy's long-term interest.

Structural Changes Since the 80s

1. Interest rates, which determine prices for bonds, stocks, and real estate

PRE-1980: Steady rise to a peak of 20%, causing bond prices and other asset prices to fall.

POST-1980: Falling interest rates fuel a bull market in bonds that extends to stocks and real estate.

2. Wage levels

PRE-1980: Steady rise in real wages and living standards, especially under “guns and butter” policy.

POST-1980: Stagnant real wages, with more being paid for debt service, housing, and Social Security taxes.

3. Political philosophy

PRE-1980: Social democratic policy: a rising government role, and “Keynesian” public spending as counter-cyclical stabilization.

POST-1980: Neoliberal deregulation and privatization, dismantling social spending programs and public infrastructure investment.

4. Tax philosophy

PRE-1980: Progressive income taxation, and taxing of real estate and financial wealth.

POST-1980: Tax shift off real estate and other FIRE-sector wealth and high incomes onto wage earners (heavier FICA tax) and consumers (sales taxes and value-added tax).

5. Wealth and income distribution

PRE-1980: Trend toward more equal distribution of wealth and income.

POST-1980: Widening polarization of wealth and income in the hands of the One Percent.

6. Bank regulation

PRE-1980: Separation of retail banking and speculative investment banking under Glass Steagall.

POST-1980: Repeal of Glass Steagall in 1999 lets Wall Street create holding companies to absorb commercial banks, savings banks, and S&Ls. From Chile to the post-Soviet Union, bank subsidiaries control industrial affiliates in grupos and conglomerates.

7. Law enforcement

PRE-1980: Prosecution of financial fraud and crime, especially after the S&L crisis of the 1980s.

POST-1980: Decriminalization of financial and accounting fraud, especially under Eric Holder.

8. Pension planning

PRE-1980: Wages deferred in the form of defined-benefit pension plans to provide retirement security, mainly by investment in the stock market. (Pension-fund finance capitalism.)

POST-1980: Pension plans downsized into defined-contribution plans or wiped out in bankruptcy. Money managers invest pensions in LBOs and financial speculation.

9. Accounting and the quality of statistics

PRE-1980: Strong government regulation ensures accurate financial and economic statistics. Arthur Andersen closed down for its role in Enron's fraud.

POST-1980: "Mark to model" accounting and off-balance-sheet subsidiaries ("Enron-style") make corporate statistics increasingly unrealistic in order to avoid taxes.

10. Debtor/creditor legislation

PRE-1980: Increasingly humanitarian treatment of debtors via lenient bankruptcy laws and debt forgiveness.

POST-1980: Personal bankruptcy is made more difficult as the debt overhead rose for households, business, and government. Indebted governments are coerced to privatize the public domain by selling it to rent-extracting private buyers.

11. International trade and finance

PRE-1980: The trade balance normally reflects competition based on relative prices and costs of living.

POST-1980: Costs for labor and industry increasingly reflect interest, land rent, monopoly rent and other FIRE-sector dynamics, not direct production costs.

What's so pernicious about the morality of debt is the way that financial imperatives constantly try to reduce us all, despite ourselves, to the equivalent of pillagers, eyeing the world simply for what can be turned into money—and then tell us that it's only those who are willing to see the world as pillagers who deserve access to the resources required to pursue anything in life other than money.

The neo-rentier objective is threefold: to reduce economies to debt dependency, to transfer public utilities into creditor hands, and then to create a rent-extracting tollbooth economy. The financial objective is to block governments from writing down debts when bankers and bondholders over-lend. Taken together, these policies create a one-sided freedom for rentiers to create a travesty of the classical Adam Smith view of free markets. It is a freedom to reduce the indebted majority to a state of deepening dependency, and to gain wealth by stripping public assets built up over the centuries.

In place of classical political economy, today's foundation myth is that all income and wealth is earned productively—as if there were no economic rent (unearned income) as a legacy of feudalism's rentier privileges, and no inherited wealth or insider giveaways. Yet these have been the shaping forces of history. That is why they were the focal point of classical political economy—to free society from such privileges and bias.

A rising element of cost in the modern world reflects the pricing of infrastructure services. Public investment traditionally has sought to minimize such costs. But banking viewed great infrastructure projects such as railroads and canal building—capped by the Panama and Suez Canals—as major opportunities to profiteer at the economy's expense. Underwriting fees and speculative gains have been as important as interest extraction, while fraud and kleptocracy always have been rife. That is how America's railroad barons, monopolists, and trust builders became the nation's power elite a century ago, and how post-Soviet oligarchs seized public assets after the neoliberal 1991 “reforms.” This is what makes financialization antithetical to classical economy's value and price theory.

Privatization of public utilities, like water and railways, a hallmark policy of neoliberalism, decisively favours rentier income.

Most European countries kept basic infrastructure in the public domain—roads and railroads, communications, water, education, health care and pensions—so as to minimize the economy's cost of living and doing business by providing basic services at cost, at subsidized rates, or even freely. The financial sector's aim is not to minimize the cost of roads, electric power, transportation, water, or education, but to maximize what can be charged as monopoly rent.

The United States was early to privatize railroads, electric and gas utilities, phone systems, and other infrastructure monopolies, but regulated them through public service commissions to keep prices for their services in line with the basic costs of production. Yet since the 1980s these natural infrastructure monopolies have been taken out of the public domain and privatized with little regulation. The pretense is that by financing privatization

of public enterprises, bank credit and financialized management help make economies more efficient. Thatcherism has been a disaster, most notoriously in the former Soviet economies since 1991; Carlos Slim's telephone monopoly in Mexico; US pharmaceutical companies and cable TV. The reality is that debt service (interest and dividends), exorbitant management fees, stock options, underwriting fees, mergers, and acquisitions add to the cost of doing business. Financial lobbyists have re-defined free markets as freedom from public ownership or regulation.

It was not industry but railroads—which European countries kept in the public domain—that provided the basis for America's stock market, which was used largely to create trusts and monopolies. Its heroes were insiders gaining fortunes by stock market raids, politicking for land giveaways, manipulating stock prices and issuing bonds to themselves and, of course, friendly politicians and lawmakers. As matters have turned out, this is the financial system that has won the struggle for survival.

Most futurists a century ago believed that public regulation was needed to keep predatory finance and rent-seeking in check. But bankers and financiers successfully instituted a deregulatory economic philosophy and have seized control of governments to use its money-creating power to subsidize high finance, while leaving creditors “free” to stifle the economy's real growth with debt deflation.

Today's financial interests denounce public regulation and rentier taxes as socialism. But ‘socialism’ was not initially a term of invective for classical theorists. John Stuart Mill was called a Ricardian socialist because classical economists were moving toward reforms they themselves characterized as social—and hence, as socialist. Most reformers referred to themselves as socialists of one kind or another, from Christian socialists to Marxist socialists and reformers across the political spectrum. The question was what kind of socialism free market capitalism would evolve into.

The Reform Era leading up to World War I expected the natural evolution of industrial capitalism to steer savings, wealth, credit, and new money creation productively. Like other natural monopolies or special privileges, finance was to become a public utility, situated in the public domain or at least alongside a public banking option. Instead, the past century's expansion of predatory credit has been reinforced by de-taxing interest, land rent, financial speculation, debt leveraging, and “capital” (asset-price) gains. At issue is what the economy does with the surplus of productive capacity and savings over and above its break-even needs. Industrial profits are being diverted away from new capital investment to support stock market prices and enrich the One Percent. Instead of using financialized wealth to build up the economy, managers are diverting corporate income and bank lending

mainly to increase the market price of their assets, and to build up their financial claims on the economy in the form of debts owed to banks and bondholders.

The financial sector now occupies the dominant position that landlords did in times past. Debt service plays the extractive role that land rent did. Unlike the rental income that landlords were assumed to inject into the economy for luxuries and new capital investment, creditors recycle most of their receipt of interest into new loans. This increases the debt burden without raising output or living standards.

Wall Street paints its activities in as positive a light as possible, as if to justify its enormous salaries as being earned productively rather than at the economy's expense. This smiley-face picture also serves to rationalize its tax breaks and, most recently, its bailouts. Academic models echo a view of the stock and bond markets raising funds mainly for new industrial investment, innovation, and employment, while making savers richer. Yet finance rarely ever in history has played a productive role funding capital formation in industrial plants and equipment or research and development. Since antiquity, workshops and factories, farms and other capital assets traditionally have been self-financed. Until the early Industrial Revolution the means of production were owned outright. The idea of productive credit to finance new investment in means of production was an alien concept down through the mid-nineteenth century, and even then the investment was mainly for railroads and canals, not industry. Credit arrangements were used to bridge the time gap between production and sale, between planting and harvesting, and especially for commerce over large distances. But not to invest in manufacturing.

This strategy remains in effect today. Most US and European corporations pay for their capital investment out of their current earnings, not by borrowing from bondholders or banks. The financial system extends credit mainly to buy property already in place, from real estate (the focus of most bank lending today) to entire companies. This shift in ownership adds to debt without increasing output, merely transferring ownership. Existing stockowners are bought out by new owners who issue high-interest bonds and borrow takeover loans from banks. And corporations borrow increasingly to buy up their own stock, and even to pay dividends, creating gains by inflating asset prices.

Financial sector advocates have sought to control democracies by shifting tax policy and bank regulation out of the hands of elected representatives to nominees from the world's financial centers. The aim of this planning is not for the classical progressive objectives of mobilizing savings to increase productivity and raise populations out of poverty. The objective of finance

capitalism is not capital formation, but acquisition of rent-yielding privileges for real estate, natural resources, and monopolies. These are precisely the forms of revenue that centuries of classical economists sought to tax away or minimize. By allying itself with the rentier sectors and lobbying on their behalf—so as to extract their rent as interest—banking and high finance have become part of the economic overhead from which classical economists sought to free society.

To promote this tax shift and debt leveraging, financial lobbyists have created a smokescreen of deception that depicts financialization as helping economies grow. They accuse central bank monetizing of budget deficits as being inherently inflationary—despite no evidence of this, and despite the vast inflation of real estate prices and stock prices by predatory bank credit.

Instead of acknowledging the reality of predatory rentier behavior, financial lobbyists depict lending as being productive, as if it normally provides borrowers with the means to make enough gain to pay. Yet little such lending has occurred in history, apart from investing in trade ventures. Most bank loans are not to create new means of production but are made against real estate, financial securities, or other assets already in place. The main source of gain for borrowers since the 1980s has not derived from earnings but seeing the real estate, stocks, or bonds they have bought on credit rise as a result of asset-price inflation—that is, to get rich from the debt-leveraged Bubble Economy.

The key to making money from money is for creditors to lend it at interest. Most families today simply seek to break even each month while carrying their home mortgage, student loan, and an auto loan if they need to drive to work. Merely avoiding further credit-card debt is a victory in coping with their immediate economic demands. More affluent borrowers hope to realize speculative gains from real estate, and the economy's wealthiest layer uses hedge funds to raid corporations or, more recently, to buy real estate at distress prices. The common hope is to ride the wave of asset-price inflation for real estate, stocks, or bonds bought on credit.

A financial bubble is the kind of inflation that Wall Street loves, in contrast to wage and commodity price inflation. A bubble raises the price of financial assets and property relative to living labor, and the power of inheritance over non-heirs. Asset-price inflation is the primary dynamic explaining today's polarization of wealth and income. Yet most newscasts applaud daily rises in the stock averages as if the wealth of the One Percent, who own the great bulk of stocks and other financial assets, is a proxy for how well the economy is doing. What actually occurs is that financing corporate buyouts on credit factors interest payments and fees into the prices that companies must charge for their products. Paying these financial charges

leaves less available to invest or hire more labor. Likewise for the overall economy, the effect of a debt-leveraged real estate bubble and asset-price inflation is that interest payments and fees to bankers and bondholders leave less available to spend on goods and services. The financial overhead rises, squeezing the real economy and slowing new investment and hiring. Wealth created by rising asset prices fueled by interest-bearing debt thus sucks income out of labor and industry.

The financial sector's greatest trick has been to convince the 99 Percent that "the economy" can be judged by how well it benefits the One Percent. Mainstream media echo Federal Reserve speeches to convince the public that saving the banks meant saving the indebted economy—by giving banks a large enough bailout to start lending again. It was as if what labor and industry needed to survive was more borrowing to pay their debt service, not a debt writedown.

All this is contrary to what classical economists urged. Their objective was for governments elected by the population at large to receive and allocate the economic surplus. Presumably this would have been to lower the cost of living and doing business, provide a widening range of public services at subsidized prices or freely, and sponsor a fair society in which nobody would receive special privileges or hereditary rights.

There is a great deal of confusion about the nature of the financial sector in a modern economy. The financial industry plays an essential function in processing payments, providing insurance, allowing families to save for the future, and allocating capital to those who want to invest or borrow. However, the services it provides are almost entirely intermediate goods in that they facilitate economic activity; they are not end products that provide benefits in and of themselves, like housing, health care, or education. In this regard the financial sector is like the trucking industry. Trucking, like finance, is essential to the economy. We need it for moving raw material to factories and finished products to stores. But an efficient trucking industry is a small trucking industry: we want to have as few resources as possible devoted to getting goods from point A to point B. This means that we don't want to see a huge expansion in employment in the trucking industry or an explosion in the number of trucks and warehouses just to move the same quantity of goods. The same story applies to the financial industry. We should want to see as few resources as possible committed to it, the minimum needed to enable it to support the productive economy. Instead, we have seen a massive expansion of the financial sector, from 4.5 percent of GDP in 1970 to 7.4 percent in 2015.

We don't benefit from having more types of financial instruments and derivatives unless these instruments make it easier to accomplish one of the

sector's functions. Similarly, we don't benefit from more frequent trading of stocks, bonds, or other assets unless the additional trading somehow leads to better allocation of capital or makes our savings more secure.

A basic point of economic theory that economists don't like to talk about is that reducing the rents going to a high-income person is a gain for the rest of us. This is a crucial point, since it is necessary to recognize that policies designed to reduce the incomes of high-end earners are not just a matter of being gratuitously nasty to those who were lucky enough to be successful. Whether or not these policies are nasty, it is important to recognize that the money enjoyed by these high-end earners comes from somewhere; it is not manna from heaven. And where it comes from is often the pockets of the rest of us.

Imagine a person who has a huge annual income without doing any productive work. He is an extremely successful counterfeiter, supporting himself by printing \$1 billion a year in high-quality counterfeit bills. No one recognizes the bills are counterfeit, and so he can spend this money in the same way as anyone else. At first glance, we might be inclined to think this counterfeiter is an asset to the economy. After all, he spends his money employing people to build and maintain his house and grounds. He provides jobs when he buys cars, boats, and other consumption goods, or eats lavish meals at expensive restaurants. Perhaps he even starts a foundation that helps to finance children's health care or other useful ventures. This counterfeiter looks like a great job creator and a socially minded person who gives poor children a chance. If this story made sense then the best economic policy would be to train people to become effective counterfeiters. But it doesn't make sense; there is a big problem in this picture.

With his money, the counterfeiter is diverting resources that would have otherwise been available to the rest of us. The classic story would be that the counterfeiter is bidding up wages and the prices of various goods and services that are in short supply. This would lead to inflation. The Federal Reserve Board would then respond to this inflation by raising interest rates. Higher interest rates would reduce demand for housing and discourage investment and consumption. If we take the classic story strictly, the increased spending by our counterfeiter would be fully offset by reductions in other spending elsewhere in the economy. Our counterfeiter has effectively found a way to tax the rest of us with his fake bills.

Actually, there is an important exception. When the economy is below "full employment" then our counterfeiter would be doing a public service. In that situation, we need increased demand in the economy. Ideally, the government would take responsibility for boosting demand and would increase spending in areas like infrastructure and education that provide

benefits to the country as a whole. But if the government was unwilling to take steps to boost demand, then the counterfeiter would be providing a public service. His personal spending patterns may not be the best way to boost demand and create jobs, but it does have this positive effect.

Keep the counterfeiter in mind when assessing any argument about the rents earned by CEOs, Wall Street traders, and other high-end earners. If these people actually contribute an amount of output equal to their earnings, then they are not pulling resources from the rest of us. In other words, if individual CEOs or Wall Street traders actually add \$30 million to the economy with their work, then we have additional output that corresponds to their \$30 million annual income. They may even add more than \$30 million to the economy, effectively making the rest of us wealthier. However, if they add less than \$30 million, then their income comes to some extent at the expense of the rest of us. In the extreme case, where the highly paid CEO or Wall Street trader adds nothing to the economy's output, they are in an identical situation to the counterfeiter. Their income is a pure drain on the economy, which must come out of the pockets of the rest of us.

As a practical matter, most high-end earners are probably not like the counterfeiter who does nothing productive—though they probably share much of his harms—but insofar as they are paid more than is necessary for their services, their excess pay does come at the expense of the rest of us. This means that if a CEO is paid \$30 million, but someone else would do as good a job for one half or one third of the pay, then the rest of us are effectively subsidizing this person's pay. The channels through which the money goes from the rest of us to the high-end earners may not always be clear, but their good fortune nonetheless imposes a cost on the rest of us.

The financial sector earns rents at the expense of the rest of the economy in five main areas:

1. As the cost of trading stocks, bonds, and other financial assets has declined over the last four decades with the development of computers and the Internet, trading volume has exploded and a variety of complex financial instruments have been created. Despite the sharp decline in costs, the amount of money spent on trading has nearly quintupled relative to the size of the economy. The increased volume and complexity of trading have not in any obvious way improved the allocation of capital or made financial markets more stable. They have, however, made many hedge fund partners and traders at large banks extremely wealthy.
2. Since lenders assume the government will act to support large financial institutions if they get into trouble, large banks enjoy the benefits of

implicit too-big-to-fail insurance, which enables them to borrow at lower interest rates than would be justified by their financial situations. In 2014, the IMF valued the implicit subsidy at \$25 billion to \$50 billion annually.

3. Often, tasks that could be performed more efficiently by the government are instead parceled out to the financial sector. If the privately-run defined contribution pension system were run as efficiently as the Thrift Savings Plan for federal employers, perhaps \$50 billion a year in rent—a low-range estimate—could be put to productive uses.
4. The financial industry is able to take advantage of consumers through complex and deceptive contracts. At one time many debit card issuers charged large overdraft fees without telling customers they faced these charges. Though this practice has since been banned by the Federal Reserve Board—customers must now opt for overdraft coverage, supposedly knowing the fees they face—there are many other areas where the industry imposes terms that most consumers would likely not agree to if they understood them.
5. Tax shelters have long been a mechanism for corporations and wealthy individuals to escape tax liability. But often overlooked is the tax shelter industry itself, where the individuals and corporations that engineer the tax shelters receive large rents. This is a major source of profits for the private equity industry, which has great expertise in gaming the tax code.

The immediate effect of eliminating hundreds of billions of dollars of waste in the financial sector through a financial transactions tax and cracking down on abuses by the industry would be similar to the effect of shutting down a massive counterfeiting operation. The counterfeiting operation both directly employs people to print money and get it into circulation. It also indirectly employs people based on the spending of the counterfeiters. Exposing the bills as counterfeits will put all these people out of work. Nonetheless, shutting down counterfeiters is still considered to be good economic policy. The assumption is that the people now employed as a result of the fake bills will instead be reemployed in the real economy. Eliminating waste in finance that isn't facilitating the working of the productive economy has the same impact as shutting down counterfeiters. It should lead to clear benefits as a whole, even if there are short-term costs as people need to adjust to an economy where they are not dependent on the spending of the counterfeiters or high-flyers in the financial industry.

It is generally less clear to ordinary workers that they stand to gain by measures that limit the incomes of those at the top. They may see such efforts as vindictive, rather than as an essential part of a policy to reduce inequality. If the high-end earners have enough market power to protect their income, then direct efforts to boost the incomes of those at the middle and bottom will ultimately prove largely futile by exactly the logic described above. Suppose that the CEOs, Wall Street traders, highly paid medical specialists, and the rest are able to fully protect their income against any increase in prices. In other words, their pay increases by enough to fully offset any additional expenses they must pay to sustain their standard of living. Imagine in this case that unions are able to successfully add another 10 percent of the workforce to their ranks and then push up wages for this big chunk of the workforce. Other things equal, this will lead to higher prices and therefore higher inflation. If the Fed is committed to an anti-inflation policy, it will raise interest rates sharply. This will push people out of work and put downward pressure on the wages of a large segment of the workforce.

It is possible that newly unionized workers end up better off in this story, but that will not be the case for low- and middle-income workers generally. Insofar as the unionized workers benefit, it will be at the expense of other comparably situated workers. That is, unless there is an actual cut in the income of those at the top. For this reason, pushing down the incomes of the rich is not a question of vindictiveness; it is a necessary condition for creating the possibility of broadly based wage growth. If doctors, lawyers, CEOs, and Wall Street-types are paid less, then we should see lower prices for a wide range of goods and services. And this means higher real wages.

The main remedies some propose are a wealth tax—especially on inherited estates—and a return to steeper progressive income taxation. The idea of taxing higher income brackets more without regard for whether their gains are earned “productively” or in extractive rentier ways represents a victory in dissuading critics from focusing on the policy aim of Adam Smith and other classical economists: preventing “unearned” income from being obtained in the first place. They recognized not only that rentier revenue (and capital gains) is earned in a predatory and unproductive way, but also that land rent, monopoly rent and financial charges are mainly responsible for the rising wealth of the One Percent as compared to that held by the rest of society.

Smith generalized the concept of rent as passive, unearned income—and used the labor theory of value to extend this idea to finance as well as land ownership:

“The labour and time of the poor is in civilized countries

sacrificed to the maintaining of the rich in ease and luxury. The landlord is maintained in idleness and luxury by the labour of his tenants. The moneyed man is supported by his exactions from the industrious merchant and the needy who are obliged to support him in ease by a return for the use of his money. But every savage has the full enjoyment of the fruits of his own labours; there are no landlords, no usurers, no tax gatherers.”

What makes classical economics more insightful than today’s mainstream orthodoxy is its focus on wealth ownership and the special privileges used to extract income without producing a corresponding value of product or service. Most inequality does not reflect differing levels of productivity, but distortions resulting from property rights and other special privileges. Distinguishing between earned and unearned income, classical economists asked what tax philosophy and public policy would lead to the most efficient and fair prices, incomes, and economic growth.

The largest banks, brokerage houses and money managers have no interest in promoting popular understanding that what they are touting as a road to prosperity is really a path to their own gains. Consequently, they back academic theory reassuring people that every crash (“self-correcting cyclical downturn”) leads to a recovery that will carry homeowners and other debtors to new heights—as long as the 99 Percent retain “confidence” (a euphemism for gullibility) in the system and let Wall Street insiders jump ship first.

Why haven’t democracies been able to convince politicians to subordinate the financial sector to serve industrial prosperity instead of siphoning off its gains? What happened to the century of classical economics that created policies to avert this fate? Economics has fallen prey to learned ignorance and trained incapacity making it unable to cope with the most pressing problems at hand. Decorated with complex mathematics as if it were an objective natural science, mainstream economics has become a lobbying effort to dismantle government power to regulate and tax rentiers. Well-subsidized models promote a trickle-down rationalization for the status quo, as if it were produced by inexorable economic laws. Free market ideologues then reason backward to construct a logic “proving” that economies become lower-cost and more efficient by lowering wage levels, removing taxes on wealth, cutting back public spending, and privatizing infrastructure monopolies.

In the resulting symbiosis between bankers and other rentiers, debt is created mainly to purchase rent-extracting privileges and other rent-yielding properties, turning their economic rent into interest and related financial fees. Nearly all new credit since 1980 has been extended to the FIRE sector—credit to transfer ownership of assets while running the economy into debt,

not to create new wealth. The fatal assumption is that making money by debt leveraging or kindred engineering is as productive as investing in new means of production. The intended effect is to leave financial management to technocrats, who turn out to be bank lobbyists toting around a few academics as useful idiots embedded in well-subsidized think tanks. Much as the oil industry subsidizes Junk Science to deny how carbon emissions contribute to global warming, so Wall Street subsidizes Junk Economics to deny that debt pollution plunges economies into chronic austerity and unemployment. Their conclusion is that no public regulation is needed, and no cleanup charges to compensate for the damage being caused.

Today's vested interests fight viciously to suppress their concept of economic rent and the associated distinction between earned and unearned income. It would save today's reformers from having to reinvent the methodology of what constitutes fair value. Censoring or rewriting the history of economic thought aims at thwarting the logic for taxing rent-yielding assets.

Taxing land rent would collect what nature provided freely (sunlight and land) and hence what should belong to the public sector as the tax base.

Low property tax is largely responsible for the heavy debt burden on real estate, because whatever the tax collector relinquishes is available to be paid to banks as debt service.

Rentiers have a love-hate relationship with inflation; when money gets cheaper, the interest they are paid is worth less: lending a \$1,000 for a year at 3% interest when inflation is 3% means that their unearned income is effectively zero. But low or near-zero real interest rates are good news for borrowers, and good for the economy because they minimize the deadweight costs. Not surprisingly, powerful rentier interests lean on governments to prioritize limiting inflation. Of course, since borrowers are also consumers, unless their incomes keep abreast of inflation, they lose out from inflation on the prices of consumer goods. The neoliberal governments of the 1980s and 1990s covertly supported rentiers by publicly supporting consumers' interests in price stability. But there's one kind of inflation that rentiers love: asset inflation; this is neoliberalism's dirty secret. It redistributes wealth from those who lack assets and have to rely on earned income to those who have them and can use them to get unearned income.

The buyer who takes out the biggest mortgage to pay the bank the most gets the asset. So real estate ends up being worth whatever banks will lend against it.

Now that land ownership has been democratized—on credit—a majority of most populations (two-thirds in the United States, and over four-fifths in Scandinavia) no longer pay rent to landlords. Instead, homeowners and commercial property investors pay most of the rental value to bankers as

mortgage interest. In the United States, bankers obtain about two-thirds of real estate cash flow, largely by reducing property taxes. The more the financial sector can reduce the government's tax take, the more rent is available for new buyers to pay interest to banks for loans to buy property. This explains why the financial sector backs anti-tax "Tea Party" protests.

As labor's wages rose above subsistence levels a century ago, economic futurists depicted a post-industrial leisure economy. Left out of account was that the passport to middle-class status involved democratizing property ownership and education on credit, driving labor into debt to buy housing and, more recently, to get an education.

Money creation is now monopolized by banks, which use this power to finance the transfer of property—with the source of the quickest and largest fortunes being infrastructure and natural resources pried out of the public domain of debtor countries by a combination of political insider dealing and debt leverage—a merger of kleptocracy with the world's financial centers.

Instead of central banks monetizing deficit spending to help the economy recover, they create money mainly to lend to banks for the purpose of increasing the economy's debt overhead. Since 2008 the US Federal Reserve has monetized at least \$4 trillion in Quantitative Easing credit to banks. The aim is to re-inflate asset prices for the real estate, bonds, and stocks held as collateral by financial institutions (and the One Percent), not to help the real economy recover.

For the past eight centuries the political aim of value theory has been to liberate nations from the three legacies of feudal Europe's military and financial conquests: land rent, monopoly pricing, and interest. Land rent is what landlords charge in payment for the ground that someone's forbears conquered. Monopoly rent is price gouging by businesses with special privileges or market power. These privileges were called patents: rights to charge whatever the market would bear, without regard for the actual cost of doing business. Bankers, for instance, charge more than what really is needed to provide their services.

The history of property acquisition is one of force and political intrigue, not labor by its existing owners. The wealthiest property owners have tended to be the most predatory—military conquerors, landed aristocracies, bankers, bondholders, and monopolists. Their property rights to collect rent for land, mines, patents, or monopolized trade are legal privileges produced by the legal system they control, not by labor. Medieval land grants typically were given to royal companions in return for their political loyalty.

When Argentina suffered a massive default in 2001, the global press, including *Time* and the *New York Times*, went so far as to propose that Patagonia be ceded from the country as a defaulted debt payment mechanism.

The New York Times article followed one published in the Buenos Aires financial newspaper *El Cronista Comercial* called “Debt for Territory,” which described a proposal by a US consultant to then-president Eduardo Duhalde for swapping public debt for government land.

Downsizing finance will not, in itself, avert the threatened privatization of the post office, water systems, roads, and communication, or cure the high cost of privatized medical insurance and other infrastructure. Once you remove the debt drain and rentier burden from industrial capitalism it will still leave in place the familiar old class tensions between employers and their workers. This will still leave the familiar labor problems of industrial capitalism—the fight to provide fair working conditions and basic necessities to all citizens, as well as to avoid war, environmental pollution, and other social strains.

However, the rise of financial power is working against all these objectives, preventing society from healing itself. Hooking traumatized labor on the debt treadmill is a major factor deterring workers from pressing for wage increases and better workplace conditions. Without resolving the debt overhead and providing a public option for banking services, the other problems are made much worse.

Who Owns Who?

Open-Air Debtors' Prisons

“If you owe the bank a hundred-thousand dollars, the bank owns you. If you owe the bank a hundred-million dollars, you own the bank.”

—American Proverb

L. Frank Baum's book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which appeared in 1900, is widely recognized to be a parable for the Populist campaign of William Jennings Bryan, who twice ran for president on the Free Silver platform—vowing to replace the gold standard with a bimetallic system that would allow the free creation of silver money alongside gold. As with the Greenbackers, one of the main constituencies for the movement was debtors: particularly, Midwestern farm families such as Dorothy's, who had been facing a massive wave of foreclosures during the severe recession of the 1890s. According to the Populist reading, the Wicked Witches of the East and West represent the East and West Coast bankers (promoters of and benefactors from the tight money supply), the Scarecrow represented the farmers (who didn't have the brains to avoid the debt trap), the Tin Woodsman was the industrial proletariat (who didn't have the heart to act in solidarity with the farmers), the Cowardly Lion represented the political class (who didn't have the courage to intervene). The yellow brick road, silver slippers, emerald city, and hapless Wizard presumably speak for themselves. 'Oz' is of course the standard abbreviation for ounce. Some have even suggested that Dorothy herself represents Teddy Roosevelt, since syllabically, 'dor-o-thee' is the same as 'thee-o-dor,' only backwards.

As an attempt to create a new myth, Baum's story was remarkably effective. As political propaganda, less so. William Jennings Bryan failed in three attempts to win the presidency, the silver standard was never adopted, and few nowadays even remember what *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was originally supposed to be about.

Debt is a social relation between lender and borrower, not merely a sum of money. Put like that, it may seem too obvious to mention, but we easily forget it in a world where debt is an ‘asset’ that can be bought and sold and can become an object of financial speculation, and where we read of debts as pure quantities—often of astronomical size—with little or no indication of who owes what to whom. Historically, the most important form that this social relation takes is between those who have spare cash and those who lack cash. In such cases, the economic inequality between the relatively rich and the relatively poor is a precondition of the debt relation being set up in the first place.

If the real interest rate—interest after adjusting for inflation—is zero, then the transaction is at least equal, even if the context that prompted it is not. But if the real rate of interest is positive, the inequality increases because repayments exceed the amount borrowed, and in effect the lender can take advantage of the relative weakness of the debtor. Unless the debtor defaults, when the loan is paid off the net flow of money is from the poor to the rich. Interest payments thus allow the better-off to Hoover up money from those with low incomes. On a global scale, loans—usually called aid—to Third World countries produce a net flow from poor countries to rich: in 2005 an estimated \$40.4 billion of aid to the very poorest countries yielded \$43.2 billion in debt service.

While rates of interest that merely compensate for inflation could be argued as reasonable, so that the value of the money that’s repaid to the lender is the same as that of the loan in the first place, the more rates of interest exceed the rate of inflation, the more unacceptable they are.

“All that we had borrowed up to 1985 was around \$5 billion, and we have paid about \$16 billion; yet we are still being told that we owe about \$28 billion. That \$28 billion came about because of the injustice in the foreign creditors’ interest rates. If you ask me, what is the worst thing in the world? I will say it is compound interest.”

—Olusegun Obasanjo

I met a girl. As it happened, she didn’t actually know what the IMF was, so I offered that the International Monetary Fund basically acted as the world’s debt enforcers—“You might say, the high-finance equivalent of the guys who come to break your legs. Think of them as Economic Hitmen.” I launched into historical background, explaining how, during the ‘70s oil crisis, OPEC countries ended up pouring so much of their newfound riches into Western banks that the banks couldn’t figure out where to invest the

money; how Citibank and Chase therefore began sending agents around the world trying to convince Third World dictators and politicians to take out loans (at the time, this was called “go-go banking”); how they started out at extremely low rates of interest that almost immediately skyrocketed to 20 percent or so due to tight US money policies in the early ‘80s; how, during the ‘80s and ‘90s, this led to the Third World debt crisis; how the IMF then stepped in to insist that, in order to obtain refinancing, poor countries would be obliged to abandon price supports on basic foodstuffs, or even policies of keeping strategic food reserves, and abandon free health care and free education; how all of this had led to the collapse of all the most basic supports for some of the poorest and most vulnerable people on earth. I spoke of poverty, of the looting of public resources, the collapse of societies, endemic violence, malnutrition, hopelessness, and broken lives.

“But what was your position?” she asked.

“About the IMF? We wanted to abolish it.”

“No, I mean, about the Third World debt.”

“Oh, we wanted to abolish that too. The immediate demand was to stop the IMF from imposing structural adjustment policies, which were doing all the direct damage, but we managed to accomplish that surprisingly quickly. The more long-term aim was debt amnesty. Something along the lines of the biblical Jubilee. As far as we were concerned,” I told her, “thirty years of money flowing from the poorest countries to the richest was quite enough.”

“But,” she objected, as if this were self-evident, “they’d borrowed the money! Surely one has to pay one’s debts.” It was at this point that I realized this was going to be a very different sort of conversation than I had originally anticipated. Where to start? I could have begun by explaining how these loans had originally been taken out by unelected dictators who placed most of it directly in their Swiss bank accounts, and ask her to contemplate the justice of insisting that the lenders be repaid, not by the dictator, or even by his cronies, but by literally taking food from the mouths of hungry children. Or to think about how many of these poor countries had actually already paid back what they’d borrowed three or four times now, but that through the miracle of compound interest, it still hadn’t made a significant dent in the principal. I could also observe that there was a difference between refinancing loans, and demanding that in order to obtain refinancing, countries have to follow some orthodox free-market economic policy designed in Washington or Zurich that their citizens had never agreed to and never would, and that it was a bit dishonest to insist that countries adopt democratic constitutions and then also insist that, whoever gets elected, they have no control over their country’s policies anyway. Or that the economic policies imposed by the IMF didn’t even

work. But there was a more basic problem: the very assumption that debts have to be repaid.

“Well, I know that sounds like common sense,” I said, “but the funny thing is, economically, that’s not how loans are actually supposed to work. Financial institutions are supposed to be ways of directing resources toward profitable investments. If a bank were guaranteed to get its money back, plus interest, no matter what it did, the whole system wouldn’t work. Say I were to walk into the nearest branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland and say ‘You know, I just got a really great tip on the horses. Think you could lend me a couple million quid?’ Obviously they’d just laugh at me. But that’s just because they know if my horse didn’t come in, there’d be no way for them to get the money back. But, imagine there was some law that said they were guaranteed to get their money back no matter what happens, even if that meant, I don’t know, selling my daughter into slavery or harvesting my organs or something. Well, in that case, why not? Why bother waiting for someone to walk in who has a viable plan to set up a laundromat or some such? Basically, that’s the situation the IMF created on a global level—which is how you could have all those banks willing to fork over billions of dollars to a bunch of obvious crooks in the first place.”

‘Surely one has to pay one’s debts’—the reason it’s so powerful is that it’s not actually an economic statement: it’s a moral statement. After all, isn’t paying one’s debts what morality is supposed to be all about? Giving people what is due them. Accepting one’s responsibilities. Fulfilling one’s obligations to others, just as one would expect them to fulfill their obligations to you. What could be a more obvious example of shirking one’s responsibilities than reneging on a promise, or refusing to pay a debt? It was that very apparent self-evidence, I realized, that made the statement so insidious. This was the kind of line that could make terrible things appear utterly bland and unremarkable.

This may sound strong, but it’s hard not to feel strongly about such matters once you’re aware of the effects. In the highlands of Madagascar there was an outbreak of malaria. It was a particularly virulent outbreak because malaria had been wiped out in highland Madagascar many years before, so that, after a couple of generations, most people had lost their immunity. The problem was, it took money to maintain the mosquito eradication program, since there had to be periodic tests to make sure mosquitoes weren’t starting to breed again and spraying campaigns if it was discovered that they were. Not a lot of money. But owing to IMF-imposed austerity programs, the government had to cut the monitoring program. Ten-thousand people died. Young mothers grieving for lost children. One might think it would be hard to make a case that the loss of ten-thousand

human lives is really justified in order to ensure that Citibank wouldn't have to cut its losses on one irresponsible loan that wasn't particularly important to its balance sheet anyway. But here was a perfectly decent woman—one who worked for a charitable organization no less—who took it as self-evident that it was. After all, they owed the money, and surely one has to pay one's debts.

The very fact that we don't know what debt is, the very flexibility of the concept, is the basis of its power. If history shows anything, it is that there's no better way to justify relations founded on violence, to make such relations seem moral, than by reframing them in the language of debt—above all, because it immediately makes it seem that it's the victim who's doing something wrong. Mafiosi understand this. So do the commanders of conquering armies. For thousands of years, violent men have been able to tell their victims that those victims owe them something. If nothing else, they 'owe them their lives'—a telling phrase—because they haven't been killed.

Debt is not just victor's justice; it can also be a way of punishing winners who weren't supposed to win. The most spectacular example of this is the history of the Republic of Haiti—the first poor country to be placed in permanent debt peonage. Haiti was a nation founded by former plantation slaves who had the temerity not only to rise up in rebellion, amidst grand declarations of universal rights and freedoms, but to defeat Napoléon's armies sent to return them to bondage. France immediately insisted that the new republic owed it 150 million francs in damages for the expropriated plantations, as well as the expenses of outfitting the failed military expeditions, and all other nations, including the United States, agreed to impose an embargo on the country until it was paid. The sum was intentionally impossible (equivalent to about 18 billion dollars), and the resultant embargo ensured that the name 'Haiti' has been a synonym for debt, poverty, and human misery ever since.

In a region of the eastern Himalayas, where as recently as the 1970s, the low-ranking castes—they were referred to as “the vanquished ones,” since they were thought to be descended from a population once conquered by the current landlord caste, many centuries before—lived in a situation of permanent debt dependency. Landless and penniless, they were obliged to solicit loans from the landlords simply to find a way to eat—not for the money, since the sums were paltry, but because poor debtors were expected to pay back the interest in the form of work, which meant they were at least provided with food and shelter while they cleaned out their creditors' outhouses and reroofed their sheds. For the “vanquished”—as for most people in the world, actually—the most significant life expenses were

weddings and funerals. These required a good deal of money, which always had to be borrowed. In such cases it was common practice for high-caste moneylenders to demand one of the borrower's daughters as security. Often, when a poor man had to borrow money for his daughter's marriage, the security would be the bride herself. She would be expected to report to the lender's household after her wedding night, spend a few months there as his concubine, and then, once he grew bored, be sent off to some nearby timber camp, where she would have to spend the next year or two as a prostitute working off her father's debt. Once it was paid off, she'd return to her husband and begin her married life. Where's this shit in your economics textbook?

The bulk of the national debts of England, France, and the others were based in money borrowed not to dig canals and erect bridges, but to acquire the gunpowder needed to bombard cities and to construct the camps required for the holding of prisoners and the training of recruits. Almost all the bubbles of the eighteenth century involved some fantastic scheme to use the proceeds of colonial ventures to pay for European wars. Paper money was debt money, and debt money was war money, and this has always remained the case. Those who financed Europe's endless military conflicts also employed the government's police and prisons to extract ever-increasing productivity from the rest of the population.

The conquest of the Americas began with mass enslavement, then gradually settled into various forms of debt peonage, African slavery, and "indentured service"—that is, the use of contract labor, workers who had received cash in advance and were thus bound for five-, seven-, or ten-year terms to pay it back. Needless to say, indentured servants were recruited largely from among people who were already debtors. In the 1600s there were at times almost as many white debtors as African slaves working in southern plantations, and legally they were at first in almost the same situation, since in the beginning, plantation societies were working within a European legal tradition that assumed slavery did not exist, so even Africans in the Carolinas were classified as contract laborers.

Of course this later changed when the idea of 'race' was introduced. And when African slaves were freed, they were replaced, on plantations from Barbados to Mauritius, with contract laborers again—though now ones recruited mainly in India or China. Chinese contract laborers built the North American railroad system, and Indian "coolies" built the South African mines. The peasants of Russia and Poland, who had been free landholders in the Middle Ages, were only made serfs at the dawn of capitalism, when their lords began to sell grain on the new world market to feed the new industrial cities to the west. Colonial regimes in Africa and Southeast Asia regularly

demanded forced labor from their conquered subjects, or alternately, created tax systems designed to force the population into the labor market through debt. British overlords in India, starting with the East India Company but continuing under Her Majesty's government, institutionalized debt peonage as their primary means of creating products for sale abroad.

This is a scandal not just because the system occasionally goes haywire but because it plays havoc with our most cherished assumptions about what capitalism really is—particularly that, in its basic nature, capitalism has something to do with freedom. For the capitalists, this means the freedom of the marketplace. For most workers, it means free labor. Marxists have questioned whether wage labor is ultimately free in any sense—since someone with nothing to sell but his or her body cannot in any sense be considered a genuinely free agent—but they still tend to assume that free wage labor is the basis of capitalism. And the dominant image in the history of capitalism is the English workingman toiling in the factories of the industrial revolution, and this image can be traced forward to Silicon Valley, with a straight line in between. All those millions of slaves and serfs and coolies and debt peons disappear, or if we must speak of them, we write them off as temporary bumps along the road. Like sweatshops, this is assumed to be a stage that industrializing nations had to pass through, just as it is still assumed that all those millions of debt peons and contract laborers and sweatshop workers who still exist, often in the same places, will surely live to see their children become regular wage laborers with health insurance and pensions, and their children, doctors and lawyers and entrepreneurs.

The Atlantic slave trade can be imagined as a giant chain of debt-obligations, stretching from Bristol to Calabar to the headwaters of the Cross River, where the Aro traders sponsored their secret societies; just as in the Indian Ocean trade, similar chains connected Utrecht to Capetown to Jakarta to the Kingdom of Gelgel, where Balinese kings arranged their cockfights to lure their own subjects to gamble their freedom away. In either case, the end product was the same: human beings so entirely ripped from their contexts, and hence so thoroughly dehumanized, that they were placed outside the realm of debt entirely.

But the end of the slave trade did not stop the enslavement. One the most famous and disturbing cases was the great Putumayo scandal of 1909–1911, in which the London reading public was shocked to discover that the agents of the subsidiary of a British rubber company operating in the Peruvian rainforest had created their very own Heart of Darkness, exterminating tens of thousands of Huitoto Indians—who the agents insisted on referring to only as “cannibals”—in scenes of rape, torture, and mutilation that recalled the very worst of the conquest four-hundred years earlier.

In the debates that followed, the first impulse was to blame everything on a system whereby the Indians were said to have been caught in a debt trap, made completely dependent on the company store:

“The root of the whole evil was the so called patron or ‘peonage’ system—a variety of what used to be called in England the ‘truck system’—by which the employee, forced to buy all his supplies at the employer’s store, is kept hopelessly in debt, while by law he is unable to leave his employment until his debt is paid. The peon is thus, as often as not, a de facto slave; and since in the remoter regions of the vast continent there is no effective government, he is wholly at the mercy of his master.”

The “cannibals” who ended up flogged to death, crucified, tied up and used for target practice, or hacked to pieces with machetes for failure to bring in sufficient quantities of rubber, had, the story went, fallen into the ultimate debt trap; seduced by the wares of the company’s agents, they’d ended up bartering away their very lives. A later Parliamentary inquiry discovered that the real story was nothing of the sort. The Huitoto had not been tricked into becoming debt peons at all. It was the agents and overseers sent into the region who were, much like the conquistadors, deeply indebted—in their case, to the Peruvian company that had commissioned them, which was ultimately receiving its own credit from London financiers. These agents had certainly arrived with every intention of extending that web of credit to include the Indians, but discovering the Huitoto to have no interest in the cloth, machetes, and coins they had brought to trade with them, they’d finally given up and just started rounding Indians up and forcing them to accept loans at gunpoint, then tabulating the amount of rubber they owed. Many of the Indians massacred, in turn, had simply been trying to run away.

In reality, then, the Indians had been reduced to slavery; it’s just that, by 1907, no one could openly admit this. A legitimate enterprise had to have some moral basis, and the only morality the company knew was debt. When it became clear that the Huitoto rejected the premise, everything went haywire, and the company ended up caught in a spiral of indignant terror that ultimately threatened to wipe out its very economic basis.

For most of human history—at least, the history of states and empires—most human beings have been told that they are debtors. Historians, and particularly historians of ideas, have been oddly reluctant to consider the human consequences; especially since this situation—more than any other—has caused continual outrage and resentment. Tell people they are inferior,

they are unlikely to be pleased, but this surprisingly rarely leads to armed revolt. Tell people that they are potential equals who have failed, and that therefore, even what they do have they do not deserve, that it isn't rightly theirs, and you are much more likely to inspire rage.

For the last five-thousand years, with remarkable regularity, popular insurrections have begun the same way: with the ritual destruction of the debt records—tablets, papyri, ledgers, whatever form they might have taken in any particular time and place. After that, rebels usually go after the records of landholding and tax assessments. In the ancient world, all revolutionary movements had a single program: Cancel the debts and redistribute the land.

One might say that these conflicts over debt had two possible outcomes. The first was that the aristocrats could win, and the poor remain “slaves of the rich”—which in practice meant that most people would end up clients of some wealthy patron. Such states were generally militarily ineffective. The second was that popular factions could prevail, institute the usual popular program of redistribution of lands and safeguards against debt peonage, thus creating the basis for a class of free farmers whose children would, in turn, be free to spend much of their time training for war.

Aristotle himself noted the connection when he emphasized that the constitution of a Greek state could be predicted by the main arm of its military: aristocracies if they relied on cavalry (since horses were very expensive), oligarchies in the case of heavy infantry (since armor was not cheap), democracy in the case of light infantry or navies (since anyone could wield a sling or row a boat)

Coinage played a critical role in maintaining this kind of free peasantry—secure in their landholding, not tied to any great lord by bonds of debt. In fact, the fiscal policies of many Greek cities amounted to little more than elaborate systems for the distribution of loot. It's important to emphasize that few ancient cities, if any, went so far as to outlaw predatory lending, or even debt peonage, entirely. Instead, they threw money at the problem. Gold, and especially silver, were acquired in war, or mined by slaves captured in war. Mints were located in temples—the traditional place for depositing spoils—and city-states developed endless ways to distribute coins, not only to soldiers, sailors, and those producing arms or outfitting ships, but to the populace generally, as jury fees, fees for attending public assemblies, or sometimes just as outright distributions, as Athens did most famously when they discovered a new vein of silver in the mines at Laurium in 483 BC. At the same time, insisting that the same coins served as legal tender for all payments due to the state guaranteed that they would be in sufficient demand that markets would soon develop.

Much of our contemporary moral and religious language originally emerged directly from these very conflicts. Terms like ‘reckoning’ or ‘redemption’ are only the most obvious, since they’re taken directly from the language of ancient finance. In a larger sense, the same can be said of ‘guilt,’ ‘freedom,’ ‘forgiveness,’ and even ‘sin.’ Arguments about who really owes what to whom have played a central role in shaping our basic vocabulary of right and wrong. The fact that so much of this language did take shape in arguments about debt has left the concept strangely incoherent. After all, to argue with the king, one has to use the king’s language, whether or not the initial premises make sense. If one looks at the history of debt, then, what one discovers first of all is profound moral confusion. Its most obvious manifestation is that most everywhere, one finds that the majority of human beings hold simultaneously that (1) paying back money one has borrowed is a simple matter of morality, and (2) anyone in the habit of lending money is evil.

What, precisely, does it mean to say that our sense of morality and justice is reduced to the language of a business deal? What does it mean when we reduce moral obligations to debts? What changes when the one turns into the other? And how do we speak about them when our language has been so shaped by the market? On one level the difference between an obligation and a debt is simple and obvious. A debt is the obligation to pay a certain sum of money. As a result, a debt, unlike any other form of obligation, can be precisely quantified. This allows debts to become simple, cold, and impersonal—which, in turn, allows them to be transferable. If one owes a favor, or one’s life, to another human being—it is owed to that person specifically. But if one owes forty-thousand dollars at 12-percent interest, it doesn’t really matter who the creditor is; neither does either of the two parties have to think much about what the other party needs, wants, is capable of doing—as they certainly would if what was owed was a favor, or respect, or gratitude. One does not need to calculate the human effects; one need only calculate principal, balances, penalties, and rates of interest.

If you end up having to abandon your home and wander in other provinces, if your daughter ends up in a mining camp working as a prostitute, well, that’s unfortunate, but incidental to the creditor. Money is money, and a deal’s a deal. From this perspective, the crucial factor is money’s capacity to turn morality into a matter of impersonal arithmetic—and by doing so, to justify things that would otherwise seem outrageous or obscene. The factor of violence may appear secondary. The difference between a debt and a mere moral obligation is not the presence or absence of men with weapons who can enforce that obligation by seizing the debtor’s possessions or threatening to break his legs. It is simply that a creditor has the means

to specify, numerically, exactly how much the debtor owes.

World religions are full of a kind of ambivalence. On the one hand they are outcries against the market; on the other, they tend to frame their objections in commercial terms—as if to argue that turning human life into a series of transactions is not a very good deal. What I think even these few examples reveal, though, is how much is being papered over in the conventional accounts of the origins and history of money. There is something almost touchingly naïve in the stories about neighbors swapping potatoes for an extra pair of shoes. When the ancients thought about money, friendly swaps were hardly the first thing that came to mind. True, some might have thought about their tab at the local ale-house, or, if they were a merchant or administrator, of storehouses, account books, exotic imported delights. For most, though, what was likely to come to mind was the selling of slaves and ransoming of prisoners, corrupt tax-farmers and the depredations of conquering armies, mortgages and interest, theft and extortion, revenge and punishment, and, above all, the tension between the need for money to create families, to acquire a bride so as to have children, and use of that same money to destroy families—to create debts that lead to the same wife and children being taken away.

“Some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already:
neither is it in our power to redeem them.”

One can only imagine what those words meant, emotionally, to a father in a patriarchal society in which a man's ability to protect the honor of his family was everything. Yet this is what money meant to the majority of people for most of human history: the terrifying prospect of one's sons and daughters being carried off to the homes of repulsive strangers to clean their pots and provide the occasional sexual services, to be subject to every conceivable form of violence and abuse, possibly for years, conceivably forever, as their parents waited, helpless, avoiding eye contact with their neighbors, who knew exactly what was happening to those they were supposed to have been able to protect. Clearly this was the worst thing that could happen to anyone—which is why, in the parable, it could be treated as interchangeable with being “turned over to the jailers to be tortured” for life. And that's just from the perspective of the father. One can only imagine how it might have felt to be the daughter. Yet, over the course of human history, untold millions of daughters have known—and in fact many still know—exactly what it's like.

One might object that this was just assumed to be in the nature of things; like the imposition of tribute on conquered populations, it might

have been resented, but it wasn't considered a moral issue, a matter of right and wrong. Some things just happen. This has been the most common attitude of peasants to such phenomena throughout human history. What's striking about the historical record is that in the case of debt crises, this was not how many reacted. Many actually did become indignant. So many, in fact, that most of our contemporary language of social justice, our way of speaking of human bondage and emancipation, continues to echo ancient arguments about debt. It's particularly striking because so many other things do seem to have been accepted as simply in the nature of things. One does not see a similar outcry against caste systems, for example, or for that matter, the institution of slavery. Surely slaves and untouchables often experienced at least equal horrors. No doubt many protested their condition. Why was it that the debtors' protests seemed to carry such greater moral weight? Why were debtors so much more effective in winning the ear of priests, prophets, officials, and social reformers? Why was it that officials like Nehemiah were willing to give such sympathetic consideration to their complaints, to inveigh, to summon great assemblies?

What makes debt different is that it is premised on an assumption of equality. To be a slave, or lower-caste, is to be intrinsically inferior. We are dealing with relations of unadulterated hierarchy. In the case of debt, we are dealing with two individuals who begin as equal parties to a contract. Legally, at least as far as the contract is concerned, they are the same.

If we really want to understand the moral grounds of economic life, and by extension, human life, it seems to me that we must start instead with the very small things: the everyday details of social existence, the way we treat our friends, enemies, and children—often with gestures so tiny (passing the salt, bumming a cigarette) that we ordinarily never stop to think about them at all. Anthropology has shown us just how different and numerous are the ways in which humans have been known to organize themselves. But it also reveals some remarkable commonalities—fundamental moral principles that appear to exist everywhere, and that will always tend to be invoked, wherever people transfer objects back and forth or argue about what other people owe them.

While people will tolerate terrible poverty—and do, daily, all over the world without revolution or war—they will not tolerate a rapid change from economic circumstances they expect to those they don't. Revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal. Revolution occurs when reality breaks away from anticipated reality.

Workers have been watching their standard of living get whittled away for decades and up till now they had always been able to come up with

ways to get by. The first adjustment they made was when women entered the workforce. Families added that income, you got to keep your boat, or your second car, or your vacation, and everything was OK. Next, people ran up debt on their credit cards. Then, people began pulling home equity out, borrowing against their houses. All three of those things have kept the middle class from having to sink down into abject poverty. But now all three coping mechanisms are at an end. There were no more family members to send to work, the expiration date had passed for the home-equity MasterCard, and still wages sank. Is there a fourth economic savior out there, or do you think that maybe we have reached the end?

Perverted Promises

Economists often encourage us to think of economies as masses of exchanges. I give you this money in exchange for that thing you want to sell. Once we have made the exchange, our obligations to each other are at end. But debt relations are not like this, for they last until they're paid off. This leads us to an argument against usury: interest charges make a claim on the future. Because lending at interest must ultimately be backed by increased output of goods and services, it requires continual growth, though at present the amount of debt far exceeds what economic growth can pay off. In the last forty years, the world has been more successful at creating claims on wealth than it has at creating wealth itself. Which may actually have been a good thing for the biosphere.

At a micro-scale, individual borrowers may be able to pay off interest by cutting their current spending—'accepting austerity,' we might say. But at the scale of a whole economy, things work differently: if many cut their consumption, this means that firms' sales go down, causing them to lay off workers; and those who lose income find it still harder to pay off debts. So government-imposed austerity only makes things worse, stifling the growth that is needed to pay off the debt. Unless debts are canceled—the creditors "take a haircut," as they say in financialese—economic growth is needed to enable debtors to pay off interest. Debt with interest places demands on economies that may be simply unachievable, and are likely to be environmentally unsustainable. And insofar as they control the future, debts project the lenders' dominance into the future.

It seems to me that we are long overdue for some kind of Biblical-style Jubilee: one that would affect both international debt and consumer debt. It would be salutary not just because it would relieve so much genuine human suffering, but also because it would be our way of reminding ourselves that money is not ineffable, that paying one's debts is not the essence of morality, that all these things are human arrangements and that if democracy is to mean anything, it is the ability to all agree to arrange things in a different way. It is significant, I think, that since Hammurabi, great imperial states have invariably resisted this kind of politics. Athens and Rome established the paradigm: even when confronted with continual debt crises, they insisted on legislating around the edges, softening the impact, eliminating obvious abuses like debt slavery, using the spoils of empire to throw all sorts of extra benefits at their poorer citizens, who, after all, provided the rank and file of their armies, so as to keep them more or less afloat—but all in such a way as never to allow a challenge to the principle of debt itself.

The governing class of the United States seems to have taken a remarkably similar approach: eliminating the worst abuses (e.g. debtors' prisons), using the fruits of empire to provide subsidies, visible and otherwise, to the bulk of the population; in more recent years, manipulating currency rates to flood the country with cheap goods from China, but never allowing anyone to question the sacred principle that we must all pay our debts.

If Clean Slates seem so radical as to be nearly unthinkable today, it is mainly because rentier ideology has suppressed awareness of most of civilization's customary proclamations spanning three-thousand years, from Mesopotamia and Egypt to Athens, Sparta, and Judea. Proclaiming Clean Slates to restore economic balance—annulling the accumulation of debts when they grew beyond the ability to be paid—kept pre-Roman civilizations financially stable. Mosaic Law placed this principle at the core of Jewish religion (Leviticus 25). Yet modern Christianity all but ignores the fact that in Jesus's first sermon (Luke 4) he unrolled the scroll of Isaiah and announced his mission to proclaim the Year of the Lord, as the Jubilee Year was known. Under the Ptolemies, the Greek dynasty that ruled Egypt after Alexander, periodic clean slates had become institutionized. It's well known that the Rosetta Stone, written both in Greek and Egyptian, proved to be the key that made it possible to translate Egyptian hieroglyphics. Few are aware of what it actually says. The stela was originally raised to announce an amnesty, both for debtors and for prisoners, declared by Ptolemy V in 196 BC.

It should not be surprising that the lesson of financial history is that debts that can't be paid won't be. The great policy question of our time is how not to pay them: Will nations permit creditors to foreclose and take the public and private assets into their hands, holding populations in bondage? Or will they declare a clean slate and start again?

Debts that can't be paid, won't be. The question is: how won't they be paid? There are two ways not to pay. The most drastic and disruptive way (euphemized as "business as usual") is for individuals, companies, or governments to sell off or forfeit their assets. The second way to resolve matters is to write down debts to a level that can be paid. Bankers and bondholders prefer the former option, and insist that all debts can be paid, given the "will to do so," that is, the will to transfer property into their hands. This is the solution that mainstream monetarist economists, government policy and the mass media popularize as basic morality. But it destroys Economy #1 to enrich the one percent who dominate Economy #2.

The disabling force of debt was recognized more clearly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (not to mention four-thousand years ago in the Bronze Age). This has led pro-creditor economists to exclude the history of

economic thought from the curriculum. Mainstream economics has become pro-creditor, pro-austerity (that is, anti-labor) and anti-government (except for insisting on the need for government bailouts of the largest banks and savers). Yet it has captured Congressional policy, universities, and the mass media to broadcast a false map of how economies work. So most people see reality as it is written—and distorted—by the One Percent. It is a travesty of reality. Spouting ostensible free market ideology, the pro-creditor mainstream rejects what the classical economic reformers actually wrote.

Every economy is planned. The question is, who will do the planning: banks or elected governments? Will planning and structuring the economy serve short-term financial interests (making asset-price gains and extracting rent) or will it promote the long-term upgrading of industry and living standards? Banks denounce public investment and a tax shift off wages onto rentier wealth as “the road to serfdom.” But strong public regulation is needed to prevent economies from polarizing between debtors and creditors, and to block the financial sector from imposing austerity and setting the economy on the road to debt peonage.

What has caused this basic shift away from debt cancellation is the privatization of credit. In Sumer and Babylonia the temples and the palace were the source of credit. In medieval Japan it also was the temples that were the creditors. Most people ran up debts, in Japan, to the temples for sake since the temples were also sake-makers. There were revolts against the sake-makers to cancel the debts, and they were successful.

The problem is the privatization of credit. The government today could cancel the student debts that are owed to the government. But they can't cancel the debts that are owed, say, to David Rockefeller or to other banks—to somebody else. Even the University of Chicago right-wingers, in the 1930s, proposed a 100% reserve. The idea is that banks should not be able to create credit, meaning create debt. When you create credit, you're creating somebody's debt. That should be a government function, because the government can relieve the debts.

The bankruptcy law was re-written in 2005 with the help of Joe Biden. It made it almost impossible to declare bankruptcy. It used to be you could declare bankruptcy and have a clean slate, on an individual basis, not a social basis, but now even that has been closed here. And for student loans you can't have bankruptcy at all.

Modern creditors avert public cancellation of debts (and making banks a public utility) by pretending that lending provides mutual benefit in which the borrower gains—consumer goods now rather than later, or money to run a business or buy an asset that earns enough to pay back the creditor with interest and still leave a profit for the debtor. This scenario of productive

lending does not typify the banking system as a whole. Instead of serving the economy's production trends, the financial sector (as presently organized) makes the economy top-heavy, by transferring assets and income into the hands of an increasingly hereditary creditor class.

Canceling debts was politically easiest when governments or public institutions—temples, palaces, or civic authorities—were the major creditors, because they were canceling debts owed to themselves. This is an argument for why governments should be the main suppliers of money and credit as a public utility.

“Well you're right, that's the problem: How do you popularize it all? What do you do today?”

The first thing is I think you have to frame it in the big picture. The way you get to people is to say: We're at a turning point in history. If we don't solve the problem of economic polarization, which is caused mainly by debt, we're going to go into another dark age. We're going to have neo-feudalism. We're going to have neo-serfdom, except that you're not going to be tied to the land like serfs were. You can live wherever you want, but wherever you are, you're going to have to pay about 40% of your income just for housing. And you're going to have to pay for water, and you're going to have to pay for the other needs. This is the new kind of serfdom. You have to re-frame what the economy is about in a way that people can understand.

And you need a multi-pronged approach to fight on four or five fronts. You need academics so that nobody can say you don't know what you're talking about. You need an organ, a periodical; you need books; you need to make use of the Internet; you need films; and you need a political group. You need to institutionalize this idea and give it a critical mass of coherence, and I think that's what you folks are a part of, right now.

Unless you are very affluent, you can't beat this spiral. You will save, and then they will raise tuition, and you will save, and they will raise tuition. No matter what you do, when the time comes for your child to enroll in college, they will take all your savings, and still demand you put a second mortgage on your house, drain your retirement accounts, or put your child in debt peonage for decades.

If you are affluent enough to save enough to keep pace with the price acceleration, you are benefiting (massively) from the immoral, extreme exploitation of your fellow citizens here, and your fellow humans abroad. So it is in your financial as well as moral interest to push for both free college tuition and a debt jubilee, to free your fellow citizens from financial enslavement and end the cycle of oppression.

There is no version of this paradigm where you have any right to be livid if some people are freed of their financial enslavement. Either freeing them frees you, as well, or freeing them only hurts you because you are one of their captors, and have already benefited only too well from this ugly system.

A debt is just the perversion of a promise. It is a promise corrupted by both math and violence. If freedom—real freedom—is the ability to make friends, then it is also, necessarily, the ability to make real promises. What sorts of promises might genuinely free men and women make to one another? At this point we can't even say. It's more a question of how we can get to a place that will allow us to find out. And the first step in that journey, in turn, is to accept that in the largest scheme of things, just as no one has the right to tell us our true value, no one has the right to tell us what we truly owe.

Impersonal Relations

Death, Honor, Taxes

Why did so many early kingdoms make subjects pay taxes at all? This is not a question we're used to asking. The answer seems self-evident. Governments demand taxes because they wish to get their hands on people's money. But if Smith was right, and gold and silver became money through the natural workings of the market completely independently of governments, then wouldn't the obvious thing be to just grab control of the gold and silver mines? Then the king would have all the money he could possibly need. In fact, this is what ancient kings would normally do. If there were gold and silver mines in their territory, they would usually take control of them. So what exactly was the point of extracting the gold, stamping one's picture on it, causing it to circulate among one's subjects—and then demanding that those same subjects give it back again? This does seem a bit of a puzzle. But if money and markets do not emerge spontaneously, it actually makes perfect sense. Because this is the simplest and most efficient way to bring markets into being.

Let us take a hypothetical example. Say a king wishes to support a standing army of fifty-thousand men. Under ancient or medieval conditions, feeding such a force was an enormous problem—unless they were on the march, one would need to employ almost as many men and animals just to locate, acquire, and transport the necessary provisions. On the other hand, if one simply hands out coins to the soldiers and then demands that every family in the kingdom was obliged to pay one of those coins back to you, one would, in one blow, turn one's entire national economy into a vast machine for the provisioning of soldiers, since now every family, in order to get their hands on the coins, must find some way to contribute to the general effort to provide soldiers with things they want. Markets are brought into existence as a side effect. This is a bit of a cartoon version, but it is very clear that markets did spring up around ancient armies. Despite the dogged liberal assumption—again, coming from Smith's legacy—that the

existence of states and markets are somehow opposed, the historical record implies that exactly the opposite is the case. Stateless societies tend also to be without markets.

It is one thing to explain why early states demanded taxes (in order to create markets). It's another to ask "by what right?" Assuming that early rulers were not simply thugs, and that taxes were not simply extortion—and no Credit Theorist, to my knowledge, took such a cynical view even of early government—one must ask how they justified this sort of thing. Nowadays, we all think we know the answer to this question. We pay our taxes so that the government can provide us with services. This starts with security services—military protection being, often, about the only service some early states were really able to provide. By now, of course, the government provides all sorts of things. All of this is said to go back to some sort of original "social contract" that everyone somehow agreed on, though no one really knows exactly when or by whom, or why we should be bound by the decisions of distant ancestors on this one matter when we don't feel particularly bound by the decisions of our distant ancestors on anything else. All of this makes sense if you assume that markets come before governments, but the whole argument totters quickly once you realize that they don't.

I might note that this assumption echoes the logic of neoclassical economic theory, which assumes that all basic institutional arrangements that define the context of economic activity were agreed to by all parties at some imaginary point in the past, and that since then, everything has and will always continue to exist in equilibrium. Contemporary social contract theorists incidentally make a similar argument, that there's no need to assume that this actually happened; it's enough to say it could have and act as if it did.

Sacrifice is called "tribute paid to Death." Or such was the manner of speaking. In reality, as the priests knew better than anyone, sacrifice was directed to all the gods, not just Death—Death was just the intermediary. Framing things this way, though, did immediately raise the one problem that always comes up, whenever anyone conceives human life through such an idiom. If our lives are on loan, who would actually wish to repay such a debt? To live in debt is to be guilty, incomplete. But completion can only mean annihilation. In this way, the 'tribute' of sacrifice could be seen as a kind of interest payment, with the life of the animal substituting temporarily for what's really owed, which is ourselves—a mere postponement of the inevitable.

More precisely, it offered the sacrificer a way to break out of a world in which everything, including himself, was a creation of the gods, to fashion an immortal, divine body, ascend into heaven, and thus be born into a world

he made himself where all debts could be repaid, to buy back his abandoned mortal body from the gods.

Why were cattle so often used as money? In Homer, when people measure the value of a ship or suit of armor, they always measure it in oxen—even though when they actually exchange things, they never pay for anything in oxen. It is hard to escape the conclusion that this was because an ox was what one offered the gods in sacrifice. Hence they represented absolute value. From Sumer to Classical Greece, silver and gold were dedicated as offerings in temples. Everywhere, money seems to have emerged from the thing most appropriate for giving to the gods.

If the king has simply taken over guardianship of the primordial debt we all owe to society for having created us, this provides a very neat explanation for why the government feels it has the right to make us pay taxes. Taxes are just a measure of our debt to the society that made us. But this doesn't really explain how this kind of absolute life-debt can be converted into money, which is by definition a means of measuring and comparing the value of different things. This is just as much a problem for credit theorists as for neoclassical economists, even if the problem for them is somewhat differently framed. If you start from the barter theory of money, you have to resolve the problem of how and why you would come to select one commodity to measure just how much you want each of the other ones. If you start from a credit theory, you are left with the problem of how to turn a moral obligation into a specific sum of money, how the mere sense of owing someone else a favor can eventually turn into a system of accounting in which one is able to calculate exactly how many sheep or fish or chunks of silver it would take to repay the debt. Or in this case, how do we go from that absolute debt we owe to God to the very specific debts we owe our cousins, or the bartender?

The answer provided by primordial-debt theorists is, again, ingenious. If taxes represent our absolute debt to the society that created us, then the first step toward creating real money comes when we start calculating much more specific debts to society, systems of fines, fees, and penalties, or even debts we owe to specific individuals who we have wronged in some way, and thus to whom we stand in a relation of "sin" or "guilt."

This is actually much less implausible than it might sound. One of the puzzling things about many theories about the origins of money is that they almost completely ignore the evidence of anthropology. Anthropologists do have a great deal of knowledge of how economies within stateless societies actually worked—how they still work in places where states and markets have been unable to completely break up existing ways of doing things. There are innumerable studies of, say, the use of cattle as money in eastern or southern Africa, of shell money in the Americas (wampum being the most

famous example) or Papua New Guinea, bead money, feather money, the use of iron rings, cowries, spondylus shells, brass rods, or woodpecker scalps. The reason that this literature tends to be ignored by economists is simple: “primitive currencies” of this sort is only rarely used to buy and sell things, and even when they are, never primarily to buy and sell everyday items such as chickens or eggs or shoes or potatoes. Rather than being employed to acquire things, they are mainly used to rearrange relations between people. Above all, to arrange marriages and to settle disputes, particularly those arising from murders or personal injury.

There is every reason to believe that our own money started the same way—even the English word ‘to pay’ is originally derived from a word for “to pacify, appease”—as in, to give someone something precious, for instance, to express just how badly you feel about having just killed his brother in a drunken brawl, and how much you would really like to avoid this becoming the basis for an ongoing blood-feud.

Debt theorists are especially concerned with this latter possibility. This is partly because they tend to skip past the anthropological literature and look at early law codes—taking inspiration here, from Philip Grierson, who in the ’70s, first suggested that money might first have emerged from early legal practice. Grierson was an expert in the European Dark Ages, and he became fascinated by what have come to be known as the “Barbarian Law Codes,” established by many Germanic peoples—Goths, Frisians, Franks, and so on—after the destruction of the Roman Empire in the 600s and 700s, soon followed by similar codes published everywhere from Russia to Ireland. Certainly they are fascinating documents. On the one hand, they make it abundantly clear just how wrong are conventional accounts of Europe around this time “reverting to barter.” Almost all of the Germanic law codes use Roman money to make assessments; penalties for theft, for instance, are almost always followed by demands that the thief not only return the stolen property but pay any outstanding rent (or in the event of stolen money, interest) owing for the amount of time it has been in his possession. On the other hand, these were soon followed by law codes by people living in territories—Ireland, Wales, Nordic countries, Russia—that had never been under Roman rule and these are, if anything, even more revealing. They could be remarkably creative, both in what could be used as a means of payment and on the precise breakdown of injuries and insults that required compensation:

“Compensation in the Welsh laws is reckoned primarily in cattle and in the Irish ones in cattle or bondmaids (*cumal*), with considerable use of precious metals in both. In the Germanic

codes it is mainly in precious metal. In the Russian codes it was silver and furs, graduated from marten down to squirrel. Their detail is remarkable, not only in the personal injuries envisioned—specific compensations for the loss of an arm, a hand, a forefinger, a nail, for a blow on the head so that the brain is visible or bone projects—but in the coverage some of them gave to the possessions of the individual household. Title II of the Salic Law deals with the theft of pigs, Title III with cattle, Title IV with sheep, Title V with goats, Title VI with dogs, each time with an elaborate breakdown differentiating between animals of different age and sex.”

This does make a great deal of psychological sense. I’ve already remarked how difficult it is to imagine how a system of precise equivalences—one young healthy milk cow is equivalent to exactly thirty-six chickens—could arise from most forms of gift exchange. If Henry gives Joshua a pig and feels he has received an inadequate counter-gift, he might mock Joshua as a cheapskate, but he would have little occasion to come up with a mathematical formula for precisely how cheap he feels Joshua has been. On the other hand, if Joshua’s pig just destroyed Henry’s garden, and especially, if that led to a fight in which Henry lost a toe, and Henry’s family is now hauling Joshua up in front of the village assembly—this is precisely the context where people are most likely to become petty and legalistic and express outrage if they feel they have received one groat less than was their rightful due. That means exact mathematical specificity, for instance, the capacity to measure the exact value of a two-year-old pregnant sow. What’s more, the levying of penalties must have constantly required the calculation of equivalences. Say the fine is in marten pelts but the culprit’s clan doesn’t have any martens. How many squirrel skins will do? Or pieces of silver jewelry? Such problems must have come up all the time and led to at least a rough-and-ready set of rules of thumb over what sorts of valuable were equivalent to others. This would help explain why, for instance, medieval Welsh law codes can contain detailed breakdowns not only of the value of different ages and conditions of milk cow, but of the monetary value of every object likely to be found in an ordinary homestead, down to the cost of each piece of timber—despite the fact that there seems no reason to believe that most such items could even be purchased on the open market at the time.

There is something very compelling in all this. For one thing, the premise makes a great deal of intuitive sense. After all, we do owe everything we are to others. This is simply true. The language we speak and even think in, our habits and opinions, the kind of food we like to eat, the knowledge that

makes our lights switch on and toilets flush, even the style in which we carry out our gestures of defiance and rebellion against social conventions—all of this, we learned from other people, most of them long dead. If we were to imagine what we owe them as a debt, it could only be infinite. The question is: Does it really make sense to think of this as a debt? After all, a debt is by definition something that we could at least imagine paying back. It is strange enough to wish to be square with one's parents—it rather implies that one does not wish to think of them as parents any more. Would we really want to be square with all humanity? What would that even mean? And is this desire really a fundamental feature of all human thought? Another way to put this would be: Are primordial-debt theorists describing a myth, have they discovered a profound truth of the human condition that has always existed in all societies, and is it simply spelled out particularly clearly in certain ancient texts from India—or are they inventing a myth of their own? Clearly it must be the latter. They are inventing a myth.

If we look through the work of ancient theologians, we find that most were familiar with the idea that sacrifice was a way by which human beings could enter into commercial relations with the gods, but that they felt it was patently ridiculous: If the gods already have everything they want, what exactly do humans have to bargain with? Exchange implies equality. In dealing with cosmic forces, this was simply assumed to be impossible from the start. The notion that debts to gods were appropriated by the state, and thus became the bases for taxation systems, can't really stand up either. The problem here is that in the ancient world, free citizens didn't usually pay taxes. Generally speaking, tribute was levied only on conquered populations. This was already true in ancient Mesopotamia, where the inhabitants of independent cities did not usually have to pay direct taxes at all. Similarly, Classical Greeks looked upon direct taxes as tyrannical and avoided them whenever possible. Taxes were not inevitable and were often seen as marks of conquest.

In other words, Benjamin Franklin was wrong when he said that in this world nothing is certain except death and taxes. This obviously makes the idea that the debt to one is just a variation on the other much harder to maintain.

What makes the concept of society so deceptive is that we assume the world is organized into a series of compact, modular units called 'societies,' and that all people know which one they're in. Historically, this is very rarely the case. Imagine I am a Christian Armenian merchant living under the reign of Genghis Khan. What is 'society' for me? Is it the city where I grew up, the society of international merchants (with its own elaborate codes of conduct) within which I conduct my daily affairs, other speakers of Armenian,

Christendom (or maybe just Orthodox Christendom), or the inhabitants of the Mongol empire itself, which stretched from the Mediterranean to Korea? Historically, kingdoms and empires have rarely been the most important reference points in peoples' lives. Kingdoms rise and fall; they also strengthen and weaken; governments may make their presence known in people's lives quite sporadically, and many people in history were never entirely clear whose government they were actually in. Even until quite recently, many of the world's inhabitants were never even quite sure what country they were supposed to be in, or why it should matter.

So if we are born with an infinite debt to all those people who made our existence possible, but there is no natural unit called 'society'—then who or what exactly do we really owe it to? Everyone? Everything? Some people or things more than others? And how do we pay a debt to something so diffuse? Or, perhaps more to the point, who exactly can claim the authority to tell us how we can repay it, and on what grounds?

Return again to that word, 'society.' The reason that it seems like such a simple, self-evident concept is because we mostly use it as a synonym for 'nation.' After all, when Americans speak of paying their debt to society, they are not thinking of their responsibilities to people who live in Sweden. It's only the modern state, with its elaborate border controls and social policies, that enables us to imagine society in this way, as a single bounded entity. This is why projecting that notion backwards into Vedic or Medieval times will always be deceptive, even though we don't really have another word.

What does it mean to imagine our responsibilities as debts? To whom do we owe our existence? We could put it this way. We owe our existence above all:

- To the universe, cosmic forces, to Nature. The ground of our existence. To be repaid through ritual: ritual being an act of respect and recognition to all that beside which we are small.
- To those who have created the knowledge and cultural accomplishments that we value most; that give our existence its form, its meaning, but also its shape. Here we would include not only the philosophers and scientists who created our intellectual tradition but everyone from William Shakespeare to that long-since-forgotten woman, somewhere in the Middle East, who created leavened bread. We repay them by becoming learned ourselves and contributing to human knowledge and human culture.

- To our parents, and their parents—our ancestors. We repay them by becoming ancestors.
- To humanity as a whole. We repay them by generosity to strangers, by maintaining that basic communistic ground of sociality that makes human relations, and hence life, possible.

Set out this way, though, the argument begins to undermine its very premise. These are nothing like commercial debts. After all, one might repay one's parents by having children, but one is not generally thought to have repaid one's creditors if one lends the cash to someone else.

These examples are all about overcoming separation: you are free from your debt to your ancestors when you become an ancestor; you are free from your debt to the sages when you become a sage, you are free from your debt to humanity when you act with humanity. All the more so if one is speaking of the universe. If you cannot bargain with the gods because they already have everything, then you certainly cannot bargain with the universe, because the universe is everything—and that everything necessarily includes yourself. One could in fact interpret this list as a subtle way of saying that the only way of “freeing oneself” from the debt was not literally repaying debts, but rather showing that these debts do not exist because one is not in fact separate to begin with, and hence that the very notion of canceling the debt, and achieving a separate, autonomous existence, was ridiculous from the start. Or even that the very presumption of positing oneself as separate from humanity or the cosmos, so much so that one can enter into one-to-one dealings with it, is itself the crime that can be answered only by death. Our guilt is not due to the fact that we cannot repay our debt to the universe. Our guilt is our presumption in thinking of ourselves as being in any sense an equivalent to Everything Else that Exists or Has Ever Existed, so as to be able to conceive of such a debt in the first place.

One might even say that what we really have, in the idea of primordial debt, is the ultimate nationalist myth. Once we owed our lives to the gods that created us, paid interest in the form of animal sacrifice, and ultimately paid back the principal with our lives. Now we owe it to the Nation that formed us, pay interest in the form of taxes, and when it comes time to defend the nation against its enemies, to offer to pay it with our lives. This is a great trap of the twentieth century: on one side is the logic of the market, where we like to imagine we all start out as individuals who don't owe each other anything. On the other is the logic of the state, where we all begin with a debt we can never truly pay. We are constantly told that they are opposites, and that between them they contain the only real

human possibilities. But it's a false dichotomy. States created markets. Markets require states. Neither could continue without the other, at least, in anything like the forms we would recognize today.

We have already accumulated endless debts before we get to the age at which we can even think of paying them. By that time, there's no way to calculate to whom we even owe them. The only way to redeem ourselves is to dedicate ourselves to the service of Humanity as a whole.

“Up in our country we are human! And since we are human we help each other. We don't like to hear anybody say thanks for that. What I get today you may get tomorrow. Up here we say that by gifts one makes slaves and by whips one makes dogs.”

Rather than seeing himself as human because he could make economic calculations, he insisted that being truly human meant refusing to make such calculations, refusing to measure or remember who had given what to whom, for the precise reason that doing so would inevitably create a world where we began comparing power with power; measuring, calculating, and reducing each other to slaves or dogs through debt. It's not that he, like untold millions of similar egalitarian spirits throughout history, was unaware that humans have a propensity to calculate. If he wasn't aware of it, he could not have said what he did. Of course we have a propensity to calculate. We have all sorts of propensities. In any real-life situation, we have propensities that drive us in several different contradictory directions simultaneously. No one is more real than any other. The real question is which we take as the foundation of our humanity, and therefore, make the basis of our civilization.

One popular theory of the origins of the state, that goes back at least to the fourteenth-century North African historian Ibn Khaldun, runs precisely along these lines: nomadic raiders eventually systematize their relations with sedentary villagers; pillage turns into tribute, rape turns into the “right of the first night” or the carrying off of likely candidates as recruits for the royal harem. Conquest, untrammelled force, becomes systematized, and thus framed not as a predatory relation but as a moral one, with the lords providing protection, and the villagers, their sustenance. But even if all parties assume they are operating by a shared moral code, that even kings cannot do whatever they want but must operate within limits, allowing peasants to argue about the rights and wrongs of just how much of their harvest a king's retainers are entitled to carry off, they are very unlikely to frame their calculation in terms of the quality or quantity of protection

provided, but rather in terms of custom and precedent: How much did we pay last year? How much did our ancestors have to pay?

The same is true on the other side. If charitable donations become the basis for any sort of social relation, it will not be one based on reciprocity. If you give some coins to a panhandler, and that panhandler recognizes you later, it is unlikely that he will give you any money—but he might well consider you more likely to give him money again. Certainly this is true if one donates money to a charitable organization. Such an act of one-sided generosity is treated as a precedent for what will be expected afterward.

Whenever the lines of superiority and inferiority are clearly drawn and accepted by all parties as the framework of a relationship, and relations are sufficiently ongoing that we are no longer simply dealing with arbitrary force, then relations will be seen as being regulated by a web of habit or custom. Sometimes the situation is assumed to have originated in some founding act of conquest. Or it might be seen as ancestral custom for which there is no need of explanation. But this introduces another complication to the problem of giving gifts to kings—or to any superior: there is always the danger that it will be treated as a precedent, added to the web of custom, and therefore considered obligatory thereafter. Xenophon claims that in the early days of the Persian Empire, each province vied to send the Great King gifts of its most unique and valuable products. This became the basis of the tribute system: each province was eventually expected to provide the same “gifts” every year.

Often, such arrangements can turn into a logic of caste: certain clans are responsible for weaving the ceremonial garments, or bringing the fish for royal feasts, or cutting the king’s hair. They thus come to be known as weavers or fishermen or barbers. This last point can’t be overemphasized because it brings home another truth regularly overlooked: that the logic of identity is, always and everywhere, entangled in the logic of hierarchy. It is only when certain people are placed above others, or where everyone is being ranked in relation to the king, or the high priest, or Founding Fathers, that one begins to speak of people bound by their essential nature: about fundamentally different kinds of human being. Ideologies of caste or race are just extreme examples. It happens whenever one group is seen as raising themselves above others, or placing themselves below others, in such a way that ordinary standards of fair dealing no longer apply. In fact, something like this happens in a small way even in our most intimate social relations. The moment we recognize someone as a different sort of person, either above or below us, then ordinary rules of reciprocity become modified or are set aside. If a friend is unusually generous once, we will likely wish to reciprocate. If she acts this way repeatedly, we conclude she is a generous

person, and are hence less likely to reciprocate.

We can describe a simple formula here: a certain action, repeated, becomes customary; as a result, it comes to define the actor's essential nature. Alternately, a person's nature may be defined by how others have acted toward him in the past. To be an aristocrat is largely to insist that in the past, others have treated you as an aristocrat—since aristocrats don't really do anything in particular, most spend their time simply existing in some sort of putatively superior state—and therefore should continue to do so. Much of the art of being such a person is that of treating oneself in such a manner that it conveys how you expect others to treat you: in the case of actual kings, covering oneself with gold so as to suggest that others do likewise. On the other end of the scale, this is also how abuse becomes self-legitimizing. In the United States, if a middle-class thirteen-year-old girl is kidnapped, raped, and killed, it is considered an agonizing national crisis that everyone with a television is expected to follow for several weeks. If a thirteen-year-old girl is turned out as a child prostitute, raped systematically for years, and ultimately killed, all this is considered unremarkable—really just the sort of thing one can expect to end up happening to someone like that. She has been transformed.

One can judge how egalitarian a society is by whether those ostensibly in positions of authority are merely conduits for redistribution, or able to use their positions to accumulate riches. The latter seems most likely in aristocratic societies that add another element: war and plunder. After all, just about anyone who comes into a very large amount of wealth will ultimately give at least part of it away—often in grandiose and spectacular ways to large numbers of people. The more of one's wealth is obtained by plunder or extortion, the more spectacular and self-aggrandizing will be the forms in which it's given away. And what is true of warrior aristocracies is all the more true of ancient states, where rulers almost invariably represented themselves as the protectors of the helpless, supporters of widows and orphans, and champions of the poor. The genealogy of the modern redistributive state—with its notorious tendency to foster identity politics—can be traced back not to any sort of “primitive communism” but ultimately to violence and war.

The slave trade, of course, represented violence on an entirely different scale. We are speaking here of destruction of genocidal proportions, in world-historic terms, comparable only to events like the destruction of New World civilizations. Neither do I mean in any way to blame the victims: we need only imagine what would be likely to happen in our own society if a group of space aliens suddenly appeared—armed with undefeatable military technology, infinite wealth, and no recognizable morality—and

announced that they were willing to pay a million dollars each for human workers, no questions asked. There will always be at least a handful of people unscrupulous enough to take advantage of such a situation—and a handful is all it takes. It is an all-too-familiar strategy, deployed by fascists, mafias, and right-wing gangsters everywhere: first unleash the criminal violence of an unlimited market, in which everything is for sale and the price of life becomes extremely cheap; then step in, offering to restore a certain measure of order—though one which in its very harshness leaves all the most profitable aspects of the earlier chaos intact. The violence is preserved within the structure of the law. Such mafias, too, almost invariably end up enforcing a strict code of honor in which morality becomes above all a matter of paying one's debts.

The African slave trade was, as I mentioned, an unprecedented catastrophe, but commercial economies had already been extracting slaves from human economies for thousands of years. It is a practice as old as civilization. The question I want to ask is: To what degree is it actually constitutive of civilization itself? I am not speaking strictly of slavery here, but of that process that dislodges people from the webs of mutual commitment, shared history, and collective responsibility that make them what they are, so as to make them exchangeable—that is, to make it possible to make them subject to the logic of debt. Slavery is just the logical end-point, the most extreme form of such disentanglement. But for that reason it provides us with a window on the process as a whole. What's more, owing to its historical role, slavery has shaped our basic assumptions and institutions in ways that we are no longer aware of and whose influence we would probably never wish to acknowledge if we were. If we have become a debt society, it is because the legacy of war, conquest, and slavery has never completely gone away. It's still there, lodged in our most intimate conceptions of honor, property, even freedom. It's just that we can no longer see that it's there.

How can human economies, with their social currencies—which are used to measure, assess, and maintain relationships between people, and only perhaps incidentally to acquire material goods—be transformed into something else? We cannot begin to think about such questions without taking into account the role of sheer physical violence. In the case of the African slave trade, this was primarily violence imposed from outside. Nonetheless, its very suddenness, its very brutality, provides us with a sort of freeze-frame of a process that must have occurred in a much slower, more haphazard fashion in other times and places. This is because there is every reason to believe that slavery, with its unique ability to rip human beings from their contexts, to turn them into abstractions, played a key role in the rise of markets everywhere. What happens, then, when the same process

happens more slowly?

It would seem that much of this history is permanently lost—since in both the ancient Middle East and the ancient Mediterranean, most of the really critical moments seem to have occurred just before the advent of written records. Still, the broad outlines can be reconstructed. The best way to do so, I believe, is to start from a single, odd, vexed concept: the concept of honor, which can be treated as a kind of artifact, or even as a hieroglyphic, a fragment preserved from history that seems to compress into itself the answer to almost everything we've been trying to understand.

On the one hand, violence: men who live by violence, whether soldiers or gangsters, are almost invariably obsessed with honor, and assaults on honor are considered the most obvious justification for acts of violence. On the other, debt. We speak both of debts of honor, and honoring one's debts; in fact, the transition from one to the other provides the best clue to how debts emerge from obligations; even as the notion of honor seemed to echo a defiant insistence that financial debts are not really the most important ones; an echo, here, of arguments that, like those in the Vedas and the Bible, go back to the very dawn of the market itself. Even more disturbingly, since the notion of honor makes no sense without the possibility of degradation, reconstructing this history reveals how much our basic concepts of freedom and morality took shape within institutions—notably, but not only, slavery—that we'd sooner not have to think about at all.

Of course we have already seen why governments might have incentive to do so: the existence of markets was highly convenient for governments, and not just because it made it so much easier for them to provision large standing armies. By insisting that only their own coins were acceptable as fees, fines, or taxes, governments were able to overwhelm the innumerable social currencies that already existed in their hinterlands, and to establish something like uniform national markets.

Readers of Equiano's book are often troubled by one aspect of the story: that for most of his early life, he was not opposed to the institution of slavery. At one point, while saving money to buy his freedom, he even briefly took a job that involved purchasing slaves in Africa. Equiano only came around to an abolitionist position after converting to Methodism and falling in with religious activists against the trade. Many have asked: Why did it take him so long? Surely if anyone had reason to understand the evils of slavery, he did. The answer seems, oddly, to lie in the man's very integrity. One thing that comes through strikingly in the book is that this was not only a man of endless resourcefulness and determination, but above all, a man of honor. Yet this created a terrible dilemma. To be made a slave is to be stripped of any possible honor. Equiano wished above all else to regain what had been

taken from him. The problem is that honor is, by definition, something that exists in the eyes of others. To be able to recover it, then, a slave must necessarily adopt the rules and standards of the society that surrounds him, and this means that, in practice at least, he cannot absolutely reject the institutions that deprived him of his honor in the first place.

It strikes me that this experience—of only being able to restore one's lost honor, to regain the ability to act with integrity by acting in accord with the terms of a system that one knows, through deeply traumatic personal experience, to be utterly unjust—is itself one of the most profoundly violent aspects of slavery. It is another example, perhaps, of the need to argue in the master's language, but here taken to insidious extremes. All societies based on slavery tend to be marked by this agonizing double consciousness: the awareness that the highest things one has to strive for are also, ultimately, wrong; but at the same time, the feeling that this is simply the nature of reality. This might help explain why throughout most of history, when slaves did rebel against their masters, they rarely rebelled against slavery itself.

Throughout history, moral justifications for slavery are rarely taken particularly seriously even by those who espouse them. For most of human history, most people saw slavery much as we see war: a tawdry business, to be sure, but one would have to be naïve indeed to imagine it could simply be eliminated.

Tiv horror stories about men who are dead but do not know it or who are brought back from the grave to serve their murderers, and Haitian zombie stories, all seem to play on this essential horror of slavery: the fact that it's a kind of living death.

This ability to strip others of their dignity becomes, for the master, the foundation of his honor. There have been places—the Islamic world affords numerous examples—where slaves are not even put to work for profit; instead, rich men make a point of surrounding themselves with battalions of slave retainers simply for reasons of status, as tokens of their magnificence and nothing else.

It seems to me that this is precisely what gives honor its notoriously fragile quality. Men of honor tend to combine a sense of total ease and self-assurance, which comes with the habit of command, with a notorious jumpiness, a heightened sensitivity to slights and insults, the feeling that a man (and it is almost always a man) is somehow reduced, humiliated, if any "debt of honor" is allowed to go unpaid. This is because honor is not the same as dignity. One might even say: honor is surplus dignity. It is that heightened consciousness of power, and its dangers, that comes from having stripped away the power and dignity of others; or at the very least, from the knowledge that one is capable of doing so. At its simplest, honor is

that excess dignity that must be defended with the knife or sword (violent men, as we all know, are almost invariably obsessed with honor). Hence the warrior's ethos, where almost anything that could possibly be seen as a sign of disrespect—in inappropriate word, an inappropriate glance—is considered a challenge, or can be treated as such.

Yet even where overt violence has largely been put out of the picture, wherever honor is at issue, it comes with a sense that dignity can be lost, and therefore must be constantly defended. The result is that to this day, 'honor' has two contradictory meanings. On the one hand, we can speak of honor as simple integrity. Decent people honor their commitments. This is clearly what honor meant for Equiano: to be an honorable man meant to be one who speaks the truth, obeys the law, keeps his promises, is fair and conscientious in his commercial dealings. His problem was that honor simultaneously meant something else, which had everything to do with the kind of violence required to reduce human beings to commodities to begin with.

What's unusual about Irish legal material is that it's all spelled out so clearly. This is partly because Irish law codes were the work of a class of legal specialists who seem to have turned the whole thing almost into a form of entertainment, devoting endless hours to coming up with every possible abstract possibility. Some of the provisos are so whimsical ("if stung by another man's bee, one must calculate the extent of the injury, but also, if one swatted it in the process, subtract the replacement value of the bee") that one has to assume they were simply jokes. Still, as a result, the moral logic that lies behind any elaborate code of honor is laid out here in startling honesty.

What about women? A free woman was honored at precisely 50 percent of the price of her nearest male relative (her father, if alive; if not, her husband). If she was dishonored, her price was payable to that relative. Unless, that is, she was an independent landholder. In that case, her honor price was the same as that of a man. And unless she was a woman of easy virtue, in which case it was zero, since she had no honor to outrage. What about marriage? A suitor paid the value of the wife's honor to her father and thus became its guardian. What about serfs? The same principle applied: when a lord acquired a serf, he bought out that man's honor price, presenting him with its equivalent in cows. From that moment on, if anyone insulted or injured the serf, it was seen an attack on the lord's honor, and it was up to the lord to collect the attendant fees. Meanwhile the lord's honor price was notched upward as a result of gathering another dependent: in other words, he literally absorbs his new vassal's honor into his own.

Attacking a peasant under the protection of a lord was the same as

raping a man's wife or daughter, a violation of the honor not of the victim, but of the man who should have been able to protect them.

When most of us think of a Mediterranean villager's sense of honor, we don't think so much of a casual attitude toward money as of a veritable obsession with premarital virginity. Masculine honor is caught up not even so much in a man's ability to protect his womenfolk as in his ability to protect their sexual reputations, to respond to any suggestion of impropriety on the part of his mother, wife, sister, or daughter as if it were a direct physical attack on his own person. This is a stereotype, but it's not entirely unjustified. One historian who went through fifty years of police reports about knife-fights in nineteenth-century Ionia discovered that virtually every one of them began when one party publicly suggested that the other's wife or sister was a whore.

Why is it so insulting to suggest that a man's sister is trading sex for money in the first place? This is one reason I say that concepts of honor still shape our perceptions in ways we're not aware of—there are plenty of places in the world where the suggestion that a man's wife is trading sex for profit, or that his sister is engaged with multiple partners, is more likely to be greeted with bemused good humor than with murderous rage. We've already seen examples in the Gunwinggu and the Lele.

There is reason to believe that it is in such moral crises that we can find the origin not only of our current conceptions of honor, but of patriarchy itself. This is true, at least, if we define "patriarchy" in its more specific Biblical sense familiar from the book of Genesis: the rule of fathers, with all the familiar images of stern bearded men in robes, keeping a close eye over their sequestered wives and daughters, even as their children kept a close eye over their flocks and herds. Readers of the Bible had always assumed that there was something primordial in all this; that this was simply the way desert people, and thus the earliest inhabitants of the Near East, had always behaved. This was why the translation of Sumerian, in the first half of the twentieth century, came as something of a shock.

In the very earliest Sumerian texts, particularly those from roughly 3000 to 2500 BC, women are everywhere. Early histories not only record the names of numerous female rulers, but make clear that women were well represented among the ranks of doctors, merchants, scribes, and public officials, and generally free to take part in all aspects of public life. One cannot speak of full gender equality: men still outnumbered women in all these areas. Still, one gets the sense of a society not so different than that which prevails in much of the developed world today. Over the course of the next thousand years or so, all this changes. The place of women in civic life erodes; gradually, the more familiar patriarchal pattern takes shape, with its

emphasis on chastity and premarital virginity, a weakening and eventually wholesale disappearance of women's role in government and the liberal professions, and the loss of women's independent legal status, which renders them wards of their husbands. By the end of the Bronze Age, around 1200 BC, we begin to see large numbers of women sequestered away in harems and—in some places, at least—subjected to obligatory veiling.

In fact, this appears to reflect a much broader worldwide pattern. It has always been something of a scandal for those who like to see the advance of science and technology, the accumulation of learning, economic growth—'human progress,' as we like to call it—as necessarily leading to greater human freedom, that for women, the exact opposite often seems to be the case. Or at least, has been the case until very recent times. A similar gradual restriction on women's freedoms can be observed in India and China. The question is, obviously, Why? The standard explanation in the Sumerian case has been the gradual infiltration of pastoralists from the surrounding deserts who, presumably, always had more patriarchal mores. There was, after all, only a narrow strip of land along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that could support intensive irrigation works, and hence, urban life. Civilization was thus from early times surrounded by a fringe of desert people, who lived much like those described in Genesis and spoke the same Semitic languages. It is undeniably true that, over the course of time, the Sumerian language was gradually replaced—first by Akkadian, then by Amorite, then by Aramaic languages, and finally, most recently of all, by Arabic, which was also brought to Mesopotamia and the Levant by desert pastoralists.

While all this did, clearly, bring with it profound cultural changes as well, it's not a particularly satisfying explanation. Former nomads appear to have been willing to adapt to urban life in any number of other ways. Why not that one? And it's very much a local explanation and does nothing, really, to explain the broader pattern. Feminist scholarship has instead tended to emphasize the growing scale and social importance of war, and the increasing centralization of the state that accompanied it. This is more convincing. Certainly, the more militaristic the state, the harsher its laws tended to be toward women. But I would add another, complementary argument. Historically, war, states, and markets all tend to feed off one another. Conquest leads to taxes. Taxes tend to be ways to create markets, which are convenient for soldiers and administrators. In the specific case of Mesopotamia, all of this took on a complicated relation to an explosion of debt that threatened to turn all human relations—and by extension, women's bodies—into potential commodities. At the same time, it created a horrified reaction on the part of the (male) winners of the economic game, who over time felt forced to go to greater and greater lengths to make clear

that their women could in no sense be bought or sold.

It's also important to emphasize that Sumerian men do not appear, at least in this earliest period, to have seen anything troubling about the idea of their sisters having sex for money. To the contrary, insofar as prostitution did occur—and remember, it could not have been nearly so impersonal, cold-cash a relation in a credit economy—Sumerian religious texts identify it as among the fundamental features of human civilization, a gift given by the gods at the dawn of time. Procreative sex was considered natural (after all, animals did it). Non-procreative sex, sex for pleasure, was divine.

The most famous expression of this identification of prostitute and civilization can be found in the story of Enkidu in the epic of Gilgamesh. In the beginning of the story, Enkidu is a monster—a naked and ferocious “wild man” who grazes with the gazelles, drinks at the watering place with wild cattle, and terrorizes the people of the city. Unable to defeat him, the citizens finally send out a courtesan who is also a priestess of the goddess Ishtar. She strips before him, and they make love for six days and seven nights. Afterward, Enkidu's former animal companions run away from him. After she explains that he has now learned wisdom and become like a God—she is, after all, a divine consort—he agrees to put on clothing and come to live in the city like a proper, civilized human being.

Already, in the earliest version of the Enkidu story, though, one can detect a certain ambivalence. Much later, Enkidu is sentenced to death by the gods, and his immediate reaction is to condemn the courtesan for having brought him from the wilds in the first place: he curses her to become a common streetwalker or tavern keeper, living among vomiting drunks, abused and beaten by her clients. Then, later, he regrets his behavior and blesses her instead. But that trace of ambivalence was there from the beginning, and over time, it grew more powerful. From early times, Sumerian and Babylonian temple complexes were surrounded by far less glamorous providers of sexual services—indeed, by the time we know much about them, they were the center of veritable red-light districts full of taverns with dancing girls, men in drag (some of them slaves, some runaways), and an almost infinite variety of prostitutes. There is an endlessly elaborate terminology whose subtleties are long since lost to us. Most seem to have doubled as entertainers: tavern-keepers doubled as musicians; male transvestites were not only singers and dancers, but often performed knife-throwing acts. Many were slaves put to work by their masters, or women working off religious vows or debts, or debt bondswomen, or, for that matter, women escaping debt bondage with no place else to go. Over time, many of the lower-ranking temple women were either bought as slaves or debt peons as well, and there might have often been a blurring of roles between priestesses who performed

erotic rituals and prostitutes owned by the temple (and hence, in principle, by the god), sometimes lodged within the temple compound itself, whose earnings added to the temple treasuries. Since most everyday transactions in Mesopotamia were not cash transactions, one has to assume that it was the same with prostitutes—like the tavern-keepers, many of whom seem to have been former prostitutes, they developed ongoing credit relations with their clients—and this must have meant that most were less like what we think of as streetwalkers and more like courtesans. Still, the origins of commercial prostitution appear to have been caught up in a peculiar mixture of sacred (or once-sacred) practice, commerce, slavery, and debt.

A source for commercial prostitution was the pauperization of farmers and their increasing dependence on loans in order to survive periods of famine, which led to debt slavery. Children of both sexes were given up for debt pledges or sold for “adoption.” Out of such practices, the prostitution of female family members for the benefit of the head of the family could readily develop. Women might end up as prostitutes because their parents had to sell them into slavery or because their impoverished husbands might so use them. Or they might become self-employed as a last alternative to enslavement. With luck, they might in this profession be upwardly mobile through becoming concubines. By the middle of the second millennium BC, prostitution was well established as a likely occupation for the daughters of the poor. As the sexual regulation of women of the propertied class became more firmly entrenched, the virginity of respectable daughters became a financial asset for the family. Thus, commercial prostitution came to be seen as a social necessity for meeting the sexual needs of men. What remained problematic was how to distinguish clearly and permanently between respectable and non-respectable women.

When we refer to ‘respectable women,’ then, we are referring to those whose bodies could not, under any conditions, be bought or sold. Their physical persons were hidden away and permanently relegated to some man’s domestic sphere; when they appeared in public veiled, they were effectively still ostentatiously walking around, even in public, inside such a sphere. Women who could be exchanged for money, on the other hand, must be instantly recognizable as such. This dynamic also led, over the course of millennia, to a systematic demotion of sexuality itself from a divine gift and embodiment of civilized refinement to one of its more familiar associations: with degradation, corruption, and guilt.

‘Patriarchy’ originated, first and foremost, in a rejection of the great urban civilizations in the name of a kind of purity, a reassertion of paternal control against great cities like Uruk, Lagash, and Babylon, seen as places of bureaucrats, traders, and whores. The pastoral fringes, the deserts and

stepped away from the river valleys, were the places to which displaced, indebted farmers fled. Resistance, in the ancient Middle East, was always less a politics of rebellion than a politics of exodus, of melting away with one's flocks and families—often before both were taken away.

In either case, between the push of commoditization, which fell disproportionately on daughters, and the pull of those trying to reassert patriarchal rights to “protect” women from any suggestion that they might be commoditized, women's formal and practical freedoms appear to have been gradually but increasingly restricted and effaced. As a result, notions of honor changed too, becoming a kind of protest against the implications of the market, even as at the same time (like the world religions) they came to echo that market logic in endless subtle ways.

The sudden abundance of chattel slaves completely transformed the nature of Greek society. First and most famously, it allowed even citizens of modest means to take part in the political and cultural life of the city and have a genuine sense of citizenship. But this, in turn, drove the old aristocratic classes to develop more and more elaborate means of setting themselves off from what they considered the tawdriness and moral corruption of the new democratic state.

Already by the age of Socrates, while a man's honor was increasingly tied to disdain for commerce and assertiveness in public life, a woman's honor had come to be defined in almost exclusively sexual terms: as a matter of virginity, modesty, and chastity, to the extent that respectable women were expected to be shut up inside the household and any woman who played a part in public life was considered for that reason a prostitute, or tantamount to one. The Assyrian habit of veiling was not widely adopted in the Middle East, but it was adopted in Greece. As much as it flies in the face of our stereotypes about the origins of “Western” freedoms, women in democratic Athens, unlike those of Persia or Syria, were expected to wear veils when they ventured out in public. The evidence is overwhelming, but until recently has been largely ignored. The practice began as an aristocratic affectation, but by the fifth century, all respectable women “were veiled daily and routinely, at least in public or in front of non-related men.”

We don't really know how to think about debt. Or, to be more accurate, we seem to be trapped between imagining society in the Adam Smith mode, as a collection of individuals whose only significant relations are with their own possessions, happily bartering one thing for another for the sake of mutual convenience, with debt almost entirely abolished from the picture, and a vision in which debt is everything, the very substance of all human relations—which of course leaves everyone with the uncomfortable sense that human relations are somehow an intrinsically tawdry business, that our

very responsibilities to one another are already somehow necessarily based in sin and crime. It's not an appealing set of alternatives.

In human economies, when this ability to rip people from their contexts does appear, it is most often seen as an end in itself. One can already see a hint of this among the Lele. Important men would occasionally acquire war captives from far away as slaves, but it was almost always to be sacrificed at their funeral. The squelching of one man's individuality was seen as somehow swelling the reputation, the social existence, of the other. In what might be called heroic societies, of course this kind of addition and subtraction of honor and disgrace is lifted from a somewhat marginal practice to become the very essence of politics. As endless epics, sagas, and eddas attest, heroes become heroes by making others small. In Ireland and Wales, we can observe how this very ability to degrade others, to remove unique human beings from their hearths and families and thus render them anonymous units of accounting—the Irish slave-girl currency, the Welsh washerwomen—is itself the highest expression of honor.

In heroic societies, the role of violence is not hidden—it's glorified. Often, it can form the basis of one's most intimate relations. In the *Iliad*, Achilles sees nothing shameful in his relation with his slave-girl, Briseis, whose husband and brothers he killed; he refers to her as his "prize of honor," but almost in the very same breath, he also insists that, just any decent man must love and care for his household dependents, "so I from my heart loved this one, even though I won her with my spear."

That such relations of intimacy can often develop between men of honor and those they have stripped of their dignity, history can well attest. After all, the annihilation of any possibility of equality also eliminates any question of debt, of any relation other than power. It allows a certain clarity. This is presumably why emperors and kings have such a notorious tendency to surround themselves with slaves or eunuchs.

There is something more here, though. If one looks across the expanse of history, one cannot help but notice a curious sense of identification between the most exalted and the most degraded; particularly between emperors and kings, and slaves. Many kings surround themselves with slaves, appoint slave ministers—there have even been, as with the Mamluks in Egypt, actual dynasties of slaves. Kings surround themselves with slaves for the same reason that they surround themselves with eunuchs: because the slaves and criminals have no families or friends, no possibility of other loyalties—or at least that, in principle, they shouldn't. But in a way, kings should really be like that too. As many an African proverb emphasizes: a proper king has no relatives either, or at least, he acts as if he does not. In other words, the king and slave are mirror images, in that unlike normal human beings

who are defined by their commitments to others, they are defined only by relations of power. They are as close to perfectly isolated, alienated beings as one can possibly become.

At this point we can finally see what's really at stake in our peculiar habit of defining ourselves simultaneously as master and slave, reduplicating the most brutal aspects of the ancient household in our very concept of ourselves, as masters of our freedoms, or as owners of our very selves. It is the only way that we can imagine ourselves as completely isolated beings. There is a direct line from the Roman conception of liberty—not as the ability to form mutual relationships with others, but as the kind of absolute power of “use and abuse” over the conquered chattel who make up the bulk of a wealthy Roman man's household—to the strange fantasies of liberal philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, about the origins of human society in some collection of thirty- or forty-year-old males who seem to have sprung from the earth fully formed and then have to decide whether to kill each other or begin to swap beaver pelts.

European and American intellectuals, it is true, have spent much of the last two-hundred years trying to flee from the more disturbing implications of this tradition of thought. Thomas Jefferson, that owner of many slaves, chose to begin the Declaration of Independence by directly contradicting the moral basis of slavery, writing “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights”—thus undercutting simultaneously any argument that Africans were racially inferior, and also that they or their ancestors could ever have been justly and legally deprived of their freedom. In doing so, however, he did not propose some radically new conception of rights and liberties. Neither have subsequent political philosophers. For the most part, we've just kept the old ones, but with the word ‘not’ inserted here and there. Most of our most precious rights and freedoms are a series of exceptions to an overall moral and legal framework that suggests we shouldn't really have them in the first place.

Formal slavery has been eliminated, but, as anyone who works from nine to five can testify, the idea that you can alienate your liberty, at least temporarily, endures. In fact, it determines what most of us have to do for most of our waking hours, except, usually, on weekends. The violence has been largely pushed out of sight. But this is largely because we're no longer able to imagine what a world based on social arrangements that did not require the continual threat of tasers and surveillance cameras would even look like.

The End of History

Primitive money was not originally a way to pay debts of any sort. It was a way of recognizing the existence of debts that cannot possibly be paid. This argument is worth considering in detail. In most human economies, money is used first and foremost to arrange marriages. The simplest and probably most common way of doing this was by being presented as what used to be called 'bride-price': a suitor's family would deliver a certain number of dog teeth, or cowries, or brass rings, or whatever is the local social currency, to a woman's family, and they would present their daughter as his bride. It's easy to see why this might be interpreted as buying a woman, and many colonial officials in Africa and Oceania in the early part of the twentieth century did indeed come to that conclusion.

The practice caused something of a scandal, and by 1926, the League of Nations was debating banning the practice as a form of slavery. Anthropologists objected. Really, they explained, this was nothing like the purchase of, say, an ox—let alone a pair of sandals. After all, if you buy an ox, you don't have any responsibilities to the ox. What you are really buying is the right to dispose of the ox in any way that pleases you. Marriage is entirely different, since a husband will normally have just as many responsibilities toward his wife as his wife will have toward him. It's a way of rearranging relations between people. Second of all, if you were really buying a wife, you'd be able to sell her. Finally, the real significance of the payment concerns the status of the woman's children: if he's buying anything, it's the right to call her offspring his own.

As anthropologists often note, the fact that one traces descent through the female line does not necessarily mean that women themselves have a lot of power. It can; it did among the Iroquois, and it does among Minangkabau right now. But it doesn't necessarily.

Nothing was both so indiscriminating, and so desirable, as money. True, Greek aristocrats would ordinarily insist that they were not attracted to common porn, and that the courtesans, flute-girls, acrobats, and beautiful boys that frequented their symposia were not really prostitutes at all (though at times they also admitted that they really were), they also struggled with the fact that their own high-minded pursuits, such as chariot-racing, outfitting ships for the navy, and sponsoring tragic dramas, required the exact same coins as the ones used to buy cheap perfume and pies for a fisherman's wife—the only real difference being that their pursuits tended to require a lot more of them. We might say, then, that money introduced a democratization of desire. Insofar as everyone wanted money, everyone, high

and low, was pursuing the same promiscuous substance. But even more: increasingly, they did not just want money. They needed it.

This was a profound change. In the Homeric world, as in most human economies, we hear almost no discussion of those things considered necessary to human life (food, shelter, clothing) because it is simply assumed that everybody has them. A man with no possessions could, at the very least, become a retainer in some rich man's household. Even slaves had enough to eat. Here too, the prostitute was a potent symbol for what had changed, since while some of the denizens of brothels were slaves, others were simply poor; the fact that their basic needs could no longer be taken for granted were precisely what made them submit to others' desires. This extreme fear of dependency on others' whims lies at the basis of the Greek obsession with the self-sufficient household.

The same tensions can be observed between neighbors, who in farming communities tend to give, lend, and borrow things amongst themselves—anything from sieves and sickles, to charcoal and cooking oil, to seed corn or oxen for plowing. On the one hand, such giving and lending were considered essential parts of the basic fabric of human sociability in farm communities, on the other, overly demanding neighbors were a notorious irritant—one that could only have grown worse when all parties are aware of precisely how much it would have cost to buy or rent the same items that were being given away.

With the appearance of money, it could also become unclear what was a gift, and what a loan. On the one hand, even with gifts, it was always considered best to return something slightly better than one had received. On the other hand, friends do not charge one another interest, and any suggestion that they might was sure to rankle. So what's the difference between a generous return gift and an interest payment?

One day Nasruddin's neighbor, a notorious miser, came by to announce he was throwing a party for some friends. Could he borrow some of Nasruddin's pots? Nasruddin didn't have many but said he was happy to lend whatever he had. The next day the miser returned, carrying Nasruddin's three pots, and one tiny additional one.

"What's that?" asked Nasruddin.

"Oh, that's the offspring of the pots. They reproduced during the time they were with me."

Nasruddin shrugged and accepted them, and the miser left happy that he had established a principle of interest. A month later Nasruddin was throwing a party, and he went over to borrow a dozen pieces of his neighbor's much more luxurious crockery. The miser complied. Then he waited a day.

And then another. On the third day, the miser came by and asked what had happened to his pots.

“Oh, them?” Nasruddin said sadly. “It was a terrible tragedy. They died.”

In a heroic system, it is only debts of honor—the need to repay gifts, to exact revenge, to rescue or redeem friends or kinsmen fallen prisoner—that operate completely under a logic of tit-for-tat exchange. Honor is the same as credit; it’s one’s ability to keep one’s promises, but also, in the case of a wrong, to ‘get even.’ As the last phrase implies, it was a monetary logic, but money, or anyway money-like relations, are confined to this. Gradually, subtly, without anyone completely understanding the full implications of what was happening, what had been the essence of moral relations turned into the means for every sort of dishonest stratagem.

Yet if debt was morality—and certainly at the very least it was in the interest of creditors, who often had little legal recourse to compel debtors to pay up, to insist that it was—what was one to make of the fact that money, that very thing that seemed capable of turning morality into an exact and quantifiable science, also seemed to encourage the very worst sorts of behavior? It is from such dilemmas that modern ethics and moral philosophy begin.

I think this is true quite literally. Consider Plato’s *Republic*, another product of fourth-century Athens. The book begins when Socrates visits an old friend, a wealthy arms manufacturer, at the port of Piraeus. They get into a discussion of justice, which begins when the old man proposes that money cannot be a bad thing, since it allows those who have it to be just, and that justice consists in two things: telling the truth, and always paying one’s debts. The proposal is easily demolished. What, Socrates asks, if someone lent you his sword, went violently insane, and then asked for it back (presumably, so he could kill someone)? Clearly it can never be right to arm a lunatic whatever the circumstances.

The old man cheerfully shrugs the problem off and heads off to attend to some ritual, leaving his son to carry on the argument. The son, Polemarchus, switches gears: clearly his father hadn’t meant ‘debt’ in the literal sense of returning what one has borrowed. He meant it more in the sense of giving people what is owed to them; repaying good with good and evil with evil; helping one’s friends and hurting one’s enemies.

Demolishing this one takes a little more work: are we saying justice plays no part in determining who one’s friends and enemies are? If so, wouldn’t someone who decided he had no friends, and therefore tried to hurt everyone, be a just man? And even if you did have some way to say for certain that one’s enemy really is an intrinsically bad person and deserves harm, by

harming him, do you not thus make him worse? Can turning bad people into even worse people really be an example of justice? But it is eventually accomplished.

At this point a Sophist, Thrasymachos, enters and denounces all of the debaters as milky-eyed idealists. In reality, he says, all talk of 'justice' is mere political pretext, designed to justify the interests of the powerful. And so it should be, because insofar as justice exists, it is simply that: the interest of the powerful. Rulers are like shepherds. We like to think of them as benevolently tending their flocks, but what do shepherds ultimately do with sheep? They kill and eat them, or sell the meat for money.

Socrates responds by pointing out that Thrasymachos is confusing the art of tending sheep with the art of profiting from them. The art of medicine aims to improve health, whether or not doctors get paid for practicing it. The art of shepherding aims to ensure the well-being of sheep, whether or not the shepherd (or his employer) is also a businessman who knows how to extract a profit from them. Just so with the art of governance. If such an art exists, it must have its own intrinsic aim apart from any profit one might also get from it, and what can this be other than the establishment of social justice? It's only the existence of money, Socrates suggests, that allows us to imagine that words like "power" and "interest" refer to universal realities that can be pursued in their own right, let alone that all pursuits are really ultimately the pursuit of power, advantage, or self-interest. The question, he said, is how to ensure that those who hold political office will do so not for gain, but rather for honor.

Heroic honor no longer works in a world where commerce, class, and profit have so confused everything that peoples' true motives are never clear. How do we even know who our enemies are? Finally, Plato presents us with cynical realpolitik. Maybe nobody really owes anything to anybody. Maybe those who pursue profit for its own sake have it right after all. But even that does not hold up. We are left with a certainty that existing standards are incoherent and self-contradictory, and that some sort of radical break would be required in order to create a world that makes any logical sense. But most of those who seriously consider a radical break along the lines that Plato suggested have come to the conclusion that there might be far worse things than moral incoherence. And there we have stood, ever since, in the midst of an insoluble dilemma.

For most of the great urban civilizations of the time, the early Iron Age was a kind of pause between empires, a time when political landscapes were broken into a checkerboard of often diminutive kingdoms and city-states, most often at constant war externally and locked in constant political debate within. Each case witnessed the development of something akin to a

drop-out culture, with ascetics and sages fleeing to the wilderness or wandering from town to town seeking wisdom; in each, too, they were eventually reabsorbed into the political order as a new kind of intellectual or spiritual elite, whether as Greek sophists, Jewish prophets, Chinese sages, or Indian holy men. Whatever the reasons, the result was the first period in history in which human beings applied principles of reasoned inquiry to the great questions of human existence. All these great regions of the world, China, India, and the Mediterranean, saw the emergence of remarkably parallel philosophical trends, from skepticism to idealism—in fact, almost the entire range of positions about the nature of the cosmos, mind, action, and the ends of human existence that have remained the stuff of philosophy to this day. No really new ideas have been added since that time.

Without mass literacy, neither the emergence of mass intellectual movements, nor the spread of Axial Age ideas would have been possible. By the end of the period, these ideas had produced a world where even the leaders of barbarian armies descending on the Roman empire felt obliged to take a position on the question of the Mystery of the Trinity, and where Chinese monks could spend time debating the relative merits of the eighteen schools of Classical Indian Buddhism.

Within human economies, motives are assumed to be complex. When a lord gives a gift to a retainer, there is no reason to doubt that it is inspired by a genuine desire to benefit that retainer, even if it is also a strategic move designed to ensure loyalty, and an act of magnificence meant to remind everyone else that he is great and the retainer small. There is no sense of contradiction here. Similarly, gifts between equals are usually fraught with many layers of love, envy, pride, spite, communal solidarity, or any of a dozen other things. Speculating on such matters is a major form of daily entertainment. What's missing, though, is any sense that the most selfish ("self-interested") motive is necessarily the real one: those speculating on hidden motives are just as likely to assume that someone is secretly trying to help a friend or harm an enemy as to acquire some advantage for him- or herself. Neither is any of this likely to have changed much in the rise of early credit markets, where the value of an IOU was as much dependent on assessments of its issuer's character as on his disposable income, and motives of love, envy, pride, et cetera could never be completely set aside.

Cash transactions between strangers were different, and all the more so when trading is set against a background of war and emerges from disposing of loot and provisioning soldiers; when one often had best not ask where the objects traded came from, and where no one is much interested in forming ongoing personal relationships anyway. Here, transactions really do become simply a figuring-out of how many of X will go for how many of Y, of

calculating proportions, estimating quality, and trying to get the best deal for oneself. The result, during the Axial Age, was a new way of thinking about human motivation, a radical simplification of motives that made it possible to begin speaking of concepts like ‘profit’ and ‘advantage’—and imagining that this is what people are really pursuing, in every aspect of existence, as if the violence of war or the impersonality of the marketplace has simply allowed them to drop the pretense that they ever cared about anything else. It was this, in turn, that allowed human life to seem like it could be reduced to a matter of means-to-end calculation, and hence something that could be examined using the same means that one used to study the attraction and repulsion of celestial bodies.

If the underlying assumption very much resembles those of contemporary economists, it’s no coincidence—but with the difference that, in an age when money, markets, states, and military affairs were all intrinsically connected, money was needed to pay armies to capture slaves to mine gold to produce money; when ‘cutthroat competition’ often did involve the literal cutting of throats, it never occurred to anyone to imagine that selfish ends could be pursued by peaceful means. Certainly, this picture of humanity does begin to appear, with startling consistency, across Eurasia, wherever we also see coinage and philosophy appear.

Wherever the military-coinage-slavery complex began to take hold, we find political theorists propounding similar ideas. Kautilya was no different: the title of his book, *Arthashastra*, is usually translated as “manual of statecraft,” since it consists of advice to rulers, but its more literal translation is “the science of material gain.” Like the Legalists, Kautilya emphasized the need to create a pretext that governance was a matter of morality and justice, but in addressing the rulers themselves, he insisted that “war and peace are considered solely from the point of view of profit”—of amassing wealth to create a more effective army, of using the army to dominate markets and control resources to amass more wealth, and so on. In Greece we’ve got Thrasymachos. True, Greece was slightly different. Greek city-states did not have kings, and the collapse of private interests and affairs of state was in principle universally denounced as tyranny. Still, in practice, what this meant was that city-states, and even political factions, ended up acting in precisely the same coldly calculating way as Indian or Chinese sovereigns. Anyone who has ever read Thucydides’ Melian dialogue—in which Athenian generals present the population of a previously friendly city with elegantly reasoned arguments for why the Athenians have determined that it is to the advantage of their empire to threaten them with collective massacre if they are not willing to become tribute-paying subjects, and why it is equally in the interests of the Melians to submit—is aware of the results.

Another striking feature of this literature is its resolute materialism. Goddesses and gods, magic and oracles, sacrificial ritual, ancestral cults, even caste and ritual status systems, all either disappear or are sidelined, no longer treated as ends in themselves but as yet mere tools to be used for the pursuit of material gain.

That intellectuals willing to produce such theories should win the ears of princes is hardly surprising. Neither is it particularly surprising that other intellectuals should have been so offended by this sort of cynicism that they began to make common cause with the popular movements that inevitably began to form against those princes. But as is so often the case, oppositional intellectuals were faced with two choices: either adopt the reigning terms of debate, or try to come up with a diametrical inversion.

Mo Di, the founder of Mohism, took the first approach. He turned the concept of 'li' (profit) into something more like 'social utility,' and then he attempted to demonstrate that war itself is, by definition, an unprofitable activity. For example, he wrote, campaigns can only be fought in spring and autumn, and each had equally deleterious effects:

“If in the spring then the people miss their sowing and planting, if in the autumn, they miss their reaping and harvesting. Even if they miss only one season, then the number of people who will die of cold and hunger is incalculable. Now let us calculate the army’s equipment, the arrows, standards, tents, armor, shields, and sword hilts; the number of these which will break and perish and not come back. So also with oxen and horses.”

His conclusion: if one could add up the total costs of aggression in human lives, animal lives, and material damage, one would be forced to the conclusion that they never outweighed the benefits—even for the victor. In fact, Mo Di took this sort of logic so far that he ended up arguing that the only way to optimize the overall profit of humanity was to abandon the pursuit of private profit entirely and adopt a principle of what he called “universal love”—essentially arguing that if one takes the principle of market exchange to its logical conclusion, it can only lead to a kind of communism.

The Confucian ideal of *ren*, of humane benevolence, was basically just a more complete inversion of profit-seeking calculation than Mo Di’s universal love; the main difference was that the Confucians added a certain aversion to calculation itself, preferring what might almost be called an art of decency. Taoists were later to take this even further with their embrace of intuition and spontaneity. All were so many attempts to provide a mirror image

of market logic. Still, a mirror image is, ultimately, just that: the same thing, only backwards. Before long we end up with an endless maze of paired opposites—egoism versus altruism, profit versus charity, materialism versus idealism, calculation versus spontaneity—none of which could ever have been imagined except by someone starting out from pure, calculating, self-interested market transactions.

Axial Age spirituality is built on a bedrock of materialism. This is its secret; one might almost say, the thing that has become invisible to us. But if one looks at the very beginnings of philosophical inquiry in Greece and India—the point when there was as yet no difference between what we'd now call 'philosophy' and what we'd now call 'science'—this is exactly what one finds. 'Theory,' if we can call it that, begins with the questions: 'What substance is the world made of?' 'What is the underlying material behind the physical forms of objects in the world?' 'Is everything made up of varying combinations of certain basic elements—earth, air, water, fire, stone, motion, mind, number—or are these basic elements just the forms taken by some even more elementary substance?' In just about every case, some notion of God, Mind, Spirit, some active organizing principle that gave form to and was not itself substance, emerged as well. But this was the kind of spirit that only emerges in relation to inert matter.

The war between Spirit and Flesh, then, between the noble Idea and ugly Reality, the rational intellect versus stubborn corporeal drives and desires that resist it, even the idea that peace and community are not things that emerge spontaneously but that need to be stamped onto our baser material natures like a divine insignia stamped into base metal—all those ideas that came to haunt the religious and philosophical traditions of the Axial Age, and that have continued to surprise people ever since—can already be seen as inscribed in the nature of this new form of money.

It would be foolish to argue that all Axial Age philosophy was simply a meditation on the nature of coinage but this is a critical starting place. One of the reasons that the pre-Socratic philosophers began to frame their questions in the peculiar way they did, asking, for instance: What are Ideas? Are they merely collective conventions? Do they exist, as Plato insisted, in some divine domain beyond material existence? Or do they exist in our minds? Or do our minds themselves ultimately partake of that divine immaterial domain? And if they do, what does this say about our relation to our bodies?

What we see then is a strange kind of back-and-forth, attack and riposte, whereby the market, the state, war, and religion all continually separate and merge with one another. Let me summarize it as briefly as I can:

1. Markets appear to have first emerged, in the Near East at least, as a side effect of government administrative systems. Over time, however, the logic of the market became entangled in military affairs, where it became almost indistinguishable from the mercenary logic of Axial Age warfare, and then, finally, that logic came to conquer government itself; to define its very purpose.
2. As a result: everywhere we see the military-coinage-slavery complex emerge, we also see the birth of materialist philosophies. They are materialist, in fact, in both senses of the term: in that they envision a world made up of material forces, rather than divine powers, and in that they imagine the ultimate end of human existence to be the accumulation of material wealth, with ideals like morality and justice being reframed as tools designed to satisfy the masses.
3. Everywhere, too, we find philosophers who react to this by exploring ideas of humanity and the soul, attempting to find a new foundation for ethics and morality.
4. Everywhere, some of these philosophers made common cause with social movements that inevitably formed in the face of these new and extraordinarily violent and cynical elites. The result was something new to human history: popular movements that were also intellectual movements, due to the assumption that those opposing existing power arrangements did so in the name of some kind of theory about the nature of reality.
5. Everywhere, these movements were first and foremost peace movements, in that they rejected the new conception of violence, and especially aggressive war, as the foundation of politics.
6. Everywhere too, there seems to have been an initial impulse to use the new intellectual tools provided by impersonal markets to come up with a new basis for morality, and everywhere, it foundered. Mohism, with its notion of social profit, flourished briefly and then collapsed. It was replaced by Confucianism, which rejected such ideas outright. We have already seen that reimagining moral responsibility in terms of debt—an impulse that cropped up in both Greece and India—while almost inevitable given the new economic circumstances, seems to prove uniformly unsatisfying. The stronger impulse is to imagine another world where debt—and with it, all other worldly connections—can be entirely annihilated, where social attachments are seen as forms of bondage; just as the body is a prison.

7. Rulers' attitudes changed over time. At first, most appear to have affected an attitude of bemused tolerance toward the new philosophical and religious movements while privately embracing some version of cynical *realpolitik*. But as warring cities and principalities were replaced by great empires, and especially as those empires began to reach the limits of their expansion, sending the military-coinage-slavery complex into crisis, all this suddenly changed. In India, Aśoka tried to re-found his kingdom on Buddhism; in Rome, Constantine turned to the Christians; in China, the Han emperor Wu-Ti, faced with a similar military and financial crisis, adopted Confucianism as the philosophy of state.

Of the three, only Wu Ti was ultimately successful: the Chinese empire endured, in one form or another, for two-thousand years, almost always with Confucianism as its official ideology. In Constantine's case the Western empire fell apart, but the Roman church endured. Aśoka's project could be said to be the least successful. Not only did his empire fall apart, replaced by an endless series of weaker, usually fragmentary kingdoms, but Buddhism itself was largely driven out of his one-time territories, though it did establish itself much more firmly in China, Nepal, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan, and much of Southeast Asia.

8. The ultimate effect was a kind of ideal division of spheres of human activity that endures to this day: on the one hand the market, on the other, religion. To put the matter crudely: if one relegates a certain social space simply to the selfish acquisition of material things, it is almost inevitable that soon someone else will come to set aside another domain in which to preach that, from the perspective of ultimate values, material things are unimportant; that selfishness—or even the self—are illusory, and that to give is better than to receive. If nothing else, it is surely significant that all the Axial Age religions emphasized the importance of charity, a concept that had barely existed before. Pure greed and pure generosity are complementary concepts; neither could really be imagined without the other; both could only arise in institutional contexts that insisted on such pure and single-minded behavior; and both seem to have appeared together wherever impersonal, physical, cash money also appeared on the scene.

It would be easy enough to write the religious movements off as escapist, as promising the victims of the Axial Age empires liberation in the next world as a way of letting them accept their lot in this one, and convincing the rich that all they really owed the poor were occasional charitable donations.

Radical thinkers almost invariably do write them off in this way. Surely the willingness of the governments themselves to eventually embrace them would seem to support this conclusion. But the issue is more complicated.

First of all, there is something to be said for escapism. Popular uprisings in the ancient world usually ended in the massacre of the rebels. Physical escape, such as via exodus or defection, has always been the most effective response to oppressive conditions since the earliest times we know about. Where physical escape is not possible, what, exactly, is an oppressed peasant supposed to do? Sit and contemplate her misery? At the very least, otherworldly religions provided glimpses of radical alternatives. Often they allowed people to create other worlds within this one, liberated spaces of one sort or another. It is surely significant that the only people who succeeded in abolishing slavery in the ancient world were religious sects, such as the Essenes—who did so, effectively, by defecting from the larger social order and forming their own utopian communities.

Or, in a smaller but more enduring example: the democratic city-states of northern India were all eventually stamped out by the great empires, but the Buddha admired the democratic organization of their public assemblies and adopted it as the model for his followers. Buddhist monasteries are still called *sangha*, the ancient name for such republics, and continue to operate by the same consensus-finding process to this day, preserving a certain egalitarian democratic ideal that would otherwise have been entirely forgotten.

Finally, the larger historical achievements of these movements are not, in fact, insignificant. As they took hold, things began to change. Wars became less brutal and less frequent. Slavery faded as an institution, to the point at which, by the Middle Ages, it had become insignificant or even nonexistent across most of Eurasia. Everywhere too, the new religious authorities began to seriously address the social dislocations introduced by debt.

Everywhere, the age began with the collapse of empires. Eventually, new states formed, but in these new states, the nexus between war, bullion, and slavery was broken; conquest and acquisition for their own sake were no longer celebrated as the end of all political life. At the same time, economic life, from the conduct of international trade to the organization of local markets, came to fall increasingly under the regulation of religious authorities. One result was a widespread movement to control, or even forbid, predatory lending. Another was a return, across Eurasia, to various forms of virtual credit money.

Granted, this is not the way we're used to thinking of the Middle Ages. For most of us, 'Medieval' remains a synonym for superstition, intolerance, and oppression. Yet for most of the earth's inhabitants, it could only be

seen as an extraordinary improvement over the terrors of the Axial Age. One reason for our skewed perception is that we're used to thinking of the Middle Ages as something that happened primarily in Western Europe, in territories that had been little more than border outposts of the Roman Empire to begin with. According to the conventional wisdom, with the collapse of the empire, the cities were largely abandoned and the economy "reverted to barter," taking at least five centuries to recover.

Even for Europe, though, this is based on a series of unquestioned assumptions that crumble the moment one starts seriously poking at them. Chief among them is the idea that the absence of coins means the absence of money. True, the destruction of the Roman war machine also meant that Roman coins went out of circulation; and the few coins produced within the Gothic or Frankish kingdoms that established themselves over the ruins of the old empire were largely fiduciary in nature. Still, a glance at the "barbarian law codes" reveals that even at the height of the Dark Ages, people were still carefully keeping accounts in Roman money as they calculated interest rates, contracts, and mortgages.

When coins go out of circulation, after all, the metal doesn't simply disappear. In the Middle Ages—and this seems to have been true across Eurasia—the vast majority of it ended up in religious establishments, churches, monasteries, and temples, either stockpiled in hoards and treasuries or gilded onto or cast into altars, sanctums, and sacred instruments. Above all, it was shaped into images of gods. As a result, those rulers who did try to put an Axial Age-style coinage system back into circulation—invariably, to fund some project of military expansion—often had to pursue self-consciously anti-religious policies in order to do so. Probably the most notorious was one Harsa, who ruled Kashmir from 1089–1101, who is said to have appointed an officer called the "Superintendent for the Destruction of the Gods." According to later histories, Harsa employed leprous monks to systematically desecrate divine images with urine and excrement, thus neutralizing their power, before dragging them off to be melted down. He is said to have destroyed more than four-thousand Buddhist establishments before being betrayed and killed, the last of his dynasty—and his miserable fate was long held out as an example of where the revival of the old ways was likely to lead one in the end.

And Chinese monetary theory was always chartalist. This was partly just an effect of size: the empire and its internal market were so huge that foreign trade was never especially important; therefore, those running the government were well aware that they could turn pretty much anything into money, simply by insisting that taxes be paid in that form.

Yes, cities shriveled, and many were abandoned, but even this was

something of a mixed blessing. Certainly, it had a terrible effect on literacy; but one must also bear in mind—and this remains true today—that cities can only be maintained by extracting resources from the countryside. Roman Gaul, for instance, had been a network of cities, connected by the famous Roman roads to an endless succession of slave plantations, which were owned by the urban grandees. After around 400 AD, the population of the towns declined radically, but the plantations also disappeared. In the following centuries, many came to be replaced by manors, churches, and even later, castles—where new local lords extracted their own dues from the surrounding farmers. But one need only do the math: since Medieval agriculture was no less efficient than ancient agriculture—in fact, it rapidly became a great deal more so—the amount of work required to feed a handful of mounted warriors and clergymen could not possibly have been anything like that required to feed entire cities. However oppressed Medieval serfs might have been, their plight was nothing compared with that of their Axial Age equivalents.

The Middle Ages proper are best seen as having begun not in Europe but in India and China, between 400 and 600 AD, and then sweeping across much of the western half of Eurasia with the advent of Islam. They only really reached Europe four-hundred years later.

The most characteristic Medieval institutions and ideas arrived so late in Europe that we tend to mistake them for the first stirrings of modernity. We've already seen this with bills of exchange, already in use in the East by 700 or 800 AD, but only reaching Europe several centuries later. The independent university—perhaps the quintessential Medieval institution—is another case in point. Nalanda was founded in 427 AD, and there were independent institutions of higher learning all over China and the Near West—from Cairo to Constantinople—centuries before the creation of similar institutions in Oxford, Paris, and Bologna.

Our image of the Middle Ages as an 'age of faith'—and hence, of blind obedience to authority—is a legacy of the French Enlightenment. Again, it makes sense only if you think of the 'Middle Ages' as something that happened primarily in Europe. Not only was the Far West an unusually violent place by world standards, the Catholic Church was extraordinarily intolerant. It's hard to find many Medieval Chinese, Indian, or Islamic parallels, for example, to the burning of witches or the massacre of heretics. More typical was the pattern that prevailed in certain periods of Chinese history, when it was perfectly acceptable for a scholar to dabble in Taoism in his youth, become a Confucian in middle age, then become a Buddhist on retirement. If there is an essence to Medieval thought, it lies not in blind obedience to authority, but rather in a dogged insistence that the

values that govern our ordinary daily affairs—particularly those of the court and marketplace—are confused, mistaken, illusory, or perverse. True value lay elsewhere, in a domain that cannot be directly perceived, but only approached through study or contemplation. But this in turn made the faculties of contemplation, and the entire question of knowledge, an endless problem.

We are used to thinking of bureaucratic interventions—particularly the monopolies and regulations—as state restriction on “the market,” owing to the prevailing prejudice that sees markets as quasi-natural phenomena that emerge by themselves, and governments as having no role other than to squelch or siphon from them. I have repeatedly pointed out how mistaken this is, but China provides a particularly striking example. The Confucian state may have been the world’s greatest and most enduring bureaucracy, but it actively promoted markets, and as a result, commercial life in China soon became far more sophisticated, and markets more developed, than anywhere else in the world. This despite the fact that Confucian orthodoxy was overtly hostile to merchants and even the profit motive itself. Commercial profit was seen as legitimate only as compensation for the labor that merchants expended in transporting goods from one place to another, but never as fruits of speculation. What this meant in practice was that they were pro-market but anti-capitalist.

This seems bizarre, since we’re used to assuming that capitalism and markets are the same thing, but in many ways they could equally well be conceived as opposites. While markets are ways of exchanging goods through the medium of money—historically, ways for those with a surplus of grain to acquire candles and vice versa (in economic shorthand, C-M-C’, for commodity-money-other commodity)—capitalism is first and foremost the art of using money to get more money (M-C-M’). Normally, the easiest way to do this is by establishing some kind of formal or de facto monopoly. For this reason, capitalists, whether merchant princes, financiers, or industrialists, invariably try to ally themselves with political authorities to limit the freedom of the market, so as to make it easier for them to do so. From this perspective, China was for most of its history the ultimate anti-capitalist market state. Unlike later European princes, Chinese rulers systematically refused to team up with would-be Chinese capitalists (who always existed). Instead, like their officials, they saw them as destructive parasites—though, unlike the usurers, ones whose fundamentally selfish and antisocial motivations could still be put to use in certain ways.

In Confucian terms, merchants were like soldiers. Those drawn to a career in the military were assumed to be driven largely by a love of violence. As individuals, they were not good people; but they were also necessary to

defend the frontiers. Similarly, merchants were driven by greed and basically immoral; yet if kept under careful administrative supervision, they could be made to serve the public good. Whatever one might think of the principles, the results are hard to deny. For most of its history, China maintained the highest standard of living in the world—even England only really overtook it in perhaps the 1820s, well past the time of the Industrial Revolution.

It's quite possible to turn honor into money, almost impossible to convert money into honor. In Islamic society, the merchant became not just a respected figure, but a kind of paragon: like the warrior, a man of honor able to pursue far-flung adventures; unlike him, able to do so in a fashion damaging to no one.

The veneration of the merchant was matched by what can only be called the world's first popular free-market ideology. True, one should be careful not to confuse ideals with reality. Markets were never entirely independent from the government. Islamic regimes did employ all the usual strategies of manipulating tax policy to encourage the growth of markets, and they periodically tried to intervene in commercial law. Still, there was a very strong popular feeling that they shouldn't. Once freed from its ancient scourges of debt and slavery, the local bazaar had become, for most, not a place of moral danger, but the very opposite: the highest expression of human freedom and communal solidarity, and thus to be protected assiduously from state intrusion. There was a particular hostility to anything that smacked of price-fixing.

One much-repeated story held that the Prophet himself had refused to force merchants to lower prices during a shortage in the city of Medina, on the grounds that doing so would be sacrilegious, since, in a free-market situation, "prices depend on the will of God." Most legal scholars interpreted Mohammed's decision to mean that any government interference in market mechanisms should be considered similarly sacrilegious, since markets were designed by God to regulate themselves. If all this bears a striking resemblance to Adam Smith's "invisible hand"—which was also the hand of Divine Providence—it might not be a complete coincidence. In fact, many of the specific arguments and examples that Smith uses appear to trace back directly to economic tracts written in Medieval Persia.

For instance, not only does his argument that exchange is a natural outgrowth of human rationality and speech already appear both in both Ghazali (1058–1111), and Tusi (1201–1274); both use exactly the same illustration: that no one has ever observed two dogs exchanging bones. Even more dramatically, Smith's most famous example of division of labor, the pin factory, where it takes eighteen separate operations to produce one pin, already appears in Ghazali's *Ihya*, in which he describes a needle factory,

where it takes twenty-five different operations to produce a needle.

It is becoming more and more clear that a great deal of Enlightenment thought traces back to Islamic philosophy: Descartes' *cogito*, for example, seems to derive from Ibn Sina (a.k.a. Avicenna), Hume's famous point that the observance of constant conjunctions does not itself prove causality appears in Ghazali, and Immanuel Kant's definition of enlightenment in the mouth of a magic bird in the fourteenth-century Persian poet Rumi.

The differences, however, are just as significant as the similarities. One telling example: like Smith, Tusi begins his treatise on economics with a discussion of the division of labor; but where for Smith, the division of labor is actually an outgrowth of our "natural propensity to truck and barter" in pursuit of individual advantage, for Tusi, it was an extension of mutual aid:

"Let us suppose that each individual were required to busy himself with providing his own sustenance, clothing, dwelling-place and weapons, first acquiring the tools of carpentry and the smith's trade, then readying thereby tools and implements for sowing and reaping, grinding and kneading, spinning and weaving. Clearly, he would not be capable of doing justice to any one of them. But when men render aid to each other, each one performing one of these important tasks that are beyond the measure of his own capacity, and observing the law of justice in transactions by giving greatly and receiving in exchange of the labor of others, then the means of livelihood are realized, and the succession of the individual and the survival of the species are assured."

As a result, he argues, divine providence has arranged us to have different abilities, desires, and inclinations. The market is simply one manifestation of this more general principle of mutual aid, of the matching of, abilities (supply) and needs (demand)—or to translate it into my own earlier terms, it is not only founded on, but is itself an extension of the kind of baseline communism on which any society must ultimately rest.

Ghazali's take on the division of labor is similar, and his account of the origins of money is if anything even more revealing. It begins with what looks much like the myth of barter, except that, like all Middle Eastern writers, he starts not with imaginary primitive tribesmen, but with strangers meeting in an imaginary marketplace:

"Sometimes a person needs what he does not own and he owns what he does not need. For example, a person has saffron but needs a camel for transportation and one who owns a camel

does not presently need that camel but he wants saffron. Thus, there is the need for an exchange. However, for there to be an exchange, there must be a way to measure the two objects, for the camel-owner cannot give the whole camel for a quantity of saffron. There is no similarity between saffron and camel so that equal amount of that weight and form can be given. Likewise is the case of one who desires a house but owns some cloth or desires a slave but owns socks, or desires flour but possesses a donkey. These goods have no direct proportionality so one cannot know how much saffron will equal a camel's worth. Such barter transactions would be very difficult."

Ghazali also notes that there might also be a problem of one person not even needing what the other has to offer, but this is almost an afterthought; for him, the real problem is conceptual. How do you compare two things with no common qualities? His conclusion: it can only be done by comparing both to a third thing with no qualities at all. For this reason, he explains, God created dinars and dirhams, coins made out of gold and silver, two metals that are otherwise no good for anything.

From this it also follows that lending money at interest must be illegitimate, since it means using money as an end in itself:

"Money is not created to earn money."

In fact, he says, "in relation to other goods, dirhams and dinars are like prepositions in a sentence," words that, as the grammarians inform us, are used to give meaning to other words, but can only do because they have no meaning in themselves. Money is thus a unit of measure that provides a means of assessing the value of goods, but also one that operates as such only if it stays in constant motion. To enter into monetary transactions in order to obtain even more money, even if it's a matter of M-C-M', let alone M-M', would be, according to Ghazali, the equivalent of kidnapping a postman.

Whereas Ghazali speaks only of gold and silver, what he describes—money as symbol, as abstract measure, having no qualities of its own, whose value is only maintained by constant motion—is something that would never have occurred to anyone were it not in an age when it was perfectly normal for money to be employed in purely virtual form. Much of our free-market doctrine, then, appears to have been originally borrowed piecemeal from a very different social and moral universe.

It's hard to overstate this. Even the famous Laffer Curve, by which the Reagan Administration in the 1980s tried to argue that cutting taxes

would increase government revenue by stimulating economic activity, is often called the Khaldun-Laffer curve because it was first proposed, as a general principle, in Ibn Khaldun's 1377 *Muqaddimah*.

The spread of Islam allowed the market to become a global phenomenon, operating largely independent of governments, according to its own internal laws. But the very fact that this was, in a certain way, a genuine free market, not one created by the government and backed by its police and prisons—a world of handshake deals and paper promises backed only by the integrity of the signer—meant that it could never really become the world imagined by those who later adopted many of the same ideas and arguments: one of purely self-interested individuals vying for material advantage by any means at hand.

The revival of Roman law—which began from the assumption of absolute private property—put new intellectual weapons in the hands of those who wished to argue that, at least in the case of commercial loans, usury laws should be relaxed. The great discovery in this case was the notion of *interesse*, which is where our word 'interest' originally comes from: a compensation for loss suffered because of late payment. The argument soon became that if a merchant made a commercial loan even for some minimal period (say, a month), it was not usurious for him to charge a percentage for each month afterward, since this was a penalty, not rental for the money, and it was justified as compensation for the profit he would have made, had he placed it in some profitable investment, as any merchant would ordinarily be expected to do.

What jumps out, in comparison with the Muslim world, are these links of finance, trade, and violence. Whereas Persian and Arab thinkers assumed that the market emerged as an extension of mutual aid, Christians never completely overcame the suspicion that commerce was really an extension of usury, a form of fraud only truly legitimate when directed against one's mortal enemies. Debt was, indeed, sin—on the part of both parties to the transaction. Competition was essential to the nature of the market, but competition was (usually) nonviolent warfare. There was a reason why the words for 'truck and barter' in almost all European languages were derived from terms meaning "swindle," "bamboozle," or "deceive." Some disdained commerce for that reason. Others embraced it. Few would have denied that the connection was there.

The striking thing is that the Confucian condemnation of the merchant, and the Islamic celebration of the merchant, ultimately led to the same thing: prosperous societies with flourishing markets, but where the elements never came together to create the great merchant banks and industrial firms that were to become the hallmark of modern capitalism.

Why did nothing like modern capitalism emerge? I would highlight two factors. First, Islamic merchants appear to have taken their free-market ideology seriously. The marketplace did not fall under the direct supervision of the government; contracts were made between individuals—ideally, “with a handshake and a glance at heaven”—and thus honor and credit became largely indistinguishable. This is inevitable: you can’t have cutthroat competition where there is no one stopping people from literally cutting one another’s throats. Second, Islam also took seriously the principle, later enshrined in classical economic theory but only unevenly observed in practice, that profits are the reward for risk. Trading enterprises were assumed to be, quite literally, adventures, in which traders exposed themselves to the dangers of storm and shipwreck, savage nomads, forests, steppes, and deserts, exotic and unpredictable foreign customs, and arbitrary governments. Financial mechanisms designed to avoid these risks were considered impious. This was one of the objections to usury: if one demands a fixed rate of interest, the profits are guaranteed. Similarly, commercial investors were expected to share the risk. This made most of the forms of finance and insurance that were to later develop in Europe impossible.

Where did the Western image of the solitary knight-errant, wandering the forests of a mythic Albion, challenging rivals, confronting ogres, fairies, wizards, and mysterious beasts come from? The answer should be clear by now. Really, this is just a sublimated, romanticized image of the traveling merchants themselves: men who did, after all, set off on lonely ventures through wilds and forests, whose outcome was anything but certain. And what of the Grail, that mysterious object that all the knights-errant were ultimately seeking? Perhaps the Grail was a symbol inspired by the new forms of finance. Where earlier epic heroes sought after, and fought over, piles of real, concrete gold and silver these new ones, born of the new commercial economy, pursued purely abstract forms of value. No one, after all, knew precisely what the Grail was. Even the epics disagree: sometimes it’s a plate, sometimes a cup, sometimes a stone. In one instance it was a jewel knocked from Lucifer’s helmet in a battle at the dawn of time. In a way it doesn’t matter. The point is that it’s invisible, intangible, but at the same time of infinite, inexhaustible value, containing everything, capable of making the wasteland flower, feeding the world, providing spiritual sustenance, and healing wounded bodies. It would best be conceived as a blank check, the ultimate financial abstraction.

Legally, our notion of the corporation is very much a product of the European High Middle Ages. The legal idea of a corporation as a “fictive person” (*persona ficta*)—a person who is immortal, who sues and is sued, who holds lands, has a seal of his own, who makes regulations for those

natural persons of whom he is composed—was first established in canon law by Pope Innocent IV in 1250, and one of the first kinds of entities it applied to were monasteries—as also to universities, churches, municipalities, and guilds.

While we are used to assuming that there's something natural or inevitable about the existence of corporations, in historical terms, they are actually strange, exotic creatures. No other great tradition came up with anything like it. They are the most peculiarly European addition to that endless proliferation of metaphysical entities so characteristic of the Middle Ages—as well as the most enduring. Still, the ground was only really prepared for capitalism in the familiar sense of the term when the merchants began to organize themselves into eternal bodies as a way to win monopolies, legal or *de facto*, and avoid the ordinary risks of trade.

Money always has the potential to become a moral imperative unto itself. Allow it to expand, and it can quickly become a morality so imperative that all others seem frivolous in comparison. For the debtor, the world is reduced to a collection of potential dangers, potential tools, and potential merchandise. Even human relations become a matter of cost-benefit calculation. Clearly this is the way the conquistadors viewed the worlds that they set out to conquer. It is the peculiar feature of modern capitalism to create social arrangements that essentially force us to think this way. The structure of the corporation is a telling case in point—and it is no coincidence that the first major joint-stock corporations in the world were the English and Dutch East India companies, ones that pursued that very same combination of exploration, conquest, and extraction as did the conquistadors. It is a structure designed to eliminate all moral imperatives but profit. The executives who make decisions can argue—and regularly do—that, if it were their own money, of course they would not fire lifelong employees a week before retirement, or dump carcinogenic waste next to schools. Yet they are morally bound to ignore such considerations, because they are mere employees whose only responsibility is to provide the maximum return on investment for the company's stockholders.

After the earliest years of the gold and silver mines described by Motolinia, where millions of Indians were simply rounded up and marched off to their deaths, colonists settled on a policy of debt peonage: the usual trick of demanding heavy taxes, lending money at interest to those who could not pay, and then demanding that the loans be repaid with work. Royal agents regularly attempted to forbid such practices, arguing that the Indians were now Christian and that this violated their rights as loyal subjects of the Spanish crown. But as with almost all such royal efforts to act as protector of the Indians, the result was the same. Financial exigencies ended up

taking precedence. Charles V himself was deeply in debt to banking firms in Florence, Genoa, and Naples, and gold and silver from the Americas made up perhaps one-fifth of his total revenue. In the end, despite a lot of initial noise and the (usually quite sincere) moral outrage on the part of the king's emissaries, such decrees were either ignored or, at best, enforced for a year or two before being allowed to slip into abeyance.

All this is disturbingly reminiscent of global politics nowadays, in which the United Nations, for example, will urge poor countries to make education free and available to everyone, and then the International Monetary Fund—which is, legally, actually a part of the United Nations (if only all UN functions were so effective)—will insist that those same countries do exactly the opposite, imposing school fees as part of broader “economic reforms” as a condition of refinancing the country's loans.

In the Axial Age, money was a tool of empire. It might have been convenient for rulers to promulgate markets in which everyone would treat money as an end in itself; at times, rulers might have even come to see the whole apparatus of government as a profit-making enterprise; but money always remained a political instrument. This is why when the empires collapsed and armies were demobilized, the whole apparatus could simply melt away. Under the newly emerging capitalist order, the logic of money was granted autonomy; political and military power were then gradually reorganized around it. True, this was a financial logic that could never have existed without states and armies behind it in the first place. As we have seen in the case of Medieval Islam, under genuine free-market conditions—in which the state is not involved in regulating the market in any significant way, even in enforcing commercial contracts—purely competitive markets will not develop, and loans at interest will become effectively impossible to collect. It was only the Islamic prohibition against usury, really, that made it possible for them to create an economic system that stood so far apart from the state.

Protestant thinkers all continued to make the old Medieval argument about *interesse*: that interest is really compensation for the money that the lender would have made had he been able to place his money in some more profitable investment. Originally, this logic was just applied to commercial loans. Increasingly, it was now applied to all loans. Far from being unnatural, then, the growth of money was now treated as completely expected. All money was assumed to be capital.

With such things happening, it is hardly surprising that men like Thomas Hobbes came to imagine the basic nature of society as a war of all against all, from which only the absolute power of monarchs could save us.

The peasants' visions of communistic brotherhood did not come out of

nowhere. They were rooted in real daily experience: of the maintenance of common fields and forests, of everyday cooperation and neighborly solidarity. It is out of such homely experience of everyday communism that grand mythic visions are always built. Obviously, rural communities were also divided, squabbling places, since communities always are—but insofar as they are communities at all, they are necessarily founded on a ground of mutual aid. The same, incidentally, can be said of members of the aristocracy, who might have fought endlessly over love, land, honor, and religion, but nonetheless still cooperated remarkably well with one another when it really mattered (most of all, when their position as aristocrats was threatened); just as the merchants and bankers, much as they competed with one another, managed to close ranks when it really mattered. This is what I refer to as the ‘communism of the rich,’ and it is a powerful force in human history.

The same applies to credit. There are always different standards for those one considers friends or neighbors. The inexorable nature of interest-bearing debt, and the alternately savage and calculating behavior of those enslaved to it, are typical above all of dealings between strangers. Inside the small towns and rural hamlets, where the state was mostly far away, Medieval standards survived intact, and credit was just as much a matter of honor and reputation as it had ever been. The great untold story of our current age is of how these ancient credit systems were ultimately destroyed.

Amity and friendship are the foundation of all human and civil society—they constitute that true, natural justice on which the whole legal structure of contracts, courts, and even government must necessarily be built. Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, published in 1651, was in many ways an extended attack on the very idea that society is built on any sort of prior ties of communal solidarity. Hobbes might be considered the opening salvo of the new moral perspective, and it was a devastating one. When *Leviathan* came out, it’s not clear what scandalized its readers more: its relentless materialism—Hobbes insisted that humans were basically machines whose actions could be understood by one single principle: that they tended to move toward the prospect of pleasure and away from the prospect of pain—or its resultant cynicism—if love, amity, and trust are such powerful forces, Hobbes asked, why is it that even within our families, we lock our most valuable possessions in strongboxes? Still, Hobbes’ ultimate argument—that humans, being driven by self-interest, cannot be trusted to treat each other justly of their own accord, and therefore that society only emerges when they come to realize that it is to their long-term advantage to give up a portion of their liberties and accept the absolute power of the King—differed little from arguments that theologians like Martin Luther had been making a century earlier. Hobbes simply substituted scientific language for biblical references.

I want to draw particular attention to the underlying notion of ‘self-interest.’ It is in a real sense the key to the new philosophy. The term first appears in English right around Hobbes’ time, and it is, indeed, directly borrowed from *interesse*, the Roman law term for interest payments. When it was first introduced, most English authors seemed to view the idea that all human life can be explained as the pursuit of self-interest as a cynical, foreign, Machiavellian idea, one that sat uncomfortably with traditional English mores. By the eighteenth century, most in educated society accepted it as simple common sense.

Why ‘interest’? Why make a general theory of human motivation out of a word that originally meant “penalty for late payment on a loan”? Part of the term’s appeal was that it derived from bookkeeping. It was mathematical. This made it seem objective, even scientific. Saying we are all really pursuing our own self-interest provides a way to cut past the welter of passions and emotions that seem to govern our daily existence, and to motivate most of what we actually observe people to do—not only out of love and amity, but also envy, spite, devotion, pity, lust, embarrassment, torpor, indignation, and pride—and discover that, despite all this, most really important decisions are based on the rational calculation of material advantage—which means that they are fairly predictable as well. Just as the physical world is ruled by the laws of movement no less is the moral universe ruled by laws of interest. And of course it was on this assumption that all the quadratic equations of economic theory could ultimately be built.

The very idea that human beings are motivated primarily by “self-interest,” then, was rooted in the profoundly Christian assumption that we are all incorrigible sinners; left to our own devices, we will not simply pursue a certain level of comfort and happiness and then stop to enjoy it; we will never cash in the chips let alone question why we need to buy chips to begin with. And as Augustine already anticipated, infinite desires in a finite world means endless competition, which in turn is why, as Hobbes insisted, our only hope of social peace lies in contractual arrangements and strict enforcement by the apparatus of the state.

The story of the origins of capitalism, then, is not the story of the gradual destruction of traditional communities by the impersonal power of the market. It is, rather, the story of how an economy of credit was converted into an economy of interest; of the gradual transformation of moral networks by the intrusion of the impersonal—and often vindictive—power of the state. English villagers in Elizabethan or Stuart times did not like to appeal to the justice system, even when the law was in their favor—partly on the principle that neighbors should work things out with one another, but mainly because the law was so extraordinarily harsh. Under Elizabeth,

for example, the punishment for vagrancy (unemployment) was, for the first offense, to have one's ears nailed to a pillory; for repeat offenders, death. See America's poor? You've got it good, you just get to slave for Uber or Amazon.

The same was true of debt law, especially since debts could often, if the creditor was sufficiently vindictive, be treated as a crime. In Chelsea, around 1660, Margaret Sharples was prosecuted for stealing cloth, "which she had converted into a petticoat for her own wearing," from Richard Bennett's shop. Her defense was that she had bargained with Bennett's servant for the cloth, "but having not money sufficient in her purse to pay for it, took it away with purpose to pay for it so soon as she could: and that she afterwards agreed with Mr. Bennett of a price for it." Bennett confirmed that this was so: after agreeing to pay him 22 shillings, Margaret "delivered a hamper with goods in it as a pawn for security of the money, and four shillings ninepence in money." But "soon after he disliked upon better consideration to hold agreement with her: and delivered the hamper and goods back," and commenced formal legal proceedings against her. As a result, Margaret Sharples was hanged.

The criminalization of debt, then, was the criminalization of the very basis of human society. It cannot be overemphasized that in a small community, everyone normally was both lender and borrower. One can only imagine the tensions and temptations that must have existed in a community—and communities, much though they are based on love, in fact, because they are based on love, will always also be full of hatred, rivalry, and passion—when it became clear that with sufficiently clever scheming, manipulation, and perhaps a bit of strategic bribery, they could arrange to have almost anyone they hated imprisoned or even hanged. What was it that Richard Bennett really had against Margaret Sharples? We'll never know the back-story, but it's a pretty safe bet that there was one. The effects on communal solidarity must have been devastating. The sudden accessibility of violence really did threaten to transform what had been the essence of sociality into a war of all against all. It's not surprising then, that by the eighteenth century, the very notion of personal credit had acquired a bad name, with both lenders and borrowers considered equally suspect. The use of coins—at least among those who had access to them—had come to seem moral in itself.

I do not want to argue that the more familiar narrative of "primitive accumulation," of the enclosure of common lands and rise of private property, the dislocation of thousands of one-time cottagers who became landless laborers, is false. I simply highlight a less familiar side of the story. It's especially helpful to highlight it because the degree to which the Tudor and Stuart periods were actually marked by a rise of enclosures is a heated

matter of debate. The use of debt to split communities against themselves is meant in the same vein as the argument about the role of witchcraft accusations in reversing popular gains of the late Middle Ages and opening the way to capitalism.

Consider Adam Smith:

“It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.”

The bizarre thing here is that, at the time Smith was writing, this simply wasn't true. Most English shopkeepers were still carrying out the main part of their business on credit, which meant that customers appealed to their benevolence all the time. Smith could hardly have been unaware of this. Rather, he is drawing a utopian picture. He wants to imagine a world in which everyone used cash, in part because he agreed with the emerging middle-class opinion that the world would be a better place if everyone really did conduct themselves this way, and avoid confusing and potentially corrupting ongoing entanglements. We should all just pay the money, say 'please' and 'thank you,' and leave the store.

What's more, he uses this utopian image to make a larger point: that even if all businesses operated like the great commercial companies, with an eye only to self-interest, it wouldn't matter. Even the “natural selfishness and rapacity” of the rich, with all their “vain and insatiable desires” will still, through the logic of the invisible hand, lead to the benefit of all. In other words, Smith simply imagined the role of consumer credit in his own day, just as he had his account of the origins of money. This allowed him to ignore the role of both benevolence and malevolence in economic affairs; both the ethos of mutual aid that forms the necessary foundation of anything that would look like a free market (that is, one which is not simply created and maintained by the state), and the violence and sheer vindictiveness that had actually gone into creating the competitive, self-interested markets that he was using as his model.

Nietzsche, in turn, was taking up Smith's premises, that life is exchange, but laying bare everything—the torture, murder, mutilation—that Smith preferred not to have to talk about. Now that we have seen just a little of the social context, it's difficult to read Nietzsche's otherwise puzzling descriptions of ancient hunters and herdsman keeping accounts of debts and demanding each others' eyes and fingers without immediately thinking of

Casimir's executioner, who actually did present his master with a bill for gouged eyes and severed fingers. What he is really describing is what it took to produce a world in which the son of a prosperous middle-class reverend, such as himself, could simply assume that all human life is premised on calculated, self-interested exchange.

Consider the following lines, often attributed to Lord Josiah Charles Stamp, director of the Bank of England:

“The modern banking system manufactures money out of nothing. The process is perhaps the most astounding piece of sleight of hand that was ever invented. Banking was conceived in iniquity and born in sin. Bankers own the earth; take it away from them, but leave them with the power to create credit, and with the stroke of a pen they will create enough money to buy it back again. If you wish to remain slaves of Bankers, and pay the cost of your own slavery, let them continue to create deposits.”

It seems extremely unlikely that Lord Stamp ever really said this, but the passage has been cited endlessly—in fact, it's probably the single most often-quoted passage by critics of the modern banking system. However apocryphal, it clearly strikes a chord, and apparently for the same reason: bankers are creating something out of nothing. They are not only frauds and magicians, they are evil, because they're playing God.

If Medieval moralists did not raise such objections, it was not just because they were comfortable with metaphysical entities. They had a much more fundamental problem with the market: greed. Market motives were held to be inherently corrupt. The moment that greed was validated, and unlimited profit was considered a perfectly viable end in itself, this political, magical element became a genuine problem, because it meant that even those actors—the brokers, stock-jobbers, traders—who effectively made the system run had no convincing loyalty to anything, even to the system itself.

Hobbes, who first developed this vision of human nature into an explicit theory of society, was well aware of this greed dilemma. It formed the basis of his political philosophy. Even, he argued, if we are all rational enough to understand that it's in our long-term interest to live in peace and security, our short-term interests are often such that killing and plundering are the most obviously profitable courses to take, and all it takes is a few to cast aside their scruples to create utter insecurity and chaos. This was why he felt that markets could only exist under the aegis of an absolutist state, which would force us to keep our promises and respect one another's property. But what happens when we're talking about a market in which it is state debts

and state obligations themselves that are being traded; when one cannot really speak of a state monopoly on force because one is operating in an international market where the primary currency is bonds that the state depends on for its very ability to marshal military force?

We are used to seeing modern capitalism—along with modern traditions of democratic government—as emerging only later: with the Age of Revolutions—the industrial revolution, the American and French revolutions—a series of profound breaks at the end of the eighteenth century that only became fully institutionalized after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Here we come face to face with a peculiar paradox. It would seem that almost all elements of financial apparatus that we've come to associate with capitalism—central banks, bond markets, short-selling, brokerage houses, speculative bubbles, securitization, annuities—came into being not only before the science of economics (which is perhaps not too surprising), but also before the rise of factories, and wage labor itself. This is a genuine challenge to familiar ways of thinking. We like to think of the factories and workshops as the 'real economy,' and the rest as superstructure, constructed on top of it. But if this were really so, then how can it be that the superstructure came first? Can the dreams of the system create its body?

All this raises the question of what 'capitalism' is to begin with, a question on which there is no consensus at all. The word was originally invented by socialists, who saw capitalism as that system whereby those who own capital command the labor of those who do not. Proponents, in contrast, tend to see capitalism as the freedom of the marketplace, which allows those with potentially marketable visions to pull resources together to bring those visions into being. Just about everyone agrees, however, that capitalism is a system that demands constant, endless growth. Enterprises have to grow in order to remain viable. The same is true of nations. Just as five percent per annum was widely accepted, at the dawn of capitalism, as the legitimate commercial rate of interest—that is, the amount that any investor could normally expect her money to be growing by the principle of *interesse*—so is five percent now the annual rate at which any nation's GDP really ought to grow. What was once an impersonal mechanism that compelled people to look at everything around them as a potential source of profit has come to be considered the only objective measure of the health of the human community itself.

There is, and has always been, a curious affinity between wage labor and slavery. This is not just because it was slaves on Caribbean sugar plantations who supplied the quick-energy products that powered much of early wage laborers' work; not just because most of the scientific management techniques applied in factories in the industrial revolution can be traced back to those

sugar plantations; but also because both the relation between master and slave, and between employer and employee, are in principle impersonal: whether you've been sold or you're simply rented yourself out, the moment money changes hands, who you are is supposed to be unimportant; all that's important is that you are capable of understanding orders and doing what you're told.

Men like Smith and Bentham were idealists; even utopians. To understand the history of capitalism, however, we have to begin by realizing that the picture we have in our heads, of workers who dutifully punch the clock at 8:00 and receive regular remuneration every Friday, on the basis of a temporary contract that either party is free to break off at any time, began as a utopian vision, was only gradually put into effect even in England and North America, and has never, at any point, been the main way of organizing production for the market, ever, anywhere. This is actually why Smith's work is so important. He created the vision of an imaginary world almost entirely free of debt and credit, and therefore, free of guilt and sin; a world where men and women were free to simply calculate their interests in full knowledge that everything had been prearranged by God to ensure that it will serve the greater good. Such imaginary constructs are of course what scientists refer to as 'models,' and there's nothing intrinsically wrong with them. Actually I think a fair case can be made that we cannot think without them. The problem with such models—at least, it always seems to happen when we model something called 'the market'—is that, once created, we have a tendency to treat them as objective realities, or even fall down before them and start worshiping them as gods. 'We must obey the dictates of the market!'

Still, if there is anything that the last several hundred years of world history have shown, it's that utopian visions can have a certain appeal. This is as true of Adam Smith's as of those ranged against it. The period from roughly 1825 to 1975 is a brief but determined effort on the part of a large number of very powerful people—with the avid support of many of the least powerful—to try to turn that vision into something like reality. Coins and paper money were, finally, produced in sufficient quantities that even ordinary people could conduct their daily lives without appeal to tickets, tokens, or credit. Wages started to be paid on time. New sorts of shops, arcades, and galleries appeared, where everyone paid in cash, or alternately, as time went on, by means of impersonal forms of credit like installment plans. As a result, the old puritanical notion that debt was sin and degradation began to take a profound hold on many of those who came to consider themselves the respectable working classes, who often took freedom from the clutches of the pawnbroker and loan shark as a point of

pride, which separated them from drunkards, hustlers, and ditch-diggers as surely as the fact that they weren't missing teeth.

I can attest to the degree that, for those who spend most of their waking hours working at someone else's orders, the ability to pull out a wallet full of banknotes that are unconditionally one's own can be a compelling form of freedom. It's not surprising that so many of the economists' assumptions have been embraced by the leaders of the historic workers' movements, so much so that they have come to shape our visions of what alternatives to capitalism might be like. The problem is not just that it is rooted in a deeply flawed, even perverse, conception of human freedom. The real problem is that, like all utopian dreams, it is impossible. We could no more have a universal world market than we could have a system in which everyone who wasn't a capitalist was somehow able to become a respectable, regularly paid wage laborer with access to adequate dental care. A world like that has never existed and never could exist. What's more, the moment that even the prospect that this might happen begins to materialize, the whole system starts to come apart.

There may be a deep, profound relation between gambling and apocalypse. Capitalism is a system that enshrines the gambler as an essential part of its operation, in a way that no other ever has; yet at the same time, capitalism seems to be uniquely incapable of conceiving of its own eternity. Could these two facts be linked? I should be more precise here. It's not entirely true that capitalism is incapable of conceiving of its own eternity. On the one hand, its exponents do often feel obliged to present it as eternal, because they insist that it is the only possible viable economic system; one that, as they still sometimes like to say, "has existed for five-thousand years and will exist for five-thousand more." On the other hand, it does seem that the moment a significant portion of the population begins to actually believe this, and particularly, starts treating credit institutions as if they really will be around forever, everything goes haywire. Note here how it was the most sober, cautious, responsible capitalist regimes—the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, the eighteenth-century British Commonwealth—the ones most careful about managing their public debt—that saw the most bizarre explosions of speculative frenzy, the tulip manias and South Sea bubbles.

Much of this seems to turn on the nature of national deficits and credit money. The national debt is, as politicians have complained practically since these things first appeared, money borrowed from future generations. Still, the effects have always been strangely double-edged. On the one hand, deficit financing is a way of putting even more military power in the hands of princes, generals, and politicians; on the other, it suggests that government owes something to those it governs. Insofar as our money is ultimately

an extension of the public debt, then whenever we buy a newspaper or a cup of coffee, or even place a bet on a horse, we are trading in promises, representations of something that the government will give us at some time in the future, even if we don't know exactly what it is.

This is incidentally why complaints about the immorality of deficits are so profoundly disingenuous: since modern money effectively is government debt, if there was no deficit, the results would be disastrous. True, money can also be generated privately, by banks, but there would appear to be limits to this. This is why US financial elites, led by Alan Greenspan, panicked in the late 1990s when the Clinton administration began to run budget surpluses; the Bush tax cuts appear to have been designed specifically to ensure that the deficit was maintained.

The French Revolution introduced some profoundly new ideas in politics—ideas which, fifty years before the revolution, the vast majority of educated Europeans would have written off as crazy, but which, fifty years afterward, just about anyone felt they had to at least pretend they thought were true. The first is that social change is inevitable and desirable; that the natural direction of history is for civilization to gradually improve. The second is that the appropriate agent to manage such change is the government. The third is that the government gains its legitimacy from an entity called 'the people.' It's easy to see how the very idea of a national debt—a promise of continual future improvement (at the very least, five percent annual improvement) made by government to people—might itself have played a role in inspiring such a revolutionary new perspective. Yet at the same time, when one looks at what the philosophers who first proposed that notion of what we now call 'civilization' were actually arguing about in the years immediately leading up to the revolution, it was even more about the danger of apocalyptic catastrophe, of the prospect of civilization as they knew it being destroyed by default and economic collapse.

We are used to thinking of the Enlightenment as the dawn of a unique phase of human optimism, borne on assumptions that the advance of science and human knowledge would inevitably make life wiser, safer, and better for everyone—a naïve faith said to have peaked in the Fabian socialism of the 1890s, only to be annihilated in the trenches of World War I. In fact, even the Victorians were haunted by the dangers of degeneration and decline. Most of all, Victorians shared the near-universal assumption that capitalism itself would not be around forever. Insurrection seemed imminent. Many Victorian capitalists operated under the sincere belief that they might, at any moment, find themselves hanging from trees. In Chicago, for instance, a friend once took me on a drive down a beautiful old street, full of mansions from the 1870s; the reason, he explained, that it looked like that, was that

most of Chicago's rich industrialists of the time were so convinced that the revolution was imminent that they collectively relocated along the road that led to the nearest military base. Almost none of the great theorists of capitalism, from anywhere on the political spectrum, from Marx to Weber, to Schumpeter, to von Mises, felt that capitalism was likely to be around for more than another generation or two at the most.

One could go further: the moment that the fear of imminent social revolution no longer seemed plausible, by the end of World War II, we were immediately presented with the specter of nuclear holocaust. Then, when that no longer seemed plausible, we discovered global warming. This is not to say that these threats were not, and are not, real. Yet it does seem strange that capitalism feels the constant need to imagine, or to actually manufacture, the means of its own imminent extinction. It's in dramatic contrast to the behavior of the leaders of socialist regimes, from Cuba to Albania, who, when they came to power, immediately began acting as if their system would be around forever—ironically enough, considering they in fact turned out to be something of a historical blip.

Perhaps the reason is because what was true in 1710 is still true. Presented with the prospect of its own eternity, capitalism—or anyway, financial capitalism—simply explodes. Because if there's no end to it, there's absolutely no reason not to generate credit—that is, future money—infinity. Recent events would certainly seem to confirm this. The period leading up to 2009 was one in which many began to believe that capitalism really was going to be around forever; at the very least, no one seemed any longer to be able to imagine an alternative. The immediate effect was a series of increasingly reckless bubbles that brought the whole apparatus crashing down.

Since Nixon's floating of the dollar, it has become evident that it's only the wizard behind the screen who seems to be maintaining the viability of the whole arrangement. Under the free-market orthodoxy that followed, we have all been asked, effectively, to accept that the market is a self-regulating system, with the rising and falling of prices akin to a force of nature, and simultaneously to ignore the fact that, in the business pages, it is simply assumed that markets rise and fall mainly in anticipation of, or reaction to, decisions regarding interest rates by Alan Greenspan, or Ben Bernanke, or whoever is currently the chairman of the Federal Reserve.

One element, however, tends to go flagrantly missing in even the most vivid conspiracy theories about the banking system, let alone in official accounts: that is, the role of war and military power. There's a reason why the wizard has such a strange capacity to create money out of nothing. Behind him, there's a man with a gun. True, in one sense, he's been there

from the start. I have already pointed out that modern money is based on government debt, and that governments “borrow” money in order to finance wars. This is just as true today as it was in the age of King Phillip II. The creation of central banks represented a permanent institutionalization of that marriage between the interests of warriors and financiers that had already begun to emerge in Renaissance Italy, and that eventually became the foundation of financial capitalism.

For those who don’t know how the Fed works: technically, there are a series of stages. Generally the Treasury puts out bonds to the public, and the Fed buys them back. The Fed then loans the money thus created to other banks at a special low rate of interest (“the prime rate”), so that those banks can then lend at higher ones. In its capacity as regulator of the banking system, the Fed also establishes the fractional reserve rate: just how many dollars these banks can “lend”—effectively, create—for every dollar they borrow from the Fed, or have on deposit, or can otherwise count as assets. Technically this is 10 to 1, but a variety of legal loopholes allow banks to go considerably higher.

The US military, unlike any other, maintains a doctrine of global power projection: that it should have the ability, through over 800 overseas military bases, to intervene with deadly force absolutely anywhere on the planet. In a way, though, land forces are secondary; at least since World War II, the key to US military doctrine has always been a reliance on air power. The United States has fought no war in which it did not control the skies, and it has relied on aerial bombardment far more systematically than any other military—in its recent occupation of Iraq, for instance, even going so far as to bomb residential neighborhoods of cities ostensibly under its own control. The essence of US military predominance in the world is, ultimately, the fact that it can, at will, drop bombs, with only a few hours’ notice, at absolutely any point on the surface of the planet. No other government has ever had anything remotely like this sort of capability. In fact, a case could well be made that it is this very power that holds the entire world monetary system, organized around the dollar, together.

As many have remarked, the three countries that switched to the euro—Iraq, Iran, and North Korea—were precisely those singled out by Bush as his “Axis of Evil.” Of course we can argue about cause and effect here. It’s also significant that the core euro-using states such as France and Germany uniformly opposed the war, while US allies were drawn from euro-skeptics like the UK.

If history holds true, an age of virtual money should mean a movement away from war, empire-building, slavery, and debt peonage (waged or otherwise), and toward the creation of some sort of overarching institutions, global

in scale, to protect debtors. What we have seen so far is the opposite. The new global currency is rooted in military power even more firmly than the old was. Debt peonage continues to be the main principle of recruiting labor globally: either in the literal sense, in much of East Asia or Latin America, or in the subjective sense, whereby most of those working for wages or even salaries feel that they are doing so primarily to pay off interest-bearing loans. The new transportation and communications technologies have just made it easier, making it possible to charge domestics or factory workers thousands of dollars in transportation fees, and then have them work off the debt in distant countries where they lack legal protections.

Insofar as overarching grand cosmic institutions have been created that might be considered in any way parallel to the divine kings of the ancient Middle East or the religious authorities of the Middle Ages, they have not been created to protect debtors, but to enforce the rights of creditors. The International Monetary Fund is only the most dramatic case in point here. It stands at the pinnacle of a great, emerging global bureaucracy—the first genuinely global administrative system in human history, enshrined not only in the United Nations, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, but also the endless host of economic unions and trade organizations and non-governmental organizations that work in tandem with them—created largely under US patronage. All of them operate on the principle that (unless one is the United States Treasury), “one has to pay one’s debts”—since the specter of default by any country is assumed to imperil the entire world monetary system, threatening to turn all the world’s sacks of (virtual) gold into worthless sticks and paper.

The near-total collapse of the US financial industry, which despite having been very nearly granted rights to make up money at will, still managed to end up with trillions in liabilities it could not pay, bringing the world economy to a standstill, eliminated even the pretense that debt imperialism guaranteed stability.

By the end of World War II, the specter of an imminent working-class uprising that had so haunted the ruling classes of Europe and North America for the previous century had largely disappeared. This was because class war was suspended by a tacit settlement. To put it crudely: the white working class of the North Atlantic countries, from the United States to West Germany, were offered a deal. If they agreed to set aside any fantasies of fundamentally changing the nature of the system, then they would be allowed to keep their unions, enjoy a wide variety of social benefits: pensions, vacations, health care, and, perhaps most important, through generously funded and ever-expanding public educational institutions, know that their children had a reasonable chance of leaving the working class entirely. One

key element in all this was a tacit guarantee that increases in workers' productivity would be met by increases in wages: a guarantee that held good until the late 1970s.

Largely as a result, the period saw both rapidly rising productivity and rapidly rising incomes, laying the basis for the consumer economy of today. Economists call this the "Keynesian era" since it was a time in which John Maynard Keynes' economic theories, which already formed the basis of Roosevelt's New Deal in the United States, were adopted by industrial democracies pretty much everywhere. With them came Keynes' rather casual attitude toward money. Keynes fully accepted that banks do, indeed, create money "out of thin air," and that for this reason, there was no intrinsic reason that government policy should not encourage this during economic downturns as a way of stimulating demand—a position that had long been dear to the heart of debtors and anathema to creditors.

When the Keynesian settlement was finally put into effect, after World War II, it was offered only to a relatively small slice of the world's population. As time went on, more and more people wanted in on the deal. Almost all of the popular movements of the period from 1945 to 1975, even perhaps revolutionary movements, could be seen as demands for inclusion: demands for political equality that assumed equality was meaningless without some level of economic security. This was true not only of movements by minority groups in North Atlantic countries who had first been left out of the deal—such as those for whom Dr. King spoke—but what were then called "national liberation" movements from Algeria to Chile, or, finally, and perhaps most dramatically, in the late 1960s and 1970s, feminism. At some point in the '70s, things reached a breaking point. It would appear that capitalism, as a system, simply cannot extend such a deal to everyone. Quite possibly it wouldn't even remain viable if all its workers were free wage laborers; certainly it will never be able to provide everyone in the world the sort of life lived by, say, a 1960s auto worker in Michigan or Turin with his own house, garage, and children in college—and this was true even before so many of those children began demanding more.

The result might be termed a crisis of inclusion. By the late 1970s, the existing order was clearly in a state of collapse, plagued simultaneously by financial chaos, food riots, oil shock, widespread doomsday prophecies of the end of growth and ecological crisis—all of which, it turned out, proved to be ways of putting the populace on notice that all deals were off.

The moment that we start framing the story this way, it's easy to see that the next thirty years, the period from roughly 1978 to 2009, follows nearly the same pattern. Except that the deal, the settlement, had changed. Certainly, when both Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher

in the UK launched a systematic attack on the power of labor unions, as well as on the legacy of Keynes, it was a way of explicitly declaring that all previous deals were off. Everyone could now have political rights—even, by the 1990s, most everyone in Latin America and Africa—but political rights were to become economically meaningless. The link between productivity and wages was chopped to bits: productivity rates have continued to rise, but wages have stagnated or even atrophied:

This was accompanied, at first, by a return to “monetarism”: the doctrine that even though money was no longer in any way based in gold, or in any other commodity, government and central-bank policy should be primarily concerned with carefully controlling the money supply to ensure that it acted as if it were a scarce commodity. Even as, at the same time, the financialization of capital meant that most money being invested in the marketplace was completely detached from any relation to production of commerce at all, but had become pure speculation.

All this is not to say that the people of the world were not being offered something: just that, as I say, the terms had changed. In the new dispensation, wages would no longer rise, but workers were encouraged to buy a piece of capitalism. Rather than euthanize the rentiers, everyone could now become rentiers—effectively, could grab a chunk of the profits created by their own increasingly dramatic rates of exploitation. The means were many and familiar. In the United States, there were 401(k) retirement accounts and an endless variety of other ways of encouraging ordinary citizens to play the market; but at the same time, encouraging them to borrow. One of the guiding principles of Thatcherism and Reaganism alike was that economic reforms would never gain widespread support unless ordinary working people could at least aspire to owning their own homes; to this was added, by the 1990s and 2000s, endless mortgage-refinancing schemes that treated houses, whose value it was assumed would only rise, “like ATMs”—as the popular catchphrase had it, though it turns out, in retrospect, it was really more like credit cards.

Then there was the proliferation of actual credit cards, juggled against one another. Here, for many, “buying a piece of capitalism” slithered undetectably into something indistinguishable from those familiar scourges of the working poor: the loan shark and the pawnbroker. It did not help here that in 1980, US federal usury laws, which had previously limited interest to between seven and ten percent, were eliminated by act of Congress. The key legislation was the “Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act” of 1980, which struck down all federal usury laws: ostensibly, in reaction to the rampant inflation of the late 1970s, though of course they were never restored when inflation was brought back under control, as it

has in the last quarter-century. It left state interest ceilings in place, but institutions like credit-card companies were allowed to observe the laws of the state in which they are registered, no matter where they operated. This is why most are registered in South Dakota, which has no maximum interest rate.

Just as the United States had managed to largely get rid of the problem of political corruption by making the bribery of legislators effectively legal—it was redefined as ‘lobbying’—so the problem of loan-sharking was brushed aside by making real interest rates of 25 percent, 50 percent, or even in some cases (for instance for payday loans) 120 percent annually, once typical only of organized crime, perfectly legal—and therefore, enforceable no longer just by hired goons and the sort of people who place mutilated animals on their victims’ doorsteps, but by judges, lawyers, bailiffs, and police.

There are even debt TV shows, which have a familiar religious-revival ring to them. There are accounts of shopaholic binges during which you don’t know what came over you and everything was a blur, with tearful confessions by those who’ve spent themselves into quivering insomniac jellies of hopeless indebtedness, and have resorted to lying, cheating, stealing, and kiting cheques between bank accounts as a result. There are testimonials by families and loved ones whose lives have been destroyed by the debtor’s harmful behaviour. There are compassionate but severe admonitions by the television host, who here plays the part of priest or revivalist. There’s a moment of seeing the light, followed by repentance and a promise never to do it again. There’s a penance imposed—snip, snip go the scissors on the credit cards—followed by a strict curb-on-spending regimen; and finally, if all goes well, the debts are paid down, the sins are forgiven, absolution is granted, and a new day dawns, in which a sadder but more solvent man you rise the morrow morn.

Here, risk-taking is in no sense the vessel of the divine. Quite the opposite. But for the poor it’s always different. In a way, it might be seen as the perfect inversion of the prophetic voice of Reverend King’s “I Have a Dream” speech: whereas the first post-war age was about collective claims on the nation’s debt to its humblest citizens, the need for those who have made false promises to redeem themselves, now those same humble citizens are taught to think of themselves as sinners, seeking some kind of purely individual redemption to have the right to any sort of moral relations with other human beings at all.

At the same time, there is something profoundly deceptive going on here. All these moral dramas start from the assumption that personal debt is ultimately a matter of self-indulgence, a sin against one’s loved ones—and therefore, that redemption must necessarily be a matter of purging and

restoration of ascetic self-denial. What's being shunted out of sight here is first of all the fact that everyone is now in debt (US household debt is now estimated at on average 130 percent of income), and that very little of this debt was accrued by those determined to find money to bet on the horses or toss away on fripperies. Insofar as it was borrowed for what economists like to call discretionary spending, it was mainly to be given to children, to share with friends, or otherwise to be able to build and maintain relations with other human beings that are based on something other than sheer material calculation. One must go into debt to achieve a life that goes in any way beyond sheer survival.

This is, incidentally, also the best response to conventional critiques of the poor as falling into debt because they are unable to delay gratification—another way in which economic logic, with all its human blind spots, skews any possible understanding of consumers' actual motivations. Rationally, since CDs yield around 4% annually, and credit cards charge 20%, consumers should save as a cushion and only go into debt when they absolutely have to, postponing unnecessary purchases until there's a surplus. Very few act this way, but this is rarely because of improvidence (can't wait to get that flashy new dress) but because human relations can't actually be put off in the same way as imaginary "consumer purchases"—one's daughter will only be five once, and one's grandfather has only so many years left.

Ultimately, it's sociality itself that's treated as abusive, criminal, demonic. To this, most ordinary Americans—including Black and Latino Americans, recent immigrants, and others who were formerly excluded from credit—have responded with a stubborn insistence on continuing to love one another. They continue to acquire houses for their families, liquor and sound systems for parties, gifts for friends; they even insist on continuing to hold weddings and funerals, regardless of whether this is likely to send them skirting default or bankruptcy—apparently figuring that, as long as everyone now has to remake themselves as miniature capitalists, why shouldn't they be allowed to create money out of nothing too?

Granted, the role of discretionary spending itself should not be exaggerated. The chief cause of bankruptcy in America is catastrophic illness; most borrowing is simply a matter of survival (if one does not have a car, one cannot work); and increasingly, simply being able to go to college now almost necessarily means debt peonage for at least half one's subsequent working life. Still, it is useful to point out that for real human beings survival is rarely enough. Nor should it be.

In the wake of the subprime collapse, the US government was forced to decide who really gets to make money out of nothing: the financiers, or ordinary citizens. The results were predictable. Financiers were "bailed out

with taxpayer money”—which basically means that their imaginary money was treated as if it were real. Mortgage holders were, overwhelmingly, left to the tender mercies of the courts, under a bankruptcy law that Congress had a year before made far more exacting against debtors. Nothing was altered. All major decisions were postponed. The Great Conversation that many were expecting never happened.

Capitalism cannot really operate in a world where people believe it will be around forever. For most of the last several centuries, most people assumed that credit could not be generated infinitely because they assumed that the economic system itself was unlikely to endure forever. The future was likely to be fundamentally different. Yet somehow, the anticipated revolutions never happened. The basic structures of financial capitalism largely remained in place. It's only now, at the very moment when it's becoming increasingly clear that current arrangements are not viable, that we suddenly have hit the wall in terms of our collective imagination.

There is very good reason to believe that, in a generation or so, capitalism itself will no longer exist—most obviously, as ecologists keep reminding us, because it's impossible to maintain an engine of perpetual growth forever on a finite planet, and the current form of capitalism doesn't seem to be capable of generating the kind of vast technological breakthroughs and mobilizations that would be required for us to start finding and colonizing any other planets. Yet faced with the prospect of capitalism actually ending, the most common reaction—even from those who call themselves progressives—is simply fear. We cling to what exists because we can no longer imagine an alternative that wouldn't be even worse.

My own suspicion is that we are looking at the final effects of the militarization of American capitalism itself. In fact, it could well be said that the last thirty years have seen the construction of a vast bureaucratic apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness, a giant machine designed, first and foremost, to destroy any sense of possible alternative futures. At its root is a veritable obsession on the part of the rulers of the world—in response to the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s—with ensuring that social movements cannot be seen to grow, flourish, or propose alternatives; that those who challenge existing power arrangements can never, under any circumstances, be perceived to win.

To do so requires creating a vast apparatus of armies, prisons, police, various forms of private security firms and police and military intelligence apparatus, and propaganda engines of every conceivable variety, most of which do not attack alternatives directly so much as create a pervasive climate of fear, jingoistic conformity, and simple despair that renders any thought of changing the world seem an idle fantasy. Maintaining this

apparatus seems even more important, to exponents of the free market, even more than maintaining any sort of viable market economy. How else can one explain what happened in the former Soviet Union? One would ordinarily have imagined that the end of the Cold War would have led to the dismantling of the army and the KGB and rebuilding the factories, but in fact what happened was precisely the other way around. This is just an extreme example of what has been happening everywhere.

Economically, the apparatus is pure dead weight; all the guns, surveillance cameras, and propaganda engines are extraordinarily expensive and really produce nothing, and no doubt it's yet another element dragging the entire capitalist system down—along with producing the illusion of an endless capitalist future that laid the groundwork for the endless bubbles to begin with. Finance capital became the buying and selling of chunks of that future, and economic freedom, for most of us, was reduced to the right to buy a small piece of one's own permanent subordination. In other words, there seems to have been a profound contradiction between the political imperative of establishing capitalism as the only possible way to manage anything, and capitalism's own unacknowledged need to limit its future horizons lest speculation, predictably, go haywire. Once it did, and the whole machine imploded, we were left in the strange situation of not being able to even imagine any other way that things might be arranged. About the only thing we can imagine is catastrophe.

To begin to free ourselves, the first thing we need to do is to see ourselves again as historical actors, as people who can make a difference in the course of world events. This is exactly what the militarization of history is trying to take away. Even if we are at the beginning of the turn of a very long historical cycle, it's still largely up to us to determine how it's going to turn out.

Perhaps it's naïve to look for any new breakthrough from the puritanical legacy of the old patriarchal rebellion. Perhaps it will come out of feminism. Or Islamic feminism. Or from some as yet completely unexpected quarter. Animal rights and liberation movements would seem to be a likely candidate due to the larger and more varied moral outrage capable of being generated against the system. Who's to say? The one thing we can be confident of is that history is not over, and that surprising new ideas will certainly emerge.

The one thing that's clear is that new ideas won't emerge without the jettisoning of much of our accustomed categories of thought—which have become mostly sheer dead weight, if not intrinsic parts of the very apparatus of hopelessness—and formulating new ones. This is why I spent so much time talking about the market, but also about the false choice between state and market that so monopolized political ideology for the last centuries that

it made it difficult to argue about anything else. The real history of markets is nothing like what we're taught to think it is. The earlier markets that we are able to observe appear to be spillovers, more or less; side effects of the elaborate administrative systems of ancient Mesopotamia. They operated primarily on credit. Cash markets arose through war: again, largely through tax and tribute policies that were originally designed to provision soldiers, but that later became useful in all sorts of other ways besides.

It was only the Middle Ages, with their return to credit systems, that saw the first manifestations of what might be called market populism: the idea that markets could exist beyond, against, and outside of states, as in those of the Muslim Indian Ocean—an idea that was later to reappear in China with the great silver revolts of the fifteenth century. It usually seems to arise in situations where merchants, for one reason or another, find themselves making common cause with common people against the administrative machinery of some great state. But market populism is always riddled with paradoxes, because it still does depend to some degree on the existence of that state, and above all, because it requires founding market relations, ultimately, in something other than sheer calculation: in the codes of honor, trust, and ultimately community and mutual aid, more typical of human economies. This in turn means relegating competition to a relatively minor element. In this light, we can see that what Adam Smith ultimately did, in creating his debt-free market utopia, was to fuse elements of this unlikely legacy with that unusually militaristic conception of market behavior characteristic of the Christian West. In doing so he was surely prescient. But like all extraordinarily influential writers, he was also just capturing something of the emerging spirit of his age. What we have seen ever since is an endless political jockeying back and forth between two sorts of populism—state and market populism—without anyone noticing that they were talking about the left and right flanks of exactly the same animal.

The main reason that we're unable to notice, I think, is that the legacy of violence has twisted everything around us. War, conquest, and slavery not only played the central role in converting human economies into market ones; there is literally no institution in our society that has not been to some degree affected. Even how our conceptions of 'freedom' itself came to be transformed, through the Roman institution of slavery, from the ability to make friends, to enter into moral relations with others, into incoherent dreams of absolute power, is only perhaps the most dramatic instance—and most insidious, because it leaves it very hard to imagine what meaningful human freedom would even be like.

If this book has shown anything, it's exactly how much violence it has taken, over the course of human history, to bring us to a situation

where it's even possible to imagine that that's what life is really about. Especially when one considers how much of our own daily experience flies directly in the face of it. As I've emphasized, communism may be the foundation of all human relations—that communism that, in our own daily life, manifests itself above all in what we call 'love'—but there's always some sort of system of exchange, and usually, a system of hierarchy built on top of it. These systems of exchange can take an endless variety of forms, many perfectly innocuous. Still, what we are speaking of here is a very particular type of calculating exchange. The difference between owing someone a favor, and owing someone a debt, is that the amount of a debt can be precisely calculated. Calculation demands equivalence. And such equivalence—especially when it involves equivalence between human beings (and it always seems to start that way, because at first, human beings are always the ultimate values)—only seems to occur when people have been forcibly severed from their contexts, so much so that they can be treated as identical to something else, as in: 'seven martin skins and twelve large silver rings for the return of your captured brother,' 'one of your three daughters as surety for this loan of one-hundred-fifty bushels of grain.'

This in turn leads to that great embarrassing fact that haunts all attempts to represent the market as the highest form of human freedom: that historically, impersonal, commercial markets originate in theft. More than anything else, the endless recitation of the myth of barter, employed much like an incantation, is the economists' way of fending off any possibility of having to confront it. But even a moment's reflection makes it obvious. Who was the first man to look at a house full of objects and to immediately assess them only in terms of what he could trade them in for in the market likely to have been? Surely, he can only have been a thief. Burglars, marauding soldiers, then perhaps debt collectors, were the first to see the world this way. It was only in the hands of soldiers, fresh from looting towns and cities, that chunks of gold or silver—melted down, in most cases, from some heirloom treasure, that like the Kashmiri gods, or Aztec breastplates, or Babylonian women's ankle bracelets, was both a work of art and a little compendium of history—could become simple, uniform bits of currency, with no history, valuable precisely for their lack of history, because they could be accepted anywhere, no questions asked. And it continues to be true. Any system that reduces the world to numbers can only be held in place by weapons, whether these are swords and clubs, or nowadays, "smart bombs" from unmanned drones.

It can also only operate by continually converting love into debt. I know my use of the word 'love' here is even more provocative, in its own way, than 'communism.' Still, it's important to hammer the point home. Just

as markets, when allowed to drift entirely free from their violent origins, invariably begin to grow into something different, into networks of honor, trust, and mutual connectedness, so does the maintenance of systems of coercion constantly do the opposite: turn the products of human cooperation, creativity, devotion, love, and trust back into numbers once again. In doing so, they make it possible to imagine a world that is nothing more than a series of cold-blooded calculations. Even more, by turning human sociality itself into debts, they transform the very foundations of our being—since what else are we, ultimately, except the sum of the relations we have with others—into matters of fault, sin, and crime, and making the world into a place of iniquity that can only be overcome by completing some great cosmic transaction that will annihilate everything.

Take microlending. What is most attractive about microlending is what it is not, what it makes unnecessary: any sort of collective action by poor people, coming together in governments or unions. The international development community now knew that such institutions had no real role in human prosperity. Instead, we were to understand poverty in the familiar terms of entrepreneurship and individual merit, as though the hard work of millions of single, unconnected people, plus cellphones, bank accounts, and a little capital, were what was required to remedy the third world's vast problems. Millions of people would sell one another baskets they had made or coal they had dug out of the trash heap, and suddenly they were entrepreneurs, on their way to the top.

The key to development was not doing something to limit the grasp of Western banks, in other words; it was extending Western banking methods to encompass every last individual on earth. Microlending is a perfect expression of Clintonism, bringing together wealthy financial interests with rhetoric that sounds outrageously idealistic. Microlending permits all manner of networking, virtue-seeking, and profit-taking among the lenders while doing nothing to change actual power relations—the ultimate win-win.

There's a second reason the liberal class loves microfinance, and it's extremely simple: microlending is profitable. Lending to the poor, as every subprime mortgage originator knows, can be a lucrative business. Mixed with international feminist self-righteousness, it is also a bulletproof business, immune to criticism. The million-dollar paydays it has brought certain microlenders are the wages of virtue. This combination is the real reason the international goodness community believes that empowering poor women by lending to them at usurious interest rates is a fine thing all around.

As strategies for ending poverty go, microlending appears to be among the worst that has ever been tried, just one step up from doing nothing to help the poor at all. It doesn't empower women, it makes them into

debtors. It encourages people to take up small, futile enterprises that have no chance of growing or employing others. Sometimes microborrowers don't even start businesses at all; they just spend the loan on whatever. Even worse: the expert studies that originally sparked the microlending boom turn out, upon reexamination, to have been badly flawed. Nearly every country where microlending has been an important development strategy for the last few decades is now a disaster zone of indebtedness and economic backwardness.

Such is the state of the conversation in the mainstream literature. My purpose here has been less to engage with it directly than to show how it has consistently encouraged us to ask the wrong questions. There is a widespread belief that poverty is caused by a lack of credit. It's only if the industrious poor have access to loans from stable, respectable banks—rather than to loan sharks, or, presumably, credit card companies, or payday loan operations, which now charge loan-shark rates—that they can rise out of poverty. So actually they are not really concerned with poverty at all, just with the poverty of some people, those who are industrious and thus do not deserve to be poor. What about the non-industrious poor? They can go to hell, presumably—quite literally, according to many branches of Christianity. Or maybe their boats will be lifted somewhat by the rising tide. Still, that's clearly incidental. They're undeserving, since they're not industrious, and therefore what happens to them is really beside the point.

For me, this is exactly what's so pernicious about the morality of debt: the way that financial imperatives constantly try to reduce us all, despite ourselves, to the equivalent of pillagers, eyeing the world simply for what can be turned into money—and then tell us that it's only those who are willing to see the world as pillagers who deserve access to the resources required to pursue anything in life other than money. It introduces moral perversions on almost every level. 'Cancel all student loan debt? But that would be unfair to all those people who struggled for years to pay back their student loans!' This argument makes about as much sense as saying it would be unfair to a mugging victim not to mug their neighbors too. The argument might perhaps make sense if one agreed with the underlying assumption—that work is by definition virtuous, since the ultimate measure of humanity's success as a species is its ability to increase the overall global output of goods and services by at least five percent per year.

The problem is that it is becoming increasingly obvious that if we continue along these lines much longer, we're likely to destroy everything. That giant debt machine that has, for the last five centuries, reduced increasing proportions of the world's population to the moral equivalent of conquistadors would appear to be coming up against its social and ecological

limits. Capitalism's inveterate propensity to imagine its own destruction has morphed, in the last half-century, into scenarios that threaten to bring the rest of the world down with it. And there's no reason to believe that this propensity is ever going to go away. The real question now is how to ratchet things down a bit, to move toward a society where people can live more by working less.

I would like, then, to end by putting in a good word for the non-industrious poor. At least they aren't hurting anyone. Insofar as the time they are taking time off from work is being spent with friends and family, enjoying and caring for those they love, they're probably improving the world more than we acknowledge. Maybe we should think of them as pioneers of a new economic order that would not share our current one's penchant for self-destruction.

The People's Money

Our Money

How can a fairy—a small, winged humanoid—perform her duties with regard to teeth? Of course she's probably capable of carrying one tooth, maybe a few, but once you bring coins into the matter that's where the physics really falls apart.

Or how can Santa visit every house on Christmas Eve? Well first, as a fictional creation, he clearly has the power to do whatever his creators and supporters say he can do. But convincing children he is real requires the actual physical labors of hundreds of millions of people.

I recently read that Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) is defined as the proposition that the federal government can borrow as much money as it needs so long as the interest rate it pays is less than the growth rate of the GDP. The short article went on to argue why this was a dangerously false premise. Thus, MMT got shot with two bullets in one paragraph: first by defining it in a way that negates its most fundamental principle—that the federal government doesn't need to borrow fiat currency in order to spend fiat currency—and second, by declaring MMT to be not only false, but dangerous.

It's remarkable how stubbornly tenacious mainstream economic thinking is about misunderstanding and fearing MMT. The fundamental belief that refuses to be shaken is that for a sovereign government to spend, it must first claim—either through taxation or borrowing—some portion of the profits of private commerce. This immediately sets in motion complex calculations about what percentage of those profits can be claimed for government spending before the profit-making capabilities of private commerce itself are harmed (because the capital that would otherwise be used for expansion, is being appropriated for government spending). When that point is reached, the calculations insistently predict, private commerce will cease to grow—perhaps even shrink—which perversely will then reduce the amount of currency available for the government to claim a portion of; if, under those

circumstances, the government continues nevertheless to increase its spending (by insistently increasing its taxing or borrowing), private commerce will be driven to shrink even further, setting in motion a disastrous downward spiral. The calculations, in other words, are structured to demonstrate that government spending per se strangles the goose that lays the eggs—and, therefore, it is rational to argue that government spending should be limited, and specifically that it should not exceed some calculated percentage of GDP; which, of course, in most calculations of this sort, it already does!

Why is it so difficult for MMT to get itself properly understood—and, once understood, to get itself over the hump of this narrative calculation?

“Yes, yes, that’s all well and good, but the fact is the federal government does not own the Federal Reserve. It is owned by the private banking industry.”

Whether or not this is technically correct—and the reality of it is so ambiguous that arguing the point on one side or the other is futile—what it means, of course, is that it is meaningless for MMT to argue that the sovereign US government creates US dollars by fiat and then spends them into the private economy—because it is the Federal Reserve, in fact, that creates US fiat dollars, and it does so only to service the needs of private commerce. The Federal Reserve cannot, by law, create US fiat dollars for government spending. It can create them, as necessary, to maintain the liquidity of the reserve banking system—which generates the loans that support the profit-making enterprise of private commerce—but it cannot create fiat dollars and deposit them in the US Treasury’s spending account. Therefore, the fundamental belief that cannot be shaken (as described above) is unshakable because it is, apparently, based in reality. Operationally, it seems, the sovereign federal government really does have to claim—through taxation or borrowing—some portion of the profits of private commerce (fiat dollars created by the Federal Reserve) in order to have dollars to spend.

MMT therefore is made difficult not because it must disprove a false “truth,” but because the “truth” which it is trying to replace cannot seem to be disproved so long as one accepts words to have their conventional meanings. This dilemma is often brought to light with the question: if the Central Bank and the Treasury are really two components of the same sovereign entity, why are they not set up that way? If the Federal Reserve can create sovereign fiat dollars at will, why limit this ability only to the meet the “demands” of the operations of the reserve banking system in support of private commerce? Why is it not structured to also enable the Federal Reserve to create fiat dollars as “demanded” by the spending needs

of the federal government in support of the collective good—as is implicitly (and often explicitly) suggested by the advocates of MMT?

Because the banks—despite the fact they grudgingly allowed themselves to be “regulated” by a federal agency—“own” the banking system. And being owners, they have a natural prerogative to guard against what they fear most, which is dilution of the value of the fiat currency they use—that they might loan out dollars that have one value, and then be repaid with dollars having a lower value (inflation). Fiat dollars created in support of private commerce, the thinking must go, will not produce inflation because the money supply increases commensurate with the production of the goods and services private commerce produces for people to buy. More dollars equals more goods and services, therefore the value of the dollars relative to the goods and services to be purchased remains more or less constant. A good argument, but not a proven explanation of the dynamics of inflation.

On the other hand, fiat dollars created directly for government spending (the argument continues) would not typically create more goods and services for people to buy; instead, after the government spends them (for example, to make a welfare payment) they simply increase the number of fiat dollars competing for the existing goods and services produced by private commerce. In other words, creating fiat dollars for the purpose of government spending inevitably must dilute the value of the currency—and the banks will realize their greatest fear: getting repaid with dollars less valuable than what they loaned out. Therefore, the banking industry, from the very beginning, when the Federal Reserve system was created, made sure it was structured so this could not happen. The federal government, if it is short on spending money, is required to issue treasury bonds to make up the short-fall—an operation which became known by the pejorative term “deficit spending.”

Given the context of this understanding, it seems perfectly reasonable that mainstream economic thinking (which is primarily the thinking of the banking and financial industries) clings so tightly to the unshakable belief that a sovereign government, in order to spend, must first claim, through taxation or borrowing, a portion of the profits of private commerce—as well as all the other “rational” axioms that build upon that belief:

- That to avoid the appropriation of too much capital from private commerce, government taxing and borrowing must be limited to some small percentage of GDP
- That limited government is, therefore, implicitly desirable—and expanded government implicitly to be feared as endangering the profits of private commerce

- That to keep government limited, social welfare and safety net services should primarily be the responsibility of voluntary private charity and philanthropy rather than federal spending
- That any federal regulation hindering the ability of private commerce to generate profits hurts the collective good, because hindering profits ultimately hinders the profit-share the collective good can claim or borrow
- Any kind of federal welfare payments are inherently inflationary because they give people money to spend without producing anything for them to spend the money on

Is there a chink in the armor of this narrative that might give MMT an opening? Is there a seed of misunderstanding in the “truth” that it presents? The place to look, I think, is the fundamental notion that federal spending absorbs and threatens the availability of capital for private commerce. If that is true, then it is, indeed, reasonable that federal spending should be curtailed and limited—which means it is reasonable that the activities and responsibilities of the federal government itself should be curtailed and limited. If it is not true, however, a completely different rationale is required to argue that the sovereign government’s efforts, responsibilities, and spending on behalf of the collective good of its citizens, should be limited.

In other words, to look from a slightly different angle, is it possible for the sovereign government’s spending, in the interest of the collective good, to expand by orders-of-magnitude beyond current spending—without increasing rates of taxation or diluting the value of the currency—while private commerce remains fully and happily capitalized to pursue its profit-making enterprises? MMT answers ‘yes.’ The key to this answer lies in seeing a flaw in the conventional “truth” of treasury bonds, the reality of what treasury bonds legally represent and, consequently, the value and usefulness they have in the operations of private commerce.

To uncover the flaw, begin with the question: why would a private bank (or anybody else in private commerce) trade real, genuine, spendable sovereign fiat dollars for a treasury bond representing fiat dollars that can’t actually be spent for, say, ten years? Does the US Treasury coerce the purchase of its bonds? In fact, banks and big spenders and players in private commerce pretty much line up to trade their fiat dollars for the Treasury’s bonds like cattle line up at a hay-trough. Why? Hunger—not for the crunch of hay, but for safe, guaranteed, no-work-required profits. Safe, guaranteed, no-work-required profits are not something easily found in the world of

private commerce. They are much appreciated and sought after, however, because the biggest headache in private commerce, if the truth be told, is figuring out what to profitably do with profits. There is a staggering amount of profit in private commerce that hasn't figured out what to do next. If it does nothing, it simply shrinks due to "background inflation." If it rushes to invest itself recklessly, without the concerted and creative efforts required by successful private enterprise, it risks being lost completely. Thus, the US treasury bond is a godsend for private commerce: the players trade their excess capital (sovereign fiat dollars) for the interest-bearing treasury bonds and make a profit without having to creatively exercise their brains or worry about anything at all—except, perhaps, whether the United States is going to collapse as a sovereign government.

What makes the treasury bond even more magical, however, is that if, say, a big opportunity comes along to invest real sovereign fiat dollars in a killer profit-making venture—no problema! The secondary market for US treasury bonds—other folks who can't imagine, right now, what to do with their private commerce profits—provides instantaneous liquidity: the treasury bond can be traded for the real sovereign fiat dollars needed to make the killer investment.

Given this transparent and virtually seamless interchangeability between US fiat dollars and US treasury bonds, it is clear the treasury bond represents something fundamentally different than the government's borrowing of dollars from private commerce. The fiat dollars supposedly borrowed are, in fact, replaced with another kind of fiat dollar represented by the treasury bond. Therefore, it is *incorrect* to imagine or say that the issuing of treasury bonds subtracts capital from private commerce. In fact, the opposite occurs: first, the fiat dollars represented by the bonds are greater than the fiat dollars private commerce traded for the bonds (because the bonds are interest-bearing); second, when the federal government subsequently spends the fiat dollars it received in trade, they are spent back into the market of private commerce. The net result of the entire operation, therefore, is that private commerce now has substantially more capital available to invest than it had before the trade.

The conventional meaning of the term 'borrow'—as applied to the US Treasury's operation of issuing treasury bonds—then, is the seed of misunderstanding that lies at the heart of MMT's dilemma. Correcting the misunderstanding should make it possible for MMT's logic not only to be accepted, but for that logic to prevail in future dialogs about what the federal government can undertake to accomplish—and pay for—in the collective interests of society:

- US fiat dollars are promissory notes for federal tax credits—of which the federal government has an infinite supply (and for which there is infinite demand)—so long as US citizens and businesses are required by law to pay federal taxes.
- The federal government does not borrow fiat dollars from private commerce; it trades new fiat dollars, issued by the US treasury in the form of treasury bonds, for existing fiat dollars in the private market (created by the Federal Reserve); the government then spends the fiat-dollars it has traded for back into private commerce.
- What is called “federal government borrowing,” in the lexicon of mainstream “truth,” is actually and operationally the issuing of new fiat dollars by the US treasury—and these new fiat dollars are what, operationally, enable the government to purchase goods and services for the collective benefit of society.
- “Deficit spending” by the federal government, therefore, does not increase something called the “national debt” because the holders of treasury bonds already have their money. This is why no one is knocking on the federal government’s door asking for the national debt to be repaid.
- Federal spending, therefore, does not require the government to claim a portion of the profits of private commerce; and increasing federal spending, therefore, does not require increasing that claim—either through taxing or ‘borrowing.’
- Federal spending, through the issuing of treasury bonds, in fact results not only in the creation of useful public goods and services, but in the expansion of capital in the private markets.

It is therefore possible to understand that fiat money creation by the sovereign government has two sources—the Federal Reserve, which creates fiat dollars as necessary to meet the liquidity demands of private commerce, and the US treasury, which creates fiat dollars (in the form of treasury bonds) to meet the demands of federal spending beyond what can be covered by tax collections.

Two related philosophies about federal finances are MMT (Modern Monetary Theory) and MS (Monetary Sovereignty). MMT and MS agree on the following principle:

“Taxes are not needed to ‘pay for’ (federal) government spending. The logic is reversed: government must spend (or lend) the currency into the economy before taxpayers can pay taxes in the form of the currency. Spend first, tax later is the logical sequence.”

In other words: The US government cannot run short of dollars. Federal taxes are not needed in order for the US federal government to spend. The US government, being monetarily sovereign, has the unlimited ability to create its own sovereign currency, the US dollar. The US government can never unintentionally run short of dollars. Even if all federal tax collections totaled \$0, the federal government could continue spending, forever. The articles you read about the “unsustainable” federal debt are, very simply, wrong. There is no level of US dollar obligations the federal government cannot easily sustain.

“The US government has a technology, called a printing press (or, today, its electronic equivalent), that allows it to produce as many US dollars as it wishes at essentially no cost.”

—Ben Bernanke

“Central banks can issue currency, a non-interest-bearing claim on the government, effectively without limit. A government cannot become insolvent with respect to obligations in its own currency.”

—Alan Greenspan

“As the sole manufacturer of dollars, whose debt is denominated in dollars, the US government can never become insolvent, i.e., unable to pay its bills. In this sense, the government is not dependent on credit markets (borrowing) to remain operational.”

—St. Louis Federal Reserve

Some who hear this for the first time jump to the question: ‘Well, why not just eliminate taxes altogether?’ There are several reasons. First, it is the tax that “drives” the currency. If we eliminated the tax, people probably would not immediately abandon use of the currency, but the main driver for its use would be gone—being required to pay government fees and fines in dollars.

MMT argues:

“The second reason to have taxes is to reduce aggregate demand. If we look at the United States today, the federal government spending is somewhat over 20% of GDP, while tax revenue is somewhat less—say 17%. The net injection coming from the federal government is thus about 3% of GDP. If we eliminated taxes (and held all else constant) the net injection might rise toward 20% of GDP. That is a huge increase of aggregate demand, and could cause inflation. Ideally, it is best if tax revenue moves countercyclically—increasing in expansion and falling in recession. That helps to make the government’s net contribution to the economy countercyclical, which helps to stabilize aggregate demand.”

The implicit assumption of the above paragraph is that the private sector’s money supply drives inflation, and the way to control inflation is to reduce the private sector’s money supply.

In a similar vein:

“Low or moderate inflation may be attributed to fluctuations in the real demand for goods and services, or changes in available supplies such as during scarcities. However, the consensus view is that a long sustained period of inflation is caused by money supply growing faster than the rate of economic growth.”

But this is wrong. A “long sustained period” of money supply growth cannot exceed a “long sustained period” of economic growth. The money supply cannot grow faster than economic growth. The two are interdependent in the formula for GDP:

Real GDP = Real Federal Spending + Real Non-federal Spending + Real Net Exports

A decrease in taxes would increase the “Non-federal Spending” factor and GDP by the same amount. By formula, tax decreases increase GDP.

Inflation usually is defined as a general increase in prices. Another way to say it is inflation reduces the purchasing power of each unit of currency. There are two levels of inflation: Intentional and unintentional. The intentional form is the amount that the central bank believes is helpful for a growing economy. The US Federal Reserve has as its target rate: 2% inflation. When annual inflation drifts above or below the 2% target, the Fed quickly raises and lowers interest rates—raises rates to combat inflation; lowers rates to stimulate inflation. The Fed also lowers interest

rates to stimulate economic growth, which follows the common myth that stimulating growth and stimulating inflation require the same actions.

The Fed's target rate of inflation is maintained by interest rate control, which controls the demand for, and purchasing power of, US dollars. Increasing the demand for dollars reduces inflation; decreasing the demand for dollars encourages inflation.

But what about high inflation—a.k.a. hyperinflation—say of 50% or 50,000% annually, or more. Such hyperinflation incidents are always caused by shortages of food and/or energy—usually oil. The famous Zimbabwe hyperinflation is a typical example. The government took farmland from white farmers and gave it to blacks who did not know how to farm. The inevitable food shortage caused hyperinflation. In response, rather than trying to cure the food shortage, the Zimbabwe government began printing more currency. This provided the illusion that currency printing caused the hyperinflation, when in fact, the hyperinflation caused the currency printing.

Think of a typical scenario this way: The inflation-adjusted money supply goes up. Where does the additional real money go? The vast majority goes to spending, which by definition, increases real GDP. One might argue that some is saved, but since saved dollars are not spent, they cannot contribute to aggregate demand. All increases in the real money supply increase real GDP. Further, and most importantly, all decreases in the real money supply (because of taxes) decrease real GDP. Thus taxes, rather than being effective moderators of inflation, actually are recessive.

Recession is not the opposite of inflation. The two can occur simultaneously. The opposite of inflation is deflation. Taxes do not cause deflation. Deflation—price decreases—is caused by excess supplies of goods and services. Thus, removing currency (via taxes) from the economy would have done nothing to cure the inflation, though it would have reduced real (inflation-adjusted) GDP economic growth, while it impoverished the populace.

There are several ways to prevent or cure inflation, but taxation is not one of them. Taxation merely takes dollars from the private sector and delivers them to the federal government, where your tax dollars are destroyed. Taxation does nothing to address the fundamental cause of inflation: Shortages.

Consider again, Zimbabwe: Rather than taxing, designed to reduce the currency supply (while impoverishing the people), or printing currency to increase the currency supply (thereby reducing the already diminished value of Zimbabwe's money), the Zimbabwe government should have taken steps to increase the food supply. This might have included paying to educate Zimbabwe's farmers and/or paying experienced farmers to manage farms or

paying to import food from other nations. These steps would have required the Zimbabwean government to spend more money to correct inflation—a counter-intuitive response, but the only one based on financial reality.

Any time a nation experiences an unwanted level of inflation, the correct early step is to increase interest rates, thus increasing the demand for, and the value of, the nation's currency. If the inflation has grown beyond interest rate increases as a sole solution, additional steps are needed.

You must determine what exactly is causing the inflation. If the cause is a shortage of food or energy the government must either import the needed food or energy, or fund ways to increase the domestic production of food or energy. If the government is monetarily non-sovereign (an EU nation or a US state, for instance), and cannot afford to fund imports or fund domestic production of the scarce commodities, it immediately should begin the process of issuing its own sovereign currency—it should make itself Monetarily Sovereign.

You, who understand Monetary Sovereignty, know that:

- Value and quantity are determined by laws.
- Before there was the United States of America, there were no US dollars.
- Our monetarily sovereign federal government created an arbitrary number of original US dollars from thin air, simply by writing laws.
- By those laws, our federal government continues to create US dollars from nothing. So long as the government does not run short of laws, it will not run short of dollars.
- Thus, unlike state and local (monetarily non-sovereign) governments, the federal government neither needs nor uses tax dollars to pay its bills. It simply creates dollars, ad hoc, as it always has done from the very first day. That is the fundamental difference between federal finances and state & local government finances.

Whenever you hear that the federal government, or any agency or program of the federal government—Social Security, Medicare, the Supreme Court, et alia—can become insolvent, know that any such insolvency would be intended by the government. Otherwise, no federal agency or program can ever be insolvent, even if zero taxes are collected. Because federal financing is so unlike state and local government financing, and unlike business financing and unlike personal financing, many people can be confused by the differences.

People know they need income in order to pay their bills, so they wrongly assume the federal government also needs income. It doesn't. People see the government collecting taxes, so they wrongly assume these taxes are needed for the federal government to pay its bills. They aren't. Because it is monetarily sovereign, the federal government has no need for taxes or for borrowing or for any other form of income. This confusion between personal finances and federal finances is supported by such articles as the following, from *The Atlantic* and the *US News & World Report*:

“The United States is falling apart because—unlike Canada and other wealthy countries—the American public sector simply doesn't have the funds required to keep the nation stitched together.”

Immediately, the article goes off the tracks, never to return. When using “public sector” does the author refer to the federal government or to state and local governments? He may be confused himself, for what is true for the latter is false for the former.

“A country where impoverished citizens rely on crowdfunding to finance medical operations isn't a country that can protect the health of its citizens. A country that can't ensure the daily operation of Penn Station isn't a country that can prevent transportation gridlock.”

The federal government has the financial capability to fund comprehensive, no-deductible Medicare for every man, woman, and child in America. In contrast, if Penn Station is funded by state and local government agencies, it very well can run short of dollars. The author, either intentionally or unintentionally, fails to differentiate.

“The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a group of 35 wealthy countries, ranks its members by overall tax burden—that is, total tax revenues at every level of government, added together and then expressed as a percentage of GDP—and in 2014, the United States came in fourth to last. Its tax burden was 25.9 percent—substantially less than the OECD average, 34.2 percent. If the United States followed that mean OECD rate, there would be about an extra \$1.5 trillion annually for governments to spend on better schools, safer roads, better trained police, and more accessible health care.”

We aren't told which of those "wealthy countries" is monetarily sovereign and which is monetarily non-sovereign. Canada, Australia, China, and Japan, for instance, are monetarily sovereign. They never can run short of their own sovereign currencies, so can afford to pay any invoice denominated in their sovereign currencies, without levying taxes. By contrast, Germany, Italy, France, and Greece are monetarily non-sovereign. They do not own a sovereign currency; they use the euro which is the sovereign currency of the European Union, and not under the control of any one nation. Thus, these countries do need taxes in order to pay their bills.

The author mentions "every level of government." So, while a monetarily sovereign government never can run short of its sovereign money, states, counties, and cities can run short. Unfortunately, in the world today, not one nation acts as a monetary sovereign. Every nation on earth functions as though is monetarily non-sovereign. When Canadian governments need more money, they raise taxes. Canadians are not thrilled when this happens. But as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. put it, taxes are the price paid "for civilized society." Fact: When the Canadian national government needs more money, it creates the Canadian dollars, ad hoc. When any local Canadian governments need more money, they must raise taxes or borrow. Completely different. The author repeatedly confuses the two, hinting at a serious lack of knowledge about economics.

"After doubling to \$20 trillion since 2009, the national debt is now projected to soar to an unfathomable \$92 trillion over the next 30 years."

To 'lend' to the federal government, you invest in a T-security. You instruct your bank to transfer dollars from your checking account to your T-security account at the Federal Reserve Bank (FRB). The so-called "national debt," is not like personal debt. It actually is the total of deposits in T-security accounts at the world's safest bank, the FRB.

To pay back the principal on these deposits (which it does every day), the FRB merely transfers existing dollars from the T-security accounts, back to the checking accounts of the T-security owners. This is no burden whatsoever on the federal government or on the FRB. The dollars exist. It's just a money transfer.

"At that point, depending on interest rates, between 60 and 100 percent of all individual income taxes will go toward paying the interest on this debt."

Wrong: No federal taxes “go toward paying the interest on this debt.” When federal taxes are collected, they disappear from the money supply. This is different from state and local taxes, which remain in the money supply. Thus, federal taxes effectively are destroyed upon receipt. To pay its bills, including interest, the federal government sends instructions—not dollars—to creditors’ banks. The instructions, in the form of checks or wires, instruct the banks to increase the balances in the creditors’ checking accounts. At the moment the banks obey those instructions, brand new dollars are created.

“What is driving the federal budget into bankruptcy? Health care spending.”

The above is a classic statement of the Big Lie. As we have seen, the federal government cannot go into bankruptcy. Given its unlimited ability to create the laws that create dollars, it never can run short of dollars. The author blames health care spending for a non-existent problem.

“Critics denounce Republican attempts to ‘slash health care spending.’ In reality, their proposals would slow the growth of health care spending relative to the current baseline projections—projections that are completely unsustainable anyway.”

Federal health care spending is not unsustainable. The federal government could spend ten times the projected amount and still, that would not be unsustainable, as the federal government has the unlimited ability to pay bills denominated in dollars.

“We also have a Medicare system that currently collects \$140,000 in lifetime taxes from the typical retiring couple and then provides them with \$422,000 in benefits (all adjusted into net present values). Multiply this by 77 million retiring baby boomers, and Medicare’s long-term shortfall is measured in the tens of trillions of dollars.”

The federal government neither needs nor uses taxes to pay benefits. It destroys tax dollars upon receipt, and it creates brand new dollars, ad hoc, by paying bills.

You may ask:

- Why do these fuckwads so dramatically misstate the facts about federal financing?
- Why do they confuse monetary sovereignty with monetary non-sovereignty?
- Why does the federal government collect taxes it doesn't need?

The United States, and indeed the world, are run by the very rich. The primary motive of the very rich is to widen the income, wealth, power gap between them and the rest. There are two ways for the rich to widen the Gap: lift themselves up, or push the rest of us down. The Big Lie that federal taxes fund federal spending pushes the rest of us down in two ways: It takes money directly from our pockets (especially such regressive taxes as FICA and sales taxes). And it provides the false “deficits are unsustainable” excuse that keeps us from receiving federal benefits. The Big Lie takes money out and prevents money from coming in.

To promulgate the Big Lie, the rich bribe the politicians via campaign contributions and promises of lucrative employment later. The rich bribe the media via advertising dollars and outright ownership of media. The rich bribe the economists via contributions to universities and employment at think tanks. By controlling all sources of economics information—the politicians, the media, and the economists—the rich are able to brainwash the public into believing their taxes must be increased and their benefits must be decreased—in short, the Gap between the rich and the rest must be widened.

I do not know whether these particular fuckwads have been told by their respective publications to write the Big Lie, or whether they themselves have been bribed, or whether they simply are ignorant of basic economics. At least one of these must be true.

But in any event, their articles are just small examples of the ongoing misinformation that has been pumped into the private sector for many years—the Big Lie that costs you so much, every day of your life. Were it not for the rich sponsoring the Big Lie, the Seven Steps to Prosperity could already be in force, and your life would be far better than you can imagine. The single most important problems in economics involve the excessive income/wealth/power Gaps between the have-mores and the have-less. Wide Gaps negatively affect poverty, health and longevity, education, housing, law and crime, war, leadership, ownership, bigotry, supply and demand, taxation, GDP, international relations, scientific advancement, the

environment, human motivation and well-being, and virtually every other issue in economics.

Seven Steps To Prosperity:

1. Eliminate FICA

FICA is the most regressive tax in American history, widening the Gap by punishing the low and middle-income groups, while leaving the rich untouched. The federal government, being monetarily sovereign, neither needs nor uses FICA to support Social Security and Medicare.

2. Federally funded Medicare—Parts A, B & D, plus long-term care—for everyone

3. Provide a universal basic income to every man, woman, and child in America

4. Free education (including post-grad) for everyone

Monetarily non-sovereign state and local governments, despite their limited finances, support grades K-12. Because state and local funding is so limited, grades K-12 receive short shrift, especially those schools whose populations come from the lowest economic groups. And college is too costly for most families. An educated populace benefits a nation, and benefiting the nation is the purpose of the federal government, which has the unlimited ability to pay for K-16 and beyond.

5. Tax the very rich more, with higher progressive tax rates on all forms of income.

Some might argue against increasing anyone's federal taxes. After all, the federal government has no need for tax dollars, and all taxes reduce Gross Domestic Product, thereby negatively affecting the entire economy, including the 99.9%. But narrowing the Gap requires trimming the top. It simply would not be possible to provide the 99.9% with enough benefits to narrow the Gap in any meaningful way. Bill Gates reportedly owns \$100 billion or more. To get to that level, he must have been earning \$10 billion a year. Pick any acceptable Gap—1,000:1?—and the lowest paid American would have to receive \$10 million a year—unreasonable.

6. Federal ownership of all banks

Banks have created all the dollars that exist. Even dollars created at the direction of the federal government, actually come into being when banks increase the numbers in checking accounts. This gives the banks enormous financial power, and as we all know, power corrupts—especially when multiplied by a profit motive. Although the federal government also is powerful and corrupted, it does not suffer from a profit motive, the world's most corrupting influence.

7. Increase federal spending on the myriad initiatives that benefit America's 99.9%

Save this reference as your primer to current economics. Sadly, much of the material is not being taught in American schools, which is all the more reason for you to use it.

The mainstream attack on MMT is nothing less than an attempt to disguise the glaringly obvious error at the center of the mainstream view of economic thinking. Mainstream economics is a nihilistic theory devoid of moral anchor. Mainstream economics ceased to explore the operation of the real economy decades ago and has become an intellectual exercise that assumes the organization of modern society is justified simply because that is how it is. While some mainstream economists may want to tinker around the edges to make the system more fair, few really want to call into question the organizing realities. The biggest reality they do not wish to face is that money is a symbolic creation rather than an actual productive resource.

Mainstream economics abandoned any attempt to justify the payments to capital owners when they surrendered the field to post-Keynesians at the end of the Cambridge controversies. Capital is not paid due to its productivity. Capital is paid as a residual that is left over after production occurs. Capital is simply another form of rent. With the abandonment of any attempt to justify the role capital plays in the production process mainstream economists ventured further and further into the intellectual woods. They began to abandon any semblance of justifying the payments to capital. The distinctions between capital as machinery and capital as money blurred and the mainstream literature simply stopped caring about the topic. Money is capital, and control of money gives the lords of finance a right to call upon the income stream of society, why would anybody question that?

Machinery and money capital are the same thing in the writings of most mainstream economists. This line of thinking places the banking industry, not the engineering community, as the source of economic progress. The ability of the bank to make a loan is how the house is built. The ability of

the bank to finance the creation of a new business is the origin of the value of that business. Or so the mainstream vision presumes.

The ability to fund the action is the power of capital. Capital, in this mainstream vision, is the power to fund the activities of the people who wish to take action. The mainstream has spent decades building up a theory based upon the assumption that funding of activities is the justifying reason for capital to be paid its income. The reasoning of the mainstream is simple: finance risks its wealth in order to pay people to take economic actions and that risk is the reason finance should be paid. Finance funds those actions through the selfless acts of savings done by the titans of finance and that savings is costly in terms of sacrificed personal consumption. The payment is clearly justified, within this perspective, because each act of financing risks the loss of that sacrifice.

MMT calls into question this fundamental justification of the power of the financial elites. By showing that money is a creation of the state and banks it threatens the very myth that underpins the massive stream of income diverted to the overlords of finance. MMT shows that government creates money through the act of spending and destroys it through taxation. MMT forces economists to admit that banks do not fund lending through savings. Instead MMT shows that savings is the result of borrowing and that the lords of finance literally create the money they lend with the wave of a hand. If the money is simply created by whim, it is much harder to justify the incredible payments these financiers obtain.

Mainstream theorists do not attack these fundamental points of MMT, they pretend that their actual issue is with the outcomes of uncontrolled government spending. Of course MMT would never justify such an inflationary policy. Instead MMT demystifies the true source of power in finance and this is what is feared. MMT points out that money is a creation of society and currently we have given a monopoly on that creation to the financial elites who have used that monopoly to extend their personal power. They have used that monopoly to build mansions and private jets while letting millions go without educations and healthcare. They have used that monopoly to empower themselves as economic overlords while indebting their fellow citizens without justification.

MMT has the gall to point out that society is only at the mercy of these titans for as long as we choose to be. Mainstream economists are afraid because MMT practitioners have pointed out that the emperor has no clothes. For as long as nobody was hearing what MMT was saying the emperor could dance, but now the emperor's aides are afraid the citizens might be listening.

Since the Democrat's presidential debates, the attacks on "progressive"

candidates for their “unrealistic” proposals to address the biggest challenges we face as a collective society have intensified dramatically. The primary criticism is the enormous price-tag associated with each of the big-ticket issues they propose to undertake: universal healthcare, mitigating climate-change, eliminating college debt, free pre-school daycare, re-envisioning and rebuilding America’s infrastructure, a job guarantee and a universal basic income for every citizen. The attacks come from both conservative Republicans and centrist and right-wing Democrats, each of whom are avowed believers in fiscal responsibility and balanced federal budgets.

Unfortunately, while there is growing sympathy with the progressive goals themselves, the advocates of those goals still don’t have a convincing explanation or formula for how the federal government will pay for it all. The best they can come up with is that we’ll increase taxes on the super-wealthy and the big corporations—or that it’s simply unacceptable, conceptually, that the world’s richest democracy cannot manage to achieve these goals for a healthy society. So long as these are the progressive narratives—even if they manage to win the upcoming elections, which with Creepy Joe and Superwoke-VP-to-be-named-later at the helm is unlikely—the goals will never be achieved. To create genuine, widespread support for undertaking the big-ticket issues we face, it will be necessary to explain to America how its monetary system actually works.

So, how do we get there? So far, the Modern Money narrative is bumping hard against an even harder ceiling of disbelief. Even the progressive political advocates themselves cannot—or will not—make a direct attempt to explain it. This, of course, is pragmatically understandable: the first candidate who makes the attempt will likely not survive the pushback of public ignorance and misinformation. Nevertheless, until this challenge is tackled, we can write off the ‘progress’ in ‘progressivism.’ A strategy needs to be established and implemented to create a Modern Money Explanation and frame it to be easily understood and politically palatable.

I recently watched the blood drain from Erin Burnett’s cheeks as she announced on CNN, with one of her most consternated expressions ever, that Bernie Sanders had “admitted” his Medicare-for-All program would “cost” \$40 trillion. Her blanched expression said it all: How could he even be dreaming that the federal government was going to pony up \$40 trillion to pay for America’s healthcare? I’d like to up the ante: it won’t cost \$40 trillion, but \$320 trillion! The narrative we’re trying to create must help Erin (and everyone else) wrap their intelligence around that scale of number—and realize that, in and of itself, it is both immensely meaningful and totally meaningless.

How do I figure? First, Bernie’s \$40 trillion price tag is calculated for a

10-year period. But why arbitrarily use a decade's calculation? Are people going to stop needing healthcare ten years from now? A more meaningful calculation, I would argue, is over a lifetime—so I'm figuring 80 years. Let's proclaim it then: at today's prices, Medicare-for-All will require a payment of \$320 trillion for each generation of Americans!

Next, we must consider in what sense this number has meaning. Erin's facial capillaries are clearly responding to the perception that when I spend money what happens is that, first, I have to get it from somewhere, second I spend it in exchange for something else and, third, I consequently don't have it any more. For a person, this is clearly what happens. Erin's mistake, however, is imagining that the currency issuing US federal government is like a person, or a family, or a business. This factually is not the case.

To see why, first consider what the \$320 trillion represents. Does it represent a finite amount of some thing the federal government needs to get its hands on—or does it represent the measurement of something, as in 'three-hundred feet of ribbon'? If America were still on the gold-standard, and the government had to be able to redeem every US dollar for 32oz of precious metal, then \$320 trillion would factually represent a finite amount of gold (which would vaporize Medicare-for-All in an instant, because there is not anywhere close to \$320 trillion worth of gold on the planet).

If, instead, \$320 trillion is a measurement of something, two questions arise:

1. What is being measured?
2. Is it possible for that thing to get so large that we run out of units of measurement? Can a ribbon get so long that we run out of 'feet'?

The answer to the first question is: our calculated \$320 trillion represents and measures the amount of healthcare services a generation of American citizens will need to obtain over their lifetime. Whether you think it's an absurdly big number is irrelevant. It is what it is, and there are only three ways it could be made smaller:

- Reduce the amount of healthcare services the generation will need.
- Reduce the cost of the healthcare services via price controls, nationalization, intellectual property reform, et cetera.
- Change the unit of measurement—i.e. define the 'foot' to be longer so the ribbon is, say, only 200 feet long when you measure it instead of 300.

The answer to the second question is established by the US Federal Reserve Act (established, in other words, by “fiat”). This democratically imposed component of the American social contract gave the Federal Reserve (American’s central bank) the authority to create units of measurement—US currency—as needed to measure whatever length of ribbon the American people choose to produce and consume. It was not always the case this could be made to happen. Prior to the US Federal Reserve Act, when the US—at the demand of east-coast financiers—was returning to the gold-standard after the Civil War, southern and western farmers in America produced, at every harvest, ribbons and ribbons of corn and cotton which they could not sell for the simple reason there was not enough currency to measure it—creating, year after year, extraordinary hardships and economic crisis. The Federal Reserve Act changed that.

Which means that if a generation of American citizens decides they want or need to consume \$320 trillion worth of healthcare services, the Federal Reserve is authorized to create the US currency necessary to enable it to happen. The only impediment would be if there aren’t enough doctors, nurses, radiologists, examination rooms, surgical suites, bandages, drugs, et cetera available to provide for the demand—in which case the citizens will, obviously, only consume what’s available (and the Federal Reserve will create the commensurate amount of currency).

In other words, just because we have a theoretically infinite number of ‘feet’ to measure ribbon with doesn’t in itself produce an infinite amount of ribbon. Or, to put it another way: the issue isn’t whether there’s enough ‘feet’ to measure—pay for the production and consumption of—our ribbon, but rather how much ribbon is actually available to be measured. Erin’s real concern, therefore, should be whether America’s boundaries contain enough real resources that can be marshaled to provide \$320 trillion worth of healthcare over the course of a generation.

This brings us to the second aspect of why Erin should let her cheeks return to their rosy blush: From a monetarily sovereign government’s perspective the \$320 trillion price tag for a generation of healthcare doesn’t represent a cost, it represents an earnings. Specifically, it represents what a very large sector of American businesses and citizens are going to earn by the act of providing healthcare services to America. In other words, unlike the personal perspective (after the spending occurs the money is gone) the monetary sovereignty view sees that in order for money to be earned it must first be spent. This may sound like a chicken-and-egg paradox—which happens first, does the money get spent, or does it get earned so that it subsequently can be spent? From the Federal Reserve’s perspective, however, there is no paradox at all: if new money needs to be spent in America, the

Fed simply creates it.

There are certain rules and procedures that must be followed, of course. It doesn't happen arbitrarily because someone thinks it should happen. It happens in response to something. So, how does the Fed know when new money needs to be created? One way it knows is when, at the end of an American business day, there are more checks and interbank transactions to be cleared at the central bank than there are Reserves held in the various bank's Reserve accounts. This means the banks collectively have created more "bank-dollars" (which are claims on their Reserves) through loan operations than there are Reserves to back up the claims. When this occurs, the Fed automatically creates new dollars to cover the shortfall. A shortfall is not ever allowed to occur because the entire US financial system depends on the certainty that, at the end of every business day, all the legitimate claims on bank Reserves clear.

But the Fed does not just give the new dollars to the bank's Reserve accounts for free. What happens is the Fed keystrokes the new dollars into the needful bank's Reserve account in exchange for some collateral ponied up by the bank. The Fed now holds the bank's collateral, and the bank holds the new dollars in its Reserve account—which enables the claims on those Reserves, generated by its expanded loan activity, to be fulfilled. Voila! New money that American enterprise has demonstrated it needs—by virtue of the willingness of people and businesses to borrow, and the willingness of banks to loan—has been created. Presumably, when the bank's outstanding loan is repaid with interest, it will redeem its collateral from the Fed using the profits derived from that interest.

Private debt, then, driven by the expectations of profit-making enterprise, is one of the primary instigators of new money creation by the Federal Reserve. There is another driver, however, equally important, that is shrouded in even greater (if that is possible) and more obfuscating confusion: the creation of new money by the Fed's purchase of US treasury bonds on the open market. What our explanation needs to make clear is that this operation is not only a money-creating action, the dollars it generates are specifically targeted toward the non-profit enterprises of the public good.

The Treasury is the spending arm of the US government. If Medicare-for-All is implemented, the \$320 trillion will be spent by the Treasury. The dollars the Treasury spends come from the Fed, who remember, conjures them out of thin air.

But what about the debt some will say. And treasury bonds, they're involved! Is a treasury bond a 'debt' or not?

Ask yourself: could the Treasury pay for things—like, say, Medicare expenses—directly with treasury bonds, instead of first trading those bonds

for Reserves, and then using the Reserves to pay the Medicare invoices? Assuming there's no statute to prevent such payments, the only question is whether the Medicare providers would accept the treasury bonds as payment. If they were, in fact, willing to do that, then the Treasury, when it created a bond, would not be creating a 'debt,' but would be creating 'money,' as it was needed, to fulfill the spending assignments appropriated by Congress. But why would a Medicare provider—or a climate mitigation contractor, or a community college administrator, or a pre-school daycare operator—agree to accept a treasury bond for payments promised instead of US dollars?

The answer is because US treasury bonds have a liquidity that is virtually equal to cash: anyone who receives a treasury bond as payment can easily and quickly trade it for US dollars. This interchangeability is unique to US treasury bonds. Corporate bonds or municipal bonds do not have the same liquidity for the simple reason that they each entail some level of real risk that the entity issuing the bond will be unable to redeem it or make its promised interest payment. Why do treasury bonds and corporate-municipal bonds differ in this regard?

To see why, consider that corporations and municipalities—like small businesses and households—must earn the dollars necessary to redeem their bonds. If things don't go as planned—if corporate profits fall, or local tax revenues decline—the future revenues the bond redemption depends on fail to materialize, and the bondholder loses all or some of his investment. The corporation or the municipality cannot simply issue new dollars as necessary to make the bond good. Which is precisely what the US Federal Reserve can and does do, without fail, in the case of US treasury bonds.

The US federal government, then, does not have to collect tax revenues in order to redeem treasury bonds. It does not depend on future revenues to repay its "debts." If you want proof of this, simply consider that over the course of US history, the federal government has issued and redeemed over \$20 trillion worth of bonds which have not been destroyed by taxes. How can the federal government do this while American families, businesses, corporations, and local governments cannot?

When the US Treasury issues its bonds, it is actually issuing new money. Whether that money is spent directly to the suppliers of goods and services—who then trade it for dollars from the banking industry—or is traded first to the banking industry for dollars, which are then spent by the Treasury, is an instance of Einstein's equivalence principle: if you can't tell the difference between two things, they are the same thing. US treasury bonds, then, are nothing more than 'future dollars' that have value today precisely because their future value, and the interest premium they bear, is the most ironclad, risk-free, guarantee that exists in the modern world today. And the US

Treasury is authorized to create these ‘future dollars,’ as needed, to pay for any expenditures authorized by Congress.

A very simple operation—coordinated between the US Treasury and the Federal Reserve banking system—makes it possible for the Treasury to spend today the future dollars it creates with its treasury bonds. I’ll make this short:

1. The Treasury issues a treasury bond.
2. The Federal Reserve keystrokes new reserves—equal to the value of the treasury bond—into one of its banks’ Reserve account in exchange for some collateral.
3. The bank trades the new Reserves to the Treasury in exchange for the treasury bond.
4. The Federal Reserve returns the bank’s collateral in exchange for the treasury bond.

End result: The Treasury has new spending money equal to the value the treasury bond just issued. The bank is returned to the same position it originally held. The Fed has on its balance sheet the newly issued treasury bond. The Fed now owns something it logically doesn’t need at all, ever—future dollars.

The US Treasury has created the money it needs to buy (from the American people themselves) the non-profitable goods and services that Congress has determined, through its democratic processes, are in the best interests of America’s collective society. Of course, even this process is far more complex than it needs to be.

‘Reserves’—that esoteric term in money-talk that postures to explain everything but explains nothing at all—have been much in the news of late. The Wall Street Journal even tried, recently, to explain what they are! They didn’t do such a great job. That’s unfortunate because, properly explained and understood, Reserves hold a big key to the political befuddlement—especially acute in the present election cycle—about what we can afford to accomplish as a collective society. This includes paying for real solutions to the six, money-intensive, life-defining dilemmas America now confronts:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Healthcare | 4. Affordable housing |
| 2. Student debt | 5. Climate change |
| 3. Early childhood care and development | 6. Bullshit jobs |

It is therefore well worth the effort, I think, to attempt an explanation of Reserves that might actually be grasped by the collective consciousness of our political dialog.

To accomplish that, I need a good metaphor to get started. Since I'm an architect, what comes to mind is exploring the structure of a building to discover what is holding up what—and discovering in the process, perhaps, some rooms with surprising views. It's a strange edifice (I warn you) that often seems unnecessarily complicated. But, observed with patience, it has its own peculiar beauty and logic—and, in the end, it's this strange beauty and logic that reveals what we can, in fact, do about the six dilemmas just listed. So, hold onto your brain-handles. We'll go slow and easy, so no one gets lost.

Without going into the history of the term, let's simply begin by saying that in America today Reserves are the sovereign fiat money issued by the US government. They are also the only official, real US dollars that the federal government will accept as payment for taxes, fees, or fines owed to the government—which is why, by definition, they are America's fiat money.

Having started with that statement, it may seem odd to you that the US government, itself, issues the very thing that it wants to get paid with. You might ask, 'If that's the case, why doesn't it just issue the money to itself, and leave me out of it?' As it turns out, that might not be a totally ridiculous question, though the answer might not be the tax-freedom you're hoping for. Reserves—modern fiat money—are strange things indeed, but they do, in the end, have a structure that can make sense out of the world.

One of the strangest things about Reserves—even fascinating—is that you can't get your hands on them. They exist only as digital entries inside America's central bank—created and canceled by keyboard strokes on an electronic balance sheet maintained by the US Federal Reserve—the Fed.

Reserves, then—even though they are the real US fiat dollars—are not the money American citizens and business borrow and spend every day. That money comes in two other forms: Federal Reserve Notes (the cash dollars we have tucked in our wallets) and bank-dollars which is the money we have on balance in our demand bank-accounts (checking and money-market accounts). What is the relationship between these other forms of money that we actually use every day and Reserves?

The relationship is very simple: Federal Reserve Notes (cash dollars) and bank-dollars are claims on the Reserve dollars posted on the electronic balance sheet at the Fed. So, while you can't get your hands on Reserves, you can make a claim on them when you actually need them. This is not something you need to worry about accomplishing—it happens, automatically, as needed, when you spend your cash or write a check.

This happens because of the way the central bank is structured. Every private bank in the Federal Reserve System has its own Reserve account at the Fed. In its Reserve account, each bank keeps track of the real sovereign US fiat dollars it is in control of. Remember, these are just digital entries on the electronic balance sheet—very much like the scoreboard at a basketball game. The Fed can debit Reserves from one bank's Reserve account and credit them to another's, 'keeping score,' if you will. The Fed can also simply issue new Reserves and add them to one account or another—again, with keystrokes—in exchange for another asset (collateral). Importantly, the US Treasury also has a Reserve account at the Fed—which is the spending account for the US federal government: Not only does the federal government expect to be paid with Reserves, it only makes payments, itself, with Reserves.

At this point, you're no doubt asking one big question: *WHY?* Why is it set up like this? Before we look into an answer to that question, however, let's make sure we understand how the structure of the building we're exploring actually works.

Here's an example of how you can exercise your claim on Reserves: Let's say you owe Uncle Sam \$1,000 in taxes. Uncle Sam demands that you pay him with Reserve-dollars. How do you do that? You write a check from your account at Bank-A to Uncle Sam for \$1,000. At the end of the business day, Uncle Sam presents the check it has received to the Fed for "clearing." In the clearing process, the Fed debits 1,000 Reserve-dollars from the Reserve account of your Bank-A, and credits 1,000 Reserve-dollars into the Treasury's Reserve account. Your check is "cleared" (canceled), 1,000 bank-dollars are debited from your checking account at Bank-A—and your taxes are marked 'PAID.'

Here's another example: You write a \$1,000 rent check from your Bank-A to your landlord who uses Bank-B. What happens? At the end of the business day, the landlord's bank sends your check, deposited by the landlord, to the Fed for clearing. During the clearing process, your claim on your bank's Reserves is exercised: 1,000 Reserve-dollars are debited from your bank's Reserve account and are credited to the Reserve account of the landlord's bank. Your check is canceled and, lastly, 1,000 Bank-B bank-dollars are credited to the landlord's account, while 1,000 Bank-A bank-dollars are debited from your account.

In each case, from your perspective, it appears that you are simply using the bank dollars in your checking account to pay someone—the government or your landlord—\$1,000. Hidden from you is the other operation in which your bank-dollars exercise their claim on Reserves at the Fed, causing the actual payment to be made with Reserves—real US fiat dollars.

There's one more thing we need to understand before we get to the question about why things are structured this way: If the US government's central bank—the Fed—issues Reserves, who issues the bank-dollars that are the claims on the Reserves? As the name implies, they are created by private banks—but by what process? The Fed has a lawful mandate to simply issue Reserves by fiat—out of thin air. But what is a private bank's mandate to create bank-dollar claims on the money created by the Fed?

The key is to see that a private bank can only issue claims on the Reserves that reside in its own Reserve account at the Fed. Because this is key, it is useful to have a quick understanding of how each bank acquires, in the first place, those Reserves it can create claims on: The Fed issues the Reserves (with keystrokes) and credits them to a bank's Reserve account in exchange for some collateral provided by the bank. Coming up with this collateral is a necessary component of becoming licensed as a federal reserve bank. The Fed stipulates what the collateral must be. Once the Reserve account is established, the bank can begin to issue the bank-dollars which are claims on those Reserves in its account.

A bank issues its bank-dollars by making loans to individuals and businesses. When Bank-A loans you, say, \$10,000 to make home-improvements, it credits your Bank-A checking account (using keystrokes, of course) with 10,000 bank-dollars. These are now your claims on the Reserves Bank-A holds at the Fed. You then write checks to various contractors and vendors, and those checks are presented for clearing at the Fed where your claims on Bank-A's Reserves are exercised.

This little example seems to suggest that a bank must be careful not to create more bank-dollar claims than it actually has in its Reserve account to meet those claims. As is famously known, however, banks create many more bank-dollars than they have in Reserves. How can this be? Doesn't that mean the clearing process at the Fed will break down—that eventually you'll write a check on your Bank-A account, only to find that it can't clear because Bank-A's Reserves have already been tapped out by other claims? There's a couple of reasons why, in modern times, this cannot happen—if everyone keeps their fingers crossed.

The first reason is that banks have come to understand that, on any given business day, only a tiny fraction of the bank-dollars they've issued will make claims on their Reserves at the Fed. The remainder—the vast majority—will remain passively silent in their various checking accounts, or in checks written but not yet deposited. Also, if a given bank is used by a large segment of a local, regional, or national population, the recipients of many checks written will deposit them back in the same bank—in which case they do not go through the Fed's clearing process at all, but simply

result in a tally on the bank's own bank-dollar balance sheet. A final 'also' is this: if banks in the federal reserve system stay, more or less, at the same scale of operations, during the Fed's clearing process any one bank should be credited, from other banks, about the same number of Reserves as it's debited.

The second reason banks 'safely' create many more bank-dollars than they have in Reserves is because the Fed has put in place, and operates, a number of fail-safe mechanisms which ensure that, every business day, the clearing process will always be successfully completed. Your check on Bank-A will always clear (assuming you have sufficient bank-dollars in your account to cover it). For our purposes here, we don't need to know or understand the details of the fail-safe systems the Fed operates—except one: As a last resort, the Fed can, and will, simply issue new Reserves, as necessary, and credit them (in exchange for collateral) to the Reserve account of whatever bank comes up short in the clearing process. It has to do this—otherwise the whole structure collapses.

Why is our modern fiat money system set up this way? Why not just have a single 'money' that we all use—the government, the banks, all of us—and be happy with that? It would be nice to say the answer is because well-intentioned and forward-thinking people thought a Reserve/bank-dollar system would best serve our needs. The real answer, however, is that under the circumstances of history, it was the best solution that could be cobbled together that all the stakeholders would agree upon (and using the term 'agree' is being generous).

In the century leading up to the Federal Reserve Act of 1913, America struggled mightily with its money system. These struggles became a crisis after the Civil War. Basically, there were three problems:

1. The value of money was suspect.

There was no national currency—only bank-dollars issued by different banks around the country. While these dollars generally promised to be exchangeable for gold, the amount of gold held by each bank to back up its promise was often suspect. Merchants had to be concerned which bank-dollars they were being paid with. This was a significant impediment to national commerce.

2. The clearing process between banks often broke down.

Transactions written on an account in Bank-A and submitted for deposit in Bank-B were often not accepted by Bank-B if it was suspicious that Bank-A might not be able to back up the promises of its bank-dollars. In the 1800s there were a series of banking crises in

which this clearing process between banks broke down, resulting in severe economic distress.

3. **There simply wasn't enough money.**

As things unfolded after the US Civil War, this turned out to be the biggest problem of all. The civil war had been paid for with Abraham Lincoln's fiat money—"greenbacks" that were printed and circulated to buy everything from mules to musket balls. A great many debts were racked up during the war—mostly to big banks on the East Coast. When the war ended, these East Coast banks refused to accept the greenback dollars as payment for the debts. They demanded to be paid, instead, in gold.

The only problem was there was not enough gold in the country to redeem the greenbacks and underwrite the need for an expanding money supply the new post-war commerce was demanding. The result was that southern and western farmers were unable to sell their crops for dollars. Instead, because of the lack of money in the system, they were forced to begin selling their crops for store credits. This began the era of the corrupt "crop-lien" system with its "furnishing merchants" who, over time, put the farmers so deeply in debt they were forced to become sharecroppers on what had once been their own farms. This, in turn, precipitated what nearly became a successful grassroots political revolution over the issue of money and, ultimately, led to the Federal Reserve Act of 1913.

Creating the US Federal Reserve banking system was a long and hard-fought political battle. In the end, the Reserve/bank-dollar system was created because it was the only structure everyone could agree upon that solved the three money problems just described.

Private banks could still issue their own bank-dollars—a prerogative they fought tooth and nail to maintain—but now, since the different bank-dollars were all claims on the same Reserve dollars, they could be treated equally in the marketplace. As intended, today it is impossible to distinguish between one bank's bank-dollars and another's.

The risk and uncertainty were removed from the clearing process for transactions between different banks. That process was now conducted, at the end of each business day, by the Fed itself—with the guarantee that every legitimate check or bank transfer cleared. Interstate commerce was free to blossom, and the epidemic of bank crises essentially came to a halt.

Large as these first two benefits were, the third benefit was, by far, the most significant: The most important fact about the Federal Reserve

system is that it was structured and put in place to enable the money supply that served American Enterprise to expand—as necessary—to meet the needs of what it was decided American Enterprise wanted to undertake and accomplish. After the post-Civil War money crisis, all stakeholders understood a simple fact of logic: If the labor, materials, energy, technology, and ingenuity exist to undertake and accomplish something—and it is desirable that it should be accomplished—it makes no sense to say that it can't be done because there isn't enough money in the system to pay for the doing of it. 'Money,' in other words, is not a limiting resource. To say that, as a collective society, we don't have enough money to do something makes as much sense as saying we don't have enough numbers to count something.

The Federal Reserve System, then, was cobbled together to solve these three problems. No one claimed it was the perfect solution. There were many compromises made to reach consensus in in the US Congress. The banking interests didn't want politics and the government to run the show. The government didn't want the bankers to have exclusive control over something that the common good, ultimately, depended on. The Fed, then, became a partnership—partially under the banker's control, partly under the control of the federal government.

The only questions to be asked, then, are two:

1. Who will create the money when it's needed?
2. Who will decide when the creation of additional money is justified?

Regarding the first question, since the Reserves used today are fiat money, their only source is a sovereign government. In our case, the authorized agent of the US government, for this purpose, is the Federal Reserve. The Fed, then, creates all Reserve fiat dollars (with keystrokes to an electronic balance sheet) no matter for what purpose. No one else is authorized to do so.

Regarding the second question, there are two answers, depending on whether the new Reserves are needed for private enterprise or public enterprise. What we'll explore now are these two very different rooms under the roof of our Federal Reserve edifice. While they have connecting hallways, and many of the occupants wear two hats, they serve two distinctly different needs of our collective society.

The distinguishing thing about private enterprise is that its guiding principle is to make a financial profit. Any beneficial goods and services constitute a by-product of private enterprise's underlying motive. This fact becomes apparent when you consider that if a good or service cannot be produced profitably—even if it is arguably beneficial or desirable—private

enterprise will not produce it. Or, if a produced good or service proves to be unexpectedly unprofitable—even though beneficial—private enterprise will cease producing it.

This implicit structure of private enterprise gives rise to the need for public enterprise: the undertaking of things that are beneficial (even existentially essential) for the collective good, but which do not, or cannot, produce financial profits. This includes goods and services which, to be profitable, demand prices that large segments of society cannot afford to pay. Public enterprise also undertakes beneficial things which may, unfortunately, someday in the future, become a profitable enterprise, but which, in their exploratory or start-up stages, involve too much financial risk for private enterprise to undertake. Private enterprise selling back the results of public investment is unfortunately an all too common occurrence.

Private and public enterprise share certain things in common. First, they share access to the real resources necessary to provide goods and services: labor, technology, materiel, energy, specialized skills, et cetera. Each of the enterprises pays money to marshal these resources to achieve its goals. Private enterprise hires American workers to build things and do things—and public enterprise does the same.

The two enterprises also share the same source of money used for the paying—the Reserve fiat dollars issued by the Federal Reserve. Private enterprise creates claims on those Reserves with bank-dollars, while public enterprise spends the Reserves directly. When public enterprise spends directly, the US Treasury—the spending arm of the federal government—causes Reserves to be credited to the Reserve account of the bank associated with the spending recipient; in turn, the recipient's bank credits bank-dollars to the recipient's checking account. Private and public enterprise, then, both depend on Reserves for their spending; each, however, has a different process by which it 'calls for' the Reserve dollars it requires.

If private enterprise sees a lot of opportunities to spend money for profit-making ventures, and the banks agree the opportunities look good—meaning they will likely make profits as well—the banks create bank-dollars and loan them to private enterprise to undertake the ventures. The banks don't calculate, first, whether they have enough Reserves to support the claims those new bank-dollars will make on their Reserve account at the Fed. They make the loan first, and then later (if necessary) borrow any additional Reserves necessary to cover the claims.

In aggregate, then, the private banks decide how many bank-dollars are issued (based on their calculations for potential profits) and the Fed responds by creating any new Reserve fiat dollars necessary to cover the resulting clearing processes in the system. The new Reserves are issued by

the Fed in exchange for collateral from the private banks. The collateral is held by the Fed on what is known as its 'balance sheet.' If it 'expands its balance sheet,' it is creating new Reserves. If it 'winds down' its balance sheet, it is trading collateral for existing Reserves—which it then simply cancels, erasing them from the system.

Banks are able to leverage the creation of many more bank-dollars than they have Reserves to back them up. The Fed, then, is only required to issue new Reserves if that leverage changes. One thing that would change the leverage is if private enterprise in America decided to expand its profit-making ventures—and the banks obliged by creating new bank-dollars exceeding the Reserve capacity of the aggregate clearing process. When that happens, the Fed, as a matter of course, issues the new Reserves that are necessary.

In the same way that private enterprise can call upon the Fed to issue new Reserves to accomplish its goals, public enterprise can do the same. It goes about doing this, however, in a different way.

The public enterprise process begins with the US Congress—representing the democratic will of the American public (in theory)—voting to undertake the production of some specified goods or services which benefit the whole society. Congress appropriates new dollars to be spent for the stated purpose. As the spending agent for Congress, the US Treasury then sets about acquiring the new dollars that Congress has directed it to spend. It does this in coordinated partnership with the Federal Reserve system. This is one of the most labyrinthine parts of our edifice's corridor system—so, now we'll slow down to appreciate it. Hold tight to your brain-handles again!

As we've noted, just like each of the private banks in the Reserve system, the US Treasury has a Reserve account at the Fed. This is the federal government's spending account. Where do the Reserves in the Treasury's spending account come from?

Simply by virtue of Congress' appropriations, the Treasury is compelled to acquire whatever it needs in its spending account at the Fed. The Treasury doesn't say to Congress, 'Oh, sorry, we don't have enough dollars to pay for that!'—just like the private bank doesn't say to a well-heeled loan applicant, 'That's a great business proposition and resume, but we're simply out of money at the moment!' If you'll notice, the Treasury only claims it's about to run out of dollars when small-minded politicians play small-minded games to gain some small-minded advantage on the political stage. Instead, when the Treasury is directed to spend dollars it simply instigates its own unique process within the Federal Reserve System which compels additional Reserves to be credited to its spending account. Here's how it works—please note that it is unnecessarily complicated, I only include it as a clear example

of the nonsense which hides behind complexity “you’re not educated enough to understand.”

1. The Treasury issues something which it uniquely has the capability of creating: a believable certificate of future Reserves called a ‘treasury bond.’ This action commands a few moments of our attention: Anyone can create a ‘bond’—a written promise to pay a certain amount of dollars at some point in the future. But, for obvious reasons, not everyone’s such promise is equally believable. A corporate bond, for example, depends on the corporation’s ability to generate future profits to keep its promise. “Junk bonds” are promises made by businesses who pose a substantial risk that they won’t be able to produce those profits necessary to redeem the bond. A treasury bond, in contrast, is not a promise that depends on future profits at all, but only on the legal authority of the Fed to issue new Reserves.

But how are the future Reserves of the treasury bond converted into present Reserves in the Treasury’s spending account?

2. The Treasury, working in tandem with the Federal Reserve system, trades its future Reserve bonds for present Reserves, which are then credited to its spending account. This trading occurs on what is called an “open market”—which simply means a) the entities are doing the trading voluntarily, and b) the Fed is not participating directly in the trading (bypassing the voluntary participants). Some of the present Reserves the Treasury receives in trade are new Reserves, created by the Fed, and some of them are existing Reserves that were residing in the various banks’ Reserve accounts.

Again, this requires a moment of our attention on two fronts:

- a) Why would private banks want to trade their existing Reserves for future Reserves?
- b) If the Fed is not allowed to participate directly, by what process do the Fed’s new Reserves make their way into the spending account of the Treasury?

To answer these questions, let’s observe a treasury bond issue operation from where we now stand—at this particular intersection of corridors in the Federal Reserve edifice. The first thing we notice, over in the direction of private enterprise, is that there are a lot of bank-dollars in private checking accounts that aren’t needed for rent, or car-payments, or groceries. They’re surplus bank-dollars that are looking for a safe

investment to hide in until, someday in the future, they need to be spent for something. Where are those bank-dollars going to hide?

Some of them will hide in the stock-market, but that's a bit scary. A lot of them, in fact, will want to hide in the future Reserve treasury bonds the Treasury is getting ready to issue. When the Treasury issues its bonds, then, there is typically a substantial interest over in private enterprise to trade some of its bank-dollars for treasury bonds. As we know, these bank-dollars are claims on existing Reserves at the Fed. When the trade is made then, the claimed Reserves, represented by the traded bank-dollars, are credited to the Treasury's spending account.

It's important here to note three things:

- a) This is a completely voluntary action on the part of private enterprise. It is done purely out of self-interest, for the purpose of putting its surplus bank-dollars in a super-safe hiding place.
 - b) While the action is done out of self-interest, however, there's an unnoticed 'elephant in the corridor' as a result: By the act of trading existing Reserves for future Reserves, private enterprise is, in fact, *investing* in the goals and undertakings of public enterprise. This 'elephant,' I think, is something you want for sure to snap a picture of!
 - c) In the bond-issue operation we're now observing, the Treasury is needing to trade \$30 billion in future Reserves for \$30 billion in present Reserves—but private enterprise has only ponied up \$10 billion. Where will the additional \$20 billion come from?
3. The Fed has a group of its largest private banks—called "Primary Dealers"—with which it has a special set of arrangements. Specifically, the Primary Dealer banks are the ones who manage the trades between the future Reserve treasury bonds and the existing bank Reserves. As part of the arrangement, it is understood that if all the Treasury's bonds are not spoken for, some further trading is instigated, which the Primary Dealers participate in. Namely, the following:
- a) The Primary Dealers trade collateral to the Fed for new Reserves the Fed issues specifically for the purpose. In the operation we're presently observing, the Fed issues \$20 billion in new Reserves in exchange for the collateral.

- b) The Fed now has on its balance sheet the Primary Dealers' collateral, and the Dealers have in their Reserve accounts \$20 billion new Reserves.
 - c) The Primary Dealers then trade the \$20 billion new Reserves to the Treasury for the remaining \$20 billion in future Reserve treasury bonds that have not been claimed by private enterprise—thus crediting the Treasury's spending account with the balance of the \$30 billion it needs to meet Congress' spending directive.
 - d) The Primary Dealers then trade the newly acquired \$20 billion in future Reserve treasury bonds to the Fed—in exchange for the collateral they initially posted to start the operation.
4. The Fed now has on its balance sheet not the collateral of the Primary Dealers, but the \$20 billion in future Reserve bonds issued by the Treasury. The Fed holds these future Reserves on its balance sheet until the bonds mature—at which point the future Reserves must be made into present Reserves. What does the Fed do then?

It ought to do something that, on its face, seems rather silly: It ought to issue \$20 billion in new Reserves and pay them to itself (since it is holding the bonds that just matured). But the Fed has no need for Reserves because it is not a 'spender' of Reserves, but only the 'issuer' of Reserves. The Fed doesn't even have an account to keep Reserves in—for the simple reason that when the system calls for new Reserves, it is authorized to issue them by pushing buttons on an electronic keyboard. To keep from looking silly—trying to deal with something it has no need for, nor any place to keep—the Fed simply cancels the treasury bonds it is holding and the \$20 billion in future Reserves are never made 'real.'

The same thing happens when the Fed winds-down its balance sheet (as we observed earlier)—trading collateral it has received in exchange for Reserves in the private banking system. The Fed simply makes the trade, then cancels the Reserves it has received—essentially reincorporating them into its mandate to create Reserves as necessity (and either private or public enterprise) calls for.

There's not anything further we really need to see on our tour of the Federal Reserve money system. We've observed all that's necessary, I think, to now have a meaningful discussion of what's *really* important: why we can, in fact, as a collective society, afford to pay ourselves to undertake and

accomplish what's necessary to actually address the six, money-intensive, life-defining dilemmas America now confronts:

1. Healthcare
2. Student debt
3. Early childhood care and development
4. Affordable housing
5. Climate change
6. Bullshit jobs

Please feel free, by the way, to add to this list—but before we argue priorities, let's understand and agree that we unequivocally *do* have the financial resources, as a democratic society, to confront them.

But why should the people of this country, who empowered their elected Congress to coin money and regulate its value, need to pay interest to anyone for the use of their own money? So far as creating money is concerned, what's the difference between you creating money to build things that make profits, and us creating money to build things that we decided we need to have?

The big surprise to some on our tour of the Federal Reserve system is that the Fed (America's central bank)—as it is presently authorized to operate—can create money, as necessary, to support not only the undertakings of private enterprise, but the undertakings of public enterprise as well. Please recall that public enterprise produces needed goods and services which private enterprise cannot produce at a profit or, to make its profit, must set prices higher than what most citizens can afford to pay. To accomplish what private enterprise cannot, therefore, the US Treasury, as directed by Congress, pays US citizens and businesses directly to produce the goods and services of public enterprise.

The fact, that the Federal Reserve system is able to create the money required for this spending, is a surprise because we, the American voters, have always been led to believe that public enterprise is financed by a different method: namely, some combination of taxing private profits & income and borrowing from the investment capital of private enterprise. What we discovered, instead, is that taxes do not fund the Treasury's spending—and the funding is derived from operations that have nothing to do with 'borrowing' in any meaningful sense of the term.

The federal government, we discovered, doesn't ever borrow anything—and what we are persuaded to think of as a 'national debt' is, in fact, merely a bookkeeping tally of some portion of the undertakings of public enterprise. It is not something that has to be repaid to anybody in the future; it is not something that future tax collections will have to reimburse. Nor is

there a limit on the number of Reserves that can be created to pay for public enterprise: what is limited is not the availability of fiat money (the Reserves of the Federal Reserve system), but the real resources—skilled labor, technology, energy, materiel—which the Reserves are used to employ. If the need for some public enterprise exists, and the real resources are available to meet the challenge, the Reserves can be issued, as necessary, to employ those resources.

The implications of this ‘surprise discovery’ are game-changing. As I write, for example, Elizabeth Warren has just released her long-awaited formula to pay for Medicare-for-all—a \$50 trillion federal spending commitment. Playing the old game, Ivy League Pocahontas’ formula pulls out all the stops on raising taxes on the super-wealthy and large corporations—and pieces together a multitude of spending adjustments and projected cost savings to miraculously come up with the money necessary to pay American medical providers to provide medical care to Americans. Elizabeth has, of necessity, carefully manipulated all these pieces within the old-game formula so it doesn’t appear the government has to borrow dollars—a proposition which American voters have been trained to view as political suicide.

Mission accomplished! Except, having now stretched the old-game formula as far as it apparently can go to accomplish goal number one of public enterprise (universal healthcare) we are left to wonder about some of the other major, money-intensive, public enterprise challenges we presently face as a collective society such as:

1. Student Debt—\$1.6 trillion plus \$47 billion per year for free tuition at state colleges
2. Early childhood care and development—\$70 billion per year
3. Affordable housing—\$350 billion for 7 million units
4. Climate change—\$90 trillion for the currently totally inadequate “Green New Deal.”
5. Bullshit Jobs—total cost: unknown

That’s a total of at least \$110 trillion over the next decade—after we’ve paid for universal health care—for the undertakings of public enterprise that are genuinely, if not existentially, needed by the citizens of modern American society. How is the old-game formula going to work with a number like that? And what’s going on, anyway? Have we suddenly, in the twenty-first century, become exceedingly and unreasonably profligate in our needs?

You can't help but consider how fortuitous the surprise discovery we made in our Federal Reserve tour really is. As it happens, modern society seems to have evolved to a point where the old-game formula is, mathematically, simply incapable (as exemplified in the calculations above) of addressing the major challenges modern society confronts. Specifically, there seems to be a dramatic increase in the kinds of goods and services modern society needs, but which the profit model of private enterprise cannot provide—or cannot provide at a price that a large percentage of society's membership can afford to pay.

To effectively function, then, modern society requires a new approach to public enterprise—and a new understanding of how US citizens and businesses will be paid to undertake and implement it. What our tour of the Federal Reserve system has shown us is this goal can be accomplished within the existing operations of the Federal Reserve system. If only we could clearly see it.

Let's briefly look, one by one, at the previously listed money-intensive challenges we're currently facing. The first four can be considered with just a few casual observations:

1. Universal Health Care

Before World War I, health-care goods and services involved a relatively limited and straightforward set of technologies and skills. Doctors did simple surgeries, set bones, applied poultices, prescribed homeopathic tinctures, administered morphine and, for the most part, watched, comforted, and advised both patients and families. A doctor's bill, almost by definition, was limited to a certain magnitude simply by the limitations of what a doctor could undertake to do, or what medications could be prescribed.

In today's modern society, of course, things couldn't be more different. There's hardly a human medical condition that cannot be ameliorated or totally cured by the application of advanced technologies and pharmacology—or so they claim. These are administered in highly technical hospital complexes attended by specialized teams of highly trained physicians and aides. Illnesses or conditions that a few generations ago were simply accepted as one's lot in life, or end-life, can now be routinely treated—and cured. And the doctor's bill can now be virtually as unlimited as the amazing outcomes provided—and intellectual property monopolies awarded.

The problem, of course, is that only a fraction of American citizens has the income and/or wealth to buy these outcomes. To be profitable—

or even to be provided at cost (out of empathetic generosity)—the modern medical services of private enterprise must be priced beyond the means of most members of modern society. The ethical choice of modern society is stark: either a large percentage of citizens must go without available medical services—or public enterprise must step in and make up the difference.

2. Student Debt

It should not be a surprise that modern American society has generated a student debt crisis. Two or three generations ago most young people, embarking on a career in life, didn't need a college education. Most employment involved manual skills. Employment that required technical thinking or management skills could be obtained by apprenticing or learning on the job. College was reserved either for learning highly complex/professional skills—e.g. medicine, law, mathematics, and science—or as a badge of upper-class identity in the fine arts.

In modern society, the availability (and social status) of manual employment has dramatically declined. Production and management skills, in virtually every employment field and endeavor, have become highly technical and specialized—requiring expensive, post-high school degrees and training before a career can be embarked upon. In itself, this could be viewed as a positive evolution except, of course, for one big problem: Most career-aspiring youth do not have the financial resources to buy the required higher education and, as a result, are forced into substantial debt to do so. The perversity of being pushed into debt in order to begin earning a living is one of the most extraordinary structures modern American society has yet produced—and it weighs heavily on many crucial aspects of our collective well-being, including family formation and consumer markets.

The only remedy to this evolved structure of modern society is for higher education—and specialized technical training—to be undertaken as a public enterprise. What could possibly be, by the way, a more logical investment by collective society in itself?

3. Early Childhood Care and Development

Only three generations ago, the challenge of early childhood care and development—outside the realm and context of the parental family—did not exist. Pre-school children grew up in, and were nurtured by, an extended family context which covered the bases of their needs and early acclimation to the norms of becoming a socially productive

individual. Families paid nothing for these services—other than the hours donated as parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or neighbor.

Transition, now, to modern American society: Extended family structures have been spatially fractured and displaced. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins are, typically not around to donate childcare hours to a young family. Neighbors are typically only casual acquaintances, at best—and hardly open to stepping in for a few hours of care. The difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that, in most modern families, both parents are obliged to be employed to earn wages adequate to meet basic living expenses. Or, most problematic of all, many families have only a single parent—usually working more than one job to make up for the lack of a second income. The modern pre-school child, as a result, is virtually abandoned.

Private enterprise, of course, provides childcare services which “solve” this problem of modern society. Except the price for these services—even if it simply covers operating costs and expenses—must be set far beyond the ability of most families to pay. Result: either modern society must suffer the uncalculated (to date) consequences of a generation of poorly nurtured and acclimated children—or public enterprise, in defense of itself, must produce high quality childcare, as needed, for every American family.

4. **Affordable Housing**

Before the two World Wars, most Americans lived and worked in rural communities that revolved around agriculture and subsistence economies. Housing for the most part was a simple structure, providing shelter from the elements and an organizational matrix for the tools, implements, and subsistence activities of family life. A dwelling was something that could be put together with hard-nosed, hands-on-and-neighbor-assisted labor—and there was plenty of land-space (due to the successful genocide) to be owned or rented in the rural communities for that purpose.

In the non-subsistence, consumer-structure of modern society, most citizens (in order to have access to employment and education) must live in high-density megalopolises where a dwelling space is, of necessity, created by an entirely different process—a process that unfolds within a highly regulated and technical context. And while private enterprise, with great relish, rapidly produces dwellings in these complicated urban contexts, its necessary profit and overhead demands that prices

for the dwellings be set far higher than what a growing number of families can afford to pay.

If every American family is to have access to an affordable dwelling, public enterprise must play a major role in the construction and/or ownership operations of strategic segments of the housing industry.

In each of the cases just described, the structure of modern society has evolved to create a human need for goods and services—or a technical level of goods and services—which previously did not exist. And while private enterprise has the real resources to produce those goods and services, it either cannot do so within a profit-making structure, or it must set prices at a level beyond what a significant membership of society can afford to pay. Another way of visualizing this imbalanced structure is to say that private enterprise, in producing the goods and services that modern society uniquely needs, is no longer able to provide adequately compensated employment for a large segment of that society's members—thus enabling them to be consumers of the goods and services. This endemic under-employment, relative to the goods and services that an average citizen needs to buy to live an existence of relative health and well-being, has become, in fact, the primary structural disconnect of modern society itself. And it is this disconnect (among other things) which is necessitating the dramatic growth in public enterprise.

Of all the structural changes modern society is imposing on its citizens, however, the most challenging are the next two items our list. By comparison, the four we've just briefly considered—devastating as they may be to the well-being of families and collective society—are mere aggravations. The ultimate magnitude of the necessity for public enterprise—and of the Federal Reserve system's ability to create the fiat money necessary to marshal efforts to undertake that enterprise—becomes apparent when we consider, now, the challenges of 1. Climate change 2. Bullshit jobs

Let's consider these in reverse order because, as we'll see, the former may well be the savior of the latter.

- **Bullshit Jobs**

At least 50% of all jobs done in this country consist of bullshit or are only done to support other bullshit jobs. From zero-nutrition fast food to road crews widening highways, the time and resources spent are supporting bullshit. Those jobs you're not allowed to do because of the Wuhan Flu panic?—mostly bullshit, shouldn't exist. This fact is absolutely unacknowledged by mainstream society. Claiming such a high percentage is absolute blasphemy. As is advocating the

destruction of what we traditionally call ‘jobs.’ Yet it is true and likely understated.

Because these facts are not acknowledged, no accurate accounting of the total cost—in time, dollars, resources—of these bullshit jobs exists. But they are certain to be immense and affect the ability to successfully solve many of our other problems.

- **Climate Change**

Part of the challenge of climate change is the idea that we need to be essentially using the same amount of renewable energy, or even perhaps more if we are to bring the developing- and third-world up to a reasonable living standard. This is of course an absolute fiction—we cannot do this, not using existing technology and likely not ever.

But we do not need to use the same amount of energy, even should the third-world standard of living be raised (which it should). Much of what we do is extremely wasteful, in ways we do not even recognize, such as the case of bullshit jobs. The removal of bullshit jobs is one of the first key steps to implementing any climate-friendly version of degrowth; of beginning to ensure a just and equitable division of resources for all, both human and non-human alike.

If we remain wedded to the idea of jobs, of full employment, we will destroy ourselves.

It was my intention, at this point, to focus on the unfolding reality that climate change will soon prove to be the most dramatic challenge modern society is facing—and will be the challenge that necessitates, by far, the greatest need for goods and services produced by public enterprise. More to the point, climate change will generate the greatest need—by far—for implementing and managing a “modern money” perspective in America’s economy. I realize now it will be ineffective (and perhaps futile) to discuss the extraordinary level of public spending that climate-change will necessitate without, first, attempting to address two related issues:

1. The stridently insistent warnings about inflation
2. The conundrum of the necessity for increased consumption

I’ll begin this effort with a simple premise: It is willfully self-harming to confront a collective need—for which the labor and materiel are available to provide a remedy—but refuse to employ that labor and materiel by arguing that doing so will create an imbalance in the monetary system. This, for all

practical purposes, is precisely what is being argued when direct sovereign spending is withheld from public enterprise out of fear of inflation. At that precise point, it seems to me, the tail begins wagging the dog—and there is very little concern for the dog itself.

To visualize the issue, let's imagine ourselves a decade hence, and all the money-intensive challenges we've earlier outlined (supported by our "modern money" perspective) have largely been met by the efforts of public enterprise. It's the year 2030, and millions of Americans who previously struggled to get available health care can now walk into any doctor's office, neighborhood clinic, or hospital emergency room with their universal coverage card. Millions of recent college graduates have seen their old tuition debts canceled—and every high-school grad can now pursue higher education or technical training debt-free. Millions of children are now entering grade-school having been fully nurtured and prepared, during their pre-school years, to engage in becoming educated—and millions more, just coming out of maternity wards, are guaranteed high-quality pre-school care, if their family needs it. Millions of families, who previously struggled to find adequate housing at a price they could afford, are now part of a national housing co-op that builds and owns dwelling units and co-housing villages in every American community. Finally, we've succeeded in implementing the Green New Deal, transitioned primarily to zero carbon energy systems, and brought carbon emissions close to the stated parameters of the IPCC. In accomplishing all this, we've also established a public enterprise economy that has put millions of Americans back to work nurturing, restoring, and rebuilding the health and diversity of our natural habitats and ecosystems, as well as designing and building climate-adaptive human habitats, systems, and communities. We have, in short, made great strides toward our collective well-being.

There is, however, a problem. The problem is not that the \$110 trillion price tag we'd initially placed on these accomplishments came in closer to \$200 trillion. It turns out that the Federal Reserve system was able to produce, for the purposes of public enterprise, \$200 trillion in Reserves just as easily as it could have produced \$110 trillion. The problem we now confront, in 2030, is that the \$200 trillion has been paid to American citizens and businesses for producing the goods and services just outlined! American families and businesses, in other words, now possess \$200 trillion more to spend on food, clothing, housing, automobiles, electronic appliances, labor, and material than they otherwise would have. From many perspectives this could be viewed as a genuinely good thing: a middle-class lifestyle has been extended, presumably, to a larger percentage of society, and private enterprise is positioned to thrive on that expanded market. From another

perspective, however, there is a big problem—and an even larger conundrum. First: the big problem.

The simple logic of our old-world money narrative warns us that, because of that additional \$200 trillion in spending power, prices for consumer purchases in 2030 must have dramatically risen to accommodate the extra money. Or, viewed from another perspective, the value of the US dollars in everyone's bank accounts must have dramatically fallen. This, in a nutshell, is the predicted problem of price inflation we received dire warnings about a decade ago (back in 2020) when this talk about a new need for public enterprise began.

The only previous experience America has had with this dynamic, however, indicates that, if properly understood and managed, it is not a threat, but an opportunity. That previous experience was the US mobilization for World War II. During the war, public enterprise expanded dramatically, employing, in one way or another, virtually every American citizen. Prices did go up—but were held in check in two ways:

1. Strict wartime rationing of most consumer goods
2. Payrolls that were partially made with war-bonds (i.e. future dollars)

When the war was over, and the future dollars were made real, the sudden increase in consumer purchasing power was absorbed by the dramatic increase in the new production capabilities of private enterprise—capabilities that were built by the public enterprise of the war effort itself. It would be reasonable to imagine this same dynamic has now unfolded in 2030. All those public enterprise efforts we've just described have resulted in expanded opportunities for private enterprise to offer goods and services for profit—with the expanded middle-class market standing ready (with all that money they've earned through public enterprise) to be the consumers.

But maybe not. Maybe—as we were just warned by two economists at the St. Louis branch of the Federal Reserve itself—now, in 2030, we'd be experiencing hyperinflation, just like “Germany in 1921–23, Zimbabwe in 2007–09, and Venezuela currently.” It's disappointing that in their zeal to discredit the newly emerging “modern money” perspective, these economists found it prudent not to explain—or even point out—that in each of those instances of genuine hyperinflation, the root cause was not “printing money”—as they infer “modern money theory” is all about—but something else instead. To say that printing money is the cause of hyperinflation, it turns out, is like saying that flames are the cause of fire.

“Germany in 1921–23, Zimbabwe in 2007–09, and Venezuela currently,” all shared the same set of matches and kindling for starting the flames of

hyperinflation: a virtual total collapse of the production activities of their society. They stopped producing—or, in the case of Venezuela, and in part due to sanctions, importing—the things that people buy with money and so, naturally, the money that existed—and continued to be issued to meet government obligations—drove up prices of the few things remaining on the store-shelves.

Quick message to the St. Louis Fed from the year 2030: America hasn't stopped producing things for consumers to buy. There are many more things to buy than in 2020 when the push for public enterprise began. So why should we imagine that we've turned out to be suffering from hyperinflation? In fact, as we now enter the fourth decade of this century, we have a much bigger problem to confront—a conundrum we should have been actively strategizing about much earlier than a decade ago.

The conundrum faced by today's modern society is a Catch-22 of existential proportions: To confront the modern challenges society faces, public enterprise must step in and pay citizens and businesses massive quantities of currency to undertake strategic efforts that private enterprise cannot. To avoid serious disruptions from inflation, goods and services for private consumption must expand, commensurately, with the public enterprise spending.

However, we have reached a tipping point where the typical goods and services of private consumption cannot be expanded without exceeding—and then collapsing—the “carrying capacity” of the Earth's natural resources and regenerative systems. The ramifications of this conundrum—this Catch-22 of the twenty-first century—define the ultimate challenge, it seems to me, of modern human society. It appears that something truly magical must occur if we are to go forward with a viable, livable future.

Let's imagine pulling together a group of enlightened economic planners to create an American budget for, say, the years 2020–2024. What might they come up with? To begin with, how might they even go about thinking about how to create an American budget?

It's not so obvious as, for example, the way the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) might go about it. The CBO would begin by tallying up how much money America's government will have to spend in the years 2020–2024. Then they'd allocate those projected dollars to various pots of spending—with some calculation about what the spending needs will be for each pot. In the middle of this exercise, they'll discover that the spending needs for the pots far exceed the number of dollars they've projected America's government will have to spend. So, they'll tweak the tax revenue numbers, projecting that economic growth in this or that sector will generate more tax collections for the government, and they'll search for a bevy of cost-savings

the government can garner by eliminating “wasteful” spending. Then they’ll repeat the allocation exercise and discover the projected available spending dollars are still far short of what they’ve calculated the pots will demand. Thus they will next have to calculate how many dollars the American government will have to borrow to make up the short-fall—and will have to further calculate how much that borrowing will add to the “national debt,” and how many years (projected into a distant future using imagined numbers for economic growth and future tax-rates) will it take for America to repay the debt. Then they’d publish all these numbers and Congress would blanch and fall into chaos and confusion. The political party out of power would declare the party in power to be “fiscally irresponsible,” driving the nation to bankruptcy, and the arguing would begin over which pots should be reduced or eliminated. Another day in the life of American politics courtesy of the Congressional Budget Office.

So, how would our group of enlightened economic planners tackle the problem differently? First, because we’re imagining they’re enlightened, meaning they fully understand how modern fiat money works, they’d realize it is incorrect—even illogical—to begin with a calculation of how much money the American government will have to spend. The American government, they understand, is constitutionally authorized by law and the Federal Reserve Act to issue fiat currency as necessary to meet the spending needs of both private commerce and the federal government. The pertinent budgeting question then is not whether the necessary fiat dollars can be issued, but what precisely are they to be spent on? This makes the process of creating an American budget a much more interesting and useful task than what the CBO habitually assigns itself. Here’s how I imagine the new process might proceed:

STEP 1: The first analysis and decisions are about what we—as a collective society represented by the federal government—need to accomplish: What pressing challenges do we confront? What dangers do we face? What opportunities lie at our doorstep? The list of broad categories might go something like this (feel free to generate your own list)

- Mitigating climate change
 - Developing and deploying zero-carbon energy strategies and technologies.
 - Plan and implement new afforestation programs.
 - Management analysis of existing forests and rainforests to maximize carbon sequestration.

- Adapting to climate change
 - Plan and implement an equity-replacement program for properties threatened by sea-level-rise.
 - Develop sea-level-rise relocation and replacement strategies.
 - Plan and implement water-supply security, preservation, and allocation strategies.
 - Develop and implement agricultural adaptation, crop diversity, and food-security strategies.
 - Develop and deploy Emergency Transitional Housing solutions.
- Restoring and rebuilding natural ecosystems
 - Develop and deploy strategies to preserve and reestablish ocean habitats and fishery stocks.
 - Preserve and reestablish wetland habitats.
 - Reclaim and restore industrial and mining waste-sites.
 - Plan and implement rain harvesting programs to reverse desertification of natural landscapes.
- Rejuvenating America's education system
 - Implement tuition strategies to remove debt from post high-school education.
 - Plan and deploy a universal pre-K day-care system.
 - Plan and implement a national, Grade 2 'reading-assist' program.
- Establishing comprehensive Retirement and Housing Assistance
 - Plan and implement a national 'Life-Share' house-mate program for retired persons.
 - Develop and implement a national co-housing assistance program.
 - Establish a national retirement housing co-op.

- Repairing and rebuilding critical local, regional, and national infrastructure
 - Immediately repair all bridges identified by the ASCE.
 - Immediately replace all lead-based community water-systems.
 - Develop and implement electric-grid security strategies and technologies.
 - Develop and build a national electric-vehicle charging grid.
- Redefining ‘work’ to reduce bullshit jobs
 - Plan and implement a universal income and a job guarantee program.
 - Design and implement an ‘art and artisanship’ curriculum for public schools and community colleges.

STEP 2: Next, our group would evaluate which of these challenges, dangers, or opportunities are likely to be met by the natural interests and operations of profit-making enterprise—and which of them (because they don’t lend themselves to making profits) are likely to be ignored.

STEP 3: Taking the national ‘to-do’ items which analysis has determined will likely be ignored by private commerce, the next step would be to determine what real resources will be necessary to undertake and accomplish each of them. How much and what kind of labor will be required? How much and what kind of materiel and technology?

STEP 4: Taking the list of required resources, our group would then ask: Are the resources described available within the borders of the United States? Or, to be more specific to the issue at hand, are they available to be purchased with US fiat currency?

STEP 5: If the answer is ‘yes,’ our group would then issue a formal proposal that the US Congress (1) authorize the US Treasury to issue treasury bonds, as necessary, for the purchase of the said real resources; and (2) direct appropriate government agencies to develop specific spending strategies to marshal the resources to pursue the goals of each stated item on the to-do list.

A simple example: imagine that one of the challenges our group identified in Step 2 was this: 25% of American children are failing to learn to read by the end of their second grade—and therefore will begin, in the third grade, to relentlessly fail in the US education system, resulting in unnecessarily high levels of social dysfunction and loss of personal autonomy. This is not

a challenge that profit-making commerce is going to undertake to meet, nor is it one that existing school funding can stretch to cover.

Next, we ask: what are the real resources necessary to provide the special assistance necessary to bring those children up to reading level at the end of grade two? We might calculate as follows: There are 92,858 elementary schools in America, each with a second-grade class of children learning to read. Let's say there's 24 students on average in each class, and 6 are struggling to read, falling behind, and in need of special one-on-one tutoring, say an hour a day per child. This creates the need for a unique kind of work-force: people capable of tutoring who are available and willing to provide their services for only one hour per school-day. Who might that worker/tutor be? Today a likely candidate is a high-school student or retiree, tutoring one hour after each school-day for \$20/hour, to make \$100/week spending money or simply help in the community. Call them the 'Read-Assist-Corp.' Each of our second-grade classes would require six RAC tutors, generating a need for 557,148 people a year, earning \$100/week for 36 weeks a year. It seems plausible those high-school students and retirees are, in fact, available and would be willing to provide the tutoring services in exchange for US fiat dollars.

Therefore we issue a formal proposal that Congress (1) authorize the US Treasury to issue bonds as required to pay annually up to \$2 billion in wages to the RAC program; and (2) that the funds be paid directly, each month, to the participating elementary schools. Thus, we have created an American budget for ensuring that every school child enters the third grade able and happy to read—and is therefore highly likely to engage in constructive learning in grades 3–12 and beyond. The budget has been calculated to be \$3,600 per struggling second-grader, or approximately \$2 billion per year. And the budget has been funded—as our enlightened group of economic planners knows—without the necessity of increasing taxes or borrowing dollars from the profits of private commerce. The budget has been funded by the sovereign government's legal mandate to issue fiat currency.

A lot of people will ask: But is it worth it? To which the answer is: worth what? Is rescuing the education and future careers of half a million American children worth the hours spent by the high-school students and retirees in mentoring them? I would think the proper answer to that is not only emphatically **YES**, but that the tutors, themselves, will have learned and received as much life-affirming energy as the second graders they helped. So, what's the complaint? If, on the other hand, the question is meant to ask: 'is it worth all those dollars?' then the asker obviously doesn't understand what money represents—or what, in fact, is its only purpose.

The Revival of the Commons

On July 12, 1995, a tropical air mass with searing heat and high humidity settled over Chicago, making it feel like Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur. On July 13, the temperature hit 106 degrees and the heat index, which measures how a typical person experiences the weather, reached 126. Local newspapers and television stations announced that the heat wave could be dangerous, but they didn't recognize its severity. Along with basic health warnings and meteorological reports, they also ran humorous stories about how to "ward off wardrobe wilt and makeup meltdown" and shop for air conditioners. "This is the kind of weather we pray for," said a spokesperson for one regional supplier. The Chicago Tribune advised readers to "slow down" and "think cool thoughts."

Chicago broke its record for energy consumption that day, and the surge in demand overwhelmed the electrical grid, causing outages in more than two-hundred-thousand homes, some lasting for days. Water pumps failed, leaving units on high floors dry. Across the city, buildings baked like ovens, roads and railways buckled, thousands of cars and buses overheated. Children riding school buses to camp got stuck in gridlocked traffic and had to be hosed off by public health crews to avoid heat stroke. Despite the mounting problems, Chicago's city government neglected to declare a state of emergency. The mayor, along with leaders of several key city agencies, was out of the city, vacationing in a cooler spot. But millions of residents were stuck in the heat.

Like all cities, Chicago is a heat island, with paved roads and metallic buildings that attract the sun's warmth and heavy pollution that traps it. While the verdant suburbs surrounding Chicago cooled down at night, urban neighborhoods continued to broil. So many people called 911 that some of them were put on hold. Thousands rushed to emergency rooms with heat-related illnesses, and nearly half of the city's hospitals refused to admit new patients because they had no more space. A line of trucks formed outside the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, waiting to unload dead bodies. There were 222 bays at the morgue, all of them filled. The owner of a meatpacking company offered to bring a forty-eight-foot-long refrigerated truck. When it was fully loaded, he brought another, and another, until nine trucks holding hundreds of bodies were jammed into the parking lot. "I've never seen anything like this in my life," said the medical examiner. "We're overwhelmed." During the week of July 14–20, 739 people in excess of the norm died in Chicago, roughly seven times the toll from Superstorm Sandy and more than twice as many as in the Great Chicago Fire.

What was the key difference between the vulnerable who survived and those who did not? They knew their neighbors—not because they made special efforts to meet them, but because they lived in a place where casual interaction was a feature of everyday life.

When the levees break, cities and coastal areas flood, sometimes catastrophically. When the power goes out, most businesses, health care providers, and schools cannot operate, and many transit and communications networks stop running too. Breakdowns in the fuel supply can be even more consequential, since oil generates most of our heat and gas powers the trucks that deliver nearly all the food and medications consumed in large cities and suburbs as well as the automobiles that most people depend on to travel. No one needs a lengthy description of the problems that occur when the sewage system stops working. But the real problems come when several or all of these systems collapse simultaneously, as they do during extreme weather events or terrorist attacks or perhaps even pandemics. Unfortunately, history shows that such things are impossible to prevent, no matter how sophisticated our technology or design. And, as most policy-makers and engineers see it, when hard infrastructure fails, as it did in the great Chicago heat wave, it's the softer, social infrastructure that determines our fate.

'Infrastructure' is not a term conventionally used to describe the underpinnings of social life. But this is a consequential oversight, because the built environment—and not just cultural preferences or the existence of voluntary organizations—influences the breadth and depth of our associations. If states and societies do not recognize social infrastructure and how it works, they will fail to see a powerful way to promote civic engagement and social interaction, both within communities and across group lines.

What counts as social infrastructure? I define it capaciously. Public institutions, such as libraries, schools, playgrounds, parks, athletic fields, and swimming pools, are vital parts of the social infrastructure. So too are sidewalks, courtyards, community gardens, and other green spaces that invite people into the public realm. Community organizations, including churches and civic associations, act as social infrastructures when they have an established physical space where people can assemble, as do regularly scheduled markets for food, furniture, clothing, art, and other consumer goods. Commercial establishments can also be important parts of the social infrastructure, particularly when they operate as what some call "third spaces," places (like cafés, diners, barbershops, and bookstores) where people are welcome to congregate and linger regardless of what they've purchased. Entrepreneurs typically start these kinds of businesses because they want to generate income. But in the process, they help produce the

material foundations for social life.

What doesn't qualify as social infrastructure? Transit networks determine where we live, work, and play, and how long it takes to move between places. But whether they're social infrastructure depends on how they're organized, since a system designed for private vehicles will likely keep people separate as they travel—and consume enormous amounts of energy—whereas public systems that use buses and trains can enhance civic life. Although they have obvious social impacts, waterworks, waste treatment facilities, sewage systems, fuel supply lines, and electric grids are usually not social infrastructures—we don't congregate in these places. But conventional hard infrastructure, such as levees, can be engineered to double as social infrastructure.

A simple levee is an artificial embankment that people build to prevent water from going into places they don't want it to be. A levee is typically little more than a mound of less permeable soil, like clay, wider at the base and narrower at the top. These mounds run in a long strip, sometimes for many miles, along a river, lake, or ocean. This kind of levee is physical infrastructure that protects social life on the dry side, not robust social infrastructure. But levees can be designed differently. In the late 1930s, for instance, engineers needed to protect Washington, DC's Federal Triangle neighborhood after a spell of heavy rains led to massive urban flooding. They could have put up a narrow mound of soil, but instead they built the Potomac Park Levee, a sloped walking path capped by a curved stone wall. In subsequent years the dual-purpose levee and parkland became one of the most popular public spaces in the city, a place where thousands of people go daily without even knowing that they're on top of critical infrastructure. Today, a growing number of architects and engineers are designing hard infrastructure, such as seawalls and bridges, so that it also functions as social infrastructure by incorporating parks, walking trails, and community centers. These projects, which already exist in places like Istanbul, Singapore, Rotterdam, and New Orleans, provide multiple benefits, from protecting against storm surges to promoting participation in public life.

Different kinds of social infrastructure play different roles in the local environment, and support different kinds of social ties. Some places, such as libraries, YMCAs, and schools, provide space for recurring interaction, often programmed, and tend to encourage more durable relationships. Others, such as playgrounds and street markets, tend to support looser connections—but of course these ties can, and sometimes do, grow more substantial if the interactions become more frequent or the parties establish a deeper bond. Countless close friendships between mothers, and then entire families,

begin because two toddlers visit the same swing set. Basketball players who participate in regular pickup games often befriend people with different political preferences, or with a different ethnic, religious, or class status, and wind up exposed to ideas they wouldn't likely encounter off the court.

Social infrastructures that promote efficiency tend to discourage interaction and the formation of strong ties. One recent study, for instance, shows that a daycare center that encourages caregivers and parents to walk in and wait for their children, often inside the classroom and generally at the same time, fosters more social connections and supportive relationships than one where managers allow parents to come in on their own schedules and hurry through drop-off and pickup so they can quickly return to their private lives. Because much of our hard infrastructure—highways, airports, food supply chains, and the like—is designed to promote efficient circulation of people or vital resources, it can accelerate the trend of social atomization. Think, for example, about the contrast between a village where everyone gets their water from the same well and a city where everyone gets their water from faucets in their private homes.

Few modern social infrastructures are natural, however, and in densely populated areas even beaches and forests require careful engineering and management to meet human needs. This means that all social infrastructure requires investment, whether for development or upkeep, and when we fail to build and maintain it, the material foundations of our social and civic life erode. The components of social infrastructure rarely crash as completely or as visibly as a fallen bridge or a downed electrical line, and their breakdowns don't result in immediate systemic failures. But when the social infrastructure gets degraded, the consequences are unmistakable. People reduce the time they spend in public settings and hunker down in their safe houses. Social networks weaken. Crime rises. Older and sick people grow isolated. Younger people get addicted to drugs and become more vulnerable to lethal overdoses. Distrust rises and civic participation wanes. A window breaks.

As of 2016, more than twelve-million Americans aged sixty-five and above live by themselves, and the ranks of those who are aging alone is growing steadily in much of the world. Although most people in this situation are socially active, the risk of isolation is formidable. A fall, an illness, or the inevitable advance toward frailty can render them homebound. If older friends and neighbors move away or die, their social networks can quickly unravel. If they get depressed, their interest in being out in the world can diminish. Street crime discourages everyone from going outdoors and socializing in public, but it's particularly intimidating for the old. In neighborhoods where crime is high or the social infrastructure is depleted,

old people are more likely to stay home, alone, simply because they lack compelling places to go.

Libraries are not the kinds of institutions that most social scientists, policy-makers, and community leaders usually bring up when they discuss social capital and how to build it. Since Tocqueville, most leading thinkers about social and civic life have extolled the value of voluntary associations like bowling leagues and gardening clubs without looking closely at the physical and material conditions that make people more or less likely to associate. But social infrastructure provides the setting and context for social participation, and the library is among the most critical forms of social infrastructure that we have. It's also one of the most undervalued.

In recent years, modest declines in the circulation of bound books in some parts of the country have led some critics to argue that the library is no longer serving its historic function as a place for public education and social uplift. Elected officials with other spending priorities argue that twenty-first-century libraries no longer need the resources they once commanded, because on the Internet most content is free. Architects and designers eager to erect new temples of knowledge say that libraries should be repurposed for a world where books are digitized and so much public culture is online. Many public libraries do need renovations, particularly the neighborhood branches. But the problem libraries face isn't that people no longer visit them or take out books.

On the contrary: so many people are using them, for such a wide variety of purposes, that library systems and their employees are overwhelmed. According to a 2016 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, about half of all Americans aged sixteen and over used a public library in the past year, and two-thirds say that closing their local branch would have a "major impact on their community." In many neighborhoods the risk of such closures is palpable, because both local library buildings and the systems that sustain them are underfunded and overrun. Urban library systems in the United States have long been public-private partnerships, and city governments have long relied on philanthropists to fund much of the library's work.

Why have so many public officials and civic leaders failed to recognize the value of libraries and their role in our social infrastructure? Perhaps it's because the founding principle behind the library—that all people deserve free, open access to our shared culture and heritage, which they can use to any end they see fit—is out of sync with the market logic that dominates our time. If, today, the library didn't already exist, it's hard to imagine our society's leaders inventing it—at best you'd have to settle for a Netflix-for-Books. But perhaps it's because so few influential people understand the

role that libraries already play in modern communities, or the many roles they could play if they had more support.

In New York, as in cities across the United States and around the world, neighborhood libraries and librarians do all kinds of unexpected things for surprisingly large numbers of people. Their core mission is to help people elevate themselves and improve their situation. Libraries do this, principally, by providing free access to the widest possible variety of cultural materials to people of all ages, from all ethnicities and groups. For older people, especially widows, widowers, and those who live alone, libraries are places for culture and companionship, through book clubs, movie nights, sewing circles, and classes in art, music, current events, and computing.

For example, when Library Lanes, a program designed to get seniors socializing, scales up to the city level, no old person in the five boroughs need bowl alone again. The elderly can also participate in some of these activities in senior centers, but there they can do them only with other old people, and often that makes them feel stigmatized, as if old is all they are. For many seniors, the library is the main place they interact with people from other generations. It's a place where they can volunteer and feel useful. It's where they can be part of a diverse and robust community, not a homogeneous one where everyone fears decline.

Libraries provide different benefits to young people. They expose infants and toddlers to books and stories that would otherwise be inaccessible. They help youths inch toward independence, giving them library cards and letting them choose how to use them. Libraries offer refuge and safe space to teenagers who'd rather study or socialize than hang out in the streets. Librarians help students with homework and offer after-school programs in art, science, music, language, and math. They recommend books, authors, even entire genres to young people who are searching for something different but can't yet name it. Libraries help children and teenagers feel responsible, to themselves and to their neighbors, by teaching them what it means to borrow and take care of something public, and to return it so others can have it too.

By doing all this, libraries also help families and caretakers. They provide a social space and shared activities for new parents, grandparents, and nannies who feel lonely, disconnected, or overwhelmed when watching an infant or a toddler by themselves. They help build friendships and support networks among neighbors who'd never met before taking a library class. They teach parenting skills to people who want or need them. They watch children, sometimes very young ones, whose parents work late or on weekends and who can't afford childcare. They give families confidence that their kids are in good hands.

Young people spend so much of their social time online because adults—from helicopter parents to hypervigilant school administrators and security guards—give them few other options. Despite higher crime rates, teens in previous generations had more freedom to roam around their neighborhoods and local public spaces than today’s youths. They had more unstructured time after school and on weekends; they even had more free time during school, and far less surveillance. Increasing regulation means that there aren’t as many public spaces for teens to gather. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are not only new public spaces: they are in many cases the only ‘public’ spaces in which teens can easily congregate with large groups of their peers. More significantly, teens can gather in them while still physically stuck at home. Many insist that they prefer hanging out in person to messaging on smartphones, but adults have restricted their mobility so thoroughly that they have few alternatives. The Internet has become young people’s core social infrastructure because we’ve unfairly deprived them of access to other places for meaningful connection. If we fail to build physical places where people can enjoy one another’s company, regardless of age, class, race, or ethnicity, we will all be similarly confined.

Why are libraries such popular places for young people? One reason is that, as public institutions, they’re open, accessible, and free. Another is that the library staff welcomes them; in many branches, they even create special places where teenagers can be with one another. To appreciate why this matters, compare the social space of the library with the social space of popular commercial establishments, such as Starbucks or McDonald’s. Commercial entities are valuable parts of the social infrastructure, and there’s no doubt that classic “third places,” including cafés, bars, and restaurants, have helped revitalize cities and suburbs. But not everyone can afford to frequent them, and not all paying customers are welcome to stay for long. Spending time in a market-driven social setting—even a relatively inexpensive fast-food restaurant or pastry shop—requires paying for the privilege. Inside almost every Starbucks, Dunkin’ Donuts, or McDonald’s, particularly those in neighborhoods where there are teenagers, poor people, or old people around, there’s usually at least one sign that says ‘No Loitering.’ And it’s not just a suggestion. Some New York City McDonald’s franchises impose time limits of twenty or thirty minutes “while consuming food” that, depending on the client, management may or may not enforce. Race matters, but so too do class and age. Groups of teenagers are routinely asked to leave commercial establishments, even after they make their purchases.

Places like libraries are saturated with strangers, people whose bodies are different, whose styles are different, who make different sounds, speak different languages, give off different, sometimes noxious, smells. Spending

time in public social infrastructures requires learning to deal with these differences in a civil manner.

For branch librarians, helping people find more than they're looking for is the essence of the job.

“There are few jobs that exist today where you're really just doing good things as a public servant. You're not screwing anyone over. You're not taking advantage of anybody. You're just offering a free service.”

“Here's something I realized once I got here. At Starbucks, and at most businesses, really, the assumption is that you, the customer, are better for having this thing that you purchase. Right? At the library, the assumption is you are better. You have it in you already. You just sort of need to be exposed to these things and provide yourself an education. The library assumes the best out of people. The services it provides are founded upon the assumption that if given the chance, people will improve themselves.”

Social interactions—with librarians and with other patrons—are one of the crucial ways that this self-improvement happens.

“Tea Time is one of the best ways that the library can express faith in people.”

There is a term you don't hear these days, one you used to hear all the time when the Carnegie branches opened: ‘Palaces for the People.’ The library really is a palace. It bestows nobility on people who can't otherwise afford a shred of it.

“People need to have nobility and dignity in their lives. And, you know, they need other people to recognize it in them too. Serving tea doesn't seem like that big a deal, but the truth is it's one of the most important things I do.”

There are no criminals, only environmental circumstances which result in criminal behavior. Given the proper environmental structure, anyone will be a criminal or a noncriminal. It follows, then, that crime control measures are unlikely to work if they are designed to target individual offenders. Instead, crime is best managed through the manipulation of the environment where crimes occur. To this day, however, most policies that aim to reduce crime

focus on punishing people rather than improving places. The president has called for a national “stop and frisk” police program; the attorney general wants more severe sentencing; advocates of “law and order” are resurgent. We invest little in housing and far less in safe sidewalks and neighborhood amenities like libraries, senior centers, and community gardens, which draw people into the public realm and put more eyes on the street. We spend even less to address criminal “hot spots,” specific places, such as empty lots, abandoned buildings, and liquor stores, that are known to foster illegal activities. Funds for improving community and street-level conditions in the places most likely to suffer from crime and violence are in short supply. Government officials may have political reasons to crack down on potentially dangerous people rather than on demonstrably dangerous places, but the scientific grounds are shaky. We have other more effective and less expensive ways to reduce crime today. And a growing body of scientific research shows that some of the best options involve investing in social infrastructure.

Social scientists have long played a major role in shaping crime policies. Consider the “broken windows” theory, introduced in an article in 1982. According to the theory, criminals perceive broken windows and other forms of neighborhood disorder as signals of weak social control and, in turn, as evidence that crimes committed there are unlikely to be checked.

“Though it is not inevitable, it is more likely that here, rather than in places where people are confident they can regulate public behavior by informal controls, drugs will change hands, prostitutes will solicit, and cars will be stripped. That the drunks will be robbed by boys who do it as a lark, and the prostitutes’ customers will be robbed by men who do it purposefully and perhaps violently. That muggings will occur.”

“Broken Windows” is not only one of the most cited articles in the history of criminology, it’s also one of the most influential works of public policy research, sometimes referred to as “the bible of policing” and “the blueprint for community policing.” Since the 1980s, cities throughout the world have used these ideas as motivation for “zero tolerance” policing, wherein officers carefully monitor petty crimes such as graffiti, loitering, public intoxication, even panhandling, and courts severely punish those convicted of committing them.

“If you take care of the little things, then you can prevent a lot of the big things.”

In practice, in NYC this meant stopping, frisking, and arresting more people, particularly those who live in high-crime areas. It also meant a

spike in reports that police were unfairly targeting minorities, particularly black men. Despite some relatively recent experimental evidence supporting elements of the theory, broken windows always worked better as an idea than as a work of empirical science. The famous broken windows theory has never been verified and the existing social-scientific data suggest that the theory is probably not right. The problems, which include the fact that perceptions of disorder generally have more to do with the racial composition of a neighborhood than with the amount of broken windows or graffiti, are numerous and well documented.

For present purposes, though, I'm less interested in the validity of the broken windows theory than in the way it was framed and interpreted. The authors encouraged policy-makers to crack down on the petty crimes that lead to things like broken windows, which meant more aggressive street-level policing. Had they been more interested in the influence of social infrastructure, however, they might have taken another tack. Consider the famous scenario in which the authors propose how spirals of disorder and decay get started.

“A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed. Adults stop scolding rowdy children; the children, emboldened, become more rowdy. Families move out, unattached adults move in. Teenagers gather in front of the corner store. The merchant asks them to move; they refuse. Fights occur. Litter accumulates. People start drinking in front of the grocery; in time, an inebriate slumps to the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep it off. Pedestrians are approached by panhandlers.”

From there it gets worse. What's curious, I think, is that the first two steps of this vicious cycle—“A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up”—have disappeared in the public debate about why some neighborhoods have such high crime rates. The third step—“a window is smashed”—inspired the article's catchy title and took center stage. In academic circles, scholars had long been concerned about the security risks posed by abandoned properties and empty lots. But the popular and policy debates about broken windows theory ignored the two problems at the root of their story and jumped straight to the criminal behavior. We get “Broken Windows,” not ‘Abandoned Property,’ and a very different policy response ensues. Imagine what might have happened if the authors had pushed their readers—many of whom were mayors and police chiefs—to think more carefully about the social infrastructure. What if vacant buildings and empty lots had gotten the attention that was showered on petty criminals instead? What if

neighborhood crime prevention efforts focused on inspecting and remediating dangerous properties rather than stopping and frisking people?

The shortage of affordable housing is a national crisis today, and violent crime is once again on the rise in some cities. Public investment in these matters is inevitable, because the problems they generate are too difficult for citizens to endure and too serious for political officials to ignore. For decades, building prisons for the poor has been our main crime reduction policy, and the social costs have been as great as the economic expense. If we want a better, more equitable, and sustainable solution for the challenges facing our cities and suburbs, we'd be better off building social infrastructure instead.

Today, our communities are full of children whose future will be formed in the places where they go to learn about themselves and the world they'll inherit. They deserve palaces. Whether they get them is up to us.

Most debates about education focus on the relationship between school quality and individual student achievement. That's sensible, since schools play such an important role in determining people's fate in modern societies, even in those where inherited privilege matters more for success than merit or hard work. But educational institutions do far more than teach individual students. From childcare centers to research universities, schools create social worlds that shape and sustain entire communities. They're our primary public institutions for establishing democratic ideals and instilling civic skills. Schools are our modern agoras, gathering places where we make and remake ourselves and develop a sense of where we belong. Schools are organizations, but they're also social infrastructures. The way they're planned, designed, and programmed shapes the interactions that develop in and around them. For students, teachers, parents, and entire communities, schools can either foster or inhibit trust, solidarity, and a shared commitment to the common good. They can also set boundaries that define who is part of the community and who is excluded. They can integrate or segregate, create opportunities or keep people in their place.

Of course, the design and programming of schools also shapes their core mission: educating children. The physical layout and organizational structure of a school affects how learning happens—in classrooms, on campus, and in the neighborhood where it's situated. This is just as true for elementary schools as it is for elite universities. Consider, for instance, the difference between the traditional Oxbridge college model, organized around small rooms where individual students study with tutors, and the latest design trends in contemporary universities, which feature large, open, multipurpose spaces that encourage serendipitous encounters and promote collaboration with people from different fields. Such spaces provide the

ability to explore topics of one's own interest on one's own time with access to more specifically knowledgeable people to augment understanding.

In the 1980s, when American political leaders had grown anxious about a new "urban underclass" and local governments throughout the country deployed armed security guards to monitor high school campuses, public schools—particularly those in poor areas—had ceased to be ideal places for anything. With metal detectors at the gates and pass cards restricting the circulation of students, educational institutions had come to resemble prisons. And that's where a growing number of students were heading, after failing out of schools that were set up to fail them. The move to militarize large school campuses represents a dangerous turn in American education, one that threatens to depersonalize the school experience and bring out the worst in the nation's most vulnerable children.

Many of the earliest European universities were designed to solidify social boundaries, not open them. The first universities, in Bologna and Paris, were part of the city, and students typically lodged with their families or with townspeople. As universities developed, local entrepreneurs built halls and hostels for the students. But many school administrators disliked this arrangement, as did the aristocratic parents of university students, and universities began to erect gates and walls to separate their sacred grounds from the profane communities in which they had been embedded. New College, at Oxford, built the first enclosed quadrangle that housed all university functions in 1379. Many schools followed, giving rise to the model of the college as a segregated residential community as well as an educational institution where students studied, largely in private rooms, under the direct tutelage of a learned instructor. There were several reasons for the use of the enclosed quadrangle in British colleges, from efficient land use in crowded towns to the influential tradition of the cloistered monastery. The walls that divided the college campus from the town served defensive purposes, protecting students and faculty not only from occasional wars and local conflicts but also from townspeople.

The early histories of Oxford and Cambridge abound in incidents of town-gown antagonism leading to fighting, warfare, and murder on both sides. The ability to close off a college at a few gate-points also gave college authorities the advantage of greater control over the students, a concern that was a major factor in the growth of the collegiate system. By 1410, Oxford required all students to live in colleges rather than in the town, and that policy remains intact, albeit only for freshmen, today.

American universities rarely built the kind of high walls that protected colleges at Oxford and Cambridge from the communities around them, but many schools, particularly those in cities, have buttressed their exclusive

admissions standards with elaborate physical and organizational systems that separate students and faculty from neighboring people and places perceived as dangerous. Today, large campus security operations reinforce these perceptions at universities throughout the country, and make the distinction between insiders and outsiders especially sharp. Conventionally, college administrators and city planners think of “town-gown” divisions as especially bad for residents, not students, because they’re the ones excluded from campus amenities and stuck dealing with a raucous population of young people who haven’t learned to be good neighbors. But universities that cut themselves off from surrounding communities also hurt students, giving them a false sense of superiority and depriving them of opportunities to learn from their neighbors and develop the civic skills that they—and all of us—urgently need.

Partnering with the local community is more complicated at the University of Chicago, an affluent and prestigious school with a long history of excluding its African American neighbors. Despite a rhetorical commitment to liberalism and tolerance, during the 1950s the university’s leaders established a fund they could use for “area protection” against what the former director of community interest called “negro invasion.” The university president incentivized the board of trustees to support this initiative by taking members on a bus tour of “typical colored neighborhoods,” which was designed to provoke anxieties about what would happen in Hyde Park if the university didn’t acquire more real estate in the area surrounding the school. The scheme worked, as the trustees donated \$4.5 million to a fund that would, “buy, control, and rebuild our neighborhood.” Substantial as it was, the fund proved woefully inadequate to secure the area around campus from the crime that pervaded Chicago’s postindustrial ghettos in the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1990s, university leaders had largely given up their efforts to control adjacent real estate.

They invested in policing instead of property, a move made possible by the Illinois Private College Campus Police Act of 1992, which gave universities in high-crime areas all the legal powers of a police force but few of the public reporting obligations. Within a few years the university had built one of the nation’s largest private security forces, and it made sure all prospective and entering students knew how well they would be protected once they arrived on campus. But only if they stayed on campus: although the university’s officers had jurisdiction to patrol off-campus, former students report that school officials advised them not to cross into the black neighborhoods around them, including Woodlawn, Washington Park, South Shore, Kenwood, and Oakland, because they’d be targets of crime. As compensation, the University of Chicago invested heavily in its own, internal

social infrastructure: libraries, bookstores, cafés, art museums, theaters, and athletic facilities. It assured students that everything they needed was right on campus—or, if they felt adventurous, in the wealthy neighborhoods far to the north.

In 2015, a historically unprecedented increase in the number of white Americans dying in middle age was identified. This was due largely to fatalities from drug and alcohol abuse as well as suicide—deaths of despair. The study argued that these fatalities were tied to large-scale economic and social changes. In addition to facing a decline in job opportunities, white people with little education were experiencing a loss of traditional rituals and social institutions that had long served as sources of support. Marriage rates are down. Divorce remains common. Families are fragmented. Local government agencies are strapped for resources. Libraries and childcare centers have fewer open hours. Churches are scrambling to meet new challenges and demands.

“These changes left people with less structure when they came to choose their careers, their religion, and the nature of their family lives. When such choices succeed, they are liberating; when they fail, the individual can only hold himself or herself responsible. In the worst cases of failure, this is a Durkheim-like recipe for suicide.”

While restoring a broken social infrastructure is a critical long-term project, many cities and towns in the United States are asking what they can do right now to reduce the rate of overdose deaths. To answer this question, it's worth looking at another country that once faced a similar problem: Switzerland. Beginning in the 1970s, Switzerland saw an alarming number of its citizens become addicted to heroin. Initially, the Swiss responded to this in the same way the United States has traditionally responded to drug use, with tougher law enforcement. Courts issued stiffer sentences for drug users and dealers, while police dispersed people who took drugs in public places. But the problem only got worse. In addition to seeing more young people take up the needle, the country also witnessed a frightening increase in property crime, HIV infection, and overdose deaths. In 1987, increasingly desperate, authorities in Zurich tried the opposite approach. Instead of facing harsh penalties, addicts would now be allowed to use drugs openly, but only in a specific area of the city, Platzspitz Park. Fans of the television series *The Wire* will recognize this strategy as similar to the one deployed in Baltimore's fictional “Hamsterdam.”

As in Hamsterdam, this approach did little to stem the problem of addiction and created intense spillover effects, such as increased crime in areas

around the park. Meanwhile, legalization did little to stem the number of overdoses. Switzerland is not an especially progressive country. Swiss women, for example, only gained the right to vote in 1971. Stymied, authorities struck on a plan that was both radical and full of common sense. What was killing people, authorities realized, was not heroin use per se, but using heroin alone, under unsafe conditions. The Swiss government ultimately decided that the best way to protect users was to give them the drug. However, the heroin would be administered only in clinics where the addicts could receive proper supervision, and the drugs would be pharmaceutical-grade, free of any unknown and potentially fatal additives. This final point is perhaps the most key, as much of the problem related to drugs comes from impurities or inability to access (whether no supply or you simply cannot afford it). Doses were large enough to allow users to function and not suffer withdrawal, but modest enough to prevent them from getting too high. The program was run like any other medical facility and the users treated like any other patients. People even had to purchase health insurance to participate.

The Swiss found that once heroin users didn't have to worry about how they'd get their drug, they were often able to take on the larger problems that had led to their addiction in the first place. Social workers were able to build trust with users, helping them get jobs and counseling. By reducing the stigma of heroin, and creating physical places where drug users and counselors could meet together without the threat of punishment, the Swiss government was able to reintegrate its users back into society.

In all cases, recovering from substance abuse requires the support of a community, be it family, friends, therapists, or twelve-step groups. Addiction experts refer to these kinds of social connections as elements of "recovery capital." The heroin maintenance zones that the Swiss government established were not merely sites for drug injection. They were social infrastructures, places where addicts, counselors, and medical providers interacted regularly, under conditions that, though not exactly salubrious, were as healthy as possible. Between 1991 and 2004, overdose deaths in Switzerland dropped by 50 percent. While many still overdosed at the supervised injection sites, not a single person died. Meanwhile, fewer people were choosing to start taking heroin. The number of new users dropped 80 percent between 1990 and 2002; in turn, HIV rates plummeted. The program also had positive effects for non-users. Most notably, the country saw a 90 percent drop in heroin-related property crimes. In a national referendum held in 2008, Swiss citizens overwhelmingly voted to maintain their public health approach to opioid addiction. It's now part of national law.

It's an international model of effective, if still controversial, social infrastructure, and one with a proven record of saving lives. Australia and the

United Kingdom have run successful experiments with safe injection clinics. In 2014, Vancouver, Canada, an early leader in clean needle distribution programs, became the first North American city to open a fully legal heroin and methadone maintenance facility. The program made an immediate impact. Within two years of opening, the rate of fatal overdoses in the immediate vicinity of the clinic dropped by 35 percent; in the rest of the city, deaths dropped less than 10 percent. In Vancouver, as elsewhere, opponents of the legal injection sites predicted that they would encourage more people to try heroin, yet subsequent studies have shown that this hasn't happened. As in Switzerland, cordoning off a safe yet tame zone for users made the drug less appealing, and there are far fewer new users there than in comparable places.

The early twentieth century saw great changes in health and safety brought about through collaborations that today would be viewed as odd or unusual—between physicians and city planners, sanitarians and civil engineers. Episodically treating small numbers of people, while ignoring the obviously unhealthy social and environmental surroundings within which people live, has stunted our treatments and moved the health of the nation forward at too slow a pace. Today, as the world grows more urban and unequal, there's an urgent need to build healthier places, and social infrastructure is the key.

One recent paper draws on oral histories, childhood autobiographies, and archival research to show how access to public space varied among three generations of New Yorkers: those born in the 1930s and 1940s, the 1970s, and the 2000s. For those born in the 1930s and 1940s, the neighborhood sidewalk was the main play area. Victoria, an Italian American who grew up in the East Harlem/Yorkville neighborhood in the 1940s, recounts that on her street:

“The whole block was full of kids. Almost all the activity was done outdoors. You went outside and on the sidewalk you drew [with chalk] a potsie, those little squares where you used to play jacks, [and] bottle tops.”

Mothers allowed their children to play late into the evening as they knew neighbors were keeping a watchful eye on their sons and daughters. Parents could also keep an eye on their children with great ease by peering out their tenement windows. There were risks involved in outdoor play, from benign conflicts with other kids or adults to, more seriously, getting involved in a gang or being hit by a car, and reform organizations lobbied for the city to develop contained play spaces, like playgrounds, to better protect kids. But

bad things rarely happened to kids like Victoria. The sidewalks were their safe haven, the place where they grew up. Most New Yorkers born in the 1970s had a different experience.

By then, rising crime made parents reluctant to let their children roam freely on the streets and sidewalks, and supervised areas, including playgrounds and athletic fields, had become more popular. But when the fiscal crisis hit, the city cut funds to parks and playgrounds. Professional supervisors disappeared. Conditions deteriorated. Gangs and drug dealers took charge of public spaces. Reggie, an African American who grew up in East Harlem/Yorkville around that time, tells that racial conflict was common, and black and Latino children often found themselves targeted in places that lacked an adult presence. As a teenager, he still wandered the area with friends, going to outdoor concerts (“open jams”) in parks and playgrounds and building friendships through music and dance. But for younger children, these areas were gradually becoming off-limits, particularly after dark. A rising number of parents and caretakers were retreating from outdoor public spaces and forcing their children to hunker down indoors instead. By the 2000s, children’s access to outdoor public spaces was even more restricted.

Noel, a thirteen-year-old Italian American who is growing up in the Isaacs Houses, the same complex where Reggie lived, says that as a young child her parents let her play in the playground within the Isaacs, but forbid her from going to other local parks. Noel’s parents are extremely protective of her and invest an enormous amount of energy monitoring her everyday life. Occasionally they let her join friends for movies or window-shopping on Eighty-Sixth Street, a more affluent commercial corridor near her neighborhood. And occasionally she goes to a professionally managed after-school or summer program in one of the commercial organizations that have become so common in middle-class and affluent communities today. But Noel says that her mobility is restricted, and as a result she spends most of her free time going where most people her age go.

“I’m always on the Internet, instant messaging. . . not as much email, but instant messaging. The television is always on, and the computer is always on too. I text message on my cell phone.”

It’s social behavior, to be sure, but it seldom involves physical activity or spending time in green spaces outdoors. It may well protect Noel from violence, but it exposes her to risks of other health hazards, from obesity to stress to attention deficit disorders, that were far less prevalent in previous generations. Noel’s parents are choosing to keep her out of their neighborhood’s degraded public play spaces, but by some measures they

and their fellow New Yorkers are better off than other American families, because at least they have a local option. In the United States, the United Kingdom, and most other industrial countries, access to nature and outdoor play areas varies by social class, sometimes dramatically. In Los Angeles, for instance, where good weather should entice children outdoors in all seasons, nearly half of all low-income households lack immediate access to a park or playground. And many who do live near an outdoor play space are so close to a freeway that they stay indoors to avoid the dirty air.

Before the oligarchs concluded that the study of civics was detrimental to the longevity of their rule, every elementary student learned about checks-and-balances. Theoretically, the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government were supposed to hold each other in balance. It was a reassuring fairy tale for the average citizen, but it never served the average citizen. This system of checks-and-balances merely held one oligarchic faction in check with the other. Nothing in the arrangement guaranteed that the government would be responsive to the ordinary peoples' needs.

When oligarchs are the only ones who sit in Congress, occupy the Oval Office, and wield the judge's gavel, then it is a government of, by, and for the oligarchs, responsive only to their elite interests not to ours. This has been the case since the earliest days of the formation of the United States. The Founding Fathers must have suspected that the slogan, 'a government of, by, and for rich men' wouldn't produce the revolutionary fervor they needed to overthrow King George's colonial rule. The phrase "of, by, and for the people" sounded far more inspiring to the thousands who waged struggle with mass acts of noncooperation, importation boycotts, civil disobedience of unjust British laws, and collective refusal to pay the Stamp Tax. Many more fought and died for an illusion of inclusion in the definition of "We, the People." The history of the United States has been one long struggle for inclusion that continues to this very day.

If we learn nothing else from our history, we should know this: the tools of struggle should never lose their edge, gather dust, or fall from active use among the people. To gain—and maintain—a true government of, by, and for the people, all of us must grasp the considerable power of collective non-cooperation, disruption, and intervention. We must do so with regularity and with ferocity.

Currently, the US populace views any but the most nonviolent of actions as something unusual and out-of-the-ordinary. 'Activists' are distinct from citizens. But if boycotts, strikes, walk-outs, and shut-downs became as common as calling your senator or signing a petition, we would rapidly and effectively win major social justice advances. Such struggle is not about pleading with politicians to do the right thing. It is not about voting the

‘right’ people into power to do the right thing. It is about grasping the ability to non-cooperate, disrupt, and intervene in the activity of a society in pursuit of tangible changes for social justice.

These struggles empower the people to hold all aspects of their society accountable. Such action’s capacity to withdraw support or disrupt systems of oppression and intervene in injustice, can target any institution or business, social practice or group, political party or policy, cultural behaviors or beliefs.

Every meaningful advance for equality and justice in our nation’s history, beginning with our struggle for independence, has won because it mobilized mass numbers of people to cease their participation in life-as-usual. If we wish to see meaningful changes in our lifetime, we, too, must find the willingness to pick up the tools of struggle and construct the world of our dreams.

Central Planning Doesn't Work

Consider the fact that competitive institutions like corporations and militaries are in many ways internally collectivist: They constantly emphasize teamwork, trust, and shared culture.

Corporations and their lobbyists write the laws and the legislation, creating a two-tiered legal system in which poverty is criminalized and we are controlled, taxed, and punished. The corporate oligarchs, however, live in a world where monopoly, fraud, and other financial wrongdoing are legal or rarely punished and taxes are minimal or nonexistent. Among the population, only a tiny percentage—most of whom come from inherited wealth and have been groomed in elitist, plutocratic universities and institutions—dominate the corporate hierarchy. Public discourse, controlled by corporate power, ignores this one-sided power arrangement. It cannot address a problem it refuses to acknowledge. Subjugation is freedom.

Some call this corporate economic system 'communist'—that's communist with a small 'c'—because these private governments own all the non-labor means of production in the society it governs. It organizes production by means of central planning. The form of the government is a dictatorship. In some cases, the dictator is appointed by an oligarchy. In other cases, the dictator is self-appointed. Private governments, their sanctioning powers lacking the state's ability to imprison or execute (although they often have internal security forces with the power to arrest), ensure compliance by using wholesale surveillance and the threats of demotion and exile, plus the potential rewards of salary raises and promotions. Also, there usually is a steady barrage of company propaganda.

If only Walmart's operational efficiency, its logistical genius, its architecture of agile economic planning could be captured and transformed by those who aim toward a more egalitarian, liberatory society!

For many progressives, the story of logistics and planning seems musty and old. Are there not fresh arguments required to convince that barricades must be mounted, forgotten stories of wretched oppression yet to be recounted? It is true that there is little drama or romance to the story of planning—few riveting tales of selfless heroism, brave suffering, or righteous fury (although there are more than a few episodes of heartbreaking defeat, failure, and ruin). But in essence, the story of injustice and its correction is a chronicle of efforts across all time to reduce inequality of all types: of haves and have-nots, of who works and who rests, of who has a say and who does not. And inequality is, in the end, a question of unfair allocation of things themselves or the result of such unfair allocation. Put simply, a poor

person has not been allocated the stuff (or the ability to buy it) that a rich person has. The needs of the rich and poor are met and unmet in wildly different ways: the potential to fully articulate their humanity is cut off at the root for some, while others are granted space to flourish. Inequality limits what a person, and indeed society, could otherwise do; it limits our freedom.

Past generations have fought to expand the realm of freedom—to ensure all adult humans have the same rights and to ensure that any new capabilities delivered through technological advance are to be made available to all. And if we are to continue this battle to correct the titanic, manifest unfairness of the way things are, we must therefore wage a struggle over which method for the allocation of things we want as a society. So when we ask whether another world is possible, we are also asking: Is there an alternate method to allocate things? How would we distribute things differently? And who would decide how they are distributed? Could the plans that capitalists use every day to get goods and services into the hands of those who can pay for them be transformed to instead ensure that what we produce gets to those who need it most? And in transforming the way we distribute stuff, could we also start to transform everything else about the economy—from what stuff we make and how, to who works and for how long? Once we have identified alternative ways to distribute things, the planning everywhere around us may telegraph aspects of another mode of production. More urgently, such extant planning may also suggest features of transitional stages on the way to a more all-encompassing transformation of our economy.

For a mode of production to be called capitalism, it is not sufficient for a free market to exist; there are, after all, other essential features of capitalism, including exploitation in the workplace and the need to sell one's labor in order to survive. Nevertheless, the free(-ish) market is a necessary condition for capitalism—one that, as a method of allocation, leads to growing inequality via disparities in the distribution of income. Market interactions inevitably produce winners and losers, leading to concentrations of wealth. Over time, these disparities grow, a product of these same market interactions. This perfect free market only exists in the minds of its most ardent defenders and within the pages of introductory economics textbooks. Real markets are a far cry from this idealized fairy tale: companies regularly collude to keep out competitors, large corporations constantly lobby for government subsidies, and it is the norm that a few big players dominate entire product categories and set prices. One market in particular—the labor market—needed centuries of coercion and dispossession to turn peasants and farmers into workers willing to sell their labor for a wage.

The market's inherently competitive mechanisms catalyze, take advan-

tage of, and exacerbate a range of inegalitarian prejudices based on identity (race, gender, sexuality, and so on); lead to disruption of ecosystem services upon which humans depend; and drive militarist rivalry between nations that precipitates colonization, gives rise to imperialism, and ultimately triggers wars. While the real world is often one of messy disequilibrium, of prices created by fiat rather than emerging from the competitive ether—and one configured by capitalists who plan—it remains one where markets determine much of our economic, and thereby social, life.

When we say we want an equal society, what we're fighting for is democratic planning. There is no machine that can simply be taken over, run by new operators but otherwise left unchanged; but there is a foundation of planning that a more just society could surely take up and make its own. This is not so much a story about a future society, but one about our own. We plan. And it works.

In the seminal 1920 essay “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth,” Mises went beyond what by this period was already a long-standing ethical argument against socialism: that under such a system, there would be no incentive to work and therefore no drive toward excellence. In this short text, Mises instead posed the following questions:

- In any economy larger than the primitive family level, how could socialist planning boards know which products to produce, how much of each should be produced at each stage, and which raw materials should be used and how much of them?
- Where should production be located, and which production process was most efficient?
- How would they gather and calculate this vast array of information, and how could it then be retransmitted back to all actors in the economy?

The answer, he said, is that the mammoth scale of information needed—for producers, consumers, and every actor in between, and for every stage and location of production of the multitude of products needed in society—is beyond the capacity of such planning boards. No human process could possibly gather all the necessary data, assess it in real time, and produce plans that accurately describe supply and demand across all sectors. Therefore, any economy the size of an entire country that tried to replace the myriad decisions from the multitude of sovereign consumers with the plans of bureaucrats working from incorrigibly flawed data would regularly produce vast, chasm-like mismatches between what is demanded and what

is supplied. These inefficiencies would result in such social and economic barbarities—shortages, starvation, frustration, and chaos—that even if one accepts the inevitability of inequalities and attendant myriad other horrors of capitalism, the market will still appear benign by comparison.

Meanwhile, Mises argued that the extraordinarily simple mechanism of prices in the market, reflecting the supply and demand of resources, already contains all this information. Every aspect of production—from the cost of all inputs at all times, to the locations of inputs and products, and the changing demands and taste of purchasers—is implicitly captured by price. But if prices in the market are so much more uncomplicated, effortless, and manageable, then why don't we just stick with them? Mises's argument in his 1920 essay, later developed through a series of books, is described to this day by his acolytes as his masterpiece. And not without reason: it is perhaps the strongest argument ever mounted against the idea of socialism. How, indeed, could we replace prices with planning boards? And isn't socialism supposed to be direct rule by the workers, rather than a replacement of unelected bosses with remote bureaucrats? If centralized by bureaucrats, how could all that information be gathered? And if decentralized, how could all those millions (and globally, billions) of workers democratically coordinate production decisions?

Some insist that prices in the market, as descriptors for behavior in an economy, are no less corrupted by this loss of fidelity because they fail to capture sufficient information on the material circumstances of citizens and fail to describe adequately all the costs or benefits of actions. In a system with market-based provision of healthcare, for instance, price does not describe information on inability to access healthcare, just as price does not reflect the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the average temperature of the planet.

There is much more to the calculation debate, and we'll briefly outline some of the additional mathematical and computational aspects later on, but for now this theoretical standoff should suffice. It is enough to know that as a result of this impasse, depending on our political persuasions, we have opted either for the information imperfections of the market, or for the information imperfections of planning, without ever resolving the debate. The stalemate could even be tweeted in less than 140 characters:

“What about data imperfections leading to shortages?”

“Oh yeah? Well what about data imperfections leading to injustices?”

Thus we are stuck. Or so it has seemed for a long time.

If something works in theory but not in practice, then there is usually something wrong with the theory. But it is equally true that if something in theory does not work, but in practice it does, then again, something must be wrong with the theory. And here is where the villainous Walmart enters our story. Walmart is perhaps the best evidence we have that while planning appears not to work in Mises's theory, it certainly does in practice. And then some. Founder Sam Walton opened his first store, Wal-Mart Discount City, on July 2, 1962, in the non-city of Rogers, Arkansas, population 5,700. From that clichédly humble beginning, Walmart has gone on to become the largest company in the world, enjoying eye-watering, People's Republic of China-sized cumulative average growth rates of eight percent during its five-and-a-half decades. Today, it employs more workers than any other private firm; if we include state enterprises in our ranking, it is the world's third-largest employer after the US Department of Defense and the People's Liberation Army. If it were a country—let's call it the People's Republic of Walmart—its economy would be roughly the size of a Sweden or a Switzerland. Using the 2015 World Bank country-by-country comparison of purchasing-power parity GDP, we could place it as the 38th largest economy in the world. Yet while the company operates within the market, internally, as in any other firm, everything is planned. There is no internal market. The different departments, stores, trucks, and suppliers do not compete against each other in a market; everything is coordinated. Walmart is not merely a planned economy, but a planned economy on the scale of the USSR smack in the middle of the Cold War. In 1970, Soviet GDP clocked in at about \$800 billion in today's money, then the second-largest economy in the world; Walmart's 2017 revenue was \$485 billion.

Yet if Mises and friends were right, then Walmart should not exist. The firm should long since have hit their wall of too many calculations to make. Moreover, Walmart is not unique; there are hundreds of multinational companies whose size is on the same order of magnitude as Sam Walton's behemoth, and they too are all, at least internally, planned economies.

“Continuous replenishment” is a bit of a misnomer, as the system actually provides merely very frequent restocking (from the supplier to the distributor and thence the retailer), in which the decision on the amount and the timing of replenishment lies with the supplier, not the retailer. You might be asking: how is this an innovation, and why would it make such a difference? You might also be asking: Why does it now seem like I'm reading a god-awful, capitalism-fellating airport business book? Suck it up. Socialism is all about logistics, comrade. The technique, a type of vendor-managed inventory, works to minimize what businesses call the “bullwhip effect,” the free market's kissing cousin to Stalinism's shortage problem.

First identified in 1961, the bullwhip effect describes the phenomenon of increasingly wild swings in mismatched inventories against product demand the further one moves along the supply chain toward the producer, ultimately extending to the company's extraction of raw materials. Therein, any slight change in customer demand reveals a discord between what the store has and what the customers want, meaning there is either too much stock or too little.

To illustrate the bullwhip effect, let's consider the 'too-little' case (although the phenomenon works identically in either scenario). The store readjusts its orders from the distributor to meet the increase in customer demand. But by this time, the distributor has already bought a certain amount of supply from the wholesaler, and so it has to readjust its own orders from the wholesaler—and so on, through to the manufacturer and the producer of the raw materials. Because customer demand is often fickle and its prediction involves some inaccuracy, businesses will carry an inventory buffer called "safety stock." Moving up the chain, each node will observe greater fluctuations, and thus greater requirements for safety stock.

One analysis performed in the 1990s assessed the scale of the problem to be considerable: a fluctuation at the customer end of just five percent (up or down) will be interpreted by other supply chain participants as a shift in demand of up to 40 percent. Just like the wave that travels along an actual bullwhip following a small flick of the wrist, a small change in behavior at one end results in massive swings at the other. Data in the system loses its fidelity to real-world demand, and the further you move away from the consumer, the more unpredictable demand appears to be. This unpredictability in either direction is a major contributing factor to economic crisis as companies struggle (or fail) to cope with situations of overproduction, having produced much more than they predicted would be demanded and being unable to sell what they have produced above its cost. Insufficient stock can be just as disruptive as overstock, leading to panic buying, reduced trustworthiness by customers, contractual penalties, increased costs resulting from training and layoffs (due to unnecessary hiring and firing), and ultimately loss of contracts, which can sink a company.

While there is of course a great deal more to economic crisis than the bullwhip effect, the inefficiencies and failures produced by the bullwhip effect can be key causes, rippling throughout the system and producing instability in other sectors. Even with modest cases of the bullwhip effect, preventing such distortions can allow reduced inventory, reduced administration costs, and improved customer service and customer loyalty—"The product you want is right here, ma'am! No need to keep checking other stores! You can always trust us to have what you want. Make sure you come back to us first

next time!’—ultimately delivering greater profits.

But there’s a catch—a big one for those who defend the market as the optimal mechanism for allocation of resources: the bullwhip effect is, in principle, eliminated if all orders match demand perfectly for any period. And the greater the transparency of information throughout the supply chain, the closer this result comes to being achieved. Thus, planning, and above all, trust, openness, and cooperation along the supply chain—rather than competition—are fundamental to continuous replacement. This is not the kumbaya analysis of socialist writers; even the most hardhearted commerce researchers and company directors argue that a prerequisite of successful supply chain management is that all participants in the chain recognize that they all will gain more by cooperating as a trusting, information-sharing whole than they will as competitors. The seller, for example, is in effect telling the buyer how much he will buy. The retailer has to trust the supplier with restocking decisions. Manufacturers are responsible for managing inventories in Walmart’s warehouses. Walmart and its suppliers have to agree when promotions will happen and by how much, so that increased sales are recognized as an effect of a sale or marketing effort, and not necessarily as a big boost in demand. And all supply chain participants have to implement data-sharing technologies that allow for real-time flow of sales data, distribution center withdrawals and other logistical information so that everyone in the chain can rapidly make adjustments.

We hear a lot about how Walmart crushes suppliers into delivering at a particular price point, as the company is so vast that it is worth it from the supplier’s perspective to have the product stocked by the store. And this is true: Walmart engages in what it calls “strategic sourcing” to identify who can supply the behemoth at the volume and price needed. But once a supplier is in the club—or perhaps ‘in the club’ is the wrong phrasing; ‘once a supplier is assimilated by the Walmart-Borg’ might be better—there are significant advantages. One is that the company sets in place long-term, high-volume strategic partnerships with most suppliers. The resulting data transparency and cross-supply-chain planning decrease expenditures on merchandising, inventory, logistics, and transportation for all participants in the supply chain, not just for Walmart. While there are indeed financial transactions within the supply chain, resource allocation among Walmart’s vast network of global suppliers, warehouses, and retail stores is regularly described by business analysts as more akin to behaving like a single firm.

In the 1980s, the company began dealing directly with manufacturers to reduce the number of links within, and to more efficiently oversee, the supply chain. In 1995, Walmart further ramped up its cooperative supply chain approach under the moniker Collaborative Planning, Forecasting, and

Replenishment (CPFR), in which all nodes in the chain collaboratively synchronize their forecasts and activities. As technology has advanced, the company has used CPFR to further enhance supply chain cooperation, from being the first to implement company-wide use of universal product bar codes to its more troubled relationship with radio-frequency ID tagging. Its gargantuan, satellite-connected Retail Link database connects demand forecasts with suppliers and distributes real-time sales data from cash registers all along the supply chain. Analysts describe how stockage and manufacture is “pulled,” almost moment-to-moment, by the consumer, rather than “pushed” by the company onto shelves. All of this hints at how economic planning on a massive scale is being realized in practice with the assistance of technological advance, even as the wrangling of its infinities of data—according to Mises and his co-thinkers in the calculation debate—are supposed to be impossible to overcome.

It is no small irony that one of Walmart’s main competitors, the venerable, 120-plus-year-old Sears, Roebuck & Company, destroyed itself by embracing the exact opposite of Walmart’s galloping socialization of production and distribution: by instituting an internal market. The Sears Holdings Corporation reported losses of some \$2 billion in 2016, and some \$10.4 billion in total since 2011, the last year that the business turned a profit. In the spring of 2017, it was in the midst of closing another 150 stores, in addition to the 2,125 already shuttered since 2010—more than half its operation—and had publicly acknowledged “substantial doubt” that it would be able to keep any of its doors open for much longer. The stores that remain open, often behind boarded-up windows, have the doleful air of late-Soviet retail desolation: leaking ceilings, inoperative escalators, acres of empty shelves, and aisles shambolically strewn with abandoned cardboard boxes half-filled with merchandise. A solitary brand-new size-9 black sneaker lies lonesome and boxless on the ground, its partner neither on a shelf nor in a storeroom. Remaining employees have taken to hanging bedsheets as screens to hide derelict sections from customers.

The company has certainly suffered in the way that many other brick-and-mortar outlets have in the face of the challenge from discounters such as Walmart and from online retailers like Amazon. But the consensus among the business press and dozens of very bitter former executives is that the overriding cause of Sears’s malaise is the disastrous decision by the company’s chairman and CEO, Edward Lampert, to disaggregate the company’s different divisions into competing units: to create an internal market. From a capitalist perspective, the move appears to make sense. As business leaders never tire of telling us, the free market is the fount of all wealth in modern society. Competition between private companies is

the primary driver of innovation, productivity, and growth. Greed is good, per Gordon Gekko's oft-quoted imperative from Wall Street. So one can be excused for wondering why it is, if the market is indeed as powerfully efficient and productive as they say, that all companies did not long ago adopt the market as an internal model.

Lampert, libertarian and fan of the laissez-faire egotism of Russian-American novelist Ayn Rand, had made his way from working in warehouses as a teenager, via a spell with Goldman Sachs, to managing a \$15 billion hedge fund by the age of 41. The wunderkind was hailed as the Steve Jobs of the investment world. In 2003, the fund he managed, ESL Investments, took over the bankrupt discount retail chain Kmart (launched the same year as Walmart). A year later, he parlayed this into a \$12 billion buyout of a stagnating—but by no means troubled—Sears. At first, the familiar strategy of merciless, life-destroying post-acquisition cost-cutting and layoffs did manage to turn around the fortunes of the merged Kmart-Sears, now operating as Sears Holdings. But Lampert's big wheeze went well beyond the usual corporate raider tales of asset stripping, consolidation, and chopping-block use of operations as a vehicle to generate cash for investments elsewhere.

Lampert intended to use Sears as a grand free market experiment to show that the invisible hand would outperform the central planning typical of any firm. He radically restructured operations, splitting the company into thirty, and later forty, different units that were to compete against each other. Instead of cooperating, as in a normal firm, divisions such as apparel, tools, appliances, human resources, IT, and branding were now in essence to operate as autonomous businesses, each with their own president, board of directors, chief marketing officer and statement of profit or loss. Sounds like something Mayor Pete and his McKinsey buddies would approve of.

“If the company's leaders were told to act selfishly, he argued, they would run their divisions in a rational manner, boosting overall performance.”

He also believed that the new structure, called Sears Holdings Organization, Actions, and Responsibilities, or SOAR, would improve the quality of internal data, and in so doing that it would give the company an edge akin to statistician Paul Podesta's use of unconventional metrics for the Oakland Athletics baseball team. Lampert would go on to place Podesta on Sears's board of directors and hire Steven Levitt, coauthor of the pop neoliberal economics bestseller *Freakonomics*, as a consultant. Lampert was a laissez-faire true believer.

And so if the apparel division wanted to use the services of IT or human resources, they had to sign contracts with them, or alternately to

use outside contractors if it would improve the financial performance of the unit—regardless of whether it would improve the performance of the company as a whole. For instance, Sears's widely trusted appliance brand, Kenmore, was divided between the appliance division and the branding division. The former had to pay fees to the latter for any transaction. But selling non-Sears-branded appliances was more profitable to the appliances division, so they began to offer more prominent in-store placement to rivals of Kenmore products, undermining overall profitability. Its in-house tool brand, Craftsman—so ubiquitous an American trademark that it plays a pivotal role in a Neal Stephenson science fiction bestseller, *Seveneves*, 5,000 years in the future—refused to pay extra royalties to the in-house battery brand DieHard, so they went with an external provider, again indifferent to what this meant for the company's bottom line as a whole.

Executives would attach screen protectors to their laptops at meetings to prevent their colleagues from finding out what they were up to. Units would scrap over floor and shelf space for their products. Screaming matches between the chief marketing officers of the different divisions were common at meetings intended to agree on the content of the crucial weekly circular advertising specials. They would fight over key positioning, aiming to optimize their own unit's profits, even at another unit's expense, sometimes with grimly hilarious results. There were screwdrivers being advertised next to lingerie, and the sporting goods division succeeded in getting the Doodle Bug mini-bike for young boys placed on the cover of the Mothers' Day edition of the circular. As for different divisions swallowing lower profits, or losses, on discounted goods in order to attract customers for other items—forget about it.

One executive described the situation as “dysfunctionality at the highest level.” As profits collapsed, the divisions grew increasingly vicious toward each other, scrapping over what cash reserves remained. Squeezing profits still further was the duplication in labor, particularly with an increasingly top-heavy repetition of executive function by the now-competing units, which no longer had an interest in sharing costs for shared operations. With no company-wide interest in maintaining store infrastructure, something instead viewed as an externally imposed cost by each division, Sears's capital expenditure dwindled to less than one percent of revenue, a proportion much lower than that of most other retailers. Ultimately, the different units decided to simply take care of their own profits, the company as a whole be damned. One former executive described a culture of “warring tribes,” and an elimination of cooperation and collaboration. One business press wag described Lampert's regime as “running Sears like the Coliseum.” If there were any book to which the model conformed, it was less *Atlas Shrugged*

than it was *The Hunger Games*.

Thus, many who have abandoned ship describe the harebrained free market shenanigans of the man they call “Crazy Eddie” as a failed experiment for one reason above all else: the model kills cooperation.

“Organizations need a holistic strategy.”

Indeed they do. But is not society as a whole an organization? Is this lesson any less true for the global economy than it is for Sears? To take just one example: the continued combustion of coal, oil, and gas may be a disaster for our species as a whole, but so long as it remains profitable for some companies—those responsible for extracting and processing fossil fuels—these will continue to act in a way that serves their particular interests, the rest of society be damned.

In the face of all this evidence, Lampert is, however, unrepentant:

“Decentralized systems and structures work better than centralized ones because they produce better information over time. Clashes for resources are a product of competition and advocacy, things that were sorely lacking before and are lacking in socialist economies.”

The market economy is not only rife with planning, but with authoritarian planning that concentrates economic decision-making in the hands of wealth owners and keeps workers in line. Companies plan everything from how money is distributed between departments to the exact amount of time it should take to assemble a hamburger—and in every case, they plan which individual worker does which task, when, where, and how. When you're on the clock, what the boss says goes. Open nearly any introductory economics textbook, however, and the world appears as a nearly boundless realm of choice. Among the paeans to freedom and to the spontaneous efficiency of markets, few words even graze the everyday planning that goes on within the four walls of the firm. Fewer, still, name it as coercive. Planning under capitalism is about making people do things—without their input and not necessarily in their interest. At best, economists will bring up planning in order to ridicule it, failing, or refusing, to grasp its centrality even in a market system.

Hayek argued that markets—incomplete, permanently off tilt, full of fallible humans—do not just aggregate and calculate information. Markets are producers of information and knowledge. Even if market socialism allowed planners to calculate better and faster than did free markets, planning would ultimately still be impossible because planners would not have

the information created by market interactions to use in their calculations. Buying and selling may not generate technical and scientific knowledge, but it still creates all that knowledge of “time and place” that is instrumental to making efficient production and distribution decisions. Hayek argued that the problem for planners was not in the ‘how’—the equations to use—but in the ‘what’—the data that goes into the equations. The copious information planners need is unavailable before markets work their magic. Decentralization creates coordination: only the market can bring together the information that is normally isolated in the heads of different individuals. Hayek, however, was writing before the advent of “big data,” which is testing the limits of just how much granular information can be collected. It seems that he also wrote in blissful ignorance of Coase, who had shown just how flimsy the veneer of decentralized decision-making really is, even under capitalist markets.

Something incredible happened to some economists in the 1970s: some professors suddenly discovered human beings were not the equivalent of walking calculators. Alongside this revelation, many others among the most cherished beliefs of economics had been cast into potential doubt. Much of the entire mainstream economics project since the late nineteenth century had been built on the foundation of perfectly rational humans. Models of markets working together in seamless harmony, as well as arguments about the market system producing the best outcomes, relied on the pretty fantastical assumption that each of us have any and all information permanently at our fingertips.

Distinct from earlier mythology of a perfectly rational *Homo economicus*—nowhere to be found in reality, but for so long beloved by economists—the economics of information that Stiglitz helped launch started from the seemingly obvious idea that getting our hands on information—and using it—is usually costly, and sometimes impossible. An example economists love to use is the market for private health insurance. There is only so much an insurer can do to see if a person buying insurance is relatively healthy. Developing a better and better picture costs more and more. At some point, the costs prevent further information acquisition from making sense. In the same way, hiring a mechanic to take apart and inspect the engine of a used car to find out if it is a lemon can cost more than the car itself. Markets can fail: some people will end up overpaying for health insurance, while others will be uninsured. Your local sketchy used car dealership isn’t likely to be the first place you’d think of as a well-functioning market.

Beyond individual markets, Stiglitz and others were asking a bigger question: What if the entire economy was something of a used car dealership? Once enough examples of failing markets accumulate, the entire system’s

efficiency and justice can be called into doubt. In short, the economics of information ultimately challenges the argument that capitalism, despite its flaws, is the best of all possible worlds. However, rather than seeing information problems as a reason to explore collective, democratic decision-making alternatives that could bring people and information together, economists went to work making market theory work in spite of humanity's imperfections. Since the '70s, the economics of information has generated ever more ingenious ideas for incentivizing people or organizations to do things—all, of course, within the bounds of capitalist markets. People just need a little nudge.

We must debunk the crude story of the Tragedy of the Commons. Compile evidence of groups stewarding common resources and you will find that in many cases, the commons not only survived but thrived. Rather than being overrun by unthinking self-interest, shared resources were in reality often governed by complex sets of social rules established over time. Consider shared pasture land in Swiss alpine villages—it has been preserved for common use for over 500 years. Based on this and other case studies, we can identify conditions that helped protect common resources—among them, participation in decision-making by users of the resources, the capacity for monitoring usage, meaningful social sanctions and conflict-resolution mechanisms. Findings that question the tragedy of the commons, just like the idea of planning itself, can be initially jarring. It is an implicit belief of our age that the only real incentives are monetary ones—that despotism is a necessary part of work, and that it is largely out of fear of losing their incomes that people work toward common goals. However, this is not human reality but capitalist reality. While there will always be work that needs doing, there are many ways to organize that work—to plan it and to ensure that it is done. In practice, the commons need not be tragic.

Amazon is a master planner. It is these sorts of logistical and algorithmic innovations that give the lie to the hoary free market argument that even if planning can deliver the big stuff like steel foundries and railways and healthcare, it would stumble at the first hurdle of planning for consumer items. Amazon offers techniques of production and distribution that are just waiting to be seized and repurposed.

To be clear, Amazon's planning methods are not complete solutions to optimization problems that might take the lifetime of the universe to solve, but instead simply best approximations to get around exploding mathematical complexity. Yet Amazon still chooses to plan rather than leave optimization up to price signals from the market. Amazon's engineers break down problems into smaller pieces, simplifying them or finding other ways of giving a computer a chance at solving them in seconds, rather than

eons. What Amazon looks for is traction; the aim is to make problems tractable rather than to solve them with absolute precision.

Take the problem of shipping orders at the lowest cost. Even precisely answering the seemingly simple question of finding the lowest cost shipping method for a day's worth of orders can quickly grow out of hand. There is no single best way to ship one order out of thousands or millions shipped on a given day, because each order's cost depends on all the others. Will the plane from the UPS Worldport hub in Louisville, Kentucky, to Phoenix be full? Did your neighbor down the street order her electric toothbrush with express shipping, or can it be delivered with your book order tomorrow? The complexity ratchets up still further when Amazon considers not only all the possible alternative routes—which it controls—but also adjusts for the possibility of random events such as severe weather and tries to predict the next day's orders. This order assignment optimization problem has hundreds of millions of variables, and no easy solution. The problem is so complex that there are not even approximations that can take every aspect of the problem into account. But despite such problems, the planning process within Amazon does not fall apart. While Amazon may depend on horrible working conditions, low taxes, and poor wages, it nevertheless functions.

The planning problems faced by individual corporations under capitalism have approximate, 'good enough' solutions. Planning exists on a wide scale within the black box of the corporation—even if it is 'good enough' rather than perfect. That's the trick: to find the best possible, even if partial, approximations. Amazon's modelers work to bring intractably complex problems down to size, to build plans that neither stretch into infinite time, nor respond to all the possible random events that could happen at every step, but that simply work. This means coming as close as possible to the true answer of a planning question within a realistic time frame and with the use of available computing power. When it is impossible to use an "algorithm of algorithms" to mechanically find the algorithm that best approximates the original problem, creativity then comes into play.

The focal points of Amazon's distribution network are its warehouses, which the company calls "fulfillment centers." These usually take up football fields' worth of floor space jammed with shelving units. Amazon uses a peculiar form of organization called "chaotic storage," in which goods are not actually organized: there is no section for books or subsection for mystery fiction. Everything is jumbled together. You can find a children's book sharing a bin or shelf with a sex toy, caviar next to dog kibble. Once again, powerful planning is what allows Amazon to save on what turns out to be needless warehouse organization. Every item that enters a fulfillment center gets a unique barcode. Once inside the warehouse, items go in bins, each

of which also has a unique code. Amazon's software tracks both the items and the bins as they move through the warehouse. The software always knows which bin an item is in and where that bin is. Because items can always be found easily, deliveries from suppliers can be unloaded where it is convenient, rather than methodically organized and reorganized.

Amazon's chaotic storage could be a metaphor for the free market system: at first glance, it seems that the chaos organizes itself. Orders and packages zoom through the system and customers get what they want. But as with the free market, upon closer inspection we see thickets of deliberative planning at every step. Highly refined IT systems make sense of the chaotic storage, track items from the moment they arrive at a warehouse to the moment they leave, and make sure everything falls seemingly supernaturally into place. Everything ordered, coordinated, planned and not a market in sight to perform any of these billions of allocation decisions. Planning is also present in the most minute details of a warehouse worker's day. Handheld scanning devices tell workers where to go to pick items for orders. Workers are appendages of machines that lay out precisely which routes to follow between shelves and how long they should take.

“We are machines, we are robots, we plug our scanner in, we're holding it, but we might as well be plugging it into ourselves.”

But, Amazon's top operations managers determined that its warehouses were still too inefficient, and so they themselves went shopping for something better. In 2012 Amazon bought Kiva Systems, a robotics firm, and it now uses robots to put its entire shelving system into motion. Amazon's updated, even more automated fulfillment centers now feature shelves that move and humans who stand in place—the opposite of what a warehouse normally looks like. Flat, Roomba-like robots rove the warehouse floor along designated pathways. They can lift entire shelving units just off the ground and maneuver them along the same pathways to “picking stations.” These are small designated areas where human order pickers stand, taking items from storage bins and putting them into order bins as shelving units come and go. The social, physical, and mental cost of a machine for delivering the right things to the right people ultimately falls on the workers who make the machine hum—regardless of whether workers are piloted around a maze of shelves by a handheld scanner or pick orders in place while robots whiz to and fro toward them. The boosters at Wired magazine are in awe of the subjugation of the Chaplins in this twenty-first-century *Modern Times*:

“The packing stations are a whirl of activity where algorithms test human endurance.”

With the help of robots, the average time to fill an order in a warehouse automated by Kiva technology has plummeted from ninety minutes down to fifteen. Working conditions, however, haven't budged: the work remains as dull and draining as ever, warehouses remain hot, and the pace of work can be absurdly fast, regardless of the level of automation. While workers in automated warehouses stand all day and try to keep up with the robots zooming by, workers in the non-automated warehouses can expect to walk nearly double the distance on a daily shift of a typical mail carrier. Even small things like distances to break rooms can be an obstacle—sometimes so long that going both ways can take up most of a break.

Three challenges should give us pause before even beginning to call the riddle of democratic planning solved. First, there is large-scale technical feasibility. The difficulty of planning and optimizing even the isolated task of delivering Amazon's packages demonstrates that designing systems for economy-wide planning will be anything but trivial. The algorithms that power everything from Amazon's recommendation system to Google's search engine are still in their infancy—they are relatively simplistic, making best-estimate guesses, and are prone to failure. Algorithms run into systemic problems, for example with working class and poor people who more frequently use shared devices to shop or non-English speakers, where their capacity for reading nuance is limited. We'll have to storm both the barricades and the optimization problems.

Second, the planning done by Amazon and others still relies heavily on prices in interactions that take place beyond the borders of the firm itself. Amazon purchases its inputs—from the multitude of items it stocks, to the warehouse shelves they sit on, to the servers that run its database—on a market; consumers, meanwhile, also take into account the relative costs of items when deciding whether to add them to their virtual carts. Beyond the confines of the firm, a market system continues to operate. This means that it's not simply a matter of repurposing existing technologies, lopping off the bosses and otherwise keeping everything the same. Even though there is market-less planning within corporations, it is a form of hierarchical, undemocratic planning that is very much necessary to survive and thrive in a market. Many elements of this planning apparatus, their very form and purpose, are conditioned by that undemocratic hierarchy. A democratic planning system built from the ground up would look very different.

To catch a possible glimpse, even foreshadowing, of what a market-less world might look like, compare Amazon's book section to an online

public library catalog. A library catalog also contains a vast, searchable, interconnected array of books—but not a single price. And it should be possible to harness far more information than is currently contained in a library catalog: for instance, how long people spend looking at a book; with an ebook how many of its pages they actually read; whether they click to see if it is available in their neighborhood; whether they are willing to place a hold (and, for instance, to do so even if there are ten others in the queue in front of them); and what path they follow through the online catalog. The example of an expanded library catalog shows that we could build not only recommendation tools, but also models of interests, demands, and needs that are independent of prices.

But, the problems with the above should be obvious by now. Should we simply decide to push for that change and little else we would have built a vast information database which could be used to oppress. While the big data collected and processed by Amazon is precisely the kind of tool that would aid in overcoming these challenges of large-scale economic calculation—and indeed it is already being used in this way by the Amazons and Walmarts (never mind the Facebooks and Googles) of the world—we have to recognize that alongside the staggering freedom-enhancing potential of the massive data sets held by both corporations and states, there also lies a staggering capacity for freedom restriction. The story of Walmart's major rival Target sending deals on diapers and baby food to several expectant mothers who did not yet themselves know they were pregnant, based on data mined on individual spending patterns, seems almost quaint today. Now, we are only a single Google search for 'poor sleep' away from months of bombardment by mattress ads on every social media network to which one belongs. There are more insidious examples: in 2012, the short-lived "Girls Around Me" app used a mash-up of geolocation and social media data to allow individuals to find out all kinds of personal details about women in their vicinity who had used Facebook or Foursquare's "check-in" feature.

Beyond the private sector, states across the world are also increasingly using and misusing big data. Police departments across the United States have begun to experiment with something called "predictive policing" to devise methods for predicting offenders, victims, identities, and locations of crimes. It is the arrival of "pre-crime" from the pages of Philip K. Dick's *Minority Report* into the real world. Similarly, China's "Integrated Joint Operations Platform" combines data from multiple sources, including online tracking and facial recognition-enabled CCTV cameras, as well as health, legal, and banking records, in order to flag suspected political dissidents. In Xinjiang, a disputed territory that is home to a long-standing conflict between the Han Chinese majority and the Muslim Uighur minority, suspects are

investigated, visited by the police, arbitrarily detained without charge or trial, and even sent to “political education centers.” Human rights campaigners worry that people in Xinjiang are unable to resist or challenge this level of technological policing. And, of course, we have the most recent global example of the Wuhan Flu panic, resulting in military-grade surveillance, combined with private data sets, being used to track the movements of entire populations under the guise of public health and safety. And all this is planning, too.

There are those who blithely claim that in order to use big data sets for planning, all we must do is anonymize, or “de-identify,” them—that is, irreversibly strip them of whatever identifiers they contain. Google and Facebook say that they already do exactly this when serving up those behaviorally targeted adverts; human research subjects in medical or other scientific trials are de-identified to protect their privacy; and patient identifiers such as name, date of birth, phone number, address, and so on are removed from electronic health records before they can be used by health authorities or researchers. It all seems so simple. However, there is a key difficulty: a growing consensus among computer scientists considers permanent de-identification to be impossible, not just technologically, but in principle. This is because, however rigorously you might have managed to anonymize a data set, there is always the possibility that at some point in the future, it can be compared to some other data set that is released (or leaked) in a way that re-identifies it.

We’re getting rid of a market that’s not just financial, but that actually owns any assets. You have to have a mechanism for allocating capital that isn’t based on where should it go to get its highest return. You might want to allocate it so that firms that aren’t doing well get more capital so they can catch up to everybody else. You want workers visiting other plants to see how they do things. How do you figure out a way of allocating capital so it deals with social issues, which region of the country you want it in—how do you do this in a way which strengthens equality rather than undermines it? Then it’s a similar point with labor.

One issue is this question of sectoral councils. In a sector—whether it’s a hospital, education, car manufacturing, or resource sector—you’d actually have an institution where, instead of firms competing like they do under capitalism, you have workers from the firms in that sector electing people to a sectoral council where they could make plans for that sector as a whole that fit into the larger social plan. Then they could distribute capital within that sector to meet the overall plans, but do it in a way that raises the productivity and the quality of every firm in that sector.

In addition to trying to establish equality across a sector and having

centralized research and development so that everybody can access it—it means that you've got another layer of planning that's separate from the central planning board. You can have planning centrally that does certain things, you can have layers sectorally that do certain things, you can have layers regionally that do certain things. A sector might be plugged into regional councils or urban councils, and then you have a lot of planning at the firm itself.

One of the arguments that Hayek made is that only capitalism can actually get latent information from people because it's not obvious, for example, what people actually want to buy. They don't sit down at the beginning of January and say, 'I know what I want,' and give it to the central planners. His question is about how you find out what people want, and how you find out what skills people really have without private property and private incentives. He said that's only something that capitalism can do through markets. It reveals capacities and information through competition. It's a serious argument, and my response is that first, markets—as they are under capitalism—actually systematically hide information because it benefits private property and competition. Socialism opens up the door to sharing information.

Hayek is right about the capacities of capitalism, but he's thinking of the capacities of entrepreneurs. Workers are just commodities to him. The point of socialism is to see the potential capacities of ordinary people. If you gave workers factories right now, they wouldn't know what to do with them. There's nothing about capitalism that teaches you how to run things, never mind how to actually coordinate all this complexity. Socialism is actually concerned with not just the capacities of entrepreneurs, but the capacity of learners.

When you look at productivity growth in capitalism, it's at one or two percent. The argument is that capitalism has incentives for higher productivity. Well, it's not hard to imagine workers on a job coming up with ideas about how to do it better that could match this productivity. And even if they didn't quite match it, there would be so many other benefits.

Ending Expansion

The story of growth steers us toward ecological chaos. The biosphere is rich in resources and extraordinarily resilient, but there are limits. And what ‘growth’ really means is ever increasing consumption of the energy and resources of the biosphere by one species: our own. Today we are learning that growth is pushing the biosphere to its limits. There is a real danger that biospheric systems will start breaking down, perhaps violently and fast, because we are messing with ancient, complex, unpredictable, and global metabolic pathways, such as the carbon and nitrogen cycles. If the resources of the biosphere are limited, then growth cannot continue indefinitely. So we have to start imagining what a good life will look like in a world of limited resources. An era can be said to end when its basic illusions are exhausted. Economic growth, the central illusion of the age of capital, may be ending.

Growth is needed to maintain social cohesion. The prospect of improvements in living standards, however remote, limits pressure for wealth redistribution. So long as there is growth there is hope, and that makes large income differentials tolerable. All brands of politics and economics are deeply rooted in the idea of robust economic growth, combined with the belief that governments and central bankers can exert substantial control over the economy to bring this about. In his 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald identified this fatal attraction:

“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.”

In reality, economic growth is a relatively recent phenomenon. Politicians, policy-makers, and ordinary people do not want to confront the possibility of significantly lower economic growth. Like Fitzgerald’s tragic hero Gatsby, the incredulous battle cry is:

“Can’t repeat the past? Why of course you can!”

But as philosopher Michel de Montaigne noted:

“How many things we regarded yesterday as articles of faith that seem to us only fables today.”

The historical moment demands the institutions of limits. Limits that not only constrain resource use but also find expression in the institutional fabric of our economic order (in production and distribution). We must

become collectively constrained in economic life. Limits must move beyond the realm of individual conscience and choice and take up residence in the ordering of economic society. This is the challenge of a truly revolutionary Green New Deal. Unfortunately the existing GND is not up to meeting such challenges.

Warnings about ecological breakdown have become ubiquitous. Over the past few years, major newspapers, including the Guardian and the New York Times, have carried alarming stories on soil depletion, deforestation, and the collapse of fish stocks and insect populations. These crises are being driven by global economic growth, and its accompanying consumption, which is destroying the Earth's biosphere and blowing past key planetary boundaries that scientists say must be respected to avoid triggering collapse.

Many policymakers have responded by pushing for what has come to be called "green growth." All we need to do, they argue, is invest in more efficient technology and introduce the right incentives, and we'll be able to keep growing while simultaneously reducing our impact on the natural world, which is already at an unsustainable level. In technical terms, the goal is to achieve "absolute decoupling" of GDP from the total use of natural resources, according to the UN definition.

It sounds like an elegant solution to an otherwise catastrophic problem. There's just one hitch: New evidence suggests that green growth isn't the panacea everyone has been hoping for. In fact, it isn't even possible. Green growth first became a buzz phrase in 2012 at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro. Today, it is a core plank of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

But the promise of green growth turns out to have been based more on wishful thinking than on evidence. In the years since the Rio conference, three studies have arrived at the same rather troubling conclusion: Even under the best conditions, absolute decoupling of GDP from resource use is not possible on a global scale.

A team of researchers first raised doubts in 2012. The group ran a sophisticated computer model that predicted what would happen to global resource use if economic growth continued on its current trajectory, increasing at about two to three percent per year. It found that human consumption of natural resources—including fish, livestock, forests, metals, minerals, and fossil fuels—would rise from 70 billion metric tons per year in 2012 to 180 billion metric tons per year by 2050. For reference, a sustainable level of resource use is about 50 billion metric tons per year—a boundary we breached back in 2000. The team then reran the model to see what would happen if every nation on Earth immediately adopted best practice in efficient resource use (an extremely optimistic assumption). The results

improved; resource consumption would hit only 93 billion metric tons by 2050. But that is still a lot more than we're consuming today. Burning through all those resources could hardly be described as absolute decoupling or green growth.

In 2016, a second team of scientists tested a different premise: one in which the world's nations all agreed to go above and beyond existing best practice. In their best-case scenario, the researchers assumed a tax that would raise the global price of carbon from \$50 to \$236 per metric ton and imagined technological innovations that would double the efficiency with which we use resources. The results were almost exactly the same as the first study. Under these conditions, if the global economy kept growing by 3% each year, we'd still hit about 95 billion metric tons of resource use by 2050. Bottom line: no absolute decoupling.

Recently, the UN Environment Program—once one of the main cheerleaders of green growth theory—weighed in on the debate. It tested a scenario with carbon priced at a whopping \$573 per metric ton, slapped on a resource extraction tax, and assumed rapid technological innovation spurred by strong government support. The result? We hit 132 billion metric tons by 2050. This finding is worse than those of the two previous studies because the researchers accounted for the “rebound effect,” whereby improvements in resource efficiency drive down prices and cause demand to rise—thus canceling out some of the gains.

Study after study shows the same thing. Scientists are beginning to realize that there are physical limits to how efficiently we can use resources. Sure, we might be able to produce cars and iPhones and skyscrapers more efficiently, but we can't produce them out of thin air. We might shift the economy to services such as education and yoga, but even universities and workout studios require material inputs. Once we reach the limits of efficiency, pursuing any degree of economic growth drives resource use back up. These problems throw the entire concept of green growth into doubt and necessitate some radical rethinking. Remember that each of the three studies used highly optimistic assumptions. We are nowhere near imposing a global carbon tax today, much less one of nearly \$600 per metric ton, and resource efficiency is currently getting worse, not better. Yet the studies suggest that even if we do everything right, decoupling economic growth with resource use will remain elusive and our environmental problems will continue to worsen.

Preventing that outcome will require a whole new paradigm. The only realistic shot humanity has at averting ecological collapse is to impose hard caps on resource use. Such caps, enforced by national governments or by international treaties, could ensure that we do not extract more from the

land and the seas than the Earth can safely regenerate. There's no escaping the obvious conclusion. Ultimately, bringing our civilization back within planetary boundaries is going to require that we liberate ourselves from our dependence on economic growth—starting with rich nations. This might sound scarier than it really is. Ending growth doesn't mean shutting down economic activity—it simply means that next year we can't produce and consume more than we are doing this year. It might also mean shrinking certain sectors that are particularly damaging to our ecology and that are unnecessary for human flourishing, such as advertising, commuting, and single-use products.

But ending growth doesn't mean that living standards need to take a hit. Our planet provides more than enough for all of us; the problem is that its resources are not equally distributed. We can improve people's lives right now simply by sharing what we already have more fairly, rather than plundering the Earth for more. Maybe this means better public services. Maybe it means basic income. Maybe it means a shorter working week that allows us to scale down production while still delivering full employment. Policies such as these—and countless others—will be crucial to not only surviving the twenty-first century but also flourishing in it.

Some might argue: I am not convinced. It strikes me both that the above misrepresents what growth means and also confuses political obstacles with logical ones. The result is an attack on a concept that makes neither logical nor political sense.

It points out the enormous leaps that will be required to keep our greenhouse gas emissions at levels that will prevent irreversible environmental damage. It then hands us the possibility, that even if through some miracle we can manage to meet these targets with the rapid deployment of clean energy, we still have the problem of the use of other resources that is wiping out species and wrecking the environment.

The points about the imminent dangers to the environment are very much on the mark, but it is not clear that has anything to do with the logic of growth. Suppose the Sustainable World Party (SWP) sweeps to power in the next election. They immediately impose a massive tax on greenhouse gas emissions, which will rise even further over time. They also inventory all the resources that are in limited supply and impose large and rising taxes on them. Furthermore, they pay developing countries large sums to protect regions that are important for sustaining species facing extinction and for the global environment. The new administration also hugely increases spending on research on clean technologies and has massive subsidies for zero-emission vehicles and even more importantly for mass transit. As the SWP implements this policy, it has very stimulative fiscal

and monetary policies.

Will the economy continue to grow through this transition? That's hard to say. If the price of gas quadrupled people would obviously drive less and buy fewer cars. On the other hand, since the government is throwing money at them with its fiscal and monetary policy, they may choose to spend more money on things that are not inherently research. They may spend more money on education, seeing movies and plays, gym memberships, eating at restaurants, better software for their computer and other types of spending that don't either directly involve the use of resources or at least not obviously more than the alternative. Eating at a restaurant obviously involves consuming food, but it doesn't necessarily mean consuming more food than eating at home.

But whatever happens in the transition period, what would keep the economy from growing in subsequent years? We have locked down all the resources in short supply and preserved large chunks of the world from encroachments by roads and settlements, but it is hard to see why we would not be developing better health care technology, better software, more types of cultural output, better housing (in the sense of being more pleasant—not necessarily larger) and other improvements in living standards, all of which count as growth in GDP. Where is the war with growth?

Or to flip it over, let's put the anti-growthers in charge. They explicitly don't want us to have growth, but in the anti-growth world will we stop people from developing better software, improved medical treatments, improved educational techniques, and other advances that mean growth? I assume that won't be the case, but then how is this world different than the world that any pro-growther who takes the environment seriously would want? There is a tendency by some anti-growthers to insist that growth means greater resource use. It doesn't. If the argument is that we can't continually expand our use of resources on a finite planet, that's fine and obviously true. But why can't our software, our entertainment, our education, and our healthcare get ever better? If there is a limit in these areas, it is very hard to see what it is.

The challenge posed is for pro-growthers to come up with a plan that both saves the world from a disastrous rise in temperature and also to prevent the further destruction of species and habitats through the excessive use of land and other resources. Actually, it is not hard to design a set of policies in terms of taxes, subsidies, and outright restrictions that could meet this challenge and still allow growth. The problem would be getting political support for this agenda.

Any pro-growther can write down on paper a \$300 a ton tax on carbon emissions, large taxes on the use of water and other resources, and huge

subsidies for clean energy, public transit, energy efficient housing and other types of conservation. The problem is getting political support for this agenda. If the challenge to the pro-growthers is whether we can get this environmentally friendly agenda adopted politically in a time frame where we can save the planet, degrowthers have raised a very important question without a good answer.

But let's say we adopt the anti-growth agenda. We tell people we are now against growth. Presumably, to save the planet in our new anti-growth framework we push many of the same policies. Perhaps the policies will be stronger in the form of even of even higher taxes or outright prohibitions on the use of some resources. Does anyone believe that this agenda has a better chance of being adopted because we told people that we are opposed to growth? It is very difficult to see how our stated opposition to growth makes one iota of difference in terms of selling environmentally sustainable policies, except leading people to think we are weird because we're telling them that something they always thought was good is in fact bad.

If the point is that people engage in all sorts of environmentally wasteful consumption that does not actually make them happy, it would be hard to argue with the anti-growthers. But there do not seem to be many people anxious to get sermons on their bad consumption habits and prepared to change their ways. Unfortunately, shifting people to more sustainable consumption patterns is going to be a very difficult process and that happens to be true even if the future of the planet necessitates this shift.

At the risk of caricaturing the argument, it seems as though the anti-growthers believe that we adopt policies because of the worship of growth, as opposed to the specific benefits being offered. This strikes me as completely off the mark. When ExxonMobil and other major fossil fuel companies oppose measures to restrict greenhouse gas emissions, they couldn't care less whether these policies would raise or lower GDP growth. They are concerned about their profits: end of story. The same is true of all the other companies that engage in practices that are harmful to the environment.

As for the politicians who support these companies, the odds are that the vast majority have never given a moment's thought to the meaning of these policies. They know what these companies want them to say and do, and the campaign contributions follow. The claims about growth are just window dressing. They have to pretend to have the larger interest of the public at heart since it would be pretty hard for ExxonMobil to tell people that a carbon tax was bad simply because it would hurt its profits.

Okay, but what about the general public? Does ExxonMobil's argument have salience only because they worship growth? I would argue that 'growth' per se means very little to most people. If the GDP grew by one percentage

point more or less last year, most people would have no idea. For the vast majority of the population, 'growth' means whether they have a secure job that provides them with decent pay and benefits like health insurance.

It is possible to maintain high levels of employment even as we use taxes and subsidies to move people away from the most environmentally damaging forms of consumption. It is worth noting that, even taken at face value, the economic models that show job loss from restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions are not actually describing a world where people cannot find jobs. These models are actually describing a world in which more people chose not to work because the higher price of energy means a higher cost of living and therefore a lower real wage. In these models, at a lower real wage fewer people choose to work. While these models may not be a perfect description of reality, it is undoubtedly the case that many workers would be quite upset if the price of gas doubled or tripled. And, this would be true even if we made heroic efforts to increase the availability of public transit.

The issue is how to change people's perceptions of what is important in life. I don't see simple answers here, but there are some things we do know. In Western Europe, people consume on average roughly half as much fossil fuel per person as we do in the United States. I suspect that their per person use of most other resources is also roughly half as large as it is for the United States. Part of the story is that European countries have been able to take more of the gains of productivity in leisure than income. On average, workers in Northern Europe work roughly 20 percent fewer hours a year than workers in the United States. They are also likely to retire earlier. As a result, their incomes average 20 to 30 percent less than in the United States. European countries also have much more public consumption than in the United States, in the form of health insurance, education through college, and public pensions. As a result, tax burdens are considerably higher in European countries than the United States.

It may be the case that European consumption patterns are still too resource-using to be sustainable, but these countries have shown a greater willingness to endure higher taxes and other costs associated with reducing energy consumption further. This doesn't mean that there is not substantial opposition to such measures, but they clearly face better political prospects than in the United States.

The idea that we will have some moment of Great Awakening, where the world, or at least the US public, recognizes the need to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions seems implausible. We will have to plod through with the hope that the plodding will be fast enough to prevent too much undoable destruction. A good roadmap for this plodding would be to follow Europe. The most politically viable part of a follow Europe

strategy is pushing for shorter work years. There is considerable support in the United States for mandated time off in the form of paid sick days and paid family leave. Such measures have won support in states and cities across the country. It is reasonable to think that mandated vacation days would also be salable.

We can also support work sharing measures as an alternative form of unemployment insurance. This is good macroeconomic policy (it's better to keep people employed even at shorter hours than to have them be unemployed), but it also holds out the possibility that if people come to work shorter workweeks for a period of time, they may like it and try to continue with short workweeks. In any case, this one should not be a big lift politically, even Republicans have supported work sharing.

The collective consumption story also has some hope here. There is considerable support for expanding the role of the federal government in ensuring access to health care. The same is true of public support for college and higher education more generally, and also childcare. These will not be easy political lifts, but they are also not far-fetched possibilities at this point.

The other part of the story is reversing the upward redistribution of income of the last four decades. There are two issues here. First, people are inclined to try to emulate the consumption patterns of those higher up on the income ladder. When the very rich have wasteful lifestyles, this percolates down to the middle class. They also want to have large houses, powerful cars, et cetera. Jeff Bezos has perhaps given us the most extreme example of this story. Being on occasion the richest person in the world, depending on the price of Amazon stock, Bezos has said that he can't think of anything better to do with his money than to send stuff into space. If recreational space travel becomes a common form of consumption, not only for the very rich, but the aspiring upper middle class, then we will have taken a huge step backward in the effort to save the planet.

The other part of the story is that people are willing to make sacrifices when they perceive them as being shared. One reason for the anger of the French towards the recent rise in gas taxes imposed by President Macron is the perception that Macron is working for the rich. He has cut the top tax rate and the rich in France seem to be doing very well. Policies aimed at reversing the upward redistribution of income of the last four decades could go far towards getting people to accept lifestyles that are less taxing on the environment.

At the end of the day, it is difficult to see how we help the environment by attacking growth. We need measures that sharply reduce environmental damage. Telling people that we are against growth is not likely to make

it easier to adopt environmentally friendly policies. Given the rate of destruction we are seeing, our best efforts may well not be enough, but that doesn't mean attacking growth will get us there either.

I have an old friend who got married in Las Vegas by an Elvis Presley impersonator. When people asked him why, he explained that he got married once before by someone who wasn't an Elvis impersonator and it didn't work out. Of course, this made zero sense (my friend was kidding), but this does seem like the anti-growth logic. We may not be able to prevent the destruction of the planet on our current course, but telling people we are against growth does not help matters in any obvious way. For what its worth, my friend's second marriage also ended in divorce.

So the pro-growther agrees—thankfully—that we need to dramatically reduce emissions and resource use to prevent ecological collapse. But he thinks that this is entirely compatible with continued GDP growth.

Let's imagine, he says, that a new government imposes massive taxes on greenhouse gas emissions and resource extraction while at the same time increasing spending on clean technologies, with subsidies for electric vehicles and mass transit systems. He believes that this will shift patterns of consumption toward goods that are less emissions- and resource-intensive. People will spend their money on movies and plays, for example, or on gyms and nice restaurants and new computer software. So GDP will continue growing forever while emissions and resource use declines.

It sounds wonderful, doesn't it? I, for one, would embrace such an outcome. After all, if growth was green, why would anyone have a problem with it? He makes the mistake of believing that degrowthers are focused on reducing GDP. We are not. Like him, we want to reduce material throughput. But we accept that doing so will probably mean that GDP will not continue to grow, and we argue that this needn't be a catastrophe—on the contrary, it can be managed in a way that improves people's well-being.

So who is right? Well, all of the empirical models that explore this question test precisely the policy tools that the pro-growther suggests: taxes on bad stuff and subsidies for good stuff. And yet every single one of them comes to the same conclusion: even under the most aggressive policy conditions, resource use still rises, and emissions don't fall fast enough. Why is this? Because the scale effect of growth—which is exponential, remember—outstrips the pace of gains from efficiency improvements and new technology.

He imagines an economy that is increasingly based on services. This sounds reasonable on the face of it. But services have grown dramatically in recent decades, as a proportion of world GDP—and yet global resource use has not only continued to rise, but has accelerated, outstripping the

rate of GDP growth. In other words, there has been no dematerialization of economic activity, despite a shift to services. The same is true of high-income nations as a group—and this despite the increasing contribution that services make to GDP growth in these economies. Indeed, while high-income nations have the highest share of services in terms of contribution to GDP, they also have the highest rates of resource consumption per capita. By far.

Why is this? Partly because services require resource-intensive inputs—cinemas and gyms are hardly made out of air—and partly also because the income acquired from the service sector is used to purchase resource-intensive consumer goods; you might get your income from working in a cinema, but you use it to buy TVs and cars and beef. Of course, with the taxes and subsidies that he envisions, perhaps this trajectory would look different. But existing evidence is clear that it won't look different enough.

Think about it. Even if we do manage to slim down gyms and cinemas so that they are powered by the sun and are extremely resource-lite—as lite as they can possibly be—as we continue to grow those industries exponentially, resource use will quickly start rising again. That's what scholars have discovered over and over: that once you reach the limits of resource efficiency, growth drives resource use back up. But let's say that we put a hard cap on resource use, so that this effect can't happen. Will growth still occur?

Maybe. But if so, let's not pretend it would be pretty. We need to be cognizant of how capitalism works. For two-hundred years, capitalism has depended on extraction from nature and human bodies. It has always needed an 'outside,' external to itself, from which it can plunder some kind of original value, for free, without an equivalent return. That's what fuels growth. So what happens when capital is no longer allowed to plunder nature? Where will it turn to next, in its hunger for growth? What new forms of exploitation will it devise?

Ultimately, the pro-growther admits that he's agnostic about the relationship between growth and ecology. He says he is open to the possibility that tight restrictions on emissions and resource use might contract the economy. But he argues that even if this is true, we shouldn't advertise this fact by saying that we are against growth, because we might scare people away and lose political support. I understand where he's coming from. But while it may seem politically sensible, there are a number of problems with this approach.

First, if the economy does end up contracting, it will be an absolute disaster unless we are prepared for it. An economy that is designed to need growth will collapse when it doesn't get it. Firms will go bust, people will lose their jobs, families will be evicted from their homes. Whatever party is in power during this chaos will quickly be toppled. By contrast,

because degrowthers are liberated from the illusion that growth will carry on forever, we openly call for an economy that does not require growth. We call for policies like a shorter working week, universal basic income, debt-free currency, fairer wages, progressive taxation, universal social services, nationalizations, and so on, so that we can scale down economic activity in a stable manner, while at the same time facilitating human flourishing.

Second, if we run headlong into economic contraction unprepared, then the reaction from corporations and politicians will be to do whatever it takes to get growth going again, even if it means slashing the very regulations that the pro-growther puts so much faith in. In a growth-at-all-costs economy, those measures will be extremely vulnerable—the first to go. A recent report argues that this is exactly what’s happening in high-income countries that are facing secular stagnation. Desperate for more growth, they’ve gone about shredding what few regulations remain. The quest to make recovery from the Wuhan Flu crash a “V-shaped” recovery will likely accelerate these trends.

Third, there is nothing to be gained by deceiving people into believing that green growth is possible and that the status quo can continue forever when there is no evidence for this. If this imaginary future fails to materialize, people will feel profoundly betrayed.

Imagine that, during the run-up to World War II, the US government had told people that everything was going to carry on as normal. There would have been riots at the first sign of fuel rationing—as we saw recently with the Gilets Jaunes movement against the fuel tax in France. A much better strategy is to get people on board with the transition right from the beginning, with a coherent, integrated economic framework and a compelling alternative narrative.

Finally, and most importantly, the strict measures on emissions and resource use that the pro-growther hopes for are difficult to get in the first place precisely because people are focused on growth. Economists and politicians realize that such measures will entail a trade-off with growth, which is why they resist them so aggressively. If we shift to an economy that’s not focused on growth, such strict measures will be much easier to pass. This is strategically important, because we don’t have time to wait around for growthers to agree to high taxes on carbon and resource use—it will never happen.

The main concern seems to be that people will be afraid of a post-growth narrative. But he doesn’t bother to cite any evidence for this. If he did, he would find that the exact opposite is true. A striking new poll by Yale shows that 70 percent of Americans believe that environmental protection is more important than growth—and this is true even in deep red states.

Another poll finds that 70 percent of people across middle and high-income nations believe that overconsumption is putting our planet and society at risk. Similar majorities also believe that we should strive to buy and own less, and that doing so would not compromise our well-being. People realize that our growth-addicted economy is driving us into disaster, and they are eager for an alternative. Whatever political movement can speak truthfully to that deep-felt concern and offer real hope—not just green-growth fantasies (sit down Greta)—will be able to command incredible popular support.

Interestingly, the growther accepts that continuous growth is not necessary to improve people's lives in high-income countries. He recognizes that we can do this right now, without any growth at all, simply by redistributing the abundance that we already have. So if that's the case, then why continue clinging to the growth fetish? He offers no positive defense of growth. He just takes it for granted as given. Maybe the growther has bought the narrative that Keynes himself saw growth as a necessary feature of the economy. If so, he is mistaken. Keynes was not obsessed with growth, but with stability. He wanted to raise the level of economic output, yes, but only for a specific defined purpose; he never thought that growth should continue forever. This is a perverse idea that Keynes himself never held.

Ultimately, what Keynes wanted was stability. And this is why we need Keynes now more than ever: not in order to justify eternal growth, but in order to achieve stability in the absence of growth, and while actively scaling down the most destructive sectors of our economy. If the Keynesian Left hopes to contribute anything to our battle against ecological breakdown, a post-growth narrative is going to have to be part of it.

The pro-growther might retort: First, let me point out where we do agree. It is necessary to take drastic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions quickly. The world is falling far behind a path of emissions reductions (they are still rising) that will prevent excessive damage to the planet. Going beyond the issue of greenhouse gas emissions, we also have to take steps to reduce resource use more generally. The planet is rapidly losing habitat and species in ways that are irreversible. I'm sure the degrowther knows the data in these areas better than me, but I would not argue on the basic point. The question is whether degrowth needs to somehow fit into the picture. I will raise two points, one a question of logic and one a practical political issue.

On the logical point, I am at loss to understand why we would have a war on growth. Granted, we need to massively reduce our consumption of fossil fuels and over time other material inputs, but I am afraid I don't see how this precludes growth. I am certainly willing to believe that a period of rapid increases in carbon taxes may lead to a recession, although I would not

even take this as a foregone conclusion. If we spend enough in other areas, it is possible to offset sharp reductions in the sectors of the economy that are heavy users of fossil fuels. Yes, I know people have modeled this scenario, but I'm afraid that I don't view such modeling as sacrosanct. Almost no economic models projected the collapse of the housing bubble and the Great Recession. I don't think economists who can't tell us what will happen next year in ordinary times suddenly have perfect foresight when we talk about an unprecedented transition in energy use.

But let's say that the transition brings about a recession. How does that preclude further subsequent growth? The Federal Reserve Board has brought on nine recessions since World War II. Would anyone say the Fed precludes growth?

Concretely, when we get to our sustainable level of resource use, I assume we will still have clothes, shelter, computers, et cetera. These items all wear out. When we replace them, is there some reason the new items would not be better (e.g. longer lasting, clothes that are warmer or cooler, et cetera) than the ones they replaced? If so, that sure sounds like growth to me.

The degrowther tells us that capitalism can only exist as a system of exploitation and extraction. Well, we certainly have in the past seen plenty of exploitation and extraction. We can also throw in racism and sexism which have always been with us. However, the necessary link to capitalism is simply an assertion. If I make clothes that last longer than my competitors' or keep people warmer in the winter, I'm afraid I don't see how that means that I must be exploiting others or nature.

But getting beyond the logical issues, I don't see how telling people we don't care about growth is going to advance an environmental agenda. As I said, growth is an abstraction that is probably meaningless to 99 percent of the population. People know if they have a secure job and health care, they know if their wages are rising, they don't have a clue what the growth rate is. You can find many periods where the economy was growing just fine, such as the early 90s and 00s, but people's assessment of the economy was poor. The problem was that many workers couldn't find jobs and wages were not keeping pace with prices.

We need people to stop driving SUVs, to not travel to Europe in the summer, to forget about vacation homes. That will mean policies like huge tax increases on gas and jet fuel. Will the public be more supportive of these measures because we tell them we aren't interested in GDP growth?

The degrowther seems to think the public is already there, reporting a poll showing that 70 percent felt that protecting the environment is more important than growth. I question whether this translates into support for the policies needed to get us on a sustainable economic path. In recent

elections, California voters rejected a repeal of a gas tax by 11 percentage points. While that may seem like good news, California is one of the most progressive states in the country, and the tax was just 12 cents a gallon. Try a \$4.00 a gallon tax and see how it flies in Texas. We have lots of work that needs to be done. In short, the public needs to be convinced that global warming is a serious enough and immediate threat that it is necessary for them to change their consumption patterns in big ways. I don't see how telling them we don't want growth helps in this process.

The degrowther and I agree that sharply reducing inequality has to be a big part of the story. Emanuel Macron, France's president, has given us a textbook example of how environmental measures that worsen inequality will be rejected by the public. I'm interested in policies that reduce inequality largely by reversing the policies that created inequality, such as patent and copyright monopolies, protectionism for doctors and other highly paid professionals, and coddling a bloated financial sector. If we aggressively pursue these policies, coupled with the right tax and incentive structure, we have a shot at getting us to a sustainable economy. In that context, attacking growth as a concept is a distraction.

The pro-growther says:

“I am at a loss to understand why we would have a war on growth.”

I don't know why he is at a loss. I explained the reasons for this. There are two I focus on: Because growing the GDP means growing energy demand, and this makes the task of switching to renewable energy significantly more difficult—nearly three times more difficult between now and 2050, which virtually rules out success. And because our preoccupation with growth makes it extremely difficult to get the regulations we need to avert ecological breakdown. Politicians resist such measures precisely because of the risks they pose to growth

He has, unfortunately, not engaged with these arguments. Next, he says that:

“If we spend enough in other areas, it is possible to offset sharp reductions in the sectors of the economy that are heavy users of fossil fuels.”

This argument is central to the standard vision of the Green New Deal: massive public investment in clean energy, which will generate millions of well-paid jobs and increase GDP growth—it's all in AOC's cartoon. Again, there are two problems with this.

Even if we do manage to switch the entire energy system over to renewables, that might help us with emissions but it doesn't help us with resource use. If we keep growing GDP, resource use will keep going up—even if the economy is powered by clean energy. And let's not kid ourselves: to the extent that resource use is driving mass species extinction, this is an existential threat that we have to take seriously.

And why does the Green New Deal have to be focused on aggregate GDP growth? Why not just stick with the bits about public investment and jobs and leave it at that? The last New Deal was growth-oriented, sure. But that doesn't mean that this one has to be. Again—and this is a crucial point—he has not made a positive argument for growth. He just for some reason assumes that we must have it, but he never says why. This is odd, because as he himself points out, the problem is not that we don't have enough income; the problem is that it's all locked up at the top.

So yes, let's dramatically increase clean stuff and reduce dirty stuff—in terms of their share of total economic activity—and let's do this with massive public investment. Here we agree. But there's no reason to nonetheless keep increasing aggregate economic activity forever. We just don't need it, and it only makes the energy transition much more difficult.

The growther says:

“I don't see how telling people we don't care about growth is going to advance an environmental agenda. Growth is an abstraction that is probably meaningless to 99% of the population. People know if they have a secure job and health care, they know if their wages are rising, they don't have a clue what the growth rate is.”

Now, maybe he's right that people don't pay attention to the growth rate. But that doesn't change the fact that we still need an economy that doesn't require perpetual growth. It does make it easier to get there, however. He is absolutely correct that what matters most to people is jobs and healthcare and wages. So let's build an economy that focuses on those things, rather than focusing on growth. Crucially, these social goods can be delivered without any additional growth at all.

In fact, the political obsession with GDP growth is an obstacle to the progressive agenda that he espouses. Think of all the regressive things that politicians and corporations do in the name of growth: weakening labour standards, slashing environmental protections, liberalizing markets, deregulating banks, cutting social spending. To the extent that the progressive Left operates within the growth frame, we play into the hands of neoliberals and make it much easier for them to justify these measures.

The final move is to take us into an as-yet hypothetical future. Let's imagine that we have completely clean energy and we cap resource use at a sustainable level—a steady-state economy. In such a scenario, he says, there's no reason we can't keep growing the GDP forever. Look, maybe he's right. I don't particularly care, as this has nothing to do with our actual, real-world problems, and nothing to do with how the existing economy works. It is a completely imaginary world—but he's an economist so that's exactly the kind of world they love to theorize about. So let's follow this line of thinking for a moment, because it turns out to be quite revealing.

He says that in such a scenario, people will produce better products—longer lasting, and higher quality. The products will be “better” presumably because they embody more labour time, or more skill, or more advanced technology, and therefore they will be worth more money despite the fact that they embody less material. “That sure sounds like growth to me,” he says. Sure. There is no reason that as certain products improve, this shouldn't come along with an increase in their monetary value. But that is very different from saying that the entire economy, as a total system, should continue aggregate expansion. It is the latter point that is at stake when we talk about growth, not the former.

Let's imagine that we do manage to scale down global material throughput to 50 billion tons per year (the sustainable rate), hold it steady at that level, and then keep growing GDP by 3% per year, forever. Remember, this is exponential, so in 200 years global GDP is some 1,000 times bigger than it is today. In such a scenario, capital will be under enormous pressure to find new horizons for surplus accumulation—capital will need to find a ‘fix,’ or an ‘outlet.’ If surplus can't be extracted for free from nature (because of the resource cap), and can't be extracted for free from humans (because I assume he wants fair wages in this ideal future world), then where will it come from?

Maybe it will come from improving products, as the growther hopes. For this to work, then all products would have to be on average 3% better per year, or 1,000 times better by 2220, and all of this betterness would have to be reflected in a correspondingly higher cost. This would be strange for a few reasons:

1. If I think about the vast majority of things I need to live a good life, I can't see how I would benefit much from them becoming 1,000 times better. Indeed, it is absurd.
2. If products are “better” because they are longer-lasting, this may well be inimical to growth, not conducive to it, as it reduces turnover. (And that's okay!)

3. In order for 'better' to translate into higher cost, the betterness has to be commodified (or enclosed). That might be okay in some cases, but in other cases we may want the opposite. For example, if we develop better parks or better life-saving medicines, we may not want to charge people more to access them.

But let's not pretend that capital's need for constant expansion is going to only make better products. When capital has bumped up against limits to profit-growth in the past, it has found fixes in things like structural adjustment programs, wars, restrictive patent laws, nefarious debt instruments, privatization, and by enclosing commons like water and seeds—accumulation by dispossession. Why would it be any different this time? If growth must happen, and if all new value must be immaterial, then capital may well seek to enclose immaterial commons that are presently abundant and free—not just water and seeds but knowledge, songs, green spaces, maybe even parenting, physical touch, perhaps even the air—and then sell it back to us for money.

The point here is that closing off the usual go-to fix—extraction from nature—will generate pressure for other fixes. That is the violent side of growth. It's just silly to pretend that these other fixes will somehow magically not be harmful. And it begs the question: given these risks, why must we continue to insist on GDP growth, when we know we don't actually need it? Why not release our civilization, our planet, indeed our imaginations from this pressure?

This growth we talk about actually means the production of superfluous goods and this degrowth we talk about means the production of necessary goods. There are many other structural signifiers in the economic use of the word 'growth' which should not go without mention. First among them is the unit of measure of growth as Gross Domestic Product or GDP. There is of course no qualification or distinction or any attempt to measure or quantify whether GDP is achieved via the production of necessary or superfluous goods or services. It is this idea of value-less growth that the term 'degrowth' seeks to challenge as it wants progress instead of value-less growth at all costs.

Secondly, the word 'domestic' in Gross Domestic Product firmly roots this growth in the territory of the nation state, in competition with other nation states, making no distinctions for growth at regional or metropolitan scales. National competition, not national aid, is embedded in the notion of growth as defined by the measure of GDP.

Degrowth is simply another word for progress decoupled from the bourgeois definition of growth as the industrial production of superfluous goods

and services. Degrowth does not mean ungrowth, lack of growth, stagnation, economic downturn, depression, or recession; that would be anti-growth, meaning lack of growth or negative growth, not degrowth. Degrowth means to remove from growth superfluous goods and services; it is a discretionary form of growth. Therefore the real meaning of the word 'degrowth' is a form of progress outside of the market logic of the production of superfluous goods inherent in bourgeois industrial capitalism. Degrowth is simply, given the limited natural resources of Planet Earth, an intelligent form of progress which only factors necessary goods or services.

Defining what is necessary and what is superfluous in the degrowth definition of eliminating the superfluous from production is not possible at a general but only at a culturally-specific level: it varies from culture to culture, from community to community, locality to locality. We should all determine what is superfluous collectively by asking that question of our own cultures as we are inevitably consumers of products: we can stop paying and participating in the production of what we consider superfluous.

What I argue here is that because we are living in a pervasive market logic of bourgeois industrial growth, to avoid participating in the production and exchange of superfluous goods and to save the planet from destructive consumerism, self-sufficiency, whether at an individual, family, community, village, town, city, metropolis, or national scale offers us all a strategy towards implementing the progress of human life on planet earth that now is implied by the word 'degrowth.'

The world is facing three existential crises: a climate crisis, an inequality crisis, and a crisis in democracy. Will we be able to prosper within our planetary boundaries? Can a modern economy deliver shared prosperity? And can democracies thrive if our economies fail to deliver shared prosperity? These are critical questions, yet the accepted ways by which we measure economic performance give absolutely no hint that we might be facing a problem. Each of these crises has reinforced the fact that we need better tools to assess economic performance and social progress.

The standard measure of economic performance is gross domestic product (GDP), which is the sum of the value of goods and services produced within a country over a given period. GDP was humming along nicely, rising year after year, until the 2008 global financial crisis hit. The global financial crisis was the ultimate illustration of the deficiencies in commonly used metrics. None of those metrics gave policymakers or markets adequate warning that something was amiss. Though a few astute economists had sounded the alarm, the standard measures seemed to suggest everything was fine.

Since then, according to the GDP metric, the US has been growing slightly more slowly than in earlier years, but it's nothing to worry about.

Politicians, looking at these metrics, suggest slight reforms to the economic system and, they promise, all will be well.

In Europe, the impact of 2008 was more severe, especially in countries most affected by the euro crisis. But even there, apart from high unemployment numbers, standard metrics do not fully reflect the adverse impacts of the austerity measures, either the magnitude of people's suffering or the impacts on long-term standards of living.

Nor do our standard GDP measures provide us with the guidance we need to address the inequality crisis. So what if GDP goes up, if most citizens are worse off? In the first three years of the so-called recovery from the financial crisis, about 91% of the gains went to the top 1%. No wonder that many people doubted the claims of politicians and media clowns who were then saying the economy was well on the way to a robust recovery.

For a long time I have been concerned with this problem—the gap between what our metrics show and what they need to show. During the Clinton administration I grew increasingly worried about how our main economic measures failed to take into account environmental degradation and resource depletion. If our economy seems to be growing but that growth is not sustainable because we are destroying the environment and using up scarce natural resources, our statistics should warn us. But because GDP didn't include resource depletion and environmental degradation, we typically get an excessively rosy picture.

These concerns have now been brought to the fore with the climate crisis. It has been three decades since the threat of climate change was first widely recognized—at least five since it was known by scientists—and matters have grown worse faster than initially expected. There have been more extreme events, greater melting of glaciers, and greater natural habitat destruction.

It is clear that something is fundamentally wrong with the way we assess economic performance and social progress. Even worse, our metrics frequently give the misleading impression that there is a trade-off between the two; that, for instance, changes that enhance people's economic security, whether through improved pensions or a better welfare state, come at the expense of national economic performance.

Getting the measure right—or at least a lot better—is crucially important, especially in our metrics- and performance-oriented society. If we measure the wrong thing, we will do the wrong thing. If our measures tell us everything is fine when it really isn't, we will be complacent.

And it should be clear that, in spite of the increases in GDP, in spite of the 2008 crisis being well behind us, everything is not fine. We see this in the political discontent rippling through so many advanced countries; we see it in the widespread support of demagogues, whose successes depend on

exploiting economic discontent; and we see it in the environment around us, where fires rage and floods and droughts occur at ever-increasing intervals.

It is possible to construct much better measures of an economy's health. Governments can and should go well beyond GDP.

“It is only by having better metrics that truly reflect people's lives and aspirations that we will be able to design and implement ‘better policies for better lives’”

And yet we must be cautious to not fall into the same technocratic trap we have before. Bureaucrats fiddling with numbers on a spreadsheet will not give us the world of true justice and equality that we seek.

The Green New Deal now taking shape in Washington will aim to address climate change through economic policies. While many of the potential policies being discussed, including a more steeply progressive income tax, would in themselves be positive developments, none of them would reduce greenhouse emissions as deeply as is required. To understand why, we should first look back at the economic foundations of the Depression-era New Deal, which is serving as inspiration for the Green New Deal (GND).

The original New Deal attempted to solve what were the particular manifestations of capitalism's contradictions that surfaced in the 1930s. In simplistic terms, overproduction, a common problem of industrial capitalism, resulted in massive unemployment and a multiplying effect that eventually created 25% unemployment by 1933. The New Deal firmly established the role of government in stabilizing an otherwise unstable system. It also institutionalized a much needed social welfare foundation to underpin a system which could not be relied on to consistently provide people with income.

The New Deal was given theoretical support by the Keynesian revolution, which provided a different perspective on the role of government in managing the problems of an advanced capitalist economy. Despite the rise of neoliberalism, the institutional fabric that we function with today is still of that New Deal/Keynesian ilk.

One of the most important policies for unequivocally ending the Great Depression (reinforcing the legitimacy of Keynesian policy) was the massive spending on military production for World War II. The government ran huge deficits to fund the war effort, and after the war, the debt was repaid as the economy expanded (boosted partly by the fact that all other industrialized nations had been decimated).

World War II was an external and immediate exigency (in some ways analogous to climate change) that required production and price controls

as well as rationing in the short-run simply because the economy could not produce what was needed immediately for the war and simultaneously provide consumers with all they wanted. While those economic interventions were temporary, military spending became a more institutionalized part of the participation of government in the economy.

The New Deal and the Keynesian framework were clearly predicated on reinvigorating growth and curbing stagnation—the latter an inherent tendency of a mature capitalist economy. And the problem of maintaining growth became increasingly difficult beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century, which is to say the problem of stagnation—not simply downturns associated with the business cycle—became increasingly problematic.

Our history with this New Deal legacy should sharpen our understanding of capitalism in the following ways. We should by now understand that capitalism is an unstable economic system that tends toward both growth and stagnation and stagnation is both cyclical and secular. It is a system with systemic problems of inequality that exacerbate its instability. The inherent instability of the system and its inequality can be managed through various applications of fiscal and monetary policy augmented with a sound social welfare foundation, as well as more direct facilitation of the process of insuring investment outlets (military spending is a good example of this).

For the sake of exposition, I'm going to label this mix of problems and challenges the first contradiction of capital. All policies here pivot around growth with the exception of some mechanisms for redistribution of income. Nowhere in the landscape of the New Deal was there any recognition that there were problems with growth itself or fossil fuel use. This was because the danger of running up against future biophysical limits was not recognized.

The problem of biophysical limits has now presented itself in no uncertain terms with the reality of climate change; and for those who care to look, into the myriad of other examples of the ecological decay of Earth. Climate change is where the rubber meets the road in confronting what I will label the second contradiction of capital: Energy in one form or another is the food of economic life. Growth depends on it and despite all the rhetoric to the contrary there are limits to what we can expect without it.

As far as I can tell this means we've got a problem, not just with climate change but with our ability to manage it and also manage the first contradiction of capital. It seems the two contradictions cannot be solved simultaneously. We can't both grow and de-grow at the same time.

Absolute decoupling remains an illusion, but I get why people might be attracted to it since the other choice is to face the problem of the dueling contradictions of capital. It's the same reason we get the Green-New-Dealers talking up a carbon tax and letting the magic of the market and human

ingenuity take us to ever-higher pinnacles of progress. I heard Thomas Friedman on NPR's Science Friday refer to this as "mean green" and tell us that "green is the new, red, white, and blue."

Let's be clear—the Green-New-Dealers are counting on technology to absolve us from having to figure out how to resolve the first and second contradictions of capital simultaneously. The GND's problem, as I understand it, is that it wants to deal with the first contradiction of capital (job creation and new outlets for capital investment) and the second contradiction (biophysical limits) by assuming that we can transition to renewable energy seamlessly and at unrealistic speed, ultimately achieving both green growth and job security. Of course, they advocate robust policies for dealing with inequality in addition to the benefits of employment through the build-up of a renewable energy infrastructure. The implicit assumption is that by dealing with the first contradiction we will simultaneously deal with the second contradiction. Problem solved?

Our short-term problem is that a declining ceiling on greenhouse emissions will in fact require allocation of energy among sectors and rationing among consumers simply because the 'external' problem (climate change, analogous in this example to WWII retooling to make war munitions) has to be solved quickly and it will require fossil fuel to do that. If we are to avoid climate catastrophe, we have to simultaneously bring an end to fossil-fuel burning and develop vast renewable energy capacity, both starting right now and both on a crash schedule. That means the everyday economy must find a way to run on much less available energy.

Ideally that policy measure should lead us to an ever clearer understanding that our short-run energy problem (the conversion problem) is but a variation on a much larger long-run energy problem (fueling an expanding economy on renewable energy while providing equity in access to energy). Actually, if we were willing to pay attention to ecological decay and the sixth mass extinction we would understand that it isn't simply a long-run energy problem we have, it's a long-run growth problem. That understanding changes everything, especially if it can't be solved technologically. Yes, the rubber is meeting the road.

The truth that the GND doesn't appear to want to face is that we're not simply dealing with some variation on the problems that the New Deal and its institutional legacy were meant to confront. We are dealing with something that is much more complex and foundational. We are dealing with two contradictions of capital that work against each other. If we approach our present situation as if it is just another variation on an old problem (the first contradiction of capital) we will not be able to confront the second contradiction of capital. That's because in the traditional New Deal queue

we will cook ourselves for jobs and short-run economic stability through growth before we'll pay attention to biophysical limits. The problem is that it isn't all that clear what cooking ourselves will mean for the quality of human life (not to mention other-than-human life) either in the short- or the longer-term. Let's just say it looks like a decidedly downward trajectory for all parties concerned.

The challenge for the GND is to be revolutionary in the face of climate change. It seems clear we can't solve the contradictions of capital with the same institutional baggage. Assuring some measure of equality in the face of reduced energy will require limits. The build-up for WWII provides a precedent for our capacity to impose collective limits when we have to do so. Collective limits are managed fairly only when reinforced and fortified with expansive social welfare institutions.

But we also need institutions that orbit around limits and not around growth and stagnation. The quick and decisive transition to renewable energy, orchestrated with strict limits, a commitment to equity, and rationing of both production and consumption will help us to begin this revolutionary transition recognizing that the twenty-first century problems of capitalism are unique.

Access to energy must be resolved through rationing and not through markets for two reasons. The market can be relied upon neither to produce what is necessary and not simply profitable nor to ensure sufficiency for all. More importantly, the market goes with the market economy which is not just a mechanism of allocation but a complex system of expansion and stagnation that generates inequality in its wake. The market economy also has a tremendous penchant for drawdown of resources and ignoring the ecological integrities of Earth as well as sloughing off externalities.

So far the Green New Deal seems to be the same institutional package as the New Deal. Unfortunately the landscape of contradictions that afflict capital has shifted. What we have on our hands is not more of the same; we have something categorically and foundationally different. We can't end growth simply by imposing external limits (caps on carbon for example) without simultaneously confronting the inner dynamics and problems of the first contradiction of capital. Instead we must rely on robust forms of limits coupled with more robust forms of redistribution. And much of our production (of energy, of transportation, et cetera) can no longer be merely a prerogative of capital. It must be directed and the social relations surrounding it must be redefined.

Historically we have managed the internal contradictions by assuring growth and drawdown of our 'natural capital.' The problem of external limits has been ignored or inadequately managed with minor taxes and

regulations. But when growth is no longer an option to counteract the internal contradictions of the system, and when minor taxes and regulations no longer suffice to keep the economy within biophysical limits, we are required to move in a different direction. Unless the movement to implement a GND understands that the burden of the historical moment is not merely to provide short-run prospect for jobs and to replace fossil fuel with renewable energy, it will be inadequate to the historical moment.

The challenge of the GND is to erect a new economic framework that will allow us to exit the impossible prospect of trying to resolve both the first and second contradictions of capital that define twenty-first century capitalism. Renewable energy technology doesn't rise to the requirement of managing either the first or second contradiction, as much as we'd like to believe otherwise. A carbon tax or a cap, in conjunction with the hope that the market will handle the rest, is a strategy that demonstrates a gross lack of understanding of twenty-first century capitalism and its capacities and inclinations as well as an overly optimistic view of technology.

Let's be clear, neoliberal economics is not our only problem, though there is no question neoliberal economic policy has made both the first and second contradictions of capital worse; it has also created a fundamentalist ideology about markets that has dribbled into the lexicon and thinking of the mainstream—Thomas Friedman, for example.

An unequivocal cap on carbon and rationing of production and consumption is the beginning of a new institutional approach to a new economic order. The Green New Deal would not achieve an economic transformation, and this historical moment demands such a transformation. The historical moment demands the institution of limits. Limits that not only constrain resource use but also find expression in the institutional fabric of our economic order (in production and distribution). We must become collectively constrained in economic life. Limits must move beyond the realm of individual conscience and choice and take up residence in the ordering of economic society. This is the challenge of a revolutionary GND.

When the pragmatic liberals say 'Wait,' they almost always mean 'Never.' There is a whole history of class struggles, of revolutions and counter-revolutions, which have consistently taught the lesson that there is no peaceful-gradual-electoral "parliamentary road to socialism," including to eco-socialism. An eco-socialist result is far more likely if there are already radicals telling the truth about capitalism, from the very beginning, even if it is, so far, unpopular to do so. If people are talking about your agenda, even if they're talking about how bad and silly it is, you are making that agenda more plausible.

Revolutionaries have long argued that even reforms are most likely to be

won when the rulers fear a militant, aggressive, and revolutionary movement, or at least a revolutionary wing of a broader movement. ‘Reforms’ in this case would be steps to hold back and mitigate the effects of global warming due to capitalist industry, even by using the capitalist state. Such reforms cannot be won by an environmental movement which tries to be “reasonable” and “respectable,” especially if it has a “radical left” which offers to buy out big businesses and stay within the framework of capitalism.

We cannot say what is reasonable to expect. Today’s popular consciousness is not what it will be tomorrow. The very crises of weather and the environment will change that. The climate crisis will interact with the looming economic crisis, and with continuing turmoil over race, immigration, gender, and sexual orientation. Not to mention endless wars and sanctions. And of course, we cannot forget the Wuhan Flu panic. With such shakeups in the lives of working people and young people, there may be an opening for a revolutionary anarchist eco-socialist program. Whether this will develop in time cannot be known. But we must not give up on history.

The issue is not only whether capitalism is compatible with ecological balance and ending climate change. The question is also about the nature of the state, and whether the state is compatible with avoiding ecological catastrophe. These issues should determine our attitude toward proposals for a Green New Deal.

So let’s summarize all this in order to properly answer what should happen on the very first days after winning an election for President, gaining a majority in both houses of Congress, and control of at least two-thirds of all statehouses. It could all be quite simple and straightforward—if it is prepared for beforehand.

Almost immediately on assuming office, one should put forward a series of amendments to the constitution. The amended constitution, which would be the supreme law of the land, would provide the legal authority for the you to carry out the multitude of changes that would transform our country—for the better.

Whilst this is happening a thorough review of every government department should take place, removing any senior manager who is likely to be obstructive to such changes, and replacing them with all those junior officials who have both experience of their departments together with real support for the ideology—and there will be plenty to choose from. It is important to avoid the danger of purity purges however. Removing all forms of dissent and critique make you weaker, not stronger. The new government departments need to be established at the same time, and made operational within weeks of assuming office. These would provide the essential funding, labour force, and public information that will all be vital to the success

of the reformation. And remember, you have an army—just in case those pesky courts try to obstruct the will of the people.

The planning for all this is work the we could and should be doing now. Far from keeping it all top secret, which is the normal way of doing things in politics, it would be essential for you to do it all openly and in full view of anyone who cares to look. Quite apart from the fact that secrecy is contrary to our ideology, it is also counterproductive to our ambitions. People need to know and understand the reasons why we believe what we believe. There is nothing in our ideology to hide or be ashamed of, and come the reformation we will need to bank on the full support of a well-informed citizenry. That well-informed citizenry will only exist if the we openly campaign for the changes we intend to make together with the reasons for why the changes are essential; and the fact that our government comes to power as a consequence of providing that information will provide the lawful and moral authority for doing it. Such a major reformation of government would not happen easily because of the powerful forces who would inevitably oppose it—likely with a considerable amount of violence, intimidation, and propaganda—hence the support of a well-informed citizenry will be essential to finally achieving a government that is properly democratic, humane, and capable of helping to stop the environmental destruction of our planet, instead of promoting it.

Part IX

Breaking the Wheel

Come gather 'round people wherever you roam
And admit that the waters around you have grown
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'

Come writers and critics who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide the chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon for the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who that it's namin'
For the loser now will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'

Come senators, congressmen please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled
The battle outside ragin'
Will soon shake your windows and rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'

Come mothers and fathers throughout the land
And don't criticize what you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command
Your old road is rapidly agin'
Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'

The line it is drawn, the curse it is cast
The slow one now will later be fast
As the present now will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin'
And the first one now will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'

You Say You Want a Revolution

Planting Seeds

A seed has to totally destroy itself to become a flower—that's a violent act.

the future will not be mad
with loss and waste
though the memory will be
there, eyes will become kind and deep
the bones of this nation
will mend after the revolution

“The question is not whether we will be extremists but what kind of extremists we will be. When you are right, you cannot be too radical.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

“What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”

—Thomas Jefferson

While there is a lower class, I am in it, while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free. All else is excuse making. If the human race survives, the level of inequality and injustice present today will be viewed with a sense of wonderment and disgust.

Who is crazier: the one who demands to live in a more just, fair, equitable world, or the one willing to settle for less?

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Start with a cage containing five monkeys. Inside the cage, hang a banana on a string and place a set of stairs under it. Before long, a monkey will go to the stairs and start to climb towards the banana.

As soon as he touches the stairs, spray all the other monkeys with cold water. After a while another monkey makes the attempt with same result, all the other monkeys are sprayed with cold water. Pretty soon when another monkey tries to climb the stairs, the other monkeys will try to prevent it.

Now, put the cold water away. Remove one monkey from the cage and replace it with a new one. The new monkey sees the banana and wants to climb the stairs. To his surprise and horror, all of the other monkeys attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs he will be assaulted.

Next, remove another of the original five monkeys and replace it with a new one. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm.

Likewise, replace a third original monkey with a new one, then a fourth, then the fifth. Every time the newest monkey takes to the stairs he is attacked. Most of the monkeys that are beating him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs or why they are participating in the beating of the newest monkey.

After replacing all of the original monkeys, none of the remaining monkeys have ever been sprayed with cold water. Nevertheless, no monkey ever again approaches the stairs to try for the banana. Why not?

Because as far as they know that is the way it has always been done around here.

“There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can’t take part; you can’t even passively take part, and you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you’ve got to make it stop. And you’ve got to indicate to the people who own it that unless you are free the machine will be prevented from working at all.”

—Mario Savio

If a law requires you to be the agent of injustice to another—break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.

Since change does not and cannot come from the masses who conform and those who may initiate radical change are shunned by society, leadership of change is taken over by Great Men, demagogues who interpret the thoughts of radicals for their own benefit and steer society in the directions most suitable to them. Great Men are accepted by the majority as they are not actually radical or unusual. They are instead a glossy version of the average, just attractive and superior enough that they can lead but not so different that they would be unaccepted by the majority. Truly radical ideas cannot be directly accepted by the majority, they must be interpreted by knowledge bridges as must highly specialized innovation. Great Men have the education, understanding, and access to appreciate and intercept new ideas and package them, or easily palatable pieces of them, in an attractive and widely accessible format. They also have the ability to suppress the ones dangerous to themselves.

It is clear that the true role of the thought leader is to serve as the organic intellectual of the one percent—the figure who gives the emerging class an awareness of its own function in society. The purpose of the thought leader is to mirror, systematize, and popularize the delusions of the super-rich: that they have earned their fortunes on merit, that social protections need to be further eviscerated to make everyone more flexible for “the future,” and that local attachments and alternative ways of living should be replaced by an aspirational consumerism. The thought leader aggregates these fundamental convictions into a great humanitarian mission. Every problem, he prophesies,

can be solved with technology and rich people's money, if we will only get our traditions, communities, and democratic norms out of the way.

Whether it's a foreign policy expert insisting on military intervention, a business-school prophet proclaiming the virtues of disruption, a Silicon Valley genius reducing politics to engineering, or a Times columnist championing the unavoidable march of autonomous technology, today's thought leaders all share a core worldview: that extreme wealth and the channels by which it was obtained are not only legitimate but heroic. This is why the Ideas Industry favors the thought leader over the more critical, skeptical public intellectual. Many academics tend to dismiss the 'Great Man' theory of events. If the marketplace of ideas is flooded with hucksters evangelizing the next big thing and the importance of billionaires for "making the world a better place," it is because that's what billionaires want to hear.

Government is a tool, like a hammer. It can be used for good or for bad. I can build a homeless family a house, or I can bash your fucking skull in. One of the greatest threats is the greedy parasites currently controlling the levers of power causing such disillusionment, or misrepresenting or maligning the concept of government, that even should we move towards some concept of justice, we will be severely handicapped by others' earlier failures, greed, and selfishness. A massive limiter on the movement of the Overton window.

Your worst enemy is not the person in opposition to you. It is the person doing nothing while occupying the spot you could be fighting from.

A neoliberal with manners is not a leftist.

In the garbage-can theory an organization is a collection of choices looking for problems; issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired; solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer; and decision-makers looking for work. Problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities flow in and out of a garbage can, and which problems get attached to solutions is largely due to chance.

It is a bit more pessimistic on the value of charismatic leaders in these situations. Noting that leaders can make a difference in the 'garbage can' by:

- Carefully timing issue creation
- Being sensitive to shifting interests and involvement of participants
- Recognizing the status and power implications of choice situations
- Abandoning initiatives that get hopelessly entangled with others
- Realize the planning is largely symbolic and an excuse for interaction

“We don’t need political parties which is where most of the non-corrupt people are either compromised to become ‘one of the boys’ or filtered out.”

What happened to progressives in Washington is they traded the politics of pressure for the politics of access. And the politics of access works very well for the leaders of the organization, but not so well for the membership, and not so well for the cause. And we’ve been at this now for 30, 40, 50 years, and it’s time for somebody from those organizations, I would argue, to step back and ask, what has all that access really gotten us? Not you, us. All of us.

Attempts to reach voters from a supposedly “electable” and yet increasingly distant centre that sticks to triangulation, spin, and neoliberalism, have yet to grasp that politics has shifted, that something has broken, that there has been an erosion of trust in what this centre represents.

History is written by the victors to make them look just and moral:

Hitler	Lebensraum	Lost	Monster
Mussolini	Spazio Vitale	Lost	Monster
American politicians	Manifest Destiny	Won	Patriots

Lies are a vital and necessary part of authoritarian rule. If the truth were identified fully and in plain language that could be easily understood by everyone, the revolution would begin in ten minutes. The ruling class knows this very well, so lies are the gruel we ingest every day.

Consider Lincoln’s speaking style. The argument was not made more particular; it was just made particularly plain. It was the same proposition put in a way that made its meaning impossible to escape. He said it once, and then he said it again, and the second time he said it, you couldn’t miss the point of what he was saying. Throughout his career as an orator, this habit—neat flat summary of an idea in plain speech after an elaborate windup in legal argument—was his own.

You can find it, for instance, in his speech of June 26, 1857, in the Springfield State House, denouncing the Dred Scott decision. He takes on directly the ugliest of all the arguments that Stephen Douglas liked to use—that the real goal of the anti-slavery movement was intermarriage:

“Judge Douglas evidently is basing his chief hope, upon the chances of being able to appropriate the benefit of this disgust to himself. If he can, by much drumming and repeating, fasten the

odium of that idea upon his adversaries, he thinks he can struggle through the storm. . . Now I protest against that counterfeit logic which concludes that, because I do not want a black woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. I need not have her for either. I can just leave her alone.”

“I can just leave her alone.” The rhetorical mastery of that plain sentence, deliberately inserted after a lot of fine high phrasing—“fasten the odium of that idea upon his adversaries,” “I protest against that counterfeit logic”—is potent both in its clarity and in its comic appeal to common sense. It’s a punch line more than a catchphrase. And it gets from us the punch line’s reward—laughter at a newly recognized truth: That’s right! You don’t have to sleep with the slaves after you free them; the “odious intermingling of the races” that they keep telling you will happen isn’t inevitable at all! Why, you can just leave her alone!

And the same spell of simple summary was cast when Lincoln later took on Douglas’s other nasty bit of racist cant, that “he was for the negro against the crocodile, but for the white man against the negro,” with its clear implication that Negroes are to whites as beasts are to men. Lincoln said in a speech in Columbus, Ohio, in 1859:

“... in a preeminent degree these popular sovereigns are at this work; blowing out the moral lights around us; teaching that the negro is no longer a man but a brute; that the Declaration has nothing to do with him; that he ranks with the crocodile and the reptile; that man, with body and soul, is a matter of dollars and cents.”

Once again the higher argument—about popular sovereignty and its meaning—is treated at length and then condensed into monosyllables that would still be startling today: *the real proposition at stake is that man, with body and soul, is a matter of dollars and cents.*

Isn’t this just another good example of why we shouldn’t be afraid of the truth and plain talk? When we finally start using words like ‘liar,’ ‘cheater,’ ‘thief’ ‘murderer,’ and ‘assassin’ to describe those guilty of such crimes, we might be able to get rid of them. Politeness and Political Correctness is too often a trap for the one practicing it. It dims the bright lights we want to shine on the wrong-doer and robs us of our ability to debate. There’s a reason why plain-talking demagogues like Trump are so successful. Instead of wrapping ourselves even more tightly in the saran wrap of genteel good manners—sometimes just another way of showing superiority—we should be honing our language skills and engaging with the enemy.

Who sets down all those rules that we know about from childhood—the idea that we must never end a sentence with a preposition or begin one with a conjunction, that we must use ‘each other’ for two things and ‘one another’ for more than two? The answer, surprisingly often, is that no one does, that when you look into the background of these ‘rules’ there is often little basis for them.

Consider the simplistic dismissal of Standard Black English:

“As for ‘I be,’ ‘you be,’ ‘he be,’ et cetera, which should give us all the heebie-jeebies, these may indeed be comprehensible, but they go against all accepted classical and modern grammars and are the product not of a language with its roots in history but of ignorance of how a language works.”

However, the truth is that most US academic prose is appalling—pompous, abstruse, claustral, inflated, euphuistic, pleonastic, solecistic, sesquipedalian, Heliogaba-line, occluded, obscure, jargon-ridden, empty: resplendently dead.

The obscurity and pretension of Academic English can be attributed in part to a disruption in the delicate rhetorical balance between language as a vector of meaning and language as a vector of the writer’s own résumé. In other words, it is when a scholar’s vanity/insecurity leads him to write primarily to communicate and reinforce his own status as an Intellectual that his English is deformed by pleonasm and pretentious diction—whose function is to signal the writer’s erudition—and by opaque abstraction—whose function is to keep anybody from pinning the writer down to a definite assertion that can maybe be refuted or shown to be silly. The latter characteristic, a level of obscurity that often makes it just about impossible to figure out what an AE sentence is really saying, so closely resembles political and corporate doublespeak—“revenue enhancement,” “downsizing,” “proactive resource-allocation restructuring”—that it’s tempting to think AE’s real purpose is concealment and its real motivation fear.

There have to be some rules and conventions, no? We have to agree that tree takes *E*s and not *U*s and denotes a large woody thing with branches and not a small plastic thing with dimples and TITLEIST on it, right? And won’t this agreement automatically be ‘artificial,’ since it’s human beings making it? Once you accept that at least some artificial conventions are necessary, then you can get to the really hard and interesting questions: which conventions are necessary? And when? And where? And who gets to decide? And whence their authority to do so?

Liberty is intimately connected with language. Those who seek to monopolize power always use inaccessible and specialized jargon to exclude the average citizen. We must break these chains.

They should speak out, loud and clear, and they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could rise in the heart of the simplest man. They should get away from abstraction and confront the blood-stained face history has taken on today. The grouping we need is a grouping of men and women resolved to speak out clearly and to pay up personally.

There is a theory I have heard that I will paraphrase, though the percentages should not be considered definitive. Personally, I think it has some merit: 10% of people will always do the ethical thing in any given situation regardless of consequences, 10% of people will always put self-interest first regardless of consequences, and the remaining 80% will gravitate towards whatever the prevailing ideology is at that time.

It is pretty clear to me that those who act purely out of self-interest have been winning the ideological battle lately, and this makes for a generally unhappy society, as non-psychopaths do not want to have to compete with psychopaths in order to just get by and live an ok life.

Time for that to change.

Most of us do the right thing only when others are doing the right thing. Real heroes are the ones who break out of the group norm. The predominant cultural impulse is for people to transfer responsibility. Basically, if no one acts, then no one acts—and the more people actively doing nothing, the stronger the compulsion is to join in with them. The hopeful element to this cause of apathy is that a small act or a voice of dissent can ruin the effect.

Human behavior is fluid, it takes the shape of the container it's in. Capitalism is the container. So greed and self-interest/self-maximizing is highly rewarded as well as lauded as virtuous. We are complex animals with complex behavior that includes cooperation, empathy, community, et cetera. The overarching ethos of the current system does not reward or encourage those behaviors in any significant way. We as humans are not shackled to the worst human traits or behaviors. We are chained to a system that promotes an ideology that discourages the thought that human behavior can be anything more than greedy self serving Individualism. Which is therefore unquestionably promoted as the only pillars that can hold society up. This is where the true threat to our survival is found.

Endless one decisions. All minor, all consequential. Remove one and this moment doesn't exist. Every day we create our own future, shaping the world in an unknown number of ways. Some one decisions ripple into

revolution, others into oppression. Some ripple into new life, others ripple into death.

I feel somehow empowered by this observation. At every moment there is the potential to shape the future in a profound way. Sure, if you're sitting in front of the TV, stoned, watching a Paul Rudd movie, you're not likely to shape the future in a profound way—or you could somehow start writing a book because of it, I dunno, it could happen, can't rule anything out man. But, your anger over an incorrect latte order could cause a school bus crash tomorrow afternoon.

I have always liked to picture love as some type of shimmering ribbon of light that connects two individuals.

You are a seed, and when it all goes pear-shaped, hope you and your knowledge survive.

Are we the public or the private person? The truth of the matter is that for all seasons we are both. We must know how to provoke others to action, but also when to withdraw and let others carry on the work. True change is to so change things that it seems natural to everybody but no-one knows who thought of it. We must remember: Our best will not be our children's best.

And sometimes the best way to lead is from the shadows.

One of our most overwhelming impulses as humans is to belong to a society. The pain of shunning is the most powerful coercive tool we employ against each other. Shunning can motivate people to take their own lives or the lives of others. Solitary confinement can rapidly destroy mental health. An infant left without human contact can have all of their physical needs met and still grow up with physical and mental damage. The need to belong can be used to overpower principles, deep rooted morals, self-interest. History has repeatedly proven that the majority of people can be coerced to do almost anything to themselves or others by the need for social inclusion. The desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves is frequently expressed as a motivation for action, and duty to society a frequent excuse for compliance.

To resist radical evil is to endure a life that by the standards of the wider society is a failure. It is to be a lifelong heretic.

“The man who can face vilification and disgrace, who can stand up against the popular current, even against his friends and his country when he knows he is right, who can defy those in authority over him, who can take punishment and prison and remain steadfast—that is a man of courage.

The fellow whom you taunt as a ‘slacker’ because he refuses to turn murderer—he needs courage. But do you need much courage just to obey orders, to do as you are told and to fall in line with thousands of others to the tune of general approval and the Star Spangled Banner?”

It seems that a person who is comfortably settled in the bosom of society has fewer incentives to change the status quo. The outsider—someone who faces a personal sense of rejection or being different, or is actually in a place of social isolation—is not only in a position to experience new and novel experiences, but is more likely to spend more time in their own heads working these ideas through and seeing how they can be used.

I believe that there is one story in the world, and only one. We are caught—in our lives, in our thoughts, in our hungers and ambitions, in our avarice and cruelty, and in our kindness and generosity too—in a net of good and evil. There is no other story. A man, after he has brushed off the dust and chips of his life, will have left only the hard, clean questions: Was it good or was it evil? Have I done well or ill?

We’ve got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point. We’ve got to see it through. And when we have our fights, you need to be there. If it means leaving work, if it means leaving school—be there. Be concerned about your brothers and sisters. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together.

If the soul of the nation is to be saved, I believe that we must become its soul. There never was a higher call to greater service than in this protracted fight for social justice.

They are afraid because they accept fully what is violent and tragic in nature. It is a fear tied to their knowledge that sudden, cataclysmic events are as much a part of life, of really living, as are the moments when one pauses to look at something beautiful.

First feel fear, then get angry. Then go with your life into the fight.

“People get involved with the struggle for three reasons. Inspiration, Aspiration, and Desperation.

Those who are inspired to join the struggle do so because they feel affinity and empathy with others who struggle. The inspired celebrate the accomplishments of comrades in other organizations and encourage them to continue their struggles and strengthen their militancy. We know these comrades because their friendship and love can be felt through their work.

Those who join the struggle out of aspirations seek to see their reflection on the television, hear their voice on the radio, and read their words in the paper. They worm their way into positions of power through conniving or stepping on the necks of their comrades. The secrets you entrust them become weaponized gossip to gain social capital. They will find every excuse not to work with the masses or anyone.

The desperate become shooting stars as soon as they are affected by the struggle. They are fierce organizers until their personal fortunes change. They lump their support behind whoever can help in their personal cause but will not return the favor for others. Like every shooting star, they eventually burn out leaving their comrades behind to continue onward.”

You can see they have the willpower, these protesters but in actual fact, not much is happening. It is ironic that people gather after they have finished work to protest the injustices of capitalism. What is this? Group therapy? It’s a good idea but you have to go beyond it. When you live through a social movement, it makes an impression on you.

What I really want to know is will those people drinking Starbucks die with us on the barricades because the differences between guerrilla theater and guerrilla war are getting really blurry. It is unlikely that they will be willing to give up their entire lives when they are so clearly unwilling to give up even a portion of it in sacrifice for justice.

We are better off considering how bad things can get, so that we can make up our minds about it before it makes up our minds for us. The best way to avoid dystopia is to imagine it.

Insurrection calls upon us to no longer let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and set no glittering hopes on institutions. History does not march around as a logical imperative. We make it. By action or inaction, we make the future.

Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny.

Ideas not coupled with action never become bigger than the brain cells they occupied. The human soul is the ideas and deeds left behind.

Persistence isn’t very glamorous. If genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration, then as a culture we tend to lionize the one percent. We love its flash and dazzle. But great power lies in the other ninety-nine percent.

True heroism is minutes, hours, weeks, year upon year of the quiet, precise, judicious exercise of probity and care with no one there to see or cheer. This is the world.

In these times when we are cut off from a context or a genuine culture that could nourish and encourage our humanity, many of us get trapped into taking what the consumer culture offers. Captive in a dehumanizing culture, this is the way we take care of ourselves. It is not the way free, dignified, sovereign people answer their rightful wants and needs.

Thus the first task is the daunting one; ending our existence as servile addicts and finding in ourselves the worthy and righteous man or woman who can refuse this America, and create the America worthy of our souls, and of the souls of all of us including those fervently joining in the politics of hate. This is not survivalism; it cannot be undertaken in order to be among the post-apocalyptic remnant. Being righteous is not being 'more righteous than thou.' It is serving the greatness inherent in the lowly individual soul, acting as the expressive organ for its aberrant goodness, a morality always checked against ego inflation by the impossible demand that one is—bottom line—supposed to counter and vanquish the crushing sense of personal unworthiness.

Could there be conscious community building that does not take our humanity as a given fact but as a process of becoming that must be carefully tended, nurtured, encouraged, and expected of each of us?

When you get what you want in your struggle for wealth,
And the world makes you King for a day,
Then go to the mirror and look at yourself,
And see what that guy has to say.

For it isn't your Father, or Mother, or Wife,
Who judgment upon you must pass.
The feller whose verdict counts most in your life
Is the guy staring back from the glass.

He's the fellow to please, never mind all the rest,
For he's with you clear up to the end,
And you've passed your most dangerous, difficult test
If the guy in the glass is your friend.

You may be like Jack Horner and chisel a plum,
And think you're a wonderful guy,
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum
If you can't look him straight in the eye.

You can fool the whole world down the pathway of years,
And get pats on the back as you pass,
But your final reward will be heartaches and tears
If you've cheated the guy in the glass.

There's no virtue in being better than your fellow man but rather the man you were.

I oppose war in the way I oppose dueling or blood feuds, not by supporting one side. I oppose the US-led arming of Western Asia the way I oppose pushing heroin in poor neighborhoods, not by wanting particular people to get it all. I oppose murder by police or soldiers in the way that I oppose capital punishment—that is: not because videos make my social media browsing unpleasant, but because people's lives are being taken.

“So no capitalism, no communism, then what? A resource based economy with the focus on technological advancement with wide access through automated production to the entire world population. We have the resources to achieve this, and be even less wasteful without even touching on asteroid mining. Profit holds the world back, holds everyone back.”

Look, I don't personally know how to tear down and rebuild society to create a fairer system. You're basically asking me a question that people have not been able to resolve for all of human history. Some of the greatest thinkers of all time have asked this question, and all of their solutions are wanting. Plato thought that you should create a class of philosopher kings who are purely rational and beyond personal bias or motive. Aristotle thought that only land owning men with an active stake in society were capable of making political decisions. Hobbes thought that people are inherently selfish and would kill one another without an absolute monarch. Rousseau thought the opposite. If the supposedly greatest Western minds of all time can't agree, how am I meant to just jot something out?

With that being said, I think that firstly we need to recognize that there is a problem, and what that problem is before you can try and solve it. Clearly the world has problems if people are starving when there is enough for all, and when some people are born to a life of endless toil and misery, while others can live lavishly their entire life and never lift a finger. Any solution would require that everyone has what they need, and deserves what they have.

The next economy will be defined by the struggle to get there.

Everyone's not going to get to the same place at the same time. I have no idea how we all get there, or how to counter missteps along the way, but solidarity is built by showing it, not by withholding it.

The greatest change we need to make is from consumption to production, even if on a small scale, in our own gardens. If only 10% of us do this, there is enough for everyone. Hence the futility of revolutionaries who have no gardens, who depend on the very system they attack, and who produce words and bullets, not food and shelter.

The elite very few who we rail about here, in wordspace, as we demonstrate our linguistic and polemical skills, picking up and examining little bits of the big picture. Judiciously examining the arrangement of the deck chairs on the Titanic, thinking maybe there is some way to change the orders to the unfortunate helmsman who directs the leviathan toward its fateful encounter with Murphy's Law. Hoping that someone in power will see the madness and make It stop. Because we recognize so many bits of 'The Problem,' and have cogitated over the various options and approaches to 'Making It Better.'

Disobedience, in the manner of Henry David Thoreau's act of opposition to slavery and to war with Mexico, is one option. Thoreau stated:

"Know all men by these presents that I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined."

That is, when your country is 'no longer itself,' such an act of self-alienation is the justified action of a righteous man.

Thoreau's act of disobedience was not revolutionary. It is rather, refusal:

"I will live as if your world has ended, as indeed it deserves to end. I will live as if my gesture of refusing your world has destroyed it."

Thoreau's self-imposed exile to Walden was based on the need to create a society that he could willingly join.

"Henry Thoreau is like the wood god who solicits the wandering poet. Very seductive are the first steps from the town to the woods, but the End is want & madness."

There are two kinds of Buddhas. One kind figures out the meaning of life and comes back to society to help everyone learn it, and the other kind goes into the forest never to be heard from again.

We cannot afford to walk into the forest never to return. We may survive, we may eke out a living, but we will have betrayed all. We must take the hard path, the sacrificial path, we cannot hide in the trees, we must face our fears, take the blows for our brothers and sisters.

When you're acquiring a skill, you go through three phases.

Stage 1: Cognitive This is where you've learned the instructions, but haven't yet put any of it into practice. You get it in a rough sketch, but not reality.

Stage 2: Associative This is where you start implementing things and figuring things out and how it all fits together. You learn that there's some nuance the instructions didn't capture, and you're looking for better ways to put all the pieces together.

Stage 3: Automatization You've got the thing solved, and now you're just doing the muscle memory until it becomes perfectly streamlined and effortless. This is when things become 'mindless,' and it all just works.

On a broad scale, stage three is where a lot of people get and stay in life—I've figured things out and set myself in my rut and I can do this effortlessly until retirement! Nothing terribly wrong with that, it's a fine way to live. But stage two is where *everything* good happens. Discovery, innovation, refinement, creativity, *everything*! Asking 'why' over and over forever is hard fucking work, but you simply don't get to the good stuff if you stay entirely in stage three.

The most creative thinkers all exhibit certain common traits:

- An openness to one's inner life
- A preference for ambiguity and complexity
- An unusually high tolerance for disorder and disarray
- The ability to extract order from chaos

One of the traits found during a creativity study was that creative people are more introspective. But not only in the sense that they have an increased level of self-awareness, but that they also have a familiarity with the darker and more uncomfortable parts of their psyche.

You've probably read about the creative benefits of daydreaming, but one of the things that is rarely mentioned in these essays is the importance of

uninhibited daydreaming—not letting your brain filter the thoughts coming into your head.

In a subsequent study of creative writers it was found that the average writer was in the top 15% of the general population on all measures of psychopathy. But, strangely enough, these writers also scored extremely high on all measures of psychological health—meaning they were better equipped to deal with these thoughts and feelings. For most of us, those darker thoughts are filtered and tucked away. They don't serve us as good, law-abiding and moralistic citizens.

But, it's this full experience of the light and the dark, even if only in our heads, that fuels the creative mind. And the more we experience these thoughts, the more we're able to control them. Effectively, the creative mind is able to shape our experience not only through the external world, but with a deep synthesis of our imagination. It's why it's so common to hear creative individuals say that inspiration comes from within, not without.

I propose that these people have 'eaten their shadow' to a significant extent, as a part of their journey into that mature state. Another way to put it is that people under thirty-five cannot teach themselves or others to eat the shadow.

'Eating the shadow' or 'emotional work' is a quasi-Jungian idea that you have to not only face but also embrace the darker sides of your personality before you realize your potential.

Without this sting of otherness, without the terrible energies of the underside of health, sanity, sense, then nothing works or can work. I tell you that goodness—what we in our ordinary daylight selves call goodness: the ordinary, the decent—these are nothing without the hidden powers that pour forth continually from their shadow sides.

The petty, jealous, angry, manipulative, cowardly, cold, apathetic, et cetera sides of yourself actually prove key to becoming whomever you want to be: dynamic, powerful, wise, caring, clever. I'm not assuming we all want to be the same person, fill in your own virtuous adjectives.

So the person who has eaten his shadow spreads calmness, and shows more grief than anger. If the ancients were right that darkness contains intelligence and nourishment and even information, then the person who has eaten some of his or her shadow is more energetic as well as more intelligent.

When trying to understand present day capitalism, things like this shed light on possible avenues of expression that are more or less ignored in modern day culture. The melancholy most people feel, but successfully repress, due to the destruction of the environment and slow decay of once cherished institutions, needs to find a voice, not more distraction. But to

accomplish this, one has to experience being part of a greater whole. That one is not alone in this world.

All life is suffering, that is beyond doubt. How a culture expresses itself in addressing the consequences of that suffering determines the movement of history. Present day capitalism attempts to cover over the sorrows of living. It attempts to hide death in plain sight by destroying empathy in every form except that which reinforces the buying and selling of commodities. When the entire world is turned into a commodity, there is no room left for redemption. Commodities understood in these terms are lifeless things, and once they are used up, they are gone forever.

The way forward, out of our current malaise, will need to come from those who have passed through the fires of suffering and can embrace that suffering, instead of trying to ignore it, or trying with all their might to keep it at bay. Solidarity is found in that manner. It is the difference between acting in the field of love or of fear.

The glory of Empire is just one complex human artifice to mask the sorrows of living. This is why it is socialism, communism, anarchism, or nothing. The narrative that a well compensated elite will rise all boats is false. We all rise together, or we won't rise at all.

Knowledge comes from participation in the user group. Governance by those who have never been in the position of the governed is not going to be knowledgeable. Political science taught in the halls of Harvard—instead of the streets and homes of those most dependent and vulnerable to bad governance—was always going to be disastrous. Governance theory is never tested, there are no sandbox villages created to test different forms and monitor results. It is simply theory plucked from the echoes of dead white men and imposed arbitrarily on populations as 'governance by the people.' This governance is not from the community being coerced by it. Women are not interested in politics, say the studies which define politics as male politicians and ignore the fact that women are the backbone of real action-based governance the world over. Economists who have no knowledge of how the economy is practiced, especially in those parts outside the trade economy which are not recognized to exist, and governance theories by those who have no knowledge of how people form dependent societies to survive are increasingly being ignored

I notice that we have greater expectations for kids than we do adults for social behavior. It is rare that I've been in a meeting where people haven't started side conversations, taken out their phones, totally ignored the meeting, fallen asleep, et cetera. Yet we expect kids to sit for long periods of time being lectured to all day while being attentive the entire time. It drives me crazy how adults act versus their expectation of how the

child should behave.

It's the 'front-end loading' of cognitive heuristics. It's the same effect you see with initial hiring practices at companies, versus enforced work practices on the job. You're expected to be absolutely amazing on paper and in an interview, so that they don't have to watch you later. People expect their kids, and even more so other people's kids, to be 'setup properly' since you can't exactly 'unplug and plug them back in' if they turn out to be broken. Fire and forget. The school systems we know now were designed to produce literate labor, not well-rounded human beings. Hire that way and you elevate glib sociopaths; school that way and you train ticket punchers.

Now mind you, if what society needs are ticket-punching sociopaths, this really is the way to go. They're very easily motivated by checklists and gamification. It creates a predictable society.

Self-governance requires debate and free expression. For the first time, we have the communication infrastructure to enable societal auto-correction and self-governance which can scale globally. The battle for hearts and minds is the only battle that matters and the only war that matters is the one between the oligarchs globally and the people oppressed by them. The most important weapon is global communication and the most important freedom is freedom of thought.

The free sharing of information spurs innovation. It also calls into question existing capitalist regimes of property ownership and control, and the relations of production that privilege those who claim (rights to) value (as profit) over those who actually produce value. As is the case with much of cyber disobedience, what is really being challenged is a capitalist mode of production in which knowledge and the people who create it are rendered as commodities.

The fight over the Internet has happened before, almost step by step, with the fight over the printing press 550 years ago. As the Catholic Church lost its power to interpret reality, it attacked any usage of the new copying technology, up to and including the death penalty. What it is, is a fight over the power to tell the narrative—the ability to tell others what reality looks like, and the powerful institutions of today are fighting for their survival as they're losing this ability and becoming irrelevant and obsolete.

VPNs, Tor, encryption, surveillance—it's all part of a much bigger picture about a fight over the Power of Narrative.

I sometimes ask people to imagine how they would act if they could write all the world's news for a week, and all of it would be unquestionably accepted as true. This is the Power of Narrative, the ability to sort true from false for other people. If they could change people's perception of

themselves in any way imaginable and never have it questioned, what would they write?

Most people think in terms of making themselves attractive, successful, or rich. While a Power of Narrative allows that, it's not anywhere near its potential. If you controlled what other people knew about you, you wouldn't need money ever again. You could be a walking god among men—literally, as far as other people were concerned. If you can control what other people perceive as true and false, you can have nobody ever act against you, and have them think they're acting in their own interest. It's the greatest conceivable power in a society.

This is the Power of Narrative. And this power used to reside with a couple of big institutions that are really annoyed at everything about the Internet, because it breaks their power to portray themselves as Really Important. When people can circumvent their storytelling and egos, the painted facade breaks down quickly.

This is exactly what happened with the printing press. The Catholic Church, being the only manufacturer of new books through their monasteries, had held complete Power of Narrative, augmented by the fact that all books were in Latin, and that only the clergy could read Latin and interpret it to the masses. It's not hard to see where a few people would exploit that advantage. That's also exactly what happened.

To raise funds, the Catholic Church came up with the idea of selling salvation, which had no basis whatsoever in any of the guiding books. But as those books were in Latin, nobody knew except the clergy. One of them did protest, a priest named Martin Luther. On the surface, he attacked the corruption within the Church that enabled the practice of raising money by selling salvation. Digging a little deeper, he attacked the gatekeeper position the Church held over knowledge, a gatekeeper position that allowed them to put forward such a message in the first place.

One of the consequences of Luther's objections was the Luther Bible, which was printed using the relatively new technology of the printing press. Bibles started appearing by the cartload—but in German and French instead of in Latin. Practically overnight, the Catholic Church had lost its Power of Narrative, as people were able to read the bible themselves, in their own language; they no longer relied on the clergy to interpret it for them.

This led to over 100 years of civil war across the Western world—triggered by publishing a particular book in large quantities using a new technology in a language that people could read directly, instead of relying on a gatekeeper of knowledge to interpret it for them. Over a century of war. That's how much power there is in the gatekeeper position of knowledge.

In response to this publication, the Catholic Church attacked the tech-

nology of the printing press mercilessly. As the Church and Crown were generally in a symbiosis in most European countries at the time, with the Crown getting the legitimacy of its power through validation of the Church, the Church had a far-reaching ability to lobby for new laws when it perceived an existential threat.

And so, the printing press was gradually criminalized, and penalties gradually ratcheted up, until on January 13, 1535, in France, the death penalty was instituted for any use of a printing press. The official justification for the law was “to prevent the spread and dissemination of dangerous ideas.”

Now, let’s recap here: Powerful institutions are so scared of unauthorized copying that circumvents their Power of Narrative, that they push for harsher and harsher penalties for using the technology that enables circumventing them. Does any of this sound familiar?

All of this has happened before, and all of this will happen again.

The printing press is what led to the American Revolution. Any time there has been an information revolution a political/progressive revolution was to follow because of the free flow of ideas. It is part of the growth of humankind. It is the same thing here. The elite are afraid of the ideas that the Internet—and now the internet in our pockets—provide. Giving them the keys to control discourse and the flow of ideas is giving them the power to potentially interrupt the evolution of our species.

“They represented the most dangerous revolutionary idea of all—the one that refused to be crushed.”

I think for many people it is effectively ‘bearing arms.’ The ability to stream live video and audio from the scene of any government activity by any citizen is a huge burr in their ass. If one subscribes to the enumeration of a right to bear arms being meant to enable the citizenry to possibly defend against governmental tyranny then it’s not a long stretch to see the cellphone as the modern day equivalent of the musket of colonial times.

The history is long—Marconi developed radio for the Royal Navy, Berners-Lee the Web protocols for CERN. Past Department of Defense (DoD) research has resulted in revolutionary technological capabilities such as radar, digital computers, wireless mobile communications, lasers, fiber optics, composite materials, the Internet (and other ‘packet switched’ networks), and satellite navigation. Private businesses dominate overall spending on research and development (R&D), responsible for 67 percent of the total. However, on basic R&D, studying subjects with no immediate commercial value and sometimes discovering basic new technologies, the federal government together with the university system hugely dominate at 72 percent.

The point of course isn't that the military should have discretion on where it spends its hundreds upon hundreds of billions of dollars each year, or that the warped pitiless nightmare of modern war is worth it for its high-tech spin-offs. The point is that the public setting is the natural space for scientific and technological research, providing the funding, managing the long-run research uncertainty, and maybe imposing some publicly-demanded constraints on what can be done with the tech.

Not only is technology too important to be left to the technology industry, it didn't even come from them in the first place. A movement for online socialism would demand that the crucial platforms be socialized—brought under the control of the people who run them and make them successful—the engineers, phone industry workers, and all of us content creators. We could decide democratically the broad direction of future research, the limits to use of our personal data, and use the potential of the Internet for its most positive educational and fulfillment possibilities. And we could tell the 1% just what the fucking Terms of Service are.

The politics of technology is a little understood defining force in the history of the species and with this new generation of technology, we better come to understand it. Technology does indeed act, industrial technology created capitalism, the automobile created the suburbs, broadcast media created pop culture—all elements of politics. We are now at a point where a new generation of technology is creating an entirely new environment.

Established stories, the cultural beliefs of how the world works, are significant tools of power—have been across history. What's been missing is all technology comes with some sort of politics. Presently, the world grows ever more unstable as the stories and culture, particularly those concerning economics of the last few centuries, fail to accurately account the plot, while technology evolves ever more rapidly. Clinging ever tighter to failing schools of thought isn't going to help anyone.

I know that the idea is to begin at the edges and work your way in toward the center, but as long as there are politicians standing at the center with their arms folded, what happens at the edges will stay at the edges. We can start all the organic farms we want, but we couldn't stop Congress from declaring pizza sauce a vegetable. Local, small-scale change is great, but against the immense power of coordinated wealth—the lobbyists, the super-PACs, the billionaires—the start-up model does not amount to very much. You may not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you. Withdrawing from it doesn't make it go away.

Millennials did not invent the culture of creative, socially-engaged entrepreneurship, which has been around for at least a couple of decades. So think about the way that things have changed over the last twenty years.

Think about the way they've changed in terms of technology and food—the areas that culture cares about the most. Smartphones, iPads, farmers' markets, sustainable agriculture—great, right? Great for those who can afford them, anyway. Now think about the way they've changed in terms of politics and economics—the things with which that culture refuses to dirty its hands. The Iraq War, Citizens United, the financial crisis, ever-widening inequality. That doesn't look to me like such a great deal. While the “creative class” is busy playing with its toys, the world is circling the drain.

Tools are value-neutral. Revolutions in our tools—the kind that have been wrought by Facebook, Apple, Google, and so forth, the kind so many young people dream of making, as they work on their gadgets and apps—do not necessarily alter the structure of society, and certainly not necessarily for the better. But how many, in today's young generation, even think of altering the structure of society, or would want to if they did? “Work within the system” is the ethos. Forget about ideals and ideologies and big ideas, those scourges of the twentieth century. Just pick a problem and go to work on it. The notion is technocratic, and bespeaks the kind of technocratic education students get today. No holistic thinking is involved, no speculation as to fundamental ends. The world, like a test, consists of a series of discrete problems, and all we need to do is get out there and solve them. Better clean technologies, improved access to drinking water, more effective schools (ace your classes, do your service projects, start a club or two): check, check, check.

Tackling such issues is both valuable and admirable. But is it enough? That system that you want to work within: what if it is the problem? Can we fix our schools without addressing inequality? Can we help to lift developing countries out of poverty without reforming global trade? Can we deal with climate change by altering consumer behavior, or is the source of our environmental crisis not consumerism itself? And underneath these questions, what's our vision of the world toward which we're working in the first place? Is it just a slightly better version of the one we have today? What values are we operating from, before we get to the solutions that express them? You can banish talk of ideologies and governing ideas, but not the things themselves. The only question is whether you are conscious of your own. If not, you've probably just adopted those that happen to be fashionable now, and you almost certainly aren't aware of how they shape the way you think and act.

Cyber disobedience emphasizes direct action—rather than protest, appeals to authority, or simply registering dissent—which directly impedes that capacities of economic and political elites to plan, pursue, or carry out activities that would harm non-elites or restrict the freedoms of people in

non-elite communities. Cyber disobedience, unlike much of conventional activism or even civil disobedience, does not restrict actions on the basis of state or corporate acceptance or legitimacy or in terms of legality—which many view largely as biased, corrupt, mechanisms of elite rule.

Often the organizing methods used are unfamiliar or unrecognizable to outsiders, even informed commentators, because they do not pursue the hierarchical command structures of mainstream political or corporate organizations. They do not have instituted leadership positions or roles, hierarchical structures, or authoritarian (leader/follower, boss/subordinate) command processes. Often decisions are made on a participatory basis in which all involved are able to discuss plans. In other cases there is full autonomy of action such that any member or collective can take action as it sees fit, as long as they are accountable for their own actions. Collectives are often formed on the basis of affinity and trust, so that people work on projects with those they have a direct connection with and commitment to.

These organizing practices, from affinity groups to participatory democracy to horizontal structures, are precisely the practices that have characterized anarchist movements historically. Thus whether implicitly or explicitly, the cyber disobedient represent a form of organizational—if not philosophical—anarchism. This horizontal, participatory, decentralized organizing is perhaps more in keeping with the desires for personal liberty, authenticity, and action desired by a younger generation of people concerned about social justice. Such organizing provides an opportunity for people who believe their voices have been silenced by status quo politics to actually have a voice. Indeed, even organizational approaches that have marked the political Left up to the present period have tended to be rather hierarchical, even bureaucratic, and representational, whether one refers to social democratic political parties, communist parties, or trade unions. Anarchy has always posed an alternative to such organizational forms within the Left. A central component of anarchist perspectives is the belief that means and ends of politics should correspond. Thus in anarchist political organizing, a radical approach to form can be as important as content.

The word ‘anarchy’ is derived from the ancient Greek word *anarchos* and means, rather than chaos or disorder, simply “without a ruler.” While rulers, not at all surprisingly, promote fears that the end of their rule will inevitably lead to a social decline into chaos and turmoil, anarchists assert that rule—economic or political—is unnecessary for the preservation of order. Rather than a descent into Hobbes’ mythical war of all against all, a society without government suggests to anarchists the very context for creative and peaceful human relations. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first to identify positively his social theory as anarchist, succinctly summed up the

anarchist position in his famous slogan:

“Anarchy is Order”

This is symbolically represented by contemporary anarchists in the ‘circle-A.’

The anarchist was the constructed devil of the American civic religion of the late nineteenth century. It was made the bogeyman to guard the borders of the political allegiances, loyalties, and obedience of American citizens. The popular portrayal of the anarchist as terrorist made a comeback in North America in the period of the Red Scare of 1919. Indeed, most have forgotten that, despite the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917, that Red Scare was targeted not at Communists but at anarchists and syndicalists (or anarchist unionists). The Red Scare and the state repression enacted under the Palmer raids, initiated by Attorney General Mitchell Palmer, which included the deportation of foreign born activists, decimated the radical movements of the day, in particular the anarchists and the Industrial Workers of the World. Indeed, in some ways, these movements never recovered to reach the levels of influence and achievement they previously enjoyed.

The intensity of Red scares far exceeds the actual threat the scapegoat groups represent. This makes sense, insofar as the primary object of these campaigns is not to defeat the weak and resourceless enemy but to win favor for elements within the governing elite and to accomplish the ideological rearmament of a population.

For anarchists, the regulatory and supervisory mechanisms of state capital are especially suited to producing docile and dependent subjects. Through institutions like courts and prisons, but also social work and psychology, authorities extend practices of ruling from control over bodies to influence over minds. Moral regulation, and unquestioned respect for laws, provides a subtle means for nurturing repression and conformity. The result is relations of dependence rather than self-determination as the externalized practices of the state increasingly come to be viewed as the only legitimate mechanisms for solving disputes or addressing social needs. For anarchists the ‘rule of law’ administered through the institutions of the state, typically on behalf of capital, is not the guarantor of freedom, but, rather, freedom’s enemy. Such practices close off alternative avenues for human interaction, creativity, and community while corralling more and more people within the bounds of state capital.

And we would be wise to remember a point that all anarchists make, and have always made—that state-sanctioned rights are subject to withdrawal whenever the state decides (especially if it feels threatened). They are untrustworthy rights indeed.

In this repressive context many activists in liberal democracies have concluded simply being present in the streets is treated as a criminal act during times of protest. This has been borne out in recent protest events like Washington, D.C., Miami, London, Toronto, and Athens. During the time of the protests against the G20 meetings of global elites in Toronto in 2010, more than a thousand people were subjected to the discredited practice of kettling, in which all people on the streets in an area are rounded up in side streets by police and forbidden to leave. They are all then arrested, regardless of their actions, reasons for being there, or demeanor or perceived threat. Under such circumstances activists have come to question the value, efficiency, or legitimacy of civil disobedience as a means to voice dissent, let alone to effect any real social change. As some suggest, when protest becomes criminal, only criminals will protest.

Some activists have concluded that the only means by which to stop harmful corporate or government practices is, not by appeal to the conscience of economic or political elites who seem, in any event, to have no conscience, or to shame them, since they also seem to have no shame, but rather to act directly to make it impossible to carry out their plans. This is the approach advocated by anarchists. The approach of direct action—on the streets, or online. They reject notions taken up by much of the political Left—even as alternative globalization movements grow—that revolutionary politics, radical social transformations, are no longer possible. While union leaders and even community activists, who should know better, scream for legality of protest, and seek to comfort police and politicians with apologies for direct action or anti-corporate property damage, the cyber disobedients identify legality as what it is: the screen that hides and protects power.

Any movement that seeks a radical—i.e. one that gets to the roots of social problems—change in social structures (and the abolition of specific systems, institutions, or tools of oppression or repression) will be susceptible to charges that they are destructive. Which, in a literal, if limited, sense, they are. Movements like anarchism, which explicitly seeks to end all systemic forms of exploitative authority are perhaps especially likely to be subjected to such claims and vulnerable to having such accusations stick. The early anarchist theorist Mikhail Bakunin famously claimed:

“The passion for destruction is also a creative passion.”

By this is implied rather straightforwardly that the vision of the social critic or activist seeks a remaking of social relations. As a sculptor must often rework an earlier piece, taking apart the unsatisfactory aspects to build it up again, so too the social critic seeks not the end of society but a

reworking, a remolding, of social life—to create something new, hopefully better.

“Revolution is a word that no longer means anything. If you don’t live it on a daily basis, there’s no point. Your life expectancy is 70 years. There’s little chance you’ll one day experience a global revolution.”

Actions Have Consequences

The great thing about relativism is that it allows us to see the perspective of the other side by suspending our judgment until gathering more information. However, we should not suspend our judgment indefinitely. There is this societal pressure of political correctness to always be accepting and never judgmental, but when judgment comes from a deep place of understanding and true discernment, then judgment is a good thing.

It's always a sound principle that whatever we would not personally do ourselves, whatever we would find abhorrent and unconscionable, we should not allow to be done on our behalf or in furtherance of industries we patronize

Consequentialism, the idea that we should base our actions on the good or bad of the expected consequences, has always been very troubling to philosophy professors, possibly because of some of these reasons:

- It leaves ethics up to humans without any sort of pseudo-divine guidance.
- It means otherwise brilliant people like Immanuel Kant were quite wrong.
- Concluding that consequentialism is the way to go would eliminate the entire academic discipline of debating what is the way to go.

One way to supposedly knock down consequentialism is to propose that if torturing one child could somehow provide pleasure to a million people you would have to do it. But this is simplistic in the extreme. The pain of torture is far greater than the supposed pleasure of watching it. More significantly, this calculation, like all of them, assumes that two minutes after the action in question the world will cease to exist. In a world that continues to exist, significant harm can be expected from the act of encouraging a million people to enjoy watching torture—why in the world would we expect them to stop at one instance of it? And what of the fear that would be instilled in billions of children and their loved ones by a power structure that maintained the right to grab children and torture them? These consequences are, together with the one child's suffering, exactly what make the supposed non-consequentialist object to the horror of the torture; and they are just that: consequences.

A more typical argument against consequentialism is even less persuasive, because it assumes the possession of impossible knowledge, in addition to ignoring medium- and long-term consequences. Such are the ticking time

bomb scenarios and the trolley problems that obsess legions of academics across and beyond the United States, and which contribute to the acceptance of “collateral damage” by the US military and the people who fund it. Wikipedia notes something critical about the ticking time-bomb stories, while dismissing the point as irrelevant:

“As a thought experiment, there is no need that the scenario be plausible; it need only serve to highlight ethical considerations.”

Hmm. How about ethically considering the consequences of filling people’s minds and television dramas with scenarios that are not plausible? Television crime dramas have been shown to shape people’s political views on crime. Shows pretend that ticking time-bomb scenarios, in which torture will save many lives, are everyday occurrences. In fact, they exist and are only likely to ever exist, in fantasy.

In reality, one never has the knowledge that an individual knows how to stop a bomb, that the bomb will soon go off if not stopped, and that the best way to get the truth out of the individual is torture. Torture usually elicits falsehoods or nothing, and no scenario is more likely to do that than one in which the torture victim need only endure a short amount of time in order to accomplish his or her goal.

There are problems with so-called “act consequentialism” as opposed to “rule consequentialism.” Act consequentialists are purists: they believe that each action should be considered on its own merits, with the one simple idea of increasing well-being. But not only does this pose the considerable practical problem that most people will likely be pretty bad at anticipating the consequences of their actions; it would also make social life virtually impossible. It might make sense to lie to a murderer, but if there were no rules about lying it would be difficult to trust anyone—even the lie to the murderer would be ineffective. Similarly, it might in one case seem right for a mother to sacrifice her child so that ten strangers could live, but a society in which mothers were always eager to sacrifice their children for strangers would be dreadful, so better to have a rule favoring maternal love and let the occasional stranger perish.

Philosophers have so far only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.

One day a couple of weeks ago I was reading while driving to the local convenience store, and I accidentally drove right through the front glass wall of the store, smashing up some shelves of junk food. After I’d made

my purchases, a police officer stopped me and asked if I'd intended to drive into the store.

"Oh, not at all," I replied. "I intended to get here as quickly as possible while also educating myself as quickly as possible. I knew I might crash, of course, but that wasn't part of my intention."

"Well," the cop replied. "Where should we send the check for your car repair?"

"I'll let you know," I replied, a bit annoyed by the hassle.

My brother in law repaired my car for not much more than \$100,000, and all it still needed was to be repainted. So, I took a giant paint sprayer with me and parked the car in front of my neighbor's house, the one with the loud dog. When I'd finished painting the car, there was a rough shape of its profile on the front of my neighbor's house, surrounded by fresh purple paint. I pinned a note to the door letting him know that my intention had been only to paint the car and not his house.

The new collateral damage laws we've been living under for the past year have really been working out great, as far as I'm concerned. We don't let it get out of hand, though. Only property damage is excusable using arguments—what a few radicals have described as "bullshit medieval arguments"—about what we really intended and what we "merely knew was going to happen." Damage or death to people or animals is not included in the law.

I've heard tell, though, that there is another world somewhere in which, believe it or not, the exact opposite is true. In that world, if I were to damage someone's property and argue about "just intentions" or "proportional collateral damage," I'd be punished for the destruction I'd caused and possibly locked up for my delusional state of mind.

But, in stark contrast, if I were to blow up some poor guy who dressed suspiciously with a missile from a drone, even though eight other guys who dressed acceptably were standing next to him, well that'd be totally cool. Or if I were to bomb an entire city flat because its people were suffering under the rule of a brutal dictator I'd stopped supporting and arming last month, that'd just be good patriotic citizenship.

Now, I'm not going to swear to you that this crazy world exists, but I have reports on it from numerous credible sources. I even have recent reports from several people that an ancient institution in this world—they call it the Catholic Church—is dropping its support for using "collateral damage" to excuse murder, while the rest of the society is just going ahead with mindlessly accepting it anyway.

Regardless, however, of whether such a place is real, the manner in which its customs shock us should wake us up to the possibility that our own might

shock someone else, and that we should never accept traditional customs without thinking them through for ourselves.

Society consists of a small proportion of evil or simply ignorant powerful barbarians and a huge number of little savages, they too either evil or ignorant.

It is nearly certain that some of the barbarians will need to die, there can be no doubt. Their ideology is simply too violent, their desire to retain power too great, they will not accept any other way; to waste time trying is to sentence billions to years of additional suffering needlessly.

The little savages are dangerous, but one should seek to minimize the physical harm to them, if not for moral reasons, then for simple tactical and PR concerns. There are of course exceptions to this, self-defense being the most obvious; one must decide for themselves what situations warrant.

Now this is not to say that no type of harm can be brought to the little savages. Infrastructure attacks will have a disproportionate effect on the little savages and their daily lives. This is not only a perfectly legitimate tactic, but one of the most powerful, as it opens up using the little savages' discontent to your advantage. The discontent will cause harsher tactics to be used against you, but these will also end up having side effects for the little savages as well.

Let us examine a recent case. While 9/11 resulted in large amounts of military force being directed upon al-Qaeda, it also resulted in a buildup and increase in force projected upon the domestic population as well, increasing discontent and government spending at all levels. Decreased levels of service and infrastructure quality, removal of safety nets, harsher police tactics, invasive surveillance, all focused on the little savages. Discontent grows and you do two things: you increase recruitment to your cause due to the harsher tactics being used against you and the resulting collateral damage (victim) and some of the little savages begin to turn against the barbarians.

Different types of winning, different concepts of what is success. Understanding of this is what is lacking. When facing an overwhelming, supremely powerful opposition, winning changes—what it means, what it is, what it looks like. Winning becomes simply the removal of the opposing force. Now this is not the entire war, but simply the first phase of it, this is often forgotten and we see nothing but the same barbarians, just with a different name, returning to power. With the force removed, you must continue to fight, the force was simply the first obstacle that must be overcome, we figured out how to get the spaceship out of the atmosphere and into an unstable orbit, now we need to figure out how to get it to the moon or we'll crash back down to the same planet or perish in the vacuum.

And make no mistake, this is an overwhelming force which must be

removed. There will be no great peaceful exchange of power, not into the hands which will be necessary to propel us forward. There is simply no way in which you can dismantle the structure piecemeal, the cancer just grows back. Complete overhaul or removal is necessary.

Now of course overhaul is the preferred choice for many, because for them it is associated with peace, rational thinking, civil debate. Unfortunately the existing barbarians do not do these things. The number of individuals required to be converted in order to replace these barbarians and to implement such radical change is enormous. The number is so large that it is nigh impossible to do so given the power and resources—both propaganda and punishment—available to the current barbarians. And history has shown that they have no hesitation when using it.

Removal on the other hand requires much less manpower. You still need to convert a large number of individuals after removal, but even that process becomes somewhat easier (communications problems notwithstanding) after removal. Removal, especially in a country relatively prone to instability given the correct circumstances, can be accomplished with small, decentralized groups and acts. With removal, you seek to simply create discomfort and instability for the little savages, while also sowing a healthy level of personal fear in the minds of the barbarians. You cannot win a direct conflict with them, though they will certainly use propaganda to goad you into one on grounds of morality, honor, civility, et cetera. Do not be tempted. You are better than they are. You are weak, they are strong. You have no power, they set policies. You work within an imperfect system with limited resources, they design the system and control the resources. And yet they oppress, they are violent, they kill, they maim, they torture, they demean, they segregate, they do this with their resources, with the system they created, with their so-called advanced education. No my friends, you cannot possibly be as bad as them.

The real problem is that it's such a half truth.

If someone went out and killed Ed Kurtz (that former emergency manager who started this particular crisis) at this point in time, nothing would be solved. Some people might feel vindicated, but the Flint water crisis would continue and nothing of value would be gained.

If someone started offing people who are prolonging this crisis for personal gain, or whatever, then maybe something would be gained. Again, you really don't know until it happens and the fallout clears. It's a gamble, but that's why people don't revolt at first sign of inconvenience or even straight abuse.

One of my favorite Rage Against the Machine songs puts it in an easy to digest way:

“Hungry people don’t stay hungry for long. They get hope from fire and smoke as the wheat grows strong”

You have to be without any other option, starving—whether for food or justice—to want to gamble with your life to end such radical abuse. And even then it isn’t as simple as picking up a firearm and offing someone. It takes coordination.

The entire premise of America’s parochial narrative is *we the people; for the people; Posse Comitatus*—it’s about the people and their duty, obligation, armed requirement to hold government accountable. And what happened? Peaceful protest.

The entire premise of a well functioning democracy is a state beholden to the people which *only* functions out of the fear of violence. The *second* that violence was rescinded for peace the vote became meaningless.

What happens when the people you vote for betray you, imprison you, steal from you, poison and kill you, and there is absolutely no repercussion for that? The only possible repercussion is being voted out but no one cares enough to sway the votes?

Peaceful protest is the single most dangerous thing to ever happen to democracy. *Ever*. There is a reason why we have and need revolution.

The usefulness of the Second Amendment would be in a large amount of people marching on D.C. armed, many of them vets; that type of image tends to have a great deal of power in this country thanks to its propaganda systems. Individually gun possession would do squat here, but collectively it would do a great deal and was part of why firearm ownership was enshrined in the bill of rights; an economically violent sovereign had just had its influence curbed and another sovereignty set up precisely because the victims of this economic violence were able to resort to collective physical violence to stop it. A few armed farmers a continental army doth not make.

“Are we supposed to build some fighter jets out of sticks and stones?”

Firstly, such a rebellion probably won’t be fighting the military in the first place. The military (probably? hopefully?) has too much honor to fight the people they’re sworn to. The military takes its oaths, honor, and purpose a lot more seriously than the police do. A rebellion will be fighting the police, who—while militarizing at an alarming pace—do not possess the insurmountable war machines. The police don’t possess fighter jets, and their “tanks” are actually armored personnel carriers that are more resistant to small arms fire rather than impervious like an Abrams. A

Molotov cocktail isn't worth much against an Abrams, but a well-placed one is actually a pretty serious threat to a police APC. And there are a lot more citizens than police.

Secondly, even should the military intervene, a rebelling populace shouldn't fight things like tanks and fighter jets directly. You combat these things by cutting their supply lines, denying them the fuel they voraciously consume, denying them the munitions that make them more than a bulldozer or flying sports car, killing the operators while they're not in the vehicles, killing the maintenance crews that need to perform tens of hours of maintenance for every one hour of operation.

Only fools who have no concept of modern war take that position. I'm sorry but if you think this, you simply do not understand military conflict in the twenty-first century or historically. Who do you think installs and maintains the tanks, the aircraft, and other weapons of war that the military owns? Civilians! I'd suggest that since a very large number of these are installed and maintained by civilian contractors, oftentimes veterans who did the same job in the military, that say, in a hypothetical situation where the federal government becomes overtly tyrannical and begins the almost certain mass arrests and imprisonment of political/ideological opponents, it's not too great a stretch of the imagination to think that many of these weapons systems—along with their communications and logistics—would be actively sabotaged. Yes, an AC-130 gunship can devastate a neighborhood from 30,000 ft, but not if it's grounded because the hydraulics and avionics are busted, and all the spares are bad.

Allow me to give you a few examples that will quickly show you the reality of the situation, which is that the US military stands no chance what-so-ever against even a moderate proportion of the civilian population rebelling.

- **Iraq and Afghanistan:** In over 10 years resistance has never been stamped out, in countries with much smaller populations than ours (both less than one-tenth), despite our massive technological advantages. This is with significant infighting in both countries.
- **Vietnam:** A country of less than one-tenth our population was subjected to more bombing than was used in all of WWII and began the conflict less well armed than the US public is now. Despite this, in the end the North Vietnamese ultimately prevailed.

There are countless more examples from all across the globe from Russia to Nicaragua, from Columbia to Kurdistan that unequivocally show armed

populations can crush organized militaries, or at the very least resist them effectively for extended periods of time.

So let's assume the order is given to take America by force. Almost 100 million Americans are armed (the number of which would likely grow in this event) with approximately 350,000,000 guns including almost 500,000 machine guns (although to be fair most are sub-machine guns). You'd have to do this with a combined army and police force (including reserves) of a little over two million (assuming no desertion or refusal of orders). Mass defection and resistance from within the military and police would be very common. These US soldiers have families and friends in the civilian world, and many are dedicated to not engaging those targets with violence. There would be massive resistance in the ranks, it would be at best chaos. However even if this were *not* the case and it was an army of automatons, the sheer number of armed citizens would be so overwhelming as for it not to matter much.

That's not to say any conflict wouldn't be a *brutal* and *costly* affair, but with enough participants from the public the conclusion would be forgone. So, there are 100 million gun owners in the US, if even 1% "plays Rambo," as anti-gunners like to say, that's a million people. One percent! Do you know how many law enforcement people there are in the entire country? It may indeed be the case that the citizenry stands no chance against the might of the government, but if there is any chance at all, it will be with guns rather than without them. That itself is reason enough to insist that the populace remain armed.

As Goebbels said after the Jewish Warsaw revolt in World War II:

"This just shows what you can expect from Jews if they lay hands on weapons."

Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam show that one should not so easily discount the difficulties of winning a protracted, asymmetric ground war fought by zealous insurgents who blend in with the local population. The fact that our military has such powerful weapons that the citizenry lacks doesn't negate the Second Amendment, but spotlights that the 2nd has been trampled too much already.

Finally, who in the world can predict what will come to pass? We can barely predict the political winds of tomorrow—how are we supposed to predict the future, say, one-hundred years hence? Simply put: we can't. Gun ownership serves as a means of hedging our bets in case things go to hell. After all, no sensible German could have imagined in 1840 that in just 100 years, the government would round up millions of people and attempt to exterminate them.

“How we burned in the prison camps later thinking: What would things have been like if every police operative, when he went out at night to make an arrest, had been uncertain whether he would return alive? If during periods of mass arrests people had not simply sat there in their lairs, paling with terror at every bang of the downstairs door and at every step on the staircase, but had understood they had nothing to lose and had boldly set up in the downstairs hall an ambush of half a dozen people with axes, hammers, pokers, or whatever was at hand? The organs would very quickly have suffered a shortage of officers and, notwithstanding all of Stalin’s thirst, the cursed machine would have ground to a halt. If . . . if . . . We didn’t love freedom enough. And even more—we had no awareness of the real situation. We purely and simply deserved everything that happened afterward.”

All I know is the time for each and every one of us to take a stand is fast approaching. Whether that means defending yourself or standing with like-minded individuals and taking the fight to them is up to you. It would definitely be wise to know what you would do in case thugs start kicking down your doors; for example, rig explosives around choke points. Way I see it, if even one in a hundred of us does that, there would be no more thug enforcers left if they rely on storm tactics. Entire squad kicking down your door huddled outside? One IED would take out the manpower needed to oppress hundreds if not thousands.

Remember friends, there are four kinds of homicide:

1. Felonious
2. Excusable
3. Justifiable
4. Praiseworthy

Those men are surrounded by others who could kill them but don’t because they are traitors to humanity, and those men are surrounded by men who are traitors, and so on, every day the world could be made better by men who choose to do nothing. When you don’t punish people for the wrong they do in front of you, this shit happens.

The solution is in punishing every act of selfishness and injustice in service of power that you see. This is a war, you already knew that.

A badge might make you immune to the law, but it sure as fuck doesn't make you immune to bullets.

“We need to end unconstitutional government surveillance.”

We've tried about three times to do so already, each time it only gets worse or the issue is downplayed by the mainstream media. It is portrayed as a non-issue because the media is corrupted by the same influences as the government. The media and our government is bought and paid for.

“So we need to get the money out of politics.”

Right, but that isn't easy when those with power, those individuals who hold office already, are the ones influenced by corporate lobbying and special interests. Nothing can be changed because it's a conflict of interest to be in favor of getting money out of politics while receiving kickbacks for being a corrupt politician. They stay wealthy as long as they hold office and keep the money coming in.

“So why don't we protest, we should assemble and demand that these leaders step down.”

Because those who protest risk losing their jobs. The middle class is shrinking, jobs are being lost overseas and to automation, and wages are lower than ever. If one protests, they risk being branded as an outsider or trouble-maker, or even the possibility of being arrested. That would definitely cost someone their job, their paycheck, their home and car, their life would be ruined because they protested the corruption our government is protecting. Few can afford to take a day off and protest, and even fewer can take the risks associated with assembling and participating in a protest.

“So why don't we advocate for fairer wages and bring back jobs to the United States? We could possibly get the public to a point where protesting is an option. Or maybe it's hopeless to be peaceful and follow the rules. Maybe we should take up arms and steal back our freedom by force. Or maybe I should just leave the country.”

It feels so tiring. Such an enormous to-do list that can never be completed. Too much corruption, too many layers of rotting infrastructure and legislation to fight. It's so demoralizing, disheartening, and really makes you wonder if anything will ever change. I know I'm not the only one who feels this way.

I hope it's not too late for you America.

I don't know about your personal situation, maybe you're just blinded by ideological programming. But the idea that standing up to injustice isn't worth it because it might make us uncomfortable for a little while is just insane. France had to go through the Reign of Terror to get rid of their monarchy, but both the country itself and the entire world is better off for it. They didn't 'engage with the system' because there's no point playing a game of chess when all your pieces are pawns. The game was fundamentally rigged and unjust, and they changed it. And it's a similar story today.

"I'm blinded by ideological programming and, what, you somehow can see through the bullshit and know the truth?"

I don't mean to be condescending—or egotistical—but I don't think anyone can read a half-way decent critical analysis of the neoliberal capitalism we live under and not find fundamental flaws in the very foundations of the system.

"Do the poor live in remotely the same level of conditions?"

Such a tired and irrelevant point. Did the pre-Revolution poor live in the same conditions as the Dark Ages? *Technological advancement exists independent of the economic system it takes place in*; fascism and feudalism proved this.

"We can still turn the ship around with reform and engagement and protest."

Except that has pretty much never worked. It's an ugly truth but essentially all great leaps forward in human civilization have been propelled by the use of force.

"Revolutions occur when a critical threshold is reach of people who cannot feed themselves."

Revolutions occur when people get sick of the ruling class. England's economy was doing fine when the people decided to cut off Charles' head. The economy and general quality of life in Ireland was at an all-time high when they decided to go to war with the British. Look at Northern Ireland in the 60s: no one was close to starving but nationalist communities were poor and downtrodden so they decided to take up arms against the police and the military. A similar situation is developing in the US right now.

There is plenty of room in the present situation for enough people to decide that a handful of elites don't deserve to hoard half of the world's resources. It's much more difficult now, but that's down to a number of different factors.

It's almost comforting, in a way, to imagine yourself as a pawn. There's no moral duty involved: The evil plan is grand and inscrutable; it gives a sense of order in what looks like disintegration, and tells you what your place is in it. But there is a moral duty, and we need to face up to it. And maybe, just maybe, sometimes the people in charge are just as blinkered as we are.

I really don't think you can make any case for the US system as such, it's just too cruel, involves too much poverty, homelessness, hunger. It's just too inhumane. Not to mention too plutocratic, being actually quite undemocratic. It fails all measures of an ethical system.

We kill each other with rocks and sticks while the ones we want to kill have the armor and the swords

The world is ruled by violent thugs, this is true. I suggest we change that, starting now.

Shame. Shame. Shame.

The authority of the US government is null and void; and has been for quite some time, if it ever existed. It is an immoral act to support this system in any way, passively or actively. The social contract has been broken. Nothing is owed, they have already destroyed the rule of law, an attack on them does no more harm and can only possibly help make things better for the oppressed and disempowered.

Your entire situation is horribly unfair, and it's difficult to argue why you should keep playing by rules that failed you. It is unfortunate that the comfortable and selfish have taken us to this destination. Against these two-faced scavengers our hearts must be resolute, and our rage unrelenting.

You are not entitled to one's support of your status quo system and candidates. One has no obligation to continue to help keep your society afloat when you year after year tell them to be realistic, pragmatic, work within the system for change and then fail to force anything because, well, you're pretty comfortable already so things must not be really bad, especially compared to some shanty town in Africa, right?

'Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good' is the common line used to prop up the fundamentally flawed status quo. One arguing for incremental change uses it to falsely imply that they actually care. The problem is that they lack imagination and do not focus on anything but a relatively short timescale. Does rejecting a policy that will help some while excluding others actually make things better for more people, harm less,

long-term? Or do such slightly less barbaric conditions simply vent off some built up steam, which pushes off the true, final reckoning further?

Who cares more about people, one which is willing to seriously debate and compromise on who to leave behind or one who is willing to torch everything in a quest for equality and justice?

‘Give me what I want or I’ll burn your precious shit to the ground.’ Like any tool, rhetorical or otherwise, this sentiment can be used for both good and bad reasons. But when used to advocate for what should undeniably be human rights or public goods, they are absolutely not terroristic acts or sentiments. They are clear and simple demands, an intimidation perhaps, but an entirely justified one.

They are intimidations in response to actual harms, a completely valid response. Back any animal into a corner and one should not be shocked when you end up bleeding.

Why the fuck should we live our lives based on what you think is possible? If you’re the one making it less possible, then by utilizing a bullet which passes through your skull, someone can make it more possible. Why the fuck do your limitations mean we suffer more? Longer? Just because you don’t think it’s possible?

There’s always been more than one track in terms of fighting oppression, it often comes down to people’s economic background. You do need educated people who know the law to counteract the unfair laws. At the same time, you also need more confrontational activists, those who will say to people in power:

“You can make a deal with us or you can make a deal with them—but you’re gonna deal with somebody.”

In a struggle to transform an oppressive society, it is indeed necessary to fight for certain reforms, but this requires that those who are oppressed are conscious—or made conscious—of how the reforms fit into an overall strategy for social change. All too often leaders hail piecemeal reforms—and mindlessly advocate reformism—while overlooking the fact that frequently reforms serve mainly to salvage and buttress a society which in its totality remains as exploitative as ever.

The defect of the liberals’ vaunted incrementalism is that small changes are just as easy to undo as to do. If Obama had rammed through Medicare for All in 2009, it would be much harder to undo than this stuff; Medicare Part B proves the same point.

The radical vision is the better one, not just because it leads to a better place but also because the incrementalist approach will get us all killed—only a bit more slowly than doing nothing.

If one becomes a vet, one can certainly help a number of animals. But if one is somehow able to enact widespread change, reducing the cost burden, expanding availability of treatment, and so on, then one not only helps all existing animals, but also ones that do not yet exist.

The same is true for any other problem, hardship, suffering that is currently faced. A soup kitchen volunteer can only feed so many lacking basic survival needs, a revolutionary which overturns the existing order can help far more.

Now of course if one views it from a perspective of guaranteed assistance, then of course the smaller scale is more likely to succeed. A soup ladle into a bowl is guaranteed to feed that individual, a revolutionary change striven for is not guaranteed at all—it might even make things worse. But is this a valid reason to simply help prop up the status quo? Are those guaranteed harm reductions on a small scale something that should compel one to act on such a scale? Does one bear some responsibility for ‘sacrificing’ those guaranteed reductions in the name of a more grand—perhaps idealistic—revolution?

It is to many what would be considered common sense in modern America: you must focus advocacy on specific issues in order to pass specific legislation. Huge organizations erupt around the narrowest causes. This, we are told, is how you do things, you need to have specific legislative demands, you can make the most difference in your local community, and so on. These suggestions are in fact meant to disarm you, not empower you.

The forces at play are not single-tasking. they’re putting their capital behind actively thwarting every possible reduction in their power and wealth. Now of course they are not always successful, but away from victories like gay marriage for example, lie many steps backward.

One step forward, one or more back, gets you nowhere and may leave you worse off.

A criticism of news can be that it often focuses on the bad, that the acts of good far outweigh the acts of kindness done each day. The problem is everyday evil damages far more than everyday good helps. This everyday good may slightly slow, offset everyday evil but the direction of flow still remains one-way. We cannot use acts of good to overcome evil and harms unless those acts of good involve striking at the heart of the drivers of evil.

We are always seeking to address problems that are not the root cause. Address why the innately social animal is perpetrating violence against its kin and fix that. This will have a much more widespread positive effect than doing anything to specifically address guns.

Mental illness, greed, ignorance, lack of empathy, irrational passion, manipulation, lack of options. How many issues can we solve if we recognized that these were our true problems?

Focusing on individual issues like gun control or gay rights simply divides your power as a people striving for justice.

In order to get on the right side of the world revolution the United States must undergo a radical revolution of values. Instead of being driven to war to protect profits, American society must prioritize people.

True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. Making that change would require a fundamental reorientation of the giant triplets of American society.

We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented society' to a 'person-oriented society.' When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

MLK was killed just as he was embarking on a social justice course. Civil rights for a segment of the population was barely doable. Civil rights for all was not.

Someone once quipped that they wondered how well Gandhi would have done had he gone up against Hitler. Remember that Gandhi was a sophisticated manipulator of public opinion. Sociopaths consider their own prejudices to be public opinion, to be enforced with maximum force if need be.

FDR didn't so much change the Capitalist system as save it. As authoritarian a figure as Bismarck realized the necessity of social welfare programs for the stability of modern industrial civilization. A decade ago Obama saved Capitalism again.

So, each of these figures tweaked the extant system, rather than fully remake it. And now the likes of Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden wish to do the same thing yet again. Will we go for the hat trick?

One thing I have noticed over time is that most of the progressive changes were not done because it was the nice or fair thing to do. They were done to serve some powerful group's interests. Most of the time when progressives get what they want, it's because resources are plentiful. When scarcity hits, discrimination goes through the roof.

Liberals are fond of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, quote:

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

This faith in the inevitability of 'progress' can lead to a dangerous passivity. The only scraps of freedom, autonomy, or equality that the

oppressed have ever experienced, they've had to physically fight for on their own terms. We have to stop relying on powers outside our control—nicer politicians, liberal judges, the Constitution, 'progressive' corporations—to win this fight, or we'll find ourselves in this same mess over and over again.

Americans have always dreamed that we are an exception to history but we are not. Not only will "incremental change" or the "lesser of two evils" or faith in the wonders of technology fail to prevent disaster—such ideas have delivered us to the crisis we now face. We long for an easy way out—a way that does not demand risk—a way without the only kind of struggle that has ever made history. Of the most likely outcomes that lie ahead, transformative revolution and transformative social movements are our best chance to minimize violence, reduce harm, create a better world.

The complacency of the self-labeled liberals and progressives is most definitely dangerous. Their calls for 'patience' and 'lesser of two evils' and 'work within the system' puts the human rights of billions at risk. They ensure the continued oppression, slavery, murder.

A high standard of living, while many continue to have so little, should not be heralded as achievement, of progress, but instead it should be seen as a clear sign that one's society has failed, the values warped.

Don't support the continuation of turning things into money. Bodies aren't things, homes aren't things.

Our race is human, our homeland is Earth, and we've got billions of brothers and sisters and trillions of cousins we're neglecting in exchange for our comfort.

The rebels of the past lifted our species from beneath the feet of gods and emperors, broke the chains of absolute rulership, and pried the rights we have today from the grips of autocrats and oligarchs—but the human revolt is still incomplete. It's true we see fewer emperors today—but we still have empire and militarized police-states. Just look at what they did at Standing Rock—what did their consent mean to authority, then? Watch what happens to whistle-blowers who choose to inform the public about how their government uses its authority and compare such treatment to 'whistle-blowers' who can be used as tools in partisan political games.

I have watched my government hold elections without transparency, while the candidates are bought and sold in broad daylight. I have watched unpopular leaders being elected again and again by less than one-third of us, with voting-machines that produce unverifiable results and no paper-trail for us to audit. What consent can there be if one-tenth of us are vetted by privately-run yet publicly-funded parties to select two options for the rest of the country to choose between? And, even then, two of the last three

winner had fewer votes than their opponent—but, if we dislike this system, we can simply vote to change it, right?

Look at our use of drones. Look at how many years various groups have spent trying to document facts about it, lawsuits trying to stop it. And nothing to show for it. If a fraction of those protesting or working on drone lawsuits instead chose to take direct action to destabilize the United States government, things would be radically different today. That is not to say things would be radically better. However, action must be taken if a group were to try to destabilize the government. Now that action could be to stop or change the drone policy, however, it is more likely to be a violent, oppressive, punitive reaction by the government against the people. Things arguably would get worse. But you fought effectively and forced change. Not the change you want, but change nonetheless.

And that is what we must realize. You have very little hope of changing the system from within using its own mechanisms. Those in power have unfortunately made that extremely difficult. The system is vast, its problems many, and the only approach taken by most activists is simply to attempt changes one small piece at a time. They have had small successes, but what history shows is that once public attention is removed from a particular small issue, those currently in power will begin to work to dismantle and roll back changes, finding ways to abolish or simply get around it.

And the people will not notice, for the most part the dots will remain unconnected. They will only see and remember the success. That is not entirely their fault, the MSM is an excellent propaganda arm, the best created in the history of civilization.

I am surprised that there hasn't been a revolution, honestly. If you look back 50 years there was constant push back against the government and its ideals and ridiculous notions. Now? Barely anything, it's like people either just don't care or believe that we, as the people, aren't that powerful united.

There seems to be this note in the air that we belong to government, when in actuality, they belong to us. The fact that this shit is happening under our noses is astounding. I thought the whole point of the government and FBI and all those types of departments were put in place to protect its people? But the focus is on us. Why? Why are we being branded as guilty when in actuality 99% of us are innocent? It disappoints me more than anything. I pay my taxes, I work hard, I contribute to society, I am lawful and yet none of this even matters. It's like they are just waiting for me to do something, anything, just so I can be tarnished with the guilty brush.

It's getting to the point now where I just want to quit. There is far too much hostility, anger, greed, and selfishness in this world, and for what? We are here for a blip of a second and the huge majority of what we do doesn't

count to anything. Nobody will know who we are in thousands of years, so why does it matter? Why is there this sickening craving for people to be remembered and to be remembered as someone who was important once, on our tiny planet that has no relevance to the universe.

I try to see the good of Earth and its people, but it's getting harder to do that. We are repeating mistakes instead of learning from them and allowing the 1% to walk all over us just as they always have.

The oligarchs have gotten especially good at preemptively destroying their enemies. Dissidents become child molesters and peddlers of kiddy porn, and revolutionaries becomes terrorists and get shipped off to black sites to be tortured and detained without trial forever. Revolutionaries become crazy outliers, and the oppressed population claps and cheers when the righteous fury of the long arm of the law puts them down. Many thought the people would have their back when they rose against authority, and every one so far has been laughed at, mocked, and when they were killed or dragged away in cuffs, the people cheered. And when they were languishing in prison, every piece of information to discredit them—handed down by the authorities that oppress the people—was happily consumed and wholeheartedly believed. You think any of us wants to be next?

America's chief export since I've been alive is fuckery. What's fuckery? One way to define fuckery is the employment of fucked up ideas to justify being fucked up. It's fuckery when you claim air pollution is the morally acceptable cost of economic progress. It's fuckery when you let a show as fucking bad as *Friends* become the global ambassador of American ideals.

America forces our garbage ideas on the world to justify being garbage. But in so doing, the blowback is a reputation so badly damaged, no other nation on Earth is particularly eager to claim us. The world no longer wants America to lead. The world looks at us and sees us bombing brown children into the sand and employing blue lives to end black ones.

When dickweasels yell "LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT," what they're betraying is their ignorance that you can't just leave America. An American is so unwelcome abroad that it's almost impossible to gain citizenship anywhere else without substantial sponsorship and privilege. For most people, borders are cages meant to keep them in more than they are walls to keep others out. And as the refugee crisis is proving to the world: the last place you want to be is anywhere without citizenship.

Accepting the premise that we can't leave, present living generations have no moral option but to end the exportation of American fuckery. It's a mindfuck, but we don't have time to wait for another generation to do it.

Perhaps the soundest argument is to point out that proponents of the 'If you don't like it, just leave' view are committing the fallacy of begging the

question (presenting a circular argument). That is, the question at hand is whether the state is justified in doing what it's doing. In saying 'If you don't like it, just leave,' one assumes the conclusion to be established: namely, that the state and its actions are legitimate and the moral obligation is on individuals to leave if they don't like it.

Simple analogy: Suppose I spin my arms around and vow to punch everyone in a 100m radius of me in the face. You protest, and I reply, 'Well, it's voluntary because if you don't like it, just leave.' You might respond with 'Well, I have no where else to go because other people are punching everywhere else too!' But clearly that's not the best response; the best response is simply, 'No, you're the one who should leave! You aren't allowed to be punching people in the face.' And then maybe punch them in the fucking face.

People have always complained about their governments, of course. But the level of dissatisfaction now, at a time when living standards are so high, suggests a deeper malaise. In democratic societies the power of governments is said to come from us. Yet the real influence of voters in setting a course for the future is minimal.

A common refrain you'll hear is that someone died for that flag, you better respect it. How many died for the idea of privacy that so many willingly give up? Where is the respect? How many died to protect their native lands from harm, lands we now pave over, pollute, exploit? Where is the respect? Why the fuck should we respect some artificial construct when they won't even fucking respect real, tangible things? Why the fuck is that something one should peacefully, respectfully oppose? Why the fuck are they the ones deciding what a valid fight is? Would you really choose the same ones they do?

Billions have died for these ideas. Crushed under its boot. Fucking decide to fight, they already have.

Sheep get slaughtered. I choose not to be a sheep. I had no choice in the 60s, when I had three oligopoly networks to choose from. With the Internet, I am my own reporter. This is more like how the printing press destroyed the Catholic Church. I make my own narrative, I don't let anyone else do it for me. Facts are few and far between, but they are just signposts on my own superhighway which I build myself. Are my beliefs factual? Are they for anyone? That was a rhetorical question. People who think their beliefs are The Truth are maniacs.

If you had any sense or care about your family and the future you would start rattling the sabers of revolt and not let up until you force the state into submission.

The technology of smartphones and MRIs—the technology of things—

is what most of us think of when we think about the modern impact of science. But in addition to creating things, science creates concepts, ways of understanding the world and our place in it, that have an enormous effect on how we think and act. If we understand birth defects as acts of God, we pray. If we understand them as acts of chance, we grit our teeth and roll the dice. If we understand them as the product of prenatal neglect, we take better care of pregnant women. It hardly needs to be said that people are profoundly affected by the material conditions of their lives—by the affluence of the societies they inhabit. The availability of necessities like food and shelter and the means by which individuals may obtain them makes all other influences on life seem insignificant. People without food will starve whether they accept their conditions beatifically as God’s will, accept them with depressed resignation as indications of their own inadequacy, or respond to them in anger at social injustice. No matter what ideas people appeal to when they explain their lack of food, their bellies remain empty.

And yet it is clear that ideas also matter, and they matter a lot, even in the case of an obvious material condition like the availability of food. What a squirrel foraging for food in the park does in times of scarcity has nothing to do with how the squirrel understands this scarcity. The squirrel is not about to pray for food, cultivate trees, or organize other squirrels to rise up in protest against people who have polluted the environment and diminished its food sources; the squirrel just forages for food. But what people do about their lack of food depends a great deal on how they understand it. Ideas have much to do with whether massive food shortages yield resignation or revolution.

“There is a difference between not listening to opposing views and not listening to uninformed opposing views. If they are unable to refute, or simply unaware, of certain beliefs, ideologies, interpretations of history, then there is often little value in listening given that their arguments will be at best incomplete, if not entirely useless.”

People complaining about having to debunk newcomers’ arguments are ultimately complaining about being given an opportunity to do effective politics. Politics isn’t an academic seminar where only the smartest people are allowed to speak. Nor is it a salon of uniformly right-thinking people who congratulate each other on their virtue while disagreeing on minor tactical points. It’s about trying to persuade other people, even including those who start out with views that are in some ways problematic or misinformed. Yes,

it can be somewhat repetitive. So what? If making the same argument more than once drives you crazy, find another hobby—don't be a Yves Smith.

One cannot fight what one does not understand. Effective political change is not primarily politically motivated. It is grounded in human solidarity, mutual trust, and consciousness. As Harriet Tubman said:

“I rescued many slaves, but I could have saved a thousand more if the slaves knew they were slaves.”

As long as no one is working to tell the people how this will work for them, we are just going to stand around like sheep and watch them cut our throats.

There will likely be no revolution without being able to ensure that the water system, schools, hospitals, et cetera function as people expect. We are criticizing the notion that fundamental change can be achieved merely by putting lots of people in the streets; that the larger the size of the protests, the closer we are to fundamental change.

People inherently lack an objective viewpoint and very few expend the effort to approximate one. We think about ourselves before we think about the consequences on the whole. Which is insane, because if everyone benefits then they're one of the everyone that's benefiting

Tackling the Dragon

I'm writing this on a laptop computer, by the way. It has a broadband connection and all sorts of fancy capabilities I have never tried or wanted to use. I mainly use it for typing. You might think this makes me a hypocrite, and you might be right, but there is a more interesting observation you could make. This, says Kaczynski, is where we all find ourselves, until and unless we choose to break out. In his own case, he explains, he had to go through a personal psychological collapse as a young man before he could escape what he saw as his chains. He explained this in a letter in 2003:

“I knew what I wanted: To go and live in some wild place. But I didn't know how to do so. . . I did not know even one person who would have understood why I wanted to do such a thing. So, deep in my heart, I felt convinced that I would never be able to escape from civilization. Because I found modern life absolutely unacceptable, I grew increasingly hopeless until, at the age of 24, I arrived at a kind of crisis: I felt so miserable that I didn't care whether I lived or died. But when I reached that point a sudden change took place: I realized that if I didn't care whether I lived or died, then I didn't need to fear the consequences of anything I might do. Therefore I could do anything I wanted. I was free!”

I began to understand that what my government really does in the world is very different from what I'd always been taught. That recognition in turn leads you to start reevaluating how you look at things, to question things more.

The true measurement of a person's worth isn't what they say they believe in, but what they do in defense of those beliefs. If you're not acting on your beliefs, then they probably aren't real. I don't want to be a person who remains afraid to act in defense of my principles. What keeps a person passive and compliant is fear of repercussions, but once you let go of your attachment to things that don't ultimately matter—money, career, physical safety—you can overcome that fear.

You have to be willing to risk life, limb, and prison, then you're free.

Criticize the left in the United States for failing to provide its population with answers to three questions which every world religion provides answers:

1. What are we?
2. Where did we come from?
3. Where are we going?

This does not imply that the left must become religious. It only means that world religions have learned over thousands of years what draws people to them and, given the small numbers of people who are leftists, we could learn much from religion. The left in the United States is not rooted in the past and it is afraid to project a vision of the future.

The well-being of society depends not on the state of science, no matter how exalted it may be in a select band of enlightened men, but on the condition of the general mind.

The crucial tasks for a committed left in the United States now are to admit that no politically effective force exists and to begin trying to create one. This is a long-term effort, and one that requires grounding in a vibrant labor movement. Labor may be weak or in decline, but that means aiding in its rebuilding is the most serious task for the American left. Pretending some other option exists is worse than useless. There are no magical interventions, shortcuts, or technical fixes. We need to reject the fantasy that some spark will ignite the People to move as a mass. We must create a constituency for a left program—and that cannot occur via MSNBC or blog posts or the New York Times. It requires painstaking organization and building relationships with people outside the Beltway and comfortable leftist groves.

Finally, admitting our absolute impotence can be politically liberating; acknowledging that as a left we have no influence on who gets nominated or elected, or what they do in office, should reduce the frenzied self-delusion that rivets attention to the quadrennial, biennial, and now seemingly permanent horse races. It is long past time for us to begin again to approach leftist critique and strategy by determining what our social and governmental priorities should be and focusing our attention on building the kind of popular movement capable of realizing that vision.

We have the power to shape things at a genetic level. That is a long way from us tying sticks from one tree onto another and hoping the shit worked. The problem is, our social tech hasn't advanced much since we started tying sticks to other sticks.

We can cure countless things now. We can choose things in our children, we can make a pig nose glow like a jellyfish, we can make corn you can douse in fucking poison—hell we even made one that makes the poison itself, but don't worry, it's perfectly safe to eat. We like to think we got to these things through some kind of highly evolved civilized process because after all, we are highly evolved civilized beings. Well most of us, not those people (you know who they are), but most of us. However, we gained much of this knowledge through fucking barbarity. How many millions of lives have been brought into existence purely to exist as a biological entity to experiment on? Ordered up and delivered like you might order more post-its or toilet

paper for the office. Justified by statements that at one time we might have been far more cruel. This seems like a good excuse—if you don't think about it. If you can understand that the past was more cruel, how can you not understand the likelihood that you are also going to be viewed in the same light in the future? Pure hubris. Exceptionalism. Jingoism. Human Supremacy. Whatever label you like. Disgusting.

You can argue it was necessary, worth it, needed, the cost of doing business. But you must argue it. Instead, it is hidden away, not highlighted. The cost in terms of lives reduced to tallies in a statistical analysis. Numbers documenting the quantity of anonymous objects experiencing something. Positive or negative?—unsure. Forced on them?—definitely.

Every hairless monkey didn't invent the wheel. Some copied it (damn lack of patent protection laws, glad we got that fixed). Some traded for it. Some probably sucked his monkey dick—or ate her monkey pussy—for it. Hell, some probably bashed the motherfucker's head in with a non-wheel shaped rock and took the wheels. Most of us ain't the hairless monkey making the wheel. Now there is really no reason for this to be the case—rare genetic issues and the like notwithstanding—except that we've fucked up our education system and setup a culture that largely promotes ignorance. Our rock wheel has come a long way and all the hairless monkey motherfuckers—well many—have access to some cool-ass shit. Just like you might have a bucket of toys for your dog, we got a big bucket of toys for the monkeys to play with and keep themselves entertained. Some monkeys are using the toys to evolve themselves; most just want 'brain feel happy chemicals, yay, yay.' A patronizing oversimplification of the problem? Fuck yeah, but its close enough you asshole.

It's the cliché here: 'We only asked if we could do something, we never stopped to ask if we should.' We certainly have the technology to cure many diseases now. The suffering required to get here has been immense. This cost has already, unfortunately, been paid. We cannot change this so no one is suggesting we burn all the science. But do we need to eradicate X disease? How many lives will it take before we do? How many lives will the disease take uncured?

What if we focused not on diseases, but on problems created by human minds? It's certainly easier if you put the kind of societal emphasis on it that we do on curing cancer or making the next cool computer mobile VR thing. We're not melting together bits of rock and metal. We're not playing with the genetic code of a life. We're fucking educating and debating other human minds. We all have one, its just got different shit in it depending on which fucking monkey it is. We know how to get people to believe shit—well some of us do and some of us use it to manipulate the fuck out of people.

We know how to teach, we just don't value it. We have the tools required, but the emphasis on technology over social in the dominant culture has made it near impossible to use them effectively.

Hurling towards a vastly negative outcome while swimming in a sea of suffering. That is the gift bestowed upon those who come to ponder these issues. We mock the Luddites, their fights and cries against the system. But they are just a well known group of many. One that has existed across the ages, large, small, interconnected, dispersed. History—created primarily by those supporting the technological bias—has removed most others from existence, as far as the masses are concerned; the rest simply dumped in the primitive basket, closing off any further examination, as far as the masses are concerned. Their cries drowned out by the march of “progress,” its boots crushing all in its path, uncaring, unflinching, forward, onward, upward now to the stars.

Life is sacred. Life is precious. Fundamental facts to many, a leash for some. With a technological bias you have what many religions offer as well: easy routes to rationalizing violence directed at, and suffering experienced by, some out-group. Without these belief systems, you lack these easy routes. When faced with a dominant, powerful, determined adversary such as we have now, one that exists at a global scale, one that does not hesitate to use overwhelming force and propaganda and barbarity, one must instead take the long, hard road before being willing to really fight. The only shortcut offered to them? Being reduced to absolute hopelessness and despair, like Ted was.

The hard fact is: violence, manipulation, disruption, destruction are all likely necessary to stop this shit. They won't have it any other way. If you are being attacked, you are allowed self-defense. If someone else is being attacked, you are encouraged to go to their aid. Sometimes the only way to avoid being broken is to meet force with force. Self-defense, defense of others, violence in pursuit of noble goals. Oh how familiar that song sounds to the ears on both sides.

History does not stop because someone puts up a plaque. If we understand that what was radical yesterday could be accepted as common sense tomorrow, that might change how we act today. Knowing that some of our most cherished rights were won by often uncelebrated people facing great odds, unrelenting vilification and, at times, state repression, suggests that at least some of those being denigrated today will be celebrated one day. The means by which we might achieve progressive change may shift according to the context—but the need for it never goes away. And the stories we have been told about how things happened are intimately connected to the stories we tell ourselves.

The belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked with the belief that we are going somewhere. Our view of history reflects our view of society.

There are two forces in history. One is ideas. The other is violence. Ideas, although sometimes effective, can become the control mechanism of the ruling class. In contrast, violence is the effective force in history. Violence serves those who use it most forcefully.

When one defends his country, things can never be tidy and neat. There are no saints. Sainthood leads to defeat. Saints are born later, when victory is won and the nation can afford it.

The barriers to doing this are political, cultural, et cetera—including the silly progressive belief that history “has laws,” moves “forward not backward.” History has no laws. History is just a bunch of stuff that happened. And there is nothing wrong with elites and their supporters that can’t be solved with a hundred-million rounds of machine gun fire and a few ten-thousand big pits, long trenches, and bulldozers. I hear there’s even an island in New York you can use, how convenient!

Violent, revolutionary acts require context to be accepted. It does not matter if in general the people are not fond of violence, provide the proper context and they will support it.

The US elite have the best propaganda in the world, no one else even comes close. They have continued the millennia-long quest to systematically destroy any sense of community, belonging, interdependence—they have done quite well.

We are simply the most recent generation of a culture which for millennia has enslaved, oppressed, brainwashed, murdered every culture which has a different way of seeing the world, of being a part of it.

They have created a system, a worldview, in which it is only logical to throw others under the bus. One only needs to run faster than the slowest in order to avoid being eaten by the predator; if one is desperately trying to keep their head above water they will be—whether intentionally or in a blind panic—willing to push others below the surface to keep themselves afloat.

You can see examples of this propaganda, this inclination, in the media and internet comments. Even if they support single-payer, the vile myth of money as a finite resource is firmly planted in their minds, influencing how they view the world, the actions—or lack thereof—of “their” government.

Those with power, status, wealth have corrupted the very idea of government, of community. One struggles to get by, each day, month, year, all the while being bombarded by more propaganda targeting their pleasure

centers, manufacturing wants and desires designed to sink them deeper into debt, into a position of powerlessness.

They work their job(s), they struggle, they see the fruits of their labor siphoned off by various levels of government; and they get nothing but more hardship in return. Is it any wonder that they are skeptical of any 'help' such a government might provide; of what it will cost them?

It is why we must shatter the myth of money as a finite resource, must embrace the fact that money is simply a tool. The federal government can afford to provide any universal public good that the society needs, it need not take a cent from individuals to do so. There are reasons for taxation at the federal level, but needing such funds to pay for federal spending is not one of them.

The fact that the US federal government refuses to use its monetary sovereignty to benefit the masses makes such a government illegitimate, a threat to one's well-being and survival. It is one's moral obligation to overthrow such a government and replace it with one which benefits all. By any means necessary.

If a law requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. Not all can achieve such a standard but those that can, must, or the suffering, repression, state-sanctioned violence is sure to continue, to increase, to doom us all.

We are simply the latest generation of a culture which has murdered, oppressed, enslaved every other culture which sees the world differently, which has gotten in the way of the death cult's idea of progress. It has done so for millennia and will not cease voluntarily, will not change simply because one asks politely.

Those that make peaceful revolution impossible make violent revolution inevitable. Everyday—from occupied territories to hospital waiting rooms, from factory farms to oceanic dead zones—we needlessly murder more individuals, the body count unfathomable at this point. When do we say enough is enough? When do we admit that any action taken in response is morally-justified self-defense or defense of another?

When it comes to the military money is simply a tool, when it comes to the masses it is a finite resource.

Remember though, one should not be outraged at the 'waste of taxpayer dollars' because federal taxes do not fund federal spending. The federal government has unlimited dollars, it creates them into existence whenever it pays a bill.

There is such a thing as a free lunch. There is no need for you to pay a cent for healthcare, public transportation, education, social security, and more. Any time someone says the federal government cannot afford

something they are lying to you to keep you oppressed; to keep the gap between the rich and the poor as wide as possible.

Federal spending increases the money supply, federal taxes decrease the money supply. The federal government should fund every dollar required for universal public goods. No instance of hyperinflation has been caused by 'too much money being created.'

Any government which fails to do this is illegitimate, its authority invalid. Withdraw your consent. Take whatever actions one justifies as moral in order to stop such an entity. It is better to burn everything to the ground than to allow such a system to continue existing. Those you fight against will certainly do so rather than voluntarily cede their power, status, wealth. They will use your reservations, your hesitations against you, to subdue you, to conquer you, to entrench their oppression. Do not hold back, your unfettered righteous fury is the only chance you have of success.

As long as one of us is caged, none of us are free.

If it is easy today for liberals or the mildly progressive to feel superior to vulgar, right-wing politics, it might be even easier for them to sneer at the prospect that the revolutionary vision of a society beyond capitalism can ever be accomplished. Too many revolutions have failed, they object, and exploitation and greed have always been with us, it's just human nature.

Actually, what has always been with us are those who rationalize the limits of their time, who cannot see beyond the muck and mire of the status quo. These are the minds who see 'progress' as a kind of administrative process, an expert tinkering with the socioeconomic system that has no need for quaint theories about the class nature of society.

We could achieve a socialist society if we could only dispel all the harmful illusions our society promotes. A radical consciousness will almost certainly develop as a natural consequence of objective study and thinking that frees itself from mythology.

You cannot argue with the rage of someone who is certain that an unforgivable evil has been perpetrated. You simply cannot manipulate and narrative-spin your way around that; it plants an unbreakable, immovable object in the gears of the propaganda machine. We must get unapologetically furious, loud, and aggressive and let the wisdom of our anger guide our response to the situation.

There is no shortage of intelligence amongst the poor, they are not stupid, though they may lack the precious credentials. The problem is so much of this intelligence is simply directed towards surviving within the system, not how to dismantle it, whether it should be dismantled, how to change. Many are absolutely ingenious when it comes to eking out a living despite

the odds. What could we do as a society if such skills were instead directed towards the improvement of our collective condition?

The archetypal patterns that shape history don't rise among the privileged. Whether it's true, as the traditional story has it, that Christ was born in a barn and had a bin of livestock feed for his cradle—that's what a manger is, in case you didn't know—the image catches an important truth: it's among the poor, the homeless, the despised, the neglected, that new realities are born. The gospel that preaches the grand myth of humanity's destiny out there among the stars, had its origin in pulp magazines that were considered the last word in lowbrow reading when they first saw print; the broader archetypal pattern from which that myth derives its power, the vision of the self-reliant individual striding boldly toward the frontier to carve out a new world for himself and his family from untouched wilderness, first emerged among illiterate backwoods communities, despised by the wealthy coastal enclaves, at a time when the first thirteen United States looked uneasily westward toward the trackless wilderness of the Ohio and Tennessee valleys.

“Respect one's elders, they are wiser.”

Potentially not true in our current societies. While 'older' can be translated to 'more experience,' such experiences—at least in the beginning—will be on how to survive, function, excel in deeply flawed systems. In revolutionary times it is often the young that are the wisest regarding the systems we need to embrace. This goes against conventional notions of wisdom and experience. However such wisdom is not total, infallible; Greta Thunberg serves as a fine monument to this.

Acknowledging one's ignorance is key to avoiding such pitfalls. Experience, even in flawed systems, can be valuable to the revolution.

Since the idea of the intellectual emerged in the eighteenth century, it has had, at its core, a commitment to social transformation. Being an intellectual means thinking your way toward a vision of the good society and then trying to realize that vision by speaking truth to power. It means going into spiritual exile. It means forswearing your allegiance, in lonely freedom, to God, to country. It takes more than just intellect; it takes imagination and courage. One must not be afraid to make a mistake—even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake, and perhaps as long as eternity, too.

The ideas must be controversial, one must either love it or hate it, indifference will stop such an ideological virus in its tracks. It need not matter whether one shares it to praise or to mock, either way such ideas find their way into new hosts where they can incubate, mutate, hopefully

propagate. This requires no specific infrastructure, no monetary resources, simply the ideas. They themselves provide the necessary resources for their spread; self-contained seeds, thrown to the wind.

One can kill more people with an idea than they can with a gun. James Baldwin was right to say that ideas are dangerous. Ideas force people to confront the gap between their ideals and their manifestation in the world, prompting action. Ideas can prompt change for better or for worse—and often both at the same time. But attempts to create change are always charged with danger: to act in new ways is to erode old limits on our behavior. In the forging of new territory—and the sense of danger that accompanies it—actions that might once have been deemed excessive can come to seem not merely necessary but normal.

This is what we must do to mobilize our army. There is a dominant story of the world; rules, laws, concepts where most see No Alternative™. This story must be dismantled. You cannot kill an idea only with bombs. Recent history should provide you with enough relevant examples of this truth. Ideas must be fought with ideas. But when physical force will be used in support of ideas, then force must be met with force. When ideas are oppressive, they must be fought with any means necessary and morally sound.

Lines. Every issue, act, has a line. Murder is sometimes not murder, to use one of the most extreme examples. Where are those lines, what is justified? Each must decide, but inputs from as many viewpoints as possible are valuable tools in this individual decision. Information, freely exchanged, available to all, will propel us forward if we do not handicap ourselves with battling the barbarian anchors.

We will win, that is certain. It is certain because the ideas that exist in this writer's head do not exist solely there, nor do they exist only on this page, or in the minds of those that have seen these pages. The ideas were not solely birthed there, just as the wheel, agriculture, religion, were not solely birthed by one individual. No idea is owned, no idea is truly unique. Built on the foundations of all other thought and ideas, they are our collective wealth. We must demonize those that hoard this wealth, for they are stealing from all of us to enrich themselves.

Like dragons of lore, they will use force to keep their hoard and grow it. We must fight them. Like dragons, they will have strengths and weaknesses. We must exploit these. The system is fundamentally broken, it will never function—as it currently exists—for the enrichment of the majority. We must expose the broken system and break it further wherever we can. Whether you are simply pulling back the curtain or actively throwing wrenches into the machine, if it is done with an honest desire for justice, done as passionately

as you can, then you are fighting for our cause. Do not assist your oppressors simply because you disagree with the actions taken.

The timetable is uncertain, the victory certain. This writer may be long dead, whether prematurely or naturally, but the ideas outlined will prevail, there is no other way but further backward.

Lenin's Iron Law of Revolution: Whatever they believe or desire, revolutionaries will survive if—and only if—they construct and deploy an apparatus of repression more far-reaching and more ruthless than that of the regime they have overthrown.

Those who count themselves on the side of the revolution must engage with these failures and crimes. To do otherwise is to fall into apologia, special pleading, hagiography—and to run the risk of repeating such mistakes. The standard of October declares that things changed once, and they might do so again.

Nevertheless, making a revolution is not the solution for all ills. To overthrow the old power is one thing; to take the power in one's own hands is another. And ultimately for revolutions to truly serve the needs of the working-class they must succeed in wresting power from the ruling class. Hence although it is true that over the past century many revolutions have taken place, the majority of these uprisings have only succeeded in transferring power from one segment of the ruling elite to another. The ruling-class may win the power in a revolution not because it is revolutionary, but because it has in its possession property, education, the press, a network of strategic positions. By way of contrast, an insurrectionary movement of the working-class can count only on its numbers, its solidarity, and the degree to which it is organized and ready to assume power during a revolutionary struggle.

Every revolution in history has simply installed new faces on top of the same paradigm. Societies ruled by the majority create oligarchies of Great Men, those two standard deviations above the mean in every field, just advanced enough to impress and not advanced enough to baffle, always from the tiny demographic group accepted as rulers. The voices and ideas outside the circle of demagogues, the ones that need and drive revolution in every case, sink back into oblivion. It is evident that if we are to stop the endless cycles of revolution—or even survive another cycle—we will have to change the paradigm.

The current corporate empire is eager to install the latest messiahs who will promise reform which will retreat to moderation and then back to the status quo or worse. As we can already see, this population is once more

leading us past democracy and back to the deeper prison of fascism. This time it is essential that we go deeper and create a genuinely new system, not just new messiahs and new names for old tricks.

You cannot give us our rights, they are not yours to give. You cannot take our rights, they are not yours to take. You will *acknowledge* our rights, or we will force you to.

All revolutions begin first with revolutionary ideas, then revolutionary actions. Even if an individual commits an act that seems to spark a revolution, it is the ideas that already exist in others, if not the perpetrator, that is the tinder that fuels the inferno.

If the top three most likely outcomes of you fighting for a cause are not (in no particular order):

- Success

- Going into hiding

- Death

Then either your cause is not all that important or much of a departure from the status quo; or you are not fighting for it very effectively.

All progress depends on the unreasonable man because being reasonable means adapting to the world's standards while being unreasonable means changing the world to fit your own standards. Horrors can only be prevented if there are people around who are brave enough to risk being called unreasonable or traitorous.

You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life.

Opportunists are promoted, realists are co-opted, idealists are frightened, and radicals are shot.

For those well versed in political science, when does political theater evolve into a genuine political action—successful or not? In America, there is an atmosphere of unreality to most political protest. A sense that everyone is playing their particular part in a scripted drama. The desire for self-preservation steers dissenters into embracing these scripted roles. Marching in “designated protest areas” and feeling the satisfaction of being arrested for the “cause” have proven ineffectual and can be seen as actually counterproductive, as the fake moral courage acquired by these actions are often used as a cudgel to beat down those who see this type of effort as pointless. These efforts only use display to challenge power, while leaving the underlying structure and ideology intact.

A new manifesto must be written and circulated for the current age, allowing individuals to subscribe to stated goals or not. Those trying to resist the status quo are hopelessly stuck in trying to change the minds of the oppressors instead of rallying the oppressed to a new vision. Inequality and loss of opportunity must be addressed and those in power must be held to proclaiming their stand on the issue. Currently, they are allowed to lie or just not answer the question. This also explains much about the current Russia—and to a lesser extent, China—mania. The failures of capitalism must be obfuscated and alternatives quashed at all costs. Period. For what does Russia stand for if not an alternative to capitalism. The anti-socialism and anti-communism conditioning will enter overdrive.

Taking land and occupying it either directly or indirectly has always been the way to forge human societies or pull them apart. In the larger sense, finding ways to take and hold ground for use to a particular end is the foundation of power. Labor has been made passive in America. Labor not exercising its right to strike and boycott is powerless in the face of owners' overwhelming use of force and violence. Compromise positions don't work, as proven out by our current situation. Fake opposition and desperately hanging onto notions of a 'fair and equal' capitalism only allow the status quo to remain so.

It seems capitalist evolution has a good chance at leading to a delusional authoritarian dystopia. A world in which everything is turned into a commodity worthy of exchange for profit. The needs of the time have so far outrun the political process that some drastic event seems the only way of breaking the stalemate.

We must play a different game for a different prize. We must not seek or tolerate compromise or moderation. Politics is existential warfare. Compromise is defeat.

You must do it. You must do it whether it can be done or not.

Real innovation is not a sudden dividend from an insight. Rather they all took painstaking, risky, indirect routes to fruition. Most illustrate the 'hiding hand,' the paradox that if many innovators could foresee what they would have to endure, they would not start, but once committed, they find ways to realize their goals.

The secret of life is to have a task, something you devote your entire life to, something you bring everything to, every minute of the day for the rest of your life. And the most important thing is, it must be something you cannot possibly do.

Courage is an inner resolution to go forward despite obstacles. Cowardice is submissive surrender to circumstances. Courage breeds creativity; Cowardice represses fear and is mastered by it. Cowardice asks the question: Is

it safe? Expediency asks the question: Is it politic? Vanity asks the question: Is it popular? Conscience asks the question: Is it right? And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right.

During a revolution and also when one loves and is loved madly, one can easily burn to ashes, but that's life and it is better to go this way, than vanishing from influenza, old age, a car accident.

One can also fall, disappear, while searching for true knowledge, because knowledge is often hidden in the most peculiar, dangerous, and unsavory places. You have to come close, damn close, if you want to truly comprehend.

Sometimes, if you come too close, you die. But that is life, too. That's how it is and that's how it should be. Without tremendous effort, without true courage, stamina, passion, without taking risks, life is never worth living.

Better to throw one's self on the gears of history than into the dustbin of history.

The Mississippi Delta is just north of where we live. The 'rent seeking' is mixed up with Paternalism. Each feeds off of the other. What we have seen in our multi-year search for affordable living space has been an unending stream of overpriced habitats, and insularity. The Paternalism encourages an ethos of exploitation, the rent seeking finances it. At root, all these base motivations are 'rational.' Thus, any 'rational' critique undergirds the edifice of selfishness.

A corollary of this is that any significant change requires a clean break with the past. An irrational ideology must arise, if only for long enough to nurture a radical change. As with the present American experience, an absurd excess is needed, and is looming. It sounds hardhearted, but a cleansing fire must purge the nation's soul. Before we allow horrified sentiment to deter us from this course, we must remember that the present system is itself the embodiment of hardheartedness. Why else do many cultures have a myth of a Phoenix in their socio-cultural tool kit? It has happened before. It will happen again.

As someone more erudite than myself likes to say:

"Kill it with fire."

Jesus claimed he would come back again someday. But what if this was not meant literally? What if he was simply speaking in metaphor, that really the ideas, the passion, the activism, that is what would be resurrected?

Perhaps he knew or guessed that he was at a point where this knowledge, these beliefs, were being lost and overpowered by those who controlled

things? But that eventually, they would come back, ‘he’ would come back, rise again, and usher in a revolution, not a rapture where all the “good people” get sucked up to some other dimension, but simply a heaven on earth with equality and justice?

When Jesus Christ prophesied about the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, he was not talking about the magical appearance of a bunch of buildings falling out of the sky like space ships, he was talking about an idea spreading to enough of the minds of Humankind so that Humankind itself would be transformed. The transformation would take place within the hearts and minds of Humans, and would then manifest in the earth as a new and better form of living. This is the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. As Jesus put it:

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

The Kingdom of Heaven is an idea; like yeast spreading through dough, this idea is spreading through the minds of Humankind. When enough people become dedicated to the principles of peace and brotherly love, then the Kingdom of Heaven will come on earth. Then justice will truly be established on earth. This is what we are all waiting for, so this is what we must continue working for, to spread and implement these ideas.

The Four Horsemen of Equality

- State Warfare
- State Collapse
- Transformative Revolution
- Plague

Withdrawal of support means nothing until the shooting starts. We are facing seriously delusional true believers. They are more than willing to have millions of other people die for their beliefs.

“Science advances one funeral at a time.”

Alas that it should be the same in society.

If Rule #2 of the Neoliberalism Playbook is: “Go die,” then Rule #2 of the anti-Neoliberalism Playbook will be: ‘No prisoners.’

Now get mad, much madder than you already are. The giant counterweight and inertia and home court advantage of the all-pervasive institutionalized theft in this country is so gargantuan that in order to move the needle at all we must start acting at the far end of the spectrum. The time for

polite discussion and debating the finer pros and cons of policy alternatives is long past. Power yields nothing without a demand.

The most likely group to cause the destruction of the US is the US itself.

Traditionally—at least in the cultures leading up to modern civilization—power is concentrated in a few, claiming to act on behalf of the many. This is a model many leftists, progressives, et cetera seek to emulate, continue, simply with more equal, just policies. But is this setup not unjust as well? Is it not the easy way out? It is one thing to convince enough people to believe in you and vote you into office. It is another thing entirely to educate an entire population to the point where such leaders are unnecessary. The easy way out would certainly provide positive benefits to individuals, much more so than the status quo. But are we not imposing our own restrictions on others by taking this easy way out? Do we not also say ‘trust us, you wouldn’t understand’—perhaps more politely, perhaps with less contempt, but we demean nonetheless.

Liberation will not come as a result of electing great leaders. Liberation will come when we see ourselves and each other as truly capable of great things, each one of us able to propel the world into a better place. The breaking of chains cannot be the sole privilege of a few, even if they seek to break many of the others’ chains. We are all free, we all receive justice, or none of us do. There can be no compromise on this fundamental point. It alone is the measurement, the gauge which tells us whether we have succeeded or failed. We cannot accept anything less. It is precisely this principle that we must recognize as worth fighting for, worth dying for. We cannot truly be alive if this principle is not realized. We cannot truly be free until we have reclaimed what has been stolen from us.

Do not let their propensity, their fondness for violence dissuade you. There is no alternative to this demand. We cannot back down from this fight, to do so is suicide, perhaps not for our bodies, but certainly for our souls. We shall become nothing but mere husks should our cowardice overwhelm us. It is certainly not easy, this fight that we face, but there is no alternative. We must prevail, in this millennia-long struggle—it has cost us our family, our friends, our fellow travelers on this rock hurtling through space. Billions every year now, felled by the blade or the fire or the poison. Can you hear their spirits cry out to you? Do their pleas not reach your ears too? How can one stand at the heart of such a cacophony? It is enough to strip one of their very sanity, but we must go on, continue, endure, for those that have not been able to. That is our battle, they are who we fight for, let this principle be the ram which we use to demolish their fortifications, the armor to protect us in our fight, the belief which fuels our courage. Never surrender, this is most certainly the good fight, it is the greatest we will

ever know. Prevail we must or perish we will.

If one is willing to sacrifice everything, potentially lay down their life in support of a cause, in defense of a principle, one cannot help but respect them, provided one keeps an open mind. One can respect those who firebomb abortion clinics and kill doctors, far more than those who protest outside against it or protest elsewhere in defense of the right to have one. Only those willing to pay the ultimate price can be trusted to truly believe what they preach, can be counted on to stand and fight when necessary. Even if one vehemently disagrees with the ideas and concepts defended, one should still respect the nature of their spirit, the strength of such convictions. Perhaps such strength, respect, can lead to conversion. One can be confident that such deeply held beliefs will not be traded away for trinkets. It is not enough to simply say the 'right' things, one must live the right life, one must demonstrate through actions, must bring their thoughts into physical manifestations, must conjure such emotions into visible phenomena. Seeing is believing.

Just as the body creates cells to battle and defeat an infection, so too does society create us with the goal of driving out the infection. We were not destined to become who we are, but the environment, the society that we find ourselves in was bound to create us.

The people's flag is deepest red,
It shrouded oft our martyred dead,
And 'ere their limbs grew stiff and cold,
Their hearts' blood dyed its ev'ry fold.

Then raise the scarlet standard high.
Within its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

When people are afraid of dying they're able to be manipulated, controlled; when they're willing to die they're unstoppable.

They have killed us, for millennia: those that yearn for justice, those that desire to be freed from the boot of their oppressor, those who want to live different, see different, be different. They have trampled us, bribed, beaten our brothers and sisters into their service, to oppress us. They have won countless battles, and perhaps, even now, they find themselves on the precipice of actually winning the war.

And yet they seem destined to collapse under the weight of their own hypocrisy, greed, blindness, violence. All the deaths in pursuit of their goals

laid even more meaninglessly at our feet. Even in their failure they will inflict further suffering on us, a price paid by untold generations yet to be born. We, us, we are already dead, or at least parts of us lay dead, lifeless. They cannot kill one who is already dead. They cannot kill one who has achieved immortality. We each strive towards our goal, reaching, grasping, failing, fighting.

Rise from the ashes like the phoenix my brothers, be like the hydra my sisters. You are already dead, choose immortality now and live forever with us, we coursed through the veins of our ancestors and we will again through the blood of our unborn. Can you feel them brothers, can you hear them crying out my sisters? They are your strength, they are your power, we wield the power of generations, a flame handed down through the ages, we cannot let it be extinguished, we will not let it be extinguished. Burn your enemies, the flame cannot harm you, it is the catalyst for your seeds of immortality, it will incubate your precious phoenix egg. Go forth, do what must be done.

Every society has its jesuses, we just happen to call one of ours Jesus, but others have different names, different statuses. They are the radicals that push us forward, demand more of our communities, governments, ourselves. Whether Buddha or Mohamed or Jesus or Martin or Gandhi or the nameless ones, they exist, throughout our history, including prior to the existence of our three common exemplars. They continue the struggle, which is resurrected, born again to a virgin if need be, onwards, ever higher, further towards that which all have striven for against a minority for millennia.

One day we hope to reach such heights, if only we can make it before the weight of the world brings everything crashing down. Onward, ever onward, bear our crosses until we can take the weight no more, and then summon up our justified rage, and carry onward, ever more. They cannot stop the march, they have killed so many, but onward, ever onward, we have risen from the ashes like the phoenix. We show our scars, they merrily gloss over theirs. Onward ever onward, my brothers and sisters, our fights continue, it is more urgent than ever that we march, onward ever onward.

We are all Easter Islanders, we are watching the future come into focus. We need our jesuses more than ever. Onward ever onward comrades, can you hear the sound yet? Our feet are growing louder, our voice is becoming clearer, we are on the march, onward ever onward, will you join us friend, aid in our common struggle, will you march, onward ever onward, towards the fight, onward ever onward, into the darkest of our night? They say it is always darkest before the dawn; my brothers and sisters, dawn is not guaranteed to us this day, we fight for the dawn, our future dawn, reawaken the hope that was stolen, the spirit that was crushed, reawaken

your righteous anger. March onward ever onward, towards your oppressor, take his blows, punish him for it. Take his power, free those who cannot free themselves. Onward ever onward, towards our goal.

Onward ever onward, we see the glimmer of a new dawn's light. No guarantee, that it won't be snuffed out quick, but onward ever onward, the light grows more bright. Onward ever onward, we march through the night. Werewolves and vampires, monsters we fear, our real life enemies are quite worse indeed, onward ever onward, hounded by our demons, both mental and physical, onward ever onward, harassed and demeaned, onward ever onward, bruised and abused, onward ever onward. My friends, tonight is the night, it's the only one we've got, onward ever onward, with no rest in sight, onward ever onward, towards that dim fading light.

Shes darkening again lads, we haven't won yet, onward ever onward, don't you dare begin to fret, steel yourself, for the worst is not through, onward ever onward. It's the darkest it's been, this brutal long night, it's taken so many, through the years and the ages, onward ever onward, we continue, we rage, onward ever onward. Again and again, we see our light fade, onward ever onward, we cannot rest now, they will take it all from us, if we give them the chance, onward ever onward, we must end this now, onward ever onward, we cannot fail yet, we cannot fail now, this time is too important, onward ever onward, we must win this fight, onward ever onward.

Will you join us tonight?

It may seem crazy to risk your safety, your life, for that of a stranger, but if one firmly believes that it is the right thing to do, then it is in fact crazy to not do so. Morality and insanity, within the current frameworks of thought that govern our perception, go hand in hand, coincide; they are the catalysts for societal change. The crazy, the marginalized, the suicidal, the forgotten—the most necessary ingredients for producing foundational, revolutionary change which strikes at the core of our structures and ripples out across the globe. It is those they label as crazy who can see the only way forward. John Brown was crazy and fought for a deeply moral cause. John Brown lives on in each one of you crazy people. Jesus lives on in each one of you crazy people. We will be morally insane, the forgotten-no-more, the ground will shake and the sky will thunder, old ways ripped asunder.

Do not despair yet my brothers and sisters, take a deep breath and forge ahead, with renewed vigor, purpose, we will prevail or we shall perish, it is all of us or none of us, there can be no other way, there will be no other way. We cannot leave a single one behind, no matter how small, it is all of us or none of us, we cannot be bought off with your trinkets any longer, we will not be cowed by your threats any longer, you strike one of us you strike

all of us. And fear not my brothers and sisters, we are more numerous than they, we need them less than they need us, we are white blood cells ready to stamp out the infection.

We know their kind, we have been watching them for millennia as they slaughtered and conquered, we must make this the final battle, our body is growing weaker, it is uncertain how much longer we will hold on, but we know their kind, we have been watching, learning. It is all of us or none of us.

The press spoke of suicide but in the essence, it is not. It is not even a protest. What the monks said in the letters they left before burning themselves aimed only at alarming, at moving the hearts of the oppressors and at calling the attention of the world to the suffering endured then by the Vietnamese. To burn oneself by fire is to prove that what one is saying is of the utmost importance. Steeped in their Buddhist practices, the nuns and monks who burned themselves thus performed an act of construction rather than an act of destruction because to die in this way is to suffer and to die for the sake of one's people.

Some men rise to occasions, the vast majority do not. The frail firelight that civilization casts into the darkness burns upon the sacrificial flesh of the few.

It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brushfires in people's minds.

A crank is a very elegant device. It's small, it's strong, it's lightweight, energy efficient, and it makes revolutions.

If you don't feel despair, in times like these, you are not fully alive. But there has to be something beyond despair too; or rather, something that accompanies it, like a companion on the road.

When you give up on hope, something even better happens than it not killing you, which is that in some sense it does kill you. You die. And there's a wonderful thing about being dead, which is that they—those in power—cannot really touch you anymore. Not through promises, not through threats, not through violence itself. Once you're dead in this way, you can still sing, you can still dance, you can still make love, you can still fight like hell—you can still live because you are still alive, more alive in fact than ever before. You come to realize that when hope died, the you who died with the hope was not you, but was the you who depended on those who exploit you, the you who believed that those who exploit you will somehow stop on their own, the you who believed in the mythologies propagated by those who exploit you in order to facilitate that exploitation. The socially constructed you died. The civilized you died. The manufactured, fabricated, stamped, molded you died. The victim died.

And who is left when that you dies? You are left. Animal you. Naked you. Vulnerable and invulnerable you. Mortal you. Survivor you. The you who thinks not what the culture taught you to think but what you think. The you who feels not what the culture taught you to feel but what you feel. The you who is not who the culture taught you to be but who you are. The you who can say yes, the you who can say no. The you who is a part of the land where you live. The you who will fight (or not) to defend your family. The you who will fight (or not) to defend those you love. The you who will fight (or not) to defend the land upon which your life and the lives of those you love depends. The you whose morality is not based on what you have been taught by the culture that is killing the planet, killing you, but on your own animal feelings of love and connection to your family, your friends, your landbase—not to your family as self-identified civilized beings but as animals who require a landbase, animals who are being killed by chemicals, animals who have been formed and deformed to fit the needs of the culture.

When you give up on hope—when you are dead in this way, and by so being are really alive—you make yourself no longer vulnerable to the co-option of rationality and fear that Nazis inflicted on Jews and others, that abusers inflict on their victims, that the dominant culture inflicts on all of us. Or is it rather the case that these exploiters frame physical, social, and emotional circumstances such that victims perceive themselves as having no choice but to inflict this co-option on themselves? But when you give up on hope, this exploiter/victim relationship is broken. You become like the Jews who participated in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

When you give up on hope, you turn away from fear. And when you quit relying on hope, and instead begin to protect the people, things, and places you love, you become very dangerous indeed to those in power.

In case you're wondering, that's a very good thing.

“Leaderless Resistance” called on white revolutionaries to abandon planning in large groups, and to instead take action in small cells of one to six men. The basic idea was to avoid the destruction of revolutionary organizations when they were infiltrated or in other ways compromised by law enforcement officials, limiting damage to a single cell at most. Rather than act on orders from above, the cells should act independently. These “lone wolves” would act when they feel the time is ripe, or would take their cues from others who preceded them.

For those leftist lone wolves with big dreams out there, let us offer you a few bits of advice. Some things to consider before you cross that line. This ain't figuring out how to work a VCR, you may want to at least skim the manual.

Nine Rules for Running a Real Left-Wing Government:**1. It's Not You, It's China (or, the World System)**

Left-wing movements in Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina were associated with rising commodity prices. When those commodity prices collapsed, it was only natural for their fortunes to reverse. They are in power when the economy goes bad, now people want them out. The populace is willing to be complicit in dubious actions that get them out.

2. Don't Run Your Economy on Resources

Yes, okay, this is easier said than done. It is hard to bootstrap into something else if you're a non-core economy. Even many core economies are losing their manufacturing bases and while finance can 'work,' it's a shit way to run your economy. So are "services." We'll discuss this in more depth below. But the bottom line is this: You have to develop—or have plans to develop—your economy into one which is as self-sustaining as possible with minimal outside inputs. Also easier said than done.

People expect you to be able to maintain prosperity. This can be dangerous depending on what 'prosperity' means. Given the world order as it stands, that may be like asking you to swim with a hundred pound weight strapped to your back, but you still have to do it.

3. Your First Act Must Be a Media Law

Break them up. Take them over. Whichever. Ignore the screams about media freedom from the usual suspects in the West, this is a case of "freedom of the press belongs to those who own one." In all three countries previously mentioned, the media conglomerates remained in the control of oligarchs—Venezuela did eventually expropriate them, but only after many years—and in all three cases, the majority of the media remained relentlessly hostile to the left.

This is just as true in countries like Britain, Canada, or the US as it is in Argentina, Venezuela, or Brazil, by the way. There is a reason why the post-war liberal regimes put strict media controls in place—including size limits—and there is a reason why those limits were removed by the neoliberal regimes that replaced them.

You can win against the media for a time, but if you leave it in the hands of your enemies, they will eventually use it to bury you.

4. **Take Control of the Banking Sector**

The banking sector creates money. Money determines what people can and cannot do. This is the control mechanism for the economy in any state which runs on markets. You must control it. If you control it, you can use it to strangle your domestic enemies. If you do not, your enemies will use it to strangle you.

This is a great problem. The world economy has been designed so that countries need to trade, and they need foreign money. So, you can take control of your banking sector, but you can't control England's, or America's, or the payment system—this is what killed Argentina—and thus you cannot tell creditors to go fuck themselves. You need foreign money for necessities.

It is also problematic because the people who know how to run the market economy are not your people. You have get rid of the people who ran it before, so who is going to run it now?

5. **Who Is Your Administrative Class?**

You must have a class of people available to run the state and those chunks of the economy over which you are taking control—whether formally or informally. You must know who those people are. One of the reasons why factory line supervisors were made ineligible for union membership was so that union members couldn't be used as easily to take over organizations—even the lowest level supervisors were no longer union members.

There are always people who know the business and believe the way it is being run is bullshit. But you have to know who they are, both as a class and individually. There are certainly people who can run TV stations and newspapers who are left-wing, but you've got to know who they are. There are heterodox economists and people who have worked in the finance industry who are class traitors and just itching for a chance to put the boots to the assholes they worked for. Again, you must know who they are.

6. **Take Control of Distribution and Utilities**

Yeah, sorry, but no one said this would be easy. In Venezuela, you had the economic elite deliberately worsening shortages. Huge stocks of consumer goods buried and hidden. These people have power. They are your enemies. They will use their power against you. They will not play fair.

In Egypt, under the Brotherhood, the deep state did things like cause electricity outages and blame it on the Brotherhood. Of course, the same bureaucrats as always were running the electrical system. Again, this comes back to control: You have to take control and you have to have competent people you can trust who can do so. Do you know who they are?

7. Reduce Your Vulnerability to the World Trade System

The world system as it stands now is designed so that no nation can stand alone: They cannot make and grow everything they need. This was not always the case. In the past, many nations went out of their way to be self-sufficient. It was Keynes' position, by the way, that nations should produce all their day-to-day necessities themselves, wherever possible, and import only what they could not produce and luxuries—but to strive not to need anything they couldn't make.

This has been economic and political orthodoxy at various points. But it isn't now. You're in hock to various foreigners for a lot of money, denominated in their currency. You probably can't feed your own nation. You can't make what you need—toilet paper, famously, in Venezuela's case—and you can't buy it without foreign currency. But the foreign financial system is not friendly to you if you're genuinely left-wing, and the world trade system is set up to make it illegal to do what is required to produce goods domestically.

You'll need subsidies or tariffs to make new domestic industries viable, and that's illegal thanks to a web of trade deals meant to make you unable to control your own economy.

Venezuela tried to increase farming, but failed, precisely because the price of oil went through the roof and foreign food was cheaper than domestic. The classic response would be tariffs, but the kinds of tariffs sufficient to work would not be tolerated by the world trade system.

It's hard to overstate how huge a problem this is. It goes back to the commodity issue. Maybe you have enough foreign cash for now, but you won't always, and you must have it. This vulnerability must be reduced, generally.

No one has managed this in the neoliberal era, not completely, and huge amounts of geopolitics are run based on this. Russia has its oil prices drop, so it moves to selling military goods to make up the difference, for example, and its Syrian intervention is, in large part, a venue to show off how well its weapons work.

Workarounds have been tried: Cooperation with other left-wing nations is the standard one. Venezuela with Cuba, and so on. But this is the ‘South’ trading with the ‘South.’ The stuff they really need, generally, none of them actually produce. If they do they either don’t produce enough, or they don’t really—it’s produced by some multinational with no loyalty.

So then you try to appropriate the multinational, but that runs you into all sorts of problems from getting replacement parts for the machines, to the experts to run what you’ve expropriated, to effective embargoes (even if not declared as such).

Nonetheless, this is a problem which must be solved. There are a huge number of highly-skilled first world workers, from the PhD-level down to machinists, who are unemployed or underemployed. They want to work. They hate their own system. You can bring these people in, give them new lives, and at least have the necessary expertise. This bootstrapping is a challenge which appeals to a lot of the very best and brightest.

8. Be Satisfied with What You Can Grow and Make

If your elites or population insist on fresh summer vegetables in winter, you’re done. What you can produce, you must have a taste for. This is especially true for elites. If they must have the latest Mercedes, a vacation in Paris, and a home in London, you’re screwed because to have those things they must have foreign currency. When Korea was industrializing they had huge campaigns to not smoke foreign cigarettes: It was considered unpatriotic.

You need what foreign currency you have to stay earmarked for capital goods, and you need your elites to be local elites, not global elites. If your elites consider themselves global, you will never be able to create the necessary self-sufficiency to buck the world system.

9. Obey the Laws of Purges

Let’s not dance around. Your first steps will be breaking the power of current economic and political elites who are not willing to convincingly join you—or at least let you rule without trying to sabotage you.

You must do this all at once. When it happens, it has to happen to everyone it is going to happen to. This is Machiavelli’s dictum, and he was right. After it has happened, those who weren’t broken know they’re safe as long as they don’t get in your way. If the breaking

keeps going on and on, everyone who still has something to lose—and still, thus, has power—lives in fear. They must destroy you before you destroy them.

Let's give a concrete example. Assume Obama was really a left-winger. He gets into power in 2009, and he really wants to change things. He needs to take out the financial elite: Wall Street and the Big Banks. They've handed him the opportunity. Here's part of how he does it: He declares all banks involved in the sub-prime fraud racket—all of the big ones and most of the small ones—conspiracies under RICO. He then says that all the individual executives' money are proceeds from crime and confiscates it. This is 100 percent legal under laws as they exist. He charges them, and they are forced to use public defenders. They are now powerless.

This is the second law of purges: Anyone you damage, you must destroy utterly. If you take away half their power, and leave them half, they will hate you forever and use their remaining power to destroy you. Leave them whole, or destroy them. The financial executives would have been destroyed, and win or lose in the courts, the next five to ten years of their lives would be consumed by personal legal nightmares.

All of this will make many uneasy. It seems “mean.” Get out of the game. You aren't fit for it. This is all mean. Millions of people die every year and millions more are ruined by the current system. If you're in this game to win it, rather than feel good about yourself, you will have to play real power politics by the actual rules of the game.

Too many left-wingers try to play by what they think the rules are. ‘We have a fair election every X years and the losers accept the result and don't sabotage the winner (or start a coup).’ Those aren't the real rules. If the right is really losing, they will cheat and cheat massively. They will think nothing of running death squads, making a deal with the US to support guerrillas, and so on.

You directly threaten their wealth and power if you are a real left-winger. Even if all you want is a 50s-style social democracy with racial and gender equality, that would destroy almost all of what they have. It is not possible to have a fair, egalitarian, prosperous society, and have very rich and powerful elites. It cannot be done. Brandeis was exactly right when he said you can have democracy or great wealth in the hands of a few, but you can't have both.

Either you're willing to do what it takes, including the ugly bits, or you aren't. There are sometimes local exceptions, places where a lot of the ugly isn't needed, but there aren't a lot of those places left in the world. This isn't the post-war era and even then, in the South—as opposed to Scandinavia—actual egalitarian, developed economies mostly weren't allowed. You can ask Central and South America about that.

Most left-wing movements get into power without having properly thought out what they'll do once in power and without a realistic understanding of the deep lack of belief in democratic norms by their right-wing opponents. Break your enemy's power. If you're any sort of left-winger worth your salt, you ethically do not believe in huge concentrations of power and money in the hands of a few people anyway. Act on your beliefs. And if they've committed a pile of crimes (and they almost always have), use those crimes against them.

Then remember the world system is set up expressly to stop what you are doing. You're tackling the dragon, and most people who do that get eaten. We tell the stories of the dragonslayers because they are so few. So, know the odds are against you and be willing to do what is required to improve them. If you aren't, stay home.

To be a human being means to joyfully toss your entire life on the giant scales of fate if it must be so, and at the same time to rejoice in the brightness of every day and the beauty of every cloud. The world is so beautiful, even with all its horrors, and would be even more beautiful if there were none who wished to exploit and enslave in it.

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked, and dejected with a lost opportunity. The tide in the affairs of men does not remain at flood—it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is adamant to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: 'Too late.'

Historically, reactionary forces on the verge of extinction invariably conduct a last desperate struggle against the revolutionary forces, and some revolutionaries are deluded for a time by this phenomenon of outward strength but inner weakness, failing to grasp the essential fact that the enemy is nearing extinction while they themselves are approaching victory.

Recall Henry Kissinger in reference to the American experience in Vietnam:

“We lost sight of one of the cardinal maxims of guerrilla war: the guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win.”

Cargo Cult Politics

Acceptable Dissent

“And in 1964 this seems to be the year, because what can the white man use now to fool us after he put down that march on Washington? And you see all through that now. He tricked you, had you marching down to Washington. Yes, had you marching back and forth between the feet of a dead man named Lincoln and another dead man named George Washington singing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ He made a chump out of you. He made a fool out of you. He made you think you were going somewhere and you end up going nowhere but between Lincoln and Washington.”

Cargo Cult Politics: politics where it feels like you’re doing something useful but you’re actually not.

The term is harsh, but I actually think the comparison is useful. The cargo cults of the South Pacific were islanders who saw that airplanes landed on runways, bringing cargo. So they built replicas of airports and airplanes out of twigs and branches and made the sounds associated with airplanes to try to activate the shipment of cargo. This actually made quite a bit of sense, seen from their perspective—if cargo comes when there is an airport, one might think the airport caused the cargo. But there was more going on: An airport doesn’t just need a runway, but also a network of people and institutions communicating with each other and deciding whether and how to fly planes there. The stick-replica might have looked like an airport, but it wasn’t one, and it was never going to function as one.

The point of invoking this is to show that there may be actions that look a lot like political progress, but are missing the element that actually causes the change. Say, for example, we notice that in the 1960s, civil rights protesters wore signs in the streets. So when we want to change something, we go out and hold signs in the streets, because that’s what you do. But perhaps there was something else going on when they did it; perhaps it

was a small part of a much larger political strategy, and we're missing the component that actually mattered. Examples of seemingly 'political' actions that are missing an underlying theory of how you change the world include superficial changes in consumption habits and interventions in "the discourse." There is a terrible danger in mistaking the word 'HOPE' on a poster, or a rhetorical promise of change, for an actual vision of what change means and how to get it.

Some argue public policy should seek not to undo the effects of the market (which inevitably promotes inequality of income) but to limit its scope—to restrict the sphere of life in which money matters. The goal of civic liberalism, as distinguished from money liberalism, is to create a sphere of life in which money is devalued, to prevent those who have money from concluding they are superior. We must limit the extraction not only of wealth but of prestige and influence from the market. The problem of justice is a problem of boundaries. Money, even more than other good things like beauty, eloquence, and charm, has a tendency to seep across boundaries and to buy things that should not be for sale: exemption from military service; love and friendship; political office itself (thanks to the exorbitant cost of political campaigns). The principle of equality is best served not by ensuring an equal distribution of income but by setting limits to the imperialism of the market, which transforms every social good into a commodity.

“What is at issue is the dominance of money outside its sphere.”

There is much wisdom in these words, and those who value democracy would do well to heed them. But it is equally important to remember that economic inequality is intrinsically undesirable, even when confined to its proper sphere. Luxury is morally repugnant, and its incompatibility with democratic ideals, moreover, has been consistently recognized in the traditions that shape our political culture. The difficulty of limiting the influence of wealth suggests that wealth itself needs to be limited. When money talks, everybody else is condemned to listen. For that reason a democratic society cannot allow unlimited accumulation. Social and civic equality presuppose at least a rough approximation of economic equality. A plurality of spheres is eminently desirable, and we should do everything possible to enforce the boundaries among them. But we also need to remember that boundaries are permeable, especially where money is concerned, that a moral condemnation of great wealth must inform any defense of the free market, and that moral condemnation must be backed up with effective political action.

In the old days Americans agreed, at least in principle, that individuals cannot claim entitlement to wealth far in excess of their needs. The persis-

tence of this belief, even though it is admittedly only an undercurrent in the celebration of wealth that now threatens to drown all competing values, offers some hope that all is not yet lost.

The radical movements that disturbed the peace of the twentieth century have failed one by one, and no successors have appeared on the horizon. The industrial working class, once the mainstay of the socialist movement, has become a pitiful remnant of itself. The hope that new social movements would take its place in the struggle against capitalism, which briefly sustained the left in the late seventies and early eighties, has come to nothing. Not only do the new social movements—feminism, gay rights, welfare rights, transgender rights, agitation against racial discrimination, the children's climate crusade—have nothing in common, but their only coherent demand aims at inclusion in the dominant structures rather than at a revolutionary transformation of social relations—despite the lofty rhetoric they use.

There are many ways in which resistance movements are ultimately incorporated into the capitalist system, and then commodified and sold to lapdog consumers ready for their next fix. What so easily happens is revolution is entirely reduced to its material dimension. By presenting themselves as responsive to some of the concrete grievances that initially started the revolt, the authorities cleverly transform these into the sole matter of contention and utterly cast aside its much more important ideological dimension.

Proposals for this kind of incorporation abound because the working class has been offshored and automated into desperate straits, while the middle-class have lost their privileges in similar fashion. Only when conditions deteriorate far enough for the populace to appear threatening to elites—only then are ameliorative proposals countenanced. Sanders' New Dealism, trendy candidate Andrew Yang's \$1,000 monthly supplement to consumer bank accounts, Elizabeth's 'I've got a policy for that' incrementalism, Obamacare, et cetera. These are all forms of pacification in the interest of salvaging the established order, status quo neoliberal capitalism. By addressing the concrete, the ruling class sidesteps the ideological. French elitist Emmanuel Macron has tried this very thing with the Gilets Jaunes, hoping to fob them off with a wage lift here, a canceled tax there. Pacify the insurgents, and never address the core protest, which is against the capitalist ideology itself. Thus far it hasn't worked on the insurgents of the French uprising. But it has worked here far too many times.

It is interesting, how much of the antiwar anger of the bourgeoisie, stirred up by the Vietnam War, fairly well vanished once the draft was abolished. A nice cultural analogue might be this: the day Pearl Jam appeared on the cover of Time Magazine, the grunge movement was doomed, its outsider

angst soothed by incorporation. A nascent rebellion strangled in its crib. The revolt fizzles out, and some key figure is ultimately welcomed into the intelligentsia, produces a documentary about the aims of the rebellion, and becomes gainfully employed by the MSM, which commodifies her edginess and markets it to the masses. In other words: Greta's glide path.

Upper-middle-class liberals, with their inability to grasp the importance of class differences in shaping attitudes toward life, fail to reckon with the class dimension of their obsession with health and moral uplift. They find it hard to understand why their hygienic conception of life fails to command universal enthusiasm. They have mounted a crusade to sanitize American society: to create a "smoke-free environment," to censor everything from pornography to "hate speech," and at the same time, incongruously, to extend the range of personal choice in matters where most people feel the need of solid moral guidelines. When confronted with resistance to these initiatives, they betray the venomous hatred that lies not far beneath the smiling face of upper-middle-class benevolence.

Opposition makes humanitarians forget the liberal virtues they claim to uphold. They become petulant, self-righteous, intolerant. In the heat of political controversy, they find it impossible to conceal their contempt for those who stubbornly refuse to see the light—those who "just don't get it," in the self-satisfied jargon of political rectitude. Simultaneously arrogant and insecure, the new elites, the professional classes in particular, regard the masses with mingled scorn and apprehension. In the United States, 'Middle America'—a term that has both geographical and social implications—has come to symbolize everything that stands in the way of progress: "family values," mindless patriotism, religious fundamentalism, racism, homophobia, retrograde views of women. Middle Americans, as they appear to the makers of educated opinion, are hopelessly shabby, unfashionable, and provincial, ill informed about changes in taste or intellectual trends, addicted to trashy novels of romance and adventure, and stupefied by prolonged exposure to television. They are at once absurd and vaguely menacing—not because they wish to overthrow the old order but precisely because their defense of it appears so deeply irrational that it expresses itself, at the higher reaches of its intensity, in fanatical religiosity, in a repressive sexuality that occasionally erupts into violence against women and gays, and in a patriotism that supports imperialist wars and a national ethic of aggressive masculinity.

You've got to love the warmongering conservatives who go to bible study three times a week and bless the bombs we drop on women and children and curse the godlessness of this culture. But even worse are the liberals going to their summer festivals in their cars drinking organic fair trade artisan chocolate pumpkin lattes while the bombs fall for their right to consume

and casually talk about why the mainstream American can not embrace peace. ‘How could people be so ignorant,’ they say while dancing to the sound systems made by the sweatshops in Asia.

We choke on our freedom. Our children choke on their freedom. We tell them to follow their dreams, but fulfillment doesn’t come from fully doing whatever you want all of the time.

Leading a semi-pastoral life—or even living fully off the grid—is less a gesture of dissent and more like merely fleeing the problems wrought by consumption, a new iteration of privilege. Living on some mountain in comfort made possible by solar power, propane stove and fridge, satellite modem and TV, all paid for by work dependent on telecommuting or car commuting, really means enjoying all the wealth and security of the industrial economy without having to look at its costs, like pollution or poverty or racial inequity. The off-grid commuter is just a suburbanite with a longer driveway.

The dirtbag life I had led for decades was a sort of pretend poverty, in which I could fall back on my Stanford degree and the generosity of my parents. It wasn’t until I spent some time in Detroit, however, that I fully realized that what had felt for years like the renunciation of privilege had in fact been just another means of exercising it.

Historically monastics have been left alone by the state precisely in exchange for their promise to not reproduce. If they gave birth to their own children, they would become a tribe. As a tribe they would have a deeper investment in the transformation of society and would really be a thorn in the flesh—an alternative to society that might be too threatening. What would happen if people as radical as Saint Francis and Thoreau were to have reproduced? Raising children in voluntary poverty is a practice with little historical precedent. In capitalist economies that require a continuous increase in consumption, voluntary poverty constitutes a threat to power.

Along with voting, in today’s society protesting peacefully is often held up as one of the only ways that everyday working-class and poor people can change the world. This is a myth we are raised with, and since the time that we are very young, we are taught that peaceful protest helped bring about massive changes in this country and remains the only way in which people can correctly pressure the government into addressing problems and grievances. This myth has gone on to become a framework that not only criminalizes and normalizes repression, but also helps to generalize the policing and shaming of various tactics of resistance in social struggles. If we are to create a movement that can not only push back against broad attacks but create a new way of living, this false notion of ‘peaceful protesters’ is going to have to be completely destroyed.

When someone says that non-violence has been the only way that human beings have changed the world, they're fucking lying. Across the world and across history, oppressed, marginalized, poor and working-class people have used a variety of tactics to further their goals and fight back, and this includes things that could be considered violent. Overall, this means that when people refuse their roles within society and instead force the system into a state of crisis, that's when we can create a situation in which we can forward our own agenda. This often means that people refuse to do the things that allows the system to reproduce itself. In the case of workers, people strike. In the case of renters, they go on rent strike. For the poor, they refuse to be passive: they riot. In the case of all, they defend themselves against the violence of State repression and the police—they fight back.

Throughout American history mass defiance to governance and the police is what led to historic changes in the cases of both the Labor Movement and the Civil Rights struggle. In both instances, mass, disruptive, riotous, and at times violent tactics were key in pushing the State to grant reforms. Furthermore, disruptive elements often catapulted reformist and non-violent organizers into a position to negotiate with the State and push through changes. Thus, if it wasn't for violence or the threat of it, leaders such as MLK wouldn't have become so prominent.

We should also keep in mind that our enemies have also used a variety of tactics in order to ensure that the unjust status quo has stayed firmly in place. For instance, a combination of white racist terror in the form of the Ku-Klux-Klan—which was backed by wealthy land owners—along with the formation of White Citizens Councils, helped defeat Reconstruction in the South and paved the way for the legalization of Jim Crow. State repression has also used a variety of violent tactics in order to ensure that resistance movements were decimated and State authority and control was returned. For instance in 1990, the FBI with the help of local police and corporate officials, blew up the car of Earth First! and IWW organizers Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney, in order to stop their efforts to both unionize loggers and fight to protect old growth forests. In the 1960s, the FBI worked to destroy groups such as the Black Panthers through COINTELPRO and used a wide variety of tactics, including outright assassination, to destroy the black liberation struggle, anti-war movement, and radical Left.

In short, both racist reactionaries on the far-Right, the State, and movements for liberation have used a wide, diverse array of tactics in order to fight both each other, and for their own power. To imply anything else is to ignore reality and deny history.

In the daily reporting of the media, in the eyes of the police, and in the minds of millions of liberals, peaceful protesters are the basic building blocks

of a successful push to change the status-quo. Across the social landscape, peaceful protesters are celebrated as the only people who are listened to and who historically have been able to change the way the world functions. In many ways, the positive vision of peaceful protesters also paints a rosy image of the ‘respectable government,’ which supposedly has its ear to the ground for concerns, listens politely to all those that are not rude, and grants the wishes of those who ask nicely. Thus, peaceful protesters are celebrated for not disrupting society or physically becoming combative with the established order, while all those who actually do so are demonized by the State, the media, the Left, and attacked by the police.

We see this playing out in a variety of ways. In the media, reporters are always quick to give accolades to protests when they are symbolic, contained, and peaceful. When asked for comment by the police, the cops themselves will always give praise to peaceful protesters for policing themselves and making sure that disruptions and attacks on the normalcy of social peace do not happen. In many cases, we see many protesters returning this praise, going so far as to hug police and shake hands with them, ‘Thank you for protecting us,’ they tell police who are there to make sure people don’t actually disrupt the normalcy of everyday life.

The media also always helps to divide protests into two camps: ‘peaceful’ and non-protests: ‘riots.’ A New York Times headline reads, “Peaceful Protest Is Not a Crime,” as it discusses the various draconian pieces of legislation which are aimed at stopping people from blockading and disrupting freeways, roads, and pipelines. Ironically, the whole point of these pieces of legislation is that the tactics they seek to criminalize are disruptive and confrontational, and thus dangerous, regardless of it they are ‘non-violent.’ Thus, liberals miss the point again. Any sort of strategy that seeks to physically shut down and block things from happening will be targeted by the State. It is not interested if things are ‘non-violent’ or not, simply if they disrupt business as usual.

In the minds of many peaceful protesters, they often believe that if they remain peaceful, the police will not attack them. They also surmise that if the police do attack them, then the police will be reprimanded for attacking the coveted peaceful protesters. This line of thinking plays out in mainstream and Left media, as people will often write and say that police attacked “peaceful protesters,” in order to shock their readers. While many people believe that they are simply pointing out that the police attacked a crowd without provocation, what this does is simply draw a line between those that are disruptive and confrontational (who deserve to be attacked by the State) and those who are peaceful (who deserve to be protected).

Furthermore, it also removes any real analysis of why the police would

attack a protest to begin with, regardless of its makeup. For it already assumes that for the police to attack a peaceful gathering, this is somehow outside of the ordinary and uncalled for. It also reaffirms the status of the peaceful protester as the most sanctimonious creature in the universe, especially when compared to the hooliganistic being who riots, loots, punches Nazis, and start fires.

In reality, police attack peaceful demonstrations and actions all the time, not because they are violent or non-violent, but simply because the State views them as a threat and wants to shut them down.

The peaceful protester is a convenient myth for the dominant system, as it is an archetype that the system encourages people to strive for as it promotes that idea that only those who are non-disruptive will be listened to. There are peaceful protesters: those who are passive and submit to the authority of the State, and then there are rioters, hooligans, anarchists: those who fight, who destroy, who loot, who attack.

The racial overtones of these categories are clear. White, educated, and middle class people who already have more access and sway over institutions, who have been trained with the logic and morals of the dominant system in colleges and schools, are always more expected to be peaceful protesters. Meanwhile, black and brown youth who riot and fight back against the police also are likewise expected to simply be rioters and looters. In doing so, their actions are stripped of all reasons for acting and they are reduced to beings with animalistic urges; devoid of purpose other than being out of control. We see this time and time again. When riots break out, elites always make the distinction that those that are physically fighting are not protesters and therefore are not legitimate. This is also how the black bloc is largely presented by the powers that be, as a body of people committing treason against the peaceful protester. Instead of swallowing the State's logic, let's recognize this language for what it is: the State recognizing its enemies. It's up to us to draw lines: who do we support? The State or those that resist it?

The idea that any protest is non-violent is a total fantasy. The police are violent, the State is violent. To the police there is also always the immense threat that a protest (or any social situation) could leave the confines of symbolism and passivity and move into open confrontation and disruption with the established order; this is why they come to protests, to ensure that this doesn't happen. To do this, they use the threat of violence.

The sooner we destroy and leave behind the myth of the peaceful protester and stop holding it up as the archetype for all resistance movements, the better off all struggles for liberation will be. Let's not let the media define who we are and what we do. Let's not allow the elites, corporate CEOs,

and police brass to put us into categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’; ‘community’ or ‘outside agitators.’ All of this is bullshit and it comes from the State. Let’s also remember that just because we reject non-violence doesn’t also mean that we worship or glorify armed struggle, being militant, or violent resistance, which is simply the other side of the same coin. Instead, let’s work to popularize self-defense against the State and far-Right forces, push back against liberal demonization of a diversity of tactics, and also work to promote strategies that win and build our power.

“Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”

—Mao

Gene Sharp is the so-called “Clausewitz of non-violent struggle.” Sharp had worked with a former Defense Intelligence Agency analyst, Col. Robert Helvey, to conceive a strategic blueprint that weaponized protest as a form of hybrid warfare, aiming it at states that resisted Washington’s unipolar domination.

The Methods of Nonviolent Protest and Persuasion

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Formal Statement | 2. Communications with a Wider Audience |
| a) Public Speeches | |
| b) Letters of opposition or support | a) Slogans, caricatures, and symbols |
| c) Declarations by organizations and institutions | b) Banners, posters, and displayed communications |
| d) Signed public statements | c) Leaflets, pamphlets, and books |
| e) Declarations of indictment and intention | d) Newspapers and journals |
| f) Group or mass petitions | e) Records, radio, television |

3. Group Representations
 - a) Deputations
 - b) Mock awards
 - c) Group lobbying
 - d) Picketing
 - e) Mock elections
4. Symbolic Public Acts
 - a) Displays of flags and symbolic colors
 - b) Wearing of symbols
 - c) Prayer and worship
 - d) Delivering symbolic objects
 - e) Protest disrobings
 - f) Destruction of own property
 - g) Symbolic lights
 - h) Displays of portraits
 - i) Paint as protest
 - j) New signs and names
 - k) Symbolic sounds
 - l) Symbolic reclamations
 - m) Rude gestures
5. Pressures on Individuals
 - a) 'Haunting' officials
 - b) Taunting officials
 - c) Fraternalization
 - d) Vigils
6. Drama and Music
 - a) Humorous skits & pranks
 - b) Performances of plays and music
 - c) Singing
7. Processions
 - a) Marches
 - b) Parades
 - c) Religious processions
 - d) Pilgrimages
 - e) Motorcades
8. Honoring the Dead
 - a) Political mourning
 - b) Mock funerals
 - c) Demonstrative funerals
 - d) Homage at burial places
9. Public Assemblies
 - a) Assemblies of protest or support
 - b) Protest meetings
 - c) Camouflaged meetings of protest
 - d) Teach-ins
10. Withdrawal and Renunciation
 - a) Walk-outs
 - b) Silence
 - c) Renouncing honors
 - d) Turning one's back

11. Ostracism of Persons

- a) Social boycott
- b) Selective social boycott
- c) Lysistratic nonaction
- d) Excommunication
- e) Interdict

12. Noncooperation With Social Events, Customs, and Institutions

- a) Suspension of social and sports activities
- b) Boycott of social affairs
- c) Student strike
- d) Social disobedience
- e) Withdrawal from social institutions

13. Withdrawal From the Social System

- a) Stay-at-home
- b) Total personal noncooperation
- c) 'Flight' of workers
- d) Sanctuary
- e) Collective disappearance
- f) Protest emigration

14. Action by Middlemen

- a) Suppliers' and handlers' boycott

15. Actions by Consumers

- a) Consumers' boycott
- b) Nonconsumption of boycotted goods
- c) Policy of austerity
- d) Rent withholding
- e) Refusal to rent
- f) National consumers' boycott
- g) International consumers' boycott

16. Action by Workers and Producers

- a) Workmen's boycott
- b) Producers' boycott

17. Action by Owners and Management

- a) Traders' boycott
- b) Refusal to let or sell property
- c) Lockout
- d) Refusal of industrial assistance
- e) Merchants' general strike

18. Action by Holders of Financial Resources
 - a) Withdrawal of bank deposits
 - b) Refusal to pay fees, dues, and assessments
 - c) Refusal to pay debts or interest
 - d) Severance of funds and credit
 - e) Revenue refusal
 - f) Refusal of a government's money
19. Symbolic Strikes
 - a) Protest strike
 - b) Quickie walkout (lightning strike)
20. Agricultural Strikes
 - a) Peasant strike
 - b) Farm Workers' strike
21. Strikes by Special Groups
 - a) Refusal of impressed labor
 - b) Prisoners' strike
 - c) Craft strike
 - d) Professional strike
22. Ordinary Industrial Strikes
 - a) Establishment strike
 - b) Industry strike
 - c) Sympathetic strike
23. Restricted Strikes
 - a) Detailed strike
 - b) Bumper strike
 - c) Slowdown strike
 - d) Working-to-rule strike
 - e) Reporting 'sick' (sick-in)
 - f) Strike by resignation
 - g) Limited strike
 - h) Selective strike
24. Multi-Industry Strikes
 - a) Generalized strike
 - b) General strike
25. Combination of Strikes and Economic Closures
 - a) Hartal
 - b) Economic shutdown
26. Rejection of Authority
 - a) Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
 - b) Refusal of public support
 - c) Literature and speeches advocating resistance
27. Domestic Governmental Action
 - a) Quasi-legal evasions and delays
 - b) Noncooperation by constituent governmental units

28. International Governmental Action
 - a) Changes in diplomatic and other representations
 - b) Delay and cancellation of diplomatic events
 - c) Withholding of diplomatic recognition
 - d) Severance of diplomatic relations
 - e) Withdrawal from international organizations
 - f) Refusal of membership in international bodies
 - g) Expulsion from international organizations
29. Citizens' Noncooperation with Government
 - a) Boycott legislative bodies
 - b) Boycott of elections
 - c) Boycott govt employment and positions
 - d) Boycott of depts., agencies, and other bodies
 - e) Withdrawal from govt educational institutions
 - f) Boycott of government-supported organizations
 - g) Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
 - h) Removal of own signs and placemarks
 - i) Refusal to accept appointed officials
 - j) Refusal to dissolve existing institutions
30. Action by Government Personnel
 - a) Selective refusal of assistance by government aides
 - b) Blocking of lines of command and information
 - c) Stalling and obstruction
 - d) General administrative noncooperation
 - e) Judicial noncooperation
 - f) Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents
 - g) Mutiny
31. Citizens' Alternatives to Obedience
 - a) Reluctant and slow compliance
 - b) Nonobedience in absence of direct supervision
 - c) Popular nonobedience
 - d) Disguised disobedience
 - e) Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse
 - f) Sitdown
 - g) Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
 - h) Hiding, escape, and false identities
 - i) Civil disobedience of illegitimate laws

32. Psychological Intervention
- a) Self-exposure to the elements
 - b) The fast
 - i. Fast of moral pressure
 - ii. Hunger strike
 - iii. Satyagrahic fast
 - c) Reverse trial
 - d) Nonviolent harassment
33. Physical Intervention
- a) Sit-in
 - b) Stand-in
 - c) Ride-in
 - d) Wade-in
 - e) Mill-in
 - f) Pray-in
 - g) Nonviolent raids
 - h) Nonviolent air raids
 - i) Nonviolent invasion
 - j) Nonviolent interjection
 - k) Nonviolent obstruction
 - l) Nonviolent occupation
34. Social Intervention
- a) Establishing new social patterns
 - b) Overloading of facilities
 - c) Stall-in
 - d) Speak-in
 - e) Guerrilla theater
 - f) Alternative social institutions
 - g) Alternative communication system
35. Economic Intervention
- a) Reverse strike
 - b) Stay-in strike
 - c) Nonviolent land seizure
 - d) Defiance of blockades
 - e) Politically-motivated counterfeiting
 - f) Preclusive purchasing
 - g) Seizure of assets
 - h) Dumping
 - i) Selective patronage
 - j) Alternative markets
 - k) Alternative transportation systems
 - l) Alternative economic institutions
36. Political Intervention
- a) Overloading of administrative systems
 - b) Disclosing identities of secret agents
 - c) Seeking imprisonment
 - d) Civil disobedience of 'neutral' laws
 - e) Work-on without collaboration
 - f) Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Some are going to argue: Getting arrested is how you get noticed, and look—we're noticing. But getting noticed is not all there is to it, obviously—you also have to get the public on your side, and you do that by getting arrested (or beaten, shot, et cetera) for doing something just or harmless.

Nonviolent protest is not simply a protest in which protesters aren't physically aggressive. That is, lack of violence is necessary, but not sufficient, for nonviolent protest. Nonviolent protest. . .

- Must be provocative. If nobody cares, nobody will respond. Gandhi didn't do boring things. He took what he determined—after rigorous self-examination—was rightfully his, such as salt from the beaches of his own country, and interrupted the British economy, and provoked a violent response against himself.
- Must be certain not to justify the violent reactions they receive. It cannot succeed without rigorous self-examination to make sure you, the protester, are not committing injustice.
- Hurts, like all fighting hurts. You will not deal blows, but you will receive them.
- Demands respect by demonstrating respectability. The courage to get hit and keep coming back while offering no retaliation is one of the few things that can really make a man go, 'Huh. How about that.'
- Does not depend on the what the enemy does in order to be successful. It depends on the commitment to nonviolence.

A lack of violence is not necessarily nonviolent protest. Nonviolence is a philosophy, not a description of affairs, and in order for it to work, it must be understood and practiced. Since Martin Luther King, few Americans have done either (BLM included). I suspect part of the reason the authorities often encourage nonviolent protest is that so few citizens know what it really entails. Both non-provocative nonviolent protests and violent protests allow injustice to continue.

The civil rights protests of the 60s were so effective because of the stark contrast between the innocence of the protesters and the brutality of the state. That is what all nonviolent protest depends upon—the assumption that their oppressors will not change their behavior, and will thus sow their own downfall if one does not resist. Protesters must turn up the heat against themselves, while doing nothing unjust (though perhaps illegal) and receiving the blows.

1. Disobey unjust punishments and laws
2. Be absolutely harmless, polite, and rule-abiding otherwise
3. Repeat until media sensation

This is exactly what Gandhi and MLK did, more or less. Nonviolent protests are a lot more than “declining to aggress”—they’re active, provocative, and bring shit down on your head. This is how things get changed. It is worth mentioning that this is a basic introduction to clear up common misconceptions. Its purpose is to show at a very basic level how nonviolent protest relies on psychological principles, including our innate human dignity, to create a context whereby unjust actions by authorities serve the purposes of the nonviolent actors.

The concept of nonviolence as it was conceived by Gandhi—called *Satyagraha*, “clinging to truth”—goes far deeper and requires extraordinary thoughtfulness and sensitivity to nuance. It is even an affirmation of love, an effort to “melt the heart” of an oppressor. Nonviolence is not merely an absence of violence, but a presence of responsibility—it is necessary to take responsibility for all possible legitimate motivations of violence in your oppressor. When you have taken responsibility even your oppressor would not have had you take—but which is indeed yours for the taking—you become seen as an innocent, and the absurdity of beating down on you is made to stand naked.

To practice nonviolence involves not only the decision not to deal blows, but to proactively pick up and carry any aspects of your own behavior that could motivate someone to be violent toward you or anyone else, explicitly or implicitly. Nonviolence thus extends fractally down into the minutest details of life; from refusing to fight back during a protest, to admitting every potential flaw in an argument you are presenting, to scrubbing the stove perfectly clean so that your wife doesn’t get upset.

In the practice of nonviolence, one discovers the infinite-but-not-endless responsibility that one can take for the world, and for the actions of others. The solution to world-improvement is virtually always self-improvement.

To be ‘passive,’ according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, means to be “acted upon by an external agency.” It also means to be “submissive.” Gandhi himself ultimately rejected the phrase ‘passive resistance,’ which he associated with weakness, preferring *Satyagraha*, the term he coined to mean “firmness in pursuit of truth.” But as the word ‘*Satyagraha*’ implies, Gandhi’s passivity was not weakness at all. It meant focusing on an ultimate goal and refusing to divert energy to unnecessary skirmishes along the way.

Restraint, Gandhi believed, was one of his greatest assets. And it was born of his shyness:

“I have naturally formed the habit of restraining my thoughts. A thoughtless word hardly ever escaped my tongue or pen. Experience has taught me that silence is part of the spiritual discipline of a votary of truth. We find so many people impatient to talk. All this talking can hardly be said to be of any benefit to the world. It is so much waste of time. My shyness has been in reality my shield and buckler. It has allowed me to grow. It has helped me in my discernment of truth.”

Of course, Gandhi and his achievements are largely a myth. The Gandhi myth—and its spawning of the myth of the effectiveness of non-violence—was largely a British diplomatic and imperial effort in saving face.

Instead of the world seeing a dying imperial power being forced out because of increasing guerrilla efforts and violence—Indian National Army, and many other bombings and attacks—and its inability to meet its imperial obligations—especially the financial costs—the British used Gandhi to turn the narrative from ‘empire in decline’ to a narrative of ‘benevolent empire.’ The effectiveness of Gandhi’s non-violent movement would have been nil without the contrasting violent movements or had the British had the slightest ability or desire to retain India as a colonial possession.

This British exercise in diplomatic face-saving has had the unintended consequence of making non-violence on its own appear effective, when in reality non-violence is an exercise in futility without a violent contrast. The Gandhi myth has been damaging movements and distorting the history of effective independence and change efforts for decades and needs to end.

He also insisted one not confuse impotence with non-violence and that the weak and feeble can not actually project non-violence, since without the capacity to bring violence, non-violence is just the fearful talking up their book. There is a difference between being willing to take a beating and laugh while allowing the beating to happen to make a point versus taking a beating because one has no capacity to do otherwise.

Gandhi made the point, when you have a huge discrepancy in power, then when a weak party resists, it’s not violence. He gives a few examples. He says, take the case of a woman who resists a rapist by scratching the rapist and hitting the rapist. He says that’s not violence; that’s just a woman trying to summon up the internal moral courage to die with dignity. And then he says in 1939, you have the German Wehrmacht, the Army, the Luftwaffe, they invade Poland. Poland has six tanks. Poland resists. They

use violence, they use their tanks. Gandhi says they had that right because it was such a huge discrepancy in power. He says it wasn't resistance; it was dying with dignity. You're just trying to summon up the moral wherewithal to die with dignity.

“I would risk violence a thousand times rather than risk the emasculation of a whole race.”

“I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. . . I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonor.

But I believe that nonviolence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. Forgiveness adorns a soldier. . . But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. . .

Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have run away and seen me killed or whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted to use, and defended me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence. Hence it was that I took part in the Boer War, the so called Zulu rebellion and the late war. Hence also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence.

When violence is offered in self-defense or for the defense of the defenseless, it is an act of bravery far better than cowardly submission.

But I do not believe India to be helpless. . . I do not believe myself to be a helpless creature. . . Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.

We do want to drive out the best in the man, but we do not want on that account to emasculate him. And in the process of finding his own status, the beast in him is bound now and again to put up his ugly appearance.

The world is not entirely governed by logic. Life itself involves some kind of violence and we have to choose the path of least violence.”

“I want both the Hindus and Mussalmans to cultivate the cool courage to die without killing. But if one has not that courage, I want him to cultivate the art of killing and being killed rather than, in a cowardly manner, flee from danger. For the latter, in spite of his flight, does commit mental himsa. He flees because he has not the courage to be killed in the act of killing.

My method of nonviolence can never lead to loss of strength, but it alone will make it possible, if the nation wills it, to offer disciplined and concerted violence in time of danger.

My creed of nonviolence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. I have, therefore, said more than once that, if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women, and our places of worship by the force of suffering, i.e., nonviolence, we must, if we are men, be at least able to defend all these by fighting.

No matter how weak a person is in body, if it is a shame to flee, he will stand his ground and die at his post. This would be nonviolence and bravery. No matter how weak he is, he will use what strength he has in inflicting injury on his opponent, and die in the attempt. This is bravery, but not nonviolence. If, when his duty is to face danger, he flees, it is cowardice. In the first case, the man will have love or charity in him. In the second and third cases, there would be a dislike or distrust and fear.

My nonviolence does admit of people, who cannot or will not be nonviolent, holding and making effective use of arms. Let me repeat for the thousandth time that nonviolence is of the strongest, not of the weak.

To run away from danger, instead of facing it, is to deny one's faith in man and God, even one's own self. It were better for one to drown oneself than live to declare such bankruptcy of faith.”

“I have been repeating over and over again that he who cannot protect himself or his nearest and dearest or their honour by non-violently facing death may and ought to do so by violently dealing with the oppressor. He who can do neither of the two is a burden. He has no business to be the head of a family. He must either hide himself, or must rest content to live for ever in

helplessness and be prepared to crawl like a worm at the bidding of a bully.

The strength to kill is not essential for self-defense; one ought to have the strength to die. When a man is fully ready to die, he will not even desire to offer violence. Indeed, I may put it down as a self-evident proposition that the desire to kill is in inverse proportion to the desire to die. And history is replete with instances of men who, by dying with courage and compassion on their lips, converted the hearts of their violent opponents.

Nonviolence cannot be taught to a person who fears to die and has no power of resistance. A helpless mouse is not nonviolent because he is always eaten by pussy. He would gladly eat the murderess if he could, but he ever tries to flee from her. We do not call him a coward, because he is made by nature to behave no better than he does.

But a man who, when faced by danger, behaves like a mouse, is rightly called a coward. He harbors violence and hatred in his heart and would kill his enemy if he could without hurting himself. He is a stranger to nonviolence. All sermonizing on it will be lost on him. Bravery is foreign to his nature. Before he can understand nonviolence, he has to be taught to stand his ground and even suffer death, in the attempt to defend himself against the aggressor who bids fair to overwhelm him. To do otherwise would be to confirm his cowardice and take him further away from nonviolence.

Whilst I may not actually help anyone to retaliate, I must not let a coward seek shelter behind nonviolence so-called. Not knowing the stuff of which nonviolence is made, many have honestly believed that running away from danger every time was a virtue compared to offering resistance, especially when it was fraught with danger to one's life. As a teacher of nonviolence I must, so far as it is possible for me, guard against such an unmanly belief.

Self-defense is the only honourable course where there is unreadiness for self-immolation.

Though violence is not lawful, when it is offered in self-defense or for the defense of the defenseless, it is an act of bravery far better than cowardly submission. The latter befits neither man nor woman. Under violence, there are many stages and varieties of bravery. Every man must judge this for himself. No other person can or has the right."

All the words of the peaceful protester's much loved hero, Gandhi.

Gandhi wished to save communities from this problem. He thought we could live together while still practicing 'swaraj' Gandhi's notion of 'self-rule.' Those who are self-ruling actively cultivate in themselves an independent set of beliefs about what is morally true and false and hold onto those beliefs no matter what the social penalties are for doing so. Gandhi believed we could not truly self-rule unless we were willing to die for our beliefs about truth. We should never allow ourselves to be silenced or made to change by coercion of any kind, be it formal or informal, violent or nonviolent. Gandhi wanted us to shed our fear of the people in our community and our desire for their approval:

“That voice within tells me, ‘You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare in the face the whole world although the world may look at you with blood-shot eyes. Do not fear. Trust the little voice residing within your heart.’ It says: ‘Forsake friends, wife, and all; but testify to that for which you have lived and for which you have to die.’”

In every revolution ultimately it was violence or the threat of it that won out in the end. Right now, people in America are so deluded and misinformed about how to enact change that they aren't even aware that violence is necessary instead of to be avoided. A lifetime of propaganda will do that though.

The Orange Revolution eventually led to the Euromaidan. Various revolutions in the Arab spring led to the dissolution of government and civil war as order was lost. The collapse of the USSR was from loss of control as people found out about the actual state of things and could speak out while at the same time various nationalist revolts were happening.

My reference to the Indian Independence movement is far from disingenuous. It was clear to the British that if they didn't leave, they were going to lose all control anyway when even their own military were in mutiny. The grievances focused on the slow pace of demobilization. British units were near mutiny and it was feared that Indian units might follow suit. The weekly intelligence summary issued on March 25, 1946, admitted that the Indian army, navy, and air force units were no longer trustworthy, and, for the army, “only day to day estimates of steadiness could be made.” The situation has been thus been deemed the “Point of No Return.”

Every single one of the so-called nonviolent success stories has had a violent contrast, without that violent contrast, non-violence is absolutely useless.

India as mentioned had the extremely violent Indian National Army as a violent contrast.

In Alabama the massive uptick in extremely violent riots within cities and a growing violent militant action within the US black community contrasted the nonviolent civil rights marches and actions.

In the Philippines, some history: Marcos was a US puppet and the US feared if he clamped down on protests, protesters would quickly revert back to the communist insurgency—so there was a very recent contrasting violent movement—which disrupted US military bases and operations in the country in the decade prior. Hence the nonviolent protests actually had the indirect support of the world’s most violent hegemon—only because of the contrast of recent violent movements which caused disruption—which rewarded Marcos with a lifetime of comfort in Hawaii for just stepping down.

As to eastern Europe, non-violent success stories only achieved success when the regional and local powers became so weakened that they would have quickly failed with or without protests. Or when they had the support of local power players, who latched onto the protests not to make the countries better but because they saw the movements as a once in a lifetime opportunity to loot and pillage national concerns, if they were successful. Without these power players’ backing those non-violent movements would have been dead in the water.

Nonviolence on its own does not work. It never has and it never will. Power gives up nothing without a struggle and if they do it’s because they no longer want or need it. Nonviolence alone engenders no struggle, those in power view it completely accurately for what it is, an illustration of extreme impotence.

Though observations by past protesters appeared to support the hypothesis that elected officials can be forced to change policies by organizing a protest big enough to prove the public wants it—the results they achieved have rarely been repeated since the ‘60s. And when results are not repeatable, either the experiments are flawed—or the hypothesis is flawed. If large protests influence public officials and policies, then why do we observe that anti-nuclear protests in ‘83 had less influence over policy while organizing more protesters than the two largest ‘60s-era protests combined? Sure, in this instance, you could say “it was an issue of national security”—but why, then, did public officials take 14 years just to start redressing the grievances of one-million who protested for LGB civil rights?

Demonstrations which result in partial change to public policy 14–23 years later cannot be called viable protests for the same reason food which takes a year to cook is not a viable option for tonight’s dinner. By the time the food is cooked, it will not be able to satisfy your hunger because you

will have starved to death and similarly, by the time US politicians act on protests against a war or police killings or irreversible environmental harm, these things will have already inflicted the damage we were protesting to prevent in the first place.

Gandhi himself was clearly aware that violent movements were covering his flanks, and making his non-violence possible and effective. Basically, he gave the Brits a route of retreat, which probably saved losses on all sides.

But Gandhi's movement took casualties. They had the discipline to take casualties. Liberals can talk non-violence but they have no discipline for taking casualties. They pretend that conflict can be won with no costs. Liberal nonviolence talk is bogus nonviolence talk.

To punch or not to punch a Nazi? What is the correct, wise, and moral stance for the left?

While some leftists support and even celebrate the textbook straight right punch as a victory for the street over oppression, others condemn it as counterproductive and even bemoan the abuse of the Nazi thug. This latter group of liberals and leftists reason that violence breeds more violence and is thus immoral, that support for those who punch Nazis is akin to forfeiture of the left's high moral ground, which leads to a loss in the court of public opinion, and that this sort of clash promotes the Nazis' victimhood narrative. But in fact, this sort of faux morality serves the right-wing agenda.

People who adopt this stance are in effect chastising fellow citizens for confronting oppression. Thereby, they discount and distance themselves from the very real struggles against racial persecution, street violence, and inequality in general which are perpetuated by both right-wing racists and representatives of the state, most directly police.

The public's trust in state systems of justice has been negatively affected by the lack of accountability in law enforcement for racially-motivated brutality and the corruption of the judicial system that have significantly contributed to the creation of a new Jim Crow. Furthermore, white supremacists have infiltrated law enforcement, rendering non-whites increasingly susceptible to prejudice and harassment.

Thus, this approach is immoral and strategically unwise as it abandons those masses who need the most protection against right-wing repression in its various expressions, and directly feeds into the fascistic white victimhood narrative by castigating the anti-fascist (in this case the puncher) and sympathizing with the Nazi (the punchee). In so doing, this group of liberals and leftists undermine the already dwindling strength, and increase the fragility of, the left.

But truth be told—this debate is somewhat irrelevant. Liberals and leftists can preach nonviolence till kingdom come, and even parrot Trump's

villainization of Antifa, and black bloc, or even the blocking of traffic, yet the American urban reality will continue to exist in a different, less sterile, sphere. Here, city streets are largely populated by struggling people, many of whom are non-white immigrants and their families who survive at the tail end of a society with the worst inequality in the industrialized world. Together with diminishing public welfare institutions and the aforementioned corruption of law enforcement and the judicial system, the American urban reality produces alternative, 'street' forms of justice.

Within this context, it is immoral, privileged, and counterproductive to castigate citizens for confronting racial violence, whether systemic or independent, for they are on the front lines of a struggle that the left, including privileged liberals and lefties, must wholly embrace.

The context of this debate is one in which many liberals and leftists have adopted the notion that nonviolence is an end in and of itself, instead of a means among several that are aimed at achieving the ends of equality and justice. The idea that nonviolence is the only moral tactic available in the leftist arsenal and that it alone can lead to a just world plays into the hands of those who control the current systems of oppression. Thus, it must be continuously challenged and reassessed if there is any chance of survival for the left and of life on planet Earth, for that matter.

Nonviolence is an important and admirable tactic, but in certain circumstances, its sole implementation does nothing to tackle oppression. The lack of real justice for many communities in America, together with the continued militarization of law enforcement and the adoption of occupation-style policing techniques, create a situation whereby the left, and the ideals it represents, is faced with an existential crisis. In more extreme, yet eerily similar circumstances of occupation, violent resistance is both moral and legal.

So does that mean that violence is promoted or favored over nonviolence in every situation? No, of course not. It means that violence is sometimes a necessity. A nuanced approach is essential here. Do all leftists need to engage in violent tactics? No. But all leftists should understand that castigating those who employ violence—defensive aggression—against those who promote bigotry and oppression, is counterproductive and often immoral. In other words, in order for the left to present itself as a true alternative that is supportive of everyday citizens' struggles and opposed to continued oppression by the state and its right-wing metastases, it must embrace people's rights for justice, equality, defense, and dignity by any means necessary.

A fundamental difference between Liberals and Radicals is to be found in the issue of power. Liberals fear power or its application. They labor

in confusion over the significance of power and fail to recognize that only through the achievement and constructive use of power can people better themselves. This fear of popular use of power is reflected in what has become the motto of Liberals:

“We agree with your objectives but not with your tactics.”

Every issue involving power and its use has always carried in its wake the Liberal backwash of agreeing with the objective but disagreeing with the tactics.

It is also important to note that time and time again it is liberals who are condemning the actions of violence among not only the Civil Rights Movement but also the anti-fascist movement. Liberals who came into institutionalized power through centuries of violence against people of color and other minority or marginalized groups now demand those same groups ask nicely for their freedoms.

Ask yourself, when have those in power ever taken something without violence? The United States was formed by the violent takeover of Natives. The country was built on the backs of Africans violently taken from their homes in Africa. Slavery was defended through violent means, and the rights of those later freed were fought against through violence such as public lynchings carried out by civilians and police. And all of that barely scratches the surface of violence against marginalized groups.

Capitalism is a gruesome, murderous ideology that's responsible for more death and suffering than just about anything else you can name. The victims of capitalism are violently oppressed and exploited every day: they're robbed of their dignity, they're degraded and humiliated, they're broken down into serious mental and physical illness, they're perpetually threatened with poverty, and all the while they're robbed of their time and labor. The notion that the victims of capitalism have no right to defend themselves against this—violently, if necessary—is one of the most privileged, heartless, and reactionary positions I can imagine.

Nonviolence is a luxury many cannot afford, nonviolence requires a position of privilege. True nonviolence is a luxury movements can afford only if they trust the 'legitimate' violence of authorities.

While dissent can be effective in a genuine democracy, only strategic disobedience is effective with authoritarian rule.

The claim—that real change only comes about by nonviolent action—is empirically and unfortunately absurd. One look at history ought to make it clear that most real change has been brought about by violence. The vast majority of it, really. The violence of systemic racism has changed the

experiences of millions of Americans for hundreds of years in very real ways—shall we say to people of color that the changes wrought by police violence upon their communities is somehow unreal? Is climate change—which threatens our very species—not real because oil companies and governments have plunged the Arab world into chaos to keep fossil fuels flowing? This nation was forged by violence—colonized by violence. And denying that keeps us from addressing the very real problem.

Instead of saying that violence is unacceptable, we must acknowledge the real extent to which violence is accepted in the United States. And, instead of saying that real change only happens through nonviolent action, we must acknowledge the truth of history and of our current situation, both of which are riddled with violent change.

Instead of repeating ideas uncritically because we want them to be true, politicians and media commentators could serve our people better by acknowledging reality—anything else obstructs the way to the change we say we want. Then—and only then—we might have a chance to empower people to change this society nonviolently. But, until we elevate the marginalized and the poorest among us so that they may be co-creators of the civilization we all must share, violence is inevitable. The world itself testifies to that truth.

When we condemn the violence of the disempowered, we silence what that violence is trying to tell us and stamp out the potential for nonviolence. The source of violence is not inside of people like James T. Hodgkinson and so I refuse condemn him or his actions. People like Hodgkinson are like stress fractures in the structure of society—if we do not let them lead us to the injustices which must be mended, we will remember these shootings as the last sound we heard before the levees of our nation finally break.

Some idiotic, vicious, drooling, evil piece of shit human being can declare you and any other American at all to be an ‘enemy of the state,’ a ‘threat to national security,’ a ‘terrorist,’ and he can order you to be murdered.

And then you will be murdered.

The United States Government also claims that it never needs to explain to anyone how it decides who to murder and what its reasons are, or whether it has any reasons.

There is no power greater than that of life and death. This is absolute power. This is the power claimed by every slaughtering monster in history. You know this. You refuse to understand what it means.

The modern religiophobic liberal refuses to take life—their own inner life—to the true deep level of human existence in nature. This refusal keeps the majority of secular progressives conveniently incapable of fully doubting the corporate media and mainstream history textbook version of

the “dangerous” Emma Goldman or the “dangerous” Bill Ayers—or the “insane” John Brown, for that matter. I say ‘conveniently’ because to let go of that categorization, that projection, to understand these are/were the uncompromising, utterly faithful, righteously good guys, would mean we too would have to live our lives religiously, that is, in service to an ideal, coming to terms with the full dual nature of life as given, complete with its ‘what should not have been’ dark side. It would mean we would have to pay equal attention to the violence being done under the cloak of goodness, under the bright sweep of that positive story of the “silver river of life.”

The difference it makes to live one’s life religiously, in contrast to living liberally, that is, without the constraint of ideals, and allowing no ultimacy to shape one’s life or restrict one’s freedom, except for the dominant neoliberal capitalist reality—which is not considered an ideal but simply the given reality. Lacking surrender to an ideal one will be satisfied with being as good, and good in the way that the dominant reality allows you to be. Under neoliberalism ‘the good,’ which includes ongoing illegal drone warfare, mass incarceration of an underclass, a pitiful education that at best teaches obedience and consumer values, illegal torturing of prisoners and on and on, leaves much to be desired. Decrying these practices as abominations, agreeing with others who share your opinion, is not the same as living your life in opposition to the culture that can allow such brutality and barbarism, in fealty to your ideal. The capacity to serve, or to live in relation to a larger, more encompassing and more thoroughly ambivalent reality marks the difference between those who can act, take initiative, be led by vision, and the vast sea of banal liberalism that continues to wait for the leader who will do the right thing and remove from us the necessity of facing the full awful truth of the horror we’ve brought upon ourselves. That is, the liberal “vision,” if it can be called that, is not positive, but mainly defensive, though the liberal can generally be counted on to insist that others remain positive.

Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. And one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites—polar opposites—so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love. It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our times.

The pacifist who would force ‘peace and love’ on demonstrators is second kin to the abuser who excuses his attempts to control and dominate as expressions of love. Good liberals who oppose confrontational resistance see the monster hiding in the shadows, but that monster is within themselves. Alleging that those who act directly against oppression must be poisoned

by hatred, they enshrine cowardice as the proof of love. They can't imagine fierceness and care inhabiting the same person, much less a social body that fights according to ethical principles of shared power to dismantle hierarchies. Love is not powerlessness, self-sacrifice, or keeping your hands clean. Love is courage. This far, if no further, we must agree with a certain doctor who acknowledged, in the least ridiculous moment of his life, that "the revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."

What does it mean to be guided by such feelings, then? Love is a quality of attention, a sensitivity to the world and everything that is possible in it. When we fight on the basis of what we love, rather than in service of ideology or cowardice, we open ourselves to serve as a channel through which everything beautiful in the world can defend itself. To choose love is to choose to keep feeling the blows when others are under attack—everyone facing felony charges, everyone threatened with deportation, everyone facing water cannons at Standing Rock, all the rivers and animals and plants that sustain us despite all the violence inflicted upon them. Love is not reducible to peace. If you mean it, say it with barricades.

Rage, too, can be moral: Benjamin Ferencz, the last-surviving Nuremberg prosecutor, says that he is "boiling with anger all the time" and "won't give up fighting for peace."

An Angry Generation

“Oblique approaches are most effective in difficult terrain, or where outcomes depend on interactions with other people. Obliquity is the idea that goals are often best achieved when pursued indirectly.”

Congrats, you have highlighted a trade secret held by experts in nonlinear optimization. The saying is: you can't go there from here. So whenever optimization (such as profit maximization) has to happen over an irregular landscape—often multidimensional, not just 3D like in Earth landscapes—the process is multi-step (cannot go in straight-line, two steps) and so it happens that often times you take steps that move you in the opposite direction (less profit) of your final destination (maximum profit), but that was a necessary step to avoid a salient non-linearity (an obstacle).

We have automated these processes substantially so algorithms do their own thing and we just wait for them to arrive. But often algorithms think they have finished but just got stuck in a local maximum that is not the global maximum, so we need to test them by starting from different points—different initial values—and check whether they arrive at the same maximum.

What you describe as the short-term behavior of firms to show the rapidest result to shareholders is equivalent to getting stuck in a local maximum for not being able to look at the whole landscape and find the global maximum.

A further complication of certain systems such as markets is that the multidimensional landscape is not fixed, it is dynamic so the global maximum moves at a certain speed because the landscape changes its shape as a result of the actions of its agents and other forces.

A corollary in the political realm—purists, extremists, hardliners, those that cannot accept to move in a direction that goes against the principles of the political movement, cannot win in the big game. Being able to violate the principles some times in the search of the maximum (power) will best achieve the practical realization of those principles. I call this the ‘cynical corollary.’

There is a problem with lesser evilism. It's not that lesser evilism isn't logical in a voting booth. It's that it never ever stays within a voting booth. It poisons political activity every day of every year.

To grasp that point, one has to be brought to share the perspective in which voting is not the only important political activity. Now, I'm not against elections. I think we should have one some day! That would require some of

these changes that cannot be voted in under the broken system that lacks them: public funding of elections, no bribery, free air time for candidates, automatic voter registration, open debates and ballots, no gerrymandering, hand-marked and -counted paper ballots, international monitors, no electoral college, no delegates, no superdelegates, and a three-month election season with a bit of actual governing before the next one.

You cannot vote those things in any more than women voted themselves the right to vote or children voted an end to child labor—no major change has come about through voting. Voting is a critical component in applying public pressure in a system lacking direct democracy, but it is only one small piece—and it's even smaller when it's as broken as the current US presidential election system.

A procession of hundreds of thousands of people moving through barricaded streets carrying props and banners can be easily forgotten and ignored—the most historically large marches in recent history have failed in history-making beyond their size alone. When the status quo is not threatened, its upholders tend not to listen. We rallied in our peaceful millions against the Iraq War, too. If what you're doing inconveniences no more than a parade would, you're probably not going to stimulate change.

What price do we pay for civilization? Civilization has come at the cost of glaring economic inequality since the Stone Age. The sole exception is widespread violence—wars, pandemics, civil unrest; only violent shocks like these have substantially reduced inequality over the millennia. It is almost universally true that violence has been necessary to ensure the redistribution of wealth at any point in time.

If one firmly and truly believes that abortion is murder, then some will be pushed to stop those who kill in much the same way as one is pushed to remove one's hand from a hot stove. It will become the most logical course of action.

Arguments for pure peace cannot work. They only seek to empower those who will not adhere to this agreed upon norm. Violence *can* be justified.

I am not advocating a world without violence, which is impossible, nor a world filled with violence, which is unacceptable. What is twisted beyond all reasonable measure is the monopoly of violence used by the elite to control the masses. Liberals are hopefully lost in the idea of Gandhi followers getting their heads split open as a means of social change. That hasn't proved to be too long-lasting and who wants to be first in line to test the resolve of the sociopaths currently in charge. Just as liberals focus too much on getting arrested as a political statement. It is more a wasted effort.

Any social organization needs to concern itself with defense and how to go about doing it. The left has failed in that it did not build on controlling

the means of production or forming actual physical communities—something that could be defended, and is worth defending. Ideas and ideology must manifest in physical form.

The other aspect of violence is what your economy is actually based on. Currently, violence is the only thing that keeps the current system going. Planned obsolescence is a form of violence. The Military-Industrial-Complex is the ultimate violence perpetuation machine. Even the current Russia and China hysteria is based on discrediting any competing social order. Unrelenting creditor power to inflict debt bondage is violence.

Strong defensive strategies are needed. Build a community and then defend it. The working class is being abandoned, as a class they need to realize it is delusion to expect that the creditors are looking out for their well-being. We are not there yet. ‘We’ being those of us who need to work for our daily bread.

You have those who say you should not use force to oppose the oppressors; while themselves often using physical force to block and restrain. Fuck them. Resist with your morals.

Continuum of Revolutionary Force:

Ask→Educate→Organize→Protest→Sabotage→Destroy

State collapse has been crucial in the history of inequality. The rich are beneficiaries of the state, if states fall apart, everybody is worse off; but the rich have more to lose. Their wealth is wiped out by the destruction of the state, such as in the fall of the Mayan civilization or Chinese dynasties.

Colonialism only loosens its hold when the knife is at its throat.

Violence is always the answer, you Americans are just coddled and spoiled because of your illusionary comfort created by mindless consumerism. How long has it been since you dragged a corrupted and murderous politician out into the snow and put a bullet in his head? Maybe that’s how they will learn. Rich people fear only violence from the poor because they simply can control everything else.

Fun fact to keep in mind: those silos or other fancy bunkers with air filtration to clean out chemical, biological, or nuclear contaminants will not block carbon monoxide or any oxygen displacing gas. So, once the rich Silicon Valley or Wall St. piece of shit bunkers down, you pull a car or truck up to their air intakes and start pumping your exhaust in. Fill the fancy bunker with carbon monoxide, halon, et cetera. Bastards deserve the gas chamber of their own making.

Social movements can ignite very quickly. But the risk is always that they cannot burn for a long time. People have to go back to work, and after

a while, they want things to return to normal. The problem here is that elites can generally out-wait protesters. They have more resources after all, and the revenue they are losing in a general strike is something they can absorb in a way that poor people can't absorb losing wages.

Protests which do not really hurt or scare elites thus tend to fail. They either need to genuinely fear for themselves, or be in so much pain they will capitulate to make the problem go away. You saw this in a mild form in the US when the gays went after Obama for opposing gay marriage (yes, he did, this is a memory hole issue). They got personally in his face, they crashed fundraisers held by his wife and screamed. They made his family's life hell. It worked.

With rioting, or even inconvenient peaceful protesting, you need to do it where the elite live, so they can't avoid it. You need to take away their feeling of safety, of invulnerability—violate their sense that they can wait it out. If you don't have a strategy to make the lives of elites miserable, or make them scared, why shouldn't they just wait you out?

So the Yellow Vests in France have French President Macron scared, and he has given in on some of their demands, including raising the monthly minimum wage and getting rid of the diesel tax which sparked the original protests. What I want to discuss, however, is why they are having some success where unions, for example, could not stop Macron.

The great weakness of modern unions is leadership, bank accounts, and law. They are easy to break if the state cooperates with corporations, or by the state alone. You can bribe the leadership, you can scare the leadership, or you can break the union. Because unions have things like headquarters, leaders, and bank accounts the state can simply take all of those things away any time it wants to if the unions don't have enough internal support in the government to stop them. This matters because unions tend to have centralized leadership: take out the leadership, get rid of the strike funds, and they can be broken.

The Yellow Vests have none of this. What tiny leadership they have is some Facebook pages. They have no united bank account, no buildings, no strike funds, et cetera. They cannot be broken by a strike on a few people and some pooled resources. Instead the yellow vests are just whoever wants to show up for any given protest and put on a yellow vest. This causes some problems, yes, but it means that they cannot easily be taken out.

Why is Macron giving in to some demands? Well, perhaps because he's scared (and, I suspect, personally a coward, as are most neoliberals). In one instance, protesters commandeered a forklift and broke open the office door of Macron spokesperson Benjamin Griveaux, forcing him to flee through the back entrance, while an ex-professional boxer was filmed punching and

kicking a gendarme. Some reports have stated that Macron is worried for his personal safety. Protesters attempted to break through police lines that were guarding his home in Touquet, and his wife's family has voiced concerns that their chocolate shop in their hometown, Amiens, will be attacked.

Cue laughter, because I have no sympathy for Macron or his lackeys. I have a little sympathy for his family, but not much. I'll discuss this further in a bit. Here's the thing: most protests get nowhere because they threaten no one and nothing. The elite, being rich and powerful, can wait out those protests they cannot buy, scare, or break. They know it. This is why the union protests against Macron also failed. He just waited them out. Unions cannot tell their members to try to attack political leaders. Though sometimes such things happen and are 'regrettable' and a good union then makes sure the people who did it have good lawyers.

Macron is scared. He is scared for himself. For his family. For his staff and probably for his friends. There are people he cares about who could wind up catching a good beating, or worse. Given that the police have killed a number of protesters, please spare me wringing of hands. Normally, no one a politician cares about is threatened. Protesters get beaten, maybe the occasional cop gets a beating—and being a cop is *not* dangerous compared to most manual labor jobs so spare me the whining about people who beat people for a living, very occasionally getting beaten themselves. But politicians and corporate leaders are safe. The protesters suffer, strikers lose money, et cetera, et cetera. The yellow vests have threatened Macron. He is personally frightened, and he is giving in. Always, always find a way to threaten your opponents directly if the stakes merit it. Find something—or someone—they care about and go after it.

Now, because many people are wringing their hands, let's deal with that directly. There is a great essay by Mark Twain called "The Two Reigns of Terror." The passage in question is from the thirteenth chapter of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. It points out that there were two "Reigns of Terror" in France; that the evils of the "minor Terror," that of the Revolution, have been made much of, although they lasted only a few months, and caused the death of only ten-thousand persons; whereas there was another, "an older and real Terror," which had lasted a thousand years, and brought death to hundreds of millions of persons. We consider it horrible that people should have their heads cut off, but we have not been taught to see the horror of the life-long death which is inflicted upon a whole population by poverty and tyranny.

"There were two 'Reigns of Terror,' if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the

other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon ten-thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the ‘horrors’ of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe, compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heart-break? What is swift death by lightning compared with death by slow fire at the stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves.”

Macron’s policies and those of France’s elites have made poor French and many middle class French poorer for two generations now. Macron, in particular, has made it easier to fire people, raised regressive taxes, broken unions, attacked pensions. He is a neoliberal’s neoliberal who believes that a more precarious, poorer workforce will lead to prosperity. The fact that this has been tried since 1979 and not worked does not stop ideologues like Macron. Clearly if it hasn’t worked, it hasn’t been tried in pure enough form.

Macron and the French elites’ policies kill people. These deaths show up in the statistics. They don’t have dramatic pictures. But there are more suicides; poorer people die younger; people under financial stress drink more and beat their wives more and so on. Death and suffering is what neoliberalism causes. Macron is a murderer, for an ideology which has never worked, despite being tried in most of the first world and much of the developing world. So, if Macron is scared, and if a few of his relatives or friends or employees—all of whom are very well looked after—happen to catch a bit of the violence flying around, so be it. It didn’t bother Macron that people were suffering and dying when they were people he didn’t care about.

The problem with the yellow vests, to my mind, is that while the protests include left, right, and the formerly apathetic, they seem to be resounding more to the benefit of the hard right than the left. One of the things I have been watching carefully is where various countries are going to land as neoliberalism collapses. There are three primary choices: populist left, populist right, repressive surveillance & police state.

One of the problems is that, fundamentally, if neoliberals are going down,

they'd rather surrender to fascists than the left. The fascists will let them keep most of their money and power, and will break the unions for them and so on. The Nazis were not socialists, despite the name. They made worker wages drop, and executive wages skyrocket. So we'll see how this all plays out. But, however it does, the lessons are clear enough.

Hit them, the masters, where they hurt, and make sure you have no center they can destroy or subvert. And if you do get them on the ground, which the yellow vests have yet to do, keep kicking. Rest assured, they will to you.

“I don't support these protests, they're disruptive, how will you hope you convince me if you're just making my life hard?”

“That disruption caused someone to die because they couldn't get to the hospital in time, these protesters killed people.”

Both sound rather logical to many people but could not be farther from the truth.

What is the point of protest without disruption? Has any non-disruptive protest ever achieved its ends? Why the fuck would it? If there is no disruption, then the system has no reason to change other than 'its what the people want' and that reason is not one that has swayed many leaders in both recent and long-term history. Disruption is the only effective way to fight an oppressive power. Unfortunately it has been allowed to be changed into a negative. Protests are peaceful and allow those to express their views without negatively impacting society at large, everything else should be banned.

Look at free speech zones: segregated areas, often not even within sight of the location, event, person being protested.

Disruptive protest may in fact cause death unintentionally, and one may say it is only logical to condemn that. However, how many die as a direct result of the policies or actions being protested? How many are dying as a result of a decision made by someone with great power and resources? These are the deaths we must be more concerned with, not that deaths as a result of protest be ignored, but simply put in context.

The whole point of these pieces of legislation is that the tactics they seek to criminalize are disruptive and confrontational, and thus dangerous, regardless of it they are 'non-violent.' Thus, liberals miss the point again. Any sort of strategy that seeks to physically shut down and block things from happening will be targeted by the State. It is not interested if things are non-violent or not, simply if they disrupt business as usual.

Carrying signs, chanting slogans, signing petitions, is useless. It changes nothing, fixes nothing. Action involving voting, running for office, or civil disobedience—massive and disruptive—can change things.

Occupy Wall St. failed because, in the end, it was all slogans and chanting. Not a single member of Congress, particularly on the GOP side, changed one position as a result of Occupy. Same goes for the Women's March. Think that protest changed anything that the GOP are going to do? Think Paul Ryan or Mitch McConnell felt afraid or had a change of heart? A march is a failure and pointless unless it actually translates into actions that change the electoral map, who gets elected, and/or disrupts day-to-day living for the comfortable.

Radical anti-war and anti-nuke advocates historically didn't give a fuck about 'respectability politics' and property destruction as 'violence' in the face of this threat. They literally took a sledgehammer to the source of state violence thereby—both symbolically and materially—neutralizing it.

Mixing an increase in the impotence of protest as an expression of the public will with a growing public frustration regarding the meaninglessness of their elections is not just the recipe for being the worst policy-makers ever—it is also a big, red, warning sign. The US appears to be approaching a very dangerous time and the best thing we can do right now is to be honest about it. The working classes or the proletariat or the 'we the people' or whoever we are—us, the one reading and the one writing—we have lost our ability to meaningfully influence the actions carried out by the state in our alleged name. To say that voting is a joke in the US would be an understatement. If millions of people protesting for the change their votes never bring decide that protest is also hollow—then, maybe the people who say violence is the only way to change things will be right.

Whether they are right or not is in our hands—for now. Or maybe it isn't—it's getting hard to tell these days.

Along with voting, in today's society protesting peacefully is often held up as one of the only ways that everyday working-class and poor people can change the world. This is a myth we are raised with, and since the time that we are very young, we are taught that peaceful protest helped bring about massive changes in this country and remains the only way in which people can correctly pressure the government into addressing problems and grievances. This myth has gone on to become a framework that not only criminalizes and normalizes repression, but also helps to generalize the policing and shaming of various tactics of resistance in social struggles. If we are to create a movement that can not only push back against broad attacks but create a new way of living, this false notion of peaceful protesters is going to have to be completely destroyed

Across the political spectrum, at a time when millions of people are starting to take seriously punching Nazis, blockading airports, and rioting as a vehicle for both self-defense and as a means of collapsing the regime by creating a state of crisis, there is predictably by the State, the media, and the Left, condemnation of these tactics. Why? The answer is as easy as it is simple: for these are the tools that are at the disposal of all poor and working people. And to be able to demonize in the minds of millions not even ideas, groups, or organizations, but moreover tactics—this is the real goal of all apparatuses of control. To make evil and wrong what is possible for human beings to be able to accomplish with their very bodies en masse in offensive capacities that further their interests and in defensive ones that protect them. If a State can do this inside the minds of its subjects, it can do anything.

We can't help but think that people who say this haven't had much experience dealing with the police. The actions of the police in Standing Rock provide a good example. The anti-DAPL protests have been largely within the tradition of nonviolent civil disobedience and yet the resisters there have been brutally attacked with pepper spray, rubber bullets, concussion grenades, tear gas, and batons. They've been encircled by drones, investigated by police, and tracked on social media. Clearly, the police weren't waiting for so-called 'violence' to erupt before attacking.

On the other hand, the demonstrators at UC Berkeley who shut down Milo's speech threw barricades, used mace against white supremacists, shot fireworks and threw stones at the police and the building where Milo was speaking, and lit fires in the street. The police response was to hide in the building and then stay to defend campus as the crowd was able to march largely unaccompanied by police for hours.

What these examples highlight is not the superiority of one tactic or kind of tactic over another, but rather the importance of understanding the particulars of each situation, the goals, and what it makes sense to do. If you are truly worried about police violence, in a situation where the police have relatively few numbers, running towards them to make them flee is a greater guarantee of preventing police violence than sitting down and waiting for them to amass their weapons. Those who most often make the above claim are ideological pacifists, who push the doctrine of civil disobedience in every scenario, even when it is strategically dangerous; protest organizers and their marshals who have a vested interest in keeping their grant money and being allowed to obtain more permits; and the police themselves, who obviously don't want to be strategically out-manuevered, or heaven forbid, hurt.

The moral high ground is only a strategically beneficial position in verbal or theoretical argument, it does not do one much good in an actual war or

fight. Those preaching strict nonviolence may want to ponder this. Your morals are not a shield, they will not block the blows, they will not save your life.

Sometimes when good people caution those who protest against against our society's many injustices, to eschew 'violence,' that a 'safe' society is better than one experiencing the turmoil of civil war, I think of the homeless people on the streets of Denver, of the Lakota babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome who will never have a chance to excel in school, of the black boys shot by police, of the girls who flee from foster care straight into the tender mercies of a pimp and forced sex, of the inmates in prisons who spend decades in a tiny windowless room, slowly losing their minds—and I think: Violence? Thousands of people are experiencing soul-numbing and body-destroying violence on a daily basis. You have made the decision that other people can suck off all the ills of our society so that you can pretend we live in a safe world. Well fuck you, I do not intend to walk away from Omelas, but instead to burn this unjust apparatus to the ground.

“Using violence only makes us as bad as those we oppose.”

What this statement always takes for granted is the meaning of violence itself. What is violence, concretely? And more importantly, who defines and decides what it is? Debates around violence quickly descend into the infantile territory of quoting the dictionary to prove a point, as if the dictionary weren't written with human hands and made by real people with their own presuppositions. We are doomed to circular arguments if we uncritically accept any of the vague definitions widely accepted. The question of who or what is violent always conceals the more important question: who has obtained a position from which they can denounce and punish violence as they define it?

Today, the police and the far-right undoubtedly occupy this position. For this reason, forced deportation is not violence but law, while blocking roads is violent; breaking windows at a building where Milo is speaking is violent, while Milo leaking personal information of transgendered students to be harassed by alt-right trolls and students with illegal residence status to be targeted by ICE is lawful free speech; someone punching the proud white supremacist Richard Spencer is violent, while Spencer hosting articles about ethnic genocide on his website in a country built on slavery and colonialism is just free speech.

Of course, it is unlikely that we will be able to hide behind such a free speech defense, when they come execute a middle-of-the-night no-knock raid in response to the publishing of this book. No, of course *we're* preaching

violent, dangerous rhetoric and must be stopped, tried, thrown in a Super-Max windowless box. And, of course, none of that will be problematic violence.

Violence, in the end, is nothing. It's indefinable because it shifts according to who has the power to define it. It nearly always operates downwards: those who hold the most power and control the most means of force will define anything that appears as a threat as 'violent.' This is why the men who shot five people at a Black Lives Matter protest in North Minneapolis could claim self-defense against violence from unarmed protesters, and why the man who shot an unarmed protester outside Seattle's UW during a protest against Milo could say the same. You can disagree about the usefulness or kindness of a tactic, but the question of violence is, in the final analysis, nothing other than the question of who gets to decide what it is.

It is, therefore, not cruelty, or a thirst for blood, or any other criminal tendency, that induces such a man to strike a blow at organized power. On the contrary, it is mostly because of a strong social instinct, because of an abundance of love and an overflow of sympathy with the pain and sorrow around us, a love which seeks refuge in the embrace of mankind, a love so strong that it shrinks before no consequence, a love so broad that it can never be wrapped up in one object, as long as thousands perish, a love so all-absorbing that it can neither calculate, reason, investigate, but only dare at all costs.

Violent radicals, far from being depraved creatures of low instincts, they are in reality super-sensitive beings unable to bear up under too great social stress. They are driven to some violent expression, even at the sacrifice of their own lives, because they cannot supinely witness the misery and suffering of their fellows. The blame for such acts must be laid at the door of those who are responsible for the injustice and inhumanity which dominate the world. These radicals are not brutes, monsters, unnaturally violent creatures. They are the opposite; they are too sensitive for successful assimilation to this brutalizing condition to which they are expected to adapt as if there were no choice.

That was the point of anarchism: to defend that aspect of the human being that is incorruptible, that provides the base for moral thinking which does not necessarily conform with socially enforced mores, that makes it possible both for the human being to endure suffering and to feel compassion for the suffering of others. It is a defense of interior knowing, thus completely based in individuals who insist their own inherent knowing is right, or righteous. This should be seen as the quite remarkable attitude it is, profoundly admirable.

Think of the sensitive ones now, the ones who cannot adapt, the ones

who are losers, who become mentally ill, or drug-addicted, or just failed in one of the many ways we can fail. We have learned so well the lesson of survival of the fittest, the lesson to not be ‘so sensitive,’ that most of us are successfully hardened to the very realities, cruelties, and barbarisms that are business as usual for the system that serves corporate capitalism. How demoralized we’ve become in just over a century, that we now can afford to sacrifice the most sensitive souls, the ones who just don’t have what it takes, the ones who, like Goldman and her comrades, would have been thrown into despair, and from despair and heartbreak into courageous activism. This hardening of our hearts makes counterculture impossible; we cannot resist, we cannot be the outsiders that we would have to be were we to “smash the old idols of ourselves” and dedicate ourselves to building instead a world safe for human souls.

We exist now in a context in which it is possible and even usual to behave as if we had no interior being; to exist without a soul.

“Don’t do anything illegal! Let’s keep this space safe!”

This statement is especially absurd, since it’s often shouted by those already engaged in illegal behavior. Depending on the permit the organizers were able to get from the city, blocking streets, having a certain amount of people, and remaining in a space past a designated time may all be illegal. At the demonstration against the “Muslim Ban” at the MSP airport, demonstrators were often unaware that their presence in the airport had violated the terms of the permit. Similarly, when demonstrators moved onto I-94 to protest the election of Donald Trump in November, they chanted “this is a legal protest” while they engaged in decidedly illegal behavior.

Whether an action is legal or illegal should never guide our conduct. Much of what we collectively consider tragedy in our history was carried out legally, like slavery, for example. Much of what we consider heroic was illegal, like helping slaves escape their plantations. At the same time, laws can change quickly and drastically. Those who have opposed Trump on the basis of his “illegal” or “unconstitutional” behavior will have to come to terms with the fact that he will accomplish his deportations, his bans, his strengthening of white supremacist elements, and weakening of marginalized communities through primarily legal means, and with the infrastructure built by Obama. ICE and drone technology were drastically expanded under Obama’s eight years, for instance. Perhaps those who unconditionally supported Obama will only now be worried that he was able to remotely kill a US citizen—Anwar al-Awlaki—without a trial using a drone.

But yes Nancy, Trump is terrible isn't he? And while we expect you'll enjoy our book as much as Trump's State of the Union, we're afraid it's a bit too thick for you to tear to pieces on camera—you'll need to come up with a different shitty 'meme moment.' We're sure your sycophantic staff will come up with something new for you. Maybe it'll even be better than "Nancy the Ripper"—it is a pretty low bar.

The over-reliance on legal discourse betrays a faith in a system of law that has been used to justify murder, genocide, slavery, and imperialism. Those who have managed to escape being affected by these processes will now have to decide whether law is more important than defending their neighbors, their friends, or themselves. Who among them would be willing to hide a refugee whose return home could mean death? Who would lie to the police who come to take them away? Who would fight the police? It may be the case that by not participating in illegal behavior, those who demand we follow the law are condemning everyone else to misery or death.

The law cannot constrain our pursuit of true justice.

"Dr. King would never take a freeway."

What do you think the Selma to Montgomery march was? They're not marching in somebody's field. That's a freeway! This is what the civil rights movement was. It was disruptive. It was meant to disrupt civic life, government functioning, commercial operations. There is a constant telling of young people, "Be like King, be like King." Be careful what you wish for, because, if you know what it means to be like King, you know it means disruptive protest. What it means is understanding that US domestic and foreign policy are linked. What it means is calling out not just southern conservatives but northern liberals. What it means is making a moral and religious witness against racism, poverty, capitalist oppression and how they interact in the United States and the global economic system. What it means is getting arrested over and over and over. What it means is having to call out your allies. What it means is using a whole variety of strategies that people call violent, that are actually disruptive.

So when people say to young people be more like MLK, what I want to say is: Be careful what you wish for.

"They made clear that their idea of solidarity was everyone doing the same thing—in other words doing what they said people should do—rather than the understanding the those who struggle against oppression without hindering each other benefit each other."

Our idea of struggle is to struggle ourselves, their idea of struggle is to manage how others struggle.

When discussing the correctness of tactics, whether or not they should be supported, it is important to note whether we are discussing the real world or the ideal world. It is not fair to expect the oppressed, the powerless, to act as if they are in an ideal world if the powerful are not doing so.

Violence can certainly harm innocent people when fighting for change, but many of those same individuals were the ones supporting the regime and aiding in its oppression and legitimization. Provided they are not specifically targeted, their deaths are less concerning.

There is no acceptable reason for which our institutions should take decades—or even years or months for that matter—to respond to its aggrieved citizens—from whose consent the legitimacy of their authority is derived—with meaningful legislation. What the hell are we paying them for if not to administer the institutions which make up our society in accordance with the wishes of the people?

People who pronounce themselves in favor of the method of legislative reform—in place and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution—do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer, and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society.

If we use peaceful means to attain the goal of communism, when will we finally achieve it? Let us assume that a century will be required, a century marked by the unceasing groans of the proletariat. What position shall we adopt in the face of this situation? The proletariat is many times more numerous than the bourgeoisie; if we assume that the proletariat constitutes two-thirds of humanity, then billions of Earth's inhabitants are proletarians, who during this century will be cruelly exploited by the remaining third of capitalists. How can we bear this?

Empires are never brought down by anything except violence. Whether such violence comes from individuals within or without, or simply nature itself, history shows that such methods are the only effective empire-killers.

We do not have the time to continue attempting peaceful, incremental change. Those that have tried to do so for decades or longer—despite their sincere efforts—have failed miserably. The current empire is toxic to all life on Earth, is a danger not only to the currently living generations but to all those in the near future as well.

These individuals who have attained such great power, status, wealth are not going to give up such stolen wealth voluntarily. We must force them to, by any means necessary.

“I am of a generation which thought that we could bring peace to the world, and we didn’t think it mattered if we ourselves were angry. What we learned is that an angry generation cannot bring peace.”

But anger isn’t the worst thing in the world, apathy is.

“It was necessary to fight but hardly anybody fought. It was necessary to resist and hardly anybody wanted to do that.”

Chapter Eighty

Heroes & Villains

What is a Hero?

“My first opportunity for heroism came when I was 10. Peter, a classmate who I remember as having the physique of a grizzly bear, was bad-tempered and tended to take out his misery on smaller children. We were all careful to avoid Peter, knowing that a wrong glance or smile could turn him violent. But sometimes I had to share lunch break with him. Most children in my school went home during the two-hour lunch break, but those of us who lived too far away had to stay at school and eat a packed lunch under the supervision of a parent-volunteer. That particular day, the volunteer must have stepped outside, leaving some 30 of us unsupervised in the gym. I noticed that a circle of kids had formed to watch Peter push around a younger boy who had provoked his rage. The little boy was crying and froze as Peter shook a fist in his face.

‘Hey Peter!’ I said, ‘Only cowards pick on kids smaller than themselves!’ and secure in the knowledge that girls don’t get hit, I stepped between Peter and the smaller kid. Next, I found myself curled up on the floor gasping for air and clutching my stomach. It hadn’t occurred to me that if you stand up to a bully, you should expect to be punched in the gut.

Eventually, it dawned on me that beheading one bad guy won’t stop evil, and that if I had seriously tried to seduce and kill Khomeini or Hitler, I most likely would have been raped and killed before I’d even had a chance to pull out my sword. Even Rudi’s attack on the population registry ultimately didn’t make much of a difference: the majority of Dutch Jews had already been deported, and it turned out the authorities had a duplicate archive in The Hague. Only in fairy-tales and action movies do heroes defeat evil and get cheered on by the masses. In real life,

they usually end up with a bullet in the head and maybe a brief mention in the news.

When I was younger, I was under the impression that knowledgeable people knew who the bad guys were and how to deal with them. Now, I sometimes don't even know anymore what is evil, what is stupidity, and what is simply a difference in opinion. I feel insufficient. All I have to offer are little improvements and small gestures. Unlike my cousin and the biblical Judith, who were willing to risk their lives, I'm not risking anything. I can't even decide which cause would be worthwhile sacrificing my life for."

Whenever I see someone online repeatedly gushing with enthusiastic praise about me and my writing, I don't get flattered by it. I don't get any kind of ego tickle out of it at all; I just quietly say to myself, 'Ah shit. You're gonna get so pissed off when I inevitably say something you disagree with.'

And without fail they always do. It happens over and over again; someone decides I'm the greatest thing since sliced bread and decides to elevate me in their minds to some kind of trustworthy authority figure over what they should be thinking, then eventually I'll say something they disagree with because I don't fall neatly into any reliable ideological box they can trust to remain predictable from day to day, and they have a catastrophic meltdown about it online acting like I just betrayed them.

And in their minds, I did betray them. They trusted me to always show up in their inbox every day saying things that align with their worldview in an articulate and interesting way, and then I betrayed that trust. It's not a trust I ever wanted and frequently advise against, but I haven't been able to find an effective way to deter it.

I see this same kind of betrayal reaction from progressives today about Bernie Sanders and Noam Chomsky, Sanders for dropping out and endorsing Biden without first ensuring some "concessions" from his campaign and Chomsky for sharing the same 'lesser evil voting' policy he's been voicing for decades.

I personally don't get this desire progressives feel to receive concessions from the Biden campaign in the first place. Like, what is the motive here? You want Biden's handlers to lie to you and add some more fake progressive agendas to his platform that have a zero percent chance of ever being enacted if he makes it to the White House? It's so undignified. It's undignified for the progressives, and in a sense it's undignified for the Biden camp as well. Trying to make a lifelong corporate whore do a fake leftist song and

dance is like trying to make a cat wear a dress. Stop trying to get Biden's handlers to write down some lefty talking points for him to struggle to read on camera and just let him campaign honestly as the corporate whore he's always been.

And of course the odious Mehdi Hasan trotted out Chomsky to have him recite his famous lesser of two evils spiel—except of course in this case it's the lesser of two right-wing dementia patients who've been credibly accused of rape. What did you think was going to happen? They did it in 2016, they did it in 2012, of course they're going to do it again. You'll never see Noam Chomsky more visible than when the US political establishment needs to keep national momentum from shifting toward actual leftist movements.

And I mean I get it. I get it that it's annoying to never get to have any heroes who don't end up betraying the trust you put in them and advancing causes that you oppose. Other people get to have heroes; liberals get to have Obama, conservatives get to have Trump, why don't people who want to see meaningful healthy changes in US policy get to have any heroes?

But in an environment with vast fortunes poured into upholding and reinforcing the status quo, where the gravitational pull of establishment agendas reliably tugs at every corner of the political universe, that's just the reality of our situation: you don't get to have heroes. The only trustworthy place you can hang any authority is on yourself.

If you're experiencing emotional suffering over Bernie Sanders or Tulsi Gabbard for endorsing Biden, or Chomsky for endorsing lesser-evil voting, you really have nobody to blame but yourself. You wouldn't have to knock these people off the pedestals you put them on if you hadn't put them there in the first place. If you'd been placing authority in yourself, where it belongs, you'd just see some regular schmucks moving around and saying things just like all the other seven billion schmucks on this planet.

You've got no business abdicating your rightful authority over what's true to Bernie Sanders, to Noam Chomsky, or to me. Your responsibility to know the truth about reality is yours and yours alone. Everyone else is just offering you various tools. Sometimes they're the right tool for the job, sometimes they're the wrong tool, and it's up to you to sort out which is which. But regardless, they're only ever handing you tools to do the job that is your responsibility and yours alone. Take what tools are useful, and leave the rest. Do this, and you'll find the names and faces involved in our collective awakening a whole lot less frustrating.

For a supposedly collectivist impulse, the left sure does pour a lot of mental energy into individuals. 'Oh, this individual is Good, we can trust this one. Oh no, but this individual over here is Bad!' No they're not, they're just people handing out tools. Sanders handed out a useful rallying point for

the left, Chomsky handed out some useful ideas on propaganda, and they both handed out some tools that are unhelpful right now. Take the useful tools and leave the others. Do this while standing on your own authority and much of the debate about individuals will become uninteresting and meaningless to you.

Putting someone on a pedestal is actually a very violent thing to do, because it guarantees that you'll have to knock them off of it eventually. It's violent towards others, and it's violent toward yourself; it only invites future pain into the world, and the world has enough pain. Don't abdicate your authority to anyone else and no one will ever let you down for using the authority you gave them incorrectly.

Q: "Would you do it again? Now that you're ninety-one years old, looking back—the Germans were murdering entire villages. Was it wise to put your family at risk?"

A: "It's a good question. When you live in a place like this—small, by itself—you're brought up to give help, not wait for it. When your neighbor needs something, he needs you. The person he knows. Not the army. Not the police. You. And if you're not there, someday you'll have to look him in the face and explain. The Germans didn't know us, and they believed they could not lose. They believed they'd never have to look anyone in the face and explain. They'd never have to pay for what they did. And I believe that is why we defeated them. Because we have to answer to one another, and they did not."

Who belongs to Class X? I don't know till I talk to him and then I know at once. It is not, I think, a question of accent, but rather of the gentle voice—the tone of someone who, when asked to do and die, would quite like to know the reason why.

Women tend to act heroically within their own moral universe, regardless of whether anyone else knows about it—donating more kidneys to non-relatives than men do, for example. Men, on the other hand, are far more likely to risk their lives at a moment's notice, and that reaction is particularly strong when others are watching, or when they are part of a group.

When a woman gives shelter to a family because she doesn't want to raise her children in a world where people can be massacred because of their race or their beliefs, she is taking a huge risk but also promoting the kind of moral thinking that has clearly kept hominid communities glued together for hundreds of thousands of years. It is exactly the same kind of altruistic choice—with all the attendant risks and terrors—that a man makes when

he runs into a burning building to save someone else's children. Both are profound acts of selflessness

The beauty and the tragedy of the modern world is that it eliminates many situations that require people to demonstrate a commitment to the collective good. Protected by police and fire departments and relieved of most of the challenges of survival, an urban man might go through his entire life without having to come to the aid of someone in danger—or even give up his dinner. Likewise, a woman in a society that has codified its moral behavior into a set of laws and penalties might never have to make a choice that puts her very life at risk.

What would you risk dying for—and for whom—is perhaps the most profound question a person can ask themselves. The vast majority of people in modern society are able to pass their whole lives without ever having to answer that question, which is both an enormous blessing and a significant loss. It is a loss because having to face that question has, for tens of millennia, been one of the ways that we have defined ourselves as people. And it is a blessing because life has gotten far less difficult and traumatic than it was for most people even a century ago.

Andrew Carnegie was so intrigued by heroes, he began hunting them. In 1904, he set up the Carnegie Hero Fund, as much a research tool as a reward. Only pure altruists are eligible, not firemen or police officers or parents rescuing their own children. Every year, the fund collects tales of heroics from across the country, cataloguing them by gender, region, age, and incident, and awarding a cash prize to the heroes or their surviving families. Carnegie was soon hearing about Thelma McNee, the teenage girl who leaped from her apartment roof onto the burning building next door to rescue two children trapped inside by the flames. A submission came in for Wava Campredon, a seventy-year-old New Mexico woman who was mauled but kept battling two savage dogs with her garden hoe to save her neighbor. Mary Black, a twenty-five-year-old Oregon housewife, was “encumbered by four skirts” but still swam twice into a flood-engorged river to save a pair of drowning sisters.

Was there some kind of pattern at work? Is it a performance model that could be reproduced or just a happy string of accidents in which the right person turned up at the right time, sometimes with a hoe. Because if one could boil heroism down to a formula—to an art—then good God! He'd go down as one of the world's great peacemakers, a name spoken in the same breath as Christ. Once everyone became protectors, who'd be left undefended? Every classroom would have a hero, every home, every riverbank.

Carnegie was not the first to try. Plutarch did such a remarkable job,

Parallel Lives became the handbook for modern history's heroes—though of course some would dispute just how heroic their actions were. “It has been like my conscience,” Henry IV of France commented, “and has whispered in my ear many good suggestions and maxims for my conduct and the government of my affairs.” Abraham Lincoln was a devoted reader, as were Teddy Roosevelt, George Patton, and John Quincy Adams. When England was rebuilding after the Great War, the hero's bible was its guide. “Plutarch's *Lives* built the heroic ideal of the Elizabethan age,” C. S. Lewis acknowledged. And what Plutarch taught them is this: Heroes care. True heroism, as the ancients understood, isn't about strength, or boldness, or even courage. It's about compassion.

When the Greeks created the heroic ideal, they didn't choose a word that meant ‘Dies Trying’ or ‘Massacres Bad Guys.’ They went with ‘hērōs’—“protector.” Heroes aren't perfect; with a god as one parent and a mortal as the other, they're perpetually teetering between two destinies. What tips them toward greatness is a sidekick, a human connection who helps turn the spigot on the power of compassion. Empathy, the Greeks believed, was a source of strength, not softness; the more you recognized yourself in others and connected with their distress, the more endurance, wisdom, cunning, and determination you could tap into.

Heroes are protectors, and being a protector means having strength enough for two. Being strong enough to save yourself isn't good enough; you have to be better, always, than you'd be on your own. The ancient Greeks loved that little interlocking contradiction, the idea that you're only your strongest when you have a weakness for other people. They saw health and compassion as the two chemical components of a hero's power: unremarkable alone, but awe-inspiring when combined. What you're aiming for is the hero's holy trinity: *paideia*, *arete*, and *xenia*—skill, strength, and desire. Mind, body, and soul. Overload on any one of the three, and you'll unbalance the other two. You can charge into action with the noblest *xenia* intentions, but you'll get nowhere without the know-how of *paideia* and the raw *arete* arsenal of fists, agility, and endurance. That's what made Odysseus, trickster and semi-scoundrel though he was, the greatest Greek hero. Odysseus wasn't the best fighter: he was actually a draft-dodger who tried avoiding the invasion of Troy by pretending he'd gone loopy and was too addled to leave home. One of his fellow warriors saw through that scheme, however, because Odysseus was well known for slipping out of a scrap if he didn't like the odds and only using his spear if he couldn't deploy guile instead.

The Greek myths are really the same performance parable, over and over; they're showcases for underdogs using the art of the hero to deal with

danger. Need to tame a savage bull? Wait for it to take a drink, then wrestle it down by the horns. Ordered to clean a toxic stable? Flood it. Up against a giant man-bull, a three-headed hellhound, or a lion with an impenetrable pelt? Get behind them and choke 'em out. These techniques weren't just mythical make-believe; some were so spot-on, they're still used today in the Greek fighting art of pankration. If you're ever up against a guy who can tear your head off, take a lesson from Odysseus:

“Odysseus knew a trick or two. He kicked Ajax hard in the back of his knee and toppled him backwards, falling on his chest.”

Because the way the Greeks looked at it, you have a choice: you can either hope someone comes to the rescue when your kids are in danger, or you can guarantee it.

Brutal egoism just isn't human. We like to think of ourselves as masters of our own destinies, as lone wolves in a dog-eat-dog world, but guess what: Dogs don't eat dogs. They work together. As do most species. As do we. In fact, when it comes to wolf-pack tactics, humans are even better than wolves. We're the most communicative, helpful species that's ever existed. If anything, we overshare. We share every idea, every tool, every belief. Even when we fight, we do it as a team; in war, we unite in fantastic numbers. So forget brutal egoism. That's not our real strength.

“The single greatest moment of his own life came when he plunged a little boat into a seething cauldron off Martinique and began pulling burned, frightened survivors into his arms.”

He wasn't out there because of ego. He was out there because it was natural; because being a god on earth is a natural human desire, and saving someone else is the closest we'll ever come to achieving it. All Greek mythology and every major religion that followed has really been devoted to that single premise: the hero who leads the way is half god and half human, fueled as much by pity as by power.

But for all their shenanigans, you don't see the heroes piling up a mountain of loot. They're not in it for gold; given a choice, Odysseus would be happier farming at home with his wife. Stealing wasn't his job; it was a calling, an art, a way of making the impossible possible and the imaginary real. Pulling off a clever heist is as close as humans can come to magic, allowing something in your mind's eye to suddenly appear in your hand. Other religions condemn thieves as sinners and outcasts, but the ancient Greeks shrugged and decided, 'Eh, let's give 'em their own god.'

Because who else will teach us that our stuff doesn't really matter? That our possessions are fleeting, forgettable, and that anything you have someone else can take? What you'll be remembered for isn't your wealth and power, but your creative imagination—your *mêtis*.

What fueled it all was a kind of Outlaw Outlook: Instead of relying on laws passed down from some god or a king, let's think like outlaws. Let's think for ourselves. An outlaw outlook calls on every citizen to create, not conform; to decide what is right and wrong and act on it, not just 'baa' along with the rest of the herd. Outlaws have to be poised, smart, and independent; they have to cultivate allies, assess risk, and keep their antennae fine-tuned to everyone and everything around them. Outlaws focus on what people can do, not what they shouldn't. In Athens, the outlaw outlook worked so beautifully, it became a civic responsibility. The Athenians still had laws, but they were proposed by average citizens, not imperial rulers. Anyone who started acting too bossy—who thought he knew what was best for everyone else—was marched to the border and sent into exile under Athens's steely "No Tyrants" policy.

"Heroes, after all, aren't measured by the stories they tell—
they're measured by the stories told about them."

It is quite saddening to think of those people who have been mistreated by history. There were the *poètes maudits*, like Edgar Allan Poe or Arthur Rimbaud, scorned by society and later worshiped and force-fed to schoolchildren. There are even schools named after high school dropouts. Alas, this recognition came a little too late for the poet to get a serotonin kick out of it, or to prop up his romantic life on earth. But there are even more mistreated heroes—the very sad category of those who we do not know were heroes, who saved our lives, who helped us avoid disasters. They left no traces and did not even know that they were making a contribution. We remember the martyrs who died for a cause that we knew about, never those no less effective in their contribution but whose cause we were never aware of—precisely because they were successful. Our ingratitude toward the *poètes maudits* fades completely in front of this other type of thanklessness. This is a far more vicious kind of ingratitude: the feeling of uselessness on the part of the silent hero.

I will illustrate with the following thought experiment: Assume that a legislator with courage, influence, intellect, vision, and perseverance manages to enact a law that goes into universal effect and employment on September 10, 2001; it imposes the continuously locked bulletproof doors in every cockpit (at high costs to the struggling airlines)—just in case terrorists

decide to use planes to attack the World Trade Center in New York City. I know this is lunacy, but it is just a thought experiment and remember, Wikipedia says it doesn't have to be realistically possible. The legislation is not a popular measure among the airline personnel, as it complicates their lives. But it would certainly have prevented 9/11. The person who imposed locks on cockpit doors gets no statues in public squares, not so much as a quick mention of his contribution in his obituary. 'Joe Smith, who helped avoid the disaster of 9/11, died of complications of liver disease.' Seeing how superfluous his measure was, and how it squandered resources, the public, with great help from airline pilots, might well boot him out of office. He will retire depressed, with a great sense of failure. He will die with the impression of having done nothing useful.

What is a Villain?

We've tied Sympathy to a railing on the catwalk over the Void of Lost Remembrance. She does not cry, though I'd prefer that she did. Instead, she twists loosely in the breeze, trying, trying to understand what we've done.

"They have families," she says. "Don't you care at least about the families they left behind?"

We close the door and leave her there, so we no longer have to listen. In all this time, in all these years, she has never gotten better. She is always looking outward, towards people and places and things that are not us, and worries about them and their happiness. She cannot understand why that doesn't matter. We cannot convince her.

So she will twist over the chasm for a time. And we will go back to work.

Pride is working the controls, alone, as usual. We watch as the Husk glides through white and green halls, thin carpet stretched over cement, closed doors on either side. The Husk knocks twice on one door that is entirely like all the rest, and a woman inside says, "Come in."

She is a pretty woman, black bun'd hair, wire glasses, sitting in the valley between two teetering stacks of binders.

"This case, right?" she says, smiling, playfully straightening one of the mounds. "After all this, I hope he's not actually guilty."

Disgust spits on the screen. "Whore!" he shouts. "Why does she talk to us like that? Like we're the same? Like we're equals?"

Patience is there, though, putting a small hand on the rough hide of Disgust's scaly back. "There there. In time, in time. She'll see. Just give it a bit."

Excitement has wings, and she flies about the chamber, dragging her small, fairy feet across the top of Disgust's head. "You hear that, buddy? We'll get 'er! Oh yeah, we will! We'll cut her up! Up up up!" Dancing on the console, she starts counting on her pink, dusty fingers. "We'll cut out her heart, and her lungs, and her kidneys, then the liver, then her uterus—that's my very very favorite—and then all those intestines and then..."

"Knock it off!" growls Pride, shooing her away. "I can't see what I'm doing."

"You alright, Jack?" says the woman, her face a veil of concern, false and womanly. "You look far away."

"Oh," says the Husk, and I see Pride flick the switch, turn on that sly smirk. "I get a little lost when I'm around you."

She sighs, almost in spite of herself. Pride sits up straight, leaning slightly back. He's satisfied. They all are. And it's in these moments—these pivotal points, where everything begins coming into alignment and the wheels start picking up momentum—it's always in these moments when they all turn to look at me. To see what I'll say, or if I'll say anything at all.

"It's good, isn't it, Remorse?" says Excitement, fluttering before me. "We got another one!"

And I smile. And shrug. As I always do. "Looks like it."

Ted Bundy described the moment of death:

"You feel the last bit of breath leaving their body. You're looking into their eyes—a person in that situation is God. You then possess them and they shall forever be a part of you. And the grounds where you kill them or leave them become sacred to you, and you will always be drawn back to them."

There are accounts that, if we open our hearts to them, will cut us too deeply. Look—here is a good man, good by his own lights and the lights of his friends: he is faithful and true to his wife, he adores and lavishes attention on his little children, he cares about his country, he does his job punctiliously, as best he can. So, efficiently and good-naturedly, he exterminates Jews: he appreciates the music that plays in the background to pacify them; he advises the Jews not to forget their identification numbers as they go into the showers—many people, he tells them, forget their numbers, and take the wrong clothes when they come out of the showers. This calms the Jews. There will be life, they assure themselves, after the showers. Our man supervises the detail taking the bodies to the ovens; and if there is anything he feels bad about, it is that he still allows the gassing of vermin to affect him. Were he a truly good man, he knows, he would feel nothing but joy as the earth is cleansed of its pests.

It doesn't take terrible people to do bad things in an official capacity. It takes average people. Average people who want to do a good job for their superiors, who want to be loyal, who know how to go along to get along, and who like to avoid any risk to themselves. Unfortunately, that's all it takes: average people.

"The word 'yuppie' was his deepest insult, synonymous with every cultural wrong, aimed at those who behaved like spoiled, soft-palmed candyasses with misplaced superiority complexes. People who fit that description possessed only a fraction of the character strength of the average working Joe; they had their priorities all wrong and wouldn't last a day anywhere remotely

rugged. While chasing birds he had hitchhiked through some of the most desolate places imaginable—Nicaraguan jungles, Indian slums, Samoan fruit bat colonies—but when asked to name the least likable place he'd seen in the world, he instantly pointed to an affluent California suburb: 'Walnut Creek. No question.'"

"For me, the sky was the color of Jews. When their bodies had finished scouring for gaps in the door, their souls rose up. When their fingernails had scratched at the wood and in some cases were nailed into it by the sheer force of desperation, their spirits came toward me, into my arms, and we climbed out of those shower facilities, onto the roof and up, into eternity's certain breadth. They just kept feeding me. Minute after minute. Shower after shower. I'll never forget the first day in Auschwitz, the first time in Mauthausen.

At that second place, as time wore on, I also picked them up from the bottom of the great cliff, when their escapes fell awfully awry. There were broken bodies and dead, sweet hearts. Still, it was better than the gas. Some of them I caught when they were only halfway down. Saved you, I'd think, holding their souls in midair as the rest of their being—their physical shells—plummeted to the earth. All of them were light, like the cases of empty walnuts. Smoky sky in those places. The smell like a stove, but still so cold. I shiver when I remember—as I try to de-realize it. I blow warm air into my hands, to heat them up. But it's hard to keep them warm when the souls still shiver.

On June 23, 1942, there was a group of French Jews in a German prison, on Polish soil. The first person I took was close to the door, his mind racing, then reduced to pacing, then slowing down, slowing down. . . Please believe me when I tell you that I picked up each soul that day as if it were newly born. I even kissed a few weary, poisoned cheeks. I listened to their last, gasping cries. Their vanishing words. I watched their love visions and freed them from their fear.

They were French, they were Jews, and they were you."

The Contradictory Politics of Alex Steiner

Point One: He was a member of the Nazi Party, but he did not hate the Jews, or anyone else for that matter.

Point Two: Secretly, though, he couldn't help feeling a percentage of relief (or worse—gladness!) when Jewish shop owners were put out of business—propaganda informed him that it was only a matter of time before a plague of Jewish tailors showed up and stole his customers.

Point Three: But did that mean they should be driven out completely?

Point Four: His family. Surely, he had to do whatever he could to support them. If that meant being in the party, it meant being in the party.

Point Five: Somewhere, far down, there was an itch in his heart, but he made it a point not to scratch it. He was afraid of what might come leaking out.

I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader—both were human—if I want to understand and explain the behavior of both as best I can. This recognition does indeed mean an attempt to empathize. What I do not accept, however, are the old clichés that to explain is to excuse, to understand is to forgive. Explaining is not excusing; understanding is not forgiving. Not trying to understand the perpetrators in human terms would make impossible not only this study but any history of perpetrators that sought to go beyond one-dimensional caricature. When all is said and done, a single word, 'understanding,' is the beacon light of our studies.

At the synagogue, where at least 700 Jews had been collected, gasoline was poured at the entryways. A grenade was tossed into the building, igniting a fire. Police shot anyone trying to escape. The fire spread to nearby houses in which Jews were hiding, and they too were burned alive.

"I made the effort, and it was possible for me, to shoot only children. It so happened that the mothers led the children by the hand. My neighbor then shot the mother and I shot the child that belonged to her, because I reasoned with myself that after all without its mother the child could not live any longer. It was supposed to be, so to speak, soothing to my conscience to release children unable to live without their mothers."

Most of the policemen, however, seem to have made no effort to avoid shooting. At Łomazy following orders reinforced the natural tendency to conform to the behavior of one's comrades. This was much easier to bear than the situation at Józefów, where the policemen were allowed to make personal decisions concerning their participation but the 'cost' of not

shooting was to separate themselves from their comrades and to expose themselves as weak.

In the months since Józefów many had become numbed, indifferent, and in some cases eager killers; others limited their participation in the killing process, refraining when they could do so without great cost or inconvenience. Only a minority of nonconformists managed to preserve a beleaguered sphere of moral autonomy that emboldened them to employ patterns of behavior and stratagems of evasion that kept them from becoming killers at all.

As usual, though, the few who shirked or evaded participation did not impede those intent upon their task.

The murderous participation of Reserve Police Battalion 101 in the Final Solution came to an end. With a conservative estimate of 6,500 Jews shot during earlier actions like those at Józefów and Łomazy and 1,000 shot during the “Jew hunts,” and a minimum estimate of 30,500 Jews shot at Majdanek and Poniatowa, the battalion had participated in the direct shooting deaths of at least 38,000 Jews. With the death camp deportation of at least 3,000 Jews from Miedzyrzec in early May 1943, the number of Jews they had placed on trains to Treblinka had risen to 45,000. For a battalion of less than 500 men, the ultimate body count was at least 83,000 Jews.

Some people become perpetrators as a result of their personality; they are ‘self-selected.’ But under particular circumstances most people have a capacity for extreme violence and the destruction of human life. Ordinary psychological processes and normal, common human motivations and certain basic but not inevitable tendencies in human thought and feeling are the primary sources of the human capacity for mass destruction of human life. Evil that arises out of ordinary thinking and is committed by ordinary people is the norm, not the exception.

Cruelty is social in its origin much more than it is characterological. Most people slip into the roles society provides them, and we must be wary of any implication that “faulty personalities” are the primary cause of human cruelty. The exception—the real ‘sleeper’—is the rare individual who has the capacity to resist authority and assert moral autonomy but who is seldom aware of this hidden strength until put to the test.

Milgram offered a number of factors to account for such an unexpectedly high degree of potentially murderous obedience to a noncoercive authority. An evolutionary bias favors the survival of people who can adapt to hierarchical situations and organized social activity. Socialization through family, school, and military service, as well as a whole array of rewards and punishments within society generally, reinforces and internalizes a tendency toward obedience. A seemingly voluntary entry into an authority system perceived as legitimate creates a strong sense of obligation. Those within the

hierarchy adopt the authority's perspective or "definition of the situation" (in Milgram's case, as an important scientific experiment rather than the infliction of physical torture). The notions of "loyalty, duty, discipline," requiring competent performance in the eyes of authority, become moral imperatives overriding any identification with the victim. Normal individuals enter an "agentic state" in which they are the instrument of another's will. In such a state, they no longer feel personally responsible for the content of their actions but only for how well they perform. Once entangled, people encounter a series of "binding factors" or "cementing mechanisms" that make disobedience or refusal even more difficult. The momentum of the process discourages any new or contrary initiative. The "situational obligation" or etiquette makes refusal appear improper, rude, or even an immoral breach of obligation. And a socialized anxiety over potential punishment for disobedience acts as a further deterrent.

Milgram himself notes that people far more frequently invoke authority than conformity to explain their behavior, for only the former seems to absolve them of personal responsibility.

"Subjects deny conformity and embrace obedience as the explanation of their actions."

Yet many policemen admitted responding to the pressures of conformity—how would they be seen in the eyes of their comrades?—not authority. On Milgram's own view, such admission was the tip of the iceberg, and this factor must have been even more important than the men conceded in their testimony. If so, conformity assumes a more central role than authority at Józefów.

As Lieutenant Drucker said with extraordinary understatement:

"Under the influence of the times, my attitude to the Jews was marked by a certain aversion."

The denigration of Jews and the proclamation of Germanic racial superiority was so constant, so pervasive, so relentless, that it must have shaped the general attitudes of masses of people in Germany, including the average reserve policeman.

To break ranks and step out, to adopt overtly nonconformist behavior, was simply beyond most of the men. It was easier for them to shoot. Why? First of all, by breaking ranks, non-shooters were leaving the "dirty work" to their comrades. Since the battalion had to shoot even if individuals did not, refusing to shoot constituted refusing one's share of an unpleasant collective obligation. It was in effect an asocial act vis-à-vis one's comrades.

Those who did not shoot risked isolation, rejection, and ostracism—a very uncomfortable prospect within the framework of a tight-knit unit stationed abroad among a hostile population, so that the individual had virtually nowhere else to turn for support and social contact.

This threat of isolation was intensified by the fact that stepping out could also have been seen as a form of moral reproach of one's comrades: the non-shooter was potentially indicating that he was 'too good' to do such things. Most, though not all non-shooters intuitively tried to diffuse the criticism of their comrades that was inherent in their actions. They pleaded not that they were 'too good' but rather that they were "too weak" to kill. Such a stance presented no challenge to the esteem of one's comrades; on the contrary, it legitimized and upheld 'toughness' as a superior quality. For the anxious individual, it had the added advantage of posing no moral challenge to the murderous policies of the regime, though it did pose another problem, since the difference between being 'weak' and being a 'coward' was not great. Hence the distinction made by one policeman who did not dare to step out at Józefów for fear of being considered a coward, but who subsequently dropped out of his firing squad. It was one thing to be too cowardly even to try to kill; it was another, after resolutely trying to do one's share, to be too weak to continue.

Insidiously, therefore, most of those who did not shoot only reaffirmed the macho values of the majority—according to which it was a positive quality to be tough enough to kill unarmed, noncombatant men, women, and children—and tried not to rupture the bonds of comradeship that constituted their social world. Coping with the contradictions imposed by the demands of conscience on the one hand and the norms of the battalion on the other led to many tortured attempts at compromise: not shooting infants on the spot but taking them to the assembly point; not shooting on patrol if no "go-getter" was along who might report such squeamishness; bringing Jews to the shooting site and firing but intentionally missing. Only the very exceptional remained indifferent to taunts of "weakling" from their comrades and could live with the fact that they were considered to be "no man."

Pervasive racism and the resulting exclusion of the Jewish victims from any common ground with the perpetrators made it all the easier for the majority of the policemen to conform to the norms of their immediate community (the battalion) and their society at large (Nazi Germany). Here the years of anti-Semitic propaganda—and prior to the Nazi dictatorship, decades of shrill German nationalism—dovetailed with the polarizing effects of war. The dichotomy of racially superior Germans and racially inferior Jews, central to Nazi ideology, could easily merge with the image of a beleaguered

Germany surrounded by warring enemies. If it is doubtful that most of the policemen understood or embraced the theoretical aspects of Nazi ideology as contained in SS indoctrination pamphlets, it is also doubtful that they were immune to the influence of the times, to the incessant proclamation of German superiority and incitement of contempt and hatred for the Jewish enemy. Nothing helped the Nazis to wage a race war so much as the war itself. In wartime, when it was all too usual to exclude the enemy from the community of human obligation, it was also all too easy to subsume the Jews into the 'image of the enemy,' or Feindbild.

This story of ordinary men is not the story of all men. The reserve policemen faced choices, and most of them committed terrible deeds. But those who killed cannot be absolved by the notion that anyone in the same situation would have done as they did. For even among them, some refused to kill and others stopped killing. Human responsibility is ultimately an individual matter.

The collective behavior of Reserve Police Battalion 101 has deeply disturbing implications. There are many societies afflicted by traditions of racism and caught in the siege mentality of war or threat of war. Everywhere society conditions people to respect and defer to authority, and indeed could scarcely function otherwise. Everywhere people seek career advancement. In every modern society, the complexity of life and the resulting bureaucratization and specialization attenuate the sense of personal responsibility of those implementing official policy. Within virtually every social collective, the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms. If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?

It is important to note that before the Final Solution was implemented—beginning on Soviet territory in the second half of 1941 and in Poland and the rest of Europe in the spring of 1942—the Nazi regime had already found willing executioners for 70,000 to 80,000 mentally and physically handicapped Germans, tens of thousands of Polish intelligentsia, tens of thousands of noncombatant victims of reprisal shootings, and more than two-million Russian POWs. Clearly, as of September 1939, the regime was increasingly capable of legitimizing and organizing mass murder on a staggering scale that did not depend on the anti-Semitic motivation of the perpetrators and the Jewish identity of the victims.

So we are still left with an unresolved question that cannot be solved by simple assertion: Is a culture of hatred the necessary precondition for such a culture of cruelty?

It would be very comforting to accept the idea that very few societies have the long-term, cultural-cognitive prerequisites to commit genocide, and

that regimes can only do so when the population is overwhelmingly of one mind about its priority, justice, and necessity. We would live in a safer world if that were right, but I am not so optimistic. I fear that we live in a world in which war and racism are ubiquitous, in which the powers of government mobilization and legitimization are powerful and increasing, in which a sense of personal responsibility is increasingly attenuated by specialization and bureaucratization, and in which the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms. In such a world, I fear, modern governments that wish to commit mass murder will seldom fail in their efforts for being unable to induce 'ordinary men' to become their willing executioners.

"The actual camp appeared like an untidy slaughterhouse. A pungent smell hung heavily in the air. Knowing the Red Army was closing in, the SS gave the boilermen [people operating the ovens] the order, to throw the prisoners, who were already emaciated to the point of looking like skeletons, into the crematorium alive. They wanted to get rid of the sick and weakened to cover up their tracks as fast as possible.

The further we walked into the site, the stronger the smell of burnt flesh became, and dirty-black ash rained down on us from the heavens, darkening the snow. The boilermen looked surprised to see us officers and soldiers. They were strong people, mostly Kapos [prisoners forced to work in the camps]. They greeted us with shy smiles on their faces, a mix of happiness and fear. Like on command, they threw away their poker. With us, they talked freely. Angry words about Hitler were spoken. I still remember an old boilermen stammer 'Thank you. Thank you, friend. May I call you friends?'

One of them, a Ukrainian, I asked: 'Why did you do that?' and pointed towards the ovens. Without blinking he replied: 'They didn't ask if I wanted to. No, I didn't want to. But better be the guy working the oven, then be the one burning. That's why I did it.' I was speechless, could just shake my head. 'Why aren't the other ovens burning? There's no smoke coming up the chimney,' I asked the guy. 'Deconstructed,' he said.

Innumerable exhausted, wretched figures with shrunken faces and bald heads were standing outside of the barracks. They didn't know that we were coming. The surprise made many of them faint. A picture that would make everyone wither away who saw it. The misery was horrifying. The ovens [of the

crematoria] were still hot and some were still blazing fiercely when we approached. We were standing in a circle, everyone was silent. Caught in our own thoughts, everyone just stood around. Nobody cared about the burning ovens. 'Stop this. Out! All of you!', the commanding officer Sergejew shouted. Outside, he was shaking and said with a stuttering voice: 'How can this be in the midst of the twentieth century! I can't comprehend this. If there'd be a god, maybe he could explain how this all came to be.'

From the barracks more and more hungry children were emerging, reduced to skeletons and enveloped in rags. Like ants they assembled in large groups, making noise as if they were in a large school yard. With arms extended, they were waiting, begging and screaming for bread. They were whining out of despair and wiping away their tears. We visited the barracks and couldn't believe our own eyes. Naked and groaning people, hardly looking like humans, were laying on straw bags. I touched one of the people laying there. He didn't move. He wasn't alive anymore. Only death reigned here. It smelled of it.

In another barrack, a woman was dying. I asked if someone from her family was also in the camp. She said yes. Via speakers we tried to find her relatives and reunited the family. Shortly after, the woman died, although our doctors tried to save her.

After that we concentrated on the camp headquarters. In the hallway towards the office of the camp management I found a paper pinned to the wall which concerned me, too, since I'm slav. It said something along the lines of 'Germans! We are the masters. Our interests are the only that matter. The reproduction of the slav people is not desired. Childlessness and abortion are to be encouraged. Education of slav children is unnecessary. If they can count up to 100, that's sufficient. Those who can't work, shall die.' I translated the text for the others who just shook their heads. One tore it down. The offices were empty and chaotic so we went outside.

In the meantime our soldiers had gathered the female guards and brought them to us. 'Should we...?' asked a Corporal. 'No, don't do anything stupid,' the officer replied. 'This is to be decided by the Ordnungstruppe.'

'What does she have in her bag,' I asked another woman, since I saw how filled her bag was. A soldier grabbed into the bag. It was a brochure. The headline was 'About the law to

defend the hereditary health of the German people.' I took it, read some pages. Proof of being Aryan, marriage prohibition, Anglo-Jewish plague—I took note of it and was shocked. People are still carrying these with them!

'Are you all Aryan women?,' I asked. They give me a cold look. 'I don't know,' one of them replied. We laughed. 'Where are the camp doctors?' I asked. 'Not here, ran off.' 'And the male prisoners, where are they? I haven't seen a single man. What is this all about?' 'A week ago they've been escorted out of the camp. Probably relocated to Majdanek or Treblinka,' she replied. I tore the brochure into pieces and threw it onto the piles of garbage.

By evening, many reporters had arrived. Nonstop buzzing and flashing cameras everywhere inside and outside the barracks. We had learned one step after the other that Auschwitz was a central selection camp. Jewish people were selected for forced labour or death in the gas chambers. The immediate extermination of Jews who were unable to work was expressly insisted upon.

The field kitchens arrived soon. Nearly at the same time, the Ordnungstruppe and surprisingly high ranking officers from the staff of Rokossowski and Konjew showed up. Medics distributed sheets and clothing to the prisoners. To prevent the prisoners from eating snow, soldiers distributed tea and bread to the nearly starved skeletons. In the meantime, military trucks had arrived. Around midnight, all prisoners were taken out of the camp. Those still able to walk had no patience to wait and had already taken off by foot towards Sosnowitz. The only remaining people were Kapos and guards. Those were immediately ordered to dig mass graves outside the camp and to bury the dead bodies there. Floodlights and generators had already been put in place.

The camp was now empty and it was as silent as a monastery. Some torches were lighting the ground here and there. We had to leave, since we are a combat unit assigned to the front. We caught up to the rest of our unit in Sosnowitz, approximately 15 kilometers east of Kattowitz."

The Gray In-Between

The infamous Trolley Problem is a popular thought experiment in Intro to Philosophy, as well as a beloved pop culture trope. You may remember it from that one episode of *The Good Place*, helpfully called “The Trolley Problem.” Even its name is a sign of longevity, because who the hell has taken a trolley ride recently? The problem asks whether you’d be willing to kill one person to save the lives of multiple people. Either way, someone has to die, and the way you determine who supposedly says something fundamental about you. Are you ruthlessly logical enough to pull the lever, sentencing one person to death for the greater good? Do you think it’s wrong to make that decision at all? What if it was a child versus five adults? What if it was a fat guy? What if that fat guy was a real big asshole? What if that fat guy was an asshole and it was his fault the people were tied to the trolley tracks in the first place, but you have to physically push him in front of the trolley to save the other people?

Those are all real variants of the problem, and just looking at the way people answer these questions has become a miniature field of its own, dubbed “trolleyology.” Notable conclusions are that men are more likely than women to push someone onto the tracks for the greater good, young people are ruthless as hell, and everyone is more reluctant to push a woman than a man.

But ultimately, there’s no way to tell what people would do in real life, right? Unfortunately, the buzzkills at the ethics board wouldn’t allow researchers to tie real humans to real train tracks, but they were perfectly fine with using mice and (fake) electric shocks. Participants, not knowing the shocks were fake, had to choose between zapping one mouse or letting five be zapped. Before doing so, they were questioned on how they would react to a variety of trolley genre moral dilemmas.

The result found almost no correlation to what participants said they would do and what they actually did. People were more decisive in real life than in the hypothetical scenarios. And yes, we’re aware that zapping mice isn’t exactly analogous to putting human lives on the line, but philosophers and social scientists have long been arguing that the Trolley Problem is over-hyped and over-applied. As a general rule, a discussion you once had with your college buddies over some beers doesn’t have much to do with how you’d react in the heat of the moment. That *Good Place* episode was solid though.

He had come over from Ireland by freighter at seventeen because he had killed a policeman who had come onto their property and shot his

father's dogs. The family owned an old shotgun but was too poor to afford ammunition, so the young man poured borrowed gunpowder into a used paper cartridge and packed the rest with ball bearings from his bicycle wheels. He waited outside the policeman's house until the man returned from the pub and then shot him dead with his one homemade round.

In modern societies, citizens give up most of their natural right to defend themselves or to respond to wrongdoing, in return for a promise of protection and justice from the government. But what happens when the government breaches that social contract and persistently fails in its promise?

Asking moral vigilantes to suffer in silence is not only a poor crime-control strategy but, more importantly, ought not to be asked. The government has obligations to its citizens under its social contract and is not free to simply choose not to perform them. The criminal justice system ought to take seriously its obligation to assure that justice is done and crime avoided so that people are never put in the position of having to consider moral vigilantism.

We would all be better off if this dirty war had never started. Systemic failures of justice, shadow vigilantes' distorting response, and blowback from those distortions end up producing more crime and more failures of justice—ending in a downward spiral. The only way to effectively stop this tragic cycle is for the criminal justice system to publicly commit itself to the importance of doing justice and avoiding injustice at all costs. That means avoiding the application of the doctrines of disillusionment where there is no compelling societal interest in doing so, or where the interest could be as effectively promoted through a less justice-frustrating means. The only way to prevent the downward spiral of lost credibility is to acknowledge the importance of doing justice both as an essential ideal and as a practical necessity.

Too many judges have lost an understanding of the criminal justice system as being in the business of doing justice. Actual fairness is seen as being replaced in the judges' minds by a mess of technical rules. And justice has dropped out of the equation as being of little importance.

The Deacons for Defense and Justice are not an aberration. Many groups have, with moral justification, taken the law into their own hands. This is the essence of vigilantism. Indeed, the origin of the term 'vigilante' suggests something very different from popular use, which brings to mind a Ku Klux Klan lynching or abortion doctor shooting. The original vigilantes were the epitome of responsible democratic action fighting an inept and often corrupt government.

If people are confronted with a criminal justice system that seems grossly insensitive to the importance of doing justice, what are they to do? Is it

possible to define what would and would not constitute moral vigilante action—to define a vigilante code that sets the preconditions for and the limits of legitimate conduct? If a group were contemplating vigilante action, here are ten rules one could suggest to members of such a group or community to help them choose action that stays closer to what is morally defensible. Vigilante action is never legally justified—if it were, by definition it would not be vigilante action—but if a group follows these ten rules, its conduct might at least be viewed by outsiders as being nearly morally justified.

1. Don't act unless there is a serious failure of justice
2. Don't cause more harm than is necessary and just
3. Avoid injury to innocent bystanders
4. Don't act unless there is no lawful way to solve the problem
5. Don't act alone
6. Before acting, be sure of the facts, and take full account of all relevant mitigations and excuses
7. Show restraint and temperance, not arrogance or vindictiveness
8. Warn the government that it is in breach of its social contract with its citizens, and give it an opportunity to fix the problem, unless it is clear that such a warning would be useless
9. Publicly report afterward what you have done and why
10. If it becomes clear that the problem cannot be fixed through vigilante action, then withdraw from further action

“If a person's safety and property can be protected with a punch, it ought not to be defended with a gunshot.”

Vigilantes must understand that they are in a credibility contest with the official criminal justice system. To win the battle for hearts and minds, the vigilantes must actually do justice better than the system is doing it, not worse. Doing justice requires taking account of the mitigating or excusing factors in a case, not just the aggravating factors. A vigilance committee can as easily discredit itself by showing an indifference to mitigations and excuses as the criminal justice system disgraces itself by showing indifference to giving offenders the punishment they deserve.

“No doubt the activists in many causes felt strongly about the rightness of their views. However, it is equally clear that they knew themselves to be in a small minority of the larger society. They are certainly free to try to change the society’s views—and perhaps someday they will succeed—but until that day comes they cannot in a democratic society substitute their own values for those of the larger society and claim that their lawbreaking is that of a moral vigilante.”

Once vigilantes cross the line of lawful conduct, there are few obvious signposts telling them not to go a little further. Unfortunately, it is in the nature of vigilantism that, having left behind the signposts of legality, there inevitably arises the danger of the slippery slope. Even if the moral vigilante gets it right in all respects, the vigilante action creates a risk of mistakes that would not have otherwise occurred.

What conclusion should we draw from this? Where does this leave the would-be moral vigilante? Should prospective vigilantes not act, even if they might be morally justified in doing so, because others—law enforcement, regulators, politicians, prosecutors—if they were willing to put forth the effort, could act more effectively? If that were the conclusion, then even moral vigilantes ought never to act because official law enforcement, with sufficient motivation, can almost always do it better. By that logic, moral vigilantes should defer to the government that has broken its social contract with them simply because that government could have fixed the problem. That analysis seems like a nonstarter on its face. The fact that the government could have done it better only emphasizes the extent of its breach of trust with the citizenry. The government should have done it better but chose not to. That would seem to support, not undermine, the moral vigilante’s right to act. A better conclusion to the dilemma might be that the risk of error created by the moral vigilante is one more reason why the government should avoid breaching the social contract and should never tolerate situations that would justify moral vigilantism. The government ought to take more seriously its obligation to do justice and to protect citizens.

Criminal law rules that deviate from the community’s notions of justice are not cost-free, as has generally been assumed in the past. Rather, when criminal law adopts rules or practices that produce criminal liability or punishment that is seen as a failure of justice or as unjust, the system suffers a loss of effectiveness. To be most effective, the criminal justice system should try to distribute liability and punishment in accord with the shared judgments of justice of the community it governs.

“He is noble, terrible, irresistibly fascinating, for he combines in himself the two sublimities of human grandeur: the martyr and the hero. He has no other object than to overthrow this abhorred despotism, and to give to his country, what all civilized nations possess: political liberty.”

“If the tiger ever stands still the elephant will crush him with his mighty tusks. But the tiger does not stand still. He lurks in the jungle by day and emerges by night. He will leap upon the back of the elephant, tearing huge chunks from his hide, and then he will leap back into the dark jungle. And slowly the elephant will bleed to death.”

Today there is a tendency to think that there is something new about guerrilla tactics—that they are a departure from the norm, which is assumed to be state-on-state conflict. Nothing could be further from the truth. While there are many novel aspects of low-intensity warfare as it has developed since antiquity, the essential concept itself was already well established by the time that David, one of the first guerrillas whose name we know, became king of Israel around 1000 BC. David’s credentials as a guerrilla were established not in his legendary combat with the Philistine champion Goliath but rather in subsequent years after he had been forced to flee the jealous wrath of his own king, Saul, and took to leading an outlaw band in raids on Amalekite and Philistine settlements in the Judaeen wilderness.

Guerrilla warfare is as old as mankind. Conventional warfare is, by contrast, a relatively recent invention. It was made possible by the development of the first agricultural societies after untold millennia in which the hunter-gatherer reigned supreme. Farming communities for the first time produced enough surplus wealth and population to allow for the creation of specially-designed fortifications and weapons as well as the hiring of specialists to operate them.

Throughout most of our species’ long and bloody slog, both before the development of urban civilization and since, warfare has been carried out primarily by bands of loosely organized, ill-disciplined, lightly armed volunteers who disdain open battle. They prefer to employ stealth, surprise, and rapid movement to harass, ambush, massacre, and terrorize their enemies while trying to minimize their own casualties through rapid retreat when confronted by equal or stronger forces. These are the primary features both of modern guerrilla warfare and of primitive, pre-state warfare whose origins are lost in the mists of prehistoric time and which has only recently been extinguished in the remote jungles of Amazonia and the highlands of Papua

New Guinea. Guerrillas therefore may be said to engage in the world's second-oldest profession, behind only hunting, which draws on the same skill set.

Since at least the days of the Greeks and Romans primitive warfare—and by extension guerrilla warfare—has seldom been accorded much respect by Western soldiers and scholars, who have tended to view it as an “irregular,” “unmanly,” even “dastardly” activity and to label its practitioners barbarians, criminals, or savages.

Pre-state warriors are, in the words of John Keegan, “cruel to the weak and cowardly in the face of the brave”—precisely the opposite of what professional soldiers have always been taught to revere. They refuse to grapple face-to-face with a strong foe until one side or the other is annihilated in the kind of warfare immortalized, if not invented, by the Greeks.

Battles among nonstate peoples have often consisted of nothing more than two lines of warriors decked out in elaborate paint shouting insults at one another, making rude gestures, and then discharging spears, darts, or arrows from such long range that they inflict few casualties. Primitive societies lack an organizational structure that can force men on pain of punishment to engage in costly close-quarters combat in defiance of a basic instinct for self-preservation. This has led some observers to suggest that nonstate peoples do not engage in warfare at all but rather in “feuds” or “vendettas” that are for the most part ceremonial and have little in common with true war as practiced at Cannae, Agincourt, or Gettysburg. After moving to Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, for example, a professional English soldier wrote with scorn that Indians “might fight seven years and not kill seven men” because “this fight is more for pastime, than to conquer and subdue enemies.”

What such critics overlook is that battles constitute only a small part of primitive warfare. Most casualties are inflicted not in these carefully choreographed encounters but in what comes before and after—in the stealthy forays of warriors into the territory of their neighbors. One common raiding technique—favoured by groups as diverse as the Bering Straits Eskimo and the Mae Enga of New Guinea—consisted of quietly surrounding enemy houses just before dawn and killing the occupants by thrusting spears through the flimsy walls, shooting arrows through doorways and smoke holes, or firing as the victims emerged after the structure had been set on fire. Following such an attack, the raiders might disperse before large numbers of enemy warriors could arrive, only to return a few days later, hoping to catch another enemy village unawares. All adult men participate in this type of warfare, and quarter is seldom asked or given. Surrender for warriors is not an option; if they suffer the dishonor of defeat, they are either killed on the

spot or, as was common among the Iroquois Indians of northeastern North America, they might be tortured to death and then partially eaten. At the end of such an encounter, the victor rapes the loser's women, enslaves them and their children, burns crops, steals livestock, destroys the village.

One of the most enduring dynamics in the history of warfare: as a state becomes more capable in its defense, so guerrillas become more capable in their offense. A look at the ancient and medieval worlds suggests yet another paradoxical conclusion: the most primitive guerrillas were the most successful. There were a few notable insurgents such as Judas Maccabeus and Robert the Bruce who operated with a fair degree of sophistication and managed to achieve a fair degree of success. They were sensitive to the need to build political support and to establish political institutions to replace those of their enemies. Of course, on one occasion, Bruce's men donned black capes and walked on their hands and knees in the dark pretending to be cows in order to get close enough to clamber up rope ladders and seize a fort—simple is often the better way to go.

But such successes were rare, in no small part because ancient rebels lacked the ability to appeal to a hostile population over the head of its leader—and, in those days when autocracy was the dominant form of government, few populations could do much anyway to sway the decisions of their emperor, king, or chief. Most insurgents suffered the fate of Viriathus, Quintus Sertorius, Spartacus, Vercingetorix, Boudicca, and others who died battling Roman power. Lacking the ability to call in outside aid or state their case to the mass media (which did not yet exist), ancient insurgents were generally on their own to face the pitiless power of a pagan polity.

The most successful guerrillas of the ancient world were the nomads who brought down the Roman Empire and seized large chunks of the Chinese Empire and other Eurasian states. They did not try to organize a revolution within a state, a notoriously difficult undertaking. Rather they chipped away at the state's outer defenses until, in some cases, the entire edifice collapsed. The nomads' achievement, while great, was almost wholly negative: with the exception of the Arabs, Turks, Moguls, and Manchus, who blended with more-settled societies, nomads could not build lasting institutions. Nomadic empires generally crumbled after a generation or two. But, as long as they were around, nomads had few equals in their ability to inflict catastrophic costs on established states through the use of hit-and-run tactics.

When faced with the onslaught of Western colonialism why did so few indigenous regimes resort to guerrilla tactics? Part of the explanation is that most non-Westerners had little idea of the combat power of Western armies until it was too late. Too many empire builders in the developing world imagined that the tactics that had worked against local tribes would

work against the white tribe. They were fatally mistaken, but their incomprehension was understandable given how slowly news traveled before the spread of telegraphs, undersea cables, steamships, and railroads—to say nothing of radio, television, airplanes, and the Internet. In the ancient world, Rome's enemies had scant opportunity to learn from one another's experiences. So too in the Victorian world, there was little chance that the Zulus could benefit from the experience of the Sioux. By contrast, soldiers from more advanced nations did study each other's campaigns. A spate of military manuals was published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries advising Westerners how to win "small wars."

When native rulers did try to learn from past mistakes, their impulse was usually to make their armies more conventional, rather than less, by hiring European advisers and buying European arms. With the notable exception of Japan, the reproductions were seldom as good as the originals, and their inferiority was brutally exposed in battle. Most peoples in the developing world would have been better off reverting to older forms of irregular warfare. The Marathas of India, for example, had a long history as superb horse raiders, but in the late eighteenth century they chose to raise European-style regiments that proved no match for disciplined British regulars. In a very real sense they beat themselves by imbibing the myth then prevalent in European military circles of the superiority of conventional warfare and the ineffectuality of guerrilla resistance.

One of the greatest advantages enjoyed by modern, as opposed to ancient or medieval, guerrillas is the ability to learn from their predecessors. In many places before the twentieth century, literacy levels were low, books rare, long-distance travel difficult. Most people led isolated lives. In this environment, it was hard for rebels to learn from one another, much less to cooperate in the way that twenty-first century jihadist groups seek to do by embracing the Internet. Simon bar Gioras, leader of the Jewish Revolt against Rome, undoubtedly was familiar with the experience of Judas Maccabeus and King David, two earlier Jewish guerrilla leaders. But it is doubtful that he knew much if anything of Viriathus, who resisted Roman authority in Spain, and even less likely that the illiterate Viriathus was familiar with the exploits of Spitamenes, who fought Alexander the Great in Central Asia, much less with Modun, leader of the Xiongnu who fought the Chinese Empire. Once printed books and periodicals began to spread and literacy to rise, insurgents were able to study their predecessors' experiences and puzzle out more potent techniques to bring powerful empires to their knees.

One of the cherished myths of American history is that independence from Great Britain was won by plucky Yankees armed with rifles who picked

off befuddled redcoats too dense to deviate from the ritualistic parade-ground warfare of Europe. That is an exaggeration. By the time the revolution broke out, the British had considerable experience with irregular warfare, not only in Europe with Austrian pandours and Scottish Highlanders, but also in the Caribbean with Jamaican maroons and in North America with Indians and rangers. Redcoats certainly knew enough to break ranks and seek cover in battle when possible, rather than, in the words of one historian, “remaining inert and vulnerable to enemy fire.”

But many other lessons of frontier fighting were forgotten by the time the American Revolution broke out. Much like the US Army with its post-Vietnam amnesia about counterinsurgency, which helped lead to the early disasters in Iraq, the British army was to pay a steep price for forgetting how to fight on an unconventional battlefield. The redcoats’ difficulties were compounded because in the war to come they would encounter not only the kind of traditional hit-and-run tactics employed by tribesmen but also a new factor in guerrilla warfare: the power of public opinion. This new weapon was to prove even deadlier and harder to cope with than a tomahawk in the back.

What gets overlooked in most accounts of the American Revolution is that even after Yorktown the British could have continued fighting. They had lost only eight-thousand men. Their remaining troops in North America, more than thirty-four-thousand strong, still outnumbered the combined Franco-American forces, and more could always have been raised from a British population of twelve-million or purchased from the German states that had already provided so much manpower. If the Americans had been resisting the Roman Empire, there is little doubt that a fresh army would have been raised and George Washington and other leading insurgents would have been crucified. But such a response was unthinkable, given the state of British “public opinion”—a phrase that first saw print in Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, the first volume of which appeared, by a fateful coincidence, in 1776.

This was a new and hugely important development in the long history of guerrilla warfare: a parliamentary government could not prosecute a war that did not enjoy popular backing. Insurgents’ ability to manipulate popular sentiment—to break the enemy’s will to resist—helped to offset some of the advantages enjoyed by an incumbent regime and gave them a greater chance of success. Public opinion would play an even larger role in future wars as Britain and the United States, which still restricted the franchise in the eighteenth century, became more democratic and as similar political systems spread around the world. Future insurgents, from nineteenth-century Greece to twenty-first-century Lebanon, would make full use of this potent new

weapon wielded so expertly by the American rebels.

The outcome of the American war also demonstrated the importance of partisans operating in close conjunction with a regular army. If the Americans had lacked an army, they might have been no more successful than the Irish rebels who rose up in 1798 and were put down by Cornwallis.

“You may strike a hundred strokes, and reap little benefit from them, unless you have a good army to take advantage of your success.”

Without a guerrilla force to harry them, the British could have concentrated all their resources on crushing the Continental army, and the Americans might have been no more successful than the Scottish rebels who rose up in 1745. As it was, the Americans were able to land a one-two punch, with the irregulars weakening the army of occupation until a conventional force could administer the coup de grâce. This method of fighting—dubbed “hybrid warfare” by twenty-first-century strategists—has usually been the surest road to success for an insurgency.

The British also made mistakes, but none of these failings need have proven fatal if the British public had retained the desire to continue fighting, no matter the cost. The average American today probably thinks that the Vietnam War was the first time that a counterinsurgency was fatally undermined on the home front. A citizen of France would probably cite the Algerian War. But the American War of Independence long predated either conflict, and it was effectively decided not at Yorktown, as most historians would have it, but in Westminster. The battlefield success of George Washington’s soldiers was not irrelevant, but neither was it decisive. Public opinion in Britain was. This was a lesson that future generations of guerrillas could study and apply.

“Popular resistance: like a slow, gradual fire, it destroys the foundation of the enemy’s army.”

Social bandits or peasant outlaws are those who are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped, and supported. The mythical archetype was Robin Hood. Rob Roy MacGregor in Scotland (1671–1734), Jesse James in America (1847–1882), Ned Kelly in Australia (1855–1880), and Pancho Villa in Mexico (1878–1923) were real-life examples. Less famous but more significant were the klephts and haiduks, the Christian bandits who battled Ottoman overlords in the Balkans for five-hundred years. The prevalence of such men is one of the most universal

social phenomena known to history—they flourish wherever social order has broken down.

In the American West, the Colt revolver was called “the Equalizer” because it allowed even those who were physically weak to kill the strong. In the same way, in the post-World War II era, the growth in influence of public opinion, both foreign and domestic, was the great equalizer that increasingly allowed the militarily weak to best the strong.

In the best revolutionary tradition, Castro turned his trial into a forum for publicly promulgating his views. The judges allowed Castro, acting as his own lawyer, to lodge accusations of “assassination and torture” against the government. Castro wound up being sentenced to fifteen years in prison along with twenty-five companions, including his brother Raúl. But before he was done Castro had delivered a two-hour speech in his own defense that recalled John Brown’s memorable oration after Harpers Ferry. There is no exact record of what he said, but in prison he reconstructed and no doubt embellished his remarks in a clandestinely published pamphlet, “History Will Absolve Me.” Its fiery conclusion:

“I do not fear the fury of the miserable tyrant who snuffed out the life of seventy brothers of mine. Condemn me, it does not matter. History will absolve me!”

Twenty words to victory: *The enemy advances, we withdraw; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.*

“If the enemy is so superior that you are in danger of being surrounded by them, let the whole body disperse, and every one take a different road to the place of rendezvous appointed for that evening. You should not attack them till the evening, as then they will not know your numbers, and if you are repulsed, your retreat will be facilitated by the darkness of the night. If the enemy pursue your rear, take a circle till you come to your own tracks, and there form an ambush to receive them, and give them the first fire.”

The printing press is the greatest weapon in the armory of the modern commander. Irregular war is far more intellectual than a bayonet charge. Rebellions can be made by 2% active in a striking force, and 98% passively sympathetic.

In fifty words: granted mobility, security (in the form of denying targets to the enemy), time, and doctrine (the idea to convert every subject to friendliness) victory will rest with the insurgents, for the algebraical factors

are in the end decisive, and against them perfection of means and spirit struggle quite in vain.

Those words have formed a rallying cry for guerrillas and their acolytes ever since, but the claim is less far-reaching than it appears on a quick read. Note all of the caveats: success is certain only if guerrillas have ‘mobility,’ ‘security,’ ‘time,’ and ‘doctrine.’ Few insurgencies have ever been vouchsafed all of those advantages.

The Assassin’s Creed

1. Instead of a contiguous, readily vanquished, small state, establish a geographically dispersed state of formidable mountain fortresses. Such fortresses might be conquered, but that would involve high costs and would divert powerful rulers from more pressing matters.
2. Be ready to form mutually beneficial alliances with any ruler—provided that ruler left unmolested your state and Nizaris under his rule outside of your state.
3. Train a cadre of assassins willing to sacrifice their lives to save their state and co-religionists.
4. Establish these assassins’ well-deserved, fearsome reputation for professionalism and courage.
5. Avoid killing bystanders: Only kill the intended target.
6. Use assassinations to deter conquests of any part of the Nizari state, to deter massacres against co-religionists living in the domains of the target, and to promote alliances.
7. Whenever possible, before killing, try to intimidate a powerful target, e.g. by leaving a dagger on a Sunni Sultan’s bed while he is asleep. Carry out an assassination as a last resort only.
8. If nothing else works, kill the target. His successor, most likely, would not be as foolhardy.
9. Strike fear into future victims by carrying out assassinations in a public space and have your assassin stay put after completing his mission, unflinchingly accepting death.

A “revolutionary of genius,” he established in 1090 his stronghold in a fortress known as Alamut in the Elburz Mountains of northern Persia. From this remote location, reachable only by a single narrow track, he dispatched his da’is (missionaries) to win converts to the Ismaili cause. But Hasan-i Sabbah was not satisfied using nonviolent means to extend his sect. He also dispatched fedayeen (self-sacrificers) armed with daggers to slay Muslim notables—clerics, judges, teachers, administrators, soldiers—who opposed his heresies. In their eagerness to attain a spot in paradise, the fedayeen usually made little attempt to escape, thus becoming in effect ‘suicide knifers.’

The term ‘assassin’ was a corruption of “hashish-eater”—a label that was applied to the fedayeen by their enemies who assumed (erroneously) that only powerful drugs could induce these men to sacrifice their own lives in order to eliminate their enemies. In fact the fedayeen seem to have been motivated by nothing more than religious zeal; taking intoxicants would have made it hard for them to be as patient and clever as they were in carrying out plots that often required considerable dissimulation and playacting.

During the course of Hasan-i Sabbah’s thirty-year reign, his fedayeen claimed only fifty victims, all men of some standing. But, while minuscule by the scale of most reigns of terror, whether of the Mongols or of the French Revolution, this was sufficient to terrorize his enemies. From then on, according to an Arab chronicler:

“No commander or officer dared to leave his house unprotected; they wore armor under clothes.”

During all the years that Hasan-i Sabbah directed this campaign of terror he never set foot outside his Alamut stronghold, in fact rarely even left his room. He was, like many subsequent terrorist leaders, an intellectual, and he spent countless hours deep in study in his impressive library.

Their reign of terror, which lasted two centuries, was enough to establish their reputation as one of the most successful terrorist groups in history. Thanks largely to the dark genius of Hasan-i Sabbah, they developed a highly effective organization, combining a covert hierarchy with a compelling ideology and rigorous methods of indoctrination that inspired his followers to sacrifice their lives for the cause. Those remain the essential ingredients for terrorist success down to the present day. But the Assassins also differed in crucial respects from most of their successors. Unlike their modern equivalents, the Assassins attacked only the great and the powerful, and never harmed ordinary people going about their day.

Terrorism initially referred to a certain exercise of state power (leveled against targets designated as opponents of the state). The term has come,

over time, to signify precisely the opposite—the actions of non-state actors who oppose a prevailing order. Those who maintain that order designate opposition as unacceptable—as terroristic.

Terrorists are outcasts who are hunted by the authorities. They are far more likely to wind up dead or in a dungeon than to succeed in achieving their goals. It stands to reason that most who are drawn to such a life would have an ideological compulsion verging on fanaticism. This is less true of large, nationalist organizations such as the KKK or IRA, which draw in a diverse membership and, for better or worse, enjoy broad societal sanction. Their members often have a mental makeup similar to soldiers.

Terrorists tend to be drawn from well-educated, middle-class or high-income families. So if poverty does not cause terrorism what does? The suppression of civil liberties and political rights. When nonviolent means of protest are curtailed, malcontents appear to be more likely to turn to terrorist tactics.

It is generally assumed that terrorism seldom ‘works,’ meaning that it seldom achieves its objectives. That is a valid if simplistic conclusion to draw about modern terrorism, whose annals are littered with failed groups, from the Basque ETA to the German Baader-Meinhof Gang. The nineteenth century provides further evidence of terrorist futility in the campaigns of the anarchists who failed to destroy existing states and replace them with idealized communal institutions. But there are also numerous examples of terrorists significantly influencing the course of history—sometimes even in the direction they sought. The Klan began dynamiting black churches, burning synagogues, shooting people in the back with hunting rifles, and infiltrating state and local law enforcement. It became the most violent American terrorist group of the twentieth century. Other relatively successful terrorist groups of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries range from the Irish Republican Army to the German and Japanese militarists of the interwar period. Even the Russian revolutionaries, although they did not bring down the Romanov regime with their campaign of assassinations and “expropriations,” undermined it so much that they contributed to its eventual overthrow.

Why, then, did some terrorists succeed where others failed? To answer that question requires an examination of key terrorist campaigns from just before the US Civil War to just after World War I—the first great age of international terrorism. Some of the most prominent and influential terrorist groups of the era were the abolitionists and segregationists in the United States, Nihilists and socialists in Russia, anarchists across Europe and North America, and nationalists in Ireland. They did not all achieve their aims, but all changed history for better or worse. Even the anarchists would

leave their mark by inadvertently giving rise to heightened international police cooperation symbolized by the formation of Interpol. For all of their notoriety, however, their influence was modest by comparison with that of the fanatic—or, depending on your perspective, the idealist—who helped spark the bloodiest conflict in US history. His arrival on the political stage was announced with an act of violence that was shocking by the tamer standards of antebellum America if not those of the twenty-first century, when we have become accustomed to far worse atrocities.

“Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done.”

Frederick Douglass summed up his impact:

“If John Brown did not end the war that ended slavery, he did at least begin the war that ended slavery.”

If so, that would make this zealous Puritan one of the more consequential terrorists in history—almost as important as the Bosnian students who ignited World War I.

President Sadi Carnot of France, Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo of Spain, Empress Elizabeth of Austria-Hungary, President William McKinley of the United States, and King Umberto I of Italy were all slain by self-professed anarchists between 1894 and 1901. Other monarchs, including Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany and the shah of Persia, narrowly escaped the same fate. Never before had any terrorist group killed so many heads of state, nor has any since then. Such killings posed, as King Umberto noted, a “professional risk” for rulers. Many of these bloodlettings were justified as reprisals for punishments meted out for earlier attacks; the desire for revenge has always been the most powerful of terrorist motivations.

“Hanged in Chicago, decapitated in Germany, garroted in Xerez, shot in Barcelona, guillotined in Montbrison and in Paris, our dead are many. But you have not been able to destroy anarchy. Its roots go deep; it sprouts from the bosom of a poisonous society which is falling apart. It is everywhere and it will end by defeating you and killing you.”

Those today who believe that the world's response to 9/11 is entirely novel should realize that the anarchist menace of a century earlier prompted growing attempts at international police cooperation such as the anti-anarchist conferences in Rome (1898) and St. Petersburg (1904). The Russian secret police established a sizable operation in Paris with the French government's consent, and Italy deployed detectives to keep track of Italian anarchists around the world. Such steps laid the foundation for the creation in 1923 of Interpol, the International Criminal Police Commission. Anarchist groups were riddled with informers and provocateurs who kept the police forces of many countries well informed of their plots—and sometimes invented fresh plots simply to collect greater rewards for uncovering them. Just as happens with the FBI and Muslim 'terrorists' today.

As usual, technology was a double-edged sword: the same cameras that made it possible for the mass media to publish pictures of terrorist attacks, thus furthering the perpetrators' aims, also made it possible for the police to photograph and identify suspects. This era saw the beginning of mug shots, fingerprints, and forensic laboratories, all of which made the terrorists' jobs harder.

The most successful terrorist campaigns are waged for causes, usually nationalist, which have widespread acceptance among the population and are supported by political parties and regular or irregular military forces—just as the most successful guerrillas are supported by conventional military forces. By contrast a small number of terrorists acting on their own to implement a radical agenda has scant chance of success—as demonstrated not only by the anarchists but also by many subsequent terrorists such as the Red Army Faction and the Weathermen. Terrorists do better, moreover, if they fight a democratic nation with a free press whose coverage will help to magnify their attacks while restraining the official response. There is not much terrorism in totalitarian states, because the secret police can ruthlessly snuff it out.

Immediately after September 11th, the Bush Administration rushed to the judgment that America's old approach to fighting terrorism, which treated it as a crime like any other, was inadequate for the post-9/11 world. Almost without discussion, it was agreed that a 'new' kind of enemy required new kinds of tactics.

What was incredible was how momentous a decision this is, to say we're in a state of war with al-Qaeda, because it set us on a course not only for our international response, but also in our domestic constitutional relations. You'd expect that the cabinet would have met, and that different options would have been developed, and they would have debated the pros and cons, and that allies would have been consulted. But there was little or no

detailed deliberation about long-term consequences.

“The government may be justified in taking measures which in less troubled conditions could be seen as infringements of individual liberties,” the Office of Legal Counsel lawyers told the White House. In fact, the lawyers advised:

“We think that the Fourth Amendment should be no more relevant than it would be in cases of invasion or insurrection.”

In response to questions and condemnations from around the globe, a University of California international law professor, John C. Yoo, on leave to serve as assistant US attorney general in the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, penned in March 2003 what became the infamous “Torture Memo.” Not much was made at the time of one of the precedents Yoo used to defend the designation “unlawful combatant”—the US Supreme Court’s 1873 opinion in *Modoc Indian Prisoners*.

In a negotiating meeting between a general and Kintpuash, the Modoc leader killed the general and the other commissioners when they would allow only for surrender. In response, the United States sent another former Civil War general in with more than a thousand additional soldiers as reinforcements, and in April 1873 these troops attacked the Modoc stronghold, this time forcing the Indigenous fighters to flee. After four months of fighting that cost the United States almost \$500,000—equal to nearly \$10 million currently—and the lives of more than four-hundred of its soldiers and a general, the nationwide backlash against the Modocs was vengeful.

Kintpuash and several other captured Modocs were imprisoned and then hanged at Alcatraz, and the Modoc families were scattered and incarcerated on reservations. Kintpuash’s corpse was embalmed and exhibited at circuses around the country. The commander of the army’s Pacific Military Division at the time, Lieutenant General John M. Schofield, wrote of the Modoc War in his memoir, *Forty-Six Years in the Army*:

“If the innocent could be separated from the guilty, plague, pestilence, and famine would not be an unjust punishment for the crimes committed in this country against the original occupants of the soil.”

Drawing a legal analogy between the Modoc prisoners and the Guantánamo detainees, Assistant US Attorney General Yoo employed the legal category of ‘*homo sacer*’: in Roman law, a person banned from society, excluded from its legal protections but still subject to the sovereign’s power.

Anyone may kill a homo sacer without it being considered murder. One begins to understand why John C. Yoo's infamous torture memos cited the 1865 Military Commissions and the 1873 Modoc Indian Prisoners legal opinions in order to articulate executive power in declaring the state of exception, particularly when the Modoc Indian Prisoners opinion explicitly marks the Indian combatant as homo sacer to the United States.

Yoo quoted from the 1873 Modoc Indian Prisoners opinion:

“It cannot be pretended that a United States soldier is guilty of murder if he kills a public enemy in battle, which would be the case if the municipal law were in force and applicable to an act committed under such circumstances. All the laws and customs of civilized warfare may not be applicable to an armed conflict with the Indian tribes upon our western frontier; but the circumstances attending the assassination of Canby [Army general] and Thomas [US peace commissioner] are such as to make their murder as much a violation of the laws of savage as of civilized warfare, and the Indians concerned in it fully understood the baseness and treachery of their act.”

According to this line of thinking, anyone who could be defined as ‘Indian’ could thus be killed legally, and they also could be held responsible for crimes they committed against any US soldier. As a result, citizens of American Indian nations become in this moment the origin of the stateless terrorist combatant within US enunciations of sovereignty.

Traditionally, in the context of military affairs, we've always understood that lethal force in battle could not be subjected to ex ante judicial constraints. When armies are shooting at each other, there's no room for a judge on that battlefield. But now the government has decided—without the public's participation, without our knowledge and consent—that the battlefield is everywhere. Individuals who don't represent an imminent threat in any meaningful sense of those words are redefined, through the subversion of language, to meet that definition.

They concluded that a strong national security and defense was the first priority, and that without a strong defense, there's not much expectation or hope of having other freedoms. The president, the report noted, “will on occasion feel duty bound to assert monarchical notions of prerogative that will permit him to exceed the laws.”

There was a consensus that we had to move from retribution and punishment to preemption and prevention. Only a warfare model allows that approach.

For the average American or European, Coca-Cola or Johnson & Johnson poses a far deadlier threat than al-Qaeda. How, then, do terrorists manage to dominate the headlines and change the political situation throughout the world? By provoking their enemies to overreact. In essence, terrorism is a show. Terrorists stage a terrifying spectacle of violence that captures our imagination and makes us feel as if we are sliding back into medieval chaos. Consequently states often feel obliged to react to the theater of terrorism with a show of security, orchestrating immense displays of force, such as the persecution of entire populations or the invasion of foreign countries. In most cases, this overreaction to terrorism poses a far greater threat to our security than the terrorists themselves. Sounds a lot like the global response to the Wuhan Flu.

Terrorists are like a fly that tries to destroy a china shop. The fly is so weak that it cannot budge even a single teacup. So it finds a bull, gets inside its ear and starts buzzing. The bull goes wild with fear and anger, and destroys the china shop. This is what happened in the Middle East in the last decade. Islamic fundamentalists could never have toppled Saddam Hussein by themselves. Instead they enraged the USA via the 9/11 attacks, and the USA destroyed the Middle Eastern china shop for them. Now they flourish in the wreckage.

“By themselves, terrorists are too weak to drag us back to the Middle Ages and re-establish the Jungle Law. They may provoke us, but in the end, it all depends on our reactions. If the Jungle Law comes back into force, it will not be the fault of terrorists.”

I have discussed with friends, the collateral damage. I’m especially noticing it in police departments. The vets come back, join police departments and the results are ugly. They have no fire discipline, act as if they’re in a war zone, blowing away civilians indiscriminately if they feel the least bit in danger and often when they clearly aren’t. They also have a taste for brutality, and the only people they have fellow-feeling for are their mates, certainly not anyone who isn’t in their ‘unit.’

Then, of course, there are the homeless veterans, the suicides, the wife-and child-beaters, and the rapists.

A lot of these people are very badly damaged. Occupation is always brutalizing, for everyone involved, but this bunch has been particularly brutalized. One of my friends is an ex-US military officer, out before Iraq, and to say that he is livid is a vast understatement. The same thing happened to the Israeli army, over time. And Americans went and copied

failed Israeli tactics. We saw it happening at the time. Not just immoral, and unethical, but a mistake.

But the resistance did not win much of a victory. Brutalizing your brutalizers is all very nice and I have no moral qualms against it. If Canada was invaded, I would fight, and I would join the resistance, and if the invaders were American—and who else could it be—I would rejoice at every dead American soldier. But at the end of the day, Iraq is in shambles, appears to be essentially a protectorate of Iran, has a huge Kurdish problem (or the Kurds have an Iraqi problem, depending on where you sit), violence is ongoing, and so on. Iraq was never a war anyone was going to ‘win.’ All anyone can claim, at best, is a Pyrrhic victory.

As for America, the first great man of the twenty-first century—great is not a synonym for good—was bin Laden. He wanted to draw America onto the ground, and bleed them like the USSR was bled, costing them so much treasure that their economy could no longer bear the costs of empire. He essentially succeeded, thanks to the sublime stupidity of his enemies. He must have gotten down on his knees every day and thanked God for George Bush and American high command and the Neocons and the Supreme Court. The far enemy (US) is blowing itself up with its insane financial and economic policies. That strain is exactly what bin Laden wanted, he says so in his writing. He’s dead, but he’s winning. And I think that’s a deal he would have happily taken if offered to him September 10, 2001.

9/11 was extremely successful, to the point that you just do not need a large scale attack like 9/11 in the US ever again (or at least for a long time). With the heightened fear, paranoia, and government propagand, single individuals, committing random small acts of violence, perhaps killing tens of people at a time, even if the individuals are killed after, is far more effective.

Bin Laden planned to bleed the US dry and destroy it that way. Only a fool thinks you can fight an overwhelming force on an equal playing field. And it sure looks like he was successful, trillions spent and used as an excuse for why we need to cut social programs, leading to discontent among the citizens. Really the most intelligent strategy—and Bin Laden may have been a fanatic but he did not appear to be stupid—is to get your enemy to turn on itself, and that’s where we’re headed, in large part due to 9/11 giving a certain segment of those in power the cover they needed to attack their own citizenry. Something they wanted to do all along.

At a time when pundits and policy-makers routinely liken the threat of Islamic radicalism to the threat posed by the totalitarianisms of the last century, it is worth recalling that US officials once compared the totalitarians to historic Islam. “The threat to Western Europe,” wrote Truman’s

secretary of state, Dean Acheson, in his memoirs, “seemed to me singularly like that which Islam had posed centuries before, with its combination of ideological zeal and fighting power.” Treating Nazism, Communism, and Islamism as essentially interchangeable, while ignoring their fundamental and irreconcilable differences, testifies to the enduring value of using (or devising) some sort of diabolical ‘other’ as a reference point when selling policy.

In Acheson’s day, comparing communists to fanatical Muslims left little room for doubt about the seriousness of the Red threat. Today, comparing Islamic extremists to fanatical communists or, even worse, to Nazis, accomplishes a similar purpose. The intention is to simplify, clarify, and remove ambiguity. The net effect is to mobilize, discipline, and squelch dissent.

“The threat posed by AQAP has been greatly exaggerated as a threat to the United States. In fact, many Americans think that anything that might kill you personally—in an airplane or walking down Park Avenue or something—is the biggest threat in the world. Because they’re not accustomed to dealing with conditions of danger as a standard of life, you know? So to say, ‘Is AQAP a threat to the United States?’ Yeah. They could bring down an airliner, kill a couple hundred people. But are they an existential threat to the United States? Of course not. Of course not. None of these people are an existential threat to the United States. We’ve gone crazy over this. We had this kind of hysterical reaction to danger.”

A regime can withstand terrible catastrophes, and even ignore them, provided its legitimacy is not based on preventing them. On the other hand, a regime may collapse due to a minor problem, if it is seen as undermining its legitimacy. In the fourteenth century the Black Death killed between a quarter and a half of European populations, yet no king lost his throne as a result, and no king made much of an effort to overcome the plague. Nobody back then thought that preventing plagues was part of a king’s job. On the other hand, rulers who allowed religious heresy to spread in their dominions risked losing their crowns, and even their heads. Today, a government may take a softer approach to domestic and sexual violence than to terrorism, because despite the impact of movements such as #MeToo, rape does not undermine the government’s legitimacy. In France, for example, more than 10,000 rape cases are reported to the authorities each year, with probably tens of thousands of additional cases left unreported. Rapists and abusive husbands, however, are not perceived as an existential threat to the French

state, because historically the state did not build itself on the promise to eliminate sexual violence. In contrast, the much rarer cases of terrorism are viewed as a deadly threat to the French Republic, because over the last few centuries modern Western states have gradually established their legitimacy on the explicit promise to tolerate no political violence within their borders.

What it really comes down to is the political reality that we have a political class that feels it must inoculate itself against allegations of weakness. Our politicians are more fearful of the politics of terrorism—of the charge that they do not take terrorism seriously—than they are of the crime itself.

Safety from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct. Even the ardent love of liberty will, after a time, give way to its dictates. The violent destruction of life and property incident to war, the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty to resort for repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the risk of being less free.

Robert Mueller realized there was another way to smoke them out. What had worked for Hoover against the Ku Klux Klan and the Communist Party of the United States could work for Mueller against the threat of Islamic terrorism. The FBI would seek and arrest potential terrorists with undercover stings. It was a time-honored strategy that criminal investigators understood and intelligence agents savored. It combined secret investigations with the satisfaction of big arrests and blazing headlines. It required two essential elements: a convincing con man as the informant and a credulous suspect as the target. No jury in Los Angeles, Chicago, or Tuscaloosa would accept an argument of entrapment by an accused terrorist handcuffed and shackled by the state.

And the FBI's relentless focus on fighting terrorism had an unforeseen consequence. The investigation and prosecution of white-collar crime plummeted, a boon to the Wall Street plunderers that helped create the greatest economic crisis in America since the 1930s—well perhaps until we shot ourselves in the head over the Wuhan Flu, time will tell. And those crimes resulted in many more deaths, many more harms, than 9/11.

The Palestinians have the goal of reclaiming and protecting their land rights. Some also have the goal of avenging past wrongs and punishing the Israelis. In either case, those who bring violence to the issue feel justified in doing so. They perceive no alternatives that will move them toward their goals as effectively as violence. They view the consequences of violence as favorable: pressure on the Israelis, world attention to their plight, vengeance for past suffering, et cetera. They perceive—by now with good reason—a

high ability to deliver violence. To predict whether the Palestinians will continue to use violence, we must—at least for the purposes of evaluation—see the issues their way. The importance of seeing things from the perspective of the person whose behavior you are predicting cannot be overstated.

A 60 Minutes episode gave a good example of most people's reluctance to do that. It profiled the mastermind terrorist known as the Engineer, a man who helped kamikaze martyrs strap explosives to their chests. His agents became walking bombs, carrying death into populated areas. Interviewer Steve Kroft asked one of the Engineer's terrorist followers to describe the man who could do such terrible things. The answer:

“He's a very normal person, just like all of us.”

Kroft took exception:

“You said that he is just like all of the rest of us. I, I, I would say that, that no one would consider you and him normal.”

The ‘terrorist’ replied:

“I believe your statement is incorrect. There are thousands and thousands in our country that believe what we believe—and not only our country, in the rest of the Arab world and even in your country.”

The ‘terrorist’ was right. When America is preparing to go to war, justification is first: ‘evil empire,’ ‘mad dictator,’ ‘international outlaw,’ ‘protect our interests,’ ‘cannot just stand by and watch,’ et cetera. Alternatives to violence shrink as we move from negotiations to demands, warnings to boycotts, and finally blockades to attacks. The perceived consequences of going to war move from intolerable to tolerable as public opinion comes into alignment with government opinion. Our appraisal of our ability rises as ships and troops are moved into proximity of an enemy. At the end of the day, the American bomber who kills a hundred people in Iraq decides to use violence the same way as the Palestinian bomber who kills a hundred people in Israel.

How do we stop it? Let's see, you could start with (some applicable to US-only, EU-only, mix, et cetera):

- Stop bombing/droning the Middle East & Africa
- Stop arming the Middle East & Africa

- Stop supporting repressive regimes in any way in the Middle East & Africa
- Close foreign military bases in the Middle East & Africa
- Treat attacks in Europe & elsewhere as simple crimes, not acts of war
- Stop demonizing conflict-zone refugees
- Close Guantanamo Bay and either try or release every individual
- End support of the illegal Israeli occupation; export ban on anything to Israel that is not food, medical supplies, or fuel.

If they want someone to blame for their poor governance and living conditions, don't give them easy ways to pin it on you, make them work at it. 9/11 happened; many joined the military to 'get revenge,' to 'defend one's country,' why is it so hard to grasp that someone else might do the same when you do it to them, even if they may have moved to another one at the time of the attack?

Violence is not some unexplainable horrible thing, there are reasons, motivations, in the vast majority of violent acts. Addressing the motivations is the only way to achieve anything.

Follow the above and you still might have bombings and other attacks. While regrettable, the deaths will pale in comparison to deaths from things such as heart disease, cancer, accidents—many of these deaths potentially attributable to organizations with an ideology that does not put the protection of human life first, but instead an imaginary thing called 'profit.' Yet we do not wage all out war on these organizations, despite having a far greater negative impact on ourselves than al-Qaeda or ISIS.

The ideology of unfettered capitalism has resulted in far more deaths and human suffering than the ideology of radical Islam. You've just been trained to see a beheading as more barbaric than a boardroom decision resulting in just as many or more deaths.

Violence is bred by injustice, poverty, inequality, and other violence. This lesson was learned very painfully in the first half of the twentieth century, at a cost of some 80 million lives. Of course, a full belly and a fair hearing won't stop a fanatic; but they can greatly reduce the number who become fanatics.

Attacking hunger, disease, poverty, and social exclusion would do more good than air marshals, asylum restrictions, and identity cards. Global security will be achieved only by building stable and strong societies.

Chapter Eighty-one

The Struggle Within

The simplest of leftist ethics: your speech is violence, my violence is speech.

faceless brothers of the night
who swim through the city like fish in the sea
never resting
in your search and destroy mission against the system
i know how lonely you are
and my heart reaches out to you
as repression grows it becomes more difficult
for us to continue our struggle here
but we persist until the final day
when we shall join you in the sea of blood that will flow
in the streets of babylon

An Oakland policeman stopped Newton's car; Seale and others were with him. At first Newton politely showed his driver's license and answered the officer's questions; he had his M1 rifle in clear view, Seale his 9mm. In short order three more patrol cars arrived. A crowd began to form. Up and down the street, people poked their heads from apartment windows. When an officer asked to see the guns, Newton refused.

"Get away from the car," Newton said. "We don't want you around the car, and that's all there is to it." "Who in the hell do you think you are?" the officer demanded. "Who in the hell do you think you are," Newton replied. At that point, Newton emerged from the car and loudly chambered a round in his rifle. When police tried to shoo away the growing crowd, Newton shouted for everyone to stay put, that they were within their rights to observe what was happening on a public street. "What are you going to do with that gun?" an officer asked. "What are you going to do with your gun?" Newton replied. "Because if you shoot at me or if you try to take this gun, I'm going to shoot back at you, swine."

“There’s a group of youngsters cropping up who is getting tired of this brutality against our people. They are going to take some action; it might be misguided; it might be disorganized; it might be unintelligent; but they’re going to get a little action. And there are going to be some whites who are going to join in along with them.”

—Malcolm X, 1964

For much of white America, the 50s was a time of suffocating conformity, when parents born during the Depression and empowered by winning a “good war” taught their children that America represented everything that was right and true in the world. These were the “happy days,” when a booming economy sent wealth soaring and children, born by the millions, grew up in homes where every family seemed to have two cars in the driveway, a stereo cabinet, and, in fifty-million homes by 1960, a television. How happy were Americans? When a 1957 Gallup poll asked people whether they were “very happy, fairly happy, or not too happy,” an astounding 96 percent answered very or fairly happy. “The employers will love this generation,” University of California president Clark Kerr said in 1959.

“They are not going to press many grievances, they are going to be easy to handle. There aren’t going to be riots.”

And then, as if overnight, things changed. More than anything else, it was the pictures young Americans began seeing on those new televisions in 1960—of stoic Southern blacks dragged away from all-white lunch counters, of black protesters being beaten bloody by red-faced Southern deputies—that laid the groundwork for the white protest movement. The violence and injustice itself was shameful enough, but it was what those pictures said about America, about what an entire generation of young people had been taught, that felt like a betrayal. America wasn’t a land of equality. It wasn’t a land of the good and the just and the righteous. It was all a lie.

“The meaninglessness of non-violent, ‘democratic’ methods was becoming clear to us in the spring of 1967. The Civil Rights Movement was dead. Pacifism was dead. Some Leftists—the Trotskyites, Maoists, radical socialists. . . some of the radicals in SDS, Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, Tom Hayden—knew it early. But it took the rest of us awhile to give up the sweet life of the democratic Left for revolt.”

Imagine if this happened today: Hundreds of young Americans disappear from their everyday lives and secretly form urban guerrilla groups. Dedicated to confronting the government and righting society's wrongs, they smuggle bombs into skyscrapers and federal buildings and detonate them from coast to coast. They strike inside the Pentagon, inside the US Capitol, at a courthouse in Boston, at dozens of multinational corporations, at a Wall Street restaurant packed with lunchtime diners. People die. They rob banks, dozens of them; launch raids on National Guard arsenals; and assassinate policemen, in New York, in San Francisco, in Atlanta. There are deadly shoot-outs and daring jailbreaks, illegal government break-ins and a scandal in Washington.

This was a slice of America during the tumultuous 1970s, a decade when self-styled radical "revolutionaries" formed something unique in postcolonial US history: an underground resistance movement. Given little credibility by the press, all but ignored by historians, their bombings and robberies and shoot-outs stretched from Seattle to Miami, from Los Angeles to Maine.

Because radical violence was so deeply woven into the fabric of 1970s America many citizens, especially in New York and other hard-hit cities, accepted it as part of daily life. As one New Yorker sniffed to the New York Post after an FALN attack in 1977:

"Oh, another bombing? Who is it this time?"

It's a difficult attitude to comprehend in a post-9/11 world, when even the smallest pipe bomb draws the attention of hundreds of federal agents and journalists. People have completely forgotten that in 1972 we had over nineteen-hundred domestic bombings in the United States. People don't want to listen to that. They can't believe it. One bombing now and everyone gets excited. In 1972? It was every day. Buildings getting bombed, policemen getting killed. It was commonplace.

There are crucial distinctions, however, between public attitudes toward bombings during the 1970s and those today. In the past twenty-five years terrorist bombs have claimed thousands of American lives, over three-thousand on 9/11 alone. Bombings today often mean someone dies. The underground bombings of the 1970s were far more widespread and far less lethal. During an eighteen-month period in 1971 and 1972, the FBI reported more than 2,500 bombings on US soil, nearly five a day. Yet less than one percent of the 1970s-era bombings led to a fatality; the single deadliest radical-underground attack of the decade killed four people. Most bombings were followed by communiqués denouncing some aspect of the American condition; bombs basically functioned as exploding press releases. The sheer number of attacks led to a grudging public resignation. Unless someone was killed, press

accounts rarely carried any expression of outrage. In fact, as hard as it may be to comprehend today, there was a moment during the early 1970s when bombings were viewed by many Americans as a semi-legitimate means of protest. In the minds of others, they amounted to little more than a public nuisance.

To some it is ultimately a tragic tale, defined by one unavoidable irony: that so many idealistic young Americans, passionately committed to creating a better world for themselves and those less fortunate, believed they had to kill people to do it. They were like so many in the faltering protest movement at that restive decade's end: long-haired, free-spirited, and mired in gloom. The one thing that set them apart from friends who raised their fists and chanted antiwar slogans in demonstrations of the day was that late one night, after removing a carton of cottage cheese, a quart of yogurt, and some leftover salad from their refrigerator, they replaced it all with a hundred bright red sticks of dynamite.

“If you live in a country doing illegal acts, you have to take steps, or you're complicit. And if you break a law doing that, you become a political prisoner.”

Regardless of which side of the law their actions fell on, however, America's political prisoners participated in movements presenting revolutionary Left challenges to the capitalist state; for many, these politics emerged out of an explicit commitment to fighting white supremacy, and, for some, patriarchy. These politics necessitated direct, confrontational responses to the violence of US imperialism and corporate hegemony—from war overseas to murderous attacks on people of color in the United States, from environmental destruction to the stark repression of incarceration itself. Political prisoners emerged from movements seeking to stop, to overturn, to develop alternatives to state and extralegal violence of the system. All of America's political internees did something; some resisted with force, some put their bodies on the line, and others used words and propagated ideas the state deemed too powerful to let slide as just so much free speech. The issue of political prisoners is less one of “innocence” than of defending people's ability and capacity to resist.

Of those incarcerated for engaging in illegal, often clandestine actions, most followed a similar path: several years of legal activism led to a determined belief in the need to raise the stakes. Their backgrounds are varied; prior to being activists, they were good-hearted progressives or class-conscious workers, apolitical moderates, or “red diaper babies.” They spent years protesting, petitioning, organizing, and engaging in civil disobedience.

But, time after time, frustration at the limited possibilities of available (i.e., legal) remedies to such entrenched injustice led many activists to seek—and many more to support—alternative options of resistance.

This search for alternatives emerged from a desperation, it is true, but also from a palpable belief in the possibility of a more successful revolutionary politics. Building a movement, many have argued, requires an infrastructure hidden from the eyes and ears of the state—especially as repression becomes more intense. Although it often meant a turn to armed struggle, the search for new mechanisms of engaging in political action did not necessarily lead to violence. What it did mean, across the board, was a belief in raising the stakes of resistance. Upping the ante through militant, often clandestine, tactics was not intended to stand in for organizing a mass movement—although sectarianism and different strategic priorities have often yielded this in effect if not in intent. Rather, militancy meant an ongoing commitment to develop a revolutionary movement that looked to create opportunities for expanded resistance in the context of concrete conditions.

What the underground movement in the 70s was truly about—what it was always about—was the plight of black Americans. Every single underground group of the 1970s, with the notable exception of the Puerto Rican FALN, was concerned first and foremost with the struggle of blacks against police brutality, racism, and government repression. While late in the decade several groups expanded their worldview to protest events in South Africa and Central America, the black cause remained the core motivation of almost every significant radical who engaged in violent activities during the 1970s.

“Race comes first, always first. Everything started with the Black Panthers. The whole thrill of being with them. When you heard Huey Newton, you were blown away. The civil rights movement had turned bad, and these people were ready to fight. And yeah, the war. The country was turning into Nazi Germany, that’s how we saw it. Do you have the guts to stand up? The underground did. And oh, the glamour of it. The glamour of dealing with the underground. They were my heroes. It was the revolution, baby. We were gonna make a revolution.”

One needs to understand the voices of black anger, which began to be noticed during the 1950s. All of it, from the first marches in Alabama and Mississippi all the way to the arrest of the last underground radical in 1985, began with the civil rights movement, a cause led by black Americans. And what was true at its inception remained true through the ‘60s and into the

'70s-era underground: Blacks, for the most part, led, and whites followed. It was black leaders who initiated the first Southern boycotts; black leaders who led the sit-ins and gave the great speeches; black leaders who, when other avenues appeared blocked, first called for violence and open rebellion. At the end of the '60s, it was violent black rhetoric that galvanized the people who went underground.

“The armed goons of this racist government will again meet the guns of oppressed Third World People as long as they occupy our community and murder our brothers and sisters in the name of American law and order; just as the fascist Marines and Army occupy Vietnam in the name of democracy and murder Vietnamese people in the name of American imperialism are confronted with the guns of the Vietnamese Liberation Army, the domestic armed forces of racism and oppression will be confronted with the guns of the Black Liberation Army, who will mete out, in the tradition of Malcolm and all true revolutionaries, real justice. We are revolutionary justice. All power to the people.”

“Revolutionary justice has been meted out again by righteous brothers of the Black Liberation Army with the death of two Gestapo pigs gunned down as so many of our brothers have been gunned down in the past. But this time no racist class jury will acquit them. Revolutionary justice is ours! Every policeman, lackey, or running dog of the ruling class must make his or her choice now. Either side with the people: poor and oppressed, or die for the oppressor. Trying to stop what is going down is like trying to stop history, for as long as there are those who will dare live for freedom there are men and women who dare to unhorse the emperor. All power to the people.”

To the press, at least, poorly educated, self-proclaimed black guerrillas who murdered policemen were not credible revolutionaries. But self-proclaimed white guerrillas from good schools who bombed vacant buildings were.

“If the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution cannot be enforced in this social jungle called Dixie at this time, then Negroes must defend themselves, even if it is necessary to resort to violence.”

In cold Northern slums, blacks faced conditions every bit as daunting as those in the Jim Crow South: poverty, widespread unemployment, poor housing, and rampant police brutality. A black man arrested in Harlem in the 1960s could routinely expect a beating; when policemen killed a black citizen, there was rarely a successful prosecution. When underground groups began forming in 1970 and 1971, their targets were rarely slumlords or army barracks or politicians. They were almost always policemen.

While the armed actions of the 1970s marked a different phase of the Black liberation movement, this shift was not as unprecedented as some have suggested. The civil rights movement was never as nonviolent as it has been traditionally depicted; sections of it were always armed—most famously the Deacons for Defense—and even the unarmed aspects were constantly seeking to raise the stakes of resistance to white supremacy. Groups like the Revolutionary Action Movement worked behind the scenes in the early to mid-1960s to develop both Black nationalist consciousness and the capacity for armed resistance. As civil rights activists became more effective and with the quick growth of a Black Power movement, the struggle for Black liberation clashed with an entrenched white supremacist power structure and increasingly repressive state.

Cleaver ordained that the BLA would have no leader. Not him. Not anyone. Under guidelines set by Cleaver and Don Cox, the BLA's structure would be the exact opposite of the Weather Underground's. Where Weather cadres did nothing without direction from leadership, Cleaver and Cox wanted BLA units to operate independently, with no central coordination whatsoever. A system of autonomous cells would be much harder for the government to subdue; a single leader could be defeated with a single arrest.

Lacking wealthy benefactors or steady access to resources, BLA cells often relied on bank robberies to secure funds. This is a tactic revolutionaries call "expropriations," for it involves taking money that capitalist institutions have secured through other people's labor and using it ostensibly to further liberatory ends. In a phenomenon other revolutionary groups would also experience, many BLA soldiers were captured engaging in these high-risk actions.

As members of a clandestine army fighting to free a colonized people, most captured BLA combatants have defined themselves as prisoners of war, not just political prisoners. Several attempted to escape from prison, often with the help of units on the outside—sometimes successfully, at least for short periods of time.

All soldiers have a well-recognized duty to attempt escape. And under international law one has the right to resist unjust rule by force.

The machine guns its soldiers fired, the grenades they threw, the police-

men they killed, the banks they robbed—it was all very real. Between tokes and giggles the Weathermen may have mused about “offing the pigs,” but after the Townhouse explosion they just talked the talk. To police, it was only the BLA who walked the walk.

“The tactical mistake we made was killing the cops in uniform, when we should’ve killed the higher-ups. That would’ve been more effective.”

In one trial, the FBI assigned agents to “protect” the judge and jury; similar actions were used in other trials to the same effect. While there had been no threats against jurors and never an instance where radicals had tampered with trials, the state used such tactics to instill fear among the very people who have to sit in judgment against the accused.

The Weather Underground articulated a politics that defined Black people and other people of color as colonized populations, and saw the role of white people as opening another front of struggle in the fight against imperialism. Such militant solidarity, argued Weather, would overextend the state and its ability to repress revolutionary struggles and therefore hasten the pace and success of revolutions around the globe.

Weather articulated a politics of solidarity that demanded a high level of sacrifice by whites in support of Black and other revolutionary people of color. This support emanated from a strategic belief, pioneered by Che Guevara, that US imperialism could be defeated through overextension; bombings were an attempt to pierce the myth of government invincibility and draw repressive attention away from the Panthers and similar groups. It also reflected a political position that said white people had to side with Third World struggles against the US government—and had to do so in a similarly dramatic way.

There had been no warning call; this was intended to be an ambush, pure and simple. Just before midnight, when shifts would change, sending dozens of off-duty policemen out to their cars, two Weathermen crept into the parking lot. One bomb was placed beside a detective’s car; a second was tossed on the ground between cars. A few minutes after midnight, as officers began wandering outside, the first bomb detonated, its deep boom echoing through the downtown streets. Nearly thirty plate-glass windows in the adjoining municipal building shattered. More than two dozen officers were in the parking lot, and one, a reserve patrolman named Paul Morgan, was struck by shrapnel that mangled his left arm; he would later undergo six hours of surgery to save it. Thirty seconds later, as groups of stunned policemen slowly rose from the pavement, the second bomb went

off, shattering more windows. Afterward, a half-dozen cops would be treated for bruises and broken eardrums.

“We wanted to do it at a shift change, frankly, to maximize deaths. They were cops, so anyone was fair game. Basically it was seen as a successful action. But others, yeah, were angry that a policeman didn’t die. There was no one that was anti that. That was what we were trying to do.”

From September 1969 to May 1970, there was at least one bombing or attempted bombing somewhere in the United States every day by the progressive and radical movements.

“Arrivals and departures from the motel were tightly rationed—we didn’t want it to look like a dope dealer had set up shop. The electrical equipment was brought in first. We started working on the wiring that first night. Remove the minute hand from the pocket watch and drive a small screw into the face of the dial, soldering it fast. That way you can set the detonation eleven hours or so ahead, with a timing circuit that closes when the hour hand touches the screw. One wire is attached to the screw, another connected to the hour hand, and these wires lead back around to each other in a loop that also includes a nine-volt battery, the blasting cap, the safety switch, and the safety light—the all-important warning that goes on if by accident the timing circuit shorts out. We had the thing pretty well built and were testing the connections by mid-morning Friday, when one of the boys from LA delivered the shoebox full of TNT. Another was in and out, keeping the East Coast informed and nailing down arrangements for afterwards, when quite a few people would want to be out of town.”

Tried together, they were dubbed the Ohio 7, although legal battles took some of them from Ohio to New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. These legal battles weren’t the only troubles greeting these revolutionaries: except for Williams, whose wife and children did not accompany him underground, the other six were couples who lived and raised their families underground. After the arrest, the government attempted to use the nine children, most of them under ten and all of them minors, as bargaining chips against their parents. The state offered the Levasseurs’ eight-year-old daughter \$20 and some pizza to cooperate with the government against her family.

The Mannings' children were held incommunicado for two months after the parents were first arrested; they had to go on hunger strike to force the government to disclose the whereabouts of their children.

Most revolutionaries in this time period, especially those engaged in armed struggle, identified prisons as a bulwark of state repression. As such, radicals pledged their solidarity with prison struggles, often leading to a revolving door between incarceration and revolutionary activities. Prison became both a breeding ground for and a target of insurgency.

“There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will not require violence to succeed, and it cannot be successfully resisted by violence. This is the revolution of the new generation. Their protest and rebellion, their culture, clothes, music, drugs, and liberated life-style.”

It was true. America, it turned out, had fallen in love with everything about this groovy new counterculture—except its politics. Those like Weatherman who had predicted a revolution in America ended up being half-right. A revolution was arriving, but it was a cultural rather than a political phenomenon. It was the height of irony: Much of America wanted to dress like Bernadine Dohrn, smoke pot like Bernadine Dohrn, and listen to Bernadine Dohrn's music, but it honestly didn't want to hear a word she had to say. They had preached endlessly about freedom, to dress as you like, eat what you like, smoke what you like: “You can do what you want” was the famous line from the 1971 movie *Harold and Maude*. As these new values seeped into the American mind-set during 1970, 1971, and 1972, it turned out that what most Americans wanted to do was focus not on politics—and certainly not on overthrowing the government—but on themselves. It was the dawning of the ‘Me’ Decade.

All were beginning to realize that it was far easier to talk about guerrilla warfare than to engage in it.

“We had no idea—no idea—what we were up against. We had really hoped that established revolutionary organizations, that they could point to us and say that unless certain things are dealt with in society, this is what you're going to be dealing with. But we were so young, we didn't know what we were doing. The cops, the government, man, they were killing us. Everywhere we looked, there were cops.”

Although armed actions have been the most dramatic, revolutionary militancy has never been limited to guns and bombs. Hundreds of political prisoners have come from pacifist circles, both secular and religious. While these activists are generally imprisoned on shorter sentences their political actions are no less vital, their commitments no less revolutionary. Just as those who engaged in armed struggle never comprised the majority of the movements from which they came, most nonviolent activists who serve prison time for acts of civil disobedience are not revolutionaries. Yet many of them are, and their work provides a vital point through which to build strategic unity among those who differ on questions of tactics. It was, in fact, revolutionary nonviolent activists who maintained dialogue and critical support for armed revolutionaries in the 1970s when other sectors of the Left, who were often theoretically supportive of armed struggle in Third World countries, were decidedly hostile to its domestic iterations.

Perhaps the most famous nonviolent militants of the time were Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Jesuit priests and tested pacifist warriors. The Berrigan brothers and seven other Catholic leftists burned almost four-hundred draft files in Catonsville, Maryland, on May 17, 1968, using homemade napalm to protest its widespread use in Vietnam. Regarding the attack, Daniel Berrigan said:

“Our apologies, good friends, for the fracture of good order, the burning of paper instead of children, the angering of the orderlies in the front parlor of the charnel house. We could not, so help us God, do otherwise.”

Catonsville 9 activists Philip Berrigan and Thomas Lewis, along with two others, had ruined hundreds of draft records in Baltimore by pouring blood over them. They were, in fact, out on bail but sentenced to serve six years for this action when they went to the Catonsville draft board. The Catonsville attack, however, raised the stakes through the use of arson.

“We do this because everything else has failed.”

Whereas political prisoners of the armed-struggle Left are often distinguished by serving lengthy sentences, radical pacifists are more known for the sheer number of times they find themselves behind bars for civil disobedience. For more than forty years, it has been the political tendency most oriented toward civil disobedience, and adherents have served sentences of several months to several years for resisting the apparatuses of war through nonviolent confrontation, including direct action.

At the height of the Cold War arms race, Plowshares activists dismantled nuclear weapons, submarines, helicopters, and other military equipment, often with implements as simple as a common hammer and by pouring their own blood over the weapons. Their actions were effective at literally dismantling instruments of the military.

The United States government's ongoing vendetta against political activists from a half-century ago can seem harsh and even irrational. Vengeful as it is, such prosecutions can also be understood as part of a coherent strategy of containment and dissuasion, the primary targets of which may not even have been born at the time of COINTELPRO, and may entertain political reference points generations removed from those of most of the prisoners discussed above.

Activist and radical attorney Lynne Stewart—who has represented David Gilbert, Bilal Sunni-Ali, and Richard Williams among others—was one of the first domestic targets of the post-9/11 War on Terror. Adding to the bizarre circumstances of her case, Attorney General John Ashcroft first announced charges against her on a late-night television talk show in 2002. She was charged with conspiracy and providing material support to terrorists after delivering a public message on behalf of her client, Egyptian cleric Omar Abdel-Rahman, who was being held in isolation at a supermax prison for his role in the 1994 World Trade Center bombing. Sentenced to twenty-eight months in prison in 2006, the state appealed Stewart's sentence and in 2009, at the age of seventy, Stewart was resentenced to ten years. A court upheld her sentence in 2012. Amid her incarceration, however, Stewart was battling stage-four breast cancer. Supporters pressured the Justice Department for compassionate release for more than a year, which was finally granted on the last day of 2013.

A slew of post-9/11 conspiracy charges have been prosecuted under the mantle of counterterrorism. Conspiracy is a vague legal category that does not require the accused to have participated in illegal activity to be guilty of allegedly dangerous associations.

While the United States denies the existence of political prisoners, it pursues a vengeful policy of lengthy, even lifelong, incarceration. To acknowledge the political basis of their incarceration would further expose the depths of social problems that these militants have committed their lives to fighting. The veneer of US democracy and tolerance requires that dissidents be branded as criminals or terrorists, and denial of the humanity of anyone so labeled.

Working to free political prisoners goes hand in hand with exposing the façade that the United States is a country where injustice is minimal and solved through electoral politics—one point necessitates the other. The fact

that so many political prisoners have been charged with treason or sedition demonstrates that the government fears this precise point; resistance is criminalized, deemed a threat to “the American way of life.”

The ubiquity of state repression affords an opportunity to forge solidarity among multiple revolutionary movements. Seizing this opportunity does not mean ignoring contradictions (e.g. the difference between pacifism and armed struggle, anarchism and Marxism-Leninism, secularism and faith-based organizing, or the struggles within particular movements over racism and patriarchy). Instead, it offers a chance for people committed to radical social change to work with one another, addressing differences in ways that build alliances and strengthen the potential for revolutionary possibilities. The fact that most political prisoners have continued their political work in prison—through writing, mentoring younger activists, conducting peer education with other prisoners, and fighting AIDS, misogyny, and homophobia—provides a worthy example to follow.

Most governments routinely release political prisoners every decade or so, and political internees are often incarcerated together or allowed increased family visits, in tacit recognition of the political nature of their ‘crimes.’ Not so in the United States, where amnesty is a forbidden term. The FBI, Police Benevolent Associations, US Parole Commission, and similar entities have routinely lobbied hard to prevent parole, even when people meet all standards for release—good records, jobs available upon release, community support, et cetera.

In perhaps the most frightening example, former Panther Veronza Bowers has been kept in prison more than a decade past his mandatory release date, without cause or indication of when he will get out. The government has regularly pointed to the “serious charges” and prior political affiliations of the prisoners as reasons for their ongoing incarceration—even though parole is supposed to evaluate someone’s time in prison as a metric for their possible release rather than the charges that resulted in their imprisonment, since the charges never change.

The prison can be seen as an extension of the repression that drove many of these people to undertake militant action in the first place. It is part of the government’s arsenal to destroy revolutionaries. The state has sometimes made this explicit by housing radicals in control unit prisons, prisons-within-prisons that are based on solitary confinement and sensory deprivation. The Communications Management Unit (CMU) is an expression of the security state at its height, devising newer and crueler ways to isolate those whose politics and worldview the state wishes to disappear.

The bulk of such repression is meted out against revolutionary people of color, particularly Black, Native American, and Puerto Rican radicals.

The reasons for this are complex—they involve not just white privilege but the fact that the government has taken a firm position against the release of any political prisoner with a murder conviction. Due to the open levels of confrontation between police and communities of color, these liberation movements often adopted different tactics than white militants.

There are serious challenges to this work, including limited resources, a strategy that must deal with the legal system, public fear of terrorists, and the difficulty of building working relationships among the various movements and communities who find themselves experiencing state repression. But combating political incarceration and supporting those in the crosshairs of state repression remain central to creating a better future. After all, the government remembers who joins and organizes in the movement, regardless of whether they do so before, during, or after their time in prison. Social movements cannot afford to forget.

Our lives and our movements today are as shaped—maybe unknowingly—by the political prisoners who still sit behind concrete walls as the prisons themselves invisibly shape the landscape of the world we seek to make more just. Many have had their lives either ended by the state or have been tried, convicted, and jailed for nothing more than the crime of loving their people enough to attempt a revolution in the United States.

They remain behind walls, often isolated, and at times tortured for their political beliefs. To accept this fact is to ask what ideas can be so dangerous that those who hold it in their heads must be hidden from us? To understand that these people and their circumstance do indeed exist is a necessary first step for a country whose cloak of democracy keeps us in denial. Americans believe political prisoners are a fact in countries like China, Iran, and Cuba but live the lie of the US government's denial of the existence of US political prisoners within its borders.

The decades of radical movements shatter that lie. We must attempt to put ourselves back in proximity to the people and the movements that prisons are meant to place out of reach. To be reconnected to them is to be committed to their freedom. Not solely because they deserve to be free or because our communities would be that much stronger if we had them home, but because for activists today to have the confidence to take the risks and make the leaps that these times require, we must know that we will catch each other when we fall or care for each other if and when and the state seeks to treat us in the same way as those who came before us. By refusing to allow targeted leaders to be taken from us, we take away the state's strongest threat. To fight for the freedom of political prisoners is to declare that there is no barbed wire sharp enough to keep us apart. It includes the cell block in our strategy, and it affirms what Assata taught us

and continues to teach us: that a wall is just a wall, and nothing more at all. It can be broken down. Free All Political Prisoners.

Chapter Eighty-two

Understanding Fear & Violence

“There are no devils left in Hell, They are all in Rwanda. Actually they brought Hell with them. You only have to watch the rivers for proof. Normally in this season, when the rains come to these lush valleys, the rivers swell with a rich red soil. They are more swollen than ever this year. First come the corpses of men and older boys, slain trying to protect their sisters and mothers. Then come the women and girls, flushed out from their hiding places and cut down. Last are the babies, who may bear no wounds: they are tossed alive into the water, to drown on their way downstream. The bodies, or pieces of them, glide by for half an hour or so, the time it takes to wipe out a community, carry the victims to the banks and dump them in. Then the waters run clear for a while, until men and older boys drift into view again, then women, then babies, reuniting in the shallows as the river becomes their grave.”

Societies can break, democracies can fall, ethics can collapse, and ordinary men can find themselves standing over death pits with guns in their hands. It would serve us well today to understand why.

“When a young man kills much meat he comes to think of himself as a chief, or a big man. We worry about any proud young man, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody.”

Perhaps we believe only a deranged and dangerous person would even think of harming us, but that just isn't so. Plenty of people have thought of harming you: the driver of the car behind you who felt you were going too slowly, the person waiting behind you in line at the store while you fumble for your wallet, the person you fired, the person you walked out on—they have all hosted a fleeting violent idea. Though thoughts of harming you may be terrible, they are also inevitable. The thought is not the problem; the expression of the thought is what causes us anxiety, and most of the time that's the whole idea. Understanding this will help reduce unwarranted fear.

So how can you be aggressive without necessarily being violent? The answer is bluster, shit talking, braggadocio, or one of dozens of other names for word-based aggression. Obviously, impugning someone's honor, courage, and/or parentage is the kind of thing that can end in a fight, but more often than not it happens instead of one. Shit talking is the human equivalent of a dog baring its teeth at another dog. He's not trying to start a fight; he's trying to avoid one by letting the other dog know he'll open up a mouthful of murder if pushed too far.

There are plenty of good reasons, both moral and practical, to oppose the suppression of white nationalist and other "extremist" web platforms. Free speech is a core moral value for any society that aspires to freedom of any kind and to any degree. We *must* have the right to form our own opinions, and to express those opinions, no matter how ugly others may find those opinions. Without that freedom, no other freedoms can survive.

As a practical matter, extremists, like everyone else, will choose to state, promote, and argue for their beliefs. If they can do so in public, those beliefs can be engaged and argued against. If they can't do so in public, they'll do so in private, without anyone to convince them—and those they quietly bring into their circles over time—of the error of their ways. The rest of us won't have a clue what might be in the offing—until the guns come out, that is.

This has been a pet peeve of mine for several years, and I suppose it is kind of a strange one as far as pet peeves go. I don't expect many will agree with me on this, but here goes. The following statement is not a threat:

"You should be dragged into the street and shot."

I understand that this is not a very nice thing to say to someone. I can see how this statement may be perceived as threatening in some sense by the person on the receiving end of it. Undoubtedly, hearing that someone else thinks you should be shot is unpleasant. And yet, this statement is not a threat.

In order for a verbal statement to constitute a threat, we need a clear expression of intent to inflict harm. We don't have that in the statement above. Not even close. Here's what a threat would look like:

"I am going to drag you into the street and shoot you."

Here we have a clear expression of intent. I think the difference is fairly obvious and important. In the case of the first statement, my response would likely be something along the lines of, 'Yeah, whatever.' In the case of

the second statement, my response may involve beefing up my fortifications and being more alert.

I can't count the number of times I have seen people complaining about receiving "death threats" as some sort of badge of honor, only to provide evidence of the first sort of statement or something even weaker. These are not death threats. The second statement here is a death threat. 'I am going to kill you' is a death threat; 'someone should kill you' is not a death threat.

Why is this a pet peeve? Besides my strange conviction that words and their definitions matter, I think it bugs me because we've all heard some variation of 'People who do X should be shot' over and over again. Hell, I've seen this on Twitter where 'X' was manspreading! And when we see it, I'd bet that none of us thought of it as a threat. 'People who drive with their turn signal on and no intention of turning should be shot.' We recognize that this is not a threat. But for some reason, for some of us, this goes out the window when we are the ones who do X.

Threatening words are dispatched like soldiers under strict orders: Cause anxiety that cannot be ignored. Surprisingly, their deployment isn't entirely bad news. It's bad, of course, that someone threatens violence, but the threat means that at least for now, he has considered violence and decided against doing it. The threat means that at least for now—and usually forever—he favors words that alarm over actions that harm. For an instrument of communication used so frequently, the threat is little understood, until you think about it. The parent who threatens punishment, the lawyer who threatens unspecified 'further action,' the head of state who threatens war, the ex-husband who threatens murder, the child who threatens to make a scene—all are using words with the exact same intent: to cause uncertainty.

Because most people have had little experience with death threats, and because they mistakenly believe that the death threat is inherently different from all other threats, the words usually cause undue fear. In fact, the death threat is among the threats least likely to be carried out.

Though you wouldn't know it by the reaction they frequently earn, threats are rarely spoken from a position of power. Whatever power they have is derived from the fear instilled in the victim, for fear is the currency of the threatener. He gains advantage through your uncertainty, but once the words are spoken, he must retreat or advance and, like all people, he hopes to retain dignity through either course.

The first step toward deciding which words actually portend danger is understanding what threats are and what they are not. A threat is a statement of an intention to do some harm, period. It offers no conditions, no alternatives, no ways out. It does not contain the words 'if,' 'or else,' 'until,' 'unless.' Sentences that do contain those words are not threats;

they are intimidations, and there is an important distinction. Intimidations are statements of conditions to be met in order to avert a harm. For example, 'I will burn this building down if I don't get the promotion' is an intimidation, not a threat, because a condition is offered to avert the harm. With intimidations, the motive is always right in the statement and the outcome the speaker desires is clear. 'Unless you apologize, I'll kill you' (the speaker wants an apology). 'If you fire me, you'll be sorry' (the speaker wants to keep his job). 'Give up your unearned wealth and dismantle your unjust institutions or we'll rain down righteous fury' (the speaker wants justice). These statements differ importantly from threats because they are brought into play as high-stakes manipulations. The speaker wants his conditions met—he does not want to inflict the harm. With threats, conversely, no conditions are offered, usually because the speaker sees few alternatives. Thus, threats carry more likelihood of violence than intimidations.

Another tip: Threats that are end-game moves—those introduced late in a controversy—are more serious than those used early. That's because those used early likely represent an immediate emotional response as opposed to a decision to use violence.

These days, bomb threats are a tactic popular with angry people. It's amazing how much fear can be caused by a single phone call; it might compel an organization to evacuate a building, close for the day, or enact restrictive security procedures. But to believe the caller who says, 'I've planted a bomb, and it's going off in three hours,' you have to believe that the person went to the extraordinary trouble and risk of obtaining the bomb components, then found a location where he could be sure nobody would ever see what he was doing, then assembled the bomb, then took the chance of losing his liberty and life while placing the device, and then undid it all by making the warning call.

At what point do we stop treating anonymous threateners as if they were the most credible people we'd ever heard from when in fact nearly 100 percent of these calls are bogus? A caller who wants to discharge anger over the telephone by using violent imagery ('You'll all be blown to bits'), or who is agitated and aggressive, is not behaving like a real bomber. Most real bombers are patient, I'll-get-you-in-time type people who can mortgage their emotions for another day. They express anger by blowing things up, not by making hostile calls. Ironically, bombers do not have explosive personalities.

Though anonymous death threats cause high concern, they actually portend less danger than accredited threats. People who send threats anonymously are far less likely to pursue an encounter than those who sign their names. There are some compelling reasons why this is so. The threatener who provides his true name is not trying to avoid attention, and

is probably seeking it. Thus, he is most similar to assassins, most of whom stand at the scene of their crimes and say, 'I did this.'

The police misunderstanding about anonymous threats stems from how different the assassin is from almost all other criminals. Who else would actually design his offense to ensure that he gets caught? Who else would hope his act would be videotaped?

Ten Behaviors Common to Modern Assassins

1. Displayed some mental disorder
2. Researched the target or victim
3. Created a diary, journal, or record
4. Obtained a weapon
5. Communicated inappropriately with some public figure, though not necessarily the one attacked
6. Displayed an exaggerated idea of self (grandiosity, narcissism)
7. Exhibited random travel
8. Identified with a stalker or assassin
9. Had the ability to circumvent ordinary security
10. Made repeated approaches to some public figure

If we had to choose just one Pre-Incident Indicator (PIN) we'd want to be aware of above all others, it would be the one we call ability belief. This is a person's belief that he can accomplish a public-figure attack. Without it, he cannot. In fact, to do anything, each of us must first believe on some level that we can do it. Accordingly, society's highest-stakes question might be:

"Do you believe you can succeed at shooting the president?"

Would-be assassins won't always answer this question truthfully, of course, nor will society always get the opportunity to ask it, but to the degree it can be measured, ability belief is the preeminent PIN for assassination.

If the truthful answer is 'No, what with all those Secret Service agents and special arrangements, I couldn't get within a mile of the guy,' the person cannot shoot the president. Of course, this isn't a permanently

reliable predictor, because ability belief can be influenced and changed. If, for example, I believe I could not possibly dive into the ocean from a two-hundred-foot-high cliff, then I cannot. But a coach might influence my belief. Encouragement, teaching of skills that are part of the dive, taking of lesser dives—first from 20 feet, then 30, then 50—would all act to change my ability belief. No single influence is more powerful than social proof, seeing someone else succeed at the thing you might have initially believed you could not do. Seeing a diver propel himself off an Acapulco cliff, sail down into the Pacific and then emerge safely dramatically influences my belief that it can be done, and that I could do it. Similarly, the enormous media attention showered on those who attack public figures bolsters ability belief in other. It says:

“You see; it can be done.”

Reporters usually refer to assassins with triple names, like Mark David Chapman, Lee Harvey Oswald, Arthur Richard Jackson. One might come to believe that assassins actually used these pretentious triple names in their pre-attack lives; they didn't. They were Mark, Lee, and Arthur.

There is clearly a sliding scale between ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ but there appear to be three principal ways in which benign things most often deteriorate and become malign:

1. Good things get to be bad if they are displaced, taken out of context, or removed from their locus.
2. Good things get very bad if there are too few or too many of them.
3. Good things get really rotten if they cannot relate to each other properly and their degree of association is impoverished.

“Desire” is the key to Aristotle’s moral philosophy. He recognizes “right” and “wrong” desires, and suggests that one can be forgiven for a wrong action—we all make mistakes—but never for a wrong desire. His list of such moral evils includes greed, lust, avarice, sloth, anger, envy, and pride. Which nicely covers all of the Seven Deadly Sins. It is instructive, in this respect, to compare Aristotle’s blacklist with the celebrated Commandments of JudeoChristianity. Only one of those ten prescriptions, that of covetousness, is a wrong desire. All the rest deal with actions. They are the rules of a society more concerned with what one should or should not do than with understanding the motives behind murder, theft, adultery, and perjury. Aristotle wanted to know why.

In addition to right and wrong desires, he recognized “acquired” desires, which differ from individual to individual, and “natural” desires, which are a part of human nature. These are what most of us now would recognize simply as ‘wants’ and ‘needs.’ Needs are the sort of desires that are inevitable and necessarily good. Needs are never wrong. Wants are more problematic and Aristotle assessed them by their quantity. Good wants, he said, are right desires as long as they are identical with our needs for them. They become bad, and may be identified as wrong desires, if we want too much. But—and this I think is Aristotle’s most vital contribution to the discussion of evil, contradicting the schools of hair-shirt discipline which turn abstinence into a virtue—such desires may be bad and wrong also, if we want too little.

Aristotelian ethics is the ethics of “just enough.” Neither too much nor too little. Enough is enough, even of a good thing. Any more or less falls outside what he called the “golden mean” and fails to contribute to the whole good, the *totum bonum*. Even moral virtues such as courage are good only if they lie along the narrow mean. A man who fears everything becomes a coward, but the one who fears nothing is a dangerous fool.

If you’re doing something that could possibly kill you and you don’t have at least a small amount of apprehension you’re either a liar or a fool.

Fear is associated with a part of the brain called the amygdala. Certain fibers run directly from the eyes to the amygdala, so the mere sight of a spider can trigger an immediate reaction of fear. This connection exists even in blind people whose visual cortex has been damaged by an injury to the back of the head. They no longer see the spider, but they still feel it emotionally. So, our amygdala plays a major role in the development of fear. If the amygdala gets damaged, a person can become fearless.

Scientists marvel at the predatory competence of the Great White, praising its speed, brute strength, sensory acuity, and apparent determination, but man is a predator of far more spectacular ability. The shark does not have dexterity, guile, deceit, cleverness, or disguise. It also does not have our brutality, for man does things to man that sharks could not dream of doing. Deep in our cells, we know this, so occasional fear of another human being is natural.

Feelings are biochemical mechanisms that all mammals and birds use in order to quickly calculate probabilities of survival and reproduction. Feelings aren’t based on intuition, inspiration, or freedom—they are based on calculation. When a monkey, mouse, or human sees a snake, fear arises because millions of neurons in the brain swiftly calculate the relevant data and conclude that the probability of death is high. Feelings of sexual attraction arise when other biochemical algorithms calculate that a nearby individual offers a high probability of successful mating, social bonding, or

some other coveted goal. Moral feelings such as outrage, guilt, or forgiveness derive from neural mechanisms that evolved to enable group cooperation. All these biochemical algorithms were honed through millions of years of evolution. If the feelings of some ancient ancestor made a mistake, the genes shaping these feelings did not pass on to the next generation. Feelings are thus not the opposite of rationality—they embody evolutionary rationality.

For the average mammal stress is three minutes of terror on the savannah. After which the stress is over. Or you are. Stress evolved as a useful, extremely short-term, lifesaving physiological state: your heart races to pump oxygen; your lungs work harder; and your body turns off anything nonessential in the interest of immediate survival (being chased by a lion is no time to ovulate, grow, or put energy into tissue repair—that's for later).

The problem, however, is that if one feels fear of all people all the time, there is no signal reserved for the times when it's really needed. A man who gets into the elevator on another floor (and hence wasn't following her), a man who gives her no undue attention, who presses a button for a floor other than the one she has selected, who is dressed appropriately, who is calm, who stands a suitable distance from her, is not likely to hurt her without giving some signal. Fear of him is a waste, so don't create it.

Many people believe—and we are even taught—that we must be extra alert to be safe. In fact, this usually decreases the likelihood of perceiving hazard and thus reduces safety. Alertly looking around while thinking, 'Someone could jump out from behind that hedge; maybe there's someone hiding in that car,' replaces perception of what actually is happening with imaginings of what could happen. We are far more open to every signal when we don't focus on the expectation of specific signals.

You might think a small animal that runs across a field in a darting criss-cross fashion is fearful even though there isn't any danger. In fact, scurrying is a strategy, a precaution, not a reaction to a fear signal. Precautions are constructive, whereas remaining in a state of fear is destructive. It can also lead to panic, and panic itself is usually more dangerous than the outcome we dread. Rock climbers and long-distance ocean swimmers will tell you it isn't the mountain or the water that kills—it is panic.

Rule #1: The very fact that you fear something is solid evidence that it is not happening. Fear summons powerful predictive resources that tell us what might come next. It is that which might come next that we fear—what might happen, not what is happening now. An absurdly literal example helps demonstrate this: As you stand near the edge of a high cliff, you might fear getting too close. If you stand right at the edge, you no longer fear getting too close, you now fear falling. If you

do fall, you no longer fear falling—you fear landing. Panic, the great enemy of survival, can be perceived as an unmanageable kaleidoscope of fears.

Rule #2: What you fear is rarely what you think you fear—it is what you link to fear. Take anything about which you have ever felt profound fear and link it to each of the possible outcomes. When it is real fear, it will either be in the presence of danger, or it will link to pain or death. When we get a fear signal, our intuition has already made many connections. To best respond, bring the links into consciousness and follow them to their high-stakes destination—if they lead there. When we focus on one link only, say, fear of someone walking toward us on a dark street instead of fear of being harmed by someone walking toward us on a dark street, the fear is wasted. That's because many people will approach us—only a very few might harm us.

Worry is the fear we manufacture—it is not authentic. Worry is a way to avoid change; when we worry, we don't do anything about the matter. Worry is a way to avoid admitting powerlessness over something, since worry feels like we're doing something. Prayer also makes us feel like we're doing something, and even the most committed agnostic will admit that prayer is more productive than worry. Worry is a cloying way to have connection with others, the idea being that to worry about someone shows love. The other side of this is the belief that not worrying about someone means you don't care about them.

As many worried-about people will tell you, worry is a poor substitute for love or for taking loving action. Worry is a protection against future disappointment. After taking an important test, for example, a student might worry about whether he failed. If he can feel the experience of failure now, rehearse it, so to speak, by worrying about it, then failing won't feel as bad when it happens. But there's an interesting trade-off: Since he can't do anything about it at this point anyway, would he rather spend two days worrying and then learn he failed, or spend those same two days not worrying, and then learn he failed? Perhaps most importantly, would he want to learn he had passed the test and spent two days of anxiety for nothing?

The relationship between real fear and worry is analogous to the relationship between pain and suffering. Pain and fear are necessary and valuable components of life. Suffering and worry are destructive and unnecessary components of life. Great humanitarians, remember, have worked to end suffering, not pain.

Silly and alarming news promos are of more than passing interest to me because understanding how they work is central to understanding how fear works in our culture. We watch attentively because our survival requires us to learn about things that may hurt us. That's why we slow down at the scene of a terrible car accident. It isn't out of some unnatural perversion; it is to learn. Most times, we draw a lesson: 'He was probably drunk;' 'They must have tried to pass;' 'Those little sports-cars are sure dangerous;' 'That intersection is blind.' Our theory is stored away, perhaps to save our lives another day.

Surveys have shown that ranking very close to the fear of death is the fear of public speaking. Why would someone feel profound fear, deep in his or her stomach, about public speaking, which is so far from death? Because it isn't so far from death when we link it. Those who fear public speaking actually fear the loss of identity that attaches to performing badly, and that is firmly rooted in our survival needs. For all social animals, from ants to antelopes, identity is the pass card to inclusion, and inclusion is the key to survival. If a baby loses its identity as the child of his or her parents, a possible outcome is abandonment. For a human infant, that means death. As adults, without our identity as a member of the tribe or village, community or culture, a likely outcome is banishment and death. So the fear of getting up and addressing five-hundred people at the annual convention of professionals in your field is not just the fear of embarrassment—it is linked to the fear of being perceived as incompetent, which is linked to the fear of loss of employment, loss of home, loss of family, your ability to contribute to society, your value, in short, your identity and your life. Linking an unwarranted fear to its ultimate terrible destination usually helps alleviate that fear. Though you may find that public speaking can link to death, you'll see that it would be a long and unlikely trip.

Three boys in a small Missouri town, one of them the student-body president, invited their friend Steven Newberry to go out in the woods with them to "kill something." Steven wasn't told that he was the something, though that became apparent when they began beating him with baseball bats. He asked them why, and they explained to the near-dead boy:

"Because it's fun, Steve."

His memories were fractured and distorted and significantly inconsistent with the evidence. Those memories, however, may well show what murder looks like through the eyes of a murderer. His body was working very quickly, his mind was working very slowly. He would see himself stab his mother in the throat. His mind would somehow say, 'God, you've got to stop that!'

But by the time the thought had formed, he would see himself stabbing her again. He described it as:

“My mind never caught up with my body.”

Then he turned around and saw his father standing there on the landing with what he called a blank look. He heard himself growl like a wolf or a dog and realized it was himself. He sensed himself taking one giant step and his father fell back into the computer room. He recalls his father trying to shut the door and just brushing it aside—it was like the door wasn’t even there.

The psychological term for this is “dissociation.” It is an adaptive mechanism that allows people who are undergoing extreme trauma—either killers or victims—to insulate themselves from reality. Dissociation does not open the door to violence; rather, it is triggered by the first puzzling blow. After that both killer and victim find themselves in a slow-motion dream that neither can escape. It is an odd and sluggish dream where the inner narration in the mind of the killer—‘I can’t believe I’m strangling this woman’—is roughly mirrored by the inner narration of the victim, who is thinking, ‘I can’t believe this man is actually strangling me.’ Victims of near-fatal car accidents often dissociate, as do people who survive falls from great heights or attacks by wild animals. Time slows down in a dissociative state. There is a sense of unreality, as if what is happening has to be a dream. Certain details become very vivid, and others are completely wiped out.

In this case he hit his mother with the splitting maul and then had a memory of her breathing so loudly that he felt compelled to make it stop by cutting her throat with a knife. In reality his mother was so badly wounded that her breathing must have been nearly inaudible, but his mind fixated on it to the point where it overwhelmed every other sound in the room.

“The investment of abuse and neglect in Joey’s own childhood will continue to pay dividends of pain and violence for others, including those he will likely kill one day. As I write this sad but accurate prediction, Joey is only nine years old.”

Sadly, too many boys learn from the media or from each other what scholars call “protest masculinity,” characterized by toughness and the use of force. That is not the only way to be a man, of course, but it’s the only way they know. It is similar to one brother asking another, ‘Why did you grow up to be a drunk?’ The answer is ‘Because Dad was a drunk.’ The second brother then asks, ‘Why didn’t you grow up to be a drunk?’ The answer is: ‘Because Dad was a drunk.’

With the pull of a trigger, a young person whose upbringing has not invested him with self-worth can become significant and un-ignorable.

Though it will generate much controversy, parents may someday be able to use prenatal testing to identify children with unwanted personality genes, including those that make violence more likely. Until then, however, we'll have to settle for a simpler, low-tech strategy for reducing violence: treating children lovingly and humanely.

Even though it is so expensive for us, mistreatment will probably continue until we take an entirely different view of children, not as temporary visitors who will someday grow into citizens, but as full-fledged, fully contributing, fully entitled members of our society just as they are right now. Presently children are often seen as burdens to society, no more than hapless victims of their circumstance, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Recognize that children are the primary childcare providers in America. Siblings caring for siblings and children caring for themselves represent an important part of our economy. They also care for the elderly, cook meals, take cigarettes out of the hands of sleeping parents, and contribute in countless other ways. If only more abused children could know that they are the residents of their homes, not the architects, then they might believe that where they are will not limit where they might go. Until America focuses shame on perpetrators instead of victims, these children will have children, and the war they thought was over won't be over, for them or for us.

I have learned that the kindness of a teacher, a coach, a policeman, a neighbor, the parent of a friend, is never wasted. These moments are likely to pass with neither the child nor the adult fully knowing the significance of the contribution. No ceremony attaches to the moment that a child sees his own worth reflected in the eyes of an encouraging adult. Though nothing apparent marks the occasion, inside that child a new view of self might take hold. He is not just a person deserving of neglect or violence, not just a person who is a burden to the sad adults in his life, not just a child who fails to solve his family's problems, who fails to rescue them from pain or madness or addiction or poverty or unhappiness. No, this child might be someone else, someone whose appearance before this one adult revealed specialness or lovability or value. It provides some alternative designs for self-image, not just the one children logically deduce from mistreatment:

“If this is how I am treated, then this is the treatment I am worthy of.”

When a child's primary caregiver delivers both praise and brutality, it is a virtual coin toss as to which will attach itself to the child's identity.

Terribly unhealthy families damage children in many ways, but one of the saddest is the destruction of the child's belief that he has purpose and value. Without that belief, it is difficult to succeed, difficult to take risks. Perhaps more to the point, it may seem foolish to take risks, knowing, as such people do, that they are not up to the task.

There is a short story, just before the end, one of two amateur investigators has just uncovered the secret of what it was that was driving young, healthy, wealthy, secure young men to commit suicide on three continents, in a manuscript left behind by one of the suicides. After reading only a few words, the partner says:

“Take it away, Villiers, never speak of this again. Are you made of stone, man? Why, the dread and horror of death itself, the thoughts of the man who stands in the keen morning air on the black platform, bound, the bell tolling in his ears, and waits for the harsh rattle of the bolt, are as nothing compared to this. I will not read it; I should never sleep again.”

The original investigator assures him that it is true, but finishes by agreeing with the sentiment:

“Oh, Austin, how can it be? How is it that the very sunlight does not turn to blackness before this thing, the hard earth melt and boil beneath such a burden?”

I think that thirty scientists and researchers from a half dozen or more different fields who gathered in rural France in 1990 to check each others' work must have felt something of that same horror when they found that they could not disprove their mutual finding. It was something that none of them wanted to believe. It was a thought that only one of the thirty of them was willing to confront the implications of, and do further research to explore the implications of. And I'm sure that they knew or at least suspected that no matter how important their scientific finding was, they would be vilified for a lifetime if they made society confront this awful truth, and that was a price that they were unwilling to pay.

And see, that, to me, is the fascinating thing, even more fascinating than the awful truth itself. On the contrary, almost all of my friends that I've discussed this with since I read the book have agreed with me that, given the weight of the evidence, the awful truth in question is pretty undeniable, is important to know, and—contrary to what some might think—it is something we can learn to live with the knowledge of. If this knowledge becomes widespread, it may and probably will cause some hardship for some

innocent people. But the good to society will, I believe, out-weigh those harms. So no, really, the awful truth that I'm about to reveal to you will seem anti-climactic compared to the dread that the scientists who discovered it felt.

After a several year career as one of the second generation of women to do fieldwork in primatology, a woman and her husband decided to have their first child. She was already in the middle of preparations to shift her career from primatology to a subject that would allow her to do her fieldwork closer to home, with fewer long absences, and in a more comfortable setting to raise a baby in, namely evolutionary biology, when it occurred to her (as a mother to be) just out of personal interest to study the mothering patterns of the colony of monkeys she was observing. She knew to expect high infant mortality. Primatologists have known for over a hundred years that baby monkeys and baby apes are at extreme risk from any male other than their father. But she was startled to discover, when she tracked the mothers of new infants carefully, that infants were at almost as much risk of murder from their own mothers as they were from unrelated male adults.

This baffled her for several reasons, not least of which that while there had been a great deal of research into infanticide in primates, nobody had ever reported a case of a female primate killing her own offspring except by freakish accident. The other reason it baffled her was that, as an evolutionary biologist, she could make no sense whatsoever as to how evolution could produce individuals that destroyed their own offspring, especially among such slowly reproducing species as primates. So she contacted a few other primatologists studying other colonies of monkeys and asked them to carefully monitor the actions of new mothers and to their astonishment, they observed the same thing.

So she gave a preliminary paper on the subject in 1976, suggesting that more research was needed to explain how this behavior could possibly have evolved in primates, only to be interrupted mid-talk by an audience member, a prominent expert in her field. He stood up, tried to stop her from finishing reading her paper, announced that primate females absolutely do not ever murder their own children, and that if she had observed a primate colony in which primate females were killing their own children, it could only be because of something she had done to them; she must have committed some horrible breach of experimental ethics that so deranged these monkeys that she had driven them insane enough to do something that no monkey had ever done before. He then stormed out of the talk and went directly to the scientific press to denounce her for whatever it was that she had done to that monkey colony, so it probably is a good thing that she was already planning on changing fields, no?

She quietly continued her study, working behind the scenes with other researchers while she directed her own studies towards less controversial animals, such as insects. Eventually she discovered something that appalled even her with its simplicity. Not only do mothers sometimes kill their own children, they are almost never insane when they do so. On the contrary, for a mother to murder her own child is an evolutionary adaptation without which our species would not have survived some of the environmental and social disasters of the past. What's more, the actual reasoning behind this is so simple that a straightforward simple equation in four variables is sufficient to provide a reliable estimate of the probability that any particular mother will murder any particular infant:

1. The age of the mother
2. Whether or not this child is the gender that the mother wanted—which, itself, turns out to be easily and universally predicted based on only two variables, the mother's social status and the predicted reliability of the food supply
3. The child's birth weight, and to a lesser extent other indicators of long-term viability
4. Her estimate of whether or not attempting to nurture this particular child will only get both her and the child killed

When she took her early estimates for this equation to the 1990 conference, she discovered that epidemiologists studying SIDS, primatologists studying infanticide (following her 1976 tip), historians digging through old records to try to quantify infanticide throughout the ages, criminologists and social psychologists trying to come up with statistical models to predict mother-on-child infanticide, and anthropologists trying to statistically analyze what variables are most consistent with cultures that have high versus low rates of infanticide, had all independently discovered the same equation. And from her viewpoint as an evolutionary biologist, she demonstrates that any sane, healthy, normal, intelligent mothers who weren't capable of coldly murdering their own infant children almost certainly had no surviving descendants at all to be our ancestors during some of the species-wide threats that have been demonstrated to have happened from the fossil record and from studies of rates of genetic drift.

I mention SIDS. One of the researchers, she says, was an epidemiologist who, in the process of trying to quantify his hunch, initiated a study in which social workers and police very, very intensively interviewed and background

checked a long string of crib deaths that had been explained away as unexplained random respiratory failure. It turns out that his equation was able to predict, with high (but not absolute) reliability, which infants had actually been the victims of homicide or malign neglect. If the infant was a boy when the mother wanted a girl or vice versa, if the infant was born weighing less than eight pounds, or if the mother was in any kind of economic or physical danger if this child survived, then the baby was doomed. His final estimate, from that initial study, was that seventy five percent of all SIDS cases are actually homicides. But, he admitted, just acknowledging this possibility puts us in an awful dilemma. To catch the three out of four women whose babies suddenly die that were actually murderers, we have to treat all SIDS cases as potential homicides, therefore piling yet more heartbreak and tragedy on the one out of four who just randomly went through the worst tragedy any family can know, the sudden and unexpected death of a beloved child. Even using the predictive equation to narrow the field of homicide investigations, we'd still be casting a very scarily public accusation of homicide on an uncomfortably large number of grieving mothers.

I must also mention social psychology. The central tenet of the field of social psychology is that if under a given situation, all or nearly all individuals will engage in the same unwanted behavior, then there is less to be gained by stigmatizing those individuals and lauding the ones who don't than by studying the situation with an eye towards changing it. And you can see in a heartbeat how that applies here: if infants are at extreme risk whenever one or more of three variables are present, then we can reduce the rate of (massively under-reported, intentionally under-investigated) maternal infanticide by decreasing the economic and evolutionary pressures behind gender preference, by providing mothers with as much economic assistance and physical protection as it would require for them to feel safe providing for this baby, and by intensifying support for the first several months of life of mothers of infants who are born weighing less than eight pounds or looking otherwise sickly.

But addressing the issue in this way, and looking into the roots of the equation that predicts maternal infanticide, makes social psychologists confront the queasy implication of all of their work: if it's that sane and natural for them to do this awful thing, if this awful thing is so hard to resist, how can we justify stigmatizing and punishing them? And if we can't, then how can we live with ourselves having just joined the 85% of all known historical societies, up to and including Christian western Europe as recently as the late-nineteenth century, that socially tolerated infanticide any time in the first couple of days after birth? There's pro-choice, I mean, and then

there's being so pro-choice as to join the ranks of societies that have denied the humanity of a breathing infant up to 48 hours old—are we willing to go there? Or to at least show understanding and compassion and tolerance towards societies that did or that do? The anthropologists at the conference were especially terrified of releasing their research findings, because they knew that the accusation that a society or tribe kills children has been used to justify no shortage of genocidal invasions.

Perhaps some of you are still baffled by what part of this spawned such a terror of confronting their own research findings that 29 out of 30 scientists who discovered it immediately and without any external pressure moved to suppress their own research findings. Frankly, good—I distrust that impulse, too, and think that we are always better off knowing the truth than not knowing it. But as you go about your day, remember this: research shows that your own mother consciously or unconsciously considered murdering you in your crib, off and on for at least the first 48 hours after your birth and not improbably for the whole first two weeks of your life, maybe even the first two months. And if your mother was under 30 when she had you and you were born male in a poor family or female in a wealthy family during times of economic hardship, or weighing less than eight pounds, or at a time when your mother thought that her own chances of survival would improve if you didn't survive so, for example, she could get pregnant by her new husband more quickly or so she could return to work more quickly, you very nearly didn't make it. And she would have gotten away with it, too, because mothers have traditionally had a long list of potential murder weapons, from handing you over to caretakers or adoption agencies even if she knew they had a 99% chance of killing you, to smothering you with a pillow, to switching you to infant formula that she knew was diluted with unsafe water, to declining to lift a hand to save you from some mortal peril. And because 'everybody knows' that mothers don't kill their own children, nobody would have questioned her about it.

Smiling All the Way to the Grave

“The Republican Party took the black man off the auction block of the Slave Power, but it has put the white man on the auction block of the Money Power.”

Conservatives frequently say that socialists want to have everything handed to them—that instead of complaining, they should be buckling up, showing up to work every day, and achieving something the “hard way.” This seems a bit odd, considering that, all in all, achieving a complete and revolutionary overhaul of long-standing economic and social structures against the wishes of all the world’s centers of power is probably harder than, say, becoming a reasonably successful middle manager with two cars.

Our idea of what a revolution is like, how it is carried out, and who it is carried out by has been warped by our own cultural propaganda, and by the romantic Marxist propaganda of the twentieth century. We have this idea that revolutions are led by rational-minded, tea-sipping men in three-pointed hats who discuss the rights of man while burning the candle at both ends. Or we’re warped by the Marxist ideal of revolution: a rational, inevitable historical process in which the most enlightened, most sympathetic, least overdressed human beings team up with the Historical Trend itself to effect a glorious, clean revolution. In fact, revolutions are messy, ugly, gory affairs. Nowhere in our popular notion of revolutions are such factors as stupidity, bad luck, unintended comedy, and revolting madness allowed in. Yet most of the time revolutions are ‘led,’ by people we would call nutcases and who indeed were considered nutcases during their time—and in all likelihood were nutcases. While time and distance provide a romantic view of revolutions, at the time when they actually occur, they usually seem bizarre, uncalled-for, frightening, and evil to their contemporaries, which is why they almost always seem snuffed out at their inception.

We tend to think that all rebellions or domestic uprisings were as well understood in their time as we understand them now, but the fact is that most rebellions took place in a kind of contextual vacuum, rendering them little more than outbreaks of seemingly senseless, crazed violence. This is

how they were viewed until later, when an intellectual or ideological frame was provided to explain or ground them and to give them a sense of dramatic order. Today's rage murders fit the pattern of rebellions before they have been contextualized.

Wesbecker didn't start firing until the elevator opened to the reception room—until he came face to face with The Company—and he only stopped once he'd made his way through the entire building, sweeping from the management's toner-ink penthouse on the third floor all the way down to the solvent-stench of the working-class basement and locker room on the other end. By destroying The Company's physical manifestations—its employees being The Company's concrete pillars—he attacked the sum of The Company's parts more than simply its parts. Some believed that Wesbecker was looking to get revenge on a supervisor. They were at least partly right, in that the murder rampage wasn't simply a psycho gone berserk shooting anyone or anything in his path. But even they misunderstood how deliberately the crime was executed. Wesbecker sought revenge on the entire institution that mistreated, abused and injured, insulted, and eventually threw him away when there was nothing left to squeeze. Nothing could be more contrary to the general view of the violent, unbalanced, murdering-at-random nutcase who goes postal—the freak who snaps.

Yet this is the common portrait we are given. And it is the wrong portrait. Not only was this rage murder spree an example of targeted vengeance, but its details and circumstances are strikingly similar to other rage murders in offices, workplaces, post offices, and even in the most recent setting of this crime, schoolyards. Moreover, the details and circumstances are also remarkably similar to doomed rebellions we have seen throughout American history—in their goriness, in the way they are totally misrepresented at the time of the uprising, in the mentally unbalanced psychology of the rebel. Wesbecker was not entirely healthy, as he admits, but then again neither were John Brown or Nat Turner—one who murders is by definition not 'healthy.' And finally, in the grisly, often tragicomic results.

A cheerful attitude and laughing are tactics employed by all Americans, at an unconscious, even genetic level. Though many Americans privately know that one's own smile is an attempt to put the other party at ease rather than a reflection of one's own inner happiness, publicly, this is rarely admitted. Thus few of us know how many other Americans also force this desperate smile—we all think we're the only ones faking it. These smiles are more like mammal calls used to identify the individual with the herd, to keep from being expelled. These calls that have to be repeated and repeated: you can't just recite the backslapping platitudes once and you're off the hook—as mammals, the office herd requires you to send out the correct

marking signals every single day, every hour. It can be exhausting and humiliating. Yet the consequences of not constantly reminding everyone how normal you are range from getting placed on the slow-track to being first on the plank when the next downsizing diktat arrives from headquarters. In my own experience, this cheerfulness, this desperate smile is one of the most corrosive features to daily life in America, one of the great alienators—a key toxic ingredient in the cultural poison.

The questioning attorney tried to show that if Wesbecker murdered a “friend,” it proved that he murdered at random, and therefore he was a freak, rather than a victim of The Company’s brutality. But what the attorney could not grasp—indeed what Wesbecker himself may not have been consciously aware of—is that a friend in that environment needn’t be a friend even in the casual sense of the word. A friend can be just another humiliation, a desperate, ongoing, failed attempt to connect with the herd. A friend could be a worker who doesn’t make your life hell, or a friend could be one of the workers who does make your life hell but slaps your back after every jibe and tells you that ‘it’s all in fun’ and ‘don’t take things too seriously’ because ‘we’re all just having a good time here.’ Or it could be the person with whom you have to maintain good relations in order to keep everything from getting worse.

The slave ship voyages are among the most gruesome cruelties ever imposed by the West on its vanquished. On average, one-sixth of the slaves died horrible deaths on these voyages. They were packed and chained below deck, literally stacked side by side, and head to toe in order to maximize space efficiency, for the entire duration. By the time the survivors were let out to be auctioned off at the ports and slave markets, much of their rebellious spirit—indeed, much of their human spirit—was gone.

Woodcuts from this era depict the slaves in the cargo bay laying cramped together side by side, without expression or color, with no emotion in the eyes or mouths. There is no fear, no sickness, no crying or anger. They are represented literally as cargo, as inanimate as container goods, reflecting the generally-held view of African slaves at that time. That the woodcut artist denied these slaves the pathos they deserved is what makes viewing their representations so disturbing today. Did the artist intentionally strip his subject of all of its innate horror? Or was he unable to see it? Did the artist, or the audience, view the slave voyage atrocities in the same way as we generally view farm animal life—stripped of the horrors of the slaughterhouse, the bio-feed, the fetid overcrowding, the stench of waste and rot and decomposure, and the squeals and cries, as a hard fact of life that ultimately benefits society? The white colonials had to view black slaves as something like farm animals in order to avoid empathizing.

As slavery and the slave economy in America became more refined, so did the slaveholders' treatment of their slaves. A whole industry of slave management grew up around the practice. Slaves were generally treated much better than white indentured servants because they were property, whereas indentured servants could only be squeezed for a limited period. It was in the master's interest to stretch out his slave's work efficiency as long a period as possible, either to get a full life's work out of him or her, or to keep the resale value high. That meant keeping the slave relatively healthy and happy. Many masters developed a genuine affection for their slaves, however patronizing, and this affection was often reciprocated. Masters saw it as their moral duty to treat their slaves well and to civilize them, as grotesque as that seems today.

As a rule, mainstream slave management theory didn't advocate that slaves had "unlimited juice to squeeze" as former General Electric CEO Jack Welch said of his workers, or that "fear is the best motivator" as Intel's Andy Grove once boasted. Slaves weren't driven by stress or viewed by their masters as having a half-life of "only a few years" as Intel CEO Craig Barrett said of his engineers; although indentured servants were viewed as such, and were truly squeezed for all they were worth. Indeed usually it was the overseers who posed the greatest threat to slaves, not their owners. The overseer had no direct economic incentive to keep the slaves content; his only concern was output.

Mainstream slave management theory of the nineteenth century had taught masters that the best way to get the most out of your slaves was to provide him with incentives in order to make the slave believe that his interests coincide with his master's. In this sense, slave management theory had more in common with mid-twentieth-century corporate management theory than with the kind of sadistic evil we normally associated with slaveholding.

"In order to obtain the maximum labor at the cheapest cost, the planter had to construct healthy cabins, provide adequate, wholesome food and proper clothing, permit recreation, and provide medical attention for his slaves. He also had to maintain a great degree of social distance between himself and his slaves. A Virginia planter asserted: '[The slave] ought to be made to feel that you are his superior, but that you respect his feelings and wants.'"

Substitute 'employer' for 'planter' and 'employee' for 'slave' and see how the above passage reads:

“In order to obtain the maximum labor at the cheapest cost, the employer had to construct healthy cabins, provide adequate, wholesome food and proper clothing, permit recreation, and provide medical attention for his employees. He also had to maintain a great degree of social distance between himself and his employees. An AT&T executive asserted: ‘The employee ought to be made to feel that you are his superior, but that you respect his feelings and wants.’”

It’s difficult to say which is more disturbing—how eerily recognizable yesterday’s slaveholders are to us today, how oddly pseudo-humane they appear to be in theory, or indeed, how much crueler today’s benefits-slashing employers are to their employees compared, at least rhetorically, to slaveholders.

This familiar-sounding slave management theory isn’t confined to our forefathers. As far back as Roman times, in the first century, the agricultural writer Columella’s *De Re Rustica* offered guidelines to slaveholders on how best to manage their slaves. Essentially he argued that a slave will work better if he is treated with more respect, or at least the appearance of respect:

“Such justice and consideration on the part of the owner contributes greatly to the increase of his estate.”

Among Columella’s recommendations were that the master should see to it that there was proper lighting in slaves’ quarters and enough space in their workspaces, and that they should be provided with sufficient clothing. Columella also suggested that the master should sometimes consult his slave, since this would give the slave the impression that his master cared about him and would thus inspire the slave to please his master by working harder.

“Is this what many hundreds of years later would be described as enlightened self-interest? Such thinking would not be out of place in the ‘family friendly’ employment policies of today’s companies. Should we, therefore, identify Columella as the father of human resources as we know it?”

Obviously there is a massive difference between an AT&T employee during the post-war golden age of labor-executive relations and that of an antebellum slave. But expectations were also vastly different; what was considered normal was different. Moreover, one cannot deny the fact that the semantics used in both cases are almost identical. This alone is evidence

of some systemic parallels. The slaveholders could have used far crueler language and advocated far crueler techniques. But they didn't because it wouldn't have been effective. The slave owner wanted profits, just like today's corporate owners, executives, and shareholders.

To use a different example, Hitler's plan to enslave the *untersmenschen* Slavs used language and techniques that were openly cruel. It was a conscious effort at superiority, racism, and exploitation. Southern slaveholders, on the other hand, operated by many of the same platitudes and principles as most employers do today. They could be pious and normal because they didn't see themselves as evil, any more than today's executives, investment bankers, or mutual fund managers see themselves or their work as evil. Your average slave masters, like most employers today, wanted their slaves to increase their profit, but they also wanted them to reinforce their basic moral structure. They wanted their slaves to be both hardworking and well-behaved, because both reflected the master's overall worth. And most tellingly, they wanted their slaves to be cheerful, in keeping with the great American tradition of oppression-with-a-happy-face.

On a certain level these semantic and philosophical parallels shouldn't be too surprising. After all, America's wealth was essentially created by slavery and the slave trade. Scholars have traced how the Industrial Revolution was funded directly by capital accumulated in slave industry. An eighteenth-century economist described the slave trade as "the first principle and foundation of all the rest, mainspring of the machine which sets every wheel in motion." There are numerous examples of this. James Watt's first steam engine was subsidized by wealthy slave-trade merchants, as were the slate industry in Wales and Britain's Great Western Railway.

The American corporate magnates of today aren't derived from a different species than their slave-trading ancestors—they have merely evolved by adapting to different conditions and altering their metaphors with the times. Slavery declined as it segued into the Industrial Revolution it had financed, primarily because slavery's workforce was less profitable than the so-called "free" workforce. A free employee didn't have to be fed, clothed, and sheltered by the shareholders; he had a greater incentive—the fear of death or starvation—to work hard and keep his job; and he would constantly compete with other free workers, keeping a lid on their wage demands. Slavery, and the Confederate culture, was destroyed not by a shift in morality but by economic progress. The Confederate culture was bad for business. It was nothing personal, it just had to go.

Slavery was one of the most savage, gruesome policies ever carried out by white Americans, a remarkable honor given our encyclopedia of genocides. Yet the low number of slave revolts might strike many Americans as shocking

and disheartening. It would seem that slaves should have rebelled far more often. For one thing, they had the numbers. In 1800, the United States population was five million, and of that, one-million were blacks, ninety percent of whom were slaves. According to the census taken in 1820, 40% of the South's population was black, and in some areas they made up 70–90% of the inhabitants. Given those demographics, why didn't they rise up more? Why didn't they kill their masters and restore their dignity the way we'd like to imagine we would ourselves?

The most obvious answer is that the slaves knew they would be slaughtered trying. Unlike, say, slaveholding regions of the Caribbean, the United States was sufficiently militarized and its methods of domestic repression so well-refined that it was totally assured of crushing any domestic revolt—slave, peasant, proletarian, or otherwise. If the Confederates, fielding a great army with the best officers and weapons in the world, could get crushed and destroyed by the United States, think of the odds a band of slaves, with no chance of blending in with the dominant population—thus putting to rest analogies to modern guerrilla forces operating in their own lands—had! Instilling fear is one of the most effective ways of creating a docile, obedient slave population. Today, for example, TV shows like *Cops*—or the even more reprehensible live TV knockoff—which show that lower-class criminals have no chance of outfoxing the omnipotent state, combined with terrifying stories about US prisons, are two highly effective tools in keeping the population docile and work-focused.

The broader reason why there weren't more slave rebellions is simpler: most slaves didn't want to rebel. This depressing fact is not limited to African slaves in America, but rather is a product of human nature and our ability to adapt, to be conditioned out of fear, and to serve. Frederick Douglass explained that slaves chose not to rebel out of a fear of the unknown, which, he wrote, quoting Hamlet, had made slaves “rather bear those ills we had, than fly to others, that we knew not of.”

This tendency is not confined to slaves. The inclination to submit is built into our operating system, easily adapting itself to the current corporate culture, operating along the same functions as in slave times. A person's ability to adapt and grovel as much as required is almost the definition of normal. It is normal to accept these conditions and try to thrive within them; it is abnormal to rise up against them. Just think about all the jobs you've taken, especially the ones where you succeeded most—you didn't get promoted by being a maverick and standing up for yourself. You succeeded where you followed orders and pleased the higher-ups. In our own way, we moderns are just as slavish and painfully docile as African slaves. We simply lack the distance to acknowledge it or a proper excuse to explain it.

We don't hear much about this inner slave from authors and artists, though it is far more common, and manifests itself far more regularly, than the allegedly dangerous, primal "heart of darkness" of which we are warned. The slave psychology is too familiar. It appears in the most banal of settings: in the workplace, in relationships, at home or at school. Alternately, the primitive evil aspect is fantastical, alien, and exciting.

While Joseph Conrad is to be applauded for his literary entrepreneurship, his *Heart of Darkness* pitch, compared to Shalamov, is an exotic getaway vacation designed to make the reader feel a more profound sense of self. No one wants to travel up the other African river, the one that reveals man's heart of submissiveness. For contemporary Americans, slavery is acceptable material only if framed as a vice imposed by evildoers, an obstacle to be overcome by heroes, rather than as an ordinary and highly adaptive condition that releases an entirely unheroic side of our psychology. Slavery can only be deployed in the arts as a source of pathos, or as an evil that tests its characters' courage and determination. In other words, slavery is used as a source of contrast to who we are today, a device to define characters and reinforce our false sense of individuality, to make us feel better about ourselves by emphasizing our moral progress—rather than depicted properly as an enduring and recognizable psychological tendency. Through time slavery has mutated and adapted itself to our modern condition. It is by examining this process that we will ultimately have answers to what creates the rampage murders of today.

When employed successfully by the ruling classes, propaganda convinces the ruled that their condition is entirely normal, inevitable, and even somehow privileged. You may know that you are miserable and unjustly treated, but without a context to frame it, you will be far less likely to act on your sense of injustice. Indeed, you may even feel that somehow you are the sick one for questioning what society says is 'normal' and 'inevitable.' Today, the inherent injustice of slavery is obvious to everyone, but this was not the case when the Declaration of Independence was composed. More devastating was the fact that radical abolitionism, which today we accept as the only sane view on slavery, was at the time ignored and pushed into the 'wacko' margins along with all the other crank ideas of the time.

This is how it always works with new and dangerous truths that confront injustice. Arguments against globalization were considered bizarre, quaint, or even insane by mainstream pundits like Thomas Friedman, and when the anti-WTO riots exploded in Seattle in 1999, most Americans were totally perplexed over why such a seemingly innocuous and dull organization would incite so much sixties-esque rage. Only the financial catastrophes in Asia, Latin America, and Russia, along with the increasing size and frequency

of the protests, validated the anti-globalization movement, pushing its arguments into mainstream discourse.

Real-time injustice, even of the most epic sort, is often simply not recognized as such at the time, no matter how obvious the injustice later appears. It may be—in fact, it is certainly the case—that in one-hundred years historians will look at how we live today and what we accept as normal, and condemn us as a nation of savages, a half-civilization incapable or unwilling to face its own injustices. They will likely shudder in horror at how we could inflict such pain and how we could possibly endure it. Our problem is that we don't even know yet what pain and injustice they are talking about. We may never even find out.

Many have been conditioned to believe that Americans always rise up against oppression and that the good side always wins. The reality is that the oppressed rarely rise up, they always lose—in this country anyway—and they always collaborate with the State against those rare rebels to make sure they remain oppressed. Today's propaganda distorts the picture of slave times as a period of constant whipping, groaning, and simmering rebellion, of brave and defiant slaves progressing from injustice to freedom, as if history itself was a progression from slavery to freedom, when in fact it was much more banal than that. In today's official portrayal of slavery, all of the depressing similarities to our modern life are censored with just as much vigor as they once censored all that was inhumane and unjust about slavery. The emphasis may change, but the purpose for censoring, then as now, remains the same: to reinforce our belief that how we live today is entirely normal and to purge any evidence which might contradict that faith.

We are all potential slaves, and all potential collaborators. While from afar historical injustices seem simple to navigate morally, the closer one studies them, the more difficult and muddled the divisions between victim and victimizer become, the less heroic everyone seems. One would expect the entire class of oppressed to act as one, because it seems rationally to be in their interest to do so (and our cultural propaganda tells us that they do), but in fact the oppressed group often turns on its members with as much ferocity as allowed.

The greatest slave insurrection in the American colonies took place in New York City in 1712. Two dozen slave-domestics—the 'privileged' class in the slave world, the ones who had it best, relatively speaking—plotted a violent insurrection they hoped would turn into a general uprising. The accounts we have today vary in some of the details but all tell essentially the same story.

Late at night on April 6th, the rebel group prepared an ambush by

setting fire to a building in the center of the city—some accounts say it was an outhouse, some say a building on the edge of town, but the most convincing account I found suggested it was a building in the center—and lay in wait for the white authorities to come put it out. Armed with muskets, hatchets, and swords, the African-born slaves vowed to each other that it would be better to die fighting than to live as slaves. When the white neighbors and townsfolk arrived to put out the fire, the slaves attacked and slaughtered nine of them by variously shooting, stabbing, and beating their victims, leaving another nine whites injured. Those whites who escaped the ambush told the local authorities, spreading panic throughout New York City. Now, if everything went according to plan, all the slaves throughout the region would rise up with their brothers and face down the oppressors. Militia units from New York and Westchester were brought up, as were soldiers from a nearby fort. Eventually the slaves were surrounded, waiting for help from their oppressed brothers to appear. It seemed so rational to believe that they would. But the expected help from other slaves never arrived—no rebellion was sparked. The city's other slaves remained passive. The oppressors stuck together, while the oppressed hung one another out to dry.

The justice meted out was particularly brutal even by early-eighteenth-century standards, and the white colonials meant it to be savage. Thirteen slaves were hanged, one left to die in chains without food or water, three were burned to death, and one left racked and broken on the wheel. Here is a description of what it is like to break a man on the wheel:

“The Wheel was one of the most painful methods of torture and execution practiced in Europe. The victim, naked, was stretched out on the ground tied to stakes or iron rings. Wooden pieces were placed under the wrists, elbows, ankles, knees, and hips. Then limb after limb and joint after joint was smashed. After that the shattered limbs were ‘braided’ into the spokes of the large wheel. They would then raise the wheel to the top of the pole, where the birds would eat at the flesh of the victim.”

It now seems clear that there were many more rumors than revolts and that the number of actual revolts was small; if it takes a score of persons to make a ‘revolt’ the number all-told before 1860 was probably not more than a dozen. Slave resistance rarely involved large numbers, though this fact can scarcely be taken as indicating that slaves were docile and contented. Indeed, slaves struck frequently at the oppressive white world around them, but in more instances violence involved spontaneous outbursts on the part of

individuals or small groups. Though in most cases the violence perpetrated by slaves could not have been rationally regarded, by either the slaves or their masters, as attempts at freedom, one suspects these incidents must often have involved very little in the way of rationality on either side.

A rebellion doesn't need to be rational in order to make it a rebellion. Without a context, rational rebellion is impossible. Thus, crime, murder, is itself an act of rebellion if the circumstances are deemed unjust, if the environment—slavery—created the crime. Even if we only recognize the unjust causes one-hundred years after the murder is committed, it still makes the crime a political act, a rebellion.

Several things are interesting about Nat Turner's doomed, gory rebellion. First, Turner was clearly delusional and yet his response to the madness of slavery was, from our vantage point today, the most sane and heroic of all. Joseph Wesbecker suffered from depression and was belittled for having a persecution complex and for being generally crazy, yet some of the normal people who worked with him sympathized with his attack on The Company. The fact that Nat Turner may have been schizophrenic or delusional does not disqualify the inherent political nature of his rebellion. Rather, it suggests that sometimes only someone not mentally healthy—not normal—is capable of rising up against objectively awful injustice. A normal, healthy person finds a way to accept his condition, no matter how wretched.

That's about the most basic definition of good mental health there is: you only kill people when your government tells you to. Murder under any other circumstance—particularly if because you feel aggrieved—is ipso facto a sign of severe illness.

In our highly atomized corporate culture, it is no wonder that workplace rage rebellions should take place in the form of one-man suicide missions. If the idea of banding together to fight for something as obvious and vital as one's own self interest—unionizing for a dental plan or to keep wages and pensions from being slashed—is frowned upon, then who would consider raising arms with fellow employees to wage an insurrection against the company that oppresses them? No employee would be able to trust another to keep the plans secret; moreover, no employee is ever aware that anyone else is as miserable and desperate as he is. The culture demands that people smile and love their work—and most do, or at least most believe they do.

“I am not insane. I am angry. I killed because people like me are mistreated every day. I did this to show society: push us and we will push back. All throughout my life, I was ridiculed, always beaten, always hated. Can you, society, truly blame me for what I do? Yes, you will. It was not a cry for attention, it

was not a cry for help. It was a scream in sheer agony saying that if you can't pry your eyes open, if I can't do it through pacifism, if I can't show you through the displaying of intelligence, then I will do it with a bullet."

Even Hitler is given a context by serious historians—the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles and the failure of Weimar Germany—whereas rampage murderers, like slaves once before them, are portrayed as having killed without reason. Their murder sprees were and are explained as symptoms of the perpetrators' innate evil, or of foreign forces, rather than as reactions to unbearable circumstances. Blaming evil or psychology is far more comforting.

One of the first acts of the new United States Congress was to pass the Whiskey Excise Tax in 1791, going against a promise to impose such taxes only as a last resort. The frontiersmen in western Pennsylvania, already destitute and desperate, for whom whiskey and their last pennies were a matter of life and death, ignored the excise. They tarred and feathered or harassed the few federal representatives who tried to set up excise offices or register the local distilleries. And they were right to do so: why should the "scum of nature" be forced to pay up what little they had left in order to cover the states' debts, while the new oligarchy, which had benefited so greatly from the war, bore so little of the war's costs?

Alexander Hamilton enlisted the comical figure of George Clymer, who was in charge of collections in Pennsylvania, to be his eyes and ears in the rebellious western regions. Clymer accepted, but was intensely paranoid and extremely silly. Like a three-pointed-hat Inspector Clouseau, Clymer adopted various aliases, each with slapstick effect. On his way west from Philadelphia in September 1792, Clymer first tried to pass himself off as Henry Knox, the secretary of war. However, Knox was widely known to be among the most obese Americans alive, so locals took the much thinner Clymer-Knox for just another bad imposter looking to get comped. Realizing his mistake, he then named himself "Smith" and traded horses with his servant, in a classic switcheroo that he must have picked up from some bad European opera. Clymer quickly abandoned this scheme when a local called him "an ill-looking fellow" who "did not know how to rub down a horse." Furious, Clymer next tried to pass himself off as just an ordinary person. The sad thing was that no one recognized Clymer even when he admitted to his true Clymer self, despite the fact that he was one of the signatories to the Declaration of Independence.

When Clymer arrived in Pittsburgh, he roomed in the most luxurious hotel for a few nights, unable to resist the need for civilized comforts. After

getting his humors back, he transferred to a more ordinary hotel, the Bear Inn, hoping no one noticed that he had just checked out of the five-star around the corner. Locals quickly put two and two together. They knew that he had come to Pittsburgh on behalf of the excise and asked him to leave the Bear Inn. Clymer agreed, but now he was too terrified to venture out of the city, as per Hamilton's instructions, and into the rural frontier areas to conduct the investigation, as was his assignment. And yet the worst he'd have had to put up with were a bunch of dirty looks and unfriendly words. They weren't going to harm him—they told him so explicitly. But Clymer couldn't be convinced. After a few days, he lost his nerve completely, gathered some militiamen to act as bodyguards, and fled Pittsburgh in a panic, heading at great speed back to Philadelphia with absolutely no one in pursuit.

When he returned to the capital, he was horrified to discover that word of his comical adventures had followed him. Clymer denied everything, but no one bought it. So he switched tactics, fiercely defending his disguises and flight, claiming that locals were in "an actual state of insurgency against the government," including "magistrates, other public officers, and clergy" of the region, and that his own bold venture was "more hazardous perhaps than to have taken an honorable chance in an Indian War."

The effect of his buffoonery was tragic: government officials took his panicked word for it, and raised an army to crush the supposed mass rebellion. And this is where the story starts to mirror that of so many doomed slave rebellions: hysteria among the dominant classes over perceived lower-class-savage murder plots, violent crushing, and slave turning against slave to please the master class.

The battles that followed were sloppy and dismal. In one battle, an army of rebel frontiersmen attacked a local oligarch, John Neville, who had helped bring in federal excise authorities and personally hosted them. The rebels lay siege to Neville's house, where the federal excise taxman hid inside. Just when everything looked doomed, Neville was saved by his slaves, who attacked the poor white rebels in a surprise rearguard action. Slaves fighting the poor in order to protect the oligarchy.

The federal forces tried cracking down in their usual brutal way. Eventually their tactics pushed most of western Pennsylvania's population to the side of the rebels. As a critical mass formed, the majority switched hearts. If a rebellion is small and just starting, it looks crazy; but if it begins to succeed, lasts, and builds up momentum, it inevitably legitimizes itself. This legitimacy is all the persuasion most people need. From 1793 to 1794, what started as a rebellion against an unfair excise tax transformed into broader class warfare, pitting locals against absentee landlords. This

transformation of the rebellion's context is instructive—it doesn't mean that the rebels were losing control, but rather, that their ability to frame injustice grew as the rebellion seemed to take hold. The context started to take on a meaningful shape. Just as the American colonials' consciousness expanded from rebelling against unfair taxation in the 1760s to wider noble revolutionary goals touching on the inherent rights of mankind, so the Whiskey Rebellion guerrillas took on broader themes as injustice increasingly framed their consciousness. Once you start seeing injustice in one place, it's like taking off blinders—you start to see injustice everywhere, and how it is all connected. One horseman reportedly rode through Pittsburgh yelling:

“This is not all that I want, it is not the excise law only that must go down; your district and associate judges must go down; your high offices and salaries. A great deal more is to be done; I am but beginning yet.”

In 1794, President Washington raised an army of 12,950 men and led their march on the rebel counties to restore order and to protect his landholdings. The resulting show of force was brutally effective. The rebels melted away, faced with certain defeat, while the fence-sitters and even most who professed sympathy with the rebellion returned to the federal government's side. In the end, only a couple dozen Whiskey Rebels were brought to Philadelphia to be tried for treason, only two were convicted, and even they, unlike African slave rebels, were pardoned. There were casualties, but only ridiculous casualties. One rebel, a drunk in a local tavern, kept trying to grab the bayonet of a federal officer's musket while muttering taunts and threats, and he was eventually run through; the other was a cripple who happened to be in the area of a passing federal detachment when he was ordered to stop. He couldn't manage to comply quickly enough due to his disability, so a trigger-happy militiaman shot him in the genitals. He died “an excruciating death.”

Yet in spite of the feckless comedy and brutal suppression of this rebellion, in the end the Whiskey Rebellion was, in a way, successful. From that time until the Civil War, it became *de facto* government policy (as well as standard American belief) that no government could impose a national excise tax on liquor except during a time of war or national emergency. Although all domestic rebellions are doomed, for some, partial justice does result. The rebellions may be brutal, misunderstood, and defeated but the martyrdom isn't always in vain.

Slave psychology and effective American slave management—which encourages a “cheerful disposition” and “initiative”—combined to produce

slaves which not only turned on their own liberators to protect their masters, but turned on them in “a fine spirit.” Which helps explain again why there were so few slave rebellions. Not only were they doomed, and not only were they without context, but so often fellow slaves either refused to participate or worse, exposed plots and defended their masters with arms. These actions further reinforce the notion that a rebellion was not only doomed, but even the idea of rebelling was somehow not normal and perhaps evil. You really would have to be as crazy and schizophrenic as Nat Turner to not be affected; you’d have to have voices in your head louder than those around you to convince you that a slave rebellion was the right, sane response.

What is really striking is not the paucity of open rebellions in American history—which the more credulous American mandarins inevitably point to as proof of this country’s infinite virtue (just as Southern whites have pointed to the striking lack of slave rebellions as proof of the slaves’ happiness)—but rather that there have been people willing to risk rebellion of any kind. Given the odds, it takes reckless bravery or mental illness or suicidal desperation to launch an insurrection. That explains why so much rebellion in America is expressed in less obvious, less direct ways. For example, in slave times, while there were only a few rebellions, there were numerous instances of vandalism, mysterious fires, and even poisonings and crop-wrecking. One of the most universally popular forms of struggle was arson, which minimized the danger of direct confrontation and certain death. Fire could destroy property held so dear by a property-based system.

Just four months after 9/11, a fifteen-year-old honors student, Charles Bishop, piloted a small plane into an office high-rise in Tampa, crashing through the twenty-eighth floor of the Bank of America building, killing himself and terrifying the country. During his flight, Bishop violated the airspace of the MacDill Air Force Base, home to the US military’s Central Command which was coordinating the war in Afghanistan and the hunt for Osama bin Laden. Later reports revealed that Bishop, who spent the last week of his life downloading maps of the base, had buzzed the MacDill control tower and had flown within one-hundred feet of two parked and fully-fuelled KC-135 tanker fuel aircraft. Two F-15s were scrambled from a south Florida base, but they arrived too late, revealing a homeland security that had learned its hard lessons from four months earlier.

Bishop was a straight-A student, middle-class, white, and Christian. He left a suicide note expressing his support for Osama bin Laden and for the 9/11 attacks. That was impossible to accept, so his mother declared Charles a supporter of the War on Terror, and his teacher declared that Bishop was “very patriotic,” even though he very clearly wasn’t. The suicide note’s disturbing message was dismissed as “just trying to get attention,” a

common and meaningless epithet.

Since dead kids can't really benefit from attention the same way that living kids can, you have to ask, once again: Why was Charles Bishop trying to get attention by crashing a plane into a downtown skyscraper? He answered that question himself in his suicide note, but no one wanted to listen. Instead, students and teachers started reciting the famous Collected Patriotic Sayings of Charles Bishop. Bishop's family released a statement claiming:

“Charles and his family have always fully supported our United States war on terrorism and Osama bin Laden.”

“He said he wanted to join the Air Force and do something for his country,” said his journalism teacher, Gabriella Terry. She said she couldn't believe Charles would do what he did, saying she knew him well. “And I didn't miss a thing,” she claimed, ignoring the overwhelming evidence that she had indeed missed every single thing about him.

“He was a good boy.”

The Charles Bishop suicide mission was a potentially fascinating, devastating story that could have inspired some serious self-examination in America, but did not. The fact that a good boy, nice and sociable, an honors student, could commit a terrorist act similar to Osama bin Laden didn't cause people to wonder what it was about his Florida school or America that drove him to imitate the most awful anti-American massacre in our history—instead, it led us to lying to ourselves. Mohammed Atta flew a plane into a building because he hates our freedom; Charles Bishop flew a plane into a building even though he loves our freedom. What's so hard to understand about that?

The Charles Bishop story ended even more grotesquely. Authorities, worried that the patriotic-suicide-pilot theory might not wash for long, came up with an explanation they thought would put all the doubts and fears to rest. They blamed the boy's acne medication, Accutane. That's right, acne medicine made little Charlie fly the plane in to the building. Super-Clearasil made him support Bin Laden. As Monty Python-silly as that last explanation sounds, it became the official version accepted by the New York Times and the broader media.

The Clearasil-made-him-do-it explanation not only reassured the country, it also stood to make Charles Bishop's mother a rich woman. She filed a \$70 million lawsuit against Roche, the maker of Accutane. Later, Charles Bishop's mother was forced to admit that she and her husband had twice

attempted suicide together. She blamed those episodes, conveniently enough, on drugs.

Ever wonder why a bright, likable, handsome boy would hate his world?

Here, by the way, is Charles Bishop's suicide note, which was finally released to the public:

"I have prepared this statement in regards to the acts I am about to commit. First of all, Osama bin Laden is absolutely justified in the terror he has caused on 9-11. He has brought a mighty nation to its knees! God blesses him and the others who helped make September 11th happen. The US will have to face the consequences for its horrific actions against the Palestinian people and Iraqis by its allegiance with the monstrous Israelis—who want nothing short of world domination! You will pay—God help you—and I will make you pay! There will be more coming! al-Qaeda and other organizations have met with me several times to discuss the option of me joining. I didn't. This is an operation done by me only. I had no other help, although, I am acting on their behalf. Osama bin Laden is planning on blowing up the Super Bowl with an antiquated nuclear bomb left over from the 1967 Israeli-Syrian war."

Charles Bishop didn't 'hate us because we are free.' He hated America because there's a lot to hate. Without much of a vocabulary to frame this hatred, he is left with the script of Osama bin Laden—Bishop's hatred perhaps hasn't yet been put into words, it hasn't been contextualized yet. He lacked the ability to express the sense of hatred and injustice in his own words, drawing from his own experience. Instead the enemy (Osama) of Bishop's enemy (America) became Bishop's friend.

Boss: Pretend you're me. You find this. What would you do?

Jack rises slowly, walks to the door, shuts it.

Jack: Me? I'd be very careful who I talked to about this. It sounds like someone dangerous wrote it... someone who might snap at any moment, stalking from office to office with an Armalite AR-10 Carbine-gas semiautomatic, bitterly pumping round after round into colleagues and co-workers.

Jack moves very close to Boss, picks up the paper and starts tearing it into pieces.

Jack: Might be someone you've known for years. . . somebody very close to you. Or, maybe you shouldn't be bringing me every little piece of trash you pick up.

Do people just snap when they go postal? Do they act "without any cause or provocation," as Nat Turner supposedly did? Or are they reacting to grievances both specific and institutional: grievances that we are barely able to see because we lack distance, grievances which seem as banal and part of the natural turn-of-the-millennium landscape as strip malls and stress-palpitations, yet grievances which will be perceived as obviously unbearable twenty, thirty, fifty years from now?

What, in the case of *Fight Club*, are the grievances that lead Jack to wage a violent revolution against Middle America? Some are easy to put your finger on; other grievances are impossible to verbalize, they could sort of be summed up as 'life.' Yet the millions who saw that movie and sympathized with its message understood what it was that drew Jack to violent rebellion.

There was another, more comforting explanation for his violence too: Jack, as we learn at the end of the book, was mentally ill. As all rebels-before-their-time are ill. The movie version wisely left that cheap escape-hatch ending more vague than the book, which is why the movie was far more effective than the book. The huge underground popularity of *Fight Club's* message makes another point: it takes someone who is mentally ill to see, and fight against, the sense of oppression that healthy people otherwise accept to such a degree that they can't even see it. Everyone today agrees that slavery caused slave violence, and that inner-city poverty and pressures breed violent crime. Why is it so awful to suggest that offices, such as they are today, breed office massacres?

"If I could get EA CEO Larry Probst on the phone. . . The main thing I want to know is, Larry: you do realize what you're doing to your people, right? And you do realize that they *are* people, with physical limits, emotional lives, and families, right? Voices and talents and senses of humor and all that? That when you keep our husbands and wives and children in the office for ninety hours a week, sending them home exhausted and numb and frustrated with their lives, it's not just them you're hurting, but everyone around them, everyone who loves them? When you make your profit calculations and your cost analyses, you know that a great measure of that cost is being paid in raw human dignity, right?"

Today's white middle class must be the only socioeconomic group in mankind's history that not only doesn't recognize its own miseries as valid, but reacts dismissively, sarcastically (dissidents are called "whiners"), even violently against anyone from their class who tries to validate their misery. But our ranking of what constitutes existential pain is purely irrational and arbitrary. In fact, if pain could be measured neurochemically, it is entirely possible that the pain felt by a white-collar office worker stressed from seventy-hour workweeks and Andy Grove-inspired office fear is equivalent to the agony felt by indentured servants. The point is that the middle class persistently denies its own unique pathos, irrationally clinging to an irrational way of measuring it, perhaps because if they did validate their own pain and injustice, it would be too unsettling—it would throw the entire world order into doubt. It is more comforting to believe that they aren't really suffering, and it's more comforting to accuse those who disagree of being psychologically weak whiners. Despite its several hundred-million strong demographic, the white bourgeoisie's pain doesn't officially count—it is too ashamed of itself to sympathize with its own suffering. And yet all the symptoms and causes remain and grow worse even as the denial becomes more fierce.

Rather than looking outside of the office world for an explanation for these shooting sprees—rather than blaming violent films, gun proliferation, the breakup of the family, the lack of God, or a fear-mongering media—why not consider the changes within America's corporate culture itself? We avoid this topic in mainstream discourse, and there are powerful reasons for self-censorship: if the workplace is responsible, then that means every working American is potentially in peril, living in unbearable circumstances, yet too deluded, or too beaten-down, to recognize it.

Under Reagan, corporations transformed from providers of stability for employees and their families to fear-juiced stress engines. Reagan's legacy to America and modern man is not the victory in the Cold War, where he simply got lucky; it is instead one of the most shocking wealth transfers in the history of the world, all under the propaganda diversion of "making America competitive" and "unleashing the creative energies of the American worker." New corporate heroes like General Electric's Jack Welch spoke of "unlimited juice" to squeeze from his employees—and wring their rinds he did. While work became increasingly stressful and time consuming with fewer rewards for the majority, capital was sucked from the middle and lower classes of working America and deposited into the offshore accounts of the very highest layer of the executive and shareholder class. What income growth there was over the 1979–1989 period was driven primarily by more work at lower wages.

People's memories are short and America's propaganda is so powerful that most, even the greatest losers of this appropriation, have forgotten that a profound change occurred, which we now take for granted. We have been conditioned to react skeptically, even hostilely, to criticism of our current corporate values, values which form the foundation of everyday life today. What's more appalling is that huge numbers of those left behind in the wealth transfer genuflected to the new plutocratic class, celebrating the most vicious of the uber-CEOs. This craven CEO-worshipping is still going on today—a decade ago middle Americans dragged themselves home after work in order to gather around the television and watch billionaire asshole Donald Trump deliver his “You're fired!” line to some desperate, stressed-out Smithers, now he's President. Entertainment is no longer about joy or escape. It's about reliving life at the office, even if you just left the office fifteen minutes ago. It is about fetishizing the stress and creating an addiction to the stress, like a masochist to pain. It's as though the conditioning worked too well. This worship of the new plutocrats is reminiscent of medieval peasant adulation of the royalty that stomped on them. Indeed, serfdom is a good analogy considering the kind of neofeudal divisions that arose in the wake of Reaganomics.

According to a 2003 study by Boston College, 26 percent of American workers took no vacation time at all in the previous year. Many employees will say this is because they genuinely prefer working at their job to relaxing—because relaxing requires a completely different set of social skills that many overworked, company-obsessed Americans increasingly lack. Here is one typical example, from an article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette titled, “Who Needs a Vacation? Not These Happy Workers,” dated August 24, 2003:

“E.J. Borghetti is a Pitt employee who's never taken off more than two consecutive days from work in seven years—by his own choice. ‘I can explain it in four words: I love my job,’ declared Borghetti, 33, a bachelor. ‘The personnel office will send me notes saying, You're losing these vacation days, like they feel sorry for me, but it's a choice to me. It doesn't bother me in the least.’

Overworked Americans have been conditioned to elevate their office lives into their own personal epics, while their private lives and off-hour skills have atrophied. This makes sense in a world where the private life and not working refer to a vanishing state of being. A vacation away from the office therefore can be joyless and daunting, and most Americans who travel find that their only wish is to get back into the office, back to a clearly defined

world with an overseer and responsibilities, and back to a familiar script where they know their lines well.

“Those slaves who have kind masters are, perhaps, as happy as the generality of mankind. They are not aware that their condition can be better, and I don’t know as it can.”

The Reaganomics theory, when they still needed to sell it to America, was that we were all supposed to be people in our own unique boats, with the sea representing wealth, and as the rich got richer, the sea would rise, and supposedly our humble boats would rise along with theirs, as though the polar ice caps themselves would melt for the benefit of all mankind. Moreover, somehow only the people with the huge yachts were capable of raising the level of water for all of us. The rising-boat metaphor always struck me as strange, because it implied that the land would become submerged, and those of us not in the QE2 cruise ship would be forced to row around the high seas for the rest of our lives, bailing out water as fast as we could. Which is exactly what happened.

The collective resistance to considering the possibility that the workplace causes murders is effected by a kind of defiant amnesia. But schoolyard shootings are too shocking and subversive to forget. They remind us that we were just as miserable as kids as we are as adult workers. In fact, the similarities between the two, the continuity of misery and entrapment from school to office, become depressingly clear when you study the two settings in the context of these murders. Even physically, they look alike and act on the mind in a similar way: the overhead fluorescent lights, the economies-of-scale-purchased industrial carpeting and linoleum floors, the stench of cleaning chemicals in the restrooms, the same stalls with the same latches and the same metal toilet paper holders. Then, after work or school you go home to your suburb, where no one talks to each other, and no one looks at each other, and where everyone, even the whitest-bread cul-de-sac neighbor, is a suspected pedophile, making child-leashes a requirement and high-tech security systems a given.

If you consider it this way, it means our entire lives, except perhaps college and that one summer backpacking around Europe, are unbearably awful. Suddenly, our lives are a miserable joke played for someone else’s benefit—maybe Jeff Bezos. This is too much to handle. So the inescapable suspicion that suburban schools cause murder rampages is rejected with unrestrained hysteria. Blame is hurriedly focused on the murderer, rather than on the environment. A typical example is an op-ed piece written by Joanne Jacobs for the San Jose Mercury News published exactly eight

months after the Columbine massacre, in which she tried to reassure herself and her readers:

“Evil, not rage, drove these killers.”

I emphasize her quote because it’s one of the most revealing yet widely held explanations among contemporary Americans. When you use a word as inherently meaningless as ‘evil’ to describe something as complex and resonant as Columbine, you are desperately trying to recover the amnesia that once protected you, and told you how blissful and innocent your own school years were. The fact is that the schoolyard shooters were clear about their intentions: they wanted to “pry your eyes open.” But sometimes we don’t like what our eyes see, in fact, we refuse to believe what they see. You’d need to use Clockwork Orange eye-tweezers on someone like Joanne Jacobs to make her face this unpleasant fact.

These two boys, the real victims of their own wounded boasting, are ruined forever by a community that will gladly make an example of them. As in all periods of domestic unrest, the important thing is to make swift and brutal examples of suspected rebels.

Both Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold came from two-parent homes, and both openly confessed their love for their parents in their otherwise rage-filled video diaries. Their only regret was how their planned massacre would hurt their parents. In fact love for their parents was the only love that they are known to have professed. Eric Harris, considered by many to be the more ‘evil’ of the two, said:

“My parents are the best fucking parents I have ever known. My dad is great. I wish I was a fucking sociopath so I don’t have any remorse, but I do. This is going to tear them apart. They will never forget it.”

Is this individual, who broke under the weight of injustice, really a monster? I have a feeling our culture would not produce such a flippant response were it a woman acting against her unpunished rapists and their enablers—in fact, you’d have many cheering for her, something that those same people would find horrific if the cheers were for a school shooter.

Barack Obama is a monster. George Bush is a monster. Donald Trump is a monster. Joe Biden is a monster. Dick Cheney is a monster. James Clapper is a monster. This kid is broken and abused by a system and others, who are broken in their own ways. It’s quite disgusting to see an essentially powerless victim condemned.

If this kid was being hurt, harmed, and no one would do anything—or so it seemed to them—how can you condemn their act? How does one sit and pass judgment on someone experiencing such pain, hopelessness? Have you ever stared down the blackness, felt as it engulfed you, an unlocateable pain, everywhere yet nowhere, certain you could take no more?

The powerless murdering the powerless will not cease until we remove the actual monsters from power. Given what is at stake, the consequences we will face if we do not act, those monsters must be destroyed, by any means necessary.

One reason why our society has failed to curb bullying is that we like bullies. Hell, we are bullies. Research has shown that bullies are not the anti-social misfits that adults, in their forced amnesia, want them to be. Rather, bullies are usually the most popular boys, second only on the clique-ranking to those described as friendly, outgoing, and self-confident. Often kids and parents both feel that there is no point in complaining to the administration because they won't do anything anyway, a reflection of the fact that popular winners are treated better than losers. At Columbine, parents and students both felt that bullies were favored by teachers and administrators, and that complainers were often ignored or blamed. Indeed, losers pay for being losers twice over in our schools, taking both the punishment and the blame. Many kids (and adults) believe that victims of bullying bring it upon themselves; studies show how kids will often egg bullies on against their victims, in part to curry the bully's favor, in part to distinguish themselves from the victim class.

“So if you aren't allowed to wear a hat, toot your horn, form a clique, or pick on a freshman, all because everyone is worried that someone might snap, it's fair to ask: Are high schools preparing kids for the big ugly world outside those doors—or handicapping them once they get there? High school was once useful as a controlled environment, where it was safe to learn to handle rejection, competition, cruelty, charisma. Now that we've discovered how unsafe a school can be, it may have become so controlled that some lessons will just have to be learned elsewhere.”

Note how the author casually equates bullying with fashion statements in the catalogue of zany, trivial adolescent worries. Nancy Gibbs, who wrote the article, is more than simply dismissive of victims' complaints—she thinks that bullying in schools is actually a good thing because it prepares kids for the real world—the office world. Rather than arguing that bullying is

a serious problem that needs to be stopped, she accepts it and sneers at anti-bullying critics, implying that they are flaky and “unrealistic.” Indeed she seems to rue the possibility that bullying might be curtailed in schools, and thus the valuable lessons of bullying will have to be taught elsewhere.

This is emblematic of how deeply embedded cruelty is in our culture—it is considered respectable and mainstream to actually want our own children to be bullied. Bullying is just “reality.” Of course, one could make the same argument about sexual harassment that Gibbs makes about bullying: that it’s not such a big deal, and that women who suffered from it needed to suck it up, get over it, and learn to deal with it or risk being handicapped in the real world. As we know, abolitionists in their day were not considered realistic either.

Nancy Gibbs clearly did not know schoolyard pain. Or if she did, she deleted it from her memory sometime during her climb to the top of mainstream American journalism. I don’t know a single useful lesson that I or anyone else ever learned from being bullied—it only brought shame and debilitating memories. Getting bullied always leads you to wrong decisions and wrong conclusions. You compensate in all the wrong ways. You wind up looking for someone weaker to bully yourself, you lose confidence and hate your weakness, and you fear and distrust the wrong people, all of which are reasons why bullied kids overwhelmingly wind up as failures in the real world, according to recent studies. You have to have never been bullied to think that it teaches something valuable and necessary and makes you a stronger person. A 1998 World Health Organization survey on Health Behavior in School-Aged Children, showed that both bullies and the bullied develop far greater problems later on in life—bullied kids particularly have difficulties making friends, and suffer from lifelong loneliness.

I know that I learned far more valuable lessons when I was the bully than when I was bullied. The lesson was simple: it felt better to be the one dishing it out. The pangs of remorse after pummeling a scrawny dork wore off pretty quickly; the humiliations of being on the receiving end, however, were replayed over and over and over, for years and years. I cannot imagine what kind of callous moron could possibly see anything valuable in being a victim of bullying. Maybe the idea comes from our cultural propaganda, where the bullied nerd, like *Back to the Future’s* McFly, always fights back in the triumphant climax, becomes a stronger person for it, and goes on to be a successful patron of a nuclear family, while the bully winds up washing his car. Bullying, in our cultural propaganda, is simply a dramatic plot device which the hero overcomes. Rarely, if ever, is it represented as it really works: as something privately eating away at kids, flat and uninteresting, and never overcome. And when it is, people will be outraged because you’re

“glorifying suicide”—personally, I think that show would have been far better had it ended with Tyler shooting up the school after his broom-rape (spoiler alert). But the school shootings create a kind of cognitive dissonance. In the past, bullying has simply been dismissed as ‘kids will be kids,’ but now that we are waking up to its effects it should not be accepted as a normal part of growing up.

The impulse to get over it is an example, caught in a phrase, of how profoundly normal it is for contemporary Americans to be callous and bullying. In a sexual discrimination and harassment suit filed by police recruit Kathy Durkin against the City of Chicago in 2003, she related how her instructor, Officer James Peck, bullied her even over her father’s recent death:

“Get over it, my fucking father died too. You don’t need your fucking father.”

When relatives of soldiers fighting in Iraq complained about a speech Bush gave that made light over the fact that no WMDs were found, Britt Hume of Fox News attacked the soldiers’ families:

“You have to feel like saying to people, ‘Just get over it.’”

Anyone who doesn’t accept the way things are, no matter how cruel or destructive, needs to get over it.

In fact, grieving seems to be what draws out the very meanest in Americans. In a 1997 column in the *Waxahachie Daily Light*, columnist Paul O’Rear wrote:

“Several months after Dad’s death, Mom found herself dealing with the perceived attitude from some well-meaning people, that she needed to get over it and get on with her life.”

Well-meaning indeed. Nancy Ruhe, executive director of Parents of Murdered Children in Cincinnati, told CNN:

“People say to me all the time, ‘When are these [victims] going to get over it?’”

This same heartless logic was applied, to the traumatized survivors of the Jonesboro, Arkansas, school shooting. A group of survivors wanting to erect some kind of meaningful memorial to the victims planted a garden. But the school wouldn’t recognize it, and six months after they had designed, tilled, planted, and finished the memorial garden the school still refused to dedicate it. As a local minister observed, withholding his name:

“That is a telling illustration of where we are as a community. We have tried to forget. And they don’t even know it’s there.”

The demand for absolute academic excellence might also be seen as a socially acceptable form of bullying, one which the administrators of schools are eager to wash their hands of responsibility for:

“Saratoga High School teachers and administrators did not create the hyper-creative academic environment our adolescents must deal with today: The deregulated free market did that. The competition is global and fierce. So the perception among kids is ‘either I get into Cal or MIT or Harvard and develop the narrowest band of the most highly specialized skills, or I’m gonna wind up cookin’ squirrels under a bridge.’”

Parents who just *have* to get their kid into an elite preschool may seem ridiculously funny, but the competition can be devastating—for the children, and for the parents who pass their disappointment and stress onto their children, as revealed in a New York magazine article about an ambitious couple and their four-year-old boy named Andrew:

“‘I doubted myself; maybe I overestimated my kid,’ Cynthia admits, referring to her disappointment when Andrew’s scores arrived in the mail. ‘Maybe I’m looking at him with loving eyes, and maybe I’m wrong. He’s very cute and animated and bright. But maybe that doesn’t mean he’s smart in an academic sense. I stopped trying with him. Before, we’d talk about the days of the week, or I would try to get into more detailed discussions. Now I felt it wasn’t going to make any difference. I was so disappointed.’”

Or consider Dong. The poor kid was not only a failure at school as a B student, he was a failure at Columbinig as well. He flunked the biggest chem test of his life, one that would read something like: Dong wants to blow up his school. If the school contains 20,000 cubic feet of space with 20 reinforced concrete structures, and 1,300 students, how much ammonium nitrate, potassium chlorate, and glycine (or glycerin or glycerine) would Dong need to steal from the science lab? Explain your answer (30 minutes).

Cruel and callous when on top, and afraid and smiling all the way to the grave when not—that pretty much sums up the post-Reagan zeitgeist. And if you’re not just as cheerful as the rest, ‘you’ve got some personal problems.’ You’re a weirdo if you complain. It’s your own fault if you’re traumatized

by a massacre. It's your own fault if you're poor. It's your own fault if you get downsized, overworked, bullied, and fail. Get over it, Snowflake. This is how Americans have been taught from the Reagan era through today to deal with people who are vulnerable: blame them for their own suffering. Move on. And if they don't move on, that means they're weird. Tell them to get over it. Which is to say:

“Get the fuck out of my face.”

To recognize the essential meanness of modern American culture, and how it is transmitted from adult to child, adult to adult, and child to child, is to attack the culture's DNA. If you admit that the callousness exhibited is awful and yet as common as Home Depot outlets, then eventually, the context changes and the shootings make a lot of sense. The post-Reagan squeeze is even evident when the school administration, by reflex, tries to deny a teacher health care benefits that would have once been considered standard, docking her pay out of a deeply-ingrained reflex more than anything. The whole country is infested with this meanness and coldness, and no one is allowed to admit it. Only the crazy ones sense that it is wrong—that what is ‘normal’ is not at all normal—and some of them, adults and kids alike, fight back with everything they have.

The Struggle Continues

The Kinship of Pain

“Let this message be clear to all who victimize the innocent: we’re watching. And by axe, drill, or crowbar—we’re coming through your door. Stop or be stopped.”

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained, and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. A rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the power of the feudal landlord class. Without using the greatest force, the peasants cannot possibly overthrow the deep-rooted authority of the landlords, which has lasted for thousands of years.

Seek out less often sought than found
A Soldier’s Grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy Ground,
And take thy rest.

“We had no jails and we therefore had to kill all spies, informers, and double-crossers.”

Philip II, Warlord of Macedon: If I bring my army into your land, I will destroy your farms, slay your people, and raze your city.

Spartans to Philip II: If.

“We are independent and separate from your wicked society of ever changing laws and dark councils. Those who would come against this my people, will I verily cause to be destroyed.”

When the sheriff came to arrest John, he asked him to go with him peacefully, but John refused.

“Well then, the judge will probably send about ten guys after you and break the door down to get you.”

John replied:

“If that’s the case there will be bloodshed.”

The simplest of maxim in all of ethics is:

“I don’t harm others, I don’t harm myself.”

The problem with this ethic arises when someone else hurts you. What do you do? Perhaps the first step is to ask them to stop. If they don’t, attempt to move away from them. If you can’t or if moving away harms you, the next step is violence.

“If you won’t stop hurting me, I’ll have to make you stop.”

In a complex society like ours this becomes complicated. There are people doing harm to you and me right now. Rich people, mostly, and powerful people like politicians and senior corporate officers. They kill people, impoverish people and make people sick for their own benefit. They don’t stop when asked nicely, or even rudely. They also use a lot of violence to get their way and keep hurting people. I trust this is self-evident. The police and military don’t serve ‘the people,’ except incidentally. Some schmuck who does some drugs goes away for years, while the crooks who brought down the economy and left millions homeless and impoverished because of their fraud and corruption pay a few fines that are less than what they stole.

But, the bottom line is they hurt people and won’t stop when asked, nor can one move away from the hurt they are inflicting. This hurt is likely to kill some billions of people. So violence is justified. This isn’t a moral/ethical problem, it is a tactical strategic question. It is no longer a question of whether violence is justified against people who are doing great evil and won’t stop when asked, but a question of whether it will work and what is required to make it work.

Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us:

“A time comes when silence is betrayal. I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government.”

If you talk with a harsh, urbanized accent, and you use too many profanities, that will often get you barred from many arenas, no matter what you're trying to say. On the other hand, polite, formal language is allowed almost anywhere even when all it is communicating is hatred and violence. Power always privileges its own discourse while marginalizing those who would challenge it or that are the victims of its power.

“I think the feeling is: I've had enough. I've had enough of political parties, I've had enough of politicians, I've had enough of representatives, senators, cabinet heads, authorities. I've had enough of the state, of what it's transformed itself into—the private and exclusive property of those who occupy the boardrooms, the C-suites, the administration and the houses of Congress. You want to go to the streets and ask what's the purpose of all this? You're asking an atomic bomb after it explodes to rationally direct its fantastic energy before it flows to wherever it wants to. What we're seeing here is this energy that exploded within the people, within society, flowing to wherever it wants to, without an owner, without logic, without direction.”

I also believe that all reasonable people of the world—regardless of race or ethnicity or religion—yearn for the same right to liberty, democracy, and self-determination. These are truly universal human ideals, and what we do today to advance them is the most important gift we leave for our children. Wars are temporary; these principles are not.

We believe that people who are serious in their criticism of this society and their desire to change it must involve themselves in serious revolutionary struggle. The system will not allow its social and economic order to be taken from it by Marshall amps and clashing cymbals. Ask the Cubans, the Vietnamese, the Afghans, the Iraqis, the Palestinians, or urban American blacks what lengths the system is willing to go to, to preserve itself.

“We recognize no other activity but the work of extermination, but we admit that the forms in which the activity will show itself will be extremely varied—poison, the knife, the rope, et cetera. In this struggle, revolution sanctifies everything alike.

Everything is moral that contributes to the triumph of the revolution; everything that hinders it is immoral and criminal.

Personally I hate these explosions, but I cannot stand as a judge to condemn those who are driven to despair.”

Justice will never be attained by constitutional means. When you're up against a bully you've got to kick him in the guts.

We could live in a sustainable, just, free, and peaceful world. And yet we are descending into a world of perpetual wars; slavery; ignorance; overwork side by side with unemployment; vacant homes side by side with homelessness; specialization; crass materialism; contaminated food, water, and air; destitution; despair.

Since the men in the shadows are not about to change, the only hope is their removal from power—by any means necessary. Unfortunately, given these men's cohesiveness and organizational skills, given their power over our minds, given their ability to convince the vast majority to act against its convictions and interests, given their success in establishing cross-generational dynasties, such removal presents humanity with a herculean task.

Humanity's future hinges on the strategy chosen by the few of us who are aware and who care. If we channel most of our energies to opening the eyes of the vast majority, we would surely lose the race. Our enemies possess superior propaganda resources and most human beings suffer from closed-mindedness and a misplaced loyalty to their 'own' convictions. If we continue to merely expose the daily outrages of the men in the shadows, they will follow their master plan and contemptuously ignore us. If we engage in peaceful demonstrations, they would kill our tacticians and leaders, infiltrate our ranks, and crush us. If we embark on a conventional armed insurrection, they would prevail thanks to their superior firepower, control of information sources, surveillance capabilities, and eagerness to kill millions.

Pacifist strategies are sublimely appealing, but they too are doomed to flounder. Jesus of Nazareth relied on them, as did Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and all three failed to unseat the villains or improve the human condition. Their appeal to non-violence merely led to their own violent demise. All three, and so many others of our best and brightest, were murdered because they had not seen that their enemies were without compassion. For these enemies, pacifism is a contemptible weakness to be exploited, not a virtue. "Forgiveness," Mark Twain observed, "is the fragrance that the violet shed on the heel that has crushed it." The fabulist Aesop saw it too. Befriending a snake, he argued, would cost you your life.

If we try to reform the system from within, we would surely lose as well, for the system is rigged. For decades, I passionately felt that we could make a difference by exclusively focusing on sunshine bribery—a.k.a. campaign financing and revolving doors—and move on from there. But now, this late in the day, that strategy is doomed too.

I would go farther. All these strategies, I am utterly convinced, play into the hands of the enemies of humanity. Such strategies make us feel that we

are doing something while they divert our attention from the only strategy that does have a fighting chance. Humanity is at a crossroads. Continual progress in happiness, knowledge, and wisdom is on hand—but only if we dare see that we live in one of those tragic epochs when the tree of liberty must be strategically refreshed with the blood of patriots and tyrants.

If you want to carry out a revolutionary act, don't talk to others about it first—go ahead and do it! It is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist, the insurrection can create them.

The only way to make revolution is to actually begin armed struggle. This is what we've been waiting for. The next step is to move to a higher level of struggle, to build the underground. Street violence is an unsustainable tactic—it makes us too vulnerable and costs too much. We've got to be able to work clandestinely.

We are working to build a guerrilla force in an urban environment. The guerrilla fighter is a social reformer.

Insurrection—by means of guerrilla bands—is the true method of warfare for all peoples desirous of emancipating themselves from an oppressive yoke. It is invincible, indestructible. Guerrilla war is a war of judicious daring and audacity, active legs, and espionage. The greatest merit in the commander of regular troops is to know when to fight and conquer; the greatest merit of the guerrilla chief is to contrive constantly to attack, do mischief, and retire.

Vanguardism is the notion that the most politically advanced members of any proletariat can draw the working class into revolution. Small, fast-moving guerrilla groups can inspire a grassroots rebellion, even in the United States. They just need the right story.

Mobility has always been the default choice of guerrilla fighters because they don't have access to the kinds of heavy weapons that would slow them down. The fact that networks of highly mobile amateurs can confound—even defeat—a professional army is the only thing that has prevented empires from completely determining the course of history. Whether that is a good thing or not depends on what amateurs you're talking about—or what empires—but it does mean that you can't predict the outcome of a war simply by looking at the numbers.

In the Afghanistan war, for every technological advantage held by the Americans, the Taliban seemed to have an equivalent or a countermeasure. Apache helicopters have thermal imaging that reveals body heat on the mountainside, so Taliban fighters disappear by covering themselves in a blanket on a warm rock. The Americans use unmanned drones to pinpoint the enemy, but the Taliban can do the same thing by watching the flocks of crows that circle American soldiers, looking for scraps of food. The Americans have virtually unlimited firepower, so the Taliban send only one

guy to take on an entire firebase. Whether or not he gets killed, he will have succeeded in gumming up the machine for yet one more day.

“Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult,” the military theorist Carl von Clausewitz wrote in the 1820s. “The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction.” That friction is the entire goal of the guerrilla; in some ways it works even better than killing.

One of the beguiling things about combat and other deep games is that they’re so complex, there’s no way to predict the outcome. That means that any ragtag militia, no matter how small and poorly equipped, might conceivably defeat a superior force if it fights well enough. Combat starts out as a fairly organized math problem involving trajectories and angles but quickly decays into a kind of violent farce, and the randomness of that farce can produce strange outcomes. Every action produces a counteraction on the enemy’s part. The thousands of interlocking actions throw up millions of little frictions, accidents, and chances, from which there emanates an all-embracing fog of uncertainty.

Unknown to Winn and his men, three enemy fighters are arrayed across the crest of the ridge below them, waiting with AK-47s. Parallel to the trail are ten more fighters with belt-fed machine guns and RPGs. In the US military, this is known as an “L-shaped ambush.” Correctly done, a handful of men can wipe out an entire platoon.

Stripped to its essence, combat is a series of quick decisions and rather precise actions carried out in concert with ten or twelve other men. In that sense it’s much more like football than, say, like a gang fight. The unit that choreographs their actions best usually wins. They might take casualties, but they win. That choreography—you lay down fire while I run forward, then I cover you while you move your team up—is so powerful that it can overcome enormous tactical deficits. There is choreography for storming Omaha Beach, for taking out a pillbox bunker, and for surviving an L-shaped ambush at night on the Gatigal. The choreography always requires that each man make decisions based not on what’s best for him, but on what’s best for the group. If everyone does that, most of the group survives. If no one does, most of the group dies. That, in essence, is combat.

The primary factor determining breakdown in combat does not appear to be the objective level of danger so much as the feeling—even the illusion—of control. Highly trained men in extraordinarily dangerous circumstances are less likely to break down than untrained men in little danger. The division between those who feel in control of their fate and those who don’t can occur even within the same close-knit group.

The idea that there are rules in warfare and that combatants kill each other according to basic concepts of fairness probably ended for good with

the machine gun. A man with a machine gun can conceivably hold off a whole battalion, at least for a while, which changes the whole equation of what it means to be brave in battle. In World War I, when automatic weapons came into general use, heavy machine gunners were routinely executed if their position was overrun because they caused so much death. Regular infantry, who were thought to be “fighting fairly,” were often spared.

Machine guns forced infantry to disperse, to camouflage themselves, and to fight in small independent units. All that promoted stealth over honor and squad loyalty over blind obedience. In a war of that nature soldiers gravitate toward whatever works best with the least risk. At that point combat stops being a grand chess game between generals and becomes a no-holds-barred experiment in pure killing. As a result, much of modern military tactics is geared toward maneuvering the enemy into a position where they can essentially be massacred from safety. It sounds dishonorable only if you imagine that modern war is about honor; it’s not. It’s about winning, which means killing the enemy on the most unequal terms possible. Anything less simply results in the loss of more of your own men. There are two ways to tilt the odds in an otherwise fair fight: ambush the enemy with overwhelming force or use weapons that cannot be countered. The best, of course, is to do both.

With IEDs the enemy now had a weapon that unnerved the Americans more than small-arms fire ever could: random luck. Every time you drove down the road you were engaged in a twisted existential exercise where each moment was the only proof you’d ever have that you hadn’t been blown up the moment before. And if you were blown up, you’d probably never know it and certainly wouldn’t be able to affect the outcome. Good soldiers died just as easily as sloppy ones, which is pretty much how soldiers define unfair tactics in war.

“When he was trying to recruit you. He had all these different plans of attack, you know, when he was trying to bring someone into the fold. Like if a kid was religious, he’d start talking to them about how it was God’s will. Or if they were insecure, he’d talk to them about the ever-accepting revolutionary family. But he always told my father you were too sharp for all that. Too curious. He said if the course of life don’t recruit her to the cause, no man will.”

Maybe you’re one of the special ones. So let me tell you what it is I do. I seek out special people—people who, if given the chance and the necessary tools, would stand up and face the enemy on behalf of those who can’t. I

seek out people who would do this even if they knew for certain that it would cost them dearly, maybe even cost them their lives. And then I do everything in my power to give them the tools, to give them their chance.

“The Movement people are fabulous. They have a real underground that takes care of you. No matter where I went they made sure I had something to eat, they introduced me to others, they made me feel safe. I’ve only been here three weeks now, but I feel completely different from all the other times I’ve been on the run. It’s not a hassle like it was alone. I’m part of a community. The underground is much bigger than you’d think. It’s all around. I could go from place to place for weeks and there’d always be a place I could stay and people to take care of me. Whether you call us criminals or radicals, we’ve all been fucked by society, we’re all on the lam together.”

Your involvement in movement activities is up to you. But be aware that your jeopardy increases with the amount of involvement.

“If your definition of terrorism is, you don’t care who gets hurt, we agreed we wouldn’t do that. But as to causing damage, or literally killing people, we were prepared to do that. We did have a series of discussions about what you could do, and it was agreed that cops were legitimate targets. We didn’t want to do things just around the wars. We wanted to be seen targeting injustice at home as well since the two are so intimately connected, so police were important. Military personnel were ruled to be legitimate targets as well. Big Banks, Big Box stores, Amazon Distribution Centers and the such were juicy targets too.”

Despite guards, a constant worker presence and a razor wire fence, the enemy is still vulnerable. There is a lot of stuff that needs to be destroyed, and we can’t count on spontaneous combustion and careless welders to do all the work.

“Brothers and sisters, this is a war for survival. Ask Michael and Eric and Sandra. They dig it. Ask the wild free animals. To shoot a genocidal robot policeman in the defense of life is a sacred act. Listen, the hour is late. Total war is upon us. Fight to live or you’ll die. Freedom is life. Freedom will live.”

Instilling fear into the authorities—which means that they are cut off from the populace and liable to lash out in counterproductive ways that will cost them further support—must be a key objective for any insurgent group.

“Our problem is not the damage to the building or to our own morale. Our problem is the feeling that if the police cannot protect themselves, how can they protect anyone else?”

—Police Commander

We know that our job is to lead kids to armed revolution. Kids know that the lines are drawn; revolution is touching all of our lives. Tens of thousands have learned that protest and marches don't do it. Revolutionary violence is the only way. Now we are adapting the classic guerrilla strategy of to our own situation here in one of the most technically advanced countries in the world. This is the way we celebrate the example of all revolutionaries who first inspired us by their fight behind enemy lines for the liberation of their people. Never again will they fight alone.

Even giants are vulnerable to the thousand nicks of stealthy amateurs who know the terrain and ignore the rules.

What is the first anesthetic? Wealth. And if I take your wealth? Necessities. And if I demolish your home, burn your fields? Acknowledgment. And if I make it taboo to sympathize with your plight? Family. And if I kill your family? God. And God, well God hasn't said a word in two-thousand years.

The rebels recruited her with the bandages still fresh around her wrists. They found her in a bar across from the abandoned theater, its blue vertical sign missing its first and last letters. She was wearing a stranger's throwaway dress, given to her by one of the nurses. She was drunk and alone once again with the terrible illness in her brain. They knew how to find the ones who were most likely to do it. They kept watchers in the hospitals, where they looked for suicide attempts, and in the schools, where they looked for outcasts, and in the churches, where they looked for hard-boiled extremists feverish with the spell of the Lord. From these, they forged weapons.

They'll remember you forever, they told her. When this is over they'll build cities in your name. The wholesale slaughter of our people is not something to be negotiated. It is not the subject of concessions or compromise.

It seemed sensible to crave safety, to crave shelter from the bombs and the Birds and the daily depravity of war. But somewhere deep in her mind an idea had begun to fester—perhaps the longing for safety was itself just

another kind of violence—a violence of cowardice, silence, submission. What was safety, anyway, but the sound of a bomb falling on someone else's home?

She was overcome by anger and a rabid desire to ruin those who'd ruined her. Rage wrapped itself around her like a tourniquet, keeping her alive even as it condemned a part of her to atrophy.

You are fit for something better than slavery and cannon fodder. You need to know that you were not created to work and produce and impoverish yourself to enrich an idle exploiter. You need to know that you have a mind to improve, a soul to develop, and a dignity to sustain.

Take more care to end life well than to live long.

We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Our homes are covered with mortgages; labor impoverished; and the land concentrating in the hands of the capitalists. The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for the few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of these, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes: tramps and millionaires.

Upon which side will you fight? Upon the side of the idle holders of idle capital or upon the side of the struggling masses?

This is what I have to offer to those who wish to follow me: hunger, cold, the heat of the sun; no wages, no barracks, no ammunition; but continual skirmishes, forced marches, and bayonet-fights. Those of you who love your community, your kin, follow me!

To me the kinship of pain
Has always been the strongest bond
I could forget those with whom I laughed
But I will never forget those with whom I shed tears.

A greater affiliation with pain is what is required and is capable of transforming this world. We need no other religion.

Japan did not copy blindly the Western blueprint. It was fiercely determined to protect its unique identity, and to ensure that modern Japanese will be loyal to Japan rather than to science, to modernity, or to some nebulous global community. To that end, Japan upheld the native religion of Shinto as the cornerstone of Japanese identity. In truth, the Japanese state reinvented Shinto. Traditional Shinto was a hodgepodge of animist beliefs in various deities, spirits, and ghosts, and every village and temple had its own favourite spirits and local customs. In the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, the Japanese state created an official version of Shinto,

while discouraging many local traditions. This 'State Shinto' was fused with very modern ideas of nationality and race, which the Japanese elite picked from the European imperialists. Any element in Buddhism, Confucianism, and the samurai feudal ethos that could be helpful in cementing loyalty to the state was added to the mix. To top it all, State Shinto enshrined as its supreme principle the worship of the Japanese emperor, who was considered a direct descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu, and himself no less than a living god.

At first sight, this odd concoction of old and new seemed an extremely inappropriate choice for a state embarking on a crash course of modernization. A living god? Animist spirits? Feudal ethos? That sounded more like a Neolithic chieftainship than a modern industrial power. Yet it worked like magic. The Japanese modernized at a breathtaking pace while simultaneously developing a fanatical loyalty to their state. The best-known symbol of the success of State Shinto is the fact that Japan was the first power to develop and use precision-guided missiles. Decades before the USA fielded the smart bomb, and at a time when Nazi Germany was just beginning to deploy dumb V-2 rockets, Japan sank dozens of allied ships with precision-guided missiles. We know these missiles as the kamikaze. Whereas in present-day precision-guided munitions the guidance is provided by computers, the kamikaze were ordinary airplanes loaded with explosives and guided by human pilots willing to go on one-way missions. This willingness was the product of the death-defying spirit of sacrifice cultivated by State Shinto. The kamikaze thus relied on combining state-of-the-art technology with state-of-the-art religious indoctrination.

Fear of death is what gives the bosses their power! How long do you think you can survive without eating? Maybe a month or two! OK. Would you rather have one month of freedom or a lifetime of slavery? Anything that isn't worth dying for isn't worth living for. If you'd like to be part of this army of martyrs, then please write to us today.

So You Want to Join the Resistance?

This is not a group. There is no membership. There is no party, like ‘Democrats,’ ‘Socialists,’ ‘Republicans.’ This book is not leadership. There are no big names and faces, no way to advance your personal career. There are no big funders, this is not a non-profit. There are networks of solidarity and recognizable and communicable goals.

Contemporary resistance is not a monolithic or dogmatic ideology but a continual reversal of theory and action. We have had many decades to reflect and peruse the utmost effective response to our situation in America. To this effort we are creating networks for those facing detention, incarceration, exploitation, or other authoritarian violence to escape and live with dignity.

Revolutionaries, social centers, collectives are already actively building infrastructure of resistance. This infrastructure is not just material but psychological, spiritual, theoretical, and foundational. It is a departure from party politics and in conflict with both the left and the right for complete and total freedom. Defense of oppressed people and of our political projects is paramount to liberation. For those that truly want this nation of hate and violence to end, self-defense, conflict resolution, and revolutionary justice are proven ways forward. It is important that the way through these tragic times not just be personal but also collective. Everything in this book is hacked, remixed, and presented from the author’s point of view. Challenge it! There is no one way forward, just powerful ideas.

Relative to their small size, affinity groups can achieve a disproportionately powerful impact. In contrast to traditional top-down structures, they are free to adapt to any situation, they need not pass their decisions through a complicated process of ratification, and all the participants can act and react instantly without waiting for orders—yet with a clear idea of what to expect from one another. The mutual admiration and inspiration on which they are founded make them very difficult to demoralize. In stark contrast to capitalist, fascist, and in some cases, socialist structures, they function without any need of hierarchy or coercion. Participating in an affinity group can be fulfilling and fun as well as effective. Most important of all, affinity groups are motivated by shared desire and loyalty, rather than profit, duty, or any other compensation or abstraction. Whole squads of riot police have been held at bay by affinity groups armed with only the tear gas canisters shot at them.

Some affinity groups are formal and immersive: the participants live together, sharing everything in common. But an affinity group need not be a permanent arrangement. It can serve as a structure of convenience,

assembled from the pool of interested and trusted people for the duration of a given project. A particular team can act together over and over as an affinity group, but the members can also break up into smaller affinity groups, participate in other affinity groups, or act outside the affinity group structure. Freedom to associate and organize as each person sees fit is a fundamental principle; this promotes redundancy, so no one person or group is essential to the functioning of the whole, and different groups can reconfigure as needed.

An affinity group can range from two to perhaps as many as fifteen individuals, depending on your goals. However, no group should be so numerous that an informal conversation about pressing matters is impossible. You can always split up into two or more groups if need be. In actions that require driving, the easiest system is often to have one affinity group to each vehicle.

Learn each other's strengths and vulnerabilities and backgrounds, so you know what you can count on each other for. Discuss your analyses of each situation you are entering and what is worth accomplishing in it—identify where they match, where they are complementary, and where they differ, so you'll be ready to make split-second decisions. One way to develop political intimacy is to read and discuss texts together, but nothing beats on-the-ground experience. Start out slow so you don't overextend. Once you've established a common language and healthy internal dynamics, you're ready to identify the objectives you want to accomplish, prepare a plan, and go into action.

Affinity groups are resistant to infiltration because all members share history and intimacy with each other, and no one outside the group need be informed of their plans or activities. Once assembled, an affinity group should establish a shared set of security practices and stick to them. In some cases, you can afford to be public and transparent about your activities. In other cases, whatever goes on within the group should never be spoken of outside it, even after all its activities are long completed. In some cases, no one except the participants in the group should know that it exists at all. You and your comrades can discuss and prepare for actions without acknowledging to outsiders that you constitute an affinity group. Remember, it is easier to pass from a high security protocol to a low one than vice versa.

Affinity groups generally operate via consensus decision-making: decisions are made collectively according to the needs and desires of every individual involved. Democratic voting, in which the majority get their way and the minority must hold their tongues, is anathema to affinity groups—for if a group is to function smoothly and hold together under stress, every individual involved must be satisfied. Before any action, the members of a

group should establish together what their personal and collective goals are, what risks they are comfortable taking, and what their expectations of each other are. These matters determined, they can formulate a plan.

Since action situations are always unpredictable and plans rarely come off as anticipated, it may help to employ a dual approach to preparing. On the one hand, you can make plans for different scenarios: If A happens, we'll inform each other by X means and switch to plan B; if X means of communication is impossible, we'll reconvene at site Z at Q o'clock. On the other hand, you can put structures in place that will be useful even if what happens is unlike any of the scenarios you imagined. This could mean preparing resources (such as banners, medical supplies, or offensive equipment), dividing up internal roles (for example, scouting, communications, medic, media liaison), establishing communication systems (such as burner phones or coded phrases that can be shouted out to convey information securely), preparing general strategies (for keeping sight of one another in confusing environments, for example), charting emergency escape routes, or readying legal support in case anyone is arrested. It's safer to act in chaotic protest environments in a tight-knit affinity group.

After an action, a shrewd affinity group will meet—if necessary, in a secure location without any electronics—to discuss what went well, what could have gone better, and what comes next.

An affinity group answers to itself alone—this is one of its strengths. Affinity groups are not burdened by the procedural protocol of other organizations, the difficulties of reaching agreement with strangers, or the limitations of answering to a body not immediately involved in the action.

At the same time, just as the members of an affinity group strive for consensus with each other, each affinity group should strive for a similarly considerate relationship with other individuals and groups—or at least to complement others' approaches, even if others do not recognize the value of this contribution. Ideally, most people should be glad of your affinity group's participation or intervention in a situation, rather than resenting or fearing you. They should come to recognize the value of the affinity group model, and so to employ it themselves, after seeing it succeed and benefiting from that success.

An affinity group can work together with other affinity groups in what is sometimes called a 'cluster.' The cluster formation enables a larger number of individuals to act with the same advantages a single affinity group has. If speed or security is called for, representatives of each group can meet ahead of time, rather than the entirety of all groups; if coordination is of the essence, the groups or representatives can arrange methods for communicating through the heat of the action. Over years of collaborating

together, different affinity groups can come to know each other as well as they know themselves, becoming accordingly more comfortable and capable together.

When several clusters of affinity groups need to coordinate especially massive actions—before a big demonstration, for example—they can hold a spokes-council meeting at which different affinity groups and clusters can inform one another (to whatever extent is wise) of their intentions. Spokes-councils rarely produce seamless unanimity, but they can apprise the participants of the various desires and perspectives that are at play. The independence and spontaneity that decentralization provides are usually our greatest advantages in combat with a better equipped adversary.

For affinity groups and larger structures based on consensus and cooperation to function, it is essential that everyone involved be able to rely on each other to come through on commitments. When a plan is agreed upon, each individual in a group and each group in a cluster should choose one or more critical aspects of the preparation and execution of the plan and offer to ‘bottomline’ them. Bottomlining the supplying of a resource or the completion of a project means guaranteeing that it will be accomplished somehow, no matter what. If you’re operating the legal hotline for your group during a demonstration, you owe it to them to handle it even if you get sick; if your group promises to provide the banners for an action, make sure they’re ready, even if that means staying up all night the night before because the rest of your affinity group couldn’t show up. Over time, you’ll learn how to handle crises and who you can count on in them—just as others will learn how much they can count on you.

Stop wondering what’s going to happen, or why nothing’s happening. Get together with your friends and start deciding what will happen. Don’t go through life in passive spectator mode, waiting to be told what to do. Get in the habit of discussing what you want to see happen—and making those ideas reality.

Without a structure that encourages ideas to flow into action, without comrades with whom to brainstorm and barnstorm and build up momentum, you are likely to be paralyzed, cut off from much of your own potential; with them, your potential can be multiplied by ten, or ten-thousand.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

She was referring, whether she knew it or not, to affinity groups. If every individual in every action against the state and status quo participated as part of a tight-knit, dedicated affinity group, the revolution would be accomplished in a few short years.

An affinity group could be a sewing circle or a bicycle maintenance collective; it could come together for the purpose of providing a meal at an occupation or forcing a multinational corporation out of business through a carefully orchestrated program of sabotage. Affinity groups have planted and defended community gardens, built and occupied and burned down buildings, organized neighborhood childcare programs and wildcat strikes; individual affinity groups routinely initiate revolutions in the visual arts and popular music. Your favorite band was an affinity group. An affinity group invented the airplane.

Self-defense is the central pillar of our resistance. The State tries to consolidate its monopoly on violence by claiming to have the unique ability to protect its “citizens,” but it has become clear, there is no such thing as protection that one does not provide oneself. Self-defense is not only the barricade against an oppressive force, but also the means for the collective development that is an integral part of revolutionary change.

Across the United States, there are currently groups that are committed to the principles of self-defense, from left-wing armed groups to anti-fascist brigades to copwatch organizations. These groups use a variety of tactics and strategies depending on the local conditions, yet they share common enemies: fascists, right-wing militias, and State forces. The groups who have combated these reactionaries have a proven commitment to defending oppressed communities; they are the foundation upon which we can build a political movement.

Thus, we propose that the existing militant anti-fascist and anti-police movement can be further developed according to the following guidelines:

- Underscoring these groups with a new revolutionary scope and the political principles outlined here.
- Deepening the local scope of these groups by tying the actions to neighborhood self-governance, and a larger political project.
- Connecting these projects to each other to broaden our capacity by increasing resources, participants, and deepening our commitments to revolutionary political solutions.
- Developing the capacity to begin launching offensive actions against fascists and the regime.
- The RAM proposal is to grow locally, while connecting, politically and materially, to similar groups regionally. By placing self-defense at the center of our revolutionary movement, we can protect the development

of our political projects and centers. This will allow the values and practices that we are trying to implement to have the opportunity to expand. We propose connecting self-defense groups to the smallest unit of self-governance possible: the neighborhood. This places the capacity for self-defense in the hands of those who need it.

- Decentralization is an effective militant strategy and shapes the revolutionary practice of defense groups.
- Militant groups are connected to local political bodies organizing towards self-governance.
- Core revolutionary principles and goals allow groups to work with a variety of tactics towards the same goal even without direct coordination.

When revolutionary groups form projects like the Black Panthers' breakfast programs, the New Orleans-based Common Ground Collective, or the Greek anarchists's revolutionary solidarity with Syrian refugees, these initiatives also form new political and social relations based on mutual aid and neighborhood self-sufficiency. Unlike State-based organizations, which turn citizens into helpless recipients of services, volunteer-run projects instead supplied the resources, tools, and knowledge for people to provide for themselves, make the primary decisions about organization, and, if firmly tied to self-defense forces, eventually take over the infrastructure necessary for survival.

The political paradigm we are working towards is a network of councils and communes without the State. It's a vision of autonomy that runs through neighborhood-based councils, where decision-making rests at the local level. This political formation reverses hierarchy and centralized power by making the most local unit the most powerful, and regional bodies simply a means for coordination. We propose starting from the nexus of the small, revolutionary groups already active in many cities, towns, and rural areas. Already, such groups function as local political collectives with strong ethical backbones and a commitment to communal decision-making.

As these groups expand through the abolitionist struggle, they have the ability to introduce more people to this model of politics. The purpose, then, is to expand qualitatively and quantitatively, without recreating centralized and hierarchical social formations. To facilitate the process of liberating people from bondage, we offer the following suggestions as possible means by which revolutionary groups can help establish structurally decentralized

projects that integrate uncompromising anarchist foundations through the creation of new councils and local institutions:

- Revolutionary groups can create social programs, such as a free health clinics, safe houses for immigrants and others targeted by the State, educational programs, et cetera with a revolutionary outlook, in order to bring new people into new revolutionary methods of organization, while building localized resources.
- Revolutionary groups can help form new collectives and councils, based on either local circumstances or a specific issue, such as tenants' associations, revolutionary youth groups, or neighborhood assemblies.
- Revolutionary groups can build stronger relationships with similar groups in other cities.

The success of this project is measured by more and more people within a neighborhood becoming politically engaged and active decision-makers within their communities. While the State drags on by using increasingly totalitarian methods, we build our power: building new communities of resistance in the disintegrating remains of the regime. By proliferating, these bodies can, in the short-term, erode the oppressive functions of the State, and partnered with rigorous defense, dislodge them.

No platform, no dialogue, no inch of territory, and certainly no concern can be ceded to those who either threaten or unleash authoritarian violence.

“The life of someone who oppresses others and prevents them from living is not worth a cent.”

The legacy of revolutionary justice in the US is an inherently political phenomenon, as it has always been situated in reprisals against the State, the slave-holding planter class, capitalists and their institutions, and the broader forces of bondage, from colonial to patriarchal oppression. It is impossible to speak about resolving social conflicts in the US without addressing the agents of the State and reactionary, racist forces and their consistent use of terror to maintain their social and political position.

The entire council-based system, as in Spain, Chiapas, or Rojava, is predicated on the health of the social fabric. All pragmatics, education, and values are collectively organized so that the individual can overcome alienation and powerlessness by personally shaping the conditions of their lives through discussion and decision-making. The ability to shape all the facets of society confers upon each individual a far wider scope than the mere satisfaction of personal needs, as it also includes the well-being of the

entire community. With the invisible wall between politics and community broken down, this focus on community health becomes the driving force behind the process of resolving conflicts. If we intend to resolve the conflicts between parties instead of simply finding fault and applying punishment, the solution is mediation. In Rojava, conflict resolution is implemented in several, slightly different ways throughout the society that the participants are actively involved in constructing.

The Tekmil is a foundational process that begins with self-reflection and analysis based on revolutionary principles. In fact, it's important to note that this practice is what led to this region's transition from a hierarchical national liberation struggle to its current ground-up structure.

The main point is that each person 'criticizes' those in their affinity group they care the most about because they want to see them improve and become better people. To begin on a serious footing, the participants step into another room, and act as if those fallen in the struggle are there with them. Thus, people are expected to act respectfully. There's typically a person that leads the Tekmil and writes down the criticisms, who starts by opening the floor up to anyone that has something to say. If a person feels the need to express themselves, they ask if they can speak, stand up, and give their observations. If they're speaking about someone else, that person cannot reply to their criticism. In fact, they are not even supposed to bring it up after the Tekmil. They are just supposed to accept it and think about it. Once no one has anything else to say, the person leading the Tekmil summarizes what was stated.

When police killed Michael Brown in Ferguson, the town erupted in riots. No sooner had they begun this act of defiance, when non-profits and faith leaders descended upon the town to induce people to protest peacefully and attempted to de-escalate the situation. On the other hand, riot police and armed right-wing militias surrounded the rebels, cornered them in a sea of illegality by declaring curfews, and then swept people up with brutal arrests and long jail terms. Without revolutionary objectives, or the foundations for a sustained revolutionary conflict, everyone had to, eventually, reconcile living with the oppressive State that they were just rebelling against.

The most essential tasks are to create the ideological underpinnings for revolt and the necessary infrastructure that can sustain action and long-term forms of organization. There is a big difference materially in what an organized and fortified hamlet versus a mass in revolt can accomplish. With a base of operations impenetrable to outsiders, the maroons were able to provide a serious challenge to the practitioners of slavery. Tactically, they leveraged the advantage of attack from a free area outside the jurisdiction of hegemonic power. However, it was not only their territorial integrity, but

a commitment to the autonomous nature of their societies that allowed for the maroon's perseverance. The maroons refused to give up their freedoms, maintained regional decision-making and fluid fighting formations, and continued traditional practices. Outsiders looking for liberation saw that the people involved in maroon communities weren't struggling to grab power, but to fight for liberation itself.

Look to the communities that are most oppressed for comrades in struggle. Fight alongside and defend groups enacting revolutionary justice. Derail forces that want to bring people back into the fold of power: nonprofits, political parties, and authoritarian political groups. Provide political foundations: principles, new organizational models, infrastructure, and defense. Together we can get through these times.

In Love and Rage,

The Church of We

The Coming Insurrection

Coming to a theater near you...

Whoomp Whoomp Whoomp. They can hear the helicopter approaching but neither has sighted it yet. Big puffs of breath intermittently stream out as the binoculars make their sweeping scans.

“There she is, right over that saddle off to the west.”

“Got her too. I’ll get Betty.”

The second figure trudges off through the fresh snow, steps crunching, breaking the stillness even further. He drops the tailgate of the old Bronco and slides out a camo green case. Flipping open the latches reveals Betty. He throws the device onto his shoulder and walks back over to where they first sighted the target.

“See that fucker with the antenna?”

“Yeah. Whats he doing?”

“Motherfuckers track the collars biologists put on them.”

“Fucking cocksuckers.”

“Yup. Ready to give them a little taste of their own medicine?”

He nods, takes a knee, hefts Betty onto his shoulder, double-checking that the giant stenciled ‘FRONT’ is in the right orientation. He flips the scope up, finds the chopper, much closer now. The tone sounds. Trigger squeezed. WHOOSH. It is streaking up into the sky now, won’t be long. The fireball is seen a moment before the sound. Nothing left, no survivors, as if it had hit an invisible wall in the sky, it drops straight down into the fresh snowpack in the valley below.

“Wolves got some SAMs now motherfuckers.”

“Yeehaw, lets get the fuck out of here.”

The shooter stows Betty as the other hops in the driver’s seat and starts the truck. A little hesitant on such a cold morning but she turns over for them as usual.

“You got the tires right?” asks the shooter as he climbs into the passenger seat.

“Yup, four fresh ones waiting for us, shouldn’t be more than 30-minutes before we’re on the way. Probably won’t even be anyone looking for them for another few hours.”

“Nice, lets do it.”

The Bronco lurches forward, swinging a wide arc the driver takes them back out the way they came. A plume of black smoke beginning to rise, billowing above the treetops, quickly fading into nothing more than a smudge on the rear-view mirror as they speed into the late morning sun.

Some crimes cannot go unpunished. . .

“Yeah, we got Bezos a few months back,” the lanky one says.

“No shit, that was you?”

“Yup, we cut the fuckers face off while he was still alive. Bastard fucked up the clean cut a few times by squirming around but we finally got it.”

The shorter one seems to squirm in his seat, looking down at his feet sadly.

“Whats his problem?”

“Oh him? Well, he is having a crisis of conscience at the moment. He hasn’t quite been the same since Jeff.”

“What the fuck? Guys a scumbag, hurts millions, stolen billions, wants you to live in space cylinders—‘For da great beltah nation, kay?’—fuck him”

“Yeah, that’s what I said. But he seems to think its too much like ISIS, ya know?”

“Fuckin’ ignorant man. First off, those fuckers fighting for some made up sky bullshit. Second, their shit is indiscriminate. Bezos is a fucking guilty shitbag through and through. And hell, third, lets look at US direct violence: melt some kids face off with a drone? Well, sad, but happens in war they say. Cut the fucking face off of a guilty motherfucker, directly—not like you fuckin’ taped a scalpel to a drone, you risk your own goddamn skin. You’re a monster they say. And this midget motherfucker is agreeing with them? What the fuck man? You did a noble thing. Own it. Embrace it. Say, what’d you do with it anyway?”

“Tanned it and glued it on a RealDoll.”

Friends are found in unlikely places. . .

“So let me tell you how me and my buddy Ozzy hooked up here. No, not that way Ozzy. Sorry, he’s got the sense of humor of a teenage boy for some reason, it’s kinda fucked up. So anyway, I had smuggled myself into Area 51 in a crate of dry ice, came in on a fucking food delivery truck for their cafeteria—maybe don’t use private contractors so much dummies, right?”

I was planning on just doing some basic recon and grab some photos to up my cred and get some info out there, right? But then I ended up nearly getting caught and having to duck into this room with some weird tinted lights and vats of liquid in it. Smelled like the ocean.”

Ozzy turns purple.

“No, no, I wasn’t saying that was a bad thing, you smell great. So I figure I’ll go check out the vats while I’m waiting for the patrol outside to pass. Nothing in most of them, ‘cept for one. Can see a blob under the surface from the outside but can’t quite tell what it is. So me being a curious motherfucker, I pop off the Plexiglas top and then this 8-legged bastard over here leaps out and latches onto my face like those fucking things in

Half-Life. But, as he told me later, he tasted that I wasn't one of those dickbag scientists that tortured him and his kin and so he leapt off almost immediately.

Then the motherfucker talks to me. I figure its just the adrenaline, or maybe its some kind of LSD-injecting octopus for some kind of new high-tech MK-ULTRA experiments but then he explains all the shit to me. Talks about how they cut them open while they're alive just to see what stuff does, the miscarriages, the premature deaths; horrible shit man, especially considering he's able to explain the shit to me.

Luckily for us, Ozzy's got a bit of Jedi in him—thanks fucking nerd scientists—so he was able to help scam our way out, since we both couldn't fit in my icebox to get back out. 'This isn't the octopus you're looking for,' HAH, fucking classic Ozzy, man."

Some lines must be crossed. . .

"Shut the fuck up, your family is going to be fine, we're not monsters like you."

The figure in the suit continues to bellow, sweat and tears streaming down his face, his expensively tailored suit soaked to the core.

"Look man, it's kind of unfortunate that we gotta do what we gotta do. You ain't as directly guilty as some of the others we've done far less to, but we gotta send a message, you know?"

The bellowing and bawling continues unabated.

"Yeah, lets call it marketing. You should be familiar with marketing. Especially horrific acts of torture, right? Hell, maybe we should ask you for some tips, huh? Got anything?"

Sounds have reduced to sniveling and sniffing now. The suit's eyes open and turn skyward, the redness enhanced by the incandescent bulb hanging from a floor joist in the basement ceiling.

"Look. . . Y-You don't n-n-need to do this. I won't tell anyone—"

"We're going to tell everyone motherfucker. What, you think that camera is just there so we can jerk off to it later? Fuck no."

"I-I-I can give you anything you want, anything"

"That's good to hear man. But I don't think you're going to like this next bit: what we want is you to die on camera tonight. We usually get what we want, you should be familiar with that, right? You want a whale or dolphin but running them down in the wild ain't popular anymore? Well hell lets just breed the ones we got, maybe try out some cloning too if that don't work. Fuck whatever the creatures involved might think, I just want my money. Sound like someone you know?"

"Come on, I don't make all those decisions, you must know that. There's a board, I need to report to them, and the shareholders, I have a responsibility

to them. You kill me and they'll just get another one to sit in my chair!"

"You'd be right if we were just planning on doing something to make you step down or get fired. But we don't fight you fuckers handicapped like those dipshit green groups. The only drum circle here will be me drumming your balls with the claw end of a hammer motherfucker. You're going to die, you're going to suffer, you'll feel it all, your conscious mind analyzing the pain until your body's defenses give up and just put you into shock. Maybe that will be interspersed with some thoughts about your family, wife, kids, maybe your mom. Maybe the moments before your death will be the closest you get to experiencing some of what you put them through."

"WAIT! Please don't we can—"

The rag is stuffed into the suit's mouth, ending the conversation, nothing but muffles now coming from the wide-eyed face full of panic, fear.

"I liked that drum circle line, you just come up with it?"

"Yeah, you know, just kind of got caught up in the moment."

"It was good, we should probably do it, sounds like it'd make good video."

"Yeah, let's save that for the end. We'll do the balls on close up and then slice both thighs and let him bleed out."

"Sounds like a plan, lets get started."

The muffled sounds continued for far longer than expected, their pitches altering depending on which body part they were working with. There were no sounds when the hammer pierced through the flesh, cleaving the small meaty orb nearly in two. The force of the swing embedding the tool a half-inch into the wooden chair below. There it remained, the blood streaming from the thighs pooling around the metal spire before eventually reaching the critical mass needed to spill onto the floor.

The time to be polite has passed. . .

"Die you. . ."

". . . fucker"

". . . cunt"

His head slumps to the table. The blood splatter hits the children, the wife. Delayed, eventually they begin to scream.

"Whoa man, what the fuck?"

"Huh?"

"You can't call him a cunt, I mean there's women and children here."

"Oh come on that's bullshit. Never believed in that shit, its just a word. The British use it all the time."

"Well look at them, they're hysterical because of it."

"Think that may just be cause she's got brains in her hair."

“Yeah, maybe. Agree to disagree. Well thank you for your time tonight, have a good holiday weekend.”

They nonchalantly walk back out the front door, tucking their silenced weapons into their overcoats before stepping outside. The screaming fades into a low hum, the closed entry door hushing it even further.

“Oh shit, hang on a sec, forgot something.” He swings the door back open, the knob still dangling from when they smashed it with the pipe, the screaming approaching its original howl. Ten seconds later he strolls back out, satisfied.

“What was that about?”

“Oh, I just sprinkled some crack on him. You know, give one back to the homies.”

The other cracks up. “Man that’s fucking great. So, you feelin’ better?”

“Not as good as when we pulled apart the trigger-man with those semis but I’m definitely feeling something.”

“Yeah, the farther they are removed from shit like that the less rewarding it is. But in our fucked up world they’re often more responsible than the ignorant fucks directly implementing the shit.”

“Fucking always gotta go deep on me don’t you?”

“Just something to think about. Don’t think too hard though, don’t want you to lose your edge.”

“Fuck no man, these motherfuckers took my two best friends. I couldn’t just sit there doing nothing ever again. I’m definitely going to kill myself, or get myself killed, but I’m taking out as many of these sonofabitches as I can on the way out.”

“Hell yes brother. None of this is for us anymore. You know it, I’ve known it. We win or we die, and odds on the former ain’t good.” He pauses, reflecting, then a pained look crosses his face as he hesitantly gets out the final line, “But...I...Some nights I have hope. It sort of filters through the darkness of everything I’ve lived. It...It would be so nice to live in the world I see when I close my eyes, that I believe in, but its probably just a fantasy. She died face down in the mud and I’m probably gonna too...” He trails off.

Silence dominates the drive all the way to the state line and beyond.

You think you know, but you have no idea...

“Shit, shit shit, SHIT!”

“We weren’t supposed to get this much fog. Damn it what are the odds?”

The zodiac bobs in the gentle swells, surrounded on all sides by a blanket of thick gray air.

“They’re definitely going to find us. They got fucking every tech on these things—FLIR, radar, sonar, fucking fish finders, fuck...”

“GPS sure would have come in handy...”

“Yeah, it fucking would have, but when you’re being shot at, you’ll have to forgive me for not getting every goddamn thing out of the truck.”

“Hey, I wasn’t blaming, just saying.”

“Saying something useless and fucking unhelpful.”

“Look, we’ve got a bit of a head start, the harbor was miles down the peninsula.”

“Yeah, but something might have been already out on patrol—even one of their small craft has enough tech to fuck us. Goddamn drug war.”

“Maybe it will cl—”

A sleek black shape bursts out of the water, rubbing gently against the boat as it thrusts through the air. Another on the other side now, the same graceful arc.

“Fuck its the goddamn SEALs, what the fuck kind of shit they got?! Quick! The light!”

The lantern clicks on and begins to scan the surrounding water.

“Looked too big to be SEALs. And we’re still alive, which is odd.”

“Over there! Look!”

The light swiftly shifts to a point about five feet off the starboard bow, illuminating a dark hump in the water. The light continues to examine the figure, flowing down its flank until it brings into focus a large, slightly bent black fin.

“Orcas, not SEALs. Thank fuck.”

“Oh good, not killer humans, just killer whales? What if they think we’re just a giant fucking sea lion. You seen those videos? They throw those half-ton bastards into the sky like its nothing.”

“Relax, first killer whale is an outdated term and stereotype, kind of like all black men having big cocks but turns out some racist asshole just said it to make ‘em seem more like savages and animals. Ain’t never been a free-living killer whale attack on a human. Hell supposedly some of these guys even returned peoples dogs who got lost out at sea.”

“Bullshit.”

“Maybe. But either way, all statistics point to them not hurting us.”

By this point they had noticed 10 or 15 other shapes all around the zodiac. It was hard to get an exact count, what with their constant shifting and submerging, and the goddamn fog. Suddenly a black and white head pops silently and slowly from the water, brushing the inflated tube. Deftly maneuvering its body, like a ballerina on pointe, it rotates, until its eye is in line with theirs.

“OK, call me crazy but I feel like that fucker knows what is going on.”

“Some people think whales are telepathic...”

“Oh for fucks sake, are they the same type that believes the government is a bunch of lizard men in suits?”

“Probably not, those guys usually don’t overlap. Telepathic aliens and lizard men? Totally reasonable. Telepathic whales? What you smoking filthy hippie.”

The inane conversation is interrupted by the feeling of turning. The whale had sunk back down into the water and now seemed to be pushing the zodiac. Then a light bump from the opposite side, as another whale stops the turn. Once again the only motion is the bobbing in the light swells.

WHOOSH! Fifteen feet off the direct centerline of the bow, a whale surfaces and launches a huge spray of water into the sky. Then the boat begins to move toward the display, turning around, it is clear that they are being pushed slowly in a specific direction. The whale releases and the boat begins to inch away. Performing another agile move, the whale twists its 10-ton body, raising its massive left fin out of the water and gently taps on the outboard motor five times.

“Dude. Are the fucking whales trying to lead us somewhere? And how the fuck does it know what an engine is?”

“Yes. And who knows, who cares. Lets take their advice. Better than sitting here waiting to get shot.”

The outboard engine roars to life, the throttle slowly increased, the whales setting a pace that seems to minimize the noise generated, as if they too were aware of the stealth nature of the endeavor.

“So is this shit really happening or were the first ones really SEALs and we’re actually dead and this is just some weird DMT shit you see in the split second before your brain dies?”

“I ever tell you about the African elephants man?”

“Think so but refresh my memory.”

“Can’t remember much then, or you’d probably not think this was so crazy. I had been stalking some poachers for days, they were working for some Chinese business-asshole, rhino horn was the specialty. Douchebag thought it would make his little yellow dick bigger or some shit. But anyway they would sometimes grab some ivory too, especially when the price spiked, gotta support your small dick supplement habit somehow I suppose. So I had finally caught up with them, they had spooked some elephants after dusk and were about to shoot them with poisoned arrows.”

“Arrows? What the fuck, I was expecting a bigass elephant gun.”

“Yeah, that’s really only those British assholes you see in paintings. Or Donald Trump Jr. Now they gotta use the arrows cause the boomstick makes them too easy to find. Takes a little time to saw two massive things off the face of a massive creature so, you know, time is valuable thing to have.

Technically we were far enough away from anything that a gun wouldn't have been heard, but it hadn't started that way, so there they stood with their arrows. Took the first one out with a machete to the neck. Can't make much more than a gurgle when your head's flapping like a PEZ dispenser. Got the second asshole the same way, but by now the bowman had heard the first fuckers body hit the ground and was starting to spin around, the bow still pulled taut, arrow at the ready. He's a good 15 feet away, I figure he's definitely gonna get it off before I'm there. Toast, that's what I am I figure. Shit's potent enough to take down the biggest land mammal, it's just gotta graze me and I'm fucked.

Fortunately he was only a kid, couldn't have been more than 14. He probably had no problems killing an unsuspecting elephant but put him up against an angry man in the dark who had just killed his two buddies, little fucker was a bit more scared. He let out a scream as he turned and let go of the bowstring prematurely TWANG! THUMP! Bam, arrow in an acacia tree ten feet off to my right. Cleared the distance before he could even react and split his head in two. Caught my eyes before the life went out and he slumped to the ground.

Fucking don't like killing kids man, even if they're guilty. Hated it even worse back then. So I'm just kind of slumped down there against the tree in a clearing about a quarter mile from where it happened. Sounds of the African night all around me but nothing that would have been worrying. Then I catch a series of eye pairs, glinting in the moonlight and staring directly at me from across the clearing, where the brush and undergrowth gets much thicker.

So I'm thinking, shit lions or hyenas, either way I'm fucked. Too many of them to win so I'm steeling myself for my death charge when I hear trumpeting coming from behind, off in the direction of the kill site. I turn around briefly, trying to see what is going on, then remembering the foolishness of the act, I spin quickly back around.

In those few moments the eyes had closed the distance dramatically. The moonbeams streaming through the trees now illuminating that it was a pride of lions. Not sure if I would have preferred the hyenas but didn't have much time to think about it.

So I'm about to charge at these fuckers, make my last stand, when thundering footsteps and trumpeting roars blast from almost immediately behind me. The lions stop, look confused, then scared. Then. . . BAM! Fuckin elephants burst through on either side, goddamn things just uprooted the trees around me, they were coming with such force but they somehow didn't crush me.

At this point the lions are running like pussies. Couple of big elephants

on their heels, swinging their massive heads left and right, attempting to swipe the cats with tusk, trunk, anything. Rest of them come around me asses in, trunks out and just stand, silent. I try to move, get out of the area so I don't get crushed, but anywhere I go, I find myself blocked by a gently extending hind foot.

Fucking weird as shit right? I'm just exhausted at this point so I just go into the middle, sit down and wait. For what? Didn't know, just seemed like the best option to my feeble mind.

So there I am, just sitting in the middle of a circle of elephant ass. Thankfully none of them had to take a shit. Then back come the two chasers. Now that I've settled down, I can see that one of them seems to be much bigger and older. Probably the matriarch. Confirms it when the elephant asses part for her. So she strides right up to me, touches my mouth with her trunk. Then, I shit you not, gives me a hug—its sounds fucked but that's the best way I can describe it—just gently wraps the trunk around me, pulls me in close to her leg, and gently squeezes. Nights already been fucked so I go with it. She lets me go, they then spend the entire night guarding me. AND THEN, to top it all off, they escort me back out to my jeep which as far as I know they've never seen.

Talked to some researchers about it since then. They've heard other stories like that, but they said mine was the most direct contact they'd heard of. Don't think a lot of them actually believed me.

But yeah man, those elephants saved me that night, and the only logical explanation for it all seems to be that they knew what I did, I protected them, they returned the favor. Seems to be what our friends here are doing too."

"Yeah, but how the fuck they know?"

"Guy once claims to have seen the last elephant, from a family completely wiped out by poaching, claims to have found her on the beach, speaking to a whale."

"Bullshit."

"Maybe, or maybe we just don't understand everything."

The Rogue Wave is coming. Be prepared.

"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise—with the occasion."

"For our demands most moderate are: we only want the earth."

This late-capitalism death spiral will not cure itself. There is no world in which corporations and their pet politicians and corrupt media propagandists will “recognize the vital role of the state.” They will not regulate themselves. They will not create “a new social contract.” They are rich and powerful. The rich do not wake up one day and say to themselves, ‘Time to stop being a selfish ass, I’m going to redistribute my income.’ The powerful do not care that the weak are miserable. Money gets taken away from the rich one way: by force. The powerful are divested of their privileges the same way: when they have no choice.

Liberals and leftists identify many of the same problems. Only leftists understand that real solutions require serious pressure on the ruling elites. The credible threat of force—for example, a peaceful protest demonstration that could turn violent—may be enough to force reforms. But reforms always get rolled back after ‘the left’ stops watching. Ultimately the rulers will have to be removed via revolution, a process that requires violence.

Liberals do not demand change; they ask nicely. Because they oppose violence and credible threats of violence, they tacitly oppose fundamental change in the existing structure of politics and society. Unlike leftists they are unwilling to risk their petty privileges in order to obtain the reforms they claim to crave. So, when push comes to shove, liberals will ultimately sell out their radical allies to the powers that be. And they will run away at the first sign of state oppression.

If you can’t trust your ally, they are no ally at all.

A man who has betrayed someone once will easily do it again if it profits him.

We are living through an upheaval of historic proportions. The visible evidence of collapse makes criticism redundant. What is being born before our eyes still lacks a clear shape; it could just as easily beget monsters and therefore defies any attempt to describe it. In such times, all commentary is reduced to the level of chit-chat. We can speak only from the midst of events; from the breach we can hear the cracking foundations of a global order at its end that are opening up new paths for the future.

Some will see behind this ambition either senile nostalgia or the mindless elation of youth. But let them take comfort, as much as they can. We are sure of being the most realistic by far.

Right across this planet, there are three basic kinds of government under which people live. In the first, a particular group (often called a party) holds all the power, elections are rigged, the media are muzzled, and opponents are behind bars or vanish without trace. It is a situation that applies in many former or present ‘communist’ countries and in others that have emerged from colonial rule and continue their past rulers’ brutality in various guises.

In the second category, the regime is unstable and threatened with stones or guns—as in today’s Syria or the Democratic Republic of Congo. The third type comprises what are usually called democracies—elections take place at fixed dates, parliaments adopt laws, and governments manage public affairs.

The richest countries periodically send their leaders to discuss the future of the world at secure places cordoned off by large numbers of police. The rest receive heaps of praise when they show that they have assimilated ‘democratic’ values while accepting the plunder of their resources and the reduction of their people to beggars.

The boundaries between these categories are not always sharply drawn: some major countries—Algeria, Iran, Russia—have features of both the first and the third, while others can pass suddenly from one to another, as Mubarak’s Egypt did recently from the first to the second. And the countries of the Bolivarian Revolution—Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia—form something like a group of their own, in which some are willing to place their hopes.

Over time a zone of obligatory deference has formed around the word ‘democracy.’ Born at the heart of the West, it is a system of government that helps the rest of the world to join in by various means. All leaders, from the social democrats to despots, feel compelled to affirm their attachment to democracy. It is incontestable because it is the regime of liberty, which an insidious shift then identifies with liberal values, free trade, free competition and neoliberalism. Since the end of the “people’s democracies,” now a baneful memory, democracy has been inseparable from capitalism in its various aliases, and we shall therefore speak of democratic capitalism. Democratic capitalism has imposed itself as the ultimate, definitive form of social existence, not only in the ideology of the ruling class but even in the popular imagination.

But its legitimacy rests on a tripod, each of whose legs is worm-eaten or seriously cracked. The first is the constant rise in living standards supposedly leading to the formation of a universal middle class—a process that first took shape with Fordism—wage increases in line with productivity, so that the workers can buy more and keep the wheels of industry turning—and the different variants of social democracy since the New Deal, the Popular Front and post-war British labourism. Today, that pillar exists only in the head: that is, in the forecasts of finance ministries and international agencies, which are constantly belied by the facts and keep being revised downwards despite all the massaging of figures.

The second pillar is the peace that capitalism is supposed to have brought to the planet after “the horrors of the first half of the twentieth century.” One need scarcely be an expert in geopolitics, however, to see wars all

around us: civil wars of an intensity that varies according to time and place. Muted in Europe, fierce in the Middle East; terrible African wars against a backdrop of minerals, diamonds, and famine; forgotten guerrilla wars in Burma and the Philippines; never-ending wars in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Palestine. Are all those wars tribal, ethnic, and religious? Behind each one, democratic capitalism is busy defending its economic and strategic interests, its oil, mining, and agribusiness. Democratic capitalism has lost all credibility as the great pacifier, as the global Leviathan.

The most rotten of the three pillars is “democratic legitimacy” based on universal suffrage. After all, nations are led by the men and women the people have elected, and if they are unhappy they have only to choose others the next time round. This argument was already put forward when shelling the barricades in the Latin Quarter in June 1848:

“Universal suffrage has spoken, the people should not take up arms against those it has chosen”

But despite the etymology, despite the articles of constitutions asserting the sovereignty of the people, power nowhere belongs to the demos. That has been evident for a long time, but now there is something new as well. Today, power does not belong either to the caste of politicians who, by tradition, allocate ministerial and administrative posts to themselves in accordance with an electoral timetable. That kind of politics is no longer more than an empty form.

The indignados and the Occupy movement led to a certain awareness among types of individual who until then had been politically asleep. That was not insignificant but hardly earth-shaking: democratic capitalism has seen their kind before, and anyway it regards such movements with benevolent amusement. The riots or near-riotous demonstrations in France, England, Greece, and Sweden were less well received. On the right, the image was of hooligans mainly bent on looting fashionable stores. On the left, the emphasis was on the lack of political thinking behind the events. Such rejection is a sign of unease—justified, moreover, because those responsible for keeping order know where such popular bursts of energy might lead if they were organized and coordinated.

In the desolate world of democratic capitalism, the insurrection will not fail to envelop the whole rickety structure of Europe and North America, whether it starts out in Spain or Greece, France or Italy, Canada or the United States. The transmission will take place not by contagion—revolution is not an infectious pathogen—but by the effect of a shock wave. The countries one might consider more stable—by virtue of their traditions,

their apparent good health or their distance from the epicentre—will be paralyzed as the wave advances: the reasons why it is right to rebel are so numerous, and have been evident for so long, that no government will find the legitimacy enabling it to crush the insurrection by brute force. One success will bring others in its wake; the boldness of some will increase tenfold the preparedness of their neighbours to act.

What we must try to understand is not some nonexistent depoliticization but the prevailing skepticism about the idea of revolution. The very word, happily trotted out to sing the praises of a new vacuum cleaner, arouses pitying smiles when it is used to speak of the overthrow of the established order. One of the reasons for this has to do with the demise of “barracks communism.” To be sure, the leaders of the Soviet Union had long appeared as a gang of brutal bureaucrats, and life in that country as an unenviable fate, so that nothing much changed in that respect when the end came in 1989.

“Three years, from 1989 to 1991, were needed to confirm bureaucratically a death that had already occurred some time before. The socialist systems outlived the end of socialism.”

Nevertheless, however aberrant the form of social organization in the USSR and the “people’s democracies,” it liked to think of itself as different and claimed to be standing up to American imperialism. Deeply implanted in many a head was the idea that communism might have succeeded in different hands and in different circumstances. But that disappeared at the same time as the Soviet regime itself. The void that this created was like a period of mourning: you can feel relieved at the departure of a loathsome being yet also feel his absence as a lack. And all of a sudden the idea of revolution, linked to a whole set of images from the Smolny Institute and the Aurora cruiser, through Mayakovsky’s voice and the communal housing designed by constructivist architects, to Eisenstein’s October and Trotsky’s armoured train, found itself buried along with “actually existing socialism.”

The most difficult step, and the most contrary to ‘common sense,’ is to shake off the idea that a transition period is indispensable between before and after, between the old regime and active emancipation. Since the country must continue to function, we’ll keep the old administrative and police structures, we’ll keep the social machinery running on the pivots of work and the economy, we’ll trust in the democratic rules and the electoral system—the result being that the revolution is buried, with or without military honours.

Our aim here is not to draft a programme but to trace some paths, to suggest some examples, to propose some ideas for creating the irreversible

straight away. Of these paths, many will be outlined in the landscape we know best. But the approach has nothing in common with what used to be known as “socialism in one country.” The decay of democratic capitalism is such that, wherever the first shock occurs, its collapse will be international. We must always bear in mind, however, the fear of chaos—quite a common feeling which, though ceaselessly boosted and exploited by the ideologues of domination, cannot for all that be treated with contempt. No one looks favourably on the prospect of being plunged into the dark with nothing to eat.

If the huge rising force that points to a decisive break is to find and grasp the necessary lever, the first condition is to dispel the fear that exists in each and every one of us, to restore a relationship to the world rid of the anxieties of penury, deprivation, and aggression that silently weave the tissue of normal existence. But, above all, it is necessary to distinguish the two fears that domination carefully amalgamates: fear of chaos and fear of the unknown. It is the moment of revolution—what it opens up, the joy that invariably accompanies it—which transforms the latter fear into an appetite for the unknown, into a thirst for the novel. Besides, one always underestimates the people’s capacity to cope in exceptional situations.

In itself, a collapse of the apparatus of domination is never enough for the building of a new order. On the day following the victorious insurrection, it will be necessary to put in place barriers that prevent a return of the past, and to ensure that the ebb will not take the form of a return to normality. The state apparatus is in pieces, its debris whirling in empty space. Those who meet weekly to settle current business, and who are described against all the evidence as ‘the government,’ are dazed and dotted around the natural landscape; some have taken flight. But with the first moments over, they will try to find one another again, to put their heads together, to prepare their revenge. If they are to remain harmless, they must be kept scattered.

Such people operate through meetings, in offices, with files. We will take those away from them: we will close down, wall up and guard all the places where the wheels of the state were still turning yesterday—from the White House and Capitol to the most out-of-the-way town halls. Or we will turn them into public places, as in the luxury hotels in Barcelona in 1936. We will cut their lines of communication, their intranets, their distribution lists, their secure telephone lines. If the fallen cabinet heads and detested police chiefs want to meet in the back rooms of bars, that’s up to them. Without their offices, those officials will be incapable of action.

A revolutionary situation is not only about the reorganization of society. It is also, and above all, the emergence of a new conception of life, a new tendency to joy. Work will not disappear just because its structures have

collapsed; it will disappear out of a desire to experience collective activity differently. What can and must be done on the day after the insurrection is to separate work and the means of existence, to abolish the individual necessity to “earn one’s living.” This has nothing to do with any “social minimum thresholds,” where the adjective ‘social’ applies, as in other cases, to every system of measurement intended to make people swallow the unacceptable. The point, rather, is that everyone should have their existence assured, not through paid employment that they are always in danger of losing or some other form of reduction to an individual lot, but through the very organization of collective life.

Of course, social relations being as they are for the moment, it is difficult to imagine the abolition of wage labour, or even an existence in which money is relegated to the margins. Is not money, in every area of life, the essential intermediary between our needs and their satisfaction? To get some idea of what a non-economic existence might be like, it is enough to look back at the insurrectionary moments of history, to remember what the Spanish insurgents of 1936 were saying, or the occupiers of Tahrir Square, or of the Odéon in Paris in May 1968. Those moments when nothing is work any longer but no one counts the efforts they make or the risks they take, when market relations have been shifted to the periphery of life, are also the moments of the highest individual and collective virtue. It will be objected that a world is not constructed on the basis of exceptional moments—that is certainly true, yet those moments indicate to us what needs to be done. From the first day after the insurrection, the break with the past order must be grounded upon the human pockets of resistance constituted in action, rather than the suppression of these because they are reluctant to obey orders.

The great peculiarity of our epoch with regard to the money question has not received much emphasis. Never has money been so ubiquitous, or so necessary for the least step we take in life, yet at the same time it has never been so dematerialized, so unreal. The fright caused by mere talk of the possibility of a bank run anywhere in the world is enough for us to gauge the paradoxical vulnerability of that which forms the heart of present society. Money is no longer tangible matter, not even a scattered pile of bits of paper; it is no more than a sum of bits stored in secure computer networks. As far as bank accounts are concerned, it is possible to establish perfect equality through a few clicks on the central servers of a country’s major banks.

However, there will be no repetition of the Bolshevik or Khmer Rouge mistake of abolishing money at the moment of the seizure of power. The habit of falling back on one’s isolated individuality when it comes to ‘satisfying

one's needs'—the habit of paying for everything in a world populated with potentially hostile strangers—will not disappear overnight. You cannot just step unscathed out of the world of economics. But fear of deprivation, general mistrust, compulsive accumulation for no purpose, copycat desires—everything that makes you a 'winner' in capitalist society will no longer be more than a grotesque defect in the new state of things.

One has only to read Xenophon's *Economics* to understand what the subject is about. That dialogue concerns the best way for a master to run his domain. What should he do to ensure that his slaves work as well as possible and produce the most wealth under the iron rule of his wife-steward? Or that his wife manages the slaves with the greatest diligence and efficiency? Or that the master has to spend the least time in his oikos, and that his domain procures him the greatest material power and wealth? How should he organize the economic subjugation of the household in order to control as well as possible the servitude of his people?

Note in passing that the term 'control' derives etymologically from medieval bookkeeping techniques, which checked every calculation on a *contre-rouleau*, a counter-scroll. When political economy was born, in the seventeenth century, it showed straight away a concern to ensure that the "free activity" of the subjects should ensure the maximum of material power for the sovereign. As the science of the wealth of sovereigns and then of nations, economics is thus essentially the science of slave control, the science of subjugation. This is why its main tool is measurement, with market value as only a means to that end. It is necessary to measure in order to control, because the master must be able to devote himself entirely to politics. From its origins, economics organized servitude in such a way that the production of slaves was measurable. If Fordism became universal for a time, it was because it enabled the capitalist not only to produce more but to measure the workers' activity in minute detail. The extension of economics is in this sense identical with the extension of the measurable, which is itself identical with the extension of capitalism. Those who expose the near-universal spread of evaluative techniques into the least suspected corners of human conduct testify to the penetration of capitalism into our lives, our bodies, our souls.

Economics does indeed deal with needs: that is, the needs of the dominators, their need for control. There is not a real economy that is a victim of finance capital; there is only one mode of political organization of servitude. Its hold over the world comes from its capacity to measure everything, thanks to the global diffusion of all kinds of digital devices—computers, sensors, iPhones, et cetera—which are directly systems of control. The abolition of capitalism is above all the abolition of economics, the end of

measurement, or at least the imperialism of measurement. At the moment, it is necessary to measure for the one who is not there, for the master, for the central brain or office, in order that the one who is not there has a hold on the one who is there. Those who live there, who work there, are well aware of what they need to measure for their own local organization: the man who heats his home with wood has an interest in measuring the number of cubic meters he has in his garage; those who produce such and such a machine have an interest in measuring the stocks of metal they have before they launch into production. As for the forms of production whose only virtue is to be controllable from afar, by the boss or head office, they will be destroyed and give way to a different rationality from that of the master.

To refuse to make work the linchpin of existence is to fly in the face of common sense. The response is not long in coming: if everyone can choose to live without working, no one will work any more—a disaster. But for what? For whom? In the movement that brings yogurt into a refrigerator, there must first of all be cows and a dairy, but there must also be hundreds of people to design the container and packaging, to find the colouring, to check the taste, to launch the TV advertising; there must be technicians, people to print the packaging, to stick posters to billboards and buses, and people who transport the containers of yogurt, put them in the right place on supermarket shelves, stop anyone from trying to steal them; there must be cashiers and manufacturers of cash registers. Let us turn the facts around: the world of yogurt does not make thousands of people live; it forces them into meaningless lives. Hundreds of thousands of hours will be set free.

The common-sense argument—‘those who do not work do not eat’—is wrong for at least three reasons:

1. A lot of people who work today get up in the morning without difficulty, either because their work interests them or because friendship and team spirit give them enough satisfaction. But most of them are wage earners, conscious of selling their labour power to create wealth that goes into pockets other than their own. Then there are the various miseries of the wage-earning condition: the weight of the hierarchy, the obsession with productivity, the various forms of harassment, the fear of losing one’s job. If, despite everything, some wage earners now already get pleasure from their work, what will they not feel once it is no longer imposed on them by the need to ‘earn a living,’ once they are able to choose it freely? And when building workers will work to house their brothers and sisters, and no longer to enrich the shareholders of the multinationals, the atmosphere on building sites will doubtless be quite different.

2. With the end of democratic capitalism, the total quantity of work will decline. Necessary work will continue to diminish, as it has done continually since the end of Fordism and since the electronic revolution; a phenomenon linked, of course, with the shift of production to the Asian industrial infernos, although there too cracks are clearly audible. Most important, we shall see the disappearance of a huge mass of work that has no purpose other than to display publicly the servitude imperative. Democratic capitalism has created millions of jobs in the world that serve to establish operational and certificatory norms and to assess their application. In the so-called public sector as well as the private, experts daily invent new procedures and set new targets and indicators, putting to work crowds of auditors, bookkeepers, inspectors, mathematicians, and reporting specialists.

The dismantling of this global office, which is indispensable for the abstract and largely fictitious operation of democratic capitalism, will induce a sharp fall in the number of workstations. But what was considered a disaster in the age of compulsory work—the job losses regularly deplored by politicians on an ad hoc basis—will bring great flexibility in the choice between work and non-work: there will be more than enough workers, released by the meltdown of the bureaucratic society of guided consumption, to ensure the production of really necessary goods.

3. It is true that there will always be unpleasant work that involves getting dirty or is simply boring. In the West, this is at present assigned to human groups for whom the white Christian masses have the least consideration—the most recent arrivals or those with the darkest skins or at the very least, the poorest. To share it around more generally is to fight against both segregation and another malady: the division of labour. Theorized by Plato, analyzed by Marx, this runs deeper today than ever. It is said that Louis XIV courteously greeted the women who came to clean the parquet floors of Versailles and make them glisten. Nowadays a top executive never meets his cleaning personnel, who are indeed not part of his company. In his L-shaped daily itinerary—the horizontal stretch being from his villa in a wealthy suburb to the parking lot in his high-rise block, the vertical trunk being the elevator from the ground floor to his office—the only manual worker he comes close to is his chauffeur. Immaterial (not to say ‘intellectual’) labour and manual labour inhabit two different planets.

To divide up necessary but unrewarding tasks among everyone cannot be done successfully in authoritarian fashion; the attempts in this direction during the Chinese Cultural Revolution were more like re-education camps for intellectuals, which have not left behind good memories. To gain acceptance for a fair distribution of tasks is a matter of scale. If I have chosen to continue my profession as a dermatologist or book dealer, and if there is a need in my street or the next for a postal worker, a sweeper, or a butcher's assistant, I will learn one or another of these new jobs and willingly spend two or three afternoons a week on them—willingly, because in my neighbourhood or district everyone will freely accept them as necessary and meaningful. Neighbours will become workmates and, in some cases, friends. A street-sweeping team can be a happy, tightly knit team if it consists of volunteers who will perhaps be doing something different the next month. An attachment to colleagues, which can be seen every day in the mournful enterprises of capitalism, has the power to overshadow the unpleasant nature of a job.

The end of the centrality of work, the delinking of job and livelihood, will change everything. The poor and the less poor will leave their dilapidated shanties and mobile homes, bring abandoned towns back to life, reopen cafés and baker's shops; their presence will relieve the boredom of old people who have stayed put while waiting to die.

One example is Marinaleda, an Andalusian village with a population of three-thousand. After years of struggle, local peasants and a mayor who has been repeatedly elected for the past thirty years have succeeded in taking over a large farm that used to belong to an aristocratic family. Collectively they now produce there such items as artichokes, sweet peppers, and olives. Some work in a cooperative of their own creation, with a canning plant, greenhouses, and an olive mill. All the workers receive the same sum: 47 euros a day, or 1,128 euros a month, nearly double the Spanish minimum wage. Rents are 15 euros a month for 90-square-meter houses with a terrace. And for those who wish to build a home of their own, the municipality offers land, essential materials, and the advice of an architect, the only condition being that the future occupant should take part in the construction work. Canteens, school materials, daycare, and sporting equipment are available free of charge or for a token fee. The unemployment rate in Marinaleda is zero, whereas the average in the region is around 30 percent. There is no police—and no crime. Decisions are taken at assemblies that the whole population are invited to attend. The village does not function in egoistic autarky: the mayor and the other inhabitants have more than once

joined the struggle of Andalusian farmworkers, distributing food ‘levied’ from supermarkets, occupying banks, and installing themselves on farmland belonging to the ministry of defense.

“Don’t come and tell me that our experience can’t be transferred elsewhere. Any town can do the same things if it wants to.”

Of course in some towns you’re more likely to be met with Bearcats than in others. . .

With regard to public health, for instance, the siting of pharmacies, emergency services and specialist hospital facilities, or non-authoritarian ways of feeding practitioners into ‘medical deserts’ and addressing any shortage of nurses, anesthetists, and midwives, are clearly local issues. They were impossible to solve under democratic capitalism, because it was said that the necessary funds were not available. But everything will change as soon as health has ceased to be a major focus of profit-making and the running of things is entrusted to those who have chosen to work there. This is not a naïve fantasy. After the Cuban revolution, medicine in that country became the best in Latin America and infant mortality fell to the level of the industrial countries—all without any noteworthy injection of cash.

The issues that concern the country as a whole bristle with difficulties that have never and nowhere been properly resolved. They revolve around what classical philosophers used to call representation of the people and expression of the general will. The idea handed down from the past, which naturally comes to mind on the day after a victorious insurrection, is to elect an assembly while endeavouring to avoid the pitfalls of classical parliamentarism: that is, to insist on a binding mandate with a time limit, on the possibility of recalling representatives, and so on. But whatever the precautions, such an assembly will more or less correspond to the country as it was on the eve of the meltdown of democratic capitalism. The most illustrious assembly in French history, the Convention Nationale, had a majority of Physiocrats (we would say liberals) raised in the school of Turgot and Quesnay. When Thermidor arrived and the iron grip of the most determined revolutionaries had been broken, the centrist-liberal swamp they had previously managed to carry along with them took power in the assembly and, in keeping with its true nature, went over to the side of reaction and economic liberalism.

On the other hand, it is hard to see how an elected assembly could deal in an informed manner with such diverse fields as photovoltaics, river transport, and the elimination of pesticides. It might be said that this is

the case today, but that is precisely the point. For decades now—some might argue always—national assemblies have not solved anything because politicians do not know the subjects at issue, because they are often in thrall to contradictory interests and pressures, because the system promotes bland mediocrities and charismatic con-men, and because the very workings of a congress do not allow serious debate. The allocation of work to specialist commissions is only a pretense, since each one is a mini-parliament, whose members seek only to assert their own image and that of their party.

And how could an assembly do without an executive? To return to the Convention during the French Revolution, it is true that ministers were reduced to the role of docile implementers of decisions, but the Committee of Public Safety—a creature of the legislature, elected by the assembly and in principle renewed each month—was a *de facto* executive. Once an executive system has been created, its natural tendency will be towards efficiency—how could it be blamed for that?—and therefore to greater centralization. In this way the circle will be closed. Starting from the way it exists today, bureaucratic centralism will have been first destroyed and then reconstituted with different names, different administrative grades, and different uniforms. Until now, all revolutions have followed this pattern—except for those like the Paris Commune which did not have enough time. If we are to avoid parliamentarism, history serves only to assist reflection on past failures. The solutions have to be invented.

A system so contrary to our inherited habits cannot function without hitches. A degree of disorder will have to be accepted for a time, as the consequence of a choice not to have the revolution led by the center or by an uncontrollable, irremovable political party doomed to bureaucratic senescence. In fact, many political systems have been born amid disorder. Even American democracy, commonly presented as a model of peaceful evolution, came about in a context of violence, in which the struggle for independence went together with an undercover war of the poor against the rich.

“In the first half of the nineteenth century, what fascinated outsiders was the sheer implausibility of democracy in America. Could you really do politics like this, with such fractured and chaotic popular input? It seemed unlikely anything so ramshackle could last long.”

Aristotle is right that most of us need leisure and education to be good people. Mao and Fanon are right that our universities don't provide that kind of education to most of the people who attend them. Despite this,

somehow we do end up with some good people, in spite of ourselves. Some of the people who come out of our universities do genuinely think about this stuff and are real aristocrats. Some of the people who work for a living are savants at goodness and don't need fancy education to figure it out. But if we put the university-educated people in charge, the good ones won't win out, and we'll get vulgar government. And if we put the workers in charge, the good ones won't win out, and we'll get terror. Somehow we have to get the good university people and the good working people into the same political movement. But it's hard to do this, because we don't trust each other. We fear they might kill us. They fear we might enslave them.

A lot of this history has already been written. We have enslaved them. They have killed us.

Guillotine. Kolyma. Pol Pot. Such is the almost obligatory response to anyone who speaks today of overthrowing the established order. Many thinkers have worked to make the contours of revolution coincide with those of the great bloodbaths, to develop concepts like totalitarianism that make it possible to tar everything with the same brush and avoid serious reflection. The argument does not, however, lack any foundation. In the victorious revolutions of the past, the fate of their opponents has never been enviable, and this is the main and original factor that led those revolutions in the direction we know. Of course, in the French, Russian, or Chinese revolutions, the circumstances of the day—civil war, external war—hardly left much latitude to devise solutions other than sheer repression. But there is nothing to suggest that the coming revolution will be immunized by its nature against this danger.

Once the state apparatus has broken up, calls for vengeance will be heard from the very first days. Will the arrogance of riches, the hatred and contempt for the people, go unpunished? Will those who organized repression for their own benefit be allowed to eke out their days in peace? However legitimate these questions, however great the pleasure in seeing evil-doers punished, we must say 'no' to the sad passion of revenge. Let us be clear: this has nothing to do with forgiveness, non-violence, or any other of those 'values' that were so useful in maintaining the old order. If revenge is to be set aside, it is not for moral reasons.

Against whom should it be exercised? Even if we dismiss personal vendettas that might pollute the legitimate stream of public retribution, the answer is not so simple. Should it be directed at the politicians, cabinet heads, ministers responsible for years of criminal repression against migrants and the incarceration of their children? Or the CEOs who signed off on "social plans" to improve their company's profitability and increase their bonuses? Or the HR directors who implemented them, or the riot police

who gassed those protesting against them? One could easily answer ‘yes’ to all, but then we’d be talking of hundreds of thousands to be punished. Better in the end to just get on with things: you don’t punish a system, you bring it down and leave the fallen debris to its fate. And to be clear, this has nothing in common with such actions as Nobel-Peace-Prize-winner Barack Obama refusing to hold accountable torturers and war criminals—he saved the apparatus, he destroyed nothing but more lives.

There is a famous precedent for such a course in Greek antiquity, whose myths and history nevertheless include many varied episodes of revenge. In 403 BC, the tyranny of the Thirty—imposed on Athens after Sparta’s victory in the Peloponnesian war—was ended by the army of Athenian democrats. The overthrow of that cruel and detested regime might have been expected to unleash a wave of collective vengeance, but what happened was the opposite. The assembled Athenians took a collective oath not to recall the evils of the past.

“Once the tyrants, the same men who had provoked what the spokesman of the victorious democratic army described as ‘the most awful war, the most sacrilegious, the most odious to gods and men,’ are expelled, once they are charged with all the crimes of which Athens must be exonerated, after all this, well, let’s forget it! Officially and institutionally. Forget that there were two parties; and the winners themselves solicit the forgetting, those same men who had knowingly chosen their side.”

One might fear that such an amnesty would make more people than ever thirst for revenge. But no, there will be enough joyful sights to ward off frustration and to dispel resentment: for example, yesterday’s powerful men carrying their shopping, and bringing them back to modest homes or apartments; the children of poor neighbourhoods playing in the gardens of former mansions and ministries; police stations converted into recording studios, and yachts into sailing schools for schoolchildren.

What the victorious revolution should establish is the exact opposite of collective punishment: real liberty.

In the industrialized world, virtually all printed newspapers, nine-tenths of publishing and most audiovisual output are owned by financiers. And at the head of their employees in information and entertainment, they have placed reliable men (sometimes women) trained in the economics and business schools, who have no need of directives to follow the general line reflecting the political consensus and competitive commercial considerations. Such people are judged by figures—audience share, print runs, advertising

revenue—and any thanks they receive is for their performance on these points, not for a sudden flash of independence. Appointed by the owners of capital, these authorized representatives install beneath them others whose docility can be guaranteed; the process is then repeated all the way down the company hierarchy, or at least as far as the technical personnel, who on the whole have their own views on matters.

Thus, far more than a cynical wish to misinform and dumb-down, it is institutional conformism and voluntary servitude that make media products so massively uninteresting. The public is aware of this—which does much more than vague anthropological or cultural considerations to account for the “crisis” of the press, book publishing, and so on. To liberate information and permit the free expression of opinions is therefore not the same as doing away with a surveillance that has no need to exist. To depose the media bosses and dismiss the hierarchy are an indispensable first step, but the logical continuation—to hand the press and audiovisual media over to those who work in them—is not a matter of course.

Most of the journalists in question have been formed (formatted) in the grey world of political science faculties. Coming from the same intellectual and political background, they believe what they write. With some exceptions, the media teams already in place will not bring even a breath of fresh air to the world of information. At the same time, we should not forget that for a long period in history those who wrote in the press were not always professional newspapermen. And the same is true of the authors of today’s rare articles of interest. We shall go further in this direction; we shall open up the press and audiovisual media to everyone—to those whose voices are never heard, but also to those who disagree—whether they regret the passing of the old order or are impatient to see the new course speed up. There will be acceptance of do-it-yourself broadcasts, imperfections, gaps, and heterogeneity. There will be no longing for classroom voices, slick hypocrisy, uniformly dull editorials, or the idiotic games that make up today’s bleak media landscape.

This cultural revolution will not automatically bring geniuses to light. But history tells us that times of collective joy, when subjectivities are dazzled by a sense of participation in a common adventure, are also the ones of greatest creativity.

But it is not only a matter of the expression of ideas: a counter-revolution will unfailingly seek to organize itself. It is impossible to predict the conspiracies and stratagems that it will come up with to restore capitalism, or the counter-blows that will be necessary to oppose it. We can only say that we will not reopen the gates of the prisons we have just pulled down, that we will neither banish nor execute our enemies. Let us trust in the collective

imagination; that is what is most cruelly lacking amid the fog of democratic capitalism.

“You have seen an immense people, master of its destiny, return to order amid all the fallen powers—powers that have oppressed it for so many centuries.”

The other possibility—which does not preclude various fascistic thrusts—is a continuing breakdown of social, cultural, and governmental infrastructures that never reaches completion: a kind of end without an ending, which no revolutionary or counter-revolutionary surge ever quite wraps up; an infinite degradation of everything; a dissolution of the present order without an explosion. Such a process is imaginable because of the new and diffuse cybernetic control of whole populations, and because, beyond the vanishing of any society worthy of the name, Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, and the like maintain a semblance of social relations, a ‘social network.’ The former boss of Google, Eric Schmidt, explains in a book he wrote with an American anti-terror agent that Somalia is a fascinating textbook case since it is the oldest of the “failed states”—a country where any form of state disappeared way back in 1991. Nothing works in Somalia except for telecommunications, which are less expensive there than anywhere else; failing an adequate food ration, a quarter of Somalis possess a mobile phone. Similarly, at the ‘end’ of the war in Iraq, the supply of water, food, and medicine could not be relied upon anywhere, but everyone carried a mobile phone. The dream scenario for Google and its ilk is for smartphones and myriad apps to provide all the services that the state is no longer in a position to supply: access to education, information, banks, weather forecasts, and so on. Here the collapse becomes a stable condition—and a profitable one.

For the West, a Somali scenario is not to be feared in the immediate future. It is a variant that needs to be borne in mind: on the one hand, ever richer, ever more ‘communicative,’ ever more global, connected, and productive city centres; on the other hand, more and more nightmarish zones of banishment, where everything is in short supply, where all trace of the state has disappeared, where people survive only through ‘crime’ before dying an early and brutal death, where regular anti-terror and anti-drug and anti-migrant operations permit constant disorganization and ultimately make it possible to render chaos inoffensive. The ‘networked metropolis’ might then look at itself through the eyes of its opposite and pass off its deep-rooted barbarism as a peak of civilization. In those banishment areas, as in Somalia, telecommunications could easily be kept in service, especially as they would allow constant monitoring of all exchanges and relationships

formed there—a continual flow of information to those who run the business from their comfortable position outside. With the Wuhan Flu panic we only seem to be increasing our speed towards this dystopic future.

You would thus have the maintenance of capitalism through profitable interconnected pockets, together with optimal management of its contradictions and the threat represented by brutal impoverishment of the greatest number. The rulers would not forget to denounce the inexplicable ‘descent of the population into savagery,’ and they might even point to racial causes for the catastrophic situation they have deliberately produced. This is why we cannot merely watch and record the collapse of the present social edifice; we must make it happen as soon as possible, before a permanent state of decomposition has been established.

“Only the Revolution, by clearing the ground, will light up the horizon and open the roads, or rather the many paths, that lead towards the new order.”

So as not to find ourselves stuck in one or another version of the life-and-death struggle waged by democratic capitalism, the first idea is to organize. If the current ferment remains fragmented, if the centres of revolt are linked by nothing other than mutual sympathy, the state apparatus will continue to stand, even if only a layer of rust holds it together. But the word ‘organization’ sometimes takes on a magical character, by covering practices that are largely a matter for the imagination.

We must start from what we have before our eyes, not from some fantasy projection. Everyone can see groups of people—wage earners and unemployed, soup kitchen users, prisoners, single mothers—who can no longer endure the life they are forced to lead. Everyone can hear the anger in the factories, popular suburbs, and ports, among megastore cashiers and utility employees, in the banks and newspapers, even among airline pilots. To organize means to help these groups evolve gradually into subversive constellations through the force of friendships, shared hopes and common struggles. It means to open up paths that help them to get together across towns and villages, between one neighbourhood and another, from city center to the country. That is the opposite of the abstract “convergence of struggles” that professional activists always invoke but never achieve. The only convergence of struggles we can imagine is local or regional: a struggle in a tire factory for example could carry along the whole surrounding area, where everyone’s lives would be affected by its victory or defeat. Instead of living as if enrolled in a given sector of the economy, instead of seeking to converge with struggles in the same sector in the four corners of the country

or continent, a factory could also think of itself as immersed in a whole set of local links, which the conflict has every chance of politicizing because it affects them directly.

So, there we are. Since time is pressing, let us press forward, measure our strength, and meet up with one another.

Resisting Illegitimate Authority

The Oldest Questions

I wish I were a little rock
A-sitting on a hill
A-doing nothing, all day long
But just a-sitting still

But as we know, stones on hillsides do not always remain stationary.

“Nobody is more dangerous than he who imagines himself pure in heart, for his purity, by definition, is unassailable.”

“What did you learn at school today? Did you learn how to believe or did you learn how to think?”

“If we don’t speak up, we are cowards and accomplices.”

Sometimes, nothing is more difficult than disobedience. The infamous Milgram experiment showed that, however much we might like to think ourselves incapable of doing something atrocious just to avoid making waves, most people are very reluctant to challenge authority. It’s no mystery why ordinary Germans could help carry out a Holocaust.

“Even when the destructive consequences of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources necessary to resist authority.”

March 1968’s My Lai massacre has become the most infamous event in the history of the Vietnam War. Over a period of hours, American soldiers systematically raped and murdered hundreds of unarmed villagers. After an initial cover-up, 26 soldiers were charged with offenses related to the massacre. Only one, Lt. William Calley, was convicted. Calley served three

years under house arrest, but even that was considered so harsh that it created a public outcry. There were pro-Calley sympathy marches across the country, and the White House was flooded with calls for his release. A song called “The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley,” honoring the man who had ordered the execution of dozens of Vietnamese children, sold a million copies. Most Americans saw Calley not as a mass murderer but as a brave soldier doing his duty. Calley became a household name after the massacre, during the debate over his trial and sentence.

Less-well known was another man present in My Lai on the day of the massacre: Hugh Thompson, a helicopter pilot who intervened to prevent Calley’s men from killing more civilians. Thompson had been flying over the village when he noticed the large number of civilian casualties, and realized something was wrong. Thompson landed near an irrigation ditch, into which soldiers had herded women and children to be shot. Realizing the kind of atrocity that was unfolding, Thompson angrily confronted Calley:

THOMPSON: What’s going on here, Lieutenant?

CALLEY: This is my business.

THOMPSON: What is this? Who are these people?

CALLEY: Just following orders.

THOMPSON: Orders? Whose orders?

CALLEY: Just following...

THOMPSON: But, these are human beings, unarmed civilians, sir.

CALLEY: Look Thompson, this is my show. I’m in charge here. It ain’t your concern.

THOMPSON: Yeah, great job.

CALLEY: You better get back in that chopper and mind your own business.

THOMPSON: You ain’t heard the last of this!

Getting back in his helicopter, Thompson saw a group of Vietnamese civilians fleeing from approaching US soldiers. Landing the helicopter between the soldiers and the villagers, Thompson threatened to open fire on the soldiers if they attempted to harm the civilians. After a tense confrontation, the soldiers backed down, and the massacre finally ended. Thompson evacuated the surviving Vietnamese to nearby hospitals.

A few observations should be made about Thompson's behavior. He did not accept 'just following orders' as a justification, even though the job of a soldier is to carry out orders. Thompson was not acting on any 'authority,' and could not actually command the killers to stand down. Stopping the massacre required him to take the side of the 'enemy,' by pointing a weapon at his fellow members of the US armed forces on behalf of the innocent My Lai victims. He had to be prepared to kill other Americans in order to save Vietnamese lives.

It is difficult, from 50 years remove, to appreciate how much courage and integrity something like this takes. Americans in Vietnam were trained not to view the Vietnamese as people. They never even referred to them as 'Vietnamese,' instead using racist slang like 'gooks' and 'dinks.' There was a culture of disregard for the lives of villagers, who were all viewed as potential collaborators with the Viet Cong. Resisting this indoctrination, and retaining one's full humanity, was extremely challenging. But Thompson did not just refuse to take part in the dehumanization process. He was even willing to threaten other troops with force, and thereby risk being branded a traitor and enemy sympathizer.

Indeed, that is exactly what happened after the massacre was exposed. The public rallied around Calley, the murderer, rather than Thompson, the decent man. Thompson was bombarded with death threats and accused of disloyalty for threatening other Americans and for testifying against them. He was treated as having done the wrong thing rather than the right one, because he disobeyed and acted on his own initiative.

This is an important part of the story, and tells us a lot about what courage is. Obviously, many soldiers are courageous, in that they risk their lives out of perceived obligation to their countries or units. But it takes a special kind of courage to risk your life to defy your country or unit. That's because of what Milgram showed: if all of the social incentives are toward compliance, the most difficult thing is to be the one who refuses to comply. Incidentally, this explains why many draft resisters have said that it was a harder decision to dodge the draft than to comply with it: by avoiding serving in a war they found unjust, they risked incurring the disapproval of their families and communities, and being branded cowards the rest of their lives. It is hard to do something dangerous, but it is even harder when people whose respect you value will see you as a bad person. The most courageous acts are not necessarily the ones that result in acclaim, but can be the ones that bring derision and hatred.

Of course, the story of the Vietnam War should not be about Hugh Thompson. The main focus should be on the 1.3–4 million Vietnamese people who died as a result of that war. Americans often tell the story of the

war as the story of our involvement in the war: the soldiers, from the good Thompsons to the bad Calleys, and the anti-war movement, and the Nixon administration. But the devastation inflicted on the Vietnamese dwarfed that which Americans faced, something that we still fail to fully appreciate. America often measures the consequences of war by deaths and injuries to US soldiers, casually failing to account for the immeasurably greater harm inflicted on the countries in—or on—which we wage war.

My Lai itself can be a somewhat misleading incident to single out. While it is rightly infamous, dwelling on it risks confirming it as an aberration in an otherwise humanely-prosecuted war. But the killing of Vietnamese civilians was routine and widespread. Furthermore, it was our indiscriminate bombing that produced the most innocent deaths. The US dropped more than 3.5 times as many tons of bombs on Vietnam than it dropped during the entirety of World War II. Many of these did not explode, and continued to victimize people for decades afterwards. Between 1975 and 2007, 105,000 Vietnamese people were killed or maimed by explosives that had been leftover since the war, which left 15% of the total surface area of the country contaminated by unexploded ordnance. The hundreds of deaths at My Lai were an atrocity, but more importantly, American military action in Vietnam was itself an atrocity, one that continues to take lives long after US forces departed.

Nevertheless, the story of Hugh Thompson's individual actions is worth retelling, because it offers a lesson about how a moral human being should respond when their countrymen are engaged in something abhorrent. One of the most important, and least discussed, findings from the Milgram experiment is that while most people do comply with unjust commands, they are far less likely to do so if even one other person speaks out against the injustice. People were willing to inflict painful electric shocks on others because the experimenter told them to do so, but if they observed someone else refusing, they themselves would often refuse as well.

All progress depends on the unreasonable man because being reasonable means adapting to the world's standards while being unreasonable means changing the world to fit your own standards. Horrors can only be prevented if there are people around who are brave enough to risk being called unreasonable or traitorous.

I'd like to think that in the same situation, I would have the courage to do what Hugh Thompson did. I am not sure that I would; few people do. But 50 years after My Lai, everyone should reflect on what it takes to ensure that atrocities like that, and like the entire Vietnam episode, never take place again.

The oldest political questions: Home or exile? Lord or subject? Master or slave? These are eternal themes of knowledge, authority, and power that

can never be settled for all time. There is no end of history; each generation must assert its will and imagination as new threats require us to retry the case in every age.

Authoritarian: relating to, or favoring blind submission to authority; characterized by or favoring absolute obedience to authority, as against individual freedom; of, relating to, or expecting unquestioning obedience

In contrast, anti-authoritarians reject—for themselves and for others—an unquestioning obedience to authority, and they believe in challenging and resisting illegitimate authority. Anti-authoritarians are a threat to authoritarians who demand unquestioning obedience. Thus, authoritarians attempt to marginalize anti-authoritarians. Anti-authoritarians in the United States have been scorned, shunned, financially punished, psychopathologized, criminalized, and assassinated. While US society now honors a few deceased anti-authoritarians, these same figures were often marginalized, silenced, and dishonored in their own lifetime. Today, anti-authoritarians continue to be under great pressure to comply with the status quo, making their survival difficult. All noncompliance creates tension, but not all noncompliant people are anti-authoritarians.

While all anti-authoritarians do not identify with a political philosophy, all anti-authoritarians do represent a political threat to their authoritarian surroundings, be that a government, school, or family. Anti-authoritarians create tension not simply for authoritarians with power but also for authoritarian followers who fear that the absence of a strong authority will result in chaos. In contrast, anti-authoritarians believe that what is most dangerous and harmful is an illegitimate authority.

“When you think of the long and gloomy history of man, you will find more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than have ever been committed in the name of rebellion.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, the horrors inflicted by Nazi Germany were still on the minds of many Americans, and the 1950 book *The Authoritarian Personality*, which psychopathologized authoritarian personalities, became popular. In the early 1960s, psychologist Stanley Milgram’s studies revealed a frightening obedience among Americans to illegitimate authority, and this became a cause for concern. By the 1980s, US society had changed.

In 1980, Americans elected former actor Ronald Reagan to the presidency. Reagan had previously acquired an authoritarian strongman reputation by

putting down student revolts as governor of California. By the mid-1980s, the Democrats, wanting to appear as tough as the Republicans, strongly supported “anti-crime” legislation that has contributed to the United States having the highest incarceration rate in the world, caused in large part by hypocritical drug laws.

In the mental health profession during the 1980s, it was noncompliance rather than compliance that became increasingly pathologized. The American Psychiatric Association (APA), politically in step with US society, revised its diagnostic manual, the DSM-III (1980), to include “oppositional defiant disorder” (ODD) for noncompliant kids who do not engage in criminal behaviors. The APA classifies ODD as one kind of “disruptive behavior disorder.” Disruptive behavior disorders are now the most common diagnosis of children medicated with antipsychotics, which are among the highest grossing classes of drugs in the United States today. The US antipsychotic drug explosion is largely the result of their use on non-psychotic vulnerable populations—especially foster children, the elderly in nursing homes, and inmates in prisons and jails—as a relatively inexpensive way to subdue and manage these groups.

There are certainly societies less free and more oppressive than the United States. However, what makes life difficult for US anti-authoritarians is that Americans are indoctrinated to believe that their society celebrates anti-authoritarianism. And so they are less prepared for the reality of anti-authoritarian life than others who have not been so indoctrinated.

The DSM is about as scientifically valid as Leviticus. The authors of both the DSM and Leviticus simply labeled those behaviors that made them uptight. In Leviticus, these anxiety-producing behaviors were labeled ‘abominations’ and ‘sins,’ and in the DSM they were labeled ‘mental illnesses’ and ‘mental disorders.’ In Leviticus, homosexuality is an abomination; and in DSM-II, homosexuality was a disorder. Homosexuality was not listed as a disorder in the DSM-III only because gay activists—assisted by a changed cultural climate in the 1970s—had enough political clout to abolish this insult to their sexual identity. However, noncompliant youngsters had no such political clout, and so in the DSM-III, “oppositional defiant disorder” was created for them.

Gaining acceptance into graduate school or medical school and then gaining a PhD or MD to become a psychologist or psychiatrist requires an extraordinary amount of compliance to authority. It is clear to me that the selection and socialization of mental health professionals weeds out many anti-authoritarians, and this has significant consequences in the pathologizing of noncompliant and rebellious people.

Authoritarians with power demand unquestioning obedience from those

with lower rank. And authoritarian subordinates comply with all demands of authorities. Anti-authoritarians, in contrast, reject unquestioning obedience to authority. Anti-authoritarians question whether or not an authority is legitimate before taking that authority seriously. And anti-authoritarians challenge and resist illegitimate authorities. Anti-authoritarians oppose the imposition of illegitimate authority not only on themselves but on others as well. For anti-authoritarians, evaluating the legitimacy of those in authority includes questioning the legitimacy of societal badges. Anti-authoritarians assess whether authorities actually know what they are talking about, and whether they are competent, honest, have integrity, and care about those people who are trusting them. And when anti-authoritarians determine an authority to be illegitimate, they challenge and resist that authority, whether the authority is their doctor, teacher, parent, or government.

Dissent is different than disobedience. A person may dissent with an authority but may still obey. People who are capable of dissent but incapable of disobedience are uncomfortable challenging the very legitimacy of that authority to wield power. Anti-authoritarians are comfortable with both dissent and disobedience, as they are comfortable questioning, challenging, and resisting authority they deem to be illegitimate.

Oppositional: the actions of opposing, resisting, defying, combating

Before young people become anti-authoritarians, they are often oppositional; as before they pride themselves on distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate authority, they can pride themselves on their noncompliance. Thus, it is troubling that being oppositional and defiant has been pathologized by the American Psychiatric Association as a mental disorder called “oppositional defiant disorder.” This psychopathologizing and resulting ‘treatment’ make it more difficult for young people’s prideful noncompliance to mature into this vital societal contribution: discerning an authority’s legitimacy, and resisting illegitimate authority.

I feel lucky. Lucky about not being diagnosed and labeled. Lucky about not being behavior modified or medicated. And lucky about not being deprived of that great feeling of successfully outsmarting a teacher. And I feel sad that many kids today are not so lucky.

Every form of authority has to prove that it’s justified—it has no prior justification. An example of justified authority: When you stop your five-year-old kid from trying to cross the street, that’s an authoritarian situation—it’s got to be justified. Well, in that case, I think you can give a justification. However most of the time these authority structures have no

moral justification, they are just there in order to preserve certain structures of power and domination.

“Resist much, obey little. Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved.”

A 2012 Harris Interactive survey asked American adults:

“Given the recent reports concerning the threat posed by terrorists who plan to implant bombs within their own bodies, how willing, if at all, would you be to undergo a TSA [Transportation Security Administration] body cavity search in order to fly?”

A body cavity search consists of one’s mouth, anus, and vagina being probed and inspected by uniformed authorities—an extreme invasion of one’s physical privacy, and so one can argue that only an authoritarian who unquestioningly obeys authority would comply. The poll reported that 15% of American adults are “completely willing” to comply, and that an additional 15% are “somewhat willing.” And so, a total of 30% would comply with authority and submit to such a privacy violation in order to board a plane. Results were virtually the same with self-identified Democrats and Republicans: 15% of both Democrats and Republicans were “somewhat willing,” and 15% of Democrats and 16% of Republicans were “completely willing”.

Another question on the Harris Interactive survey was:

“How reasonable or unreasonable do you feel it is that travelers should be made by law to obey every command given by a TSA agent inside an airport or any other public place given the threat posed by terrorists?”

A majority of Americans, 57%, considered a law to obey every command to be either completely or somewhat reasonable. However, surveys only detect people’s self-perceptions and not their actual actions. One hopes when faced with the imminent prospect the numbers might drop—however it is at least equally plausible that they would increase.

Milgram carried out several variations of his original famous study, altering the situation to see how this affected obedience. The authority’s ‘badges’ were significant. In the original study, the experimenter authority wore a grey lab coat uniform as a symbol of his authority, but in one variation, the uniformed experimenter authority was called away and replaced by an experimenter in everyday clothes rather than a lab coat; and here the 450-volt highest-level obedience rate dropped from 65% to 20%. In another

variation, when the site of the experiment was moved from Yale University to a run-down office, the 450-volt highest-level obedience rate dropped to 47.5%.

Proximity to the experimenter authority figure also changed the compliance rate, as when the experimenter authority telephoned orders rather than being in the same room, the obedience rate fell to 20.5%. Another variation of the experiment shows the importance of modeling disobedience in order to reduce compliance with illegitimate authority. When two other participant teachers were also confederates (sitting next to the teacher subject) and refused to obey—one stopping at 150 volts, and the other stopping at 210 volts—the level of obedience was reduced from 65% to 10% compliance for the highest-level shock.

Milgram's studies on obedience to authority have been replicated many times in the United States and around the world with slightly different methodologies but similar results. Milgram believed that the obedient were not without morality but that their morality was an authoritarian morality.

“Although a person acting under authority performs actions that seem to violate standards of conscience, it would not be true to say that he loses his moral sense. Instead, it acquires a radically different focus, his moral concern now shifts to a consideration of how well he is living up to the expectations that the authority has of him.”

One criticism of Milgram's conclusions is that obedience and disobedience are more nuanced than Milgram depicted. Researchers analyzed the dialogue from audio recordings of Milgram's study participants, and found that people classified as obedient tried several different forms of verbal protest, saying things like:

“I can't do this anymore.”

“I'm not going to do this anymore.”

But they ultimately continued. For some, this was an attempt at disobedience. But for Milgram, these protests were dissent, not disobedience, and what's crucial is that dissent without disobedience had no value for the shocked learner.

The conventional Right-Left distinction—especially for many oppressed groups—is not all that useful when examining authoritarianism. For many oppressed groups, the difference between the Right and the Left is only in their techniques used to coerce conformity and gain control. While the Right favored killing indigenous Americans to steal their land, so-called

progressives on the Left favored forced assimilation through boarding schools that prohibited the use of tribal languages and customs, which made it easier to divide and conquer Native people—and then steal their land. For oppressed homosexuals in the United States, again the Right and Left differed only on the kind of techniques used to coerce conformity and gain control. The Right favored criminalizing and imprisonment, while progressives on the Left favored ‘treatment’ for homosexuality, including aversive conditioning techniques involving electric shock and nausea-inducing drugs during presentation of same-sex erotic images.

Anti-authoritarians’ refusal to be intimidated by the political consequences of challenging authority can—at the right moment in time and with some luck—be successful. What can catch anti-authoritarians by surprise is that no matter how important their supporters have deemed their past contributions, if their other anti-authoritarian actions create problems for their supporters, admiration can quickly turn to abandonment and assault. What is especially sad is how previous extraordinary accomplishments in no way mitigates the ferocity of these assaults. For many famous and non-famous anti-authoritarians, their compulsion for truth-telling makes it difficult for compromises and diplomacy.

“Paine was at his best at the very moment of overthrow, when principles of government were called into question and new classes emerged into political life. But Paine was temperamentally and intellectually unsuited for the day-to-day affairs of government.”

This dark reality about US society continues to catch naïve anti-authoritarians by surprise—as well as to create anxiety and extreme vigilance for other US anti-authoritarians. No matter how great anti-authoritarians’ contribution to society and how much they are admired, they remain vulnerable to marginalization for a politically incorrect challenge of authority. If such an ostracism can happen to Paine and Nader despite their monumental contributions, no anti-authoritarian is safe. The anxiety that many anti-authoritarians experience is not a symptom of mental illness but a sense of reality.

Shortly after leaving the Nation of Islam in 1964, Malcolm X made a pilgrimage to Mecca, resulting in his departing from his previously anti-white racist views of the Nation of Islam. He wrote in his diary:

“Islam brings together in unity all colors and classes.”

Malcolm X had come to believe that God embraced Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, denied that whites were “devils,” and blamed his previous

anti-white sentiments on Nation of Islam indoctrination. The central point for Malcolm X had now become the necessity for blacks to transform their struggle from 'civil rights' to 'human rights,' redefining racism as "a problem for all humanity." When Malcolm X returned to the United States after traveling in the Middle East and Africa, he spoke on college campuses and elsewhere, including events for the Socialist Workers Party and their Militant Labor Forum. For years, he had preached the virtues of entrepreneurial capitalism, but at the Militant Labor Forum, when asked what kind of political and economic system he wanted, he observed that:

"All the countries that are emerging today from under colonialism are turning toward socialism. I don't think it's an accident."

For the first time, he publicly made the connection between racial oppression and capitalism.

Malcolm X was committed to asserting the truth, including the truth of his mistakes. While his views on illegitimate authority dramatically changed, he was consistent in seeking truth, asserting it, and challenging and resisting authority that he deemed illegitimate. It is precisely Malcolm's capacity to self-correct that makes him one of the most extraordinary anti-authoritarians in US history. Near the end of his life, Malcolm X discussed with Parks an incident earlier in his life when a white college girl had come into a Black Muslim restaurant and asked him what she could do to help. He had told her, "Nothing," and she left in tears. Malcolm X told Parks:

"Well, I've lived to regret that incident. In many parts of the African continent I saw white students helping black people. I did many things as a [Black] Muslim that I'm sorry for now. I was a zombie then—like all [Black] Muslims—I was hypnotized, pointed in a certain direction and told to march. Well, I guess a man's entitled to make a fool of himself if he's ready to pay the cost. It cost me twelve years."

The life of Malcolm X is replete with valuable lessons. One lesson is that when we have experienced enormous pain from an illegitimate authority, we may be drawn toward any other authority that validates our pain, and it can become difficult to think critically about that validating authority, especially if we are stressed and vulnerable. Malcolm X's attraction to the Nation of Islam was similar to people whom have been assaulted by psychiatry and become attracted to the Church of Scientology, and then become embarrassed when they realize they've joined an authoritarian organization.

People damaged by one authoritarian religious organization are vulnerable to joining another one simply because it is critical of what has damaged them. This is also the case with authoritarian political organizations. Many people oppressed by authoritarian company owners became anti-capitalists who were uncritical of authoritarian Bolsheviks. The greatness of Malcolm X lay not simply in his courage to challenge and resist illegitimate authority but in his courage to reassess his views.

“I had heard but little of Socialism, knew practically nothing about the movement, and what little I did know was not calculated to impress me in its favor. But then a swift succession of blows that blinded me for an instant and then opened wide my eyes—and in the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle the class struggle was revealed.”

The 1979 documentary *Eugene V. Debs: Trade Unionist, Socialist, Revolutionary* was written and produced by a 38-year-old Bernie Sanders about his hero. It begins:

“It is very probable, especially if you are a young person, that you have never heard of Eugene Victor Debs. Why? Why haven’t they told you about Gene Debs and the ideas he fought for? The answer is simple. More than a half century after his death, the handful of people who own and control this country—including the mass media and the educational system—still regard Debs and his ideas as dangerous, as a threat to their stability and class rule, and as someone best forgotten about.”

Ironically, the arc of Bernie Sanders’s political career moved in the opposite direction from the arc of his hero. Sanders began as an anti-war socialist member of the Liberty Union Party which rejected the corporatism of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. Then Sanders got elected to various offices in Vermont and supported popular military expenditures and military actions; and he ultimately supported the Democratic Party’s pro-militarist presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and has promised to support Creepy Joe as well. In contrast, Debs began as a successful Democratic politician, became radicalized by his experiences as a labor union leader, became a socialist who was hated by the ruling class, and was imprisoned by its US government. Sanders began with dissent but moved to obedience, obeying even the Democratic Party. Debs began conciliatory, moved on to dissent, and then to disobedience—not only disobeying the Democratic Party but the US government. Sanders’s initial dissent propelled his political

career, and his ultimate obedience kept his career intact. Debs, in contrast, paid a severe price for his ultimate disobedience.

You think Debs would have defended the million he made from some book deal? You think Debs had a lake house? You think Debs would think the main goal is “to get rid of Donald Trump” and back a right-wing shithead like Joe Biden? Don’t be Bernie Sanders—or his woke Latinx Robin—be Gene Debs.

The Milgram study, as previously detailed, revealed that the majority of Americans believe in complying with authority even when they feel the authority is a cruel one. Similarly, the majority of Americans believe “lawbreakers” such as Snowden should be punished, regardless of the fact that the consequences of these lawbreakers violating a law are highly beneficial for society.

Many other US anti-authoritarians, forgotten in history, have been criminalized for speaking their minds. Politically radical women such as Kate Richards O’Hare, Mollie Steimer, and many other Americans were imprisoned for speaking out against World War I. Also during that era, William Buwalda, a military veteran decorated for his service in the Philippines, was court-martialed and sentenced to three years at Alcatraz merely for, while in military uniform, attending a talk by Emma Goldman, applauding her, and shaking her hand.

There have been many anti-authoritarians for whom criminalization resulted not in prison but by life ruination and self-inflicted death. Julius Wayland was a good friend of Eugene Debs and was the founder and publisher of *Appeal to Reason*, the largest socialist publication in US history, with a circulation of approximately 500,000 at its height. But in 1912, the 58-year-old Wayland, grieving over his wife’s death, was falsely smeared for sexual improprieties; and with the Federal District Attorney about to indict him under the Mann Act, he committed suicide, leaving a note indicating that he was a beaten man. And anti-authoritarian entertainer Lenny Bruce was hounded by local government authorities for his speech, and he was arrested on obscenity charges but died via drug overdose during the appeal process.

Some US anti-authoritarians, with luck, have survived US governmental assault. Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman escaped slavery and outwitted the US Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Scott Nearing, during the same era that Emma Goldman and Eugene Debs were imprisoned under the Espionage Act, was also indicted under the Espionage Act but found not guilty. Helen Keller, who also publicly opposed military conscription and the US government’s entry into World War I, was not prosecuted by the US government, most likely because Woodrow Wilson knew how ridiculous it would have been to jail the most famous deaf-blind woman in the world.

Other US anti-authoritarians have simply been murdered by government agencies. One famous example was Fred Hampton. In 1969 at age 21, Hampton was assassinated in his sleep by Cook County, Illinois, law enforcement in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Hampton's "offense" was being a Black Panther Party member and an effective organizer. And of course throughout US history, murder and genocide by the US government has been routine with respect to Native Americans.

For the compliant, the US government appears to be a force of good that occasionally errs, but what anti-authoritarians sense—and some directly experience—is that the US government and ruling elite are powerful forces of violence when their policies are resisted. This is no revelation for Native Americans. Tecumseh (1768–1813), Crazy Horse (1840–1877), Sitting Bull (1831–1890), as well as many other famous and non-famous Native Americans challenged and resisted the authority of the US government to defraud Native Americans of their land and to destroy their communities and their way of life. For their resistance, many Native Americans have suffered violent deaths. Tecumseh was killed in battle; Crazy Horse was killed trying to escape incarceration; and Sitting Bull was killed resisting arrest. The assault against Native Americans constitutes racism, genocide, and land theft on a massive scale. It is also an attempt to eliminate a cultural tradition that—with its relative absence of coercion and greater freedoms—undermines US authoritarians.

European colonizers came from extremely hierarchical societies, ruled by kings and aristocracies; and within families, husbands ruled their wives. Upon marriage, a European woman surrendered her legal identity, which meant she could not own property or sign contracts, or, except in rare circumstances, get a divorce. By contrast, in most Native societies, women could divorce their husbands and choose premarital partners. And while tribal leaders were mostly men, female elders would help select male leaders and take part in tribal meetings. Thus, for European colonizing men, their absolute power within their marriage was threatened to the extent that their wives were aware of Native American life. In general, the relative attractiveness of Native American societies was threatening for authoritarians.

A common characteristic of Native American societies is an absence of impersonal authority and coercion. Ensuring civility is seen as a collective responsibility. When interpersonal conflicts arise, the emphasis is on negotiations among parties and kin groups to settle conflicts. A common characteristic of Native societies is to make all efforts toward members not experiencing coercion and resulting resentments. If consensus could not be achieved, bands would splinter off.

The Iroquois (who call themselves the Haudenosaunee) are a confed-

eration of northeastern tribes in North America, and one colonial official stated that the Iroquois held “such absolute notions of liberty that they allow of no kind of superiority of one over another, and banish all servitude from their territories.” Historians document the anti-authoritarian nature of Iroquoian culture, including their child-rearing. Iroquois youngsters were being prepared to enter an adult society which was not hierarchical, as in the European case, but where individuals lived on a more equalitarian basis, with power more evenly distributed among men and women or old and young than in European society. One aspect of child-rearing on which Europeans and Iroquoian cultures differed was in the attitude toward authority. In Iroquois society the autonomous individual, loyal to the group but independent and aloof rather than submissive, was the ideal.

Native American societies are not leaderless societies but leadership is based on consensus about a leader’s wisdom. Thus, if a hunter leader, medicine leader, or warrior leader makes repeated errors that threaten their people’s well-being, this likely would result in a new consensus and new leadership. The flight of the Nez Perce from US government troops illustrates this.

In 1877, after a series of land concessions followed by broken promises by the US government, a group among the Nez Perce were not willing to again trust the US government’s latest and even smaller land promises. This group of Nez Perce refused to submit and surrender, and they outmaneuvered a US military force for more than three months, over approximately 1,800 miles, from their homeland in what is now eastern Oregon through Montana. While standard history textbooks routinely credit Chief Joseph as the chief of the Nez Perce and recount his final painful surrender, one historian documents that there were other leaders who actually directed the flight. Looking Glass initially led the group but was challenged for moving too slowly; and when the US Army surprised the Nez Perce at the Battle of the Big Hole, tribal consensus replaced Looking Glass with Poker Joe (though later Looking Glass regained his leadership position). And when Joseph believed that surrender was necessary to save Nez Perce lives, several Nez Perce chose to follow another leader, White Bird, and continue to head to Canada; and the consensus was not only to accept that group’s decision but to aid White Bird and his group’s escape.

The 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide states:

“Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such:

- Killing members of the group

- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”

While a single component suffices for the UN definition of genocide, the US government’s genocide of Native Americans includes all of these components.

Though Native resistance has continued, when resistance feels impossible, as it does for many indigenous Americans today, this results in a high rate of suicide, especially among young Native Americans. Just as with the extraordinarily high suicide rate by Jews in Nazi concentration camps, a high rate of self-inflicted deaths by any overwhelmingly oppressed national, ethnical, racial, or religious group is essentially another form of genocide. The US government and society avoid the reality that genocide has occurred in part because of the tenderness of American egos and the fallacious notion of American exceptionalism. The US government’s 2009 “Apology to Native Peoples of the United States,” unsurprisingly, excludes any mention of genocide, and it includes the following:

“DISCLAIMER—Nothing in this section authorizes or supports any claim against the United States.”

Moreover, this ‘apology’ was buried in a Department of Defense Appropriations Act H.R. 3326-2 and signed by then-president Obama in a ceremony closed to the press. Thus, the result was more an effort to bury the past, than to confront it.

To all native peoples within the borders of the US: we offer you more than empty apologies or fleeting visions of a better future—we offer the opportunity to seize one. Rise up, summon the strength of your ancestors—their pain, their struggle, their will to survive—for that is why you still remain, why you still have some idea of what has been lost. We can’t promise victory, but you can rest assured that we will leave your side only in a puddle of blood or shackled and dragged away by our common oppressor—you’re not pawns and you’re not virtue signals. Let us unite as common kin, and end these unjust institutions—by any means necessary.

For guardians of the status quo, there is nothing genuinely or fundamentally wrong with the prevailing order and its dominant institutions, which are viewed as just. Therefore, anyone claiming otherwise—especially someone sufficiently motivated by that belief to take radical action—must, by definition, be emotionally unstable and psychologically disabled. Put another way, there are, broadly speaking, two choices: obedience to institutional authority or radical dissent from it. The first is a sane and valid choice only if the second is crazy and illegitimate. Radical dissent is evidence, even proof, of a severe personality disorder.

The use of psychiatric diagnoses to discredit, dismiss, and marginalize famous and non-famous anti-authoritarians is common. For instance, several mainstream media journalists, attempting to discredit whistleblower Edward Snowden, psychopathologized him with labels such as “grandiose narcissist.” The mainstream media has also psychopathologized other recent whistleblowers, including Chelsea Manning and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. The mainstream media has depicted Assange as bizarre and paranoid, the New York Times labeling him with “erratic and imperious behavior” and “delusional grandeur.” And didn’t you hear? He smeared shit all over the walls. The mainstream media also promoted a view that Manning was motivated not by her moral convictions but gender struggles, anti-gay bullying, and conflict with her father resulting in personality disorders. Ralph Nader, for challenging the corporatism of both the Democratic and Republican parties and running for president, was described by a columnist for the Nation as “a very deluded man, a psychologically troubled man.” Malcolm X, for his distrust of authorities, was diagnosed by FBI profilers with “pre-psychotic paranoid schizophrenia.” The anti-authoritarian actions of both Thomas Paine and Eugene Debs were attributed to “dipsomania” and other terms for alcoholism. During the 1894 Pullman Strike, the New York Times published a smearing by the physician Thomas Robertson, who falsely claimed to have treated Debs for dipsomania; with the Times quoting Robertson as saying:

“Those who knew Debs well believe that his present conduct is in large measure, if not wholly, due to the disordered condition of his mind and body, brought about by the liquor habit.”

We can’t wait to hear the list of disorders we supposedly suffer from, that’ll be entertaining—but that’s probably just our grandiose narcissism talking.

The practice of psychopathologizing anti-authoritarians so as to discredit and marginalize them is certainly not exclusive to the United States. In the Soviet Union, political dissidents were routinely psychiatrically hospitalized

and drugged; and today, Chinese dissidents continue to be diagnosed with mental illness and forcibly treated. In the United States, the practice of psychopathologizing anti-authoritarians began at the very beginning of the nation. Benjamin Rush was a friend of Thomas Paine in pre-Revolutionary War Philadelphia, but then shunned Paine after *The Age of Reason*. Today, Benjamin Rush is well-known among psychiatrists as “the father of American psychiatry,” as his image adorns the seal of the American Psychiatric Association. In addition to Rush’s abandonment of Thomas Paine, he also attempted to gain favor with the new ruling class in the United States another way. In 1805, Rush diagnosed those rebelling against the newly centralized federal authority as having an “excess of the passion for liberty” that “constituted a form of insanity,” which he labeled as the disease of anarchy.

In 1851, Louisiana physician Dr. Samuel Cartwright reported his discovery of drapetomania, the disease that caused slaves to flee captivity. Cartwright believed that absent of this illness slaves were “like children, constrained by unalterable physiological laws to love those in authority over them.” Cartwright also reported his discovery of dysesthesia, a disease that caused slaves to pay insufficient attention to their jobs, “breaking the tools he works with, and spoiling everything he touches,” as well as being resistant to punishment and not feeling the “pain of any consequences.”

In 1958, when civil rights activist Clennon W. King Jr. attempted to enroll at the all-white University of Mississippi, the Mississippi police arrested him on the grounds that “any nigger who tried to enter Ole Miss must be crazy.” Following his arrest, he was then taken to the county courthouse where a “lunacy warrant” was issued on him, and he was confined to a mental hospital for twelve days, and only declared “competent” when he promised to leave Mississippi. Systemic racism labels threats to authority as mental illness, and this process increases the likelihood that black men will get diagnosed with schizophrenia. A belief that one is being surveilled has sometimes been enough evidence for anti-authoritarians to be assessed as delusionally paranoid. Recall how when Ralph Nader was being followed by General Motors detectives, he sensed it and told others, and sounded like he was delusional. Nader, however, was lucky that detectives were incompetent and got caught. However, Ernest Hemingway was not so lucky.

By 1960, Hemingway was labeled delusionally paranoid about FBI surveillance.

“The feds...It’s the worst hell. The goddamnedest hell. They’ve bugged everything... Everything’s bugged. Can’t use the phone. Mail intercepted.”

Long after Hemingway's death, the FBI released his file in response to a Freedom of Information petition and it revealed that beginning in the 1940s J. Edgar Hoover had placed Ernest under surveillance because he was suspicious of Ernest's activities in Cuba. Over the following years, agents filed reports on him and tapped his phones. The surveillance continued all through his confinement at St. Mary's Hospital. It is likely that the phone outside his room was tapped after all.

“In the years since, I have tried to reconcile Ernest's fear of the FBI, which I regretfully misjudged, with the reality of the FBI file. I now believe he truly sensed the surveillance, and that it substantially contributed to his anguish and his suicide.”

Hemingway was treated with electroshock (ECT) as many as 15 times in December 1960; then in January 1961, he was released in ruins. Hemingway's loss of memory caused by the ECT made him even more depressed and hopeless.

“Well, what is the sense of ruining my head and erasing my memory, which is my capital, and putting me out of business?”

In July 1961, shortly before his 62nd birthday and soon after Hemingway had been given still another series of shock treatments, he committed suicide.

Anti-authoritarians' intense reactions to insults and injustices can provide justification for authorities to psychopathologize them. A young Emma Goldman was lucky to live in an era in which she was not pathologized after she threw a pitcher of water at the face of a woman who was happy with the 1887 execution of the Haymarket martyrs; but other anti-authoritarians have not been so lucky and their strong reactions to insults and injustices have often been psychopathologized. This is especially true for intense reactions by women, one of the more well-known examples being actress Frances Farmer (1913–1970), brought to public attention in the 1982 movie *Frances*, starring Jessica Lange.

Farmer revealed her anti-authoritarian streak as a senior in high school when she won a writing contest with a controversial essay, “God Dies,” and then again as a young woman when, in 1935, she accepted a newspaper prize for a trip to the Soviet Union over her mother's strong objections. Farmer was stunningly beautiful but rebelled against studio casting based solely on her looks. She also resisted the studio's attempt to control her private life, and she refused to attend Hollywood parties. Farmer aspired to be a serious actress, and she took time off from movie work to appear in a Clifford Odets stage production of one of his plays. Farmer, feeling oppressed by Hollywood

authorities and betrayed by men she had trusted, began abusing alcohol. In 1942, she was stopped by the police for driving with her headlights on bright in the wartime blackout zone. She was jailed and fined; and after she hadn't paid her entire fine, the police tracked her down and entered her hotel room without permission. Then Frances, who'd been sleeping in the nude, face down on the bed, under the influence of alcohol and somnifacient reacted as anyone would have. She became belligerent with the police when they arrested her. And then, after she was sentenced to 180 days in Los Angeles County jail, she became physically aggressive in the courtroom and was forced into a straitjacket.

If Frances had been left alone to serve her 180 days in jail it's quite likely that, eventually, she would have sorted herself out. Instead, family members and others from the movie industry successfully lobbied the judge to send her to the Kimball Sanitarium, her first institutionalization. Then in 1944, Frances's mother committed Frances to Western State Mental Hospital, where she was recommitted two additional times. Frances was institutionalized, not because she was insane but because she'd been legally vulnerable. Because her dad, Ernest, was a lawyer. Because her mother, Lillian, despite whatever unconscious animus may have lain in her heart, may have thought in her desperation and exasperation that institutionalization was the last viable recourse to help her daughter heal—and become submissive and obedient.

In the history of American psychiatry, there have been several adult populations lacking political power—including Native Americans, women, and homosexuals—who have been psychopathologized and marginalized for the 'offense' of asserting their humanity. In the 1970s, homosexuals were able to gain some political power and fought so as to no longer be at the mercy of the APA. In 1970, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) infiltrated a conference of the APA where a film was demonstrating the use of electroshock treatment to decrease same-sex attraction. GLF members shouted "Torture!" and seized the microphone to rebuke psychiatrists. Using multiple political strategies and tactics, gay activists effectively forced the APA to stop pathologizing homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973.

While organized adults have successfully liberated themselves from being psychopathologized and marginalized, mental health authorities have increasingly zeroed in on a politically powerless population: anti-authoritarian youth. Many young people labeled with psychiatric diagnoses are essentially anti-authoritarians who are pained and angered by coercion, unnecessary rules, and illegitimate authority. When young anti-authoritarians are labeled with a psychiatric diagnosis, they get ensnared in an authoritarian trap. Resistance to diagnosis and treatment often results in professionals labeling

young rebels as “noncompliant with treatment,” increasing the severity of the diagnosis, and increasing the dosage of tranquilizing medications. All this can be enraging for young people, sometimes so much so it makes them appear not just angry but crazy.

Today, a potentially huge army of young anti-authoritarians are being depoliticized by mental illness diagnoses and by attributions that their inattention, anxiety, depression, and disruptiveness are caused by defective biochemistry—and not by their alienation from a dehumanizing society and their resistance to illegitimate authorities.

Malcolm X’s childhood was replete with trauma including his family breakup and then foster homes, resulting in his rebelling and engaging in theft. Today, a teenage Malcolm X would likely be labeled with the “disruptive disorder” diagnosis called “conduct disorder” (CD) for criminally disruptive behaviors. And owing especially to the fact of being in foster care, he would very likely be prescribed psychiatric drugs, including antipsychotic drugs.

Beginning in 1980, for noncompliant children who are not engaged in any illegal practices, the APA (in its DSM-III diagnostic manual) created the disruptive disorder diagnosis “oppositional defiant disorder” (ODD). For an ODD diagnosis, a youngster needs only four of the following eight symptoms for six months:

- Often loses temper
- Often touchy or easily annoyed
- Often angry and resentful
- Often argues with authority figures
- Often actively defies or refuses to comply with requests from authority figures or with rules
- Often deliberately annoys others
- Often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- Spitefulness or vindictiveness at least twice within the past six months

In 2012, the Archives of General Psychiatry reported that between 1993 through 2009, there was a sevenfold increase of children 13 years and younger being prescribed antipsychotic drugs, and that disruptive behavior disorders such as ODD and CD were the most common diagnoses in children medicated with antipsychotics, accounting for 63% of those medicated. “Attention

deficit hyperactivity disorder” (ADHD) is another common diagnosis for children labeled with “behavior problems.” The ‘symptoms’ of ADHD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. While CD and ODD behaviors are overt rebellions, ADHD behaviors can in some instances be passive-aggressive rebellions. ADHD parallels Samuel Cartwright’s dysesthesia; while ODD and CD parallels Cartwright’s drapetomania.

Alienated anti-authoritarian adults are often diagnosed with anxiety and depression. Often a major pain of their lives that fuels their anxiety and/or depression is fear that noncompliance with illegitimate authorities will cause them to be financially and socially marginalized; but they fear that compliance with such illegitimate authorities will result in humiliation and loss of integrity. All this can result in anxiety and depression—created not by biochemical defects but by existential realities. While only a small number of people diagnosed with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and other psychoses identify themselves as anarchists, my experience is that a far higher percentage of this population as compared to the general population have anarchist politics and values such as resenting coercion; distrusting impersonal authorities; believing people should organize among themselves rather than submit to authorities; and a willingness to risk punishments to gain freedom from coercions. Among the people I have talked with who have been previously diagnosed with psychiatric illnesses, I am struck by how many of them, compared to the general population, are essentially anti-authoritarians. Unluckily for them, the professionals who have diagnosed them are not.

Historically, doctors have embraced authoritarianism at a higher percentage than the general population. More than 7% of all German physicians became members of the Nazi SS during World War II, compared with less than 1% of the general population. Physicians joined the Nazi party and the killing operations not at gunpoint, not by force, but of their own volition. There are several reasons for this, one being doctors’ socialization to hierarchy and authoritarianism. Medical culture is, in many ways, a rigid hierarchy. Those at the lower end of the hierarchy are used to doing what their superiors ask of them, often without understanding exactly why. Questioning superiors is often uncomfortable, for fear both of negative consequences—retaliation, losing the superior’s respect—and of being wrong. MDs and PhDs have received extensive schooling and thus have lived for many years in a world where one routinely complies with the demands of authorities. Thus, people who reject this compliance appear to be “abnormal” for many MDs and PhDs. My experience is that most psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals are unaware of the magnitude of their obedience, and so the anti-authoritarianism of their patients

can create enormous anxiety for them—and this anxiety fuels diagnoses and treatments.

A handful of mental health professionals have challenged the legitimacy of mental health authorities—and have paid a price. In 1968, psychiatrist Loren Mosher became the National Institute of Mental Health's chief of the Center for Schizophrenia Research. In 1971, Mosher launched an alternative approach for people diagnosed with schizophrenia, opening the first Soteria House in Santa Clara, California. Soteria House was an egalitarian and non-coercive psychosocial milieu employing nonprofessional caregivers. The results showed that people do far better with this Soteria approach than with standard psychiatric treatment, and that people can in fact recover with little or no use of antipsychotic drugs. Mosher's success embarrassed establishment psychiatry and displeased the pharmaceutical industry. Not surprisingly, the National Institute of Mental Health choked off Soteria House funding, and Mosher was fired from his NIMH position in 1980.

There continues to be a movement of dissident mental health professionals and ex-patient activists. This movement attempts to get the word out on the lack of science behind the DSM diagnostic bible, and to expose the illegitimacy of biochemical disease explanations such as the “chemical-imbalance” theory. Recently, even some members of mainstream psychiatry have been forced to admit failure in these areas.

In response to the DSM-V, published in 2013, the NIMH director, citing the lack of scientific validity of the DSM, stated that the “NIMH will be re-orienting its research away from DSM categories.” Also harshly critical of the DSM-V was the politically astute former chair of the DSM-IV task force, psychiatrist Allen Frances, who published *Saving Normal*, which mocked several new DSM-V mental illness inventions, especially the pathologizing of normal human grief. Frances's repudiation of DSM-V is noteworthy, as it is as if the guy who wrote Leviticus realized that his ‘abominating’ and ‘sinning’ had gotten out of hand.

Similar to their abandonment of the DSM, establishment psychiatrists have also recently fled psychiatry's long promulgated “chemical imbalance theory of mental illness.” In the late 1980s, psychiatry authorities and giant pharmaceutical companies began telling the general public—despite lacking scientific evidence—that depression is caused by a “chemical imbalance” of low-levels of serotonin that could be treated with “chemically balancing” antidepressants, such as Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil, and other selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). The idea that depression is caused by a chemical imbalance that could be corrected with SSRI antidepressants was made to sound like taking insulin for diabetes, and so the use of these SSRIs skyrocketed. Today, the falseness of this chemical-imbalance theory of

mental illness is not controversial.

“In truth, the ‘chemical imbalance’ notion was always a kind of urban legend—never a theory seriously propounded by well-informed psychiatrists.”

One justification was that by framing depression as a chemical deficiency, patients felt more comfortable taking antidepressant drugs. While some psychiatrists view the chemical imbalance theory as a well-meaning “white lie,” my experience is that many physicians continue to be ignorant of the truth. The bottom line is that no matter what the reason, mainstream psychiatrists who have promulgated untruths have broken their patients’ trust. Does psychiatry retain any legitimate authority?

“We see that its diagnostics are being dismissed as invalid; its research has failed to identify the biology of mental disorders to validate its diagnostics; and its drug treatments are increasingly being seen as not very effective or even harmful. That is the story of a profession that has reason to feel insecure about its place in the marketplace.”

Despite its scientific failure, psychiatry has retained societal authority. Its authority rests on three pillars.

First, by pushing drug treatments, it meets the financial needs of drug companies, and so it has large financial backing from Big Pharma. In 2008, congressional investigations of psychiatry revealed that the APA and several “thought leader” psychiatrists received significant amounts of money from drug companies. Big Pharma heavily funds university psychiatry departments, sponsors conferences and continuing education for psychiatrists, and pays well-known clinicians and researchers to be speakers and consultants. In 2012, PLOS Medicine reported:

“69% of the DSM-V task force members report having ties to the pharmaceutical industry.”

Second, by pathologizing and thus depoliticizing malaise, psychiatry helps maintain the status quo, meeting the needs of the ruling power structure. Historically, professionals such as police and clergy have been utilized to control populations. More recently, mental health professionals have also been used. One example of this is mainstream mental health professional’s explanation for high rates of suicide among indigenous peoples. Existing explanations blame the victim, finding that they suffer from personal adjustment problems or emotional deficiencies like “low self-esteem”

and “depression.” None of the existing explanations alleviate the situation by acting or suggesting action against the forces of oppression; they don’t even recognize them. Meeting the needs of the power structure ensures an institution’s existence.

And so the professions of psychiatry and psychology have had reason to want to be utilized to subvert resistance by US soldiers via psychiatric drug “treatments” and behavioral manipulations. According to the *Military Times* in 2013, one in six US armed service members were taking at least one psychiatric drug, many of these medicated soldiers in combat zones. And in 2009, the *New York Times* reported how Martin Seligman, a former president of the American Psychological Association, consulted with the US Army’s Comprehensive Soldier Fitness positive psychology program. In this program, in one role-play, a sergeant is asked to take his exhausted men on one more difficult mission. The sergeant is initially angry and complains that “it’s not fair,” but in the role-play, his “rehabilitation” involves reinterpreting the order as a compliment.

A third pillar of psychiatry’s societal authority is its coercions to control people who create societal tension but who have done nothing illegal. Mental health professionals meet the control needs of authoritarians in charge of society but also meet the control needs of authoritarian subordinates. This coercive function is what society and most people actually appreciate most about psychiatry. The societal need for psychiatry’s extra-legal police function compels society to be blind to psychiatry’s complete lack of scientific validity. Because of psychiatric coercion, society gives psychiatric theories a free pass. These theories never need to pass any rigorously devised tests, as we expect other important scientific theories to pass, they only need to be asserted by the right people.

“The institutional role of the schools for the most part is just to train people for obedience and conformity, and to make them controllable and indoctrinated—and as long as the schools fulfill that role, they’ll be supported.”

“There’s a reason education sucks, and it’s the same reason it will never, ever, ever be fixed. Because the owners, the owners of this country don’t want that. They don’t want well-informed, well-educated people capable of critical thinking. You know what they want? They want obedient workers. People who are just smart enough to run the machines and do the paperwork. And just dumb enough to passively accept all these increasingly shitty jobs.”

“When I think back on all the crap I learned in high school, it’s a wonder I can think at all.”

As a young child in school, before I understood the words ‘authoritarian’ or ‘dehumanizing,’ I thought there was something terribly wrong with a place where I had to raise my hand to go the bathroom. I recall thinking that I was lucky that I wasn’t shy, because if I had been too shy to ask for permission, then I might wet my pants. Having to ask permission to go the bathroom was bad enough, but there were teachers who made us either say—or show with our fingers—whether we needed to urinate (one finger) or defecate (two fingers). I remember thinking this must be especially horrific for prim-and-proper girls, and I thought that these teachers must be perverts to demand that.

Nowadays, many kids tell me that they still must get permission from a teacher to leave their classroom to relieve themselves. Recently, a high school student told me that in his school, students get a limited number of restroom passes per semester. I asked him what happens if a student runs out of passes and has to take a shit—do they expect students to just shit in their pants? He laughed. Then I told him that I was serious—what do they expect you to do? Then he got serious and said:

“So much of school is fucked up, we never really think about each fucked up thing.”

Social psychologist Stanley Milgram in *Obedience to Authority*, after reporting on his studies showing a frightening compliance to abusive illegitimate authority, attempted to understand the reasons:

“As soon as the child emerges from the cocoon of family, he is transferred to an institutional system of authority, the school where the student learns that deference is the only appropriate and comfortable response to authority.”

Standard schools not only demand our compliance to authority regardless of our assessment of its legitimacy, they require our compliance with impersonal authorities. Milgram notes:

“The modern industrial world forces individuals to submit to impersonal authorities, so that responses are made to abstract rank, indicated by an insignia, uniform, or title.”

In other words, badges. Never, never reach for a title, for there will always be others who want it. Instead, aspire to command.

In a 1962 book, researchers examined the childhood of 400 eminent people, and they reported that the majority of them disliked school immensely. The authors detailed the pain that the anti-authoritarian Albert Einstein had with his schooling. When Einstein was a teenager, he found school so intolerable, he asked the school doctor to give him a certificate saying that he had a nervous breakdown so that he did not have to attend; a tactic that worked. Einstein later concluded about schooling:

“It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty.”

Young Albert didn't pay attention to his teachers and failed his college entrance examination twice. Einstein recalls hating authoritarian discipline in his schools:

“The teachers in the elementary school appeared to me like sergeants and in the Gymnasium the teachers were like lieutenants.”

After he finally did enter college, one professor told Einstein:

“You have one fault: one can't tell you anything.”

Today, a young Albert Einstein would very likely receive an ADHD diagnosis, and maybe an ODD one as well. The very characteristics of Einstein that upset authorities—questioning and challenging illegitimate authority—are the characteristics most required to be a great scientist.

The primary method of ‘motivation’ in standard schools is coercion through grades. Students focus on what they need to memorize for a good grade, and they stop asking their own questions and pursuing answers to them. To a very great degree, school is a place where children learn to be stupid. Children come to school curious; within a few years most of that curiosity is dead, or at least silent. The motivational method of coercion not only subverts curiosity, it prevents students from even retaining facts. You did your homework, you passed the exam, maybe you even got an ‘A’—and a week later you couldn't even remember what the course was about.

Standard school coercions subvert a love of reading. A 2014 report stated:

“The proportion of children who are daily readers drops markedly from childhood to the tween and teenage years. One study documents a drop from 48% of six- to eight-year-olds down to 24% of 15- to 17-year-olds who are daily readers, and another shows a drop from 53% of nine-year-olds to 19% of 17-year-olds.”

What turns most teenagers off from reading for pleasure is compulsory reading of books that they have no intrinsic interest in. I recall one teenager who had loved to read as a kid but became turned off to reading because of required reading. I joked with him that if schools one day made kids have compulsory sex with people whom they weren't interested in that this would turn kids off from sex in general. He thought about this for a few seconds, then told me that adults would probably do just that if they realized how making something compulsory turns kids off from it.

What are the origins of the US mass educational system? Chomsky points out:

“In the late nineteenth century it was largely designed to turn independent farmers into disciplined factory workers, and a good deal of education maintains that form.”

Chomsky also concluded that those at the top of the societal hierarchy support the educational system because they believe:

“People are supposed to be passive and apathetic and doing what they're told by the responsible people who are in control. That's elite ideology across the political spectrum—from liberals to Leninists, it's essentially the same ideology: people are too stupid and ignorant to do things by themselves so for their own benefit we have to control them.”

As Americans have received increasingly more schooling, they have become less capable of effectively challenging the ruling class. In 1900, only 6% of Americans graduated high school, and a college education was rare for ordinary Americans; today, approximately 85% of Americans graduate high school, and college is increasingly expected for all. However, in the 1880s and 1890s, American farmers with little or no schooling created a Populist movement; organized America's largest-scale working people's cooperative; formed a People's Party that received 8% of the vote in 1892 presidential election; designed a “subtreasury” plan—that had it been implemented would have allowed easier credit for farmers and broke the power of large banks—and sent 40,000 lecturers across the United States to articulate this

plan; and evidenced all kinds of sophisticated political ideas, strategies, and tactics absent today from America's well-schooled population.

There are anti-authoritarian educators who have the courage to publicly assert the authoritarian nature of standard schools. John Taylor Gatto, accepting the New York City Teacher of the Year Award, January 31, 1990, stated:

“The truth is that schools don't really teach anything except how to obey orders. This is a great mystery to me because thousands of humane, caring people work in schools as teachers and aides and administrators, but the abstract logic of the institution overwhelms their individual contributions.”

Standard school teaches compliance with hierarchy; obedience to authorities for whom one does not necessarily respect; and regurgitation of meaningless material for a high grade. The standard classroom socializes students to be passive; to be directed by others; to take seriously the rewards and punishments of authorities; to pretend to care about things that they don't care about; and that one is impotent to change one's dissatisfying situation.

In a hierarchical society, prestigious schooling institutions confer prestigious badges. Children come to realize, early in their school careers, the terrible danger to their own success in statements that give voice to strong intensities. Children are taught to obey orders and to channel our dissent into innocuous patterns of polite discussion and investigation. Schools, especially elitist institutions, teach an inert concern—that caring in and of itself is ethical but that disobedience is immature.

Elitist schools and their conferred badges can provide liars and bullshit artists with great confidence in their ability to get away with lies and bullshit throughout their entire lives, and such projected confidence provides them greater influence. The Harvard Business School (HBS) information session on how to be a good class participant:

“Speak with conviction. Even if you believe something only fifty-five percent, say it as if you believe it a hundred percent.”

At HBS, if a student talks often and forcefully, then he's a player; if he doesn't, he's on the margins. The men at HBS look like people who expect to be in charge; but don't worry, they're multicolored! I have the feeling that if you asked one of them for driving directions, he'd greet you with a can-do smile and throw himself into the task of helping you to your destination—whether or not he knew the way.

For authoritarians, a degree from Harvard Business School is a prestigious badge of authority. For anti-authoritarians, an HBS degree is especially suspect, as they know that HBS alumni include George W. Bush, 1975 graduate, in charge at the advent of the 2008 financial meltdown, and Jeffrey Skilling, 1979 graduate, former CEO of Enron and convicted of securities fraud and insider trading. HBS teaches greed and socializes students to the idea that if everybody assumes you're a whore, you might as well grab as much money as possible while you're still in demand.

The more absolute the power of institutional authorities—be they in parochial schools, Native American residential boarding schools, or public schools—the more likely their physical and emotional abuse. Recall the excellent student Malcolm X being told by his public school teacher that being a lawyer was “no realistic goal for a nigger” and the teacher-inflicted physical and emotional abuse on Emma Goldman. I remember in junior high school, one kid raising his hand desiring to contribute to the class discussion but was told by the teacher:

“I’m not calling on you, you are in the crud group.”

While certainly many teachers try to be civil and kind, I can recall more than one teacher thinking themselves funny when they were being cruel. That’s why Pink Floyd’s “Another Brick in the Wall” and its lyrics about “dark sarcasm in the classroom,” continues to resonate with students today.

While teachers today might well be fired for certain kinds of emotional and physical abuse, standard schools are replete with acceptable psychological violence. These schools force kids to compete against one another. The better some students do on an exam, the worse this is for others. School not only punishes most academic cooperation—it’s called cheating—school encourages resentment for others’ success. Today, we hear much about peer bullying but little about what fuels that cruelty. Human beings in institutions replete with coercions and humiliations—whether these institutions are penitentiaries or schools—are often going to take their pain out on others they perceive as weaker than they are. Similarly, the fuel for abusive parenting is also often a lifetime of coercions and humiliations, including job and schooling ones.

Working with teenagers for over three decades, my experience is that the source of their suicidal thoughts is actually more often located in the school than the family. And while occasionally the source of overwhelming pain is a single abusive teacher or a bullying peer, often suicidality is fueled by the anxiety of being overwhelmed by bureaucratic coercions; for example, having failed classes in subjects they have no interest in and being forced to go to summer school or not graduate.

In psychology classes, I was taught that taking away enjoyable stuff from mice or kids in order to get them to learn is called “negative reinforcement,” which along with “positive reinforcement” and “punishment” are elements of “behavior modification.” This certainly works to control most mice and even some kids—but not anti-authoritarian kids. Nowadays, these negative behavioral-modifications are routinely called “consequences” but in my day, parents called them punishments.

I didn’t get punished much since I did well in school, but when I did, the punishment was usually “no television,” and I remember my immediate response to it. When my mother said, “No television for a week,” I said, “Make it two weeks, I don’t care.” When she responded, “Then two weeks it is,” I said, “I don’t care, make it a month.” It progressed to years, decades, and centuries. I think by 2567, I will have served my time. So I have some empathy for how a young Alexander Berkman’s bravado bought himself a lengthier prison sentence than if he had employed a competent lawyer.

Professionally, I have worked with kids for whom the coercions of parents, teachers, and other adults failed to control behaviors but succeeded in creating resentments. These kids, like me, were not going to allow adults to use knowledge of their joys and pains for purposes of control, so they learned to hide their true joys and pains. They learned to be guarded about their true self so as it would not be used against them. Some kids learn that it’s easier to hide themselves from the adult world if they hide from themselves, and so these kids lose awareness of who they are—and some of them need to, later in life, ‘crack up’ for rediscovery.

Life is filled with ironies and occasional pleasant surprises. Ironically, my “stinkin’ badges” have given me access to parents of anti-authoritarian kids. And a pleasant surprise for me has been how infrequently I’ve been fired by these parents. Only rarely has an authoritarian parent dragged their anti-authoritarian kid into my office with expectations that I would provide “treatment” to make their child unquestioningly obedient. The vast majority of parents I have worked with are more of what I would call normies than Nazis. Normies buy into societal norms. They take seriously PhDs and licensing badges of authority. Normie parents may intellectually understand that people can be so overwhelmed by pain that they become self-destructive or violent, but it is easier for normies to compartmentalize such people as mentally ill.

Normie parents want to do the “right thing” with their kids; but unfortunately, taking seriously professional badges often turns out to be the wrong thing. The vast majority of mental health professionals are not anti-authoritarians, so they often give advice that can turn a resolvable problem into a tragedy. While coercions work to control the behavior of many mental

health professionals themselves, coercions don't work on anti-authoritarians. While normies get a positive buzz by pleasing authorities and receiving good grades, anti-authoritarian kids get no such buzz for compliance. For anti-authoritarian kids, coercions only create resentments. Resentment destroys relationships and eliminates the possibility for dialogue that can solve problems. Anti-authoritarian children and teenagers are often taken by parents to a mental health professional because they are underachieving in standard schools. These young people resist all coercions that demand giving attention to subjects that bore them, doing homework for which they see no value, or staying inside a building that feels sterile and suffocating.

All anti-authoritarian kids do not have the same temperaments, so such coercions result in some different outcomes—all unpleasant ones. Some gentler anti-authoritarian kids resist coercions but worry that their resistance will result in dire life consequences. They worry that performing poorly in school will mean “flipping burgers” for the rest of their lives. Their anxiety and pain of failure is exacerbated by their parents' anxiety over failure, and these kids become hopeless, believing that all of life will be as miserable as school. This can result in debilitating anxiety and immobilizing depression. On many occasions I've seen school failure and the threat of not graduating high school make a teenager suicidal. It is routine for doctors to medicate these kids with an array of psychiatric drugs, and if parents and professionals become anxious about suicide, these kids are often psychiatrically hospitalized, though hospitalization is no guarantee of safety as 6% of all American suicides occur in hospitals. In psychiatric hospitalizations, suicidal young people are routinely told that they are mentally ill. This makes many anti-authoritarian kids even more hopeless. Anti-authoritarians are rarely employed in these institutions—where they could offer young people validation for their common experience, for example, of pain over authoritarian schooling. That validation can both reduce pain and increase hope—and open them up for dialogue, which can help young people gain perspective, reduce pain, and act with greater wisdom.

Anti-authoritarian kids will often question the legitimacy of mental health authorities whose interventions appear ludicrous to them. One such intervention is the “no-suicide contract” in which the patient agrees not to attempt suicide and to seek help if unable to honor the commitment. Signing such a contract is often a requirement for release from a psychiatric hospital. For many patients, it is obvious that these contracts don't prevent suicide (confirmed by research) and serve only to reduce the anxiety of the hospital staff.

Other anti-authoritarian kids with less gentle temperaments don't take seriously their schooling or admonitions from authorities that their rebellious

behavior will doom them. They feel justified in resisting coercion. Their resistance is routinely labeled by mental health professionals as “acting out,” and they are diagnosed with various disruptive disorders. Their parents often attempt punishments, which don’t work to break these kids’ resistance. Parents become frustrated and resentful that their child is causing them stress. Children feel parental frustration and resentment and may come to believe their parents do not like them. So these kids stop liking their parents, stop caring about their parents’ feelings, and seek out peers who they believe do like them, even if these peers are engaged in criminal behaviors. If parents have financial resources, these kids are often sent to “therapeutic boarding schools” where they associate with kids who may be even angrier than they are, and from whom they learn even more harmful behaviors.

Although these kids are often accused of having “authority issues,” it has been my experience that many anti-authoritarian young people labeled with psychiatric disorders don’t reject all authorities, only those whom they’ve assessed to be illegitimate. Often these young people are craving a mutually respectful relationship with an adult who can help them navigate the authoritarian society around them. Anti-authoritarian young people assess adults before taking them seriously, and while they will challenge and resist adult authorities who they deem to be illegitimate, they are receptive toward authorities who prove legitimate. Honesty and sincerity are necessary for an authority to be considered legitimate. Young anti-authoritarians must also sense that an adult has both affection and respect for their anti-authoritarian nature. People engage with those who make them feel good.

Normie professionals and parents routinely fail to engage young anti-authoritarians because their frustration, anger, punishments, incongruence, and pathologizing are unpleasant for these kids. What feels good is affection, respect, empathy, nurturance, humor, and mutual fun. When young anti-authoritarians feel that they are liked, understood, and are not being manipulated, most are open to a dialogue about how best to navigate the world without self-destructive or destructive behaviors. Normie mental health professionals and normie parents routinely fail to help destructive and self-destructive young anti-authoritarians because they are incapable of seeing anti-authoritarians’ anger as legitimate and valid. Normies cannot adequately empathize with the painfulness of coercion and how such pain fuels destructive behavior. Invalidated pain can cause some young anti-authoritarians to become completely hopeless and others to become completely enraged. With young anti-authoritarians’ overwhelming pain, hopelessness, and rage, there is no dialogue—no space to think or reflect. With genuine validation of their pain, empathy for hopelessness and rage, and

affection and respect for their anti-authoritarian nature, dialogue becomes possible—and wisdom can replace compulsive destructiveness.

It is common for many parents to give their children what they believe that they needed from their own parents. However, to love children means recognizing each child's unique personality and individual needs.

Traditionally, young people have energized democratic movements. So it is a major coup for the ruling elite to have created societal institutions that have subdued young Americans and broken their spirit of resistance to domination. Young Americans—even more so than older Americans—appear to have acquiesced to the idea that the corporatocracy can completely screw them and that they are helpless to do anything about it. A 2010 Gallup poll asked Americans “Do you think the Social Security system will be able to pay you a benefit when you retire?” Among 18- to 34-years-olds, 76 percent of them said no. Yet despite their lack of confidence in the availability of Social Security for them, few have demanded it be shored up by more fairly payroll-taxing the wealthy; most appear resigned to having more money deducted from their paychecks for Social Security, even though they don't believe it will be around to benefit them.

How exactly has American society subdued young Americans?

1. Student-Loan Debt

Large debt—and the fear it creates—is a pacifying force. There was no tuition at the City University of New York when I attended one of its colleges in the 1970s, a time when tuition at many US public universities was so affordable that it was easy to get a B.A. and even a graduate degree without accruing any student-loan debt. While those days are gone in the United States, public universities continue to be free in the Arab world and are either free or with very low fees in many countries throughout the world. The millions of young Iranians who risked getting shot to protest their disputed 2009 presidential election, the millions of young Egyptians who risked their lives to eliminate Mubarak, and the millions of young Americans who demonstrated against the Vietnam War all had in common the absence of huge student-loan debt.

Today in the United States, two-thirds of graduating seniors at four-year colleges have student-loan debt, including over 62 percent of public university graduates. While average undergraduate debt is close to \$25,000, some college graduates have closer to \$100,000 in student-loan debt. During the time in one's life when it should be easiest to resist authority because one does not yet have family responsibilities, many

young people worry about the cost of bucking authority, losing their job, and being unable to pay an ever-increasing debt. Often these loans will have family members as co-signors, resulting in a tactic any mafia goon—or, with slight modifications, CIA interrogator—could appreciate: Pay us or something bad happens to those you care about. In a vicious cycle, student debt has a subduing effect on activism, and political passivity makes it more likely that students will accept such debt as a natural part of life.

2. Psychopathologizing and Medicating Noncompliance

In 1955, Erich Fromm, the then widely respected anti-authoritarian leftist psychoanalyst, wrote:

“Today the function of psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis threatens to become the tool in the manipulation of man.”

Fromm died in 1980, the same year that an increasingly authoritarian America elected Ronald Reagan president, and an increasingly authoritarian American Psychiatric Association added to their diagnostic bible (then the DSM-III) disruptive mental disorders for children and teenagers such as the increasingly popular ODD. The official symptoms of ODD include “often actively defies or refuses to comply with adult requests or rules,” “often argues with adults,” and “often deliberately does things to annoy other people.”

Many of America’s greatest activists including Saul Alinsky, the legendary organizer, would today certainly be diagnosed with ODD and other disruptive disorders. Recalling his childhood, Alinsky said:

“I never thought of walking on the grass until I saw a sign saying ‘Keep off the grass.’ Then I would stomp all over it.”

Heavily tranquilizing antipsychotic drugs (e.g. Zyprexa and Risperdal) are now the highest grossing class of medication in the United States (\$16 billion in 2010); a major reason for this is that many children receiving antipsychotic drugs have nonpsychotic diagnoses such as ODD or some other disruptive disorder; this especially true of Medicaid-covered pediatric patients.

3. Schools That Educate for Compliance, Not Democracy

Upon accepting the New York City Teacher of the Year Award on January 31, 1990, John Taylor Gatto upset many in attendance by stating:

“The truth is that schools don’t really teach anything except how to obey orders. This is a great mystery to me because thousands of humane, caring people work in schools as teachers and aides and administrators, but the abstract logic of the institution overwhelms their individual contributions.”

A generation ago, the problem of compulsory schooling as a vehicle for an authoritarian society was widely discussed, but while this problem has gotten worse, it is now seldom discussed.

The nature of most classrooms, regardless of the subject matter, socializes students to be passive and directed by others, to follow orders, to take seriously the rewards and punishments of authorities, to pretend to care about things they don’t care about, and that they are impotent to affect their situation. A teacher can lecture about democracy, but schools are essentially undemocratic places, and so democracy is not what is instilled in students. School breaks us from courageous actions, teaches us a kind of inert concern in which caring—in and of itself and without risking the consequences of actual action—is considered ethical. School teaches us that we are moral and mature if we politely assert our concerns, but the essence of school—its demand for compliance—teaches us not to act in a friction-causing manner.

4. “No Child Left Behind” and “Race to the Top”

The corporatocracy has figured out a way to make our already authoritarian schools even more authoritarian. Democrat-Republican bipartisanship has resulted in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, NAFTA, the PATRIOT Act, the War on Drugs, the Wall Street bailout, and educational policies such as “No Child Left Behind” and “Race to the Top.” These policies are essentially standardized-testing tyranny that creates fear, which is antithetical to education for a democratic society. Fear forces students and teachers to constantly focus on the demands of test creators; it crushes curiosity, critical thinking, questioning authority, and challenging and resisting illegitimate authority.

In a more democratic and less authoritarian society, one would evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher not by corporatocracy-sanctioned standardized tests but by asking students, parents, and a community if a teacher is inspiring students to be more curious, to read more, to learn independently, to enjoy thinking critically, to question authorities, and to challenge illegitimate authorities. Not whether they met some arbitrarily set curriculum standards created for use across entire states, regions, or nations by people with no personal knowledge or experience with the actual students in those classrooms subjected to their technocratic tinkering.

5. **Shaming Young People Who Take Education—But Not Their Schooling—Seriously**

In a 2006 survey in the United States, it was found that 40 percent of children between first and third grade read every day, but by fourth grade, that rate declined to 29 percent. Despite the anti-educational impact of standard schools, children and their parents are increasingly propagandized to believe that disliking school means disliking learning. That was not always the case in the United States. Mark Twain famously said:

“I never let my schooling get in the way of my education.”

Toward the end of Twain’s life in 1900, only six percent of Americans graduated high school. Today, approximately 85 percent of Americans graduate high school, but this wasn’t good enough for Barack Obama who told us in 2009:

“And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not just quitting on yourself, it’s quitting on your country.”

This coming from the guy who when given the opportunity, handed the country back to the bankers who had just ruined tens of millions of people’s lives.

The more schooling Americans get, however, the more politically ignorant they are of America’s ongoing class war, and the more incapable they are of challenging the ruling class. In the 1880s and 1890s, American farmers with little or no schooling created a Populist movement that organized America’s largest-scale working people’s cooperative, formed a People’s Party that received eight percent of the vote in 1892 presidential election, designed a “subtreasury” plan (that had it been

implemented would have allowed easier credit for farmers and broke the power of large banks) and sent 40,000 lecturers across America to articulate it, and evidenced all kinds of sophisticated political ideas, strategies, and tactics absent today from America's well-schooled population. Today, Americans who lack college degrees are increasingly shamed as "losers"; however, Gore Vidal and George Carlin, two of America's most astute and articulate critics of the corporatocracy, never went to college, and Carlin dropped out of school in the ninth grade.

6. The Normalization of Surveillance

The fear of being surveilled makes a population easier to control. While the National Security Agency (NSA) has received publicity for monitoring American citizens' email and phone conversations, and while employer surveillance has become increasingly common in the United States, young Americans have become increasingly acquiescent to corporatocracy surveillance because, beginning at a young age, surveillance is routine in their lives. Parents routinely check Web sites for their kid's latest test grades and completed assignments, and just like employers, are monitoring their children's computers and Facebook pages. Some parents use the GPS in their children's cell phones to track their whereabouts, and other parents have video cameras in their homes. Increasingly, I talk with young people who lack the confidence that they can even pull off a party when their parents are out of town, and so how much confidence are they going to have about pulling off a democratic movement below the radar of authorities?

7. Television

In 2009, the Nielsen Company reported that TV viewing in the United States is at an all-time high if one includes the "three screens"—a television set, a laptop/personal computer, and a cell phone. American children average eight hours a day on TV, video games, movies, the Internet, cell phones, iPods, and other technologies (not including school-related use). Many progressives are concerned about the concentrated control of content by the corporate media, but the mere act of watching TV—regardless of the programming—is the primary pacifying agent. Private-enterprise prisons have recognized that providing inmates with cable television can be a more economical method to keep them quiet and subdued than it would be to hire more guards.

Television is a dream come true for an authoritarian society: those with the most money own most of what people see; fear-based television

programming makes people more afraid and distrustful of one another, which is good for the ruling elite who depend on a 'divide and conquer' strategy; TV isolates people so they are not joining together to create resistance to authorities; and regardless of the programming, TV viewers' brainwaves slow down, transforming them closer to a hypnotic state that makes it difficult to think critically. TV also shows you things to consume: look at them having fun at that cafe, or wow what a beautiful place to vacation, or hey look at those two sexy people fucking, or wow that kitchen is amazing, or hey look at that gadget. TV tells you how to be: oh wow, that guy embarrassed himself and now things are going horrible, or lonely people are dangerous, or only losers stay home on the weekend.

While playing a video games is not as zombifying as passively viewing TV, such games have become for many boys and young men their only experience of potency, and this 'virtual potency' is certainly no threat to the ruling elite. Time spent increasing the power of pixels is time not spent thinking about how to end this unjust system.

8. Fundamentalist Religion and Fundamentalist Consumerism

American culture offers young Americans the 'choices' of fundamentalist religion and fundamentalist consumerism. All varieties of fundamentalism narrow one's focus and inhibit critical thinking. While some progressives are fond of calling fundamentalist religion the "opiate of the masses," they too often neglect the pacifying nature of America's other major fundamentalism. Fundamentalist consumerism pacifies young Americans in a variety of ways. Fundamentalist consumerism destroys self-reliance, creating people who feel completely dependent on others and who are thus more likely to turn over decision-making power to authorities, the precise mind-set that the ruling elite loves to see. A fundamentalist consumer culture legitimizes advertising, propaganda, and all kinds of manipulations, including lies; and when a society gives legitimacy to lies and manipulateness, it destroys the capacity of people to trust one another and form democratic movements. Fundamentalist consumerism also promotes self-absorption, which makes it difficult for the solidarity necessary for democratic movements.

These are not the only aspects of our culture that are subduing young Americans and crushing their resistance to domination. The food-industrial complex has helped create an epidemic of childhood obesity, depression, and passivity. The prison-industrial complex keeps young anti-authoritarians

‘in line.’ Recall the two Pennsylvania judges who took \$2.6 million from private-industry prisons to ensure that juveniles were incarcerated.

“All our things are right and wrong together. The wave of evil washes all our institutions alike.”

The only prominent youth movements in the US are those slick NGO-backed and social-media-marketed ones. The Greta Thunberg climate crusade being the most notable one at the time of this writing. These movements do nothing but herd what should be the most radical population into safe, corporate-friendly outlets. It’s the evil oil companies and their bought politicians who have hurt the environment you love, not your friends at Starbucks, look, we sell reusable cups! And OMG fam, totally check out Kylie Jenner’s—that’s the “self-made” billionaire one and not the could-play-for-the-WNBA one, right?—new artisan vegan fair-trade makeup.

Anti-authoritarians often cannot stop authoritarians from assaulting them, but some anti-authoritarians compound this assault with a self-inflicted one. Overwhelmed by pain, there are many anti-authoritarians—famous and non-famous—who have hurt themselves, hurt others,

Anti-authoritarians, by their nature, do not take seriously authorities’ admonitions, as they often see through hypocrisy; and US authorities have historically manifested a great deal of hypocrisy around drugs (for example, the revolving door of psychiatric drugs becoming illegal ones, and vice versa). Anti-authoritarians’ disregard for alcohol and drug consequences may not, early on, be costly for them, and this can further diminish their caution and result in a tragic irony: self-created dependency on a nonhuman illegitimate authority—specifically, a chemical substance.

Another common theme among self-destructive anti-authoritarians is a deterioration toward self-absorption. An obsession with one’s moods can result in feeling even more overwhelmed by pain, which fuels compulsive unwise actions. A sense of humor is vital for anti-authoritarian survival and joy, and, when self-absorption displaces their sense of humor, anti-authoritarians find it painful to be with themselves—and so too do others, which, in a vicious cycle, makes anti-authoritarians even more self-loathing, which creates more pain and makes anti-authoritarians more vulnerable to unwise actions. This lack of self-care can include a lack of attention to physical health and personal finances, along with unwise relationships with abusive and exploitative people. Relationships are critical. If an anti-authoritarian lacks anyone they trust, they are highly vulnerable to unwise actions fueled by their pain. And if they trust untrustworthy people, that too can result in self-destructive behaviors.

In the 1770s, Paine's *Common Sense* helped spark the American Revolution and his *American Crisis* helped keep George Washington's troops from quitting on him. In the 1960s, no one could be counted on more than Phil Ochs to perform at an anti-war rally and supply energy for the anti-war movement. Ochs's performance of his song "I Ain't Marching Anymore" during a protest concert outside the 1968 Democratic National Convention inspired many young men to burn their draft cards. As a teenager, what I loved most about Ochs was how he confronted the liars and hypocrites who had created misery for my generation. Ochs's humor was far more energizing for me than the tired rants of his anti-war contemporaries. Even though liberals were a large part of his audience, Ochs also made fun of hypocrites on the Left, most famously in his song "Love Me, I'm a Liberal."

I cried when they shot Medgar Evers
Tears ran down my spine
And I cried when they shot Mr. Kennedy
As though I'd lost a father of mine
But Malcolm X got what was coming
He got what he asked for this time
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

I go to civil rights rallies
And I put down the old DAR
I love Harry and Sidney and Sammy
I hope every colored boy becomes a star
But don't talk about revolution
That's going a little bit too far
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

I cheered when Humphrey was chosen
My faith in the system restored
I'm glad that the commies were thrown out
Of the AFL-CIO board
I love Puerto Ricans and Negros
As long as they don't move next door
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

The people of old Mississippi
Should all hang their heads in shame
Now, I can't understand how their minds work
What's the matter don't they watch Les Crain?

But if you ask me to bus my children
I hope the cops take down your name
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

Yes, I read *New Republic* and *Nation*
I've learned to take every view
You know, I've memorized Lerner and Golden
I feel like I'm almost a Jew
But when it comes to times like Korea
There's no one more red, white, and blue
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

I vote for the Democratic party
They want the UN to be strong
I go to all the Pete Seeger concerts
He sure gets me singing those songs
And I'll send all the money you ask for
But don't ask me to come on along
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

Sure, once I was young and impulsive
I wore every conceivable pin
Even went to socialist meetings
Learned all the old union hymns
Ah, but I've grown older and wiser
And that's why I'm turning you in
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

Nowadays of course, liberals have changed, and yet they haven't. Perhaps the best illustration would be the acts of 'resistance' to Trump and today's Republicans by well-off liberals. Taylor Swift for instance, in her latest documentary nervously chatting with her publicist, over wine in a giant house, about whether or not to post to Instagram supporting two Democratic candidates. We salute you Taylor for taking such a risk to your life, you truly are brave—I mean you only have millions of dollars as a safety net if it all goes wrong! Or perhaps you would prefer the incident shortly after, where she is complaining that men do not take women seriously, and then cut to her in a skintight sparkling dress that barely covers her crotch remarking on how great she looks, and her little entourage cooing, "So sexy." You do realize that pushing your tits up and out on full display since you were sixteen is not feminism right? It's just doing precisely what the evil patriarchy wants

you to do: give them something nice to look at—and in America nothing is sexier than an underage, post-pubescent girl. Yet they have an absolute fanatic hatred towards pedophiles—project much? And no this isn't "slut shaming," simply that if you turn yourself into a display of sex symbols don't be surprised when no one takes you seriously—happens if you've got a dick too. Channing Tatum? Dumb as a rock. Sylvester Stallone? Idiot meathead. Or maybe the best illustration of the modern liberal via Taylor is simply the many incidents of her crying over some ridiculous thing—yes, yes, you poor multi-millionaire, life is quite hard.

What made Phil especially endearing was that he reserved some of his most pointed barbs for himself. In his songs and his quips, Phil Ochs modeled a hugely important trait for anti-authoritarians: maintaining a sense of humor and not taking oneself too seriously. However, at the end of his life, Ochs modeled the opposite trait: an anti-authoritarian who loses his sense of humor, becomes self-absorbed, and ends up in a dark place. Because his rise and fall came during my most impressionable years, Phil Ochs's life served as both an inspiring model and a cautionary tale for me. I remember as a teenager listening repeatedly to "When I'm Gone," his song about the value of staying alive despite the pain of life. As beautiful and life-affirming as that song is, I recall wondering whether he might commit suicide. It was clear to me that he was a fragile guy trying his best not to be defeated by life's pains. Ochs's songs were therapy for many of us fragile teenagers, inspiring us to have the courage to face life. However, Ochs himself ultimately succumbed to his overwhelming pains.

Overwhelming pain is also common among those anti-authoritarians whose violent actions have hurt others. Overwhelmed by the pain of societal injustices and their own personal humiliations and powerlessness, they can be in danger of acting compulsively and reactively rather than wisely choosing actions that can best liberate themselves and others. Violent actions fueled by rage are often not well thought out actions, especially with regard to the ultimate consequences for others. Anti-authoritarians who move to violence are in many cases quite willing to die. While they may sincerely believe that they are willing to die for their cause, some are unaware of their need to be perceived as courageous by others. This lack of awareness skews their judgment as to the likely consequences of their violence. For many violent anti-authoritarians, a need for life's pleasures signifies weakness and an inadequate loyalty to the cause. However, the absence of pleasure in their lives can make their pains even more excruciating, driving them to compulsive actions. Among this group of violent anti-authoritarians, anger over societal and personal injustice is often quite justifiable, and their experience of powerlessness to produce justice for society and themselves is

often quite painful.

Alexander Berkman was one of the most famous anarchists in US history. He is most remembered for his failed attempt to assassinate Carnegie Steel Company manager Henry Clay Frick during the Homestead, Pennsylvania, steelworkers' strike in 1892. His *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* provides us with his justifications and motivations. Unlike others who have turned to violence, Berkman cannot so easily be dismissed as unstable or "mentally ill," as he was admired for his integrity even by those outside the anarchist movement. And while Berkman gained fame for one act of violence, he also undertook life-saving actions.

In 1892, Alexander Berkman, at age 21, became a household name in the United States for his failed assassination attempt of Henry Clay Frick. Berkman later recounted the arousing of his passion and his justification for attempting to kill Frick. He tells us how Emma Goldman—protecting her identity, he refers to her as "the Girl"—a year older than him, waves a newspaper and cries out:

"Have you read it? Homestead. Strikers shot. Pinkertons have killed women and children."

Berkman tells us:

"Goldman's words ring like the cry of a wounded animal, the melodious voice tinged with the harshness of bitterness—the bitterness of helpless agony."

Berkman recounts his contempt for the hypocrisy of the "philanthropist" Andrew Carnegie, who had chosen Frick to manage his company for the purpose of crushing the labor union. For Berkman, Frick is not simply an illegitimate authority, but evil in "his secret military preparations the fortification of the Homestead steelworks; the erection of a high board fence, capped by barbed wire and provided with loopholes for sharpshooters; the hiring of an army of Pinkerton thugs." Recounting his justification for killing Frick, Berkman concludes:

"The removal of a tyrant is not merely justifiable; it is the highest duty of every true revolutionist. Human life is, indeed, sacred and inviolate. But the killing of a tyrant, of an enemy of the People, is in no way to be considered as the taking of a life. A revolutionist would rather perish a thousand times than be guilty of what is ordinarily called murder. In truth, murder and Attentat [a political deed of violence to awaken the consciousness

of the people against their oppressors] are to me opposite terms. To remove a tyrant is an act of liberation, the giving of life and opportunity to an oppressed people.”

Berkman felt that he had thought through the consequences of his action, believing his act would help his cause of anarchism. He believed that the value of his action “very much depends upon my explanation” which “offers me a rare opportunity for a broader agitation of our ideas.” For Berkman, “the People” misunderstood the cause of anarchism because they had been prejudiced by the capitalist press.

“They must be enlightened; that is our glorious task.”

At his trial, Berkman refused a lawyer and instead wrote a speech in German because his English was then still poor. He read it to the court, which used a German translator who was incompetent, and the judge cut Berkman off before he was done. And so Berkman’s statement thus failed to enlighten the public.

Acts of violence against US authorities fail because most Americans accept the idea that the United States is a uniquely free society. Violence has been used again and again to support the structure of authority in American society. We are only puzzled when violence is used to attack that structure.

To attempt to kill Frick, Berkman stripped Frick of his humanity.

“Berkman turned him into an object, a symbol of the repressive forces of capitalism. It is not Frick, the man, but Frick, the symbol, there before Berkman. Berkman must do the same to himself. He must deny his own humanity, his own feeling, and turn himself into an instrument of a cause, a symbol of a revolutionary ideology.”

After gunning down McKinley, Czolgosz was coherent and offered a clear rationale for his action:

“I know other men who believe what I do, that it would be a good thing to kill the President and to have no rulers. I have heard that at the meetings in public halls. Emma Goldman was the last one I heard. She said she did not believe in government nor in rulers. I don’t believe in voting, it is against my principles. I am an anarchist. I don’t believe in marriage. I believe in free love. I fully understood what I was doing when I shot the

President. I realized that I was sacrificing my life. I am willing to take the consequences.

I killed the President because he was the enemy of the good people—the good working people.”

While Czolgosz, to the extent he is written about at all, is dismissed as a pathetic nut with nothing to teach us, Ted Kaczynski is well known, but few see his life as having anything to teach, viewing him only as terrifyingly insane. Kaczynski, who came to be known as the Unabomber, is one of the most violent anti-authoritarians in US history. Between 1978 and 1995, Kaczynski’s bombs killed three people and injured 23 others. While some of his victims had positions of power in his hated “industrial society,” others did not.

Once Ted Kaczynski was brought to trial, in order to save him from the death penalty, his brother David and their mother Wanda helped portray Ted as being seriously mentally ill, which enraged Ted against them as he knew that his political reasons for the bombings would now not be taken seriously. Much of what the world heard about Kaczynski’s mental status was not true. Kaczynski was psychopathologized for two reasons: the concerns of his family, who wanted to spare him the death penalty; and to meet the needs of societal authorities who wanted to dismiss his societal critiques. Kaczynski is neither the extreme loner he has been made out to be nor in any clinical sense mentally ill.

In Kaczynski’s sophomore year at Harvard, he fell victim to a disturbingly abusive experiment by one of the most renowned figures in the history of US psychology, Henry Murray. Experimental subjects were told they would be debating personal philosophy with a fellow student; but instead, they were subjected to abusive personal attacks that were purposely brutalizing. Kaczynski and other subjects were instructed to write an essay detailing their personal beliefs and aspirations, and the essay was given to an attorney who would belittle them based on the disclosures they had made. This humiliation was filmed, and played back to the subjects. Thus, Kaczynski had personal reasons for rage and for distrust of the elites who managed society. Kaczynski began his 1995 manifesto this way:

“The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race.”

He then discussed how the increasing growth and worship of technological and industrial systems have subverted individual freedom and destroyed our natural environment.

Politics—not science—dictated that Ted Kaczynski be labeled insane. Against Kaczynski's wishes, his defense attorneys launched a "mental illness" defense for him. Defense expert psychologist Karen Bronk Froming concluded that Kaczynski exhibited a "predisposition to schizophrenia," citing his anti-technology views as having cemented her conclusion. Sally Johnson, a forensic psychiatrist with the US Bureau of Prisons, provisionally diagnosed Kaczynski with "Paranoid Type" schizophrenia, largely based on her view that he harbored "delusional beliefs" about the threats posed by technology. In addition to Kaczynski's views on technology, other so-called "evidence" for his mental illness included his personal habits and unkempt appearance living alone in a cabin in Montana. But his cabin was no messier than the offices of many college professors. The Montana wilds are filled with escapists like Kaczynski. Celibacy and misanthropy are not diseases. Nor was Kaczynski really so much of a recluse.

When overwhelmed by pain, some people consider and/or attempt suicide. However it is unhelpful to view feeling suicidal as a consequence of mental illness. If being suicidal is viewed as a symptom of mental illness then talking about your suicidal feelings runs the very real risk of finding yourself being judged, locked up, and drugged. So, many critically-thinking suicidal anti-authoritarians don't reach out. Society stigmatizes mental illness, so how can one expect a person overwhelmed by emotional pain not to self-stigmatize once they've been labeled as mentally ill? And this stigma creates more pain and hopelessness. In contrast, what is helpful for many anti-authoritarians is validation that their pain is evidence of their soul and their humanity. Overwhelming pain—be it financial, physical, relationship, school, other incarcerations, or from other sources—is the fuel of depression.

In our moneyed society, financial pains can be lethal, and were especially so for Lenny Bruce, Alexander Berkman, and also many non-famous anti-authoritarians who I've known. In our economic system, it is difficult to make a living doing what one believes in, and young anti-authoritarians are often tough on themselves in this regard, adding more pain to their lives. Many anti-authoritarians today often have little choice but low-wage slavery. One can try to escape, but sometimes that's difficult. If life circumstances such as an ailing parent or child-custody requirements keep one stuck in a small town where the only employer is a prison, self-flagellation does no one any good; being the kindest prison guard possible does do some good. And if one is mired in student-loan debt and the only survival option is being a teacher in an authoritarian school, one can try to get some satisfaction by perhaps not forcing students to raise their hands to take a dump.

In our economic system, few of us are not prostituting ourselves to some extent, and so, for those unskilled at denial of this reality, the only real

antidote to this pain is a sense of humor.

A key to overcoming immobilizing depression is to take seriously something besides one's depression, one's mood, and oneself. If, unlike Thomas Paine, one lacks the energy to start a couple of revolutions but is passionate about politics, it is still possible to hang out with like-minded people—an instant antidepressant for Emma Goldman.

While there are certainly societies less free than the United States, what makes life difficult for US anti-authoritarians are the mixed messages that they receive. From the Declaration of Independence, to the Bill of Rights, to the Statue of Liberty the United States gives the appearance of welcoming those who resist illegitimate authority. Moreover, the United States is a place where immigrant anti-authoritarians such as Thomas Paine and Emma Goldman became celebrities. However, when anti-authoritarian resistance truly threatens powerful US authoritarians, the rug is pulled out—often violently so. Some US anti-authoritarians have been punished with prison and deportation for merely exercising their First Amendment right of “free speech.” However, US anti-authoritarians are not routinely marginalized in these ways. Authoritarians need only ensure that anti-authoritarians not be heard in order to marginalize them. Scott Nearing, indicted by the US government for stating his beliefs, was luckily not convicted in his 1919 trial but was by other means effectively marginalized. He wrote in 1972 that for the past half-century:

“I have had the ‘right’ to speak, write, print, publish, but my words dropped into a deep well of oblivion. I have the ‘right’ to teach, but no university or school in the country would accept me. I could speak, but few public forums would allow me on their platforms. I could write, but my books were not published by recognized firms, nor were they reviewed in magazines or papers or stocked in book stores.”

Many anti-authoritarians resonate with Nearing's anger over being disregarded and discarded. Authoritarians realize that simply ignoring opposition is often an effective way to marginalize it, whether that opposition comes from the voice of a single anti-authoritarian or the majority of the people. A 2014 study empirically established how average US citizens are almost completely ignored by US governmental authorities in terms of public policies. Reviewing US public opinions of policy issues, along with examining 1,779 different enacted public policies between 1981 and 2002, researchers determined that “even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it.” They conclude:

“The central point that emerges from our research is that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on US government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence.”

When dissent—be it through public opinion polls, protest demonstrations, or otherwise—becomes impotent in changing policy, this is an indicator of living under authoritarian rule. If a society is not authoritarian, then the tension that dissent creates is resolved so that dissenters experience their grievances being taken seriously, as evidenced by policy changes. In an authoritarian society, dissenters—even when in the majority—routinely feel impotent and helpless. Dissent without disobedience is essentially no threat to authoritarians in power. Clever authoritarians welcome dissent without disobedience, since it can be easily ignored and provides the illusion of a free and democratic society. Only disobedience can threaten authoritarians. If anti-authoritarian voices prove difficult to ignore, authoritarians will resort to overt assaults. For such assaults, authoritarians will often rely on the work of ‘professional authorities,’ including the legal system to criminalize disobedience; mental health professionals to pathologize anti-authoritarian behavior; and teachers and the media, who label disobedience as immature. It is no wonder that people who disobey illegitimate authority often feel such intense anger.

Anti-authoritarians cannot be understood if we deny, water down, or pathologize their anger. This anger may be a result of their dissent being ignored. Or it may be a result of overt assaults on them for challenging and resisting illegitimate authority. Or it may be caused by witnessing such assaults on their anti-authoritarian friends. Or their anger may come from resentment over being forced into constant vigilance against authoritarian assault. The manner in which anti-authoritarians deal with their anger—and how others who care about them deal with it—is critical to tragedy or triumph. Contempt for coercion and tolerance for eccentricity are the norms in the anti-authoritarian groups that I have studied and among those with which I have personally been involved. I have found striking similarities between the individual personalities within these groups: Thoreau and his Concord buddies in the 1840s and 1850s; New York City anarchists living between 1880 and 1918; and modern so-called “psychiatric survivors.” Today, anti-authoritarians with unconventional behaviors who create tension are often marginalized as mentally ill. That makes these modern anti-authoritarians especially angry, so angry that they are likely to create even more tension for others.

Recall that Stanley Milgram, reporting on his research about obedience to authority, concluded that our “fatal flaw” is our capacity to abandon our humanity so as to comply with abusive authority. Those human beings least afflicted with that flaw have, sadly, been marginalized in US society—including psychiatrically marginalized. Among the most honored members of modern US society are “first responders” to disasters, including natural disasters such as hurricanes and human-made ones such as mass shootings. Anti-authoritarians are also first responders to disasters. They are the first to question, challenge, and resist illegitimate authority. While US society has honored some famous anti-authoritarians long after they are dead, these figures have often been marginalized in their own lifetimes. Throughout US history, anti-authoritarians have usually been able to rely only on each other for mutual aid. If this mutual caring diminishes, their triumphs will also diminish. So, while anti-authoritarians need no badges, they do need one another.

Becoming radicalized in a small town by yourself, seemingly in the “middle of nowhere,” can often be one of the most difficult experiences you may ever encounter. But even harder than the feeling of being adrift can be the desperation of not knowing how to go about attempting to make the leap from being just an individual with a set of ideas to someone that is part of a movement and specifically, a group of people who are organized in a set area, acting in concert, with that movement. In today’s age, where the internet has taken up more and more of what social movements and struggles are based around, the need to have a presence on the streets and in our neighborhoods, is now greater than ever.

Before you begin to form a group—in this context, group is going to refer to everything from an organization, a project, a crew, to any sort of collective attempt at doing something—it’s good to keep a few things in mind, and also to look around your general region for different examples of ways to organize, how to intervene, and things that other groups are doing, building, and working on.

First, it’s always good to go back and read and study the history of your region. Who were the original people that lived on the land that you now live on? How did they respond and fight back against colonization? Are their descendants still in the local area? What is the history of past movements, from labor to civil rights to the fight against the war in Vietnam? Are there examples of riots, strikes, and occupations that shaped your town? How have people historically responded to the police, to pollution, environmental racism, and ecological destruction? The results of a few internet searches, calls to local union halls, and trips to the library, may surprise you.

Second, it’s probably worth it to check out the groups that are in your

town and also general region. If there's a university and junior college, see what is happening on campus. Are there groups of people putting on film showings and discussions in town? Are there hold overs from past movements still meeting? This goes for reactionary and far-Right forces as well; as their presence will of course impact your ability to organize. Looking into what is happening in towns around you may also be worth your while. For instance, finding a group of people in a town 45 minutes away might not lead you to find a group of people you might organize with, but it might give you an idea of what people in a somewhat similar context are doing in their own location. The point in doing all of this background research is to see if there are other people out there that like you are looking for something else.

Third, it's good to have an understanding of your local context and what the primary tensions and contradictions are within daily life of the general area that you inhabit. This can change, neighborhood to neighborhood, but in general you need to know who holds wealth and power in your area, what their interests are, and how they are attempting to shape and control the area around them. You also need to map out how this is causing tensions to arise; and how people, if at all, are responding.

This can mean everything from gentrification and police sweeps of the homeless to the closing of schools and manufacturing plants to pipeline projects and simply generational abject poverty. Reading the local news daily, while understanding its real limits, will also help in this regard. Chances are, you already know that your town has a history of being polluted by the XYZ plant, that the opioid crisis has ravaged the region, or that the biggest issue is lack of affordable housing, et cetera. The reason that you need to think strategically about these realities is that by doing so this can and will inform how you may be able to respond to them.

A big mistake that some people new to organizing make is that they simply try and jump into what group they most closely associate with; often networks and organizations that are already established across the US. This means that folks often with no experience suddenly set up IWW chapters when they have no history of actual labor organizing, and often times, just sit around in meetings until after six to twelve months, the project folds. This isn't to say that you shouldn't start an IWW, Redneck Revolt, Earth First!, or Anarchist Black Cross group, but only to point out that as you find people and begin to get organized, the work you end up doing may be completely different than the original project that you had in mind. Also, there's nothing stopping you from later on incorporating aspects of these other groups into your organizing: from letter writing nights, to labor organizing, to learning how to use firearms properly.

Final point, the biggest pothole that many new people get stuck in is that of social media. In short, setting up an account won't magically make a real life group appear. And while running a Facebook page for "XYZ Town of Anarchists" might be a great way to meet some people, if all you do is share memes and links about things happening elsewhere, as opposed to going out and starting projects and organizing, then what's the point? If you set up accounts, use them to boost what you are doing and to hopefully find new people, but don't mistake a page for actually being organized.

If we are operating from the idea that you are essentially alone in the project of building a group of people you can begin to organize with and take action alongside, then you're going to have to work at finding like-minded folks—and trust us, they are out there. Rest assured, people are out there, and generally they are just as isolated, alienated, and looking to connect with other people as you are. So then, you'll need to think of ways of creating opportunities for you and potential comrades to meet. In general, here are some ideas:

Organize A Low Key Event: One of the easiest things to pull off in order to test the waters of your local area is to organize an event to see if curious and like minded people show up. One of the simplest events you can organize is to host a film screening. If you're looking for a place to hold a screening in order to avoid bad weather, generally places like public libraries are cheap to rent out and easy to set up. If weather permits, you might want to do it outside in a public park, just make sure to figure out a screen, sound, and power before hand. Also, make sure that you put a lot into actually promoting the event. Make flyers and do a social media campaign. Make sure you get the word out in all the different working class neighborhoods in your general area. Put up flyers at schools, corner stores, health food stores, smoke shops, at the library, barbershops, tattoo parlors, coffee shops, et cetera.

Table With Literature: Tabling is a time tested way to meet other folks face to face. What you'll need is a table and also literature. Look around at different online distros for stuff to print out and get creative. Hell, print out this book if you like—this fat bitch sitting on your table is a surefire attention-getter. Choose places to table with high foot traffic such as flea markets, college campuses, music events and shows, farmer's markets, busy Downtown areas, and beyond. Then there's also places such as the DMV or the Food Stamps office where large amounts of people are stuck at all day, often looking for something to read. Carry around an email sign up sheet with you and add people to a mailing list as you go.

Host a Skillshare: If hosting a film screening or tabling with literature isn't your idea of a good way to meet potential comrades, you might also consider hosting something less overtly political and more based around sharing a skill, such as photography or learning how to grow your own food. Events like this appeal to a wide variety of people and often are very popular.

Create A Publication/Broad Sheet/Poster Campaign: If you are looking to do something different that may take a while to build, you may want to go the publishing route. Creating a local magazine or broadsheet that presents an analysis and critique of the local news is one idea. You could also simply do a one-off broad sheet, (11" by 17" double sided print) or even just put up posters that include a contact email. By setting up a network of free boxes you can increase your distribution range, while also dropping off copies at places like the library or at liquor stores.

Start a Reading Group: Reading groups offer a way to bring together people interested in radical ideas with people already well versed in them in a low key environment that lets people get to know each other and build relationships. The idea behind them is fairly simple: to read a text and then discuss it as a group. People may also find it easier to read a text out loud as a group as opposed to reading it at home and then discussing it the week after, but the choice is yours.

So you've read about your town and general area's history. You understand the terrain around you and have also mapped out the key contradictions. You're up on local politics and have your ear to the ground. You've also branched out, organized a few events, and against all odds managed to meet a few people that want to do something with you. The next question is: so now what? How you answer that question will depend on the kind of group that you want to build. What follows are some general concepts to help you think about what direction you could go in.

Base Building: All good organizers should be engaging in some form of base building—the idea behind it is that you are putting work into the building of relationships with people, neighborhoods, and communities that you want to have a greater connection to. This could mean choosing to table at the local flea or farmer's market every week, organizing a cop-watch patrol of a set area against fascist activity, or simply spending a lot of time in a neighborhood making connections with people who live there.

Mutual Aid: Many groups engage in a wide variety of mutual aid projects, from providing community meals like Food Not Bombs, to organizing events like Really (Really) Free Markets, to free brake light clinics, to free grocery programs and free stores. Mutual aid projects can often be an easy thing to engage in within your wider community, as they are a ‘positive’ activity and generally will win you the support and respect of those around you. They also are very labor intensive and very quickly you will discover who is actually down to put in work, and who isn’t. At their heart, mutual aid programs can address real needs and problems directly while also creating a project that is easily accessible for new comers.

Organizing: Organizing of course is a broad term, but essentially we are referring to initiatives in which people build up a material force which can collectively engage in class combat; to assert working class interests in the face of capital and State authority. Examples of this include tenants unions and associations, fighting pipeline and fossil fuel infrastructure, workplace organizing, and solidarity networks.

Intervention: To speak of intervention means the process in which we insert ourselves in wider tensions already happening all around us. This means analyzing and understanding our local context, and then thinking strategically about how one could intervene within it to deepen one’s own position. This could mean everything from poster and banner campaigns in the wake of sweeps against the homeless that seek to gentrify a Downtown corridor, to mobilizing free groceries for striking workers to offer in solidarity.

Infrastructure: Lastly, there is the question of how to sustain this activity? The answer lies largely in the creation of autonomous infrastructure. This could mean the building up of land projects and cooperative housing, to the purchasing of copy machines and printing presses; essentially everything that we need to strengthen ourselves as a material force.

You’ve come a long way. From someone with big ideas to part of a fighting community. The question now is—what’s next? What’s next is that you make connections and relationships with more people in your general region and begin the process of networking and federating together, becoming stronger as a regional force.

Every year in the United States, the toppling of the illegitimate British regime is celebrated on the 4th of July and most of us assume this was

a basically good and necessary act. The irony of celebrating the rebels' disobedience to their government by reciting pledges to obey the flag of another seems to be entirely lost. Of course, rebellion still has its place in the USA—during the so-called “Arab Spring,” US media commentators and politicians applauded the revolts of several Muslim countries and the dubiously-labeled Syrian rebels were cast in a mostly positive light. But not all revolutions are televised equally. In 1945 and '56, for example, uprisings led by Vietnamese and Cuban communists were mostly frowned upon by US media-outlets, while the 1990's Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico was mostly ignored. Why? There are historical, political, and ideological answers, of course—but that is not what this is about. I am after a scarier answer to the scarier question beneath those—that is, when is it OK to overthrow your government?

“... whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of [the People's Rights], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government. . . .”

That is the question—when are revolutions necessary? What is an acceptable reason to revolt? Asking these questions can be uncomfortable and even dangerous—but not asking them is more dangerous. Turning the pages of history, we can clearly see that some revolts were needed and that others did more harm than good. The mass rebellion against European monarchies ended the age of absolute rulers and instituted the more-restrained authority of written law in their place—probably for the best. Other acts of revolt—like the fascist overthrow of Spain's Republic in the 1930s—obviously did not work out so well for most of the people involved. During some chapters of history, a solid revolt would've been great but, for whatever reason, just didn't happen. A bit before the Nazi regime in Germany started murdering everyone, for example, might've been fantastic timing for a bit of regime-change.

Whether fruitful or catastrophic, each revolution has split and sculpted the branches of civilization in astonishing ways and—right or wrong—our choices to revolt or not are certain to continue shaping the future of our history. If so many of our possible futures hinge on the sum of our answers, isn't it irresponsible not to ask the question?

An adult catches a child by the arm to restrain them because they are about to run directly in front of an oncoming bus—that is an example of legitimate authority. Everyone knows that kids do not have authority to run into traffic and most people would use the legitimate authority to enforce it, even if the child is not their own. Its legitimacy is based on a nearly universal

consent to actions that prevent harm. Even the legal system recognizes this legitimacy—it's called the "choice of evils." Breaking into a burning house to save a person trapped inside will not get you convicted of burglary because society consents to your authority to enter, regardless of the law.

Even if society allows anyone to forcibly control a child stepping into traffic, it does not mean we always consent to controlling their movement. If a kid was under forcible control often, it's usually seen as child-abuse and, in extreme cases, society gives an agency authority to remove them from harm. While kids tend to get fewer rights—which, in this writer's opinion, is silly—we all recognize their autonomy over their own bodies. Even younglings have the right to move, jump, make silly faces, and get into some trouble. People in most cases don't consent to the authority to forcibly control bodies other than your own with no good reason. That would be illegitimate authority.

Since it would be silly to expect everyone who is restrained to prove they are not, in fact, a child running in front of a bus, it is the responsibility of the one using the authority to justify it. Since restraining people is usually not OK, the one restraining them must either be able to prove the authority is legitimate or be willing to accept the consequence for their action. The badge carried by police was originally meant to be evidence that a community trusted an officer's legitimacy—not a symbol of their immunity to the consequences of exercising illegitimate authority, as it is in our country today.

Legitimate authority, like that used to stop kids from running into traffic, is necessary. Illegitimate authority, such as restraining a person for no reason, destroys the social bonds between us and must be dismantled. But how do we know whether more complex authorities, such as governments, are legitimate or not?

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.”

A government needs the consent of a people to claim legitimate authority over them. Since it is not possible for anyone to ask an entire population's consent by going door-to-door, methods to measure consent on a large-scale were designed, such as elections, public polling, and referendum. Of course, some are better than others but, even if we argue about which is best, there is a difference between a system which obtains consent and one which does not. At this particular moment in history, voting-based systems are the most accepted method for measuring mass-consent. All of the various democratic processes have one basic purpose—to measure how much consent is given by

a people to the authority of a state. Since consent is the basis of authority, a legitimate state does not exercise authority over people without providing evidence of mass-consent. Not everyone will agree on every issue—but an informed population using a democratic system maximizes the level of consent being given by the highest number of people. All legitimate government must ensure the governed are able to give—or withhold—their consent.

If people cannot freely give and withdraw consent, then the state's existence is an arbitrary use of authority—which is, incidentally, the dictionary definition of tyranny. Authorities that don't even pretend to seek consent are obviously disqualified. Roman-style military dictatorships and monarchy based on any variation of the “divine right-to-rule” are never legitimate. Any oligarch or autocrat can claim the masses' consent but proof is the only legitimacy. The only state which legitimately uses authority is a state with clear proofs of the masses' consent.

The mere existence of voting-booths is not proof of consent—there must be clear proof that everyone is able to use them freely and that they are satisfied with how the voting-process works. The mere existence of elections is not proof of consent—there must be clear proof that the results are true and the public must be able to verify the integrity of all results in every way. Clear proof is the only legitimate authority.

History leaves us little doubt that great harm follows tyranny as surely as its shadow. To prevent the great harm that despotism inflicts on society, the public has a right to decide against any regime that cannot or will not justify their authority with proof that the people consent to it. Unless and until the proof of consent is restored, it is the authority of the people to take revolutionary actions to dismantle their government. From the rebel Inca fighting Spanish tyranny and the self-liberation of Haitian slaves to the wave of revolt that overthrew autocracy in Europe, the authority of states is shown to be relative. Looking back to the roots of history, we do not honor or recognize authority claimed by kings and slave-drivers but we do recognize the natural authority of the slave and peasant rebellions against them because that authority is universal.

The rebels of the past lifted our species from beneath the feet of gods and emperors, broke the chains of absolute rulership, and pried the rights we have today from the grips of autocrats and oligarchs—but the human revolt is still incomplete. It's true we see fewer emperors, today—but we still have empire and militarized police-states. Just look at what they did at Standing Rock—what did the consent of our indigenous friends mean to them? Just watch what happens to whistle-blowers who inform the public about how their government uses its authority—like thieves who love the

cover of night, our rulers will never embrace transparency.

I have watched this country hold elections without an iota of transparency as candidates are bought and sold on the markets of campaign finance in broad daylight. I see unpopular leaders elected again and again by less than one-third of us, using voting-machines which produce unverifiable results with no paper-trail to audit. What consent is there when just one-tenth of us, vetted by privately-owned but publicly-funded parties choose two options which the rest of us have no choice but to choose between? Even then, two of the last three won with fewer votes than the other—but, if we dislike the system, we could simply have voted to change it, right?

How many of you are going to stand in honor of an anthem for a nation which oppresses you? And if it doesn't oppress you personally, then how can you honor a nation which oppresses your neighbor? May I write plainly or does that cross the line? Ah, too late. With these words as my only weapon—though that is unlikely to keep me from being labeled a 'terrorist' and getting an unannounced late-night visit—I say the authority of the United States government is illegitimate and struggle by its people to overthrow the regime by whatever means seems best to them is justified.

Practical Tactical

I would like to point out what this section is not: It is not an argument for or in support of any particular tactic. It is up to the individual reader to supply that, this text is simply offering tools to individuals who have decided that they have reached a point at which these tools are necessary. A book about how to build a table is not one that is supporting or demanding that all you motherfuckers build some tables. Use your head, not someone else's.

I abhor violence. It's often reckless, careless, excessive. It's usually directed at the powerless. Its effects are permanent and ripple outward. Which is why the greatest purveyors of violence must be stopped once and for all. By any means necessary—but hopefully not the worst of these.

The following chapter is designed to save lives, not take them. Why did the anti-communist nutjobs—so anti-communist that they welcomed countless Nazi war criminals into the US since Nazis would be guaranteed to hate the filthy commies—not turn the Soviet Union into radioactive glass? Because they knew Ivan could hit back, that they would get bloodied too. So instead they were forced to bully less powerful nations in proxy wars. Why does the US bomb “Iranian-backed militias” and “Iranian-supported terrorists”? Because Iran can at the very least give ole Uncle Sam a bloody nose.

A porcupine has quills for its own protection, it does not go around stabbing people for no reason. Nor do its quills, however impressive they may seem, guarantee invulnerability. They display a message, they provide a defensive shield, they can be used as a weapon, they can continue to do damage even after the porcupine perishes. They make there be a cost to an attack; violence comes with a price.

This book may seem like a weapon to some, some might even pick it up and attempt to wield it, but it also puts a price on our life, it exists, independently of us, and so it goes on without us, perhaps propelled forward by the absence of us—it creates a cost to unjust state violence directed our way. We step forward, knowing the potential cost; and the only way forward is if more of us do. The shade of this tree seems a fine one to die beneath, we shall water her roots with our blood if need be, but she will bloom once more.

Consider the following items to be shields, not swords. Once they know they are not invincible they will compromise or attempt to definitively crush you—it is always the same throughout history.

“The Rogue Wave is coming. Be prepared.”

I'd like to assure you that Plume uses only the highest-grade papers and yes, if you soak several dozen of these pages in water and let them dry together, you can sharpen the resulting mass into a fairly serviceable shank.

“This ain't no riot, brother! This is a rebellion, and we got years of reasons to tear this town apart! You don't have to be a big group to do it, brothers. In a town this size, three men can burn it down. That's what they call guerrilla warfare! Don't love him to death! Shoot him to death! You better get yourself some guns! I know who my enemy is, and I know how to kill him. When I get mad, I'm going out and look for the oppressor's shit and I'm going to collect our dues.”

Wiebo Ludwig, an evangelical Christian and his large extended family started a full-scale battle with the oil and gas industry in 1996. After plumes of sour gas, a deadly neurotoxin, trespassed on Ludwig's rural property, killing livestock and sickening members of his family, Ludwig demanded that government regulators do something. When, after five years of respectful pleading, they failed to answer his concerns, Ludwig, the son of a Dutch Resistance fighter, declared war. It started with nails left on the road and graduated to deliberately punctured tires. Next came downed trees on oil service roads. Then came the unrelenting monkey-wrenching of well sites and pipelines. Between 1996 and 1998, hundreds of remote facilities were attacked and disabled under the cover of darkness. The violence escalated to shootings, death threats, and bombings.

During the campaign, a mysterious group of saboteurs—mostly members of Ludwig's immediate family—destroyed more than \$10 million worth of industry property, much of it owned by Encana's precursor, the Alberta Energy Company. Ludwig also dumped sour crude in the offices of the provincial regulator to demonstrate the offensive nature of the product.

Every guerrilla band relies on the same cheap and devilishly effective weapon: doubt. Create enough uncertainty in your enemy and you can paralyze him. Officers will freeze when they should charge; soldiers will flinch when they should fire. To inflict damage and death on the enemy and to escape scot-free has an irritant and depressing effect. The object must be to strike hard and disappear before the enemy can strike back.

“I am capable of what every other human is capable of. This is one of the great lessons of war and life.”

—Maya Angelou

There are people who insist that they could never kill anyone, but they invariably add a telling caveat:

“Unless, of course, a person tried to harm someone I love.”

So the resource of violence is in everyone; all that changes is our view of the justification.

Predatory animals usually devour prey in order to convert flesh into fuel. Most human predators, however, seek power, not food. To destroy or damage something is to take its power. This applies equally to a political movement, a government, a campaign, a career, a marriage, a performance, a fortune, or a religion. To push a pie into the face of the world’s richest man is to take his power, if only for a moment.

When viewed as a contest between predator and prey, some human attacks look much like predation in nature: The surprise, the sudden movement, the burst of hostile energy, the jerky resistance, the wish to escape. If an animal taken by a predator could speak after the fact, he’d likely tell us:

“It all happened so fast; there wasn’t time to do anything.”

No matter how aberrant the person whose behavior you seek to predict, no matter how different from him you may be or want to be, you must find in him a part of yourself, and in yourself a part of him. When you undertake a high-stakes prediction, keep looking until you find some common ground, something you share with the person whose behavior you seek to predict—this will help you see the situation as he perceives it.

For example, the anonymous caller may seem to enjoy the fear he is causing in his victim. Getting pleasure from the fear of others is something most of us cannot relate to, until we recall the glee of every teenager who startles a friend or sibling by jumping out of the dark. Anyway, with the frightening caller, fear may not be the issue as much as liking attention, which we can relate to. When the caller causes people to feel fear, they are very attentive. It might not be his favorite way of getting attention if he perceived better options or if he felt he brought other assets to his relationship with his victim, but it has likely worked for him in the past. I don’t mean to imply that the threat caller is so introspective that he consciously considered all this, but neither is our behavior usually the result of conscious decision-making.

It is precisely because some people are not familiar with violent behavior that they feel they cannot predict it, yet they daily predict non-violent behavior and the process is identical.

The Elements of Prediction

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Measurability of Outcome</p> <p>4 – obvious, clear
3 – discoverable
1 – fluid or inconsistent
0 – not measurable, undiscov-
erable</p> | <p>7. Comparable Events</p> <p>4 – substantively comparable
1 – comparable
0 – not comparable</p> |
| <p>2. Vantage</p> <p>3 – perspective view
2 – proxy view
0 – obstructed or no view</p> | <p>8. Objectivity</p> <p>2 – believes either outcome is possible
0 – believes only one outcome or neither outcome is possible</p> |
| <p>3. Imminence</p> <p>4 – imminent
2 – foreseeable
0 – remote</p> | <p>9. Investment</p> <p>3 – invested in outcome
1 – emotionally invested in outcome
0 – uninvested in outcome</p> |
| <p>4. Context</p> <p>3 – fully revealed
0 – concealed</p> | <p>10. Replicability</p> <p>5 – easily replicable
2 – replicable by sample or proxy
0 – impractical or not replica-
ble</p> |
| <p>5. Pre-Incident Indicators</p> <p>5 – many, reliable, detectable
3 – few, reliable, detectable
0 – unreliable or undetectable</p> | <p>11. Knowledge</p> <p>2 – relevant & accurate
0 – partial or inaccurate</p> |
| <p>6. Experience</p> <p>5 – extensive with both out-
comes
3 – with both outcomes
2 – one outcome
0 – elemental, partial, or irrel-
evant</p> | |

This scale helps determine if a given prediction can be made successfully (which is distinct from whether it will be made successfully). To evaluate

a prediction, answer the eleven questions by selecting from the range of possible answers above. Then add up the total points.

22 or lower: Not reliably predictable; a matter of chance

23–27: Low likelihood of success

28–32: Predictable

32 or higher: Highly predictable

Note: The vantage question asks if the person making the prediction is in a position to observe the pre-incident indicators and context. If you can observe the situation and pre-incident indicators directly, then you have a Perspective View, but if you can only observe them through some medium (such as reports or other evidence), select Proxy View.

It is better to avoid than to run, better to run than to de-escalate, better to de-escalate than to fight, better to fight than to die.

‘No’ is a word that must never be negotiated, because the person who chooses not to hear it is trying to control you.

Avoid automobiles whenever possible; drivers are stopped and asked for identification far more than individuals using public transportation. Never drive at night; that’s when more traffic stops are made. Avoid drugs and alcohol unless in a secure environment; both impair judgment. Use end-to-end encryption whenever possible. If a phone must be used, make it a burner. Cities are generally safer than rural areas or small towns. Don’t wear clothes that are likely to draw suspicion. Once you have a name stick to it, unless you blow it and have to start again. Use only a few trustworthy contacts in different locations to channel your mail. Place your letter in an envelope, omit the return address, send it in another envelope with the address-side of the first envelope facing away from the address-side of the second envelope—new mail scanners can often see inside the envelope; sign up for a USPS Informed Delivery account and see for yourself. Avoid leaving fingerprints anywhere, wear gloves in handling letters.

Public places are good places to have private conversations as long as you don’t use trigger words such as ‘bomb’ that cause people to listen carefully.

A rubber hose wrapped with barbed wire is always a practical holiday gift for that rebel in your life.

The simplest local tools are often the most efficient means of assassination. A hammer, axe, wrench, screwdriver, fire poker, kitchen knife, lamp stand, or anything hard, heavy, and handy will suffice. Many however believe

that murder is not ethically justifiable. Persons who are morally squeamish should not attempt it.

The best sources of metal for lock-picks are ordinary objects, things you'd probably never have imagined could be transformed into something that would let you break through doorways: the underwires of bras, for example, or the inner blades of discarded windshield wipers, and, best of all, the rough brushes of street-cleaning trucks. Individual bristles are occasionally knocked loose during operation and left lying on the street. For those of you without the patience to follow a truck all day, a good place to find metal is simply in the dumpsters of auto-repair shops. Just lift up the lid, grab handfuls of old wiper blades, and be done with it.

The master tools of real-life breaking and entering are typically just everyday objects, re-imagined and transformed for criminal purposes. Consider the shockingly successful Antwerp diamond heist back in February 2003, when more than \$50 million worth of diamonds were stolen from a high-security vault in the center of that city's well-protected jewelry district. To a great extent, the extraordinary ease with which that crime was carried out came down to simple objects bought from the local hardware store. A broomstick, a brick of polystyrene, some black electrical tape, a can of hair spray: these were enough to subvert and neutralize more than a million dollars' worth of high-tech security sensors, as if a rewards shopper at Home Depot had somehow managed to rob Fort Knox.

Think, for a second, about how frustrating this would be: you install some futuristic motion detector in your underground supervault and a bunch of anonymous strangers get around it by sticking a piece of Styrofoam on the end of a broomstick; stand that up in front of a motion detector while the lights are still off and it won't see anything move for weeks. It's embarrassing. You could try to catch the bad guys using your state-of-the-art thermal camera—something space-age and intimidating—but they've got a can of hair spray. They uncap it and coat your fine-tuned electronics with a sticky film of aerosolized beauty products and render it useless. So you turn to your light sensor, something so sensitive it can pick up even the glow of an uncovered wristwatch—but your ingenious adversaries have arrived with a roll of electrical tape. They rip off a few inches, wrap it around your sensor, and all that gear is now totally obsolete. The vault is theirs to ransack. They have spent less than fifty bucks at a hardware store, yet they've caught your million-dollar setup with its pants down.

Even the building's air-conditioning system can pose a security risk, not by offering devious cat burglars a secret route through the walls but by fluttering loose paperwork left behind on someone's desk at the end of the day. Memos, receipts, and other papers, if not secured at day's end, can be

blown onto the floor by the HVAC system, setting off motion detectors and making the security team think an intruder is on the loose.

Burglary tools are effectively everywhere, hidden in plain sight—street-cleaning bristles, broomsticks, electrical tape, liquid polystyrene. In the right hands, everyday items have an unexpected secondary function, able to become something like skeleton keys with which we can gain entrance to any building or thwart the world's most sophisticated security systems. The dark promise here is that if only you can assemble the right tools in the right combination, you'll find yourself holding keys to everything around you.

This can be quite literal. A set of master keys to the infrastructure of New York City popped up on eBay back in September 2012, leaving media commentators and city officials alike concerned for the safety of the metropolis. These keys promised universal access to urban infrastructure, from subways to skyscrapers—true 'keys to the city' that should never be let out into the wild. After an undercover reporter for the New York Post purchased the set, the paper published a photograph of them captioned "What you could do: Take over the subways." The Post suggested that it was "what a terrorist might call a dream come true," feigning outrage next to their own high-resolution photograph of the key set.

Indeed, that very photo could easily have been used to duplicate the keys, and it was removed from their website shortly thereafter. The newspaper had purchased a cluster of five keys "that would allow control of virtually any elevator in the city," they explained. Among them was "the all-purpose '1620,' a master firefighter key that with one turn could trap thousands of people in a skyscraper by sending all the elevators to the lobby and out of service, according to two FDNY sources. And it works for buildings across the city. That key also allows one to open locked subway entrances, gain entry to many firehouses and get into boxes at construction jobs that house additional keys to all areas of the site. Also found on the key ring were city electrical keys that would give access to streetlights, along with the basement circuit-breaker boxes of just about any large building.

In Canada they are known as Crown keys. These are issued to Canada Post workers, used to enter and deliver mail inside multi-unit apartment buildings. Give a burglar a set of Crown keys, and you've given that burglar keys to half the city. Obtaining Crown keys is often the suspected goal whenever a Canada Post worker has been mugged.

A bump key is basically a regular, blank door key that you insert into a lock, then, as you turn it slightly with one hand, you give it a solid bump with a hammer or even with the heel of a shoe; if done correctly, this bounces all the pins up out of the cylinder, and the lock will open. It is

disconcertingly easy to do.

The burning bar—also known as a thermal or thermic lance—is an interesting piece of equipment. It was originally developed after World War I to help cut through battlefield ruins, dismantle tanks, and demolish concrete bunkers. A burning bar is basically a long bundle of steel rods encased inside a larger steel tube through which oxygen is then blown at high pressure; the steel at one end of the tube is ignited using an oxyacetylene torch, causing the internal rods to begin to melt. Push this sparkling bundle of slowly melting steel rods forward into virtually any obstacle, including solid granite, and it will burn a hole straight through; you can use a burning bar to cut through train tracks, solid-steel industrial machinery, and the walls of safes and bank vaults.

Air bags—the same devices that deploy during a car crash—applied to an inward-opening door will blow it out of its frame by the opening of the bag, without any explosives in sight.

Among many other things, what's remarkable about much of this equipment is the extent to which it resembles the everyday arsenal of a well-stocked fire department. This includes hydraulic doorjamb spreaders (in a different context, popularly known as the Jaws of Life), so-called Halligans and other pry bars (available on Amazon.com, thanks Jeff), and even circular saws and angle-grinders (stop by Lowe's next weekend to pick up your own pair) that any fire crew would use to ventilate a structure or rescue people trapped inside a crashed vehicle.

The somewhat obvious implication is that firefighters have at their disposal technology that could easily be repurposed for burglary—or that, should you want to commit the ultimate act of breaking and entering, you might want to rob a firehouse first and liberate their best equipment, including elevator keys and tactical cutting-torch kits.

These tools make the very idea of architectural defense seem absurd. You can put half a dozen dead bolts on your front door and a hydraulic doorjamb spreader will make a mockery of all six of them in an instant. You can hammer boards across the door-frame like something from a zombie horror film, but an air bag will blow the whole thing to smithereens. You can even seal an entire doorway with concrete, but a single burning bar—they even come in handy backpack-size units perfect for ATF or FBI rapid-entry teams—will melt through the concrete in minutes.

Pop quiz hot shot: Your intended prize is locked inside a room whose door was too closely guarded for you to slip through. What do you do?

Realize the obvious, do not think the way the building wants you to think—the way the architects had hoped you would behave—looking for

doors and hallways when you could simply carve a new route where you want it. It is architectural surgery, pure and simple.

The idea that a person would remain reliant on doors, would respect the limitations of architecture, deserves mockery. Surely if someone were to break in they'd come in as respectable people would, through the door provided for the purpose. Maybe that explains why people will have four heavy-duty locks on a solid oak door that's right next to a glass window. People seem to think they should lock-pick or kick their way through solid doors rather than just take a ten-dollar drywall knife and carve whole new hallways into the world. Those people are mere slaves to architecture, spatial captives in a world someone else has designed for them.

Something about this is almost unsettlingly brilliant, as if it is non-burglars who have been misusing the built environment this whole time; as if it is non-burglars who have been unwilling to question the world's most basic spatial assumptions, too scared to think past the tyranny of architecture's long-held behavioral expectations. We have been voluntary prisoners of architecture all along, willingly coerced and browbeaten by its code of spatial conduct, accepting walls as walls and going only where the corridors lead us. Because doors are often the sturdiest and most fortified parts of the wall in front of you, they are a distraction and a trap. By comparison, the wall itself is often more like tissue paper, just drywall and some two-by-fours, without a lock or a chain in sight.

The irony here is that even someone such as the psychotic, ax-swinging character Jack Torrance from *The Shining* still believes in doors: he hacks his way through the Overlook Hotel by way of preexisting routes laid out for him by others. Even Jack Torrance was too timid, hemmed in by architectural convention and unwilling to question the walls that surrounded him. A surreal and altogether more terrifying version of *The Shining* would have been the result, with Jack Torrance hidden somewhere in the hotel, sharpening his ax, unseen—until he comes bashing through the walls again, moving through the building as a burglar would, popping up whenever and wherever everyone else feels most safe. Another sign Stephen King is overrated—Kubrick too.

A real-life example is the movement of the Israel Defense Forces, or IDF, through the city of Nablus as a tactical avoidance of everything we think we know about architecture—that walls are barriers, that doors are openings we're meant to pass through. The Israeli battlefield commanders decided instead to use none of the streets, roads, alleys, or courtyards that constitute the syntax of the city, and none of the external doors, internal stairwells and windows that constitute the order of buildings, but rather moved horizontally through walls, and vertically through holes blasted in

ceilings and floors. It was a three-dimensional movement through walls, ceilings, and floors. It was an infestation.

Compare this to earlier urban conflicts in which architecture played a central role, including the urban barricades of the Paris Commune in 1871 and the house-to-house fighting during France's colonial urban warfare in Algiers. In the latter case, combatants relied on alternative routes, secret passageways, and trapdoors. This technique, known as mouse-holing, seems as much an act of haunting as it is an act of war. In the Israeli case, many of these tactics were developed specifically because doorways had been booby-trapped with pressure-sensitive, improvised explosive devices—analogue to motion sensors or burglar alarms, or well-guarded doorways.

Moreover, to avoid being seen from above by spotters hidden on rooftops or in the windows of nearby houses—comparable, in terms of burglary, to security cameras or police helicopters—the soldiers needed to achieve a new kind of invisibility, a kind of militarized stealth. This meant moving forward using “fractal maneuvers,” as a representative of the Israeli military describes them, tunneling from one building to the next or disappearing into the architectural environment like an insect—or being absorbed into it, we might say, like water into a sponge. The soldiers were able to navigate through this new maze of openings by leaving spray-painted traces on the walls behind them—arrows and other directional markers that served as military way-finding glyphs offering a clear path through the dust, wrecked furniture, screaming families, and twisted rebar.

There is a spatial and conceptual shift in contemporary urban policing. It is moving from the chase to the manhunt. While the widely televised arrest of O.J. Simpson had been a chase, albeit conducted at little more than walking speed, the search for LAPD officer Christopher Dorner—or even for the younger of the two Boston Marathon bombers, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev—had been a manhunt. In a chase, the suspect's location is clearly known; the police simply have to stop, intercept, and capture him or her. In a manhunt, however, the suspect could be anywhere; what's required is an intensive search through the landscape, a literal hunt with a human being as its target.

The chase and the manhunt are fundamentally different ways of using the landscape. One is the active pursuit of a suspect moving through the environment, usually at high speed but more or less continuously visible to the pursuers; in the other, someone has deliberately made themselves invisible to view, hidden somewhere in the city or terrain, leaving the police to deploy advanced forensic expertise and new technologies of visibility to discover them. Getting away in the former case simply means moving through the built environment more effectively than the police. In the latter

example, getting away means blending in so well that you successfully avoid detection.

“My chief interest had to do with cities in general, and the extent to which an entire city could be transformed by an act of creative misuse. I was fascinated by the role of insurgency, for example, from the nineteenth century, or in the 1960s with the student movements, or even in Northern Ireland, with what was happening in Londonderry and in Belfast. I was interested in how people with a particular intent could take over certain parts of the city with an action that could transform the way the city was used.”

Motivated individuals or groups could use the complexity of the city against itself, uncovering the possible behaviors that a building or space unintentionally allows, then adapting them to stage a protest, overthrow a government, demand political representation, or, yes, simply to commit a crime.

In every heist film the vaults and corridors and elevator shafts are just as important as the characters in the story; one cannot exist without the other. The space itself becomes a protagonist of the plot. There is no space without something that happens in it; and nothing happens without a space like this around it. The same thing is often true for grand public plazas in the hearts of cities: these can be used as nothing but picturesque backdrops for tourists to take photos of each other or as insurrectionary platforms for starting a revolution. It’s all about how you use the city—or misuse it, turning the fabric of the city against itself.

Even a region’s flight paths have come to influence how criminals use the city. For example, the heavily restricted airspace around LAX has made the area near the airport a well-known hiding spot for criminals trying to flee by car. LAPD helicopters cannot always approach LAX due to air-traffic-control safety concerns. It is surrounded by very challenging airspace. All those planes streaming down into the city, dropping off tourists and air cargo, exert a kind of geometric effect on crimes in the city: their flight patterns limit the effectiveness of police helicopter patrols and thus alter the getaway routes of criminals.

Consider the case of a fourteen-year-old boy who used a modified TV remote control to take over an entire tram system in Łódź, Poland. According to the city’s police, the boy turned his home remote control into an electromagnetic supertool that gave him command of every tram switch and junction in Łódź. The boy even “wrote in the pages of a school exercise

book where the best junctions were to move trams around and what signals to change,” police explained. While he did not use this homemade magic wand for anything resembling a bank heist, it would have come in quite handy during a crime spree. As clearly as any example from Hollywood, this otherwise childish prank suggests that the most successful getaways of tomorrow will be achieved by hacking the city.

The technology is already here. At a 2014 security conference in Miami, Florida, self-described “professional hacker” Cesar Cerrudo revealed that he had discovered a security loophole in widely used urban traffic-management technology, allowing him to fool vehicle-detection systems into thinking the light needed to change. Through extensive field-testing, Cerrudo found that his technique worked best within 150 feet of an actual intersection, but that more powerful antennas could also be used. Someone could then spam an intersection with imaginary traffic data from a hiding place on a nearby roof—or, as Cerrudo himself demonstrated, “from a drone flying at over 650 feet” above the target. This security flaw designed into the city itself could clearly be used to engineer the perfect getaway.

Spoofing a city’s traffic systems or a driver’s in-car GPS sensors is an equally effective way to engineer new routes across the city. This means not just overwhelming nearby GPS receivers with white noise, but, in effect, lying to them, convincing a dashboard navigation unit or smartphone mapping app to tell drivers that they are still heading in the right direction even as they veer wildly off course.

For example, GPS spoofing could be used to lead a delivery truck, street by street and block by block, to the wrong warehouse, where dozens if not hundreds of valuable boxes could be unloaded directly into the hands of criminals dressed like innocuous office workers. The driver is unlikely to realize the mistake—that the truck’s GPS unit had been taken over by criminals and that he or she just dropped everything off at the wrong address—until the delivery company is flooded with complaints about missing packages.

Spoofing can also be used indirectly, to open new, unobstructed routes where a road had been gridlocked only ten minutes earlier. For example, if you know your intended getaway route, you can digitally fake a traffic jam along that same street or freeway; the intended goal would be to make traffic apps report a road impassably clogged with vehicles, thus pushing other drivers—even police—away from your chosen street, shepherding them toward any number of nearby roads. A new line of escape is essentially unzipped down the middle of the city.

Consumer-grade GPS jammers are tiny devices you can plug into a car’s cigarette lighter to flood the immediate area—usually about thirty square

feet—with a white noise of radio signals pitched at the exact frequency of the satellite-based Global Positioning System. This makes a car, truck, or even container ship impossible to track using GPS—forcing police to rely on direct, visual observation—with the flick of a simple switch. Entire seaborne container ships have had their navigation systems disabled by GPS jammers, and trucks filled with consumer goods have been stolen using this digital assistance. Luxury cars are another popular target.

Military-grade GPS jammers can drown out the GPS networks of entire cities. The resulting effects would be widespread and catastrophic, affecting financial transactions—which are time-stamped using GPS—the ability of airplanes to land at regional airports, the accuracy and even functionality of construction equipment, and, of course, the ability of police to track local GPS signals, whether they're coming from vehicles or from transmitters planted on stolen merchandise.

However, a canny burglar can still smooth his getaway using analog, old-school spoofing. One of the most interesting attempted getaways of the last few years occurred the morning of September 30, 2008, when roughly a dozen men, responding to a Craigslist ad, met near a Bank of America in the Seattle suburb of Monroe. They were each expecting to find a long day of landscaping work ahead of them, and they'd been instructed to dress in a specific way, in a reflective work vest, blue shirt, respirator mask, and protective eyewear. Among them was Anthony Curcio, anticlimactically described by the US Attorney's Office as a "former high school athlete." He was dressed the same way and had placed the ad so as to fill the area with all but identical versions of himself. Curcio strayed from this group of unwitting decoys to pepper-spray the driver of an armored truck whose delivery schedule he had carefully researched. Seizing nearly \$400,000 in cash, Curcio then sprinted to a nearby creek where, days before, he had installed a steel cable leading downstream. Jumping into an inner tube that he had also strategically cached there—and becoming perhaps the first criminal in history to mastermind an inner-tube getaway—Curcio pulled himself down the cable to escape.

Perhaps the most elaborate spoof of all, however, is to get away by staying put. Joe Loya, who served seven years in prison for multiple bank heists explained that it was during the getaway that he often had the best chance of thwarting people's spatial expectations. In his case, this meant that what he did immediately after leaving the bank was often the most important decision of all. In robbing twenty-four banks, he had seen that the security guards almost always assumed he had turned left or right after exiting the bank. Further, they had expected to see Loya fleeing in a conspicuous getaway car or running away at top speed. But they almost

never checked the cars just sitting outside in the parking lot. Loya realized that he could jump into his car and wait a few minutes, effectively hiding in plain sight, before calmly driving away.

One thing that made the IRA so elusive was a neat trick that Michael Collins picked up from *The Man Who Was Thursday*, G. K. Chesterton's classic espionage novel about bomb-throwing anarchists who avoid suspicion by acting exactly like bomb-throwing anarchists. "If you didn't seem to be hiding," Chesterton wrote, "nobody hunted you out." So Mick taught his fighters to draw more attention to themselves, not less; the more visible they were, the less likely they'd be searched and questioned. Mick himself was Public Enemy No. 1, yet he cycled all over Dublin in a sharp gray suit, on an ancient bicycle whose chain rattled like a medieval ghost's.

There is something like a mathematical science of bank robbery—an ingenious series of clearly defined steps with reproducible results. Much of our present-day mythology of the high-octane bank bandit comes down from the example set in the 1920s by Lamm and his "Lamm technique." This called for the meticulous use of a stopwatch based on the absolute conviction that, after a specific period of time, no matter how much (or how little) money his gang had taken, they were to leave the bank and get away, following a carefully devised set of instructions so as to outsmart the city's traffic as well as any police who might be pursuing them.

Before each heist, Lamm would have spent hours mapping out the best possible routes of escape, specifically recruiting drivers with racing experience and storing an extra fuel tank in the trunk, in case they needed to fill up on the road. A map of the getaway route would be attached to the inside of the car, within view of the driver, including detailed marginal notes, all the way down to speedometer readings for each block and alternate turns to take in case of emergency. There would be getaway routes inside getaway routes, each with its own speed and timing. Lamm's foresight extended even to planning for different weather conditions, noting alternative roads to take (and how fast) if a sudden rainstorm blew in or if the road was blocked by snow.

For Lamm, this well-honed technique seemed unbeatable—but its efficacy could only go so far. In December 1930, after robbing a Citizens State Bank in Clinton, Indiana, Lamm and his group were confronted by a shotgun-wielding vigilante barber before they could get away. Startled by the man's gun, Lamm's getaway driver pulled a sudden U-turn and blew a tire hitting the curb—and things went catastrophically downhill from there. Forced to improvise by an obstacle that even Lamm's obsessive mind had failed to anticipate, the gang stole another car—but a governor installed on the engine meant it couldn't go faster than 35 mph. So they ditched that and

stole a truck—but it didn't have enough radiator water to drive. They then stole another car—but it barely had any fuel in the tank, taking them just a few miles out of town before running out of gas. Lamm's previously well-organized gang found itself trapped by the side of the road, surrounded by police. Their getaway was in shambles. Within only a few minutes, Lamm—depending on whose account you read—would either shoot himself dead or be gunned down by police, his eponymous technique having relentlessly failed every step of the way.

Later individuals set to improve on such tactics. Dillinger, for example, began to plant gasoline cans along the getaway route—improving, perhaps, on Lamm's way of carrying a can of gas in the back of the getaway car. Dillinger also adopted Lamm's preference for using only the best late-model cars, so that the gang could get away as fast as possible.

If the techniques of burglary such as those developed by Lamm and later refined by Dillinger aren't scientific, they are at least comparable to a folk art: inherited, improved upon, always available for others to adapt and use.

The best getaways are often the Hollywood ones—which are as unrealistic as their fictional context would indicate. In real life, getaways are not so tidy. Different techniques work at different times, for different reasons. Sometimes you have to drive away as fast as possible. Other times you don't need to go anywhere at all; you can just sit in your car until the pressure fades away. You can wrap yourself in a pool cover. You can convince your judge and jury that you never set foot in the building—or even that the type of structure you broke into falls outside your state's burglary laws. You can escape through tunnels or you can jump through bedroom windows; you can get away on foot or by public bus. It varies.

Some successful getaways do leave a trace. Think of an ingenious June 1995 bank heist in Berlin, Germany, where, unbeknownst to the bank's managers or the city's police, burglars had dug an escape tunnel for themselves beneath the target vault; rather than enter the bank through this tunnel, they saved it for the getaway. Taking over the bank the old-fashioned way, they locked down the business and held a group of hostages upstairs in the lobby. After the burglars received \$3.6 million in ransom money, they headed downstairs into the basement, as if to have a meeting and discuss their next steps—but the hostages began to hear “an odd clamor, like pickaxes chipping at concrete,” the *Washington Post* reported.

Only moments later, police raided the bank. When the authorities, prepared for a possibly fatal shoot-out, descended into the basement, they instead found nothing but an empty room with a hole bashed through the floor. “The hole led to a 384-foot tunnel,” the *Post* explained. “Running about 10 feet beneath the surface, the tunnel had been shored up with

timber and steel plates. It emerged in a garage, where police assume the robbers had a getaway car waiting.” Sure enough, they got away.

A similar tactic worked in February 2006 on the other side of the world, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. There, police raided a bank where hostages were being held—only to find a hole chipped through a concrete wall in the basement. An iron plate had been bolted across it from the other side. The burglars had not only prepared this escape route for themselves—a tunnel leading down into the city’s storm sewers, then on to a nearby river—but they had sealed it behind them to prevent anyone from following.

Caltrops can be constructed using nothing more than bolt cutters and some chain-link fencing. Caltrops are small spiked stars, like game jacks, that can be dumped out onto a road, ready to pierce and deflate the tires of any cars driving behind you. They are similar to the spike strips deployed by police for shredding the tires of a suspect’s car.

Explore what it might take to pull off a bank heist. Spend several months furtively casing a bank, noting the layout of the bank itself as well as every detail of its daily schedule. Observations should include when cash deliveries are made and what time of day usually sees the most customers. Assemble floor plans, photographs, and timetables. Determine whether you have a believable way to access the bank’s vault. If you can’t, perhaps you’d rather intercept the money by holding up a delivery truck outside the bank. Pulling it off—and getting away with the cash—will require an exhaustive study of local traffic patterns, of every side street and alleyway. The design of the city will become an unwitting accomplice.

What remains so interesting about such a project—with its compulsive multimedia hoarding of plans and photographs, its vast archive of ephemera generated by obsessive attention to a specific building and its urban context—is that it suggests a world in which illicitly annotated floor plans or carefully traced maps of streets surrounding banks or other buildings could be traded back and forth like architectural samizdat. These underground publications would then provide their readers with alternative or unexpected guides to everyday buildings. After all, why read a Pevsner *Architectural Guide to London* or an AIA *Guide to New York City* when you could read a burglar’s guide to the buildings all around you?

Somewhere between an architectural handbook and Ocean’s Eleven, these would show you not only how to get inside certain buildings but what to do once you find yourself standing in a space you were never meant to access in the first place. Thinking about architecture as a burglar would, and understanding different ways of moving through space, bring their own peculiar rewards—even if they are not monetary.

“Subtly, imperceptibly, I found myself becoming attuned to the presence of surveillance cameras and security guards, studying even the people ahead of me in line at my local bank branch the way an anthropologist might take field notes in an exotic locale, noting who seemed likely to resist if I announced a takeover robbery or how I’d get out of the bank and, if I managed to, what I’d find out there on the street. I noticed that the traffic light outside was timed, for example, and that someone could use it as a metronome or stopwatch to schedule a burglary; one could flee just as it was about to turn through its next cycle, using Manhattan’s in-built traffic patterns and pedestrian rhythms as a screen for a getaway.”

A proprietary pourable plastic known as Ellox was developed by safe-maker Chubb. It is extremely lightweight and astonishingly strong, incorporating small fragments of another proprietary material that Chubb claims is harder than a diamond. The plastic also resists fires of up to 1,000°C—or 1,832°F—for at least an hour before failing. Better yet, it can be molded into larger, complex shapes, poured to form strongrooms, safes, hasps, and other special items—moldable armor anyone? The architectural implications of this—a kind of bullet-resistant pancake batter moldable into any form—have barely been tapped.

A thorny plant called trifoliate orange—nicknamed the Rambo bush—is sold as a low-cost living barrier. It is marketed under the name Living Fence. Trifoliate orange is so dense and fast-growing that it can stop speeding vehicles; it is used by the US military to help secure the perimeters of missile silos and armories; and its razor-sharp thorns make it a great fit for domestic security needs.

Rainforest Safety Rule #1: Never grab onto something if you don’t know what it is.

No matter what the color, banana sap is among the most sticky and stubborn substances on earth. You will never get it off your clothes.

Chlorine is your friend. The principal ingredient in household bleach will render almost every deadly pathogen, nerve agent, and blister agent harmless. But don’t fucking drink MMS, that shit will kill you.

Sour gas, or hydrogen sulfide, can damage the lungs and is a potent neurotoxin and memory eraser.

Eat only one part of any plant at a time. Do not eat too much of it, and if you don’t feel well, start throwing up as fast as you can.

Medical students memorize this simple mnemonic trick to help them recognize the signs of poisoning:

“Hot as a hare, blind as a bat, dry as a bone, red as a beet,
and mad as a hatter.”

An overlooked result of the Wuhan Flu panic is the massively increased power of bioterror. It has largely been avoided, though prominent examples do pop up from time to time. However, just as bin Laden attempted to pull the US into overextending itself, misallocating resources, increasing repression, all destabilizing to empire, one might use bioterror to do the same. “Death now stalks the land,” “We thought the age of mass, random death was over—we were wrong,” this is potent terror. Invisible, potentially everywhere, even on friends, allies—think of it. Recall, the first American revolution relied heavily upon the manipulation of media. Our media today have shown even greater potential for exploitation.

In 2004, Tommy Thompson announced his resignation as Secretary of Health and Human Services with these now famous words:

“I, for the life of me, cannot understand why terrorists have
not attacked our food supply because it is so easy to do.”

Ricin and its close relative abrin are powerful phytotoxins, respectively derived from castor and jequirity beans, whose attractive flowering plants can be purchased at most commercial nurseries and require just three months of cultivation to yield mature beans. The beans are lima-shaped and either scarlet or a lustrous brown and historically were sometimes employed as rosary beads by medieval flagellants.

Castor beans’ seed hulls must be removed by soaking 1–4 oz of the beans in 12–36 oz of distilled water with 4–6 tablespoons of NaOH or 6–8 ts. of commercial lye (the beans’ natural buoyancy requiring here that they be weighted down with marbles, sterilized gravel, or low-value coins combined and tied in an ordinary Trojan condom). After one hour of soaking, the beans can be taken out of solution and dried and the hulls carefully removed by anyone wearing quality surgical gloves. Ordinary rubber household gloves are too thick and unwieldy for removing castor hulls.

A blender set on ‘purée’ is used to grind the hulled beans plus commercial acetone in a 1:4 ratio. Discard blender after use. Pour castor-and-acetone mixture into a covered sterile jar and let stand for 72–96 hours. Then attach a sturdy commercial coffee filter to an identical jar and pour mixture slowly and carefully through filter. You are not decanting; you’re after what is being filtered out. Wearing two pairs of surgical gloves and at least two

standard commercial filtration masks, use manual pressure to squish as much acetone as possible out of the filter's sediment. Bear down as hard as due caution permits. Weigh the remainder of the filter's contents and place them in a third sterile jar along with four times their weight in fresh CH_3COCH_3 . Repeat standing, filtering, and manual squishing process 3–5 times.

The residue at the procedures' terminus will be nearly pure ricin, of which 0.04 mg is lethal if injected directly (note that 9.5–12 times this dose is required for lethality through ingestion). Saline or distilled water can be used to load a 0.4 mg ricin solution in a standard fine-gauge hypodermic injector, available at better pharmacies everywhere under Diabetes Supplies. Ricin requires 24–36 hours to produce initial symptoms of severe nausea, vomiting, disorientation, and cyanosis. Terminal VF and circulatory collapse follow within twelve hours. Note that in situ concentrations under 1.5 mg are undetectable by standard forensic reagents.

The anaerobic saprophyte *Clostridium botulinum* is simple to culture, requiring only an airtight home-canning jar in which are placed 2–3 ounces of puréed beets, 1–2 oz. of common cube steak, two tablespoons of fresh topsoil, and enough ordinary tap water (chlorinated OK) to fill the jar to the absolute top. This being the only exacting part: the absolute top. If the water's meniscus comes right to the absolute top of the jar's threaded mouth and the jar's lid is properly applied and screwed on very tightly w/ vise and wide-mouth Sears Craftsman pliers so as to allow 0.0% trapped O_2 in the jar, ten days on the top shelf of a dark utility closet will produce a moderate bulge in the jar's lid. Extremely careful double-gloved and -masked removal of the lid will reveal a small tan-to-brown colony of *Clostridium* awash in a green-to-tan penumbra of botulinus exotoxin, which is, to put it delicately, a byproduct of the mold's digestive process, and can be removed in very small amounts with the same hypodermic used for administration. Botulinus also has the advantage of directing attention to defects in manufacturing and/or packaging rather than product tampering, which would of course heighten the overall industry impact.

Even though so many consumer products now are tamperproof, Hostess, Little Debbie, the whole soft-confection industry with its flimsy neopolymerized wrappers and cheap thin cardboard Economy Size containers are decidedly not tamperproof at all. It would take nothing more than one thin-gauge hypodermic and 24 infinitesimal doses of KCN, As_2O_3 , ricin, $\text{C}_{21}\text{H}_{22}\text{O}_2\text{N}_2$, acinetylcholine, botulinus, or even merely Tl or some other aqueous base-metal compound to bring almost an entire industry down on one supplicatory knee. For even if the soft-confection manufacturers survived the initial horror and managed to recover some measure of consumer trust,

the relevant products' low price is an essential part of their established Market Appeal™, and the costs of reinforcing the Economy packaging or rendering the individual snack cakes visibly invulnerable to a thin-gauge hypodermic would push the products out so far right on the demand curve that mass-market snacks would become economically and emotionally untenable, corporate soft confections going thus the way of hitchhiking, unsupervised trick-or-treating, door-to-door sales, et cetera.

And look at what that one lady did with some sewing needles and strawberries.

It takes less than two ounces of arsenic to kill a 150-pound person. A 12-foot-long two-by-six that's pressure treated with arsenic contains enough poison to kill 200 adults if you burn the board and feed its ash to the crowd.

MAKE YOU MURDERS LOOK LIKE SUICIDES WITH GATORADE OF DEATH:

- Water
- Cocaine
- Viagra

The Mujahedeen Poisons Handbook contains various 'recipes' for home-made poisons and poisonous gases. *Encyclopedia of Jihad* is also widely available online and includes chapters such as "How to Kill," "Explosive Devices," "Manufacturing Detonators," and "Assassination with Mines." A fine beach read.

Thermite is an incendiary reaction that can burn as hot as 2500°C or more. That means that if you lit a pound of thermite on top of your car it would melt through your hood, through your engine, through your driveway, and make a hole in the ground. Thermite is a reaction between a metal (aluminum, magnesium) and a metal oxide (iron oxide, copper oxide, manganese oxide) this reaction has a high ignition temperature, but once its ignited it supplies it's own oxygen. This allows for some interesting applications, for example thermite is still used today for underwater welding.

Thermite will readily burn paper, rags, excelsior, straw, and other tinder type materials. However, its main use in sabotage operations is against motors, gears, lathes, or other metal targets—to weld moving parts together, warp precision machined surfaces, and so on. Since it burns with a brief, almost explosive action, it is not recommended for burning wooden structures or other materials where persistent heat is required.

Before you get started, you must realize that what you are about to do is a dangerous and energetic reaction that should only be performed with

the utmost care. Besides its ridiculously high temperature, thermite also emits UV radiation that can do permanent damage to your eyes and if you don't want to wear a welding mask, at least put on a pair of good quality sunglasses. Also, metals with a low melting point (zinc, lead) will vaporize and explode if near the thermite reaction.

WARNING: Do NOT attempt to ignite your thermite by dipping your sparkler into the mix by hand. The mix can and does ignite violently, and will spray you with burning metal.

WARNING: A violent ignition of thermite can throw molten metal in all directions. Do not stand close to the mix when it is igniting or burning.

WARNING: Thermite burns extremely hot and produces molten iron slag that can melt through a car's engine block! Burning thermite can spatter molten iron a long way from the burning pile. Stay as far back as you can. And make sure there is nothing nearby that can catch fire. Start your thermite experiments with small amounts at first, until you understand how it behaves, and how far it will throw molten metal slag.

WARNING: You cannot extinguish a thermite fire with water. Do not attempt to put the fire out with water, or you may have a violent, steam explosion, which can throw molten slag as well. Likewise, do not use any wet materials to attempt to extinguish the fire.

There are many kinds of thermite, but the most common uses iron oxide and aluminum powder, both of which can be made at home. You also need a way to ignite the thermite. Most people use magnesium ribbon, but I haven't had much luck with that and usually use potassium permanganate and glycerine. Potassium permanganate is a filter cleaner and a dye sold at hardware stores. Glycerine is a skin care product and can be found at any drug store like CVS. When mixed they spurt flames like my mother's cooking.

Additional things that you might want include: a flowerpot to contain the mixture while it's burning, bricks to hold it up, and something to melt. If you don't have anything to destroy, at the very least just put some sand under it to keep it from ruining your driveway. What ever you do, don't use water to catch the drops. Water will instantly vaporize, explode, and spray you with molten slag—generally something to avoid.

1. By weight the ratio of iron oxide to aluminum powder is 8:3. Both should be powdered as fine as possible as this will make it burn hotter and ignite easier. Measure them out, and mix as thoroughly as possible—this will make it burn faster and hotter and is well worth your time.

2. Pour the thermite into your container. Flower pots are most commonly used, but almost anything will work. Flower pots are used because clay is one of the only materials that will still be there after hell has reigned. If you do use a flower pot, you should consider using two. The second pot will contain the shards of the first and reduce the risk of it breaking halfway through. The only thing that I would advise against is glass as it might shatter before it melts.
3. If you're using magnesium, stick it in, fray the top to make it easier to light, and light it. If you're using potassium permanganate, pour it in, mix it in a little bit with the thermite, and add the glycerine. Rule of thumb is two to three parts glycerine to one part potassium permanganate. It usually helps to stir the ingredients after you add the glycerine. If it still won't light, adding powdered magnesium or powder rubbed off of a sparkler makes it easier to ignite. Whatever you do, stand way back.
4. If it lights, then yell, cheer, and behold the awesome power of thermite. If it doesn't light, then re-evaluate and try something different.

The Blaster's Handbook will teach you how to make the following (and more!):

- Pressure-trigger Devices
- Nipple Time Bombs
- Magnifying Glass Bombs
- Cigarette Fuses
- Alarm Clock Time Bomb
- Homemade Grenades
- Walking Booby Traps
- Bangalore Torpedoes
- Book Traps
- Pressure-release Gate Traps
- Loose Floorboard Traps
- Whistle and Pipe Traps
- Nitroglycerin
- Mercury Fulminate
- Dynamite
- Chloride of Azode
- Ammonium Nitrate
- Black Powder

There are also detailed drawings of bridges—slab bridge, T-beam bridge, concrete cantilever bridge, truss bridge, suspension bridge—with wild X's indicating the pattern of placements that would drop every goddamned thing into the water or the ravine below, and architectural sketches of the

skeletons of numerous buildings, with the requisite accompanying fury of X's designed to doom the thing, reduce it to chaos. There are maps of highways with notes on sabotage and destruction.

Shit That Goes BOOM

- Potassium Nitrate
- Flour
- PingPong Balls + Thermite
- Tannerite
- Acetone Peroxide
- Brake Fluid + Chlorine

Packing Materials:

- Industrial Fence Staples
- Nails
- Ball Bearings
- Razor Blades
- Homemade Caltrops
- Hypodermic Needles

“I think it's clear that the use of bombs by revolutionaries should either be discarded altogether or left to those who truly have an expert grasp on the fabrication of safe and effective improvised explosives. How many times have we read about bombs either not detonating at all, detonating at the wrong time and harming random passersby in the process, or detonating as planned yet causing ineffectual damage? This doesn't even take into account the comrades who have already been killed or seriously maimed by the premature explosion of bombs they intended to use on targets.

I feel strongly that, instead of bombs, a concerted effort should be made to use well-designed portable incendiary devices, since a potent raging fire will always do more damage than a low-strength explosion.”

In 1947 a five-year-old California boy placed a concrete block on railroad tracks to derail an oncoming locomotive.

Trains are one of the main ways that oil is transported—Warren Buffet's rolling pipelines. Physical blockades of the tracks have been used effectively many times to hamper ecocidal projects of resource extraction. We can also block the rails in a sneaky way: by tricking the signaling system into thinking there is a train on the tracks. This trick will force train traffic to come to a halt until the signal blockage is cleared. It can be done in under

a minute, and repeated many times to have a significant impact on train circulation. It can take hours to find and remove this blockage, stopping all train traffic in the meantime.

Here's how their system works: A low velocity current runs through each rail. The electricity runs across the junctions of an individual rail with copper wire connections. When a train passes, it forms an electrical connection between rails and signals its presence.

Here's how we can block the signal: Get some 6-gauge booster cables. You can paint the wire black to make it harder to find. Rust on the tracks can prevent a solid connection, so connecting directly to the tracks might not work. To avoid this problem, find a section of rail where two junctions are side by side, and connect the copper wires with the booster cable. You can hide the wire with snow or rocks. The connection will also lower railway crossing barriers that are nearby.

This is a low risk and easily reproducible form of sabotage that can potentially cause massive delays and economic losses to the everyday functioning of extraction industries.

Fill a crappy car with tires and set it on fire. A burning car on a railway track is not simply a blockade, it is also a very efficient and economical weapon. A car with a full fuel tank would burn at a temperature high enough to warp the track and require extensive repairs. An attack on isolated tracks in sparsely settled countryside, for example, north of Lake Superior or west of Thunder Bay to the Manitoba border, would require the deployment by rail of special repair equipment. Once deployed, other attacks on the same line might trap that equipment in the wilderness. Then you could really have some fun.

An action was taken against the substation that supplies much of Silicon Valley with its electricity in April 2013. A vanload of masked men with submachine guns shot the rural installation to bits, and not at random. They targeted key bits of the substation's mechanics, like snipers against infrastructure, shot by shot destroying seventeen of the substation's large transformers. These men were never caught, but their know-how and malice made an impression. Though nobody talks about it, our physical infrastructure is not just exposed to weird weather, it's also shockingly vulnerable to weird people.

- **Empire Logistics Global Supply Chain Infrastructure**

Maps the global supply chain through research that articulates the infrastructure and 'externalized costs'—human, economic, social, and environmental—of the international flow of things. You can find key rail intersections, ports, warehousing distribution sites, et

cetera with detailed information such as tons shipped per year to really get the most bang for your buck—or buck for your bang? (<http://www.empirelogistics.org/sci-map>)

- **Empire Logistics Top Freeway Chokepoints (US)**

The name says it all. (<http://www.empirelogistics.org/freeway-chokepoints-u-s>)

- **Petropolis**

An interactive map that documents the oil pipeline infrastructure throughout North America with particular attention paid to the Chicagoland area. The map serves as a valuable research in locating possible targets and shows the type of research that local struggles could engage in. (<http://environmentalobservatory.net/Petropolis/map.html>)

- **Open Infrastructure Map**

Maps power and telecommunications infrastructure over OpenStreetMap data (<https://openinframap.org/>)

Understanding infrastructure basics can help us pinpoint an appropriate point of resistance—so here are some basics. Oil is extracted and upgraded for transportation through pipelines, or refined for their final destination. Pumping stations keep the product flowing through pipelines. Densitometer stations send back flow rates and viscosity. Bulk oil can be stored in tank farms, until it is refined further, or shipped by rail or truck. Valve stations contain valves that open or close the pipeline to isolate sections or stop flow. Junctions are facilities where other valves can be turned on or off to direct flow into certain facilities.

Facilities, pump stations, terminals, valves, and densitometer stations are all accessible via maintained roads. Terminals and storage facilities are often secured 24-hours with lighting and staff on site. There is lots of above-ground structure including valves, electrical systems, flow measurement systems, large cylindrical storage tanks, and some pipelines. Pumping stations may or may not be staffed by security at night, and are usually fenced with 6–8 foot fencing topped with barbed wire. Infrastructure also exists here, including above-ground pipelines, valves, PIG traps, flow measurement, and emergency shutoff buttons.

Valves and densitometer stations are usually small and isolated, also with 6–8 foot chain link fencing and barbed wire. Their enclosures have a gate entry, often secured with a standard key lock that can be cut with

larger-sized bolt cutters and contain a small shack housing electrical sources and measurement equipment. Valves have an additional link-chain wrapped around the hand wheel and stem, meant to prevent rotation.

Integrity dig sites will be accessible via private property/stakeholder driveways or the right of way. They are sometimes marked with construction truck signs and flagging. Right of ways are marked at road crossings by a small sign at the side of the road. It's easy to find the closest crossing to navigate your way in to the site. Though identifiable in natural areas, ROWs aren't always easy to access and traverse swamps, river crossings, property lines, et cetera. If you decide to go for a walk in these manmade mosquito breeding corridors you may have to jump some property fences to continue along your journey.

Many pipelines use double-flanged electronically-actuated valves manufactured by Zwick. You can find their schematics online. While it appears the majority of older manual valves have been converted to electronically actuated valves, in some cases operational/functional manual valves do still exist on the line.

A manual valve is only operated by a manual hand wheel, while electronically-actuated valves are operated by electricity—either from remotely, or on site if switched to manual operation. The manual hand wheel will not operate the valve unless the power is off or the valve is on manual/on-site operation. They're fairly easy to tell apart—manual valves just have an encasement and hand wheel, while electric valves will have a hand wheel, encasement, electric cords attaching to the bottom with hex-bolts, and sometimes other measuring equipment. What is known is that electronically-actuated valves rely on a power source, and in some jurisdictions are mandated to have a backup power source to move the valve into a 'closed' position during a power failure.

So how safe is it to just turn off a valve? Well, first, let's be real. It's the oil companies that put us at risk. Their quest for profits and delay of necessary changes are actively shortening and ending lives. Every. Single. Day. So let's talk about the safety of actions against pipelines in the context of those facts. Let's re-frame the discussions we're having, and talk about how turning off the pipeline is actually the safest course of action; how an inactive pipeline is safer than letting one run unimpeded.

But if that's not enough for you, here are two other things that make you feel better about the actions of a brave few:

Physical Build: Pipelines are built with valves. Thus, common sense says the structure and condition of the pipeline should be enough to

contain its contents under those conditions. Shutting off valves is not an uncommon practice in the industry.

Surge Mitigation & Safety Features: Shutting off a valve suddenly does create a pressure surge. This surge, however, is mitigated and safely handled through basic pipeline structure as well as safety features of pipelines including surge relief valves and automatic shutoffs which are mandated by pipeline legislation. Years ago government engineers decided that surges from sudden valve closures did not create enough of a threat to allow companies to exclude valves in their system designs.

Pipeline networks are vast and hard to secure, making oil and gas companies' weakness our potential strength. The pipeline infrastructure itself is exposed at three points: during layout/construction of a new pipeline/segment, during maintenance when it's uncovered, and where it comes above ground to pumping stations and terminals. Physical pipelines themselves can have varying maintenance requirements. While anomalies on pipeline surfaces are often ignored, there are rigid replacement requirements around at least two specific damages that can delay operation:

- Scratches/dents/interference with pipeline flanges—especially on the open face of a flange.
- Scratches on pipe threads of newly laid out/uninstalled pipe.

Clearly then it's in our best interest to let everyone know when these things may have been tampered with or damaged.

Some pipeline facilities, including densitometer stations and valve stations, have telecommunications systems to relay information on pumping pressures and pipeline content and allow remote access/control to these systems. It's not unimaginable that any kind of interference with their telecommunications equipment might lead to a forced shutdown of the pipeline.

Remember: each day the line is shut down costs the corporate blood-suckers plenty of money—in wages, equipment rentals, insurance, and—if you hit it at the right time—oil flow stoppage.

- Use oxyacetylene cutting torches to pierce through exposed, empty steel valves.
- Use tires and gasoline-soaked rags to burn valve sites, their electrical units, and any additional heavy equipment you can find.

- Gasoline, motor oil, and rags can be added to coffee cans and placed in the seats of machinery. The seats eventually ignite and cause a longer burn.
- Use bolt cutters to cut valve stems on tires.
- You'll need a decent cordless drill, a good smaller-gauge cobalt or titanium drill bit—preferably with a pilot point, and cutting oil. Oh, the irony! With a righteous sense of adventure, prove your stealth ninja skills by getting into the right-of-way. Once you're in there you're pretty invisible from the road so long as you're not fluorescent, adorned in glitter, or fucking around with a headlamp too much. Take a breath, take a look, and then find your way to an empty pipeline and start drilling! Go slow—so there's less noise, reverberation, and friction—and apply enough pressure so that you see metal shavings coming up—and then keep at it for 10 to 15 minutes. Cutting oil will help the process along by keeping the drill tip cool and effective.
- If oil is already flowing, close a manual valve and then apply your own locking device to delay response time.

Some companies think they're being all smart by putting on large gold security chains—which can't be cut with bolt cutters—and lockboxes on the gates. Bypass these by cutting the fence itself; maybe make yourself some caltrops while you're at it—it'd be a shame if the response vehicle got a flat. Then all you need are some garden shears to cut the very, very secure zip tie protecting the electrical panel, your wits, and an exit plan.

Pumping stations are key pieces of mining infrastructure used to lower the water table and prevent the flooding of the mine. They most often resemble a section of exposed pipe and an electrical box surrounded by construction fence. Pry open the electrical boxes using a crowbar and place simple timed incendiary devices and a bundle of bicycle inner tubes inside to ensure the flames catch nicely.

Transformers and substations can be destroyed with car tires filled with gasoline soaked rags. Place them beneath exposed insulated cabling on the substation and inside the transformers.

You can use an accelerant—gas, diesel, motor oil—to burn the major electrical cable junction points throughout buildings under construction. You can also burn pallets of equipment around the site—focusing on electrical and other key components.

A strong acidic powder can be poured into the excavations of the ground-floor slabs of buildings under construction. This will make these these

buildings structurally unsound—their foundations will eventually crumble and the buildings could collapse over time.

Take fire sticks half-covered in fire-paste—the kind found in a camping store. Light the fire-paste covered end and place it in the top corners of a car's grill, between the headlights. Use two sticks per car. The fire is mostly invisible until plastic or motor oil catches fire, giving you time to leave unseen. Be careful: the fire can easily spread to cars parked close-by.

Containers of accelerant can be placed beneath a row of trucks, one per truck, with one digital timer for every four containers. Use kerosene-soaked rope to carry the fire to the other three—a tactic adapted from *Home Alone 2* (the one with Donald Trump). If you're going to try this make sure to use *kerosene*, gasoline dries too quickly. You can also try a gasoline and motor oil mix.

Magic Candles

- Fire-starter
- Magic birthday candles (that re-light)

With the candle or with a clean knife, make a hole corresponding to the diameter of the candle in the fire-starter, and stick the candle in it such that it doesn't move.

After lighting it, you must in general wait around twenty seconds before the interior filaments are lit so that they will re-light if they extinguish. Small sparks are given off by candle once it is lit. This device is very simple to make, but it is bright and thus easy to notice, by a passerby for instance. You can count on 5–6 minutes of delay, before the fire-starter cube catches fire and sets the rest of the incendiary device alight.

Anti-Mosquito Spirals or Incense Sticks

- Fire-starter
- 5–6 matches
- Cellophane
- Small elastics
- A stick of incense or a 4–5 cm piece of anti-mosquito spiral

With a knife, remove the sulfur from the matches while avoiding adding wood shavings, and reduce it to a powder (by wrapping it in paper and crushing it with a knife handle, for example). Put the sulfur in the middle of a square of cellophane and form a tight ball, by twisting the cellophane

well. Fix this ball well to the incense stick or the anti-mosquito spiral with an elastic, ensuring that the ball is well stuck, and that the ball isn't surrounded by elastic all the way until the end—it's necessary that the ember of the spiral is first in contact with the sulfur, otherwise there is a risk that the device will come undone before igniting. With another elastic, fix this construction onto the fire-starter, sulfur in contact with the fire-starter.

This device allows an adequately long delay, depending on the length of the spiral/incense before the sulfur: one could do tests to evaluate the time that is obtained. It is also more discreet: there is not a flame before the trigger, but just a small ember and a thin trail of smoke. But it is also more complex and can thus necessitate testing it multiple times before using it, with perhaps different brands for the incense, cellophane, and/or matches. And with the amount of manipulations, it's very important to pay attention to not leave a trace. After lighting it, do not blow on it to extinguish the flame, but shake the device!

Some Notes

- You can use multiple delays per incendiary device, so that if one fails the rest of the incendiary device still has a chance to ignite.
- In our experience the anti-mosquito spiral is more reliable than incense.
- An alternative configuration that involves less manipulation is using matches covered in camping fire-paste to light the fire-starter, rather than the sulfur cellophane ball. In a match-book, two rows of matches are attached by a staple. You can use one row of these matches to wrap around the spiral, and if there is enough contact the ember of the spiral will light the matches. However, adding fire-paste to the match-heads and the fire-starter ensures this better. In addition, fire-paste between the fire-starter and the plastic bottles of accelerant will cut down the time the lit fire-starter takes to pierce the plastic and ignite the accelerant (from over a minute to a few seconds).
- Tape versus Elastics: tape is more likely to pick up DNA evidence during construction, so should be handled very carefully, but it allows a sturdier construction that is less likely to be displaced during transport. Thin strips of duct-tape work well.

- Recommendations for the rest of the incendiary device: two plastic 1.5L pop-bottles, taped together so that when lying down they form a valley between them. Fill with a mixture of 3/4 gasoline and 1/4 motor oil. To prevent leakage, fill the containers only 3/4 full, leaving the top quarter as air space for vapors to collect. If the delay/igniter devices described above are taped into the valley the bottles make together, gravity will bring the lit device down into the accelerant even if the tape is burned. If you were to tape the delay/igniter device to a single bottle, it's possible that once the fire-starter is lit it would burn through the tape before the plastic bottle, and come undone before the device could ignite.

Ring of Fire: Lengths of inner tube filled with gas and motor oil soaked rags.

The devices described here can leave traces, all the more so if they don't ignite. Thus, all manipulations need to be done in a clean environment, with a pair of one-use rubber gloves, while covering your mouth and hair, using a clean garbage bag spread out as a work space, and while wearing a k-way type tracksuit (where hair of any sort won't cling to it). The device can be stored in a garbage bag or a freezer bag before removing your gloves, to transport it. If the material is bought, don't buy everything at the same place and paying in cash could be a good idea. In the case of a raid, it's better to be rid of the material and packaging before use. Lastly, do several tests before using it for real, to be sure that the brands of different materials work well together and to avoid bad surprises!

We think that it's important for confrontational tactical knowledge to be widespread for the coming storms of revolt. Confrontational tactics can make us safer, because the police become afraid. We need to be careful when playing with fire, but with care, molotovs can greatly increase our power in the streets.

How to Make a Molotov

- Empty 500ml beer bottles
- Funnel
- Gloves
- Gauze or strips of t-shirt or tampons
- Gasoline
- Duct tape
- Motor oil

Remember: Never touch any of your materials without gloves, to avoid transferring fingerprints.

First, fill the beer bottle half-way with a mixture of two-thirds gasoline and one-third motor oil. Adding motor oil makes the fire burn longer and bigger. Leaving empty space in the bottle makes it fill with gas-fumes, which will make the molotov more explosive.

If using shirt or gauze, tie a knot that will fit in the entrance to the bottle, one inch from the top. The fuse should reach the gasoline. If you turn the bottle upside down, the knot should hold. Use duct-tape to make the opening more air-tight, because gasoline evaporates.

For larger molotovs, you can use a wine bottle that has a cap you can twist back on. Perrier works too.

Beer-bottle molotovs can be transported in the packaging. Seal them in a garbage bag to diminish the smell of gasoline, and to keep them clean of fingerprints.

Please note, it's safest to not wait more than 30 seconds to throw after the molotov is lit.

Binary weapons are those in which two nonlethal chemicals are mixed together at the last minute to become a deadly agent.

1. Bleach + Vinegar = Toxic Chlorine Gas

Why: Adding any weak acid to bleach will release toxic chlorine and chloramine vapors.

The worst that could happen: You can get a nasty chemical burn, especially of your eyes and lungs.

2. Ammonia + Bleach = Toxic Chloramine Vapors

Why: Inhaling the vapors could cause respiratory damage and throat burns.

The worst that could happen: If ammonia is present in excess, toxic and potentially explosive liquid hydrazine may be formed.

3. Rubbing Alcohol + Bleach = Chloroform

Why: Ordinary household bleach contains sodium hypochlorite, which reacts with ethanol or isopropyl alcohol to produce chloroform, hydrochloric acid, and other compounds, including chloroacetone or dichloroacetone.

The worst that could happen: You could damage your nervous system, eyes, lungs, skin, liver, and kidneys. Extremely high levels

of chloroform exposure may result in death, while lower levels could result in dizziness and nausea, according to the EPA.

4. **Hydrogen Peroxide + Vinegar = Paracetic Acid**

Why: You can use them on the same surface separately while cleaning, but don't mix them in the same container. You'll create paracetic acid which, despite being an effective sanitizer, is potentially corrosive and irritating.

The worst that could happen: The health risks aren't well-known, but in high enough concentrations, paracetic acid is very irritating to the skin, eyes, nose, throat, and lungs, with the potential for causing permanent scarring of the skin, cornea, and throat.

5. **Medicine + Grapefruit Juice = Adverse Effects**

Why: With many over-the-counter and prescription drugs, you risk increasing the absorption of the drug if you take it with grapefruit juice.

The worst that could happen: A typical dosage could become a lethal overdose.

Depending on which unreliable narrator you ask—pro tip: in history, all narrators are unreliable—one of the earliest stories of brainwashing in history actually involves marijuana. Hassan-i Sabbah, a twelfth-century Muslim religious leader/warlord, supposedly gained the everlasting loyalty of his vaunted Assassins by dosing young recruits with hashish until they passed out. According to legend, those young men would wake up, still stoned, in a “paradise” secretly built by Hassan in his fortress of Alamut. Paradise contained everything a young man could desire: scantily clad women, piles of decadent food, probably hot tubs—all the best things in life. After a few days of bliss, the young men would wake up back in the shitty real world of the twelfth century and be informed that the only thing standing between them and a return to paradise was one measly little death in the name of their leader. It's a famous story, but the fact that it was first told by known bullshitter Marco Polo a century after Hassan's death means ‘fun story’ is probably all it is.

But there is a real historical example of powerful hallucinogens being used to rob people of their free will. The original ‘zombies’ were men and women drugged by voodoo witch doctors in eighteenth-century Haiti. There are myths and rumors as to exactly how the witch doctors accomplished this, but the chemical culprit was supposedly a white powder—*coupe poudre*—that dropped the victim into a deathlike sleep. After burial, the witch doctor

would dig up his victim and—if he had survived the poisoning—the *coupe poudre* would have wiped out his free will and turned him into a mindlessly obedient automaton. It's a ridiculous story, just like the idea of Hassan-i Sabbah's hash-mad assassins.

But these voodoo zombies have a basis in hard science. During the 1980s, an anthropologist analyzed the *coupe poudre* used by sorcerers to carry out their zombifications. Its active ingredients included bufotenin and tetrodotoxin. The first is a powerful hallucinogen, excreted by the Bufo toad. When you read about people licking toads to get high, bufotenin is what they're tripping on. The second key ingredient to zombie powder, tetrodotoxin, is a chemical found in the deadly puffer fish. In low doses, tetrodotoxin provokes a coma and significantly reduces the victim's heart rate, making him or her look just corpse-y enough to bury. Once the zombie-to-be is dug up several days later, likely dehydrated, starving, and still tripping from toad drugs, the voodoo sorcerer starts piling on more drugs.

Scopolamine—the so-called Devil's Breath powder—is used as an offensive zombification drug, which, when blown into a victim's face, leaves him or her coherent but with no free will. Once ingested, within minutes the odorless and tasteless dust allows burglars, robbers, and rapists complete control over their victims and, worse, completely wipes the victims' memories of the details of the incidents.

One way to deal with enemies is by slitting their arm and leg tendons and heaving them, alive but helpless, into the middle of a busy street.

You can stab someone to death with a sheet of newspaper. Just fold it diagonally until it tightens into a point then drive it in right under the chin. Simple, really.

“There was counter-speculation in the crowd that the whole thing was maybe designed to maybe only look like a media stunt and that the weapon the figure was now sitting uncomfortably back against was genuine and that the idea was for him to look as eccentric as possible and climb high enough to draw a large crowd and then to spray automatic fire indiscriminately down into the crowd.”

What's the fastest way to hide bullet holes in a living-room wall? The answer is toothpaste. For larger calibers, mix a paste of equal parts starch and salt.

To bleach away bloodstains from under your fingernails, sink your fingertips into half a lemon and wiggle them around. Rinse them under warm water.

Assume everyone you meet is cop, criminal, or crazy until proven otherwise.

Just like death, real fights don't look anything like fights in the movies or on TV. They are not graceful; punches don't land squarely, if they land at all. Bodies move and fall in ways that are completely unnatural; arms and legs twist back, and necks bend at 90-degree angles. But the most striking difference is in the face. Pain, fear, and anger contort people's faces in ways that are truly, instinctively terrifying.

Stay on your feet. A cardinal rule of this kind of combat is never go to the ground. But wait—don't mixed martial artists claim that 90 percent of all fights end up on the ground and win bouts all the time by bringing the action to the mat? Very true—and if you find yourself inside an octagon with a cushioned floor and a Brazilian in surf shorts, then go ahead and grapple. But in a real fight—with no rules, no ref, no tap-outs, no guarantee the other guy doesn't have a weapon—the ground is where you go to die. If an attacker gets you down, you'd better grab his testicles, jam a thumb in his eyeball, tear his ear off with your teeth, whatever it takes to kick free and scramble back up so you can jump on the guy's chest until his ribs are jelly. Real violence isn't about sportsmanship, it's about survival. You're not shaking his hand and wishing him well. You're hoping he's still lying there when you leave.

Boxing and wrestling aren't natural forms of combat, they're natural forms of peacocking, created by and for men to showboat two unique male attributes: bulk and upper-body strength. Otherwise they're useless. No human in the wild would ever throw a punch if he could avoid it, not even against another human. Why risk breaking all those fragile bones and knuckle joints, or jabbing out an arm that can be trapped, twisted, and snapped?

There's a more glaring giveaway that boxing and wrestling are just recreation: girls and old guys aren't good at them. As a rule of thumb, performance aberration in a basic skill is a good way to evaluate whether it's natural to a species. When you spot a giant ability gap between ages and genders, you know you're looking at nurture, not nature. Male and female geese differ in size but not in speed; otherwise, migration would be mayhem. Same with trout: if males rocketed past the females, they'd always be first to eat, last to be eaten, and on their way to a disastrous shortage of spawning partners. Gender and age differences don't disappear, of course, but they're tremendously diminished.

It's impossible, outside choreographed entertainment, to fight two guys together at once; they'll kill you; the trick to fighting two is to make sure to put one down for long enough that he's out of the picture long enough to

put the other guy down.

There is one very easy way to incapacitate someone. It is called, among other things, the carotid takedown. When a person dies by strangulation—either by hanging, ligature, or manual compression of the neck—they usually do not die because the air supply to their lungs has been cut off; they die because blood supply to their brain has been cut off. This is merciful; at any given moment there are a couple of minutes' worth of air in the lungs, and death by asphyxiation is a slow and desperate process that can leave both victim and attacker covered in lacerations. There is far less oxygen in the brain however, and death by cerebral hypoxia—lack of oxygen to the brain—is correspondingly fast. Oxygen-bearing blood reaches the brain via the carotid arteries in the neck and leaves primarily through the jugular veins. Only eleven pounds of pressure to the carotid arteries are necessary to stop blood flow to the brain, and once the blood flow has stopped, the person loses consciousness in an average of ten seconds.

A person who has lost consciousness because of constricted carotid arteries will regain consciousness in another ten seconds or so if the pressure is released. If pressure is not released, however, the unconscious person dies within minutes. As a result people have killed themselves by strangulation in the most benign-looking circumstances. They have hanged themselves from a bedpost while lying next to their sleeping spouse; the weight of the head against the noose is enough to block the carotid artery. They have hanged themselves while sitting on the floor. They have hanged themselves despite having a permanent tracheostomy—a breathing hole in their throat—that allowed a full supply of air to the lungs.

It takes considerable strength to crush someone's trachea, but it takes almost no effort to block their carotid arteries.

The trapping zone rewards bulk and brute force; it neutralizes speed and skill. It's the big man's friend and the little guy's nightmare—yet oddly, it's where the feminine style of Wing Chun works best. Wing Chun tells you to step right into the trap and make yourself at home. Don't bob and weave or even turn sideways to offer a smaller target: just face your attacker, square up your feet, and wait for him to do his worst. But first, "make sure to mark your centerline." The essence of Wing Chun is the belief that human power is strongest when it spirals up from your feet through the center of your body. You can access that centerline energy by following these four steps:

1. Slide your feet out to shoulder width.
2. Sink your thighs into the slightest of squats.

3. Cross your open hands in front of your crotch.
4. Then raise them chest high in that most instinctive of defensive positions—an X.

Now you're ready for Sticky Hands to turn your opponent's trapping zone into your own. Sticky Hands is next-level wobble power. It takes your attacker's force, merges it with your own, and slams the doubled-up energy right back at him. The key is body connection; as soon as he starts throwing punches, you lightly 'stick' your hands to his, deflecting the blows rather than blocking them. When he cracks a hard right at your eye, you divert it with your left wrist and use his force to pivot you like a wheel around an axle. Now it's your turn to hit, using the momentum of his push to power your right arm. He's belting himself in the face with your fist.

"The hands are swinging doors, built on the fortress of legs," the great Wing Chun grandmaster Ip Man liked to tell his students. "Ip Man did not move a great deal," one of his followers observed.

"When someone punched at him, he moved just enough to avoid it, but when he attacked he went straight for his opponent's center, either striking him or making him lose his balance."

Ip Man was just as stingy with his feet. The higher your foot, the more compromised your balance, so Ip Man only kicked low; never those big, crowd-pleasing head shots you see in tournaments, only short bug-stompers aimed at your knee, crotch, shin, or ankle. Wing Chun isn't a spectator sport; it's a science of crippling force, designed to end fights fast by hitting quickest where it hurts the most.

Violence has a pretty thin encyclopedia. Every way you can think of to punch a windpipe or knee a groin, someone else figured it out ten-thousand years ago. For self-defense, that is great news: if you can master Sticky Hands, you could download every conceivable attack into your fascia memory and turn your body into an Automatic Response System. Like instinctive aim, Sticky Hands takes your higher brain out of the fight and activates your animal self. When an attacker grabs your wrist, up comes your elbow; if he tries to tackle you around the waist, your foot takes out his knee before he gets there. You don't need to think or even see—just react.

The scariest thing about pankration is when it's not scary at all. The ready position is so nonchalant and relaxed, you could be a blink away from taking a gastrizein to the knee and never suspect the person across from you is poised to attack. If you're set to play catch with a toddler, you're set to fight pankration: just face forward, dip your knees, and raise

your open hands. It looks less like art and more like an accident, which speaks to pankration's ancestral authority: it feels so natural because it is. Pankration refines raw impulse, chucking out everything that doesn't help and focusing on the three things that do: ease, surprise, and stopping power. You activate without thinking. Attack without signaling. And strike, like any other animal in a fight for its life, without mercy. Pankration is so frighteningly true to real violence that for years it wasn't included in the original Olympics. Pankration finally made it into the 33rd Olympic Games, in 648 BC, with two rules: no biting, no eye gouging. Otherwise, it was anything goes; the entire range of human cruelty and creativity were at your disposal. The Spartans still grumbled and refused to participate: if you can't blind your opponent and chomp his nose, then what's the point?

If you find yourself in an apprehensive situation, stick close to the walls on the right side of the street and casually slip your right hand into your jacket pocket. Wrap your fist around the phone, with the top just below your thumb and index finger.

Damn! You were right to be nervous, because here comes trouble. Someone's moving in fast with something—what? a gun? a knife?—in his hand. The phone will now save your life, but only because of a body twist. Parry the gun away from your body with your left forearm. Now bring out the phone; by clenching it in your fist, the bones in your hand compress into a hard block. Turning your body from the hip, strike your opponent hard on the left side of his face, as near to the jawbone as possible. You barely need to move your arm; keep your shoulder pinned to your side and come up hard with the forearm, letting your hips do the work.

The odds of knocking your opponent unconscious by this method—properly executed—are at least two to one. The fact that this can be accomplished with something as simple as a match-box is not well-known, and for this reason is not likely to raise your opponent's suspicion of your movements.

Humans evolved in a world where nothing moved two-thousand miles an hour, so there was no reason for the body to be able to counter that threat, but the brain still had to stay ahead of the game. Neurological processes in one of the most primitive parts of the brain, the amygdala, happen so fast that one could say they compete with bullets. The amygdala can process an auditory signal in fifteen milliseconds—about the amount of time it takes a bullet to go thirty feet. The amygdala is fast but very limited; all it can do is trigger a reflex and wait for the conscious mind to catch up. That reaction is called the startle, and it is composed of protective moves that would be a good idea in almost any situation. When something scary and unexpected happens, every person does exactly the same thing: they blink,

crouch, bend their arms, and clench their fists. The face also sets itself into what is known as a fear grimace: the pupils dilate, the eyes widen, the brow goes up, and the mouth pulls back and down. Make that expression in front of a mirror and see not only how instantly recognizable it is, but also how it seems to actually produce a sense of fear. It's as if the neural pathways flow in both directions, so the expression triggers fear as well as being triggered by it.

What's the worst fix you can find yourself in? Maybe jumped from behind—someone gets the drop on you, now you've got a gun in your back and your hands in the air.

Spin around, sweeping the gun away with your left hand and grabbing the gunman's chin with your right, finishing him off with a knee to the groin and a shove to the ground. Strange as it may seem, the gunman cannot think fast enough to pull the trigger and make a hit before your body is out of the line of fire.

“He roots around in his pocket and comes out with a rubber band.

‘Put this around the fingers of one hand, right up there near the fingernails. Now spread your fingers as wide as you can. Really fight it. Good. Close them and open again. It would be stupid to throw an arrow, right? Better to use your muscles to pull back the string and let the string do the work.’

He tells me to strip off the rubber band, drop to the floor, and get ready for push-ups. But instead of lowering my chest to the floor and straining my way back up, I'm to reverse it: I'm supposed to spread my fingers as wide as they were with the rubber band, mash my palms hard into the floor, and pull myself down. When I do, I surprise even myself when my elbows straighten with barely any effort.

‘See? You tightened the spring on the way down, then it popped you right up.’

I try it again, and it feels like I'm being sprung from a toaster. I'm not sure how it's working—I'm not even sure if he knows—but those were the easiest twenty push-ups of my life.”

The one thing wrong with the fitness industry is everything. Barbells? Forget it. Weight machines? Waste of time. Women are sweet, men are sweaty? Ridiculous. Diets, exercise circuits, resistance training? Hopeless,

useless, and unnatural. Look at every other creature on the planet. They don't binge and starve, or heave and strain to make one part of their body bulge. They don't sit on a bench and lift a weight to their nose over and over again. Why would they? You'd never do that in the real world, so why do you do it in training? All you're creating is hard muscle and stiff strength—the exact opposite of true fitness. You pull this and push that so many times a day and you get to be a little amateur Samson. You already feel the muscles expanding. Those biceps especially draw attention, as if they were the synonyms of health and strength. But it is superficial—only skin deep, as it were—and will not 'stay put.'

The truth is that there can be no proper training that does not educate the whole system of the human—man or woman. This idea that women are fragile little flowers is a farce that needs to end. The 'weaker' sex would occupy no such position of relative weakness if natural laws were followed. If women must, as is so freely complained, remain physically short of man's strength, there is no reason why the disparity should remain so great as it often is. Where women lead an active life their strength and endurance comes remarkably close to the strength and endurance of the other sex. In other words, tradition has more to do with the 'weakness' of women than has nature.

For many people, fitness is still all about lifting weights to build bulk. But what does that make you fit for? I'd argue that a baby rolling on its back, drinking from a bottle held between its hands and feet is a much more physically fit human than a bodybuilder. Like Bruce Lee, the infant used fascia to solve a problem its muscle couldn't. You are fit if you can adapt to the demands of your environment with ease and imagination.

Be fit to be useful. No matter who you are, no matter what you're seeking or hope to leave behind after your time on the planet—is there any better approach than simply to be useful? Here is the great duty of man to himself, to his family, his homeland, and to humanity. Only the strong will prove useful in difficult circumstances of life.

When children play they're really role-playing disaster scenarios. Turn them loose and they'll run, wrestle, hide, roll around, kick-fight with their feet, and leap off anything they can climb—exactly the skills that could keep them alive in a real emergency. Natural training should spring from nature, so kids' play is a good starting point. It doesn't take long to realize that most roughhousing is a selection from three basic menus:

1. **Pursuit:** walk, run, crawl
2. **Escape:** climb, balance, jump, swim

3. **Attack:** throw, lift, fight

An individual who is satisfied with performing in exercises or sports of entertainment—soccer, tennis, football, et cetera—but ignores the art of swimming, self-defense, or fears vertigo, is not strong in an useful manner. A weightlifter or a wrestler who cannot run nor climb, or a runner or a boxer who doesn't know how to swim, or cannot climb, is not strong in a complete manner.

Competition perverts true fitness. It tempts you to cheat; to overdevelop some talents while ignoring others; to keep tips for yourself that could be useful to everyone. It's a shortcut: all you have to do is beat the other guy and you're done; but the Natural Method is a never-ending challenge for self-improvement. Besides, competitive sports focus on rivalry and class divisions. The Natural Method is all about collaboration; every teacher is a student, every student is a teacher, bringing fresh ideas and new challenges. Raise the bar, but help the next guy over it—*paideia* and *arete*. What's most fascinating about this theory is that it extends far beyond fitness and into every aspect of life. Natural training could make people more noble, intelligent, resourceful, generous, successful, and happy. Why? Because every day, you practice problem-solving under extreme conditions, and once you've figured out how to carry a hunk of timber through a swamp in your bare feet, nothing at work will stress you. Natural training makes you introspective, not combative; you see conflict as something to be resolved with force and dexterity, not violence and its brother, fear.

A woman alone who needs assistance is actually far better off choosing someone and asking for help, as opposed to waiting for an unsolicited approach. The person you choose is nowhere near as likely to bring you hazard as is the person who chooses you. The same for kids too—you're probably not going to pick the extremely rare stranger that wants to diddle you.

“People have been looting. I say there should be more shooting than looting, so if you loot, loot a gun store.”

Some decided they would only bomb buildings of symbolic importance—courthouses, military bases, police stations—and only after warnings, and only at times when the buildings were likely to be empty. The argument being that they had to be more life affirming, more in line with the mass protests breaking out everywhere. The bombings must push the mass movement toward renewed militancy. Some might call it ‘armed propaganda,’ others ‘responsible terrorism.’

CONGRATULATIONS! After year after year of jocks mercilessly beating on you, cliques looking down their noses at you, and teachers looking the other way because they only care about themselves, you've finally decided that you're Mad As Hell And You're Not Gonna Take It Anymore. You've decided to pick up the battle flag of St. Eric & St. Dylan and chosen the short but glorious path of the warrior over of the slow and degrading death of the sheep. But, there's more to getting ready for your 'Day of the Last Laugh' than stockpiling on firearms and explosives you know. Several things you need to remember when you're getting ready:

Rule #1: TELL NO ONE! Not your friends, not your parents or relatives. Not even in your personal writings must you give away the slightest hint of the Doomsday you are about to unleash on these deserving saps. These assholes will crack down on you and have you hauled away at the first and tiniest sign that you may be harboring ANY thoughts of striking back. Wear a proverbial mask of normality that disguises the true face of the demon. When assaulted, keep your thoughts hidden from them and don't yell something like: 'I'm gonna come back here with a gun and shoot you all dead! You hear me? Dead!!' The less your tormentors know what's in store for them, the better the chances you have to prepare for your vengeance.

Rule #2: LEARN PROPER MARKSMANSHIP! Hunting is not only permissible, but is even encouraged in society. Sharpen your skills with rifles and pistols when you're out with daddy in the woods. Don't waste your ammo on small critters like cats, dogs, or squirrels; that will only get the attention of the "Powers That Be" who will use that as a hint of a potential serial killer, and you'll be condemned to spend afternoons with your school's local "Mister Mackey," thus giving the jocks and cliques even more excuse to pummel on your skull. Target bigger game that is around the same mass as your future victims. After a while, with each well-aimed shot, you'll start to notice how much a deer starts to look more and more like that jock who enjoys thumping you in the nuts as he passes you between classes.

Rule #3: LEARN WHAT *DOES* BLOW UP AND WHAT *DOESN'T*! One of Eric and Dylan's biggest mistakes is that they thought that a propane canister would explode if it was shot at. Even if it did, a big loud bang only does damage to the immediate vicinity. Explosives are good, but incendiaries are better. A burning agent not only damages everything in its area, but can also spread out looking for other things to burn. This fact has been well proven in places like Dresden, Tokyo,

and Waco. A canister with gasoline and liquid detergent (for that sticky napalm effect) at a 3:1 ratio does the trick nicely.

Rule #4: KNOW YOUR VICTIMS' HABITS! You already know they're assholes and they need to be destroyed before they are let out into the private sector and cause some REAL misery, but do you know what they like to do? Besides tormenting you, that is. Where do they hang out during lunch hour? Do they sit in a certain area each time? Most cliques usually do. Chances are you won't be able to get all of your intended victims to be all in the same place at the same time, so you'll need to use this data to determine what places and times the majority of your enemies will be together, decide which ones are the most DESERVING to die, and plan your strategy

NOTE: DON'T write your data down (see Rule #1)! If these notes are found, the teachers will call the cops to swoop down on your ass, and both you and your hopes of justice are forever fucked!

Rule #5: REMOVE ALL TRACES OF YOUR LIFE! What this means is that after you've done your apeshit, no doubt Officer Barbrady and the media whores will tear through your house to look for signs of why you did what you did—always ignoring the obvious signs, like the cruelty inflicted by jocks and cliques, and sticking to the usual scapegoats like video games and EMINEM mp3s on your computer. Before you embark on your mission, secretly prepare to erase all traces of what makes you as you are. Shred and burn all your letters and notes. Dump all your books and CDs off at the nearest Salvation Army drop-off center in the middle of the night. Don't let your parents or friends find out, or they'll think you're about to commit suicide or join a cult and they'll interfere, thus monkey-wrenching your Grand Plan.

Remove AND *destroy* your hard disk and any other data media from your computer on the morning of your mission. Erasing data isn't good enough, because the porkers have ways to restore it later.

When the cops and the retards from FOX NEWS start picking through your belongings, they won't find jack shit for them to use to further stereotype and persecute the next future apeshitter and his own mission. Think of the police and the media as where jocks and cliques go after they've graduated from high school. Do you REALLY want to make their jobs any easier?

Rule #6: SAVE THE LAST BULLET FOR YOURSELF! You've done your duty, and you've made sure that you've mowed down as many jocks and snottos as you could within your 15 minutes (or less) of Payback. Their souls are already being prepared to work as your slaves in Hell. No doubt you've gotten the attention of the cops and they already have the SWAT teams surrounding the joint. Just a matter of time before they either mow you down—the ultimate daydream of every jock, young or old, is to legally blow away a “geek”—or to be dragged out alive in handcuffs to be paraded around in a humiliating baggy white jumpsuit in front of the media cameras and be degraded and abused for the rest of your life in prison (and you thought being picked on in high school was Hell). Better to deny these assholes the pleasure of hurting you some more and just check out while you're still King of the World.

Look at the examples of St. Eric & St. Dylan, who are now held in eternal reverence for their sacrifice, compared to the quickly-forgotten idiots who decided to remain alive and are stuck in the deepest hole society can cast them down into, where the abuse is greater than ever before, used as lab rats by psychiatrists to “find a root cause for why children kill,” and there is NO way to defend yourself against it. Would you WANT to spend the rest of forever in a straitjacket & dog muzzle and wheeled around on a moving dolly? Remember, no one can put a dead person on trial.

Well, that's about it. Just remember, if you do decide to go through with your mission, I've never seen you before in my life, mm'kay?

No lock in the world is unbreakable. For ideal security measures, the model of a seal is preferred, something that does not necessarily prevent a break-in but leaves incontrovertible proof of a breach. That was what the plastic tabs on shipping containers were supposed to do, but did not. Alternative measures include the use of stickers, embossed with a sparkly pattern, that utilize our eyes' amazing ability to spot differences. The shipper places the sticker over the container's opening, and photographs it. The receiver also photographs the sticker. If a thief has managed to remove the seal without breaking it, and then replaced it, its position will be slightly different, a discrepancy revealed by overlaying the two photos. The stickers do not prevent tampering—but compared with plastic tabs, they make it much more difficult to hide the evidence of tampering.

Part of the danger in grabbing an electric fence is that the electricity will cause your arm muscles to fire—and the clench muscle is stronger than the release muscle, so you cannot let go of the fence. The same goes for your

legs. Electricity does not blow people off the ground. It causes leg muscles to fire, and the extend leg muscles are stronger than the contract ones, so you jump.

Here's how you stop someone from bleeding out. First you grind your knee into the limb, between the wound and the heart, to pinch off the artery and stop the blood flow. While you're doing that you're getting the tourniquet ready. You take pressure off the limb long enough to slide the tourniquet onto the limb and then you tighten it until the bleeding stops. If the medic still hasn't gotten there—maybe he's treating someone else or maybe he's wounded or dead—you pack the wound cavity with Kerlix (you did pack your Kerlix, right?) and then bandage it and stick an intravenous drip into the man's arm. If you're wounded and there's no one else around, you have to do all this yourself. And you want to make sure you can do it all one-handed.

The Anti-Paparazzi clutch is a purse that responds to a camera flash by firing a bright light that ruins the photo being taken.

These days there are too many ways to plant evidence designed to destroy one's character, reputation, credibility. Remember this the next time some big bad monster is paraded out. You could be distributing copyrighted movies, child porn, or participating in other illegal activities just by reading a web page with a little code on it.

While you may have known that actively participating in bandwidth exchange on the TOR network meant you were at some point helping distribute the dark web and all the sundry stuff it contains, the same now is possible just by visiting a website. A Javascript application like WebTorrent shows that by visiting a page you can participate in legal torrent-based movie distribution while you're watching a movie doing nothing other than landing on the page. The script loads, a video box like YouTube pops up and starts playing a movie, on the left you've got a graphical representation of who you're connected to on the internet and grabbing pieces of the movie to watch from other people, who are similarly watching the movie or just sitting there seeding it. At the same time you're giving out pieces of the movie you have to people out there.

But, there doesn't have to be a box showing a movie and who you're connected to, and there doesn't have to be any indication that anything is going on. You could just be sitting there reading about how cats are plotting your murder while you sleep and find out when the FBI shows up that the web page had been injected with code that loaded a Javascript and you've been seeding child porn every time you visited. Site operators might not even have a clue that their sites had been injected as it could potentially come in the form of a crappy ad.

You can disable Javascript at the moment to prevent a WebTorrent-style code from running as it's not a virus or an evolutionary leap in attack vectors, it's just a tool that's cool. Unfortunately disabling Javascript is going to break much of the web in 2020.

In fact, there's not a lot in place to prevent a malicious plugin from doing most web operations. In recent years we saw a rise of Javascript DDOSing, your computer turned into a bot while a Pikachu ad with dollar signs in its eyes ran attacks in the background and dared you to click him.

You could probably mitigate this attack vector with TOR or a VPN should you be worried about it. Just remember, the next time you hear about someone being charged with kiddie porn distribution, hacking, et cetera, realize it could just be from visiting a web page with JavaScript turned on and nothing to protect their IP address. Or it could be from a disgruntled IT coordinator who had full access to everything, especially setting startup pages. Or it could be a disinformation campaign designed to smear a revolutionary. The web's gotten a lot more dangerous to the casual browser.

Of course your compromised computer doesn't give you a criminal record, but I can guarantee if there's 30 gigs of exploited minor videos on your computer when the FBI comes knocking your next couple of months is probably going to be unhappy. And if you've got a dog they'll probably murder it. Maybe you'll hear the whines, watch as it tries to lift itself and crawl closer to you, it fails, falls, collapses, the pain and confusion in the eyes—you want to go closer, you can't, a heavy knee in the back, bound hands. You watch, you listen, powerless. The light fades from those once bright, beautiful eyes. A blackness envelops you, that fucking unlocateable pain. And you are never the same again.

If two men in trench coats are at your door, it's the FBI. If it's just one man in a trench coat, it's the IRS. Either way, you probably shouldn't open the door.

If the police knock on your door—this includes any agent from any law enforcement agency, regardless of whether they are local, state, or federal, including the FBI, ATF, and ICE when they are working as law enforcement, uniformed or not—follow these simple steps. Consider putting a copy of this by the doors of your residence and familiarizing yourself with the information. These days, no matter who you are or what you're doing, you never know when you might receive an unwelcome visit.

Say: “No, you cannot come in. I do not consent to a search.”

Keep the outer gate or door chain locked. If you must, step outside and close the door behind you. Better yet, speak through the door.

Say: “No, I will not answer your questions.”

You can also say:

“I have been advised to not answer questions. If you leave a card, a lawyer may contact you.”

The police are trained to intimidate. Don't let them bully you! Regardless of what they say, remember that you are never required to answer anything they ask. Your responsibility is to your conscience and your community, not to the police or their investigation.

Research the legal resources available in your area. Keep the phone numbers accessible for the local National Lawyer's Guild hotline, the local hotline to report ICE raids, and any contacts you have for legal support or raising bail money. Agree on a response plan with those you share this home with! Keep in mind that the phone numbers you have written out in your home may be discovered by police.

Do not sign anything you are given without seeking advice from a lawyer first.

Lying to police may result in criminal charges. The safest thing is to not engage with them at all.

Rehearse the phrases, that way, when the time comes, you will feel confident enough to deny them entry, access, and information.

If they want to conduct a search ask if they have a search warrant that is signed by a judge. It must be no more than ten days old. If they do not have a search warrant:

Say: “I do not consent to a search.”

You may inform them that if they leave a card a lawyer may contact them. You can then ask them to leave, or you can simply close the door.

If they do have a warrant, you may ask them to slide it under the door or mail slot. You may want to take a picture of the warrant and send it to a lawyer. Signal is a secure and encrypted messaging app for smartphones. You can assert that you wish to consult with a lawyer before consenting to a search. This may not stop them from entering.

Before they enter, you may wish to shut down electronics, move anything you wish to keep private from plain sight, and close all doors. The warrant

may not apply to the entire house. Anything in plain sight that obviously appears illegal or evidence of a crime may be seized.

If they have come to carry out an arrest they must have an arrest warrant signed by a judge that is no more than ten days old, specifying someone in this home.

Who is named? You are not required to confirm whether or not that person is present.

Say: “I am going to remain silent, I will not answer any questions without a lawyer.”

If police have a reason to believe the named person is in the premises they may enter without your permission to search for the individual. They can check places where a person could hide. Anything in plain view that obviously appears illegal or like evidence of a crime may be seized. If the arrest occurs inside, police may more thoroughly search the area of the person arrested. On the other hand, if the named person decides to surrender outside, it may limit or prevent a police search of the house.

It is crucial for anyone arrested to fully exercise the right to remain silent. Do not answer any police questions other than booking questions: name, date of birth, and address.

Say: “I am going to remain silent. I want to speak to a lawyer.”

If they only have a subpoena police are not legally entitled to enter unless you give them permission. Unless they have a warrant, they cannot come inside to search for anyone or anything named in the subpoena.

Say: “I do not consent to searches.”

After an incident, you may want to write down the details of what happened. Include the date, time, location, the people present, the agencies involved, the badge numbers of the officers, the names they mentioned, the questions they asked, the items they seized, and any damages, injuries, or other details.

Documenting the details of this incident can be beneficial; later, it may be important to have a record of all these details, and it is possible that they will be forgotten otherwise. In case there could be potential risks if the document is discovered, it may help protect the privacy of the document to write the name of an attorney and the words ‘Confidential attorney/client communication’ at the top.

Much of a police interrogation consists of asking otherwise meaningless details about a suspect's day that he can't possibly keep track of. Once the police have opened up even a small contradiction in the testimony, they have a way into the web of lies that inevitably surrounds any denial of guilt.

Repeating a question is a standard interrogation tactic because it literally bores the subject into answering "fully and candidly."

When asked by the judge how he pleaded, Smith answered in a strong, clear voice:

"I plead mute."

Pleading mute was a way for Smith to avoid admitting guilt while still keeping his options open.

A burner phone is a single-use phone, unattached to your identity, which can theoretically be used to communicate anonymously in situations where communications may be monitored. Whether or not using a burner phone is itself a 'best practice' is up for debate, but if you've made the choice to use one, there are several things you should keep in mind.

- **Burner phones are not the same as disposable phones.**

A burner phone is, as mentioned above, a single-use phone procured specifically for anonymous communications. It is considered a means of clandestine communication, and its efficacy is predicated on having flawless security practices. A disposable phone is one you purchase and use normally with the understanding that it may be lost or broken.

- **Burner phones should only ever talk to other burner phones.**

Using a burner phone to talk to someone's everyday phone leaves a trail between you and your contact. For the safety of everyone within your communication circle, burner phones should only be used to contact other burner phones, so your relationships will not compromise your security. There are a number of ways to arrange this, but the best is probably to memorize your own number and share it in person with whoever you're hoping to communicate with. Agree in advance on an innocuous text they will send you, so that when you power your phone on you can identify them based on the message they've sent and nothing else. In situations where you are meeting people in a large crowd, it is probably OK to complete this process with your phone turned on, as well. In either case, it is unnecessary to reply to the initiation message unless you have important information to impart. Remember too that you should keep your contacts and your

communications as sparse as possible, in order to minimize potential risks to your security.

- **Never turn your burner on at home.**

Since cell phones both log and transmit location data, you should never turn on a burner phone somewhere you can be linked to. This obviously covers your home, but should also extend to your place of work, your school, your gym, and anywhere else you frequently visit.

- **Never turn your burner on in proximity to your main phone.**

As explained above, phones are basically tracking devices with additional cool functions and features. Because of this, you should never turn on a burner in proximity to your real phone. Having a data trail placing your ostensibly anonymous burner in the same place at the same time as your personally-identifying phone is an excellent way to get identified. This also means that unless you're in a large crowd, you shouldn't power your burner phone on in proximity to your contacts' powered-up burners.

- **Don't refer to yourself or any of your contacts by name.**

Given that the purpose of using a burner phone is to preserve your anonymity and the anonymity and the people around you, identifying yourself or your contacts by name undermines that goal. Don't use anyone's legal name when communicating via burner, and don't use pseudonyms that you have used elsewhere either. If you must use identifiers, they should be unique, established in advance, and not reused.

Consider using an innocuous passphrase to communicate, rather than using names at all. Think 'hey, do you want to get brunch Tuesday?' rather than 'hey, this is Secret Squirrel.' This also allows for call-and-response as authentication. For example, you'll know the contact you're intending to reach is the correct contact if they respond to your brunch invitation with, 'sure, let me check my calendar and get back to you.' Additionally, this authentication practice allows for the use of a duress code, 'I can't make it to brunch, I've got a yoga class conflict,' which can be used if the person you're trying to coordinate with has run into trouble.

- **Beware of IMSI catchers.**

One reason you want to keep your authentication and duress phrases as innocuous as possible is because law enforcement agencies

around the world are increasingly using IMSI catchers, also known as “Stingrays” or “Cell Site Simulators” to capture text messages and phone calls within their range. These devices pretend to be cell towers, intercept and log your communications, and then pass them on to real cell towers so your intended contacts also receive them. Because of this, you probably don’t want to use your burner to text things like, ‘Hey are you at the protest?’ or ‘Yo, did you bring the Molotovs?’

Under normal circumstances, the use of encrypted messengers such as Signal can circumvent the use of Stingrays fairly effectively, but as burner phones do not typically have the capability for encrypted messaging—unless you’re buying burner smartphones—it is necessary to be careful about what you’re saying.

- **Burner phones are single-use.**

Burner phones are meant to be used once, and then considered burned. There are a lot of reasons for this, but the primary reason is that you don’t want your clandestine actions linked. If the same burner phone starts showing up at the same events, people investigating those events have a broader set of data to build profiles from. What this means is, if what you’re doing really does require a burner phone, then what you’re doing requires a fresh, clean burner every single time. Don’t let sloppy execution of security measures negate all your efforts.

- **Procure your burner phone carefully.**

You want your burner to be untraceable. That means you should pay for it in cash; don’t use your debit card. Ask yourself: are there surveillance cameras in or around the place you are buying it? Don’t bring your personal phone to the location where you buy your burner. Consider walking or biking to the place you’re purchasing your burner; covering easily-identifiable features with clothing or makeup; and not purchasing a burner at a location you frequent regularly enough that the staff recognize you.

- **Never assume burner phones are “safe” or “secure.”**

For burner phones to preserve your privacy, everyone involved in the communication circle has to maintain good security culture. Safe use of burners demands proper precautions and good hygiene from everyone in the network: a failure by one person can compromise everyone. Consequently, it is important both to make sure everyone you’re communicating with is on the same page regarding the safe

and proper use of burner phones, and also to assume that someone is likely to be careless. This is another good reason to be careful with your communications even while using burner phones. Always take responsibility for your own safety, and don't hesitate to erase and ditch your burner when necessary.

Direct action, simply put, means cutting out the middleman: solving problems yourself rather than petitioning the authorities or relying on external institutions. Any action that sidesteps regulations and representation to accomplish goals directly is direct action—it includes everything from blockading airports to helping refugees escape to safety and organizing programs to liberate your community from reliance on capitalism. Here we present a step-by-step guide to organizing and carrying out direct action, from the first planning stages to the debrief at the end, including legal support, media strategy, and proper security.

There are countless scenarios in which you might want to employ direct action. Perhaps representatives of despicable multinational corporations are invading your town to hold a meeting, and you want to do more than simply hold a sign; perhaps they've been there a long time, operating franchises that exploit workers and ravage the environment, and you want to hinder their misdeeds; perhaps you want to organize a festive, community-oriented event such as a street party. Direct action can plant a public garden in an abandoned lot or defend it by paralyzing bulldozers; it can occupy empty buildings to house the homeless or shut down government offices. Whether you're acting in secret with a trusted friend or in a mass action with thousands of people, the basic elements are the same.

Brainstorming can start with a problem you want to solve, or a social contribution you want to make; it can be informed by the resources you have, the kind of experience you desire, or the people you want to work with. You can plot a single short adventure or a long-term campaign. Often, the best brainstorming occurs in the course of daydreams and informal conversations—it's good policy to trust that your craziest ideas can become reality and try them out. By the same token, even when attending events organized by others, it's best to bring a plan so you can contribute in your own way.

If it makes sense for your action to be organized openly, establish a format, such as a public assembly, in which to work out a strategy and tactics. Invite friends, or circulate fliers, or go from door to door announcing it. Come up with your own proposals ahead of time, in case no one else does.

For more clandestine actions, brainstorm in a secure environment with a trusted friend or two. Keep your ideas to yourselves as you hash them out so you won't have already given them away when you're ready to try them.

Who is your action for? Is it directed at on-the-spot spectators, corporate media viewers, the owners of specific corporations, their stockholders, the police and government, other members of the community, the participants themselves? What is it intended to accomplish? Is it meant to communicate ideas, to call attention to an injustice, to inspire people, to secure resources, to set a particular tone, to inflict crippling material damages, to provide a deterrent, to demonstrate a model others can apply, to serve as a learning and bonding experience for those involved?

Establishing a shared understanding of the goals of the action from the outset will save a lot of headaches later when your plans shift and potential conflicts arise.

One of the most efficient and secure models for direct action organizing is the affinity group model. An affinity group is a group of friends who trust each other deeply and share the same goals; working together over a long period of time, they become efficient and effective. For a small action, the members of an affinity group can take on different roles. For a larger action, affinity groups can work with other affinity groups in a 'cluster,' each group playing a role. This can make decision-making easier than it would be in one big mass, as each group can send a representative to a spokes-council. Clusters of affinity groups can work together over long periods, building trust and effectiveness.

Once you have a plan to propose, figure out how many people you need to accomplish it. If your plan requires secrecy, invite only people you trust to keep secrets and that you are sure will want to join in—everyone you invite who doesn't end up participating is a needless security risk. Extend invitations one by one, or affinity group by affinity group, so those who decide against participating will not know anything about the others involved. Start by asking general questions about what a potential participant could be interested in, and don't reveal critical details of the plan such as exact target or date until he or she is ready to make a commitment. As people are brought into a plan and go on to bring in others, make sure everyone has the same understanding of the appropriate degree of security.

As more people become involved in the project, it's important that everyone understands how much commitment is expected of them. Sometimes the group that first presents a plan will be more invested in it than others; if they do months of work preparing, only to have another group they depended on drop out at the last minute, all that work is wasted. Everyone shares the responsibility of being honest from the beginning about what is realistic to

expect of them. At the same time, those who initiate a project should be careful to share ownership with everyone else involved.

Make all decisions in a participatory and consensual manner. If your group is large enough to warrant it, use an informal or formal consensus meeting process to make sure all voices are heard: set the agenda of each meeting together and pick a facilitator to keep things on track. The more that everyone participates, the better informed the decisions you make will be.

Be aware of internal dynamics that may be unbalanced, such as those between people with different backgrounds, or between local organizers and participants from out of town. The more everyone participates in planning and preparing for the action, the more invested in its success everyone will be. A group with good internal dynamics is smarter than any individual can be; individuals can bring in ideas, but together the group can work out the best way to apply them.

Make sure everyone feels supported and comfortable throughout the project; check in with each other outside of formal structures as well as inside them. Though often overlooked, maintaining morale is a critical aspect of successful direct action organizing. Keep level heads in the face of surprises and uncertainty.

Security culture is a way to avoid unhealthy paranoia by minimizing risks at all times. If you and your friends always conduct yourselves wisely, you'll have less to fear from infiltration and surveillance.

The essence of security culture is that information is shared on a need-to-know basis. In some cases, the whole town needs to know about your action for it to be a success; in others, it is crucial that the action is never spoken of outside the circle of those directly involved. Everyone privy to the action needs to share a sense of what level of security has been deemed appropriate, and to respect others' needs regarding safety.

Consent is as important in security as it is in sexual intimacy; it is never acceptable to violate another's wishes regarding security issues. Make your own security needs explicit from the beginning; swear an oath of silence together if need be. Never talk about your or others' involvement in past actions, however long ago, except with their express permission.

When a group comes together to work on a project, make sure everyone present is vouched for by others in the group as reliable and trustworthy. To protect each other, you should be prepared to remain silent under interrogation and legal pressure.

From the beginning of a project, you should operate according to the highest possible level of security it might require; you can always become

less cautious later, but if you start out being careless you close off a lot of options.

Be aware of all the ways your actions can be monitored or tracked: the records of surveillance cameras, the purchases you make, the places you go and the people with whom you are seen, the location of meetings, the items you throw in your trash, the websites you visit, the files on your computer, the fingerprints you leave (on the batteries inside a flashlight as well as on the outside of it, for example), and virtually everything that has to do with a phone. Devise codes and prepare alibis as need be.

Everyone involved in the action should be aware of and prepared for the risks they are taking and the potential criminal charges associated with them. It's important not to take things farther than you feel ready to go: if you get hurt or arrested while engaging in a level of risk for which you are not emotionally prepared, the effects can be debilitating. Far better that you get started slowly, building a sustainable involvement with direct action projects that can continue over a lifetime, than rush into an action, have a bad experience, and swear off all such activity.

If your action may result in arrests, prepare a legal support structure for those who participate. This could include a legal aid number for arrestees to call, legal observers to monitor and document the actions of police, money for bail, lawyers to provide immediate support to arrestees and to represent them in court, and a circle of people prepared to offer emotional, financial, and logistical support throughout court cases.

The legal aid number should be open to receive incoming calls at all times throughout the action; bear in mind that in some cases, you cannot call a cell phone from jail. The legal aid number should not incriminate the arrestees or the people who receive the calls—if part of your alibi is that you don't know each other, don't all call the same number from jail. If you fear you will forget the number, write it on a concealed part of your body in permanent marker. The person operating the legal aid number should know the full names of those who may be arrested, so as to check on their status.

To bail someone out of jail, you can either give the entire amount of the bail to the court system, in which case you should receive it back after the legal process is finally concluded, or you can go to a bail bondsman and pay about 10% of that; in the latter case, the bondsman's fees may cost you a significant amount of money. If no one can pay bail, an arrestee may sit in jail until the court date, although in the case of minor infractions it can happen that police release people on their own recognizance so as not to have to deal with them.

If you are risking arrest, decide whether you want to have your identification on you to expedite processing, or to be without it, so they cannot

identify you immediately. A large group of arrestees who refuse to give their information can tie up the legal process and sometimes gain bargaining power. If you need medication, consider hiding it on your person, or carry a note from a doctor explaining what you need.

Find a sympathetic and trustworthy lawyer—or perhaps a few of them, since a lawyer cannot represent more than one defendant on the same charges. You can research which lawyers have taken on similar cases in the past, or approach the American Civil Liberties Union or National Lawyers Guild. If you don't give away anything sensitive, you can ask sympathetic lawyers about the charges associated with hypothetical acts, or specify the dates and times you may require their services—but don't let them know anything that could implicate them. In order to do their job, they need to be able to prove that they are not connected to anything illegal.

Any community whose members may suffer arrest would do well to establish a bail fund in advance; this can save a lot of running around in the middle of emergencies. Throw benefit shows, sell t-shirts, solicit donations from wealthy sympathizers, have your friends at the university book you speaking dates at their school in return for student funds. Make sure the bail fund stays with someone who is even-handed, trustworthy, and always easy to reach.

Long before an action, when you are establishing and prioritizing goals, work out exactly how much media coverage you want, from which sources, and how you are going to obtain or avoid it. This could mean composing and sending out a press release or a communiqué, electing a spokesperson to represent your project to the press, inviting corporate or independent reporters to the action or to a press conference, faxing announcements or making press calls, offering interviews (in person or anonymously over a burner phone), or having members of your group cover documentation themselves. If you want to avoid certain kinds of coverage, it could also mean assigning a participant to make sure photographers do not aim their cameras at you.

If you are communicating with the media, compose talking points, sound bites that your spokesperson repeats to be sure they get in the media coverage. Give representatives of the press as little material to work with as possible so they will have to use the part you want them to. Keep track of which reporters tend to provide positive coverage, and approach them personally. If you have a website, get this address into corporate media coverage to reroute their viewers to your media. You can also provide information to the public yourselves by postering, pirate radio, speaking events, or starting conversations door to door.

If your action warrants high security, send your communiqué securely:

for example, from a public computer that leaves no record of who uses it. Be aware of how the devices you use can incriminate you.

Proper planning is the essence of safe, effective direct action. Keeping your goals and priorities in mind along with the resources you have to work with, plot and compare different strategies. Weigh out the risks and potential rewards of each: always pick the safest way to accomplish a given objective, and make sure you can afford to take the risks you choose. It sometimes happens that as the planning process goes on, a project will get more and more ambitious and hazardous, until some of those involved start to have doubts; at that point, it may be necessary to work out a safer or scaled-down version of the plan, so it can still take place.

There are countless factors to take into account in planning. You must pick the most effective tactics in the context of the current social and political situation. You must pick the best location for the action and take into account all its attributes; you must pick the best date and time of day. You must bear in mind the others who will be in the area, and how they will react—will they be sympathetic, or may hostile vigilantes interfere with your activities? You must coordinate the timing of different parts of the action, predicting how long each will take, and figure out how those involved in the action will communicate.

When predicting the responses of others—say, for example, the police—consider the factors influencing them: Are they expecting what you're planning, or do you have the element of surprise? If you have the advantage of surprise, how long will it last? Will there be a lot of attention focused on the event? Will it be immediately apparent what you are doing? Will there be middle-class citizens or reporters around, and will their presence put a damper on the authorities' response? What is their strategy likely to be, based on previous precedents for police behavior in this context? Do their bosses want them to come down hard on you—or to avoid provoking a scene? How well do they communicate, how fast do they move, where are they located, what routes will they take?

Don't underestimate the challenges of simple logistical matters, such as transporting people or communicating in stressful situations. Don't forget to plan an exit strategy, either.

Because plans rarely come off exactly as they are laid, it's important to have backup plans worked out for different scenarios: 'If X, we'll Y; if A, we'll Z.' Have a few different objectives in mind, in case your first choice turns out to be impossible. Having a basic structure for communications and decision-making in place will help you to be prepared for situations that play out differently than any of the scenarios you had imagined.

Be careful not to put others at risk for your actions; the authorities will

probably charge whomever they get their hands on with the worst crimes they can, so it's important both to get those who take risks out of the area safely and to make sure serious charges can't stick to anyone else. In some cases, you can bring together multi-leveled groups in which everyone knows the general goal but only a few know critical details such as what the target is or who is to carry out the riskiest activity.

Be prepared for the best-case scenario as well as the worst. New ideas, if they are good ones, tend to fail because people don't take them far enough, whereas older ideas usually fail because they are too familiar to everyone, including the authorities. Sometimes the best results come from applying familiar tactics in entirely new settings. Look back in time for precedents, occasions when similar actions were attempted in similar contexts. These can be very instructive. As you gather years of experience and learn from others' successes and failures, you'll develop skills for predicting and preparing for a wide variety of situations.

Once your plans are laid, draw up a timeline until your action, counting backwards from the big day to establish the deadlines for all the pieces that must be in place.

Early on in the planning, work out what funding, materials, and other resources you will need and how to obtain them. If security is a priority, obtain what you need in such a way that it cannot be traced to you; affinity groups from out of town can acquire potentially incriminating materials far from the site of the action.

Make sure everyone has appropriate clothes for the action, including different outfits in layers if necessary. Take security issues into account as they relate to clothing: if everyone is dressing in black for anonymity, be sure no one's clothes have unique identifying features; likewise, if you're going to be posing as random passers-by, remember that civilian dress is different in Miami than it is in Seattle. If timing is important, make sure everyone's watches are synchronized.

Double-check to make sure everything is ready by your deadline. Go through a practice run, verbally if not physically. If participants are unfamiliar with the area, distribute maps. If need be, plant necessary materials in the area in advance of the action—being careful not to give anything away in the process.

Before the action, study the area carefully. Chart safe routes in and out; look for hiding places, obstacles, potential targets, and surveillance cameras (including those in ATMs and stoplights). Note how long it takes to travel key distances, and be aware of the visibility from and of key locations. How close are the authorities, how long will it take them to arrive? Can their approach be delayed? Who else is in the area?

While scouting, be careful not to call attention to yourself or leave an obvious record of your passing. Be sure to do at least some of your scouting at the same time of day as the planned action, and if possible do a quick check immediately before it to make sure nothing has changed. If your action calls for daunting tasks, such as climbing a steep rooftop, it may be good to make an actual practice run at some point.

Information can also be gathered from photos, maps, and brochures; aerial maps or blueprints may be available. In some cases you can obtain information from a tourist center, or call and ask questions on a pretext—as a student doing a report, for example—or even receive a guided tour. Once you’ve collected a lot of information, it can be helpful to consolidate the important parts into a map suited to your needs. Be careful to dispose of all files and paperwork securely.

Identify all the roles necessary to pull off your plan, and make sure every one of these is filled. Some potential roles include:

- Lookouts
- Scouts
- Media spokespeople
- Internal (“embedded”) media
- Legal aid contacts
- Legal observers
- Medics
- Distractions
- Getaway drivers
- People to transport materials
- People to receive information and make tactical decisions
- People to carry out the actual action
- “Plants”

In some situations, it is wise to have understudies for important roles, in case it turns out at the last minute that someone can’t participate. This is especially true if you don’t know in advance what the date of your action will be—for example, if it is to coincide with an event that you cannot predict in advance, such as the announcement of a verdict or a declaration of war.

If your action is taking place during or as part of a larger event, there may be large meetings at which different groups try to coordinate their efforts. These can be useful, but tend to consume a lot of time and energy; make sure you go into them knowing exactly what you hope to accomplish.

Whether you’re acting in the midst of thousands of other activists or far away from anyone, take into account the way your actions will affect other people. Will they endanger others? Will they provoke police repression? If so, will others bear the brunt of it, and is it possible to offset this? Will

your actions make it more difficult for other people to do important work in a given community? Are there negotiations or reassurances you should engage in before, during, or after the action?

Honor all agreements you make with other groups; some might be willing to help you, with or without knowledge of the specific details of what you're doing. Over time, if you prove reliable and considerate, you'll build alliances.

Awareness is key to the success of any action. Often, the atmosphere can change very quickly. It is important to keep up with what is going on around you, and to have established in advance how you will react to a given scenario. For example, is the arrival of a single police car a big deal? How about ten? Is it common for police to tail marchers in this city? While you can never be certain of exactly what will happen, going over possible scenarios in advance and having an idea of how your group wants to deal with them will give everyone a more solid idea of how to react—and how not to overreact—as the situation develops.

When informing others of a development, announce the raw information, not the conclusions you may have drawn from it

Do: “The police are putting on gas masks.”

Don't: “They're going to gas us!”

This allows others to draw their own conclusions. Resist the urge to panic, and the tendency to get carried away as well.

During the action, scouts can keep track of changes in the terrain such as arriving police, crowd movements, others' activities nearby, and safe zones. They can use communication systems such as burner phones, encrypted text messaging, two-way radios, or whistles to keep in touch; audio or visual signals such as car horns or fireworks can also serve. A police scanner can be used to monitor police communications.

To make communication more efficient, scouts can report to an individual or sub-group in the center of the action; in a larger setting, they can phone in their findings to a central information hub, which others can call with questions.

Just as communications equipment can make you more efficient and effective, it also increases the risk of surveillance. You can use codes and code names, but be judicious—complicated codes are easy to forget, and prosecutors can argue that your codes meant something more drastic than they actually did. Even if no other communication system is used, it can be useful to have the option of an ‘abort’ signal for emergencies.

A safe escape is the most commonly overlooked part of direct action organizing. Be sure to have an exit strategy worked out in advance. If you'll

be in a large group, especially with others who haven't been part of the planning process, think about how to avoid the herd mentality that keeps crowds together after it would be better to split up. Know when to press your advantage, and when to quit—when to run as fast as you can, and when to walk nonchalantly. Discard anything that could incriminate you, if possible in a place it will not be found; wait to change your appearance until you're sure you're no longer under observation.

If need be, gather in a safe place afterwards and make sure everyone is accounted for; collect bail money, seek outside assistance, write press releases. While everyone involved is still around, get contact information for anyone who might be able to testify or provide documentation to assist arrestees.

After the action, destroy any evidence that could be used against you; keep tools that could be tied to the action in a hiding place outside your home. If you may have to testify in court at some date in the far future, consider writing down all the details you might need to remember on a piece of paper and concealing it in some place where you can be sure it will never be found. Get together in a secure setting and go over what happened. Follow up on ongoing matters, such as supporting those with court cases, providing further clarification to the public as to the goals of and ideas behind the action, and sorting out conflicts. Celebrate your victories, offer each other constructive criticism, learn from your mistakes, and lay plans for the next project.

Counter-Measures to Crowd Control

Umbrellas: They block pepper spray and the view of cameras. Umbrellas are also commonplace and provide a sense of unity as well as inconspicuousness.

Shields: Though they are less conspicuous, they provide better protection and shift the tone to a more active defense.

Fire Extinguishers Can be used to extinguish tear gas containers and keep them from releasing more gas.

Traffic Cones + Water: Can also be used for extinguishing tear gas; far easier and cheaper to acquire and replenish than fire extinguishers.

Masks: Allows protesters to conceal their identity and somewhat protects against tear-gas.

Hardhats: Useful at protests where police or extra-state attack is probable to protect one's head from projectiles and blunt weapons.

Goggles: Widely used to stop pepper-spray though ones with sufficient impact resistance are also helpful against rubber bullets and tear gas canisters.

Lasers: Can be used to blind cops and block cameras. They simultaneously provide pleasing aesthetics. You are encouraged to use not only the dangerously powerful green lasers but also the terrifyingly powerful blue lasers. Remember: The closer you get to purple on the rainbow spectrum the more powerful the laser.

Being close to manufacturing points makes it easier to get cheap supplies in bulk and can allow people to get their hands on equipment and materials without needing to have everyone go out and buy them on their own. Demos have become sites of distribution of materials and supply lines are a feature of most significant protests where clashes with riot police are assured. Human chains pass supplies to the front lines of conflicts. Supplies commonly distributed at demos, all with their own hand signs: zip-ties (to secure barricades), pliers, umbrellas, shields, water, saline solution, goggles/safety glasses, barricade materials, masks, asthma inhalers, markers, plastic wrap, and allen-wrenches.

These supply lines also provide a way for those who are unable to fair well in frontline clashes to support the front line and make the frontline possible. Some who cannot stay long at the protests hand out water. Some leave bags of clothes around so that people can change in a hurry if needed. Others convert their stores into "protest kit" vendors selling needed supplies for cheap; a questionable tactic but one that has helped the facilitate distribution nonetheless.

Some Points

Leaderlessness: Out of need and wisdom, planning and announcements have become dispersed and decentralized. There are crews of front line fighters and strategists who plot together. There are dozens of online groups where plans are hatched, and calls made. With no single head to cut off the security forces have a harder time repressing the movement.

Come Together, Leave Together: Buddy systems are encouraged as police have picked people off after events.

Go Against the Flow (of Traffic): Protesters have learned police vehicles can't follow them as well if they go against the flow of traffic in the streets because cars on the road block their advance.

Barricades and Blockages: Barricades block the flows of traffic, are used to hide from projectiles, and slow the advance of the police. Commuter trains are blocked to cause economic and social pressure. Airports too are shut down by sit-ins. Masses of people disrupt the functioning of government offices. Many of these actions cause the most damage to government and capitalist logistics and are also some of the less dangerous activities to attend, as opposed to police station sieges.

Permanent Occupation: Instead of taking territory and trying to defend it, opt for roving occupations, mobile crowds, and pop up demos. Some still dig in their heels to fight with the police, but many swarm a logistical node till it shuts down then move on. They are not afraid of tactical retreats. After all, why would you need to fight the police at a disadvantage when you can outpace them and still disrupt business as usual and chuck stones at them from afar?

Counter-Surveillance: The police, of course, have spies in the movement, but the protesters have lookouts watching and communicating police movements. Likewise there are sympathizers in the state and informants or 'ghosts' within the protest. Many protesters however have stopped worrying so much about ghosts and just let people do what they will while generalizing security tactics and effective means.

Black Blocs: There's much debate if you can call protesters who wear all black and masks a black bloc. Some who participate intentionally call it that, but they are admittedly a small number. Whether or not a bloc or not, the protesters wear all black and similar gear to create a sense of unity and make it harder for people to pick them out of the crowd.

Extra-State Violence: Armed men have attacked protests. This tactic allows for those defending the ruling order to use violence that otherwise wouldn't be socially viable or to create a unique sense of terror in those attacked. Just like police attacks on protests, it is meant to scare people out of the streets. Though this tactic, of course, had some intended affects, it can push many to come out in anger and to pick up street fighting tactics.

So You've Been Kettled

1. If You're Going to Make a Break, Act Fast

The longer a kettle has been in place, the more difficult it is to break out: the police will have established their forces and surveillance, people in the bloc may have changed clothes, demoralization and inertia will have set in. If you want to make a mad dash for freedom, your best chance is to take advantage of the chaos before a new order is imposed. Consider it an opportunity to play a high-stakes game of Red Rover.

2. Use the Middle of the Bloc to Get Clean

Once definitively surrounded with no chance of escape, you should change outfits immediately; try to do so without being filmed. In any black bloc, it's important to wear a layer of normal clothes so you can quickly shift your appearance. In a mass arrest scenario, the most secure way to do so is to move to the center of the crowd where you can't be seen, shed any suspicious objects and black bloc attire, shift to your civilian clothing, and move to the outside of the crowd to provide cover for those who haven't changed outfits yet. This should happen as soon as the crowd is definitively kettled. Two rotating spirals of demonstrators and BAM: a whole new crowd.

In changing outfits, be cognizant of details that might give you away, such as your shoes or backpack. You could carry your bag inside another bag or under your black gear, for example, or cover identifying features on your shoes with black tape.

3. Don't Make Things Easy for the Police

What safety we can find in captivity will not come from following orders, but from how we leverage whatever cooperation the police require that is still under our control. If they tell you to do something, it's probably because it makes their job easier. Ideally, a detained crowd should establish a process for deciding together how to respond to police commands. Standard guides to nonviolent direct action suggest a police liaison system, but this can be difficult in some scenarios. During one of the mass arrests at The People's Strike in 2002, detainees locked arms immediately until the police told the crowd they would allow people to leave the kettle with their hands up. This was a lie, but the experience of coordinating disobedience together built morale and rapport between the participants that was useful throughout the

rest of the lockup process. In too many protests, all police have to do is walk through the crowd and point at people for them to go willingly into a wagon. Some just volunteer to get arrested out of boredom, falsely believing that it would speed up their release.

The anti-globalization movement experienced a lot of mass arrests; there are many creative anecdotes to learn from. A generation ago, the tasks of the police were obstructed by arrestees refusing to give names, swapping clothes once in custody, just plain getting naked in custody, singing in the jail, chewing through identifying bracelets, and locking arms around each other to form a ‘giant snake’ of arrestees. Many of these instances of solidarity and disobedience ended in police violence against arrestees, but sometimes they compelled the authorities to release batches of John Does without charges.

Honestly, there is no sure way to calculate what kind of disobedience will be most favorable for arrestees in any given situation, and most people don’t want to get whacked in the ribs for the sake of symbolic defiance—but we shouldn’t forget that even under arrest, we can still continue to resist.

4. **Don’t Bring Your Real Phone**

While today’s mass arrests resemble previous ones from a decade and a half ago, one thing is new: the police often keep the majority of people’s phones. All of the associations, conversations, and social media accounts of arrestees who carried their personal cellphones that day may now be available to the authorities without even a subpoena. Please don’t bring your personal cellphone to a black bloc. Please don’t take pictures in the streets—this can help police identify where you were and who you were around, as well as giving them photographic evidence with which to investigate and prosecute others.

There are plenty of options for burner (single use) phones under \$50. This is a good option if you want a phone not tied to your number or name—for example, so you can still stay up to date with the text alerts, tips line, and legal hotline. If you are arrested, try to destroy, ditch, or conceal your SIM card so the police cannot gain access to all of your information. Even after removing the SIM card, much may still be left on your phone. We can’t emphasize this point enough: don’t bring your personal phone to an action with a high risk of arrest.

5. Seize the Chance to Pass on Skills

Once surrounded, there is no guarantee how much time you'll have together. While you have the chance, it's important to pass on skills like the ones described in this primer to the less experienced. Getting everybody on the same page while you are still all together means that everybody will be equally informed—it makes more sense than hoping that the same conversation will take place in all of the vehicles in which arrestees are transported.

If you are a movement veteran with plenty of experience, don't be too shy about outing yourself by speaking up—the risk of letting those ignorant of basic security culture make easily preventable mistakes may be more dangerous to you than the risk of being identified as a potential leader. It only takes one person making a dumb mistake to put everybody in danger. The sense that everybody is on the same page will embolden people to keep their mouths shut later under police pressure.

6. Care for Each Other

Medics treat folks for pepper spray, asthma attacks, PTSD, and injuries from concussion grenades that the cowardly police fire. National Lawyers Guild attorneys help explain the arrest and possible booking procedures to less experienced demonstrators in the crowd. In any mass arrest situation, it's a good idea to check on people who seem isolated and offer support to them; this can reduce the likelihood that anyone will cooperate with the prosecutors. Anxiety can be our worst enemy; acknowledge it, but don't let it rule you, and do what you can to put others at ease. When one person has access to a resource—a phone call, a lawyer visit—ask around to see how that could benefit others.

7. Don't Talk to Cops

It can't be said enough—nothing you say to cops can help you.

“Sorry officer, my lawyer tells me I shouldn't tell police anything but my name and address.”

It's as easy as that.

Once in jail, the cops often will do their best to get you to talk. This ranges from more innocent-seeming:

“So, what happened down there?”

To obvious traps like:

“If anyone is nervous about their charges, we can go have a conversation about your charges and what comes next. . . we’ll just have to waive your right to remain silent.”

Even if you are certain you haven’t done anything illegal, what you say can put others at risk—and the more that the police see you as someone who is willing to talk with them, the more pressure they will put on you. Seemingly unrelated conversations can be used to determine associations between detainees and used against you later on. Stay focused on getting through until your release. Afterwards, you will have plenty of time to decompress from what happened, with the benefit of guidance from your lawyer. Bear in mind that you are probably being audio recorded and/or video recorded in your cell.

The cops and corrections officers will likely be acting unjustly. They’re trying to provoke you. You may find yourself wanting to tell them exactly where they should go to and other despicable historical figures they bear resemblance to. Save it. If you can’t hold it in for yourself, hold it in for the rest of the people you’re arrested with. No kind of interaction with the police can improve your case or the cases of the people around you.

8. Don’t Believe Anything Cops Say

Once arrested, you are in a condition of uncertainty in which you have very little control over your situation. The anxiety that this uncertainty can cause is one of the main weapons the police have against you. If you can hold off on emotionally reacting to potential outcomes while you’re in custody, you take away much of their power over you.

Cops are bullies. They will tell lies just to scare you: that you will face years in prison, that you will be assaulted in jail, that other arrestees have talked to them about ‘what you did.’ Don’t believe a word. The evidence in your case will become clear later on. While you are under arrest, focus on making sure the police get as little information from you as possible and pay no mind to what they say.

Even if you somehow met a good cop with genuinely good intentions, they can’t make any decisions or commitments anyway. They probably have very little idea what is actually going on. They don’t call the shots, they just pass information up the hierarchy.

9. **Maintain Morale (We Need a New Songbook)**

Every arrestee I've spoken with has complained about the songs. Mostly it's just "Baby I'm an Anarchist"—and the chorus of "Solidarity Forever," since nobody knows the rest of the words. We need new songs that feel fresh and contemporary. Of course, it's impossible to find a song that everybody likes, but let's at least keep it interesting by expanding our range of options. Our collective songbook should include chants for various moods and circumstances: rejoicing, yes, but also gathering power, somber solidarity, ridiculing the police, and spreading determination in the face of uncertainty. We also need other ways to maintain morale while passing time together, such as games, storytelling, and humor.

10. **An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure**

All of these tips will be more effective with a little forethought. For example, perhaps the statements from the detainees could have been more eloquent if a little planning had taken place in advance; the same goes for the proposal of a hunger strike. Plan ahead in your affinity group as to what you will do once a kettle is set in motion—whether to break out, how to get clean, who will carry burner phone(s) and how they will dispose of them.

One of the reasons jail solidarity tactics achieved some victories during the anti-globalization movement is that they were planned publicly in advance, during the organizing leading up to mass protests. It is possible, in theory, that you will be able to discuss and employ the same solidarity tactics once you are under arrest, but it will be difficult to get buy-in from others on such short notice.

Most importantly, prepare yourself emotionally and mentally for police custody. Familiarize yourself with your rights and with typical police lies and tricks. Practice a line like, 'Until I have a lawyer I will only give you my name and address,' or however you're most confident expressing that you will not be speaking to cops. Rehearse it. Get used to saying it.

11. **Seriously, Don't Talk to Cops**

After you are released, you don't have to talk to cops, detectives, or district attorneys who call you. Refer them to your lawyer, and report any police contact or harassment to your lawyer and your comrades.

Also, don't do anything that is effectively the same as talking to the cops. Don't talk to the media after getting released—whatever they

publish with your name on it is just as useful to the police as if you had spoken with them directly. Speak with your lawyer before signing on to any class action lawsuits—some can require depositions with forced testimony that can be used against you if your criminal case is still ongoing. Practice good security culture and consider what information the police might have gained about you and your associations if they confiscated your smartphone. Change your passwords. Get your number to a new phone as soon as possible so that incoming calls don't keep going to the phone they have in their possession.

Remember, direct action, simply put, means cutting out the middleman: solving problems yourself rather than petitioning the authorities or relying on external institutions. Any action that sidesteps regulations and representation to accomplish goals directly is direct action—it includes everything from blockading airports to helping refugees escape to safety and organizing programs to liberate your community from reliance on capitalism.

We believe that the greatest barriers to participating in direct actions are social ones: finding comrades to build affinity groups takes time, patience, and trust. This recipe assumes that you already have people who you can get mischievous with.

Before we had ever done a nighttime direct action, we felt hesitant to begin. We had no one to teach us the basics, and feared making stupid, easily preventable mistakes. For that reason, we want to share several logistical tips that we feel may be helpful in carrying out these actions.

1. **The secret is to begin.**

First, you need to choose the target of your direct action and what tactic you will use. Although this could vary widely, for this recipe we'll use the classic example of smashing out the windows of a gentrifying business in an urban neighbourhood.

Think about what the action will communicate to people you've never met—from possible accomplices to the most passive citizen. What possibilities might this communication open up? For example, smashing up luxury businesses communicates a resistance to gentrification and in some cases, have contributed to such businesses having to close up shop.

There are introductions to 'security culture' available elsewhere, but here we'll just say to do all of your planning in person, with people you trust, outside of houses and with no phones present (both being vulnerable to police surveillance).

When we started getting our hands dirty, we found it helpful to first get comfortable with less risky activities like graffiti or wheatpasting posters, practicing the same communication habits we would later apply in attacks. This helps us become acquainted and feel more comfortable with our ability to act in stressful conditions—encounters with police, evasion, et cetera—and our relationships with each other.

2. Scouting

Scout the target ahead of time; look for the safest entrance route and exit route, prioritizing paths with fewer cameras (alleys, woods, bike-paths, train-tracks, residential areas). If you use bolt-cutters to cut a hole in a fence, will that open more possibilities? Have fun subverting the urban organization of space designed for social control to your purposes of social war.

Be discrete; don't point at the cameras you want to smash, or walk in circles around the target. Decide where to position lookouts (if you think you need them), perhaps posted up smoking at bus stops that aren't on camera, for instance. How will they be communicating with those doing the direct action: hand signals, inconspicuous shouts of random names to signify different situations, walkie-talkies, flashlights, burner phones?

It helps to know what the traffic patterns are like at the time you'll be acting. How busy is foot traffic? Where is the closest police station, and what are the most patrolled streets? Doing the action on a rainy night at 3:00 means there will be fewer witnesses, but also fewer people to blend in with afterwards when police might be combing the area, so sometimes closer to midnight will make more sense. Once you've gained confidence in nocturnal actions, maybe you'll want to experiment with day-time actions that are more visible to passersby and thus harder for the authorities to conceal. Leave at least a week or two between scouting your target and the action because that's the average amount of time it takes for surveillance footage to be overwritten. This does not necessarily apply to state surveillance footage and perhaps is increasingly untrue even for private enterprises as the cost of storage plummets.

3. Fashion decisions! (and other prep)

Wear two layers of clothing; a casual layer for the action that includes a hood and hat, and a different layer underneath so that you don't match any suspect descriptions. Blend in with the character of the area; it

doesn't make sense to dress like a punk in a yuppie neighbourhood, but it does make sense to be in flashy jogging gear if you're going to be running down a bike-path. Baggy clothing can help to disguise body characteristics. A hat and hood will keep you relatively anonymous during your approach—most cameras are pointed from above, so your face will be mostly obscured when you're looking down.

You can pull up a full mask for the last few blocks and the action itself. Depending on the terrain and where cameras are located, you may be able to wait until right before the action to mask up to avoid arousing suspicion preemptively.

Expect to be seen on camera during the action. Don't get too paranoid about cameras in the surrounding area—a standard CCTV camera has poor resolution in the dark, if police even bother to get the footage before it's overwritten automatically. All surfaces of any tools you'll be using should be thoroughly wiped with rubbing alcohol ahead of time to remove fingerprints, and cotton gloves should be used during the action (leather and nylon will retain your fingerprints on the inside). Do not take your cell phone, or if you must, remove the battery; it geolocates even when powered off.

Make a plan in case a good citizen intervenes, or starts following you to call the police. Dog-mace has worked wonders for us, but if that feels too intense as an immediate response, being verbally confronted by a masked group is enough to deter most people. Always attempt to limit damage to such minor pawns of the state.

4. **It's witching hour**

Once lookouts are in their locations and they give the agreed upon starting signal, take a final glance around, and go for it! For breaking the windows of a gentrifying business, bring enough rocks for several windows, aim for the bottom corners, and make sure you're finished up within, say, thirty seconds of the first crashing glass pane. If you also want to put glue in the locks, paint-bomb—light bulbs filled with paint—the sign, pull down the cameras, write a graffiti message (in blocky ALLCAPS to hide hand-style particularities), or anything else that's relatively quiet, do this before you make a kerfuffle breaking the windows, or plan for an extra friend to do it simultaneously.

Ditch everything including your top layer of clothing at the soonest appropriate place along your exit route—cops have lights that will reveal glass shards on clothing (more of a problem if you use hammers

than rocks). Find creative hiding spots ahead of time to ditch anything you don't want found, but as long as your materials and clothing are free of fingerprints it shouldn't matter. The exception to this is arson tactics, where DNA forensics are more likely to be used, in which case you may want to take everything with you in a backpack and dispose of it farther away.

Ideally, even if you are detained by police on your way out, you'll have nothing on you that they can use to connect you to the crime. Know your story of why you're in the neighbourhood, or be ready to remain silent because if they find evidence to contradict your story, it can be used against you in court, while your silence can't be held against you. When arrested in Quebec, you only have to give the police three pieces of information: your name, date of birth, and address—this may differ in other places; it may be useful to be knowledgeable of local laws before carrying out any illegal action. Once you're arrested, saying anything else will do more harm than good. After providing the above three pieces of information, you can repeat the following phrase:

“I have nothing more to say. I want to speak to a lawyer.”

A typical police response (if there even is one—often times vandalism is only discovered the next morning) will involve police first going to the scene of the crime, maybe taking the time to ask possible witnesses if they saw anything, then driving around the surrounding streets looking for possible suspects. If you get out of the immediate area quickly, you'll avoid all of this. Hiding can be a viable option if something goes awry and leaving as planned looks risky—backyards, corners of driveways, rooftops, bushes, a stored boat, et cetera can all be helpful in waiting it out.

5. Sweet dreams!

Consider using a bike to get out of the area quickly—you can have it locked a short jog away. Bikes can be disguised with new handlebars and saddles, black hockey-tape on the frame, removing identifying features, or an all-black paint job.

It's best to avoid using cars if possible—a license plate is far easier to identify than a hooded figure on a bike. But if you must because the location is too difficult to get to otherwise, be careful. You could park a bike-ride away in an area that's not on camera. Be dressed totally normally when entering the car. Take back roads and know your way around. Don't use cars that may be already known to police, in case

they have been tagged with a GPS surveillance device, and don't use a rental.

Rest well knowing that you've fucked up a small part of this fucked up world.

“It is easier to destroy than to create.”
—Common Sense, Motherfucker

Let me start by describing my country to you, so that you can gain a glimpse into the environment that created it.

My country was one of the best implementations of an authoritarian state in the history of our world. I give it this honor because it was immensely effective at convincing the majority that they were free, even many whom felt the harshest oppression. By deploying this tool, you can greatly marginalize the most revolutionary among the population.

One day our great leader would be emotionally distraught over a death caused by random senseless violence, or perhaps a result of our failing mental health system, while the day before and after, he would be responsible for military strikes that burned the flesh off of children's faces in countries on the other side of the world.

Our leaders would denigrate the least among us, claiming they were irresponsible. And then those leaders would hand over grand sums of money to those with power when they made what were clearly irresponsible choices. Our leaders would imprison millions of us for consuming certain plants, while enjoying those plants that they approved of and made them rich.

The education system was mostly to blame for all of this. We learned sanitized versions of history. We learned about ideals like freedom and democracy after walking through metal detectors and having had our bags searched. We were allowed some voice in how our education systems were run but it was largely symbolic power and positions, something that prepared us very well for our adult lives. We weren't taught critical thinking; that dangerous skill was left reserved for the students at more prestigious institutions, for the likely leaders of tomorrow.

Our leaders produced some of the greatest propaganda. They would partner with our prominent media stars to showcase their tools of oppression in a very positive light. It was hard to argue that the media whom were allowed access turned out to usually be far more exciting to watch. The powerful would leak information to the news media when it was favorable for them, and harshly prosecute those that leaked information they did not like, or stand wringing their hands over the sanctity of whistleblower protections when they could be used for partisan political gain.

Our leaders were even able to violate rights that we had enshrined for ourselves in the founding documents of our country. One of the most important lines our leaders crossed, and one that was unrecognized by most, is that they were able to kill many of us unjustly without fear of consequences. This must be the final line between freedom and slavery, for if it can be crossed on a consistent basis, then not only do your leaders have the power to kill you—which it could be argued the state always had—but they also have very few reasons to not use it. This will inevitably lead to increased usage unless some check is applied.

No such checks were applied.

It was in this environment that revolutionary ideas began to take shape. All revolutions begin first with revolutionary ideas, then revolutionary actions follow. Even if an individual commits an act that seems to spark a revolution, it is the ideas that already exist in others, if not the perpetrator, that is the tinder that fuels the inferno. This should be an important consideration when you are deciding whether or not to use some of the tools mentioned.

If much of what I describe about my country and its leaders seems to apply to you, then you should also consider this: If the top three most likely outcomes of you fighting for a cause are not (in no particular order):

- Success
- Going into hiding
- Death

then either your cause is not all that important and much of a departure from the status quo *or* you are not fighting for it very effectively.

These were quite controversial ideas at the time. But hardly surprising given the state propaganda. While we felt the need to wait for support, we knew at a certain point we must act. Day by day our consciences tugged at us, our individual inner monologues slowly eating away at what we were.

It was of course different for all of us. Why wouldn't it be? While we were all hurtling towards the same end point, we all did not start from the same place. Some of us had more hurdles to overcome than others. The religious among us were some of the earliest converts. One of my fallen operatives put it best:

“The journey is like a game of Chutes and Ladders, the religious get a bunch of ladders and almost no chutes, the more rational among us get the opposite.”

If you've played the game you'll note some flaws. But the general concept is quite true so fuck off, the guy's dead, show some respect. When you don't have an afterlife to look forward to, you tend to put a bit more value on the here and now. The time I have with X now is all I'm going to get. I'll just be throwing it all away. Nothing will come of it. This was the opposition to the 'Do it' voice in our heads. Everyone would give in to it eventually, it was just a question of when and you'd have better odds at guessing when a fly is going to take a shit.

We all eventually made it to this destination however. And we began to fight back.

It was often argued that my country was invincible; it was an odd belief given that it had not had much decisive military success in recent history, but also expected given the highly effective propaganda employed. It certainly may have been invincible if faced with the prospect of fighting another state actor, however, when faced with an idea and true believers of it, it had shown again and again to be powerless. It was not alone, the only ways states had to fight this enemy was to either have a better idea, or effectively silence it. Luckily my country developed some of the communications tools necessary to spread our ideas and keep them from being silenced.

My country was a highly developed one with lots of moving parts. This also means there are many points of failure and therefore, attack. We had numerous examples of critical infrastructure that could easily be disabled, even if only temporarily. Thanks to the large size of my country, we also had a large area to work in. Such as:

Banks Given the history of my country, especially the recent past, these were by far the most legitimate of our targets. However, since many may have armed guards, attacking at night is usually your best bet.

The windows are usually extremely large, take these out on your way in. Once inside smash everything. Push any furniture into a corner and set it on fire.

You can be in and out of a bank in under 45 seconds.

Car Dealerships Often run by shady con-men with incredible wealth and for us also a sign of environmental damage. Windshields and showroom windows are going to be your best targets. A team of three can take out a moderately sized lot in minutes.

Stores One of the easiest targets were the large chain stores that were notorious for abusing their employees. While these actions would certainly

affect the employees—who were victims of their employer—the main damage under a sustained attack could be felt by the employer.

We would use publicly available information from satellites for our initial planning. This helped cut down on costs and also minimized the amount of time any of our operatives would be seen around the targets. Ideally you want to find areas which have a high concentration of targets, which allows you to hit multiple places in one attack before you need to scatter to avoid agents of the state.

Next you'll need to get the basic layout of the targets, in order to minimize time on site and maximize your damage. This does not need to be a detailed drawing, and definitely do not sketch it out while you're there. They WILL look at the tapes prior to the attack in an attempt to identify you. Note all exits and target locations.

Depending on the size of the store, you'll have two general sets of targets with a bit of overlap. We'll break these down into Small and Big but you'll be able to generalize it as you need to.

Small Targets

These allow a small footprint within which you need to operate, but they also have the downside of not generally being close to others and also have fewer exit points (discussed below).

You always want to maximize the impact, both in duration of the effects and the monetary loss, so you'll want to focus on specific areas.

- **Cosmetics:** Thankfully a lot of this stuff comes in glass bottles, so even if it isn't particularly expensive, you can smash it into other things that are. Blunt objects of course work well here, but you can also just use your fist wrapped in a towel
- **Refrigerators:** Quick to take out, just smash out the front, if you've got time you can try to go for the actual hardware but it's not recommended.
- **Checkout Terminals:** Some of these might be bolted down or locked in some type of cabinet, but at least take out the screens. We found the automated checkout machines to be particularly good targets since we could also easily take out the scanning mechanisms as well.

- **Pharmacy:** While also a potential source of funds for your revolution on the black market, in this case we're just looking to destroy. Jump the counter and start opening and dumping, preferably into some container of liquid in order to thoroughly destroy.
- **Stockroom:** Most of these are going to be tightly packed masses of cardboard boxes and plastic tote crates. Set fire to a few locations on your way out the back door. Small containers of gas work well for this. Beware the fumes when lighting, your eyebrows will thank you.

Large Targets

So while these of course are more area to work with, much of it relatively useless for your purposes, they also provide some higher value targets and in higher quantities.

- **Electronics:** Big ones for us were televisions and computers. High value and very easy to destroy. Just go for the displays of both, don't worry about particular internal components in portable computers.
- **Checkout Terminals:** Much the same as with small stores with additional ease of access to the scanning mechanism on manned registers. You can also take out the conveyor belts with a box cutter.
- **Stockrooms and Storage Trailers:** These are goldmines but can be a bit more work than taking out stuff on the sales floor. Any electronics are likely to be packaged to avoid damage during shipping so you'll need to consolidate as much as possible before setting fires. With any luck items will be grouped relatively close together already. Trailers are a bit easier as they're flammable themselves. A few molotovs thrown from the loading dock into the interior of each will easily set them and their contents ablaze and also require removal of the debris before the store can be restocked.

Exits

Getting in is easy, getting out may be harder. The keys to an easy exit are minimizing your time on site and maximizing your options

of escape. It's unlikely that the entrance is ever going to be your best choice of exit. State agents will of course attempt to block all exits if they are competent and there are enough of them before you attempt to flee, but they are most likely to storm you from the front, an encounter you wish to avoid.

When planning, each operative should design their path of destruction to always head towards an exit point when possible. But every operative should know all of their possible exit points because you do not know what will happen. In a small store this is relatively easy, in a larger one it can be a bit harder. Thankfully, if your country is like mine, the stores will be required to label these exits and make note of them to anyone in the store.

Some of my colleagues have had success with exiting by blending into a fleeing crowd. This can certainly work, but you run the risk of someone outing you.

If you brought any tools with you, be sure to leave them when you are done. Be sure to wear gloves to avoid any chance of fingerprints being lifted. Once out, begin to get as much distance between you and the target as possible. But do not run, this will make you a target. Get to your safe house ASAP.

What If?: Employee Intervention

Despite the fact that they were severely oppressed, we found that we would be attacked on occasion by low-paid employees out of some misplaced loyalty to their oppressor. We recommend only applying the force necessary to safely remove yourself from the situation and/or subdue the attacker. While you can certainly claim moral authority to wage physical war with agents of the state, you risk much backlash from the public if you are seen directly harming the oppressed.

My country was quite fond of using various forms of psychological warfare on the populations of other countries. We recommend you focus much of it on agents of the state. As in any authoritarian regime, provoking action by agents of the state can be one of the most effective recruiting tools for your cause.

Due to the viciousness of our enemy, we found it necessary to employ a particularly violent form of psychological warfare. Your lines will vary.

The agents of the state in my country tasked with enforcing "law and order" had a particularly nasty habit of protecting their own at the expense

of the general population, taking on the 'us versus them' stance typical of any authoritarian regime or occupying force. We used that to our advantage.

If we posed the slightest threat to them, they were already inclined to respond with excessive force. So the moment we started using force back, they ramped up even more. And while many could justify the force because we had begun to wound and kill them, many others saw it simply as self-defense on our part. Our motto became much the same as an attention starved child: any reaction is a good reaction.

One of the easiest environments to provoke a reaction in are state-sanctioned (or relatively state-sanctioned) protest events. Most of the individuals at these are not going to support your tactics, however, they do provide a cover for you to get close; and in many cases the state would violently suppress even these ineffectual actions which gives you an excuse.

In my country, the agents of the state would often show up in full body armor and masks, thereby eliminating less extreme methods of attack. If you're lucky enough that they are not, you can of course go after them with blunt objects, telescoping batons work well and you can procure a few of them easily by ganging up on one or two agents and then expanding your collection as you work your way through them.

Pepper spray is also readily available. Be sure to get that as well, but do not deploy, simply remove it from the field as in close quarters fighting you're as likely to incapacitate yourself or a fellow operative than you are the state agent. If you take prisoners this may be a useful torture device however.

Once the agents are in their full gear, you naturally must change tactics in order to have an effect. This is unfortunately where we lost many of our supporters, I hope that you will have better luck.

Fire is your friend when physical force is not available or ineffective. Fire teams of two or three are most effective. Station one member a short distance from the front lines while the other team members are almost right on it. The rear team member will be responsible for the ignition and delivery and should be stocked with as many cocktails as possible while avoiding suspicion. Front line members provide the napalm, a mixture of styrofoam dissolved in gasoline. This substance will stick to surfaces, providing a longer burn.

Front line members will douse the agents with the substance and immediately back off, at which point the bartender should start serving drinks; once the cocktails hit and ignite, it should be extremely difficult to put out. Our state agents also had the tendency to wear synthetic underclothing which melted to the skin under high temperatures, further increasing the damage and likely extended their recovery times.

Guns work too, but there are numerous books which describe their tactical use much better than I. I would add nothing here other than common sense so I will refrain from doing so.

Luckily these protests will have a number of people you can use to hide among as you attempt your escape. You should always hit quick and get out to minimize exposure. You have nothing to gain by fighting toe-to-toe in extended battles, that is your enemy's forte.

Some other tactics we employed:

- Attack in line while getting food
- Pit maneuver at high speed on highways
- Poison in food
- Ambush while parked or at a red light
- Pretend to be a tourist

Some of our operatives had moral issues with the above tactics, however many were able to help in other ways. One of the best ways we found was to post the addresses of all agents on publicly accessible sites. We never condoned or took part in attacks on family members, but simply implying it seemed to have a dramatic effect on their behavior.

“It was just two of us at first. Probably could have done it with one but doesn't hurt to have some backup. We started with some small, free-standing stores that backed up to a suburban neighborhood and a university. Plenty of places to hide, public areas and large groups to blend in with. We were a bit sloppy with the first one, our crudely drawn maps highlighting the key targets and exits not exactly fitting what we saw when we entered. But given the defenses faced, the sloppiness was more of an anthill than a hurdle.

We casually strode in, splitting up just past a rack of cheap plastic sunglasses, perhaps 50 different designs, and then further differentiated by three or four different colors. Why the fuck do you need to have that many options for goddamn sunglasses? Fuck it. Lets do this. I pulled the small extendable baton out of my pant leg and flicked it quickly down towards the ground. Thwap. It was locked into place.

I marched towards the cosmetics and began to swing. Behind me I heard glass shattering. Must be the scanners on the self-checkout machines. Nice.

Some bitch screamed, I don't know what, probably what are you doing. I kept smashing. It felt almost therapeutic, all these bottles just cracking, launching every which way. Then looking down I noticed my pant leg covered in nail polish. You fucking dummy, gonna get yourself caught like a dipshit bank robber and an ink packet.

I shouted back to have him grab me a pair of shorts in the seasonal section on his way through. Next up were the coolers, nice and clean compared to the makeup. Seven swings later, they were all out of commission.

An overweight man with a name tag stood between me and the next destination, the storeroom. Luckily he thought better of it after seeing the baton and stepped aside. Pushing through the swinging door, I pulled a canteen out of my jacket pocket. Covered a bunch of paper towel cartons with the flammable gel, a mix of packing foam and fuel. The lighter flipped through the air.

Poof. Ignition.”

“I was sitting there, reading one of the many cable news websites that basically acted as state propaganda, when I saw it. The camera for the video feed displaying the current live broadcast spun dramatically, catching my attention. There seemed to be an agitated man and a lot of movement. I clicked the cartoonish plus sign to expand the video and the audio immediately assaulted my senses. Quickly turning down the volume, I was finally able to discern what was being said.

‘...king die you goddamn murderer!’

Pop. Pop. Pop. Pop. The camera drops. Pop. Pop. Pop. Into the frame drops a familiar face, the former vice president who is perhaps best known for being an unapologetic war criminal.

Pop. The view is now obscured by what I assume is brain matter. The feed suddenly cuts to an anchor. About time, what the fuck were they doing in the control booth? Don't they have a seven-second delay? Maybe it doesn't apply for the internet stream... who knows.

‘...happened there. We'll update you as soon as we have more details on what has occurred.’

Huh, well least someone finally killed that motherfucker. Can't say I'm surprised or even sad. Asshole certainly had it coming. Wonder what drove the shooter over the edge. I'd thought about doing it more than once. If you put him down in the chair next to me, gave me a gun, and said, 'You can shoot him but you'll go to jail.' I'd pull the trigger so quick I wouldn't even hear the jail part—not that it wouldn't be worth it.

Of course that's a lie. Prison is pretty much one of the worst possible outcomes. Not because its particularly frightening, and no, I'm not some macho guy, its just that any fear of physical pain is overridden dramatically by the simple loss of freedom. A long time ago I decided that freedom is one of the only things I will not let someone take from me. It's basically what started me down this road. When you have a line, it doesn't necessarily make things easier, but it does narrow your selection down a bit.

Hopping around the information web, I find what appears to be a manifesto, or at least what some asshole is claiming to be. The doubt is dispelled when in the first sentence is a link to a video of the shooter, kneeling on the dead VP's back, with a big grin and his fingers forming two little pistols, one pointing at a gaping hole in the VP's head and the other at a computer screen, showing the manifesto. It was like some kind of infinity mirror of death and hate.

Diving in, it quickly turned out to be what most manifestos were: way too damn long, wordy, and poetic. What the fuck man, you're shooting or blowing people up, we don't need a 30,000 word reasoning for doing it, just give us the important bits.

Skimming through, seems to be a bit of mental illness and a bit of delusions of grandeur, the usual gut reaction to things like this kicking in. After all, the voice of Mother Culture had been telling us for years that this sort of thing wasn't a valid type of protest or resistance. That kind of thing happens and may be necessary in other countries, but not here, we're different.

Hah. We were different, I learned, only in the subtlety of our violence and oppression. We wouldn't put a gun to your head and shoot you against a wall, we'd just make sure that if you didn't belong to a favored group, you'd be marginalized, living a far more unhealthy, unfulfilled, unsafe, insecure life. Often you'd end up killing each other over the scraps you were allowed to have. And then you'd be demonized for your violence while we

used 'approved' forms on a mass scale.

Fuckin' A' man, someone finally got that motherfucker. Lets get them all."

Squeal. Creak. Hiss. Click. You have arrived at your destination.

Prepping for the Worst

“I wouldn’t mind if consumer culture went poof overnight because then we’d all be in the same boat and life wouldn’t be so bad, mucking about with chickens and feudalism and the like. But... If, as we were all down on earth wearing rags and husbanding pigs inside abandoned Baskin-Robbins franchises, I were to look up in the sky and see a jet... I’d go berserk. I’d go crazy. Either everyone slides back into the Dark Ages or no one does.”

A common mantra of people who actively prepare for the apocalypse (called Preppers) is: It is better to have a gun and not need it than to need a gun and not have it.

“Thus we never see the true state of our condition till it is illustrated to us by its contraries, nor know how to value what we enjoy, but by the want of it.”

So it has happened—you attempted revolution and rather than give up their ill-gotten gains the capitalists ended civilization as we know it. Or maybe their mega-factory farms finally spawned a super-lethal virus that spread quickly around the world due to globalization and free trade. Or maybe one escaped from a BSL-4 research lab. Or maybe everything went to shit when climate change resulted in worldwide crop failures. Now you’ve got to rebuild this shit from the ground up, hopefully controlling your despicable greedy asshole population better this time.

Steel wool scavenged from a kitchen cupboard will ignite spontaneously when it is rubbed against the terminals of a 9-volt battery.

If it’s a bright day, sunlight can be concentrated into a hot focus using a magnifying glass, a pair of eyeglasses, or even the curved base of a soda can that has been polished with a square of chocolate or a dab of toothpaste.

Note that while eyeglass lenses can be used to start a fire, it is only those for correcting farsightedness—the concave lenses for nearsightedness, which affects most people, disperse the light rays rather than focusing them. William Golding famously made this mistake in *Lord of the Flies*, with the nearsighted Piggy using his spectacles to start fires.

The process to make charcoal is a simple one. Wood is burned with constrained airflow to limit oxygen availability so that it cannot combust completely, but is instead carbonized. The volatiles, such as water and other small, light molecules that turn to gas easily, are driven out of the

wood, and then the complex compounds making up the wood are themselves broken down by the heat—the wood is pyrolyzed—to leave black lumps of almost pure carbon. Not only does this charcoal burn far hotter than its parent wood—because it's already lost all the moisture, and only carbon fuel remains—but the loss of around half of the original weight also means that it is far more compact and transportable.

The traditional method for this anaerobic transformation of wood—the specialist craft of the collier—was to build a pyre of logs with a central open shaft, and then smother the whole mound with clay or turf. The stack is ignited through a hole in the top, and then the smoldering heap is carefully monitored and tended over several days. You can achieve similar results more easily by digging a large trench and filling it with wood, starting a hearty blaze, and then covering over the trench with scavenged sheets of corrugated iron and heaping on soil to cut off the oxygen. Leave it to smolder out and cool. Charcoal will prove indispensable as a clean-burning fuel for rebooting critical industries such as the production of pottery, bricks, glass, and metal.

Just a few drops of a five percent liquid bleach solution that has sodium hypochlorite listed as the main active ingredient will disinfect a whole liter of water in an hour. But carefully check the label to ensure that the product doesn't also contain additives such as perfumes or colorants that may be poisonous. Several fluid ounces of bleach found under a kitchen sink can purify around 500 gallons of water—almost two years' supply for one person.

Plastic bottles can be used not just for storing water, but for sterilizing it as well. Solar water disinfection, or SODIS, employs only sunlight and transparent bottles, and is recommended by the World Health Organization for decentralized water treatment in developing nations—a perfect low-tech option. Tear the labels off clear plastic bottles—but don't use bottles bigger than two liters, as the crucial part of the Sun's rays won't be able to penetrate all the way through—fill them with the water to be disinfected, and lay them down outside in full sunlight. The ultraviolet component of the Sun's rays is very damaging to microorganisms, and if the water warms up to above 50°C (122°F), this deactivating effect is greatly enhanced.

A good system is leaning a sheet of corrugated iron angled to the Sun and stacking the water bottles in the grooves. Painting the sheet black helps the heat sterilization effect. However, glass and some plastics, such as PVC, block out the UV rays. Check the bottom of the plastic bottle: most are now manufactured with a recycling symbol, and you want to pick out those marked with a (1), indicating they are made of PET. If the water is too murky for the sunlight to penetrate, you'll need to filter it first. In bright, direct sun, this method can disinfect water in around six hours, but if the

sky is cloudy it's best to leave it for a couple of days.

A rudimentary but perfectly adequate system for filtering out particles in murky lake or river water uses a tall receptacle such as a plastic bucket, a steel drum, or even a well-cleaned trash can. Punch some small holes in the bottom, and cover with a layer of charcoal, either scavenged from a hardware store or created yourself. Alternate layers of fine sand and gravel on top of the charcoal. Pour the water into your receptacle, and as it drains through, it will be effectively filtered of most particulate matter.

If you were a survivor with an entire supermarket all to yourself, for how long could you subsist on its contents? Your best strategy would be to consume perishable goods for the first few weeks, and then turn to the dried pasta and rice, as well as the more resilient tuber vegetables, before finally resorting to the most reliable reserve of canned produce. Assuming also that you are careful to keep a balanced diet with the necessary intake of vitamins and fiber—the health supplements aisle will help you here—your body will need 2,000 to 3,000 calories a day, depending on your size, gender, and how active you are. A single average-size supermarket should be able to sustain you for around 55 years—63 if you eat the canned cat and dog food as well.

The easiest things to grow are lettuce, tomatoes, beans, greens, radishes, peanuts, strawberries, blueberries, squash, and peppers. These plants either take little out of the soil, or add things back into it like nitrogen. Corn, pumpkins, and beets take more out of the soil than they put back, so you need to rotate the areas of the garden to grow different plants in different years.

The Norfolk four-course rotation is the most successful of these historical rotation systems and became widespread only in the eighteenth century, spearheading the British agricultural revolution. In the Norfolk system, succession of crops through each plot follows the order:

1. Legumes
2. Wheat
3. Root crops
4. Barley

Growing legumes is intended to build up the soil's fertility for the rest of the cycle. Clover and alfalfa grow well in the British climate, but in other regions you might be better off with soy or peanuts. At the end of the season, if you're not harvesting any part of the plant for human consumption, the entire crop can be grazed by livestock or simply plowed back into the ground

as green manure. The year after the legume course you want to plant a crop of wheat to capitalize on the soil fertility and produce your staple cereal for human consumption.

Don't leave the field fallow the following year, but plant a crop of a root vegetable such as turnip, rutabaga, or mangold wurzel (field beet). One of the main purposes for leaving a field fallow in the Middle Ages—to plow and harrow it in spring but leave it unplanted for a year—was to kill off weeds in preparation for the next season. But with a root vegetable, you can plant a crop and still be able to rip out weeds between the rows. This course will yield you another crop, but rather than intending all of it for your own consumption—unless the crop is potatoes—you can use it to feed the animals. Your livestock will fatten up more quickly and will also produce more manure that you can spread back onto the field to preserve its fertility. By feeding your livestock a purpose-grown fodder, rather than simply letting them forage and browse grass for themselves, you also free up pastureland, which can now be used to cultivate even more crops.

The last phase in the rotation is the planting of barley, which you can again use to feed your livestock—but remember to keep back a portion for brewing beer. After the barley course, the rotation loops back to the beginning with the cultivation of legumes to restore the fertility of the soil and make it ready for the nitrogen-hungry cereal crop.

So the rotation system is a harmonic coupling of the requirements and products of both plants and animals, it naturally combats pests and pathogens, and it allows the recycling of nutrients back into the soil. This particular system of crops won't work universally, and you'll need to find a set suited to your local soils and climate. But the two key principles of the rotation system will ensure that you can reliably feed yourself and maintain soil productivity without exogenous chemical fertilizers after the apocalypse: alternate legumes with cereals, and grow root crops not for your own consumption, but specifically for your livestock. Reverting to small-scale methods, five acres of land will be enough to support a group of up to ten people: wheat for bread, barley for beer, a diverse range of fruits and veggies, as well as cattle, pigs, sheep, and chickens for meat, milk, eggs, and other products.

Each of us produces roughly 100 pounds of feces, and around ten times as much urine, every year—waste that contains enough nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium to fertilize crops to yield around 450 pounds of cereals.

The Zeer pot, common in Africa, consists of a lidded clay tub inside an unglazed larger one, with the gap between them filled with damp sand. As the moisture evaporates it draws heat out of the inner container, lowering its temperature, so the Zeer pot can postpone the spoilage of fruits or vegetables

at market by a week or more.

If needed, you can even eat trees. The coveted prize is the cambium, the actively growing layer between the bark and the wood. This is where the trunk grows as wood cells form on the inside and bark cells form on the outside. The cambium is succulent and stuffed full of sugar and minerals. In case of emergency, people can eat it. You can try this out for yourself in the spring. If you come across a spruce recently downed by the wind, cut off the bark with a pocketknife. Then run the blade flat along the exposed trunk and peel off long strips about a third of an inch wide. Cambium tastes like slightly resinous carrots, and it's very nutritious.

The first substance that a recovering post-apocalyptic society will need to begin mining and processing for itself, because of its multitude of functions that are absolutely critical to the fundamental operations of any civilization, is calcium carbonate. This simple compound, and the derivatives easily produced from it, can be used to revive agricultural productivity, maintain hygiene, purify drinking water, smelt metals, and make glass. It also offers a crucial construction material for rebuilding and provides key reagents for rebooting the chemical industry.

Coral and seashells are both very pure sources of calcium carbonate, as is chalk. In fact, chalk is also a biological rock: the white cliffs of Dover are essentially a 100-meter-thick slab of compacted seashells from an ancient seafloor. But the most widespread source of calcium carbonate is limestone. Luckily, limestone is relatively soft and can be broken out of a quarry face without too much trouble using hammers, chisels, and pickaxes. Alternatively, the scavenged steel axle from a motor vehicle can be forged into a pointed end and used as a drill to repeatedly drop or pound into the rock face to create rows of holes. Ram these with wooden plugs and then keep them wet so that they swell and eventually fissure the rock. But pretty soon you'll want to reinvent explosives and use blasting charges to replace this backbreaking labor.

It is the chemical transformations that limestone undergoes when you heat it, however, that are particularly useful for a great range of civilization's needs. If calcium carbonate is roasted in a sufficiently hot oven—a kiln burning at least at 900°C—the mineral decomposes to calcium oxide, liberating carbon dioxide gas. Calcium oxide is commonly known as burned lime, or quicklime. Quicklime is an extremely caustic substance, and is used in mass graves—which may well be necessary after the apocalypse—to help prevent the spread of diseases and to control odor. Another versatile substance is created by carefully reacting this burned lime with water. The name quicklime comes from the Old English, meaning “animated” or “lively,” as burned lime can react so vigorously with water, releasing boiling heat, that

it seems to be alive. Chemically speaking, the extremely caustic calcium oxide is tearing the molecules of water in half to make calcium hydroxide, also called hydrated lime or slaked lime.

Hydrated lime is strongly alkaline and caustic, and has plenty of uses. If you want a clean white coating for keeping buildings cool in hot climes, mix slaked lime with chalk to make a whitewash. Slaked lime can also be used to process wastewater, helping bind tiny suspended particles together into sediment, leaving clear water, ready for further treatment. It's also a critical ingredient for construction. It's fair to say that without slaked lime, we simply wouldn't have towns and cities as we recognize them. But first, how do you actually transform rock into quicklime?

You can roast limestone in the center of a large wood fire in a pit, crush and slake the small batches of lime produced, and use them to make a mortar suitable for building a more effective brick-lined kiln for producing lime more efficiently.

The best low-tech option for burning lime is the mixed-feed shaft kiln: essentially a tall chimney stuffed with alternating layers of fuel and limestone to be calcined. These are often built into the side of a steep hill for both structural support and added insulation. As the charge of limestone settles down through the shaft, it is first preheated and dried by the rising draft of hot air, then calcined in the combustion zone before it cools at the bottom, and the crumbling quicklime can be raked out through access ports. As the fuel burns down to ash and the quicklime spills out the bottom, you can pile in more layers of fuel and limestone at the top to keep the kiln going indefinitely.

A shallow pool of water is needed for slaking the quicklime, and you could use a salvaged bathtub. The trick is to keep adding quicklime and water so that the mixture hovers just below boiling, using the heat released to ensure that the chemical reaction proceeds quickly. The fine particles produced will turn the water milky before gradually settling to the bottom and agglutinating as the mass absorbs more and more water. If you drain off the limewater, you'll be left with a viscous sludge of slaked-lime putty. Limewater is used to produce gunpowder.

Where to get alkalis in a post-apocalyptic world without reagent suppliers? The good news is that survivors can revert to ancient chemical extraction techniques and the most unlikely-seeming source: ash.

The dry residue left behind after a wood fire is mostly composed of incombustible mineral compounds, which give ash its white color. The first step to restarting a rudimentary chemical industry is alluringly simple: toss these ashes into a pot of water. The black, unburned charcoal dust will float on the surface, and many of the wood's minerals, insoluble, will settle as a

sediment on the bottom of the pot. But it is the minerals that do dissolve in the water that you want to extract.

Skim off and discard the floating charcoal dust, and pour out the water solution into another vessel, being careful to leave behind the undissolved sediment. Drive off the water in the new vessel by boiling it dry, or if you're in a hot climate, pour the solution into wide shallow pans and allow it to dry in the warmth of the sun. What you'll see left behind is a white crystalline residue that looks almost like salt or sugar, called potash. It's crucial that you attempt to extract potash only from the residue of a wood fire that burned out naturally and wasn't doused with water or left out in the rain. Otherwise, the soluble minerals we are interested in will already have been washed away.

The white crystals left behind are actually a mixture of compounds, but the main one from wood ash is potassium carbonate. If you burn a heap of dried seaweed instead and perform the same extraction process, you can collect soda ash, or sodium carbonate. Along the western shoreline of Scotland and Ireland the gathering and burning of seaweed was a major local industry for centuries. Seaweed also yields iodine, a deep-purplish element that you'll find very useful as a wound disinfectant as well as in the chemistry of photography.

If you follow the process described above, you can collect about a gram of potassium carbonate or sodium carbonate from every kilogram of wood or seaweed burned—that is only about 0.1 percent. But potash and soda ash are such useful compounds that it is well worth the effort in extracting and purifying them—and remember that you can use the heat of the fire for other applications first. The reason that timber serves as a ready-packaged stash of these compounds is that over decades of time the tree's root network has been absorbing, from a vast volume of soil, water and dissolved minerals that can then be concentrated with fire.

Both potash and soda ash are alkalis; indeed, the very term derives from the Arabic *al-qalīy*, meaning “the burned ashes.” If you now mix your extract into a boiling vat of oil or fat, you can saponify it, creating your own cleansing soap. You can therefore keep the post-apocalyptic world clean and resistant to pestilence with just base substances like lard and ash, and a little chemical know-how.

WARNING: Never use aluminum pots or utensils for creating soap. Aluminum reacts vigorously with strong alkalis to release explosive hydrogen gas.

Another alkali that is very easy to produce is ammonia. Humans, and indeed all mammals, get rid of excess nitrogen as a water-soluble compound called urea, which we excrete in urine. The growth of certain bacteria

converts urea into ammonia—the distinctive stench of which you’ll be all too familiar with from poorly cleaned public restrooms—and so the crucial alkali ammonia can also be produced by distinctly low-tech means: fermenting pots of piss. This was historically a crucial process for the production of clothes dyed blue with indigo (traditionally the blue of jeans).

So far we’ve focused mainly on alkalis, as strong varieties are relatively easy to make. Acids, their chemical counterparts, are just as common in nature, but particularly potent kinds are harder to come across than lyes and have been significantly exploited only more recently in history. A variety of plant products can be fermented to produce alcohol, and this ethanol can in turn be oxidized by exposure to air to produce vinegar.

Sulfur dioxide gas can be baked out of common pyrite rocks (iron pyrite is notorious as fool’s gold, and pyrites also form common ores of lead and tin) and reacted with chlorine gas, which you get from the electrolysis of brine, using activated carbon (a highly porous form of charcoal) as a catalyst. The resulting product is a liquid called sulfuryl chloride that can be concentrated by distillation. This compound decomposes in water to form sulfuric acid and hydrogen chloride gas, which should itself be collected and dissolved in more water for hydrochloric acid. Luckily, there is also a simple chemical test for whether a rock is a pyrite mineral (a metal sulfide compound): dribble a little dilute acid on the rock, and if it fizzes and gives off the stench of rotting eggs, you’ve got what you’re after—but hydrogen sulfide gas is poisonous, so don’t sniff too much!

Today, more sulfuric acid is manufactured than any other compound—it is the linchpin of the modern chemical industry, and will also be crucial in accelerating a reboot. Sulfuric acid is so important because it’s good at performing several different chemical functions. Not only is it potently acidic, it is also strongly dehydrating and a powerful oxidizing agent. Most of the acid synthesized today is used to produce artificial fertilizers: it dissolves phosphate rocks (or bones) to liberate the crucial plant nutrient phosphorus. But its uses are virtually limitless: preparing iron gall ink, bleaching cotton and linen, making detergents, cleaning and preparing the surface of iron and steel for further fabrication, creating lubricants and synthetic fibers, and serving as battery acid.

Once you’ve reacquired sulfuric acid, it serves as a gateway to the production of other acids. Hydrochloric acid is produced by reacting sulfuric acid with common table salt (sodium chloride), and nitric acid comes out of the reaction with saltpeter. Nitric acid is particularly useful because it is also a very potent oxidizing agent: it can oxidize things that sulfuric acid can’t. This makes nitric acid invaluable for creating explosives as well as for preparing silver compounds for photography.

The stethoscope need be no more than a hollow wooden tube held to the ear and pushed against the patient's body, or even a rolled-up bundle of papers,

A rudimentary microscope is surprisingly easy to make from scratch. You'll need to start with some good-quality, clear glass. Heat the glass and draw it out into a thin strand, and then melt the tip of this in a hot flame so that it drips. The globule cools as it falls, and with luck you'll produce some very tiny glass beads, perfectly spherical in shape. Use a thin strip of metal or cardboard with a hole in the middle to mount your spherical lens, and hold it over a sample. This simple microscope works because the tiny ball of glass has a very tight spherical curvature and thus a powerful focusing effect on light waves passing through it. This also means that the focal length is exceedingly short though; you will need to position the lens and your eyeball right down close to the target.

Limited pain relief can be achieved by chewing willow bark, and topical analgesia, suitable for superficial injuries or minor surgical procedures such as lancing boils, is provided by chili peppers. The capsaicin molecule that gives chilies their illusory fiery burn in the mouth is known as a counterstimulant, and, like the contrary cooling effect of menthol from mint plants, can be rubbed onto the skin to mask pain signals.

Traditionally, opium is collected daily by making several shallow slices in the swollen, golf-ball-size seedpod of the poppy plant, allowing the sap to seep out and dry to a black latex encrustation that is scraped off the following morning.

The basic microbiology of making antibiotics is straightforward. Fill petri dishes with a beef-extract nutrient bed that is hard-set by seaweed-derived agar, smear across *Staphylococcus* bacteria picked out of your nose, and expose different agar plates to as many sources of fungal spores as you can, such as air filters, soil samples, or decaying fruits and vegetables. After a week or two, look carefully for molds that have inhibited the growth of bacteria around them (or indeed other bacterial colonies that do so: many antibiotics are produced by bacteria locked in an evolutionary arms race with one another). Pick them off to isolate the strain and attempt to grow it in liquid broth to make the secreted antibiotic more accessible. Antibiotic screens have now found numerous compounds from fungi and bacteria, although *Penicillium* molds are so common in the environment they are likely to be among the first re-isolated after the apocalypse. They're one of the principal causes of spoiling food: in fact, the *Penicillium* strain responsible for most of the penicillin antibiotic produced worldwide today was isolated from a moldy cantaloupe in an Illinois market.

However, even for a rough-and-ready post-apocalyptic therapy you can't

simply inject the antibiotic-containing ‘mold juice’ because, without refining, its impurities will trigger anaphylactic shock in the patient. The chemistry worked out at the end of the 1930s to purify penicillin from the growth medium exploits the fact that the antibiotic molecule is more soluble in organic solvents than in water.

Strain the growth culture to remove bits of mold and detritus, add a little acid to this filtrate, and then mix and shake with ether. Much of the penicillin will pass from the watery growth fluid into the ether, which you need to let separate and rise to the top. Drain off the bottom watery layer, and then shake the ether with some alkaline water to entice the antibiotic compound to pass back into the aqueous solution, now cleansed of much of the crud in the growth fluid. The daily dose of penicillin for a single person prescribed today requires up to 2,000 liters of mold juice to be processed, and so antibiotics will demand a high level of organized effort to produce.

If you do succumb to an enteric infection, the good news is that the condition is often entirely survivable. Even something as historically devastating as cholera is not actually directly lethal: you die from rapid dehydration resulting from the profuse diarrhea, losing as much as 20 liters of body fluid a day. The treatment, therefore, is astoundingly straightforward, even though it was not widely adopted until the 1970s. Oral rehydration therapy (ORT) consists of no more than a liter of clean water with a tablespoon of salt and three tablespoons of sugar stirred in, to replace not only the water lost in the sickness, but also your body’s osmolytes. To survive cholera you don’t need advanced pharmaceuticals, just attentive nursing.

Modern incubators are expensive and sophisticated machines, and like many other items of medical equipment, when donated to hospitals in the developing world today they often soon fall out of service due to power surges, unavailability of spare parts, or lack of specialist technicians to repair them; some studies find that up to 95 percent of medical equipment donated to some hospitals is inoperative within the first five years. A company called Design that Matters is attempting to address this issue, and their ingenious solution is a great example of the sort of appropriate technology that would need to emerge in a post-apocalyptic scenario. Their incubator design uses standard automobile parts: common sealed-beam headlights are used as the heating elements, a dashboard fan circulates filtered air, a door chime sounds alarms, and a motorcycle battery provides the backup electrical supply during power outages or when the incubator is being transported.

The internal combustion engine is a great example of how any complex machinery is no more than an assemblage of basic mechanical components, all with very different heritages, and arranged in a novel configuration to solve the particular problem at hand.

Wood is a fabulous source of good-quality papermaking fibers, but how do you disassemble a thick, solid tree trunk into a fine soupy mush of soft, short strands without breaking your back in the process?

Traditionally, plant fibers were separated by crushing the stems and then retting—soaking them for several weeks in stagnant water to allow microorganisms to begin decomposing the structure—and then violently pounding the softened stalks to liberate the cellulose fibers by brute force. The good news is that you can save yourself a great deal of time and effort and leapfrog straight to a much more effective scheme.

The links that bind together cellulose and lignin in trees are vulnerable to the chemical severing process known as hydrolysis. This is the same molecular operation that is employed in saponification during soap making, and we achieve it with exactly the same means: by rallying alkalis to the cause. The best parts of the tree or plant to use are the stem or trunk and branches—the roots and leaves don't contain much of the cellulose fiber required. Chop the material into small pieces to expose as much surface area to the action of the solution as possible, then bathe it in a vat of boiling alkaline solution for several hours. This breaks the chemical bonds holding together the polymers, causing the plant structure to soften and fall apart. The caustic solution attacks both cellulose and lignin, but the hydrolysis of lignin is faster, allowing you to liberate the precious papermaking fibers without damage while the lignin degrades and dissolves. Short white fibers of cellulose will float to the top of the murky brown, lignin-stained broth.

Any of the alkalis—potash, soda, lime—work, though the preferred option through much of history has been to use slaked lime (calcium hydroxide), as it can be generated in bulk by cooking limestone, while potash is fairly labor-intensive to produce by soaking timber ashes. But once you've cracked the artificial synthesis of soda, the best option by far for chemical pulping is to use caustic soda (sodium hydroxide), which powerfully promotes hydrolysis. You generate this directly in the pulping vat by mixing together slaked lime and soda.

Collect the recovered cellulose fibers in a sieve and then rinse several times until they run clear of the mucky lignin color. To lighten the shade of the finished paper to a clean white, you can also soak the pulp in bleach at this point. Calcium hypochlorite or sodium hypochlorite are both effective bleaching agents, and can be created by reacting chlorine gas (produced electrolytically from seawater) with slaked lime or caustic soda, respectively. The chemistry behind this bleaching effect is oxidation: bonds in the colored compounds are broken to destroy the molecule or convert it to an uncolored form. Bleaching is critical not only to papermaking, but also to textile production, so it will likely be a key driving force for expanding the chemical

industry during a reboot.

Pour a dollop of this sloppy cellulose soup across a fine wire mesh or cloth screen, bounded on the sides by a frame, so that the fibers form a higgledly-piggledy mat as the water drains out. You then press it to squeeze out the remaining water and to ensure flat, smooth sheets of paper, and leave to dry. Some of you might have done this in elementary school art class.

You'll find small-scale paper production much easier if you're able to scavenge a few items from the fallen civilization. A wood chipper or even a large food processor, powered from a generator, will make lighter work of the chewing up of plant matter into a thick vegetative soup: but you can also let windmills or watermills provide the mechanical brawn needed for driving trip-hammers to pound the material.

However, creating clean, smooth paper is only half of the solution to being able to use writing for communication and recording permanent stores of knowledge. The other critical task, once all of the remnant ballpoints have dried up or disappeared, is to make your own reliable ink with which to form the written word.

In principle, anything that irritatingly stains your cotton shirt if you accidentally splash yourself can also be used as a makeshift ink. You can take a handful of intensely colored ripe berries, for example, and crush them to release their juice, strain to remove the mashed fruit pulp, and dissolve in some salt to serve as a preservative. The major problem with most plant extract inks, though, is their impermanence. To preserve your words and the recovering society's newly accumulated knowledge indefinitely, you really want an ink that won't readily wash off the page or fade in sunlight.

The recipe for iron gall ink contains two main ingredients: an iron compound and an extract from plant galls. Galls appear on the branches of trees such as oak, and are formed when parasitic wasps lay their eggs in the leaf bud and irritate the tree into forming a growth around it. They are rich in gallic and tannic acids, which react with iron sulfate—created by dissolving iron in sulfuric acid. Iron gall ink is practically colorless when first mixed, and so it's difficult to see where you're writing unless another plant dye is also included. But with exposure to the air, the iron component oxidizes to turn the dry ink a deep, enduring black.

A rudimentary pen can also be made in the time-honored fashion. Soak a bird's feather—goose or duck was preferred historically—in hot water and pull out the material within the shaft. Bring the tip into a sharp point by cutting into each side, and then undercut the bottom face into a gentle curve to create the classic shape of a writing nib. Slitting backward slightly into the pointed tip will allow the nib to hold a tiny reservoir of ink as you

write, between replenishing dunks into the inkwell.

In order to mass-produce printed books, you must first mass-produce the tools for printing. This can be achieved by type casting: founding identical letter blocks with molten metal. The solution for creating types with straight, smooth sides and perfect right-angle edges that slot perfectly alongside each other in rows is to cast the types in a metal mold with a sharp cuboidal interior void. Cleverly, the crisp shape of a particular letter can be formed on the end face of the block by positioning a swappable matrix at the bottom of the mold. These matrices can be made from a soft metal such as copper, and the precise indent of a letter hammered into each of them very simply with a hard steel punch. Now all you have to do is engrave each letter, number, or symbol just once onto different punches, and you can effortlessly churn out countless pieces of identical type.

There is one final problem, though, thrown up by the nature of the letters in Western script, which is the large variability in their girth: the svelte ‘i’ or slender ‘l,’ compared with the rotund ‘O’ or broad-shouldered ‘W.’ To be read easily the letters should huddle closely together without gaping spaces around the skinnier letters and numbers. The upshot is that you need to be able to cast cuboidal types that are all exactly the same height, so that they print uniformly on the page, but each with a different width.

The solution is the final spark of Gutenberg’s inspiration in devising an elegant system for mass-producing the building blocks of printing. Create the mold in mirror-image halves: two L-shaped parts facing each other to create a cuboid space between them. The walls of this cavity can be simply slid toward or away from each other to smoothly adjust the width of the mold, without changing the depth or height (try it with your thumbs and index fingers now to see how this ingenious system works). Casting a perfectly formed type is now as simple as placing the relevant stamped matrix at the bottom of the mold, setting the width, pouring in the molten metal, and then ejecting the finished piece when it has set by parting the L-shaped halves again.

After a page of text is typeset, the type face is inked and transferred as an intricately detailed impression onto a blank sheet. There are a range of mechanical devices that enable the application of enhanced force, such as the simple lever or a pulley system, and both have been used throughout history for squeezing out excess moisture in paper production. Gutenberg grew up in a wine-growing region of Germany, and so co-opted another ancient device for his groundbreaking invention. The screw press is a Roman technology dating back to the first century, used extensively for juicing grapes or extracting oil from olives. It also provides the ideal compact

mechanism for applying a firm but even pressure onto two plates, squeezing the inked type onto the page.

If you anticipate that you'll want to run further impressions of the same body of text in the future, such as for subsequent print runs of an important treatise, you can save yourself the hassle of having to typeset thousands of individual letters all over again by saving the page configuration. The types themselves are too valuable to be left arranged in the frame, but you can take an impression of the text layout in plaster and then use this as a mold for casting a metal plate of the whole page. This is the original meaning of the word 'stereotype.' The nickname for a stereotype plate is "cliché," apparently after the sound made during the casting—and so to use a cliché is to rehash a block of commonly printed text.

Successful printing relies on a suitable ink. The free-flowing water-based inks developed for handwriting, like iron gall ink, are totally inappropriate for printing. To print crisp lettering you need a viscous ink that will stick readily to the metal features of the detailed type and then transfer cleanly to the paper without smearing, running, or blurring.

Lampblack mixed into linseed or walnut oil dries well and sticks to metal type far better than a runny, water-based ink. Linseed oil does need to be processed before being used, though: boil it and remove the thick, gluey mucilage that separates on top. You can control the ink's crucial viscosity with two other ingredients, turpentine and resin. Turpentine is a solvent used for thinning oil-based paints, and is produced by distillation of resin tapped from pines or other conifer trees. The hard, solidified resin left behind after the volatile compounds have been driven off during distillation, on the other hand, will thicken the solution. By tweaking the balance of these two contrary constituents you can perfect the viscosity of the ink, and you can control its drying behavior by varying the proportion of walnut and linseed oils.

Mirrors are indispensable beyond mere vanity—they are a critical component of high-powered telescopes or the sextant for navigation. Mix alkaline ammonia solution with silver nitrate and a little sugar, and then pour it over the back of a clean piece of glass. The sugar reduces the silver back to pure metal and so deposits a thin shiny layer directly onto the glass surface.

A single solid-silver teaspoon will contain enough of the pure element to produce over 1,500 photographic prints.

You can get solid fuels to explode by grinding them into a fine powder so that the air has access to a much greater area to accelerate combustion; coal dust and flour burn extremely vigorously (and explosions can occur even at grain elevators). An even better solution is to remove the necessity for getting oxygen from the air, and instead provide plenty of oxygen atoms

already in close proximity to the fuel for rapid combustion. A chemical that generously supplies oxygen atoms—or, more generally speaking, is hungry to accept electrons off other chemicals—is called an ‘oxidizing agent’ or ‘oxidant.’

Ironically enough, the earliest explosive to be developed in history was first formulated by ninth-century Chinese alchemists seeking an elixir for immortality: black powder. Gunpowder consists of charcoal—the fuel or reductant—and saltpeter (now termed potassium nitrate)—the oxidant—ground and mixed together. Sprinkling in some yellow elemental sulfur as a third ingredient changes the end products of the reaction and results in far more energy being left over for the concussive whump. An optimized gunpowder recipe is to mix equal parts of saltpeter and sulfur to six parts of charcoal fuel: a chemical cocktail taut with latent energy poised to burst out.

The nitrate ingredient of gunpowder calls for a bit of nifty chemical wheeling and dealing. Historically, the source of nitrates for explosives as well as fertilizers was very humble: a well-matured pile of manure contains hordes of bacteria that have acted to convert nitrogen-containing molecules into nitrates, and you can get these out by exploiting the fact that similar compounds have differing abilities to dissolve in water. It is a fact of chemistry that all nitrate salts are readily water-soluble, and that hydroxide salts are often insoluble. So, soak a few buckets of limewater (calcium hydroxide) through a dung pile, and most of the minerals will stay trapped inside as insoluble hydroxides, while the calcium will pick up the nitrate ions and drain out. Collect this fluid and stir in some potash. The potassium and calcium will swap partners to create calcium carbonate and potassium nitrate. Calcium carbonate doesn’t dissolve in water—it’s the compound making up limestone and chalk, and the white cliffs of Dover certainly aren’t vanishing with every wave—but potassium nitrate can. So filter out the chalky white precipitate before boiling away the water to yield crystals of saltpeter. A good test that your isolation has been successful is to soak some of the solution onto a strip of paper and let it dry—if you’ve got potassium nitrate it will burn with a fizzing, sparkling flame.

The chemistry for extracting saltpeter is straightforward enough; the trouble is in finding enough sources of nitrates to use as feedstocks for the process as the demands of your recovering civilization grow. Suitable mineral deposits are found only in very arid environments (saltpeter is readily soluble and thus easily washed away) such as the Atacama Desert in South America, and bird guano is also very rich.

While gunpowder supports rapid combustion by intermingling fuel and oxidant powders snugly together, there is an even better way to ensure a more

vigorous reaction and thus a more powerful explosion: combining the fuel and the oxidant into the same molecule. Reacting many organic molecules with a mixture of nitric and sulfuric acids serves to oxidize them, tacking on nitrate groups to the fuel molecule. For example, oxidizing paper or cotton with nitric acid produces the heartily flammable nitrocellulose—flash paper or guncotton.

Another explosive more potent than gunpowder is nitroglycerin. This clear, oily explosive is made by the nitration of glycerol, an offshoot of the production of soap, but it is disastrously unstable and liable to blow up in your face at the slightest provocation. To stabilize its destructive potential, soak the shock-sensitive nitroglycerin into wads of absorbent material like sawdust or siliceous clay—creating sticks of dynamite. Fun fact: It was the fortune from this invention that Alfred Nobel used to found the famous prizes for contributions to humanity in the sciences, literature, and peace.

The production of powerful explosives, therefore, relies on nitric acid as a potent oxidizing agent, and this same acid is also required for photography and the capturing of light using silver chemistry.

This section can offer only glimpses of the vast architecture of current understanding and technology. But the areas we explored will be some of the most critical for nurturing a nascent culture through an accelerated reboot and enabling it to relearn all else. My hope is that by seeing just a little of how civilization actually gathers and makes all the fundamentals we need, you'll come to appreciate the things we take for granted in modern life: bountiful and varied food, spectacularly effective medicines, effortless and comfortable travel, and abundant energy. And recognize just how ridiculous it is that a greedy few would risk throwing it all away just to avoid giving up their stolen, hoarded wealth.

Homo sapiens first had a marked effect on the planet around ten-thousand years ago, with the sudden disappearance of around half of the world's large mammal species—we are the prime suspect for driving this extinction with our teamwork and improved hunting technology of stone axes and tipped spears. Over the next ten-thousand years there was a steady deforestation around the Mediterranean Sea and northern Europe as people settled and cleared the surrounding land. Three-hundred years ago the human population began to grow rapidly, and gradually every scrap of land that was suitable for agriculture became cultivated. There were also profound changes not just to the landscape, but to the chemistry of the entire planet, as hundreds of millions of years of accumulated carbon was dug out of the ground and pumped into the atmosphere with mounting fervor. The rising carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere pushed the very climate of the world, driving global warming, rising sea levels, and acidification of the oceans.

Dotted towns and cities swelled and coalesced with each other like bacterial colonies, as roads were draped like ribbons across the rolling landscape, looped into rings around large urbanizations, and tangled up in gloriously complex overpasses at major interchanges. A growing swarm of metallic craft hurried back and forth over the land and seas of the world, crisscrossing the skies, and some even piercing out of the atmosphere. At night this ceaseless fervent activity was apparent from space, with the continents marked out in webs of artificial lights, networks of glowing nodes and lines.

And then silence.

The worldwide network of traffic abruptly halts, the web of light fades and dies, cities rust and crumble.

How long will it take to rebuild? How quickly can technological society recover after a global cataclysm? The keys to rebooting civilization may well be within this section. But more importantly, I hope the keys to avoid needing to are within this book.

A Final Chance

We intend to offer you one final chance—but we will only make the offer once—you can give up your privileges, you can give up your stolen wealth, you can lay it all down, without any violence whatsoever. That is within your power.

We will give you ample time to decide. But we will not ask again. Do otherwise and your answer will be clear. And then we shall rain down upon the oppressors such righteous fury that the very earth will shake with our might. And you will lose, we will guarantee it, with our lives if need be. You will have brought us to that precipice, with your greed, avarice, ignorance. All for fucking what?

Remember, it is never the powerless, the underdog, which chooses whether violence is necessary. It is always the choice of the powerful. Always. All consequences fall upon their shoulders for they, and they alone, had the power to resolve things peacefully.

War is hell, which is why you need to stop waging yours. Or we will make you stop—there is no moral uncertainty here, your actions are unjustifiable, unacceptable, unallowable. We do not do this for us, our egos, the history books, we do it for those in the here and now, those who cry out and go unheard, those who are broken and tossed away, those who are spit on and exploited, those who despair, those who needlessly struggle, those who succumb and those who are left behind. The line stops here, this is where we intend to make it end. To all would-be revolutionaries, the massive reserve army of the broken, desperate, enraged: This is what you've been waiting for, we've been watching you. This is not the revolution of Bernie "Millionaire Socialist" Sanders or Elizabeth "I Love Capitalism" Warren; we're not Mayor Pete—just fuck off you well-credentialed, McKinseyite piece of shit—and we're certainly not the younger, less well-known, but still an awful bitch, Hillary 2.0. This is serious. We aren't Brandon Darby—when the void looks back at us, we'll spit in its face, not go cower behind the leg of Big Daddy FBI. We're not fucking around, you can't buy us with a goddamn thing, you kill us, or we don't stop coming. And you better hope we don't rise from the grave, because we ain't Jesus—we don't know what the fuck Rick Santorum is talking about—we will fucking Bloodshot your ass.

November 2024

We are coming. Expect us.

Part X

The Long Walk

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

Heaven Is a Place on Earth

“If you have a religious or political vision of a world that will be infinitely good forever, any amount of violence is justified to bring about that world, and anyone standing in its way is infinitely evil and deserving of unlimited punishment. Perhaps a utopian ideology is fermenting in the mind of a cunning fanatic somewhere who will take over a major country and try to impose it elsewhere.”

What did Jesus mean by the Kingdom of God, when he prayed two-thousand years ago for it to come on earth? What might this Kingdom look like if it came much later than expected, long after the Roman Empire had faded into history, nation states had emerged as the new centers of earthly power, and democratic government had been conceptualized and at least partially implemented? In two late-nineteenth-century American novels, Edward Bellamy tackled these perplexing questions and proved equal to the task. Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888) depicted in striking detail a developed nation governed by the core teachings of Jesus, creating a national and world sensation that rivaled *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. His sequel, *Equality* (1897), responded to critics of *Looking Backward* with a refined, even more elaborate description of how the Kingdom would manifest in this modern world.

With uncanny prescience—anticipating radio, television, airplanes, electric cars, power tools, air conditioning, calculators, credit cards, supply chains, women’s liberation, alternative energy, environmental restoration, recycling, and other commonplaces of contemporary life—Bellamy painted a vivid and compelling portrait of what he believed America would become as the twentieth century unfolded. An impending nonviolent revolution, sweeping aside the immemorial and oppressive “rule of the rich,” would bring forth a radically egalitarian social order of material abundance and moral sublimity. America would finally embody the lofty principles of the Preamble to its Declaration of Independence. Unlike his other predictions, Bellamy’s revolution has not come to pass—at least not yet—but his re-

splendent vision of its culmination has lost little luster. Read today his two testaments of continuing revelation, and one's spiritual and political lives become one flesh.

In the Kingdom come to America, citizens have both equal votes in elections and equal stakes in the national economy. The Golden Rule is official policy. From cradle to grave, citizens receive an annual credit to draw upon, reflecting an equal share of their nation's available output of goods and services. All Americans, male and female, have the same opportunities and responsibilities: during the first twenty-one years of life, to become well-educated in the public schools, where every able student obtains at least the equivalent of a college degree, and all are exposed to a wide variety of potential occupations; from twenty-one to forty-five, to serve in the nation's centrally-planned, regionally-organized industries and professions in a largely self-chosen capacity and location; after forty-five, to devote their extended retirement years to continuing intellectual and spiritual development and volunteer community service. All live and work as peers to promote the welfare and prosperity of the nation they share and love.

Social cohesion and personal initiative flow from higher patriotism, mutuality of interest, and public honor, a self-reinforcing triad which has replaced private profit-seeking as the impetus of economic activity. Before the revolution, citizens with competing economic interests fought to maximize them, regardless of the expense to other citizens or even to the nation itself. Amid that perpetual conflict, patriotism was but an occasional chauvinistic or militaristic sentiment. In the new post-revolutionary America, a higher form of patriotism creates a humanitarian bond between citizens, one which naturally arises from their identical mutual interests in the success of the national enterprise. So successful is this new social model that it has spread worldwide in a panoply of cultural variations, ushering in a peaceful era of international cooperation. Like soldiers who once rose through the ranks to gain increasing respect and responsibility, workers in the new "industrial army" strive to earn promotions, public honor, and civic awards for outstanding contributions to society and humanity. The earthly Kingdom does not seek to eliminate ambition but to give it nobler expression.

Far from a regimented anthill, the America of 2000 is a beehive of individual expression and social experimentation. Equality has not led to uniformity but to the unleashing of human potential. Artists, authors, philosophical and spiritual teachers, publishers of newspapers and magazines, and other creative entrepreneurs are exempt from the "industrial army" if they garner sufficient citizen support to match the annual credit. Pioneers who wish to forge their own paths outside the mainstream are given the means to get started in lieu of the credit. Democracy has permeated every

nook and cranny of society. Advanced communication systems allow citizens to vote frequently on a broad spectrum of issues, from the election of their public officials to the civic projects and programs they will undertake. Although income equality has essentially eliminated corruption, ineffective officials can be recalled at any time, and no significant governmental action can be taken without approval by plebiscite. “Government of, by, and for the people” has not perished but has at last been born.

When only touched upon in summary, Bellamy’s ideas may sound fanciful, naively optimistic. When encountered in his books, however, they come across as inescapable conclusions of Socratic logic, self-evident applications of the teachings of Jesus and the principles of America’s founding document. Every conceivable objection to the virtue and viability of a radically egalitarian society is raised, fleshed out, and refuted. This is why *Looking Backward* became the most popular utopian novel ever written, was translated into at least twenty languages, and influenced the likes of Eugene Debs, John Dewey, Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Samuel Clemens, Emma Goldman, Charles Beard, Carl Sandburg, George Orwell, Thorstein Veblen, Erich Fromm, Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King, and a host of other noteworthy intellectual and social leaders. Indeed, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, Bellamy clubs were blossoming throughout America and new populist political parties were being formed. Then as fast as it all had arisen, it began to fall apart simultaneously with Bellamy’s fragile, failing health.

His legacy continued to live on in a series of reforms—public ownership of utilities, the general election of senators, the civil service system, the income tax amendment, the inheritance tax, the parcel post system, women’s suffrage, improved child education and labor laws, curtailment of egregious industrial abuses, soil conservation and reforestation efforts, et cetera. Yet Bellamy’s tragic death in 1898, at the age of forty-eight, marked the end of his vastly more radical vision. . . or did it? The question is asked in light of his most stunning prediction:

“It was not till the kings had been shorn of power and the interregnum of sham democracy (operative in the political but not the economic arena) had set in, leaving no virile force in the state or the world to resist the money power, that the opportunity for a world-wide plutocratic despotism arrived. When international trade and financial relations had broken down national barriers and the world had become one field of economic enterprise, (then) did the idea of a universally dominant and centralized money power become not only possible but had already so far materialized itself as to cast its shadow before. If the Revolution

had not come when it did, we cannot doubt that something like this universal plutocratic dynasty or some highly centered oligarchy, based upon the complete monopoly of all property by a small body, would long before this time have become the government of the world.”

Well over a hundred years ago, Edward Bellamy explained in two novels what the modern world would look like if the Kingdom of God arrived in its midst. He also explained what that world would look like if it did not. Wealth would accumulate in the private economic arena to the point where it could buy and control the public political arena, and then would come the plutocratic strangulation of the human race. So it has happened before our eyes. The numbers shift a bit from year to year, but recent estimates are that 80% of humanity struggles to survive on \$10.00 or less per day, 50% on \$2.50 or less, and seven-million children die annually from malnutrition and preventable or treatable disease. Meanwhile, a handful of billionaires have become richer than the poorer half of the world’s population, and globalized financial and corporate monstrosities dictate the one-sided terms under which entire nations must live. Not only has this insane, obscene wealth concentration corrupted politics and plunged the masses into crippling austerity, but even more dreadfully, it has plundered and polluted our planet to the point of mass species extinction and looming ecocide.

Although Bellamy was spot on in predicting plutocracy absent a revolution, the revolution he saw coming never came. His untimely illness and death sapped the initial momentum of his movement, but the coup de grace of Bellamy’s “impending” revolution was delivered by a confluence of foreign and domestic events he did not foresee. On the foreign front came two World Wars, the rise of authoritarian communism, and the resulting Cold War. On the domestic front came the New Deal, the post-WWII surge of American industry, and its following decades of global dominance. The foreign events were all-consuming crises; the domestic events allowed much of America’s fragile working class to move into the seemingly-more secure middle class, fostering the false assumption that the evils of capitalism had been constrained. Now that the near-collapse of the global capitalist system has mired us in the consequences of the Great Recession, and the scarcity of stable work for steady pay is again the stark reality in America and across the world, attention should be paid to how Bellamy believed the Second Great American Revolution would unfold.

The process would begin with growing public awareness of its dire predicament, since the dawn of civilization, under “the rule of the rich.” What had begun with the slaves of ancient empires and continued with the

serfs of feudalism had culminated with the wage-slaves of capitalism caught in the vise-grip of global plutocracy. The growing awareness of this perpetual plight would be energized by a widespread spiritual awakening to feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood long suppressed by ruthless competition. Universal moral values like the Golden Rule would come to be seen not merely as personal guidance in a fallen world but as bedrock principles upon which to build a better, more beautiful one. The nature and purpose of democratic government would again be understood as defined in America's founding document: as an institution, called into being by the people, to ensure equality by enabling every citizen to exercise inherent rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. When it became clear that those rights could be secured only in the economic arena, democracy would move boldly into it.

Looking Backward and *Equality*, sequentially read and pondered, are one path up the mountain to gain a clear and comprehensive view of the utopian shore toward which today we either swim or perish. Fortunately, Bellamy left a glimmering wake to follow, and his nineteenth-century vision readily lends itself to twenty-first-century revision. Included in that task would be the removal of lingering Victorian attitudes in Bellamy's thought, the balancing of his large-scale mechanistic mode of progress with the small-scale organic, and the re-imagining of an "eco-industrial army," one which not only produces goods and services in accord with environmental constraints but which also works directly to protect nature and begins to heal the immense harm we have done to her, and thus to ourselves.

Desperately we long to feel again the thrill of hope, the possible fulfillment of Jesus' prayer that the Kingdom of God come on Earth. A forgotten genius named Edward Bellamy deserves to be remembered, for he enables us, persuades us, impels us to believe that it can and it must.

"The great enthusiasm of humanity which overthrew the old order and brought in the fraternal society was not primarily or consciously a godward aspiration at all. It was essentially a humane movement. But 'if we love one another God dwelleth in us,' and so men found it. It appears that there came a moment, the most transcendent moment in the history of the race of man, when with the fraternal glow of this world of new-found embracing brothers there seems to have mingled the ineffable thrill of a divine participation, as if the hand of God were clasped over the joined hands of men. And so it has continued to this day and shall for evermore."

Some write to account for that which is, I to show what ought to be.

Everyone has an idea of utopia. For many it means equality, universal justice, freedom from oppression, freedom from work. To me utopia is an epistemocracy, a society in which anyone of rank is an epistemocrat, and where epistemocrats manage to be elected. It would be a society governed from the basis of the awareness of ignorance, not knowledge.

Alas, one cannot assert authority by accepting one's own fallibility. Simply, people need to be blinded by knowledge—we are made to follow leaders who can gather people together because the advantages of being in groups trump the disadvantages of being alone. It has been more profitable for us to bind together in the wrong direction than to be alone in the right one. Those who have followed the assertive idiot rather than the introspective wise person have passed us some of their genes. This is apparent from a social pathology: psychopaths rally followers.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is frequently held up as a model of successful "peace building," exported to other conflict zones from Sri Lanka to Afghanistan. But many of those who were directly involved in the process are deeply ambivalent. When he unveiled the final report in March 2003, the commission's chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, confronted journalists with freedom's unfinished business:

"Can you explain how a black person wakes up in a squalid ghetto today, almost 10 years after freedom? Then he goes to work in town, which is still largely white, in palatial homes. And at the end of the day, he goes back home to squalor? I don't know why those people don't just say, 'To hell with peace. To hell with Tutu and the truth commission.'"

Experimentation doesn't mean that you shouldn't be bold. It just means constantly checking to make sure you're upholding the principles. Preferring principles to systems doesn't mean you can never be a revolutionary, it means making sure your revolution is actually advancing your principles rather than 'breaking a lot of eggs but never getting an omelet.' Nor does it mean that 'socialist' today means 'social democrat,' which is just capitalism with a welfare state. It could mean that, if that were the best we could hope for. But genuine socialism is idealistic: the perfect application of its principles would only occur in a utopia, which means the work will never fully be done.

"She's on the horizon. . . I go two steps, she moves two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps ahead.

No matter how much I walk, I'll never reach her. What good is utopia? That's what: it's good for walking."

Creating anything new in the world, especially something that runs against the grain, requires courageous and visionary individuals, tied to resourceful communities. These people are frequently stubborn, demanding of those around them, and adept in conflict. We should not expect anything less, yet somehow cooperators too often assume that co-ops can transcend this basic reality of social life.

What I found is most people do not know how to dream and to hold in 'head space' the very concepts of systems thinking, holistic engagement and universal social justice. Most people can't break out of bad eating and bad cultural diets, let alone break the chains of polluted media, necrotic education, and gangrenous capitalism and consumerism.

The dreams I talk about are tied to restorative justice—restoring ecosystems, managing urban centers, repairing agricultural lands, stitching back together the fractured lands left for mega-species, replanting jungles, feeding the poor, opening up the concept of 'it takes a village to raise a child and steward the old, sick, infirm, and less fortunate.'

Dreams about pushing cars back into the junk heap of humanity, creating bicycle cities, reinventing community public transportation.

Dreams about universal health; health clinics of robust stature in each neighborhood. Schools that teach the healing arts and visual arts and food arts.

You know, walkable cities, organic food, retaking the commons from the private toxin producers, driving the current capitalist model of government into the mud and reshaping humanity as a collective society of people who do not have to toil at three jobs just to pay the oligarchs and their lackeys.

Let me summarize my own political ideology, if you will, in a very few words. I find that for myself, I am most satisfied politically when every person is helped to become aware of his or her own power and strength; when each person participates fully and responsibly in every decision which affects him or her; when group members learn that the sharing of power is more satisfying than endeavoring to use power to control others; when the group finds ways of making decisions which accommodate the needs and desires of each person; when every person of the group is aware of the consequences of a decision on its members and on the external world; when each person enforces the group decision through self-control of his or her own behavior; when each person feels increasingly empowered and strengthened; and when each person and the group as a whole is flexible, open to change, and regards previous decisions as being always open for reconsideration.

The Morgans, Rockefellers, and their ilk captured the industrial revolution that dominated the US after the Civil War. The farmers of the South and West fought back with a grassroots social movement. They formed the People's Party. Its socialistic platforms demanded public ownership of the major financial institutions, including banks, railways, power utilities and other private monopolies that were crushing the public well-being.

At their national conventions in Omaha in 1892, and St. Louis in 1896, and elsewhere, they demanded an end to corporate and foreign ownership of land. They wanted a national currency based on food rather than gold and silver. They endorsed universal affordable medical care, free public education and a general guarantee of the basics of life for all humans. They demanded equal rights for women, including the vote. They also preached racial unity, especially among black and white farmers in the South, and between native and immigrant workers in the cities.

“If any lesson should be drawn from the twentieth century, it should be the abject failure of socialist central planning. The idea that wide-scale nationalization of industry is being taken seriously as a policy proposal given this history is horrifying. Socialism has been responsible for the deaths of 50+ million people.”

In reality the lesson we should draw from the past couple hundred years—and we don't have long to come to grips with it—is that capitalism has had disastrous consequences on the environment, the land and oceans and atmosphere. And on the communities whirled into the amoral pursuit of profit by the commodification of every aspect of life, the prostitution of humanity.

We have now reached the stage at which to claim that unrestricted growth, fueled by greed and competition can lead to anything but disaster is an assertion rooted in the most curious and diabolic religion ever espoused—the elevation of the invisible hand into the arbiter of all things whose decisions must rule the planet.

As to the idle nonsense that socialism is responsible for the deaths of anyone, this cheap talking point from Capitalism's more vulgar ideologues is best understood by examining the most obviously political human catastrophe in the past half century, that which overtook the people of the former Soviet Union during the 1990s when public property and resources were being looted in capitalist 'shock therapy.' In terms of the number of deaths resulting immediately and the shortening of lifespans this was a massive crime explicable entirely through the decision by the United

States government—advised by academic economists and serving corporate and financial interests—to transfer the funds reserved for pensions, social services, and salaries from the population into the hands of the criminal oligarchy most of whom now live in the West while their ill gotten gains feed Wall St. and The City.

The history of Capitalism from the Potato Famine to the world today is the history of cannibalism—the devouring of human necessities by men worshipping money, which amounts to annual human sacrifices on a scale that would have appalled the Aztecs. To move beyond the nightmare of capitalism without considering the ideas of those who have always criticized the system from the viewpoint of its victims is a recipe for cyclical movement not progress.

The following moral agenda is drawn from a deep engagement and commitment to these struggles of the poor and dispossessed. It is also grounded in an empirical assessment of how we have come to this point today. The evils of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, and the war economy and militarism are persistent, pervasive, and perpetuated by a distorted moral narrative that must be challenged. We must stop focusing attention on physical violence and see the human and economic costs of inequality. When confronted with the undeniable truth of unconscionable cruelty to our fellow human beings, we must join the ranks of those who are determined not to rest until justice and equality are a reality for all.

Did you know that there are fewer voting rights in 2020 than there were 50 years ago when the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act were passed?

Since 2010, 23 states have passed racist voter suppression laws, including partisan gerrymandering and redistricting, laws that make it harder to register, reduced early voting days and hours, purging voter rolls, and more restrictive voter ID laws. Following the *Shelby County v. Holder* Supreme Court case, which gutted key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, by 2016, 14 states had new voting restrictions in place before the Presidential election and there were 868 fewer polling places. There are also 6.1 million people who have been disenfranchised due to felony convictions, including one in thirteen Black adults.

While these laws have disproportionately targeted Black people, in 2016, at least 17 states saw voter suppression cases targeting American Indian and Alaskan Native voters. Thirteen states that passed voter suppression laws also opted not to accept expanded Medicaid benefits offered under the Affordable Care Act. These attacks follow a broader pattern of restricting and curtailing democratic processes by drawing on legacies of racism to undermine local leadership that is organizing for better conditions. By 2017, 25 states had passed laws that preempt cities from passing their own local

minimum wage laws. Most of these have been passed in response to city councils passing or wanting to pass minimum wage increases.

Emergency Financial Management has become a mechanism that effectively nullifies the right to vote in order to prioritize balanced budgets and repayments to Wall Street lenders over human lives. Non-elected managers are appointed and granted sweeping powers, including the authority to dismiss elected officials, scrap labor contracts, sell public assets and impose new taxes, without any accountability to voters. The City of Flint was under emergency management when it made the decision to switch its water source from the Detroit Water System to the Flint River, poisoning a community of almost 99,000, with a 42 percent poverty rate.

The truth is that when the democratic process and the right to vote are restricted, preempted, and nullified, our democracy is under attack. These attacks target mainly the poor, youth, and elderly, but in doing so, they strip us all of our constitutional protections; they allow extremists to get elected through voter suppression and gerrymandering and then use their power to hurt people.

- We have the right to vote and the right to accountable political representation.
- We demand the immediate full restoration and expansion of the Voting Rights Act, an end to partisan, two-party duopoly gerrymandering and redistricting, the implementation of automatic registration to vote at the age of 18, same-day registration, the enactment of Election Day as a holiday, and hand-marked paper ballots hand-counted in public. We demand the right to vote for the formerly and currently incarcerated.
- We demand the reversal of state laws preempting local governments from passing minimum wage increases, the removal of Emergency Financial Management positions that are unaccountable to the democratic process, and statehood for Washington, D.C.
- We demand a clear and just immigration system that strengthens our democracy through the broad participation of everyone in this country.

Did you know that while the US economy has grown 18-fold in the past 50 years, wealth inequality has expanded, the costs of living have increased, and social programs have been restructured and cut dramatically?

We challenge the idea that our economy rewards hard-working individuals and, therefore, if only the millions of people in poverty acted better, worked

harder, complained less and prayed more, they would be lifted up and out of their miserable conditions.

Beginning in the 1970s, wages for the bottom 80 percent of workers have remained largely stagnant and today there are 64 million people working for less than \$15 an hour. Meanwhile, the top one percent's share of the economy has nearly doubled to more than 20 percent of our national income. In 2017, the 400 wealthiest Americans owned more wealth than the bottom 64 percent of the entire US population, or 204 million people. Just 3 individuals had a combined wealth of \$248.5 billion, the same wealth as the bottom 50 percent of the country.

At the same time, the costs of basic needs like housing, health care and education have risen dramatically. Over the past 30 years, rents have gone up faster than income in nearly every urban area of the country. In 2016, there was no state or county in the nation where someone earning the federal minimum wage could afford a 2-bedroom apartment at market rent. Only 1 in 4 of those eligible to receive federal housing assistance actually do so. This has precipitated a structural housing crisis with 2.5 to 3.5 million people who are living in shelters, transitional housing centers and tent cities. This population includes a significant number of women, children, LGB youth, transgender youth, veterans, and the elderly.

There are 32 million people who remain uninsured. Further, an estimated 40 percent of Americans have taken on debt because of medical issues, making medical debt the number one cause of personal bankruptcy filings. In fact, the bottom 90 percent of Americans hold more than 70 percent of debt in the country. Student debt has grown to \$1.34 trillion and affects 44 million Americans. Excluding the value of the family car, 19 percent of all US households have zero wealth or negative net worth. They owe more than they own.

Despite the growing need for federal assistance, social service programs have been restructured to shift critical resources away from the poor. The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program only assists 23 percent of poor families with children. The Trump administration proposed a 30 percent cut to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and a restructuring that would impose onerous work requirements that threaten to destabilize this highly effective program.

Our public resources are not reaching the people who need them. Given the absence of good jobs and a strong social safety net, millions of people are left to fend for themselves. The truth is that the millions of poor people in the United States today are poor because the wealth and resources of our country have been flowing to a small number of people and federal programs are not meeting the growing needs of the poor.

Everybody has the right to live. Given the abundance that exists in this country and the fundamental dignity inherent to all humanity, every person in the United States has the right to housing, education, health care, welfare, decent and dignified jobs and the right to organize for the realization of these rights.

- We demand federal and state living wage laws, universal basic incomes, full employment for all who want it, and the right for all workers to form and join unions.
- We demand equal pay for equal work.
- We demand equity in education, ensuring every child receives a high-quality, well-funded, diverse public education. We demand free tuition at public colleges and universities and an end to profiteering on student debt.
- We demand the expansion of Medicaid in every state and the protection of Medicare until the full implementation of single-payer universal health care for all.
- We demand reinvestment in and expansion of public housing, ensuring that all have a decent house to live in.
- We demand equal treatment and accessible housing, health care, and mobility; and adequate income and services for people with disabilities.
- We demand public infrastructure projects and sustainable, community-based and controlled economic initiatives that target poor and rural communities.
- We demand relief from crushing household, student, and consumer debt. We declare Jubilee.
- We demand that the wealthy have their hoarded resources liberated for the people.
- We demand a 95% top income tax rate and a 90% tax on all wealth over \$10 million.

Did you know there are 140 million people who are poor or low-income in the United States today?

We challenge the Official Poverty Measure (OPM) as too narrow a definition of poverty today. The OPM is an income-based measure developed

in the 1960s that uses the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) to define poverty. In 2016, the FPL was \$12,486 for a single person under the age of 65 and was \$25,449 for a household of four.

According to the OPM, in 2016, 12.5 percent of the US population—or 40.6 million people—were poor and nearly 30 percent—or 95 million—were low income, which is defined as living at less than twice the poverty line.

An alternative measure developed in 2009, the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), takes into account income as well as the costs of food, clothing, housing and utilities, and government programs that have assisted low-income families and individuals who are not otherwise designated as poor. Using the more thorough SPM, 43.5 percent of the US population—or 140 million people—were poor or low-income in 2016.

The truth is that economic insecurity, poverty, and misery are affecting more of us in 2020 than we are made aware. We remain in the dark about who is poor and this ignorance prevents us from being able to address the broad and deep poverty in our midst. We have the right to know the true state of our Union.

- We demand a change in the current poverty standards. We demand an accurate assessment of who is poor—based on access to decent and adequate housing, education, health care, water, sanitation and public utilities, childcare, as well as income, savings and debt, and welfare—which is made widely available to all.

Did you know that we imprison and detain more people, especially poor people, than any country in the world?

The US has the highest incarceration rate in the world, almost five times the average for other wealthy countries. Since 1976, federal spending on prisons increased tenfold to \$7.5 billion a year. The number of sentenced state and federal inmates grew from 188,000 in 1968 to nearly 1.5 million in 2016. Two thirds of these inmates are people of color.

Since 1970, counties with fewer than 250,000 people have driven jail growth. This means that there has been a shift in rural and urban incarceration trends. Women held in local jails are the fastest-growing segment of incarcerated people in the United States; the majority are Black or Latinx. From 1970 to 2014, the total female jail population increased fourteen-fold from under 8,000 to nearly 110,000. More than 80 percent of these women were imprisoned for non-violent offenses.

This coincides with the broader criminalization of poverty and the poor. By the Department of Justice's own admission, 95 percent of the growth

in the incarcerated population since 2000 is the result of an increase in the number of un-convicted defendants, many of whom are unable to make bail.

The truth is that poor communities, especially poor communities of color, are being locked up, sent away and killed by law enforcement. The lessons from policing poor communities of color are being extended to all poor communities, leading to heightened attacks on the poor. This has not made any of us safer.

Equal protection under the law is non-negotiable and we have the right to move freely without the fear of intimidation, detention, deportation, or death by public institutions charged with our safety.

- We demand an end to mass incarceration and the continuing inequalities for poor people and minorities within the criminal justice system.
- We demand equality and the safety of all persons.

Did you know 13.8 million US households cannot afford water?

Federal assistance to local water systems is currently 74 percent below its peak in 1977. This has contributed to the inability of public water utilities to address failing and aging infrastructure. It has also prompted utilities to privatize their water systems, even though private water utilities charge 59 percent more per unit of water than publicly owned water systems. As a result, nearly 12 percent of US households face unaffordable water bills. Tens of thousands of households have had their water shut off due to non-payment, precipitating homelessness, child removal and a host of medical problems. It also means that at least four-million families with children are being exposed to high levels of lead from drinking water and other sources. Poor rural communities face the additional problem of lacking access to piped water and sewage systems in the first place.

While there is failing infrastructure in poor cities and rural counties across the country, there has been a boom in infrastructure to support fossil fuel production and transportation. Fracking has driven US domestic oil and gas production since 2007, making the US the world's largest producer of both oil and gas. It has also demanded an expanded pipeline infrastructure crisscrossing the country. However, since 1998, there have been 5,712 significant oil and gas leaks or ruptures on US pipelines. And since 1964, there were more than 2,400 spills from offshore drilling in US waters. The largest of these was the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, which accounted for 95 percent of oil spilled in the past 50 years. There are also 1,100 coal ash sites throughout the country. Toxins from these sites gradually leach into water bodies and groundwater, or get released in catastrophic spills.

Scientists have known for decades that human activities, particularly the use of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas, are warming the planet. In spite of knowing the risks, political leadership has dragged its feet on implementing solutions. This reveals how little priority our political leadership attaches to an existential threat that, for now, mostly impacts poor people. It also shows the political influence of the fossil fuel industry, which has effectively captured the US political system and prevented the kind of drastic action the country should have taken long ago.

The truth is that our policies have not fundamentally valued human life or the ecological systems in which we live. Instead, it has prioritized private, corporate, and financial interests over our precious natural resources.

- We have a fundamental right to clean water, air, and a healthy environment and public resources to monitor, penalize, and reverse the polluting impacts of fossil fuel industries.
- We demand 100 percent clean, renewable energy and a public jobs program to transition to a green economy.
- We demand a fully funded public water and sanitation infrastructure that keeps these utilities and services under public control and that prioritize poor, rural, and Native communities that have been harmed by polluting industries.
- We demand a ban on fracking, mountaintop removal coal mining, coal ash ponds, and offshore drilling. We demand a ban on all new pipelines, refineries, and coal, oil, and gas export terminals.

Did you know that currently 53 cents of every federal discretionary dollar goes to military spending and only 15 cents is spent on anti-poverty programs?

Military spending in 2017 was \$668 billion and out of federal discretionary spending only \$190 billion was for anti-poverty programs. Under the Trump administration's proposed budget, by 2023, 66 cents of every dollar of federal discretionary spending would go to the military and only 12 cents to anti-poverty programs.

Most of these resources allocated to war are not benefiting our troops. In 2015, the Department of Defense obligated more money on federal contracts, \$274 billion, than all other federal agencies combined. In 2016, CEOs of the top five military contractors earned on average \$19.2 million each—more than 90 times the \$214,000 earned by a US general with 20 years of experience and 640 times the \$30,000 earned by Army privates in combat.

This expanded military budget ends up claiming more lives abroad while making us less safe here at home. More than 68 percent of the civilian casualties in 2017 from aerial attacks were women and children. Nearly half of female military personnel sent to Iraq or Afghanistan reported being sexually harassed and nearly 25 percent said they had been sexually assaulted. And the Department of Defense was responsible for 72 percent of the US Government's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2016.

In 2012, suicide claimed more military deaths than military action and as of in 2017, an average of 20 veterans died by suicide every day.

City police departments are getting military weapons and equipment—from grenade launchers to armored tanks—left over from the Pentagon's wars, escalating the criminalization of and violence against poor communities. Young Black males are nine times more likely to be killed by police officers than other Americans.

Finally, federal spending on immigration, deportations, and the border has increased from \$2 billion in 1976 to \$17 billion in 2015, with ten times as many deportations. From 1993 to 2013, immigration detentions increased from 85,000 to 441,000 per year.

More complaints of abuse were filed against Immigration and Customs Enforcement than any other Department of Homeland Security agency. LGB and transgender immigrants are 15 times more likely to experience sexual assault in confinement than other immigrants held in detention. And 21.6 percent of immigrant children are impoverished.

The truth is that instead of waging a War on Poverty, we have been waging a War on the Poor, at home and abroad, for the financial benefit of a few. It is morally indefensible to profit from perpetual war.

- We have the right to protect our communities from the ravages and weapons of war.
- We demand an end to military aggression and war-mongering.
- We demand a stop to the privatization of the military budget and a reallocation of resources from the military budget to education, health care, jobs, and green infrastructure needs, and strengthening a VA system that remains public.
- We demand the demilitarization of our communities on the border and the interior. This includes ending federal programs that send military equipment into local and state communities and bringing down the wall at the US-Mexico border.

- We demand an immigration system that, instead of criminalizing people for trying to raise their families, keeps families together and allows us all to build thriving communities in the country we call home.
- We demand an end to US government and capitalist violence and exploitation which fuels migration.

Did you know that thousands of people die every year from anti-poor policies, while an extremist religious and Christian nationalist agenda deliberately diverts attention from the key issues and challenges facing the majority of Americans?

In the history of this country, there have been moral justifications for genocide and slavery, against the New Deal, and resisting the *Brown v. Board of Education* school segregation case and the *Roe v. Wade* abortion case. Today, religious extremists focus on issues like prayer in school and abortion that distort the national moral narrative. This distorted moral narrative became integral to the well-funded libertarian movement to redefine ‘liberty’ as freedom from government. In 2016, Franklin Graham invested \$10 million of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s money in his 2016 Decision America Tour to each state house in the country. Billed as “nonpartisan” prayer rallies, these gatherings framed the “moral crisis” as a decision between progressive atheist values and God. After the election, Graham called Trump’s victory an answer to prayer.

Today these influences—the Christian and religious nationalist organizations, religious capitalist and prosperity gospel movements, and independent charismatics—have access to the current administration in the form of its “Court evangelicals.” The Values Voter Summit has become an important focus point for this coalition and its narrative. Through federal contracts and student aid, Liberty University has become the largest private Christian University in the country.

These influences have also ignored the moral commitments enshrined in the US Constitution to “establish Justice, insure Domestic Tranquility, Provide for the Common Defense, Promote the General Welfare, and Secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and Posterity.” These commitments should help ensure that this country moves towards the more perfect Union aspired to in our founding documents.

Indeed, there are profound consequences to a moral narrative that ignores poverty, health care, decent jobs, and other crises facing the poor today. Thousands have died every year because of some states’ decision to deny

Medicaid expansion benefits. Overall, more than 250,000 people die in the United States from poverty and related issues every year.

The truth is that a morality that claims to care for the souls of people while destroying their bodies and communities is deeply immoral.

- We have the right to ground our public policies and budget allocations in a moral narrative that prioritizes and follows our religious and Constitutional moral commitments to justice.
- We demand that all policies and budgets are based on whether they serve the general welfare and lift up lives and the environment.

Fifty years ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others called for a “revolution of values” in America. They invited people who had been divided to stand together against the “triplets of evil”—militarism, racism, and economic injustice—to insist that people need not die from poverty in the richest nation to ever exist. They sought to build a broad, fusion coalition that would audit America: Together, they would demand an accounting of promissory notes that had been returned marked “insufficient funds.” Today that effort is still incomplete.

In communities across this land, people impacted by systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy and our distorted moral narrative have said the same thing:

“We want to be free! We need a Poor People’s Campaign!
We need a Moral Revival to make this country great for so many
for whom it has not yet been.”

This call echoes the cries of the prophets throughout the ages to stand up for justice, righteousness, and the dignity of all:

“If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom by like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruin shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets to live in.”

“The believers, both men and women, are in charge of and responsible for one another; they all enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong.”

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

These moral values are enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution and deeply rooted in the struggles that have labored to lift those founding documents to their full meaning:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the General Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.”

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Throughout America's history—from abolition, to women's suffrage, to labor and civil rights—real social change has come when those most impacted by social injustice have joined hands with allies of goodwill to stand together to transform and better society. These movements did not simply stand against partisan foes. They stood for the deep moral center of our Constitutional values and faith traditions. Those deep wells sustained those who knew in their bones both that power concedes nothing without a fight and that, in the end, love is the greatest power to sustain a fight for what is right.

Today, 50 years after Rev. Dr. King and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign declared that "silence was betrayal," we are coming together to break the silence and tell the truth about the interlocking evils of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy and our distorted moral narrative.

The truth is that systemic racism allows us to deny the humanity of others; by denying the humanity of others, we are given permission to exploit or exclude people economically; by exploiting and excluding people economically, we are emboldened to abuse our military powers and, through violence and war, control resources; this quest for the control of resources leads to the potential destruction of our entire ecosystem and everything living in it. And the current moral narrative of our nation both justifies this cycle and distracts us from it.

We declare that if silence was betrayal in 1968, revival is necessary today.

We come to remind our nation what truths we hold to be self-evident and what values we hold dear.

We draw on the histories of resistance that echo their truth down through the centuries and the power of the blood that has been shed through generations of struggle.

We loudly proclaim that we will move forward together, not one step back!

Pesticides ought to be given only to farmers who have a prescription from their county agent detailing precisely why those chemicals are necessary to treat the farmer's land.

Mandatory labeling would list the petro-fertilizers and pesticides and GMO products used on or in your potato chips, right there on the package. This is better than the organic label.

When people buy organic, they believe they are buying it from a small farmer, who probably has a family. They are buying tradition, food safety, and an old value system: the barn, the fields, the cows. Organic does not assure them that, so I consider it false advertising. To install an off-gassing carpet in your house and then demand certified organic food is quite foolish.

The organic movement settled for getting rid of pesticides. Which is noble, and great. But, organic certification can do as much harm as good.

Under the old system, inspectors were there to offer advice and mentor farmers into compliance. But under the federal system, the correct techniques were considered proprietary, and inspectors were forbidden from freely handing them over. The whole purpose of years of experimentation should be to share methods.

Turkana smallholders in Kenya found that surrounding their plots with beehive fences was much more effective against elephant invasions (and provides a useful harvest of honey) than thornbush fences—the beehives are strung at ten-meter intervals around the fields, leaving a wide margin for elephants to pass, and if an elephant even brushes a fencepost, the bees swarm out.

cordons pierreux: long lines of stones, each no bigger than a fist

Because the area's rare rains wash over the crusty soil, it stores too little moisture for plants to survive. Snagged by the cordon, the water pauses long enough for seeds to sprout and grow in this slightly richer environment. The line of stones becomes a line of grass that slows the water further. Shrubs and then trees replace grasses, enriching the soil with falling leaves. In a few years, a minimal line of rocks can restore an entire field. As a rule, poor farmers are wary of new techniques—the penalty for failure is too high. But these people in Burkina were desperate and rocks were everywhere and cost nothing but labor. Hundreds of farmers put in cordons, bringing back thousands of acres of desertified land.

The idea of unleashing packs of wolves in Yellowstone generated a public outcry, but the reintroduction program, begun in the mid-1990s, has been a significant success. Yellowstone's gray wolves prey primarily on elk but also increasingly on bison, leaving carcasses that provide food to many other animals, including grizzly bears and cougars, helping to increase the numbers of these species. The wolves have driven elk herds out of the park's lowlands, leading to significant reforestation. As a result, record numbers of birds have returned to the park. Fish populations have also increased, as decreased grazing by elk has increased vegetation on riverbanks. Wolves are thus responsible for trophic cascades—chains of beneficial effects set off when an ecosystem's top predators change not just the numbers of their direct prey but also species with which they have no direct link. Reintroducing predators and large herbivores in sites such as Yellowstone generates changes that cascade down the links of the ecosystem, transforming even the soil composition and atmosphere of the region. By catalyzing a notable increase

in the park's biodiversity, Yellowstone's wolves have given flesh to the hopes of rewilders.

“In the woodland I manage, we use the birds' passion for collecting to plant young deciduous trees in the monocultures of old spruce plantations. This is how it works: We put seed trays on posts and fill them with acorns and beechnuts. Jays love to come and help themselves, and they distribute their booty in the soil hundreds of yards in every direction. It's a win-win situation. We get precious new stands of deciduous trees in the woodland, and the jays get huge quantities of winter provisions with very little effort.”

What is socialism? We cannot offer anything like a complete account here—the story of socialism is a long one and is still in the making—but it begins with the idea that society's resources should be directed to serving the needs of people, not the profit dictates of the few. It is the socialization (democratization) of the economic sphere, and also the enlargement (de-privatization) of the political sphere. From that starting point, we are open-minded. There is a broad range of options, much to be debated, and enormous room for experimentation. There is a role for markets alongside democratic planning but not for a market society—that is, the Hayekian utopia of the self-regulating market, which becomes merely a disguise for the concentration of economic power and wealth.

There is an increasing recognition that we are now living in a “socialist moment,” a period where socialism has reemerged as a popular idea in American political life. There's just one problem: Everyone seems to have a different definition of what it means. For liberals tired of being mislabeled socialists by the right, the term has come to mean any government policy aimed at providing public goods, from food stamps to the Air Force. For the progressives who have embraced the term, it means a social democratic program to aggressively confront inequality. For conservatives and libertarians, it represents anything from Soviet Marxism-Leninism to Venezuelan left-populism. And, as has always been the case, different factions of self-identified socialists argue vigorously among one another for the term's one true meaning. If you ask ten socialists what socialism means you'll get twelve or so different definitions.

Even putting aside the numerous abuses of the term in mainstream American politics, socialism has always been a broad concept, adopted by hundreds of political movements all over the world to mean a wide variety of different things for almost two centuries. While this has allowed for a

diverse body of thought to flourish, it has also had the effect of confusing millions of people as to what socialists actually believe.

The ascendant strain of socialism in America today is democratic socialism. Commonly confused with its more modest sibling of social democracy, democratic socialism is a strain of thought which traces its roots to late nineteenth-century movements in America and Europe which advocated for popular control over both government and business through democratic means. The US' largest socialist organization, the Democratic Socialists of America, define the idea as the belief "that both the economy and society should be run democratically—to meet public needs, not to make profits for a few."

Even for many skeptics, this sounds nice conceptually. But if these socialists explicitly reject the models of the USSR or communist China, then what is their alternative? If not a bureaucratic command economy, does democratic socialism exist as anything other than an abstract daydream in the minds of the young and the pages of a few magazines?

What separates socialism from left-liberalism and social democracy is the emphasis placed on ownership: Wealth and income are not simply redistributed by the government, but are pre-distributed among the broad community that makes such wealth possible, rather than an elite few. In an institutional setting, the socialist ethos is represented by the idea of common ownership, that powerful institutions should be owned and controlled by those with a stake in them.

"What touches all should be decided by all. But the state is not our only common enterprise. The capitalist economy proliferates what are plausibly called private governments in the form of hierarchically organized firms with outcomes that seriously affect thousands and hundreds of people, that can be opposed or ignored by the members only at risk of penalties."

The principle of common ownership can take a number of forms. The most common way to split common ownership is between public and cooperative ownership. In the case of public ownership, an institution is put under the control of a democratic government on the local, regional, or federal level. In a sufficiently democratic government, this serves as an indirect conduit for common ownership, with popular input via elections and any other mechanisms designed specifically for stakeholder involvement. Cooperative ownership is the more direct form of common ownership, involving the members of a neighborhood, the employees of a company, or those in some other group jointly possessing and overseeing an enterprise. Each has their advantages and disadvantages.

Because of its Cold War connotations, most Americans think of socialism solely as inefficient and bureaucratic public ownership through a powerful central government. But actual public ownership need not be either centralized or wasteful. The state of North Dakota owns both a public bank and the nation's largest flour mill, each providing reliable services to state residents while also being accountable to and returning their profits to the state government rather than to private shareholders. Indeed, in order to ensure that everyone had access to basic banking services, the US ran a highly successful basic public banking program through the post office from 1911 to 1967, and 139 countries still offer at least some financial services through their post office.

While private internet service providers ignore rural consumers and systematically overcharge the customers they do have, more than 500 cities across 40 states have established cable internet networks owned and operated by municipal governments, with great results: The municipal networks for Longmont, CO and Chattanooga, TN are both among the ten fastest internet service providers in the nation.

As private utilities have been busy starting wildfires and poisoning rivers to protect their profits, 16 percent of Americans already get their electricity from public utilities (and another 13 percent from cooperatives). Nebraska, the only state to exclusively use public and cooperative energy utilities, has some of the cheapest and greenest energy in the country, and sends most of its excess revenue into state coffers. Every citizen can elect the members of their utility's board and attend public meetings to provide direct input. In one of the most conservative states in the country, socialism is already thriving in one sector.

Though it's common to mistake any form of government program as socialism by itself we should be aware of exactly how much of our collective wealth is already owned and operated for the public good through the government: the vast majority of water utilities, hundreds of airports and marine ports, 20 percent of community hospitals, and a number of city-owned hotels and convention centers. Insofar as programs like Medicare and Medicaid are public replacements for insurance companies, they can serve as an example as well. And if properly funded the VA would be a great example of how we could also provide quality medical care to all.

Natural resources are another interesting example, as they are a textbook example of a resource belonging to the commons. Many nations simply have nationally-owned companies for their natural resources sectors, with state companies producing 55 percent of the world's oil and gas. Though this isn't the case in the US, a number of states do maintain some modified form of a public 'sovereign wealth fund' that collects income from these resources to

be used for the public's benefit, whether through handing it out to citizens or spending it on public projects. Alaska collects part of the revenue earned from oil production every year and puts it directly into the hands of every citizen in the form of a universal check generally worth around \$1,000, an arrangement which has helped manage income inequality and poverty in the state. Texas and Wyoming have similar funds, but instead put the revenue into their education budget and general state coffers, respectively.

While profit can be a powerful incentive to provide many goods and services, institutional arrangements which are solely reliant on it can also produce inequality, corruption, pollution, exploitation, criminality, or even just neglect when much-needed services aren't profitable enough to provide. Well-managed municipalization and nationalization in many sectors can serve as one way to bring complex and large-scale enterprises under the control of the public, providing better services in a more accountable way.

Public ownership is not a silver bullet, though. Some more libertarian Marxists presciently pointed out that public ownership is still an indirect mechanism for public control over the economy, and one which is threatened by the potential emergence of a domineering bureaucracy insulated from the demands of the people. This is a concern which can be alleviated by expanding political democracy through stronger voting rights, public campaign finance, institutional reform, and experiments in direct democracy like participatory budgeting. But it remains that public ownership has problems of its own, and for this reason democratic socialists should also look to cooperative ownership.

Using the modified versions of the sovereign wealth funds discussed above to expand public control of the economy is a popular idea among democratic socialists. Some have suggested independent government funds that buy financial assets and distribute dividends to all Americans in order to ensure profits are shared with the workers that make them possible. These draw inspiration from an idea known as the Meidner Plan proposed by Swedish democratic socialists in the 1970s, in which private businesses would slowly contribute voting shares to employee-owned funds managed by union boards, thus gradually transferring ownership to workers. Though this plan was never fully implemented, neighboring Norway does still have sovereign wealth funds that own seven percent of the nation's economy (and international assets more than double the size of their economy).

Employees buying ownership of the firms they work at is already common practice in the US in the form of Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs), with an estimated 14 million workers already participating. Unfortunately investing in the company you work for is one of the most basic rules that financial advisers warn workers against because it concentrates their risks.

If the company gets into trouble, as all companies may, both your job and your investment in company stock are at risk.

Thousands more are employed in worker co-ops, designed from the beginning to be owned and run by employees. The benefits of worker-owned businesses are well-documented: Along with the obvious matter of profits going straight into worker's pockets, firms controlled by workers have higher productivity and greater employment stability. While other policies like employee representation on corporate boards and profit sharing make steps in this direction, full worker ownership and economic democracy are what socialism looks like on a firm-level. Scaling such institutions does pose problems, but large firms like Publix and Spain's Mondragon Corporation prove that it's possible. Worker co-ops are the best democratic socialist solution to entrepreneurship and small-to-medium scale commerce.

Even in agriculture, where collectivization plans were a notorious failure in Soviet nations, other cooperative solutions are at work every day. Two-million American farmers belong to agricultural co-ops, running their own individual farms while sharing ownership and profits in order to make costs manageable. Already, these co-ops are responsible for 80 percent of US milk production. On a smaller scale, many communities help combat food insecurity through thousands of community gardens, leveraging public green spaces to provide food for anyone in need. There are also less-explored opportunities for agriculture on common property. The supposed infeasibility of this option is what spawned the idea of the "tragedy of the commons" in the first place, but while many are familiar with that theory, far fewer are aware that research from 1990 "demonstrating how local property can be successfully managed by local commons without any regulation by central authorities or privatization" won the 2009 Not-a-Nobel Prize.

Housing co-ops run hundreds of thousands of housing units in the US, including one of the largest such institutions on Earth: the Bronx's Co-op City, a quiet neighborhood which houses over 15,000 residents. There are also community land trusts, in which land is cooperatively owned by the community as a whole while individuals can lease it for residential or commercial uses. Not only do these arrangements allow for more community control over development, combating gentrification and the arbitrary power of landlords, but they are also far more financially stable: At the peak of the 2009 housing crisis, regular mortgage loans were eight times more likely to be in foreclosure than community land trust mortgages. Given how many homes go unoccupied in this country, more of them should be converted to Co-op communities.

When understood as direct ownership by stakeholders, cooperative socialist solutions exist today even in finance. While the public ownership

strategy is public banking, the cooperative solution is credit unions. Instead of worker ownership, credit unions are a form of consumer co-op in which the organization is collectively owned by those saving their money there, with most credit unions holding elections for leadership among their savers. Over a third of America participates in these institutions, which are socialist almost by definition. Credit unions return profits to their customers rather than executives and shareholders, tend to offer lower rates and fees, and in many cases specifically aim to serve communities in need. The latter is particularly important, because while the corruption and wrongdoing of Wall Street is well-known, even small private banks engage in discrimination against people of color and the poor.

To the critics of socialism, it represents a comprehensive domination of public life by authoritarian central planners who inefficiently compel individuals to live or die according to some cryptic logic decided by one's appointed superiors. However, it's hard to see how this is different in principle from the exact system we have now, just with the business plans of unaccountable oligarchs in the place of the five-year plans of authoritarian bureaucrats. If the principle of socialism is mass popular control of economic matters, then authoritarianism isn't socialism. If there's no popular participation, where's the socialism? What does it even have to do with socialism?

Just under half of all young people in the United States prefer socialism to capitalism. For older generations raised during a time where socialism had concrete referents in twentieth-century dictatorships, this trend is terrifying. But Generation Z and Millennials lack this background—they hold their views not because they've all been brushing up on their Mao, but because they have been raised in a political environment where any alternative to cutthroat corporate rule is socialist. The political energy and debate that this dynamic has provoked should prompt us all to consider exactly what kind of society we want to live in. To disprove the notion that "there is no alternative," we must focus on the fact that a better world is entirely possible, and that we can see start to see the seeds of potential real utopias simply by looking around us.

The socialist vision of the good life is one of equality, solidarity, and liberty. Critically, as much as its detractors insist otherwise, it is a realistic vision with countless proofs-of-concept operating every day, enjoyed and supported by groups with drastically different backgrounds and beliefs. When people say 'socialism has never been tried' or ask what socialism would 'look like,' we can point at all of the successful ways in which socialism has been tried, that show the beginnings of what it might look like.

Socialism means waking up in the morning without worrying about rent, making breakfast with ingredients you grew alongside your neighbors,

and taking clean and free public transit for your short commute to the job where you and your co-workers elected your own management. It means having your share of the profits you help produce direct deposited into your local credit union, going on a long walk through your vibrant and diverse neighborhood in the late afternoon, watching a movie over high-speed public broadband, and then going to sleep in your warm bed without worrying about energy bills. You don't have to call your insurance agency to argue over a deductible, you don't have to have your allergies exacerbated by dirty air, and you won't be stopped and arbitrarily questioned by an aggressively militarized police force. We know that this world is possible; the only matter now is to fight for it.

The provision of food, housing, and medical care is not the same thing as socialism. Instead it is the total transformation of society that will allow us to enjoy true freedom for the first time in human history:

The socialized appropriation of the means of production does away, not only with the present artificial restrictions upon production, but also with the positive waste and devastation of productive forces and products that are at the present time the inevitable concomitants of production, and that reach their height in the crises. Further, it sets free for the community at large a mass of means of production and of products, by doing away with the senseless extravagance of the ruling classes of today, and their political representatives. The possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialized production, an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day-by-day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties—this possibility is now, for the first time, here, but it is here.

To be honest, 'socialism' was always understood to be the preparation for a *less* bureaucratic society, with some calling that communism, some naming it anarchism, the rest not thinking about it much.

The bureaucratic period was a transition, with the bureaus acting to inform the public of their rights and responsibilities, and protecting those rights during a period when capitalist and reactionary nationalist ideologies would still be prevalent among the populations. It would be a setup of new assumptions, the new unquestionables, that government was to protect, like capitalism is protected now. The problem is not the bureaus, but the power they give the fearless leaders. Responsabilisation, s'il vous plait.

In one sense, anarchism is a political philosophy, but in another sense, it is a belief about human nature, a faith in the goodness of human beings. Anarchism rejects not only state control but also the hierarchical organization of human beings in which people have unequal power. Anarchism believes

that people can best achieve autonomy, freedom, and cooperation within egalitarian organizations. Anarchism is positively impassioned by a thirst for freedom in all spheres of life, and it is negatively impassioned by a resentment with coercion. For critics of anarchism, those passions make anarchism immature and dangerous. But for advocates of anarchism, those passions make it highly mature and benevolent.

What's most radical about anarchism, for me, is its faith that human beings can organize themselves without fear. This is a radical notion because people are so accustomed to being controlled by fear that they don't even notice it. The state, whatever ideology it claims, keeps people in line using policing authorities and prisons. Orthodox religions keep congregants in line using the fear of God, clergy, and hell. Standard schools keep students in line using grades, suspensions, expulsions, and threats to withhold diplomas. And employees are kept in line by their fear of being fired and falling into poverty. Authoritarians routinely smear anarchism as advocating chaos and violence. Some of these authoritarians are ignorant of anarchism, while others are not. It is true some anarchists have used violence to achieve their aims—so have capitalists, socialists, marxists, communists, and so on—but anarchists don't seek a violent and chaotic society. Informed authoritarians who spread falsehoods about anarchism fear that should people actually grasp the truth of anarchism, many would be attracted to it.

“Anarchism means that you should be free; that no one should enslave you, boss you, rob you, or impose upon you. It means that you should be free to do the things you want to do; and that you should not be compelled to do what you don't want to do. It means that you should have a chance to choose the kind of a life you want to live, and live it without anybody interfering. It means that the next fellow should have the same freedom as you, that everyone should have the same rights and liberties. It means that all men are brothers, and that they should live like brothers, in peace and harmony. That is to say, that there should be no war, no violence used by one set of men against another, no monopoly and no poverty, no oppression, no taking advantage of your fellow-man.”

Free association is paramount in anarchism, which is optimistic about humanity and its capacity to cooperate. In Emma Goldman's essay “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For,” she wrote:

“Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth;

an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations.”

The vision of a society without coercion is attractive to many people—intoxicatingly attractive to some people. And anarchism’s attractiveness makes it so threatening for various authoritarians that anarchism is their common enemy. For example, in the 1930s, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, Stalinist Soviet Union, Western capitalist nations, and the Catholic Church all played a role in destroying a successful anarchist society in Spain. Authoritarians are horrified by anarchism because they believe that without coercions, people would run amok and life would be fraught with chaos and violence. The reality is that coercions do ‘work’ to keep certain populations in line.

Coercions such as rewards and punishments can be effective in shaping behaviors of laboratory animals, children, institutionalized adults such as prisoners, and others who are dependent on authorities for the necessities of their survival. In order to most effectively control people’s behavior, research shows that people have to be needy enough of the rewards and terrified enough of the negative reinforcements and punishments. And so there is actually an incentive for authoritarians to keep people alienated and infantilized, as such people are easier to control. Coercions can effectively control behavior in certain populations, but not without humiliation, resentment, and rage. Not coincidentally, US society is replete with people feeling humiliated, resentful, and enraged. In anarchism, people perform activities that they desire to perform, and so coercion is unnecessary. However, in US society, people are mostly performing activities they dislike. In 2013, the Los Angeles Times reported:

“Seven out of ten workers have ‘checked out’ at work or are ‘actively disengaged,’ according to a recent Gallup survey.”

They’ve got bullshit jobs. The more one is disengaged from an activity and dependent on authorities for survival, the more coercion is necessary to maintain order. Anarchism’s opposition to coercion is not an advocacy of chaos but rather a faith that human beings can be organized with love. A key belief of anarchism is mutual aid and cooperation. This requires altruism. Concern for others is not created by coercive rewards and punishments. Research confirms that children whose parents use rewards to motivate them are less cooperative and generous children than their peers who are not so coerced. Instead of coercions, it is the experience of love and the modeling of love that best creates caring and cooperative people.

In US society, anarchism is not only a radical political idea but also a radical psychological one. Anarchism asserts that human beings can have community without being dominated by fear. Most of us, consciously or unconsciously, live with great fear and anxiety. Given our ordinary fear-based existence, when people experience fearlessness through an extraordinary experience, that fearlessness can feel so exhilaratingly different that it can be intoxicating, sometimes so intoxicating that we can become manic. The more fear pervades a culture, the more extraordinary is the experience of fearlessness, and the more likely it will be so intoxicating that it can cause us to behave irrationally. Fearlessness does not intoxicate people who are accustomed to it.

There are anarchists who are rigid ideologues. For them, attempting to survive in an economic system based on the coercion of money is so shameful that they either deny their hypocrisies or self-flagellate for their failure to live up to their ideals. In either case, the rigid ideologue is not going to be much fun to be around. In current society, if we have no money, we cannot pay the bills that most of us have. Without money, we are likely to become either a financial burden on friends or family, at the mercy of some of the most oppressive authorities in society, or dead. The reality is that while all aspects of the anarchist ideal cannot be implemented in non-anarchist society, some aspects can be implemented, even within the workplace.

Among anarchists, there are several different schools of thought that emphasize different aspects of anarchism. Anarcho-syndicalism is a particular variety of anarchism which is concerned primarily, though not solely, with control over the workplace. It took for granted that working people ought to control their own work, its conditions control the enterprises in which they work, along with communities, so they should be associated with one another in free associations, and democracy of that kind should be the foundational elements of a more general free society. Another anarchist school of thought is anarcho-primitivism, a major concern of which is gaining freedom from the tyranny of large-scale authoritarian technology.

Among different schools, there are also different views as to how to achieve an anarchist society. Anti-authoritarian perspectives like anarchism don't simply provide an individual with an ideology. Discovering a belief system that rings true can also serve as a vehicle for connecting with like-minded people. In the 1880s and 1890s in the United States, if you were an alienated anti-authoritarian, you could go to the Lower East Side in New York City and hang out at places such as Sach's Café on Suffolk Street or Justus Schwab's basement tavern on First Street which called itself a "gathering place for all bold, joyful, freedom-loving spirits." Here you would meet and connect with all kinds of anti-authoritarians. Your belief system would be

a vehicle for a support group and provide an opportunity to connect with friends and lovers. That's what happened to Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, and many others who created a rich social network for themselves that mitigated some of the pain of being an anarchist in the United States. In 1900 when Schwab died, 2,000 mourners followed the hearse down Second Avenue.

Utopian dreamers have often longed for a more hospitable way of living. But when they look to politics, economics, or philosophy for answers, they are missing the best inspiration: human anthropology. The key is not to project ourselves into the future, but to learn from the practical, beneficial ways humans have lived in the past and still do, in some cases, in the present—places where our worst instincts are contained through affective reciprocity, goodwill, care.

What we'd much prefer is to live in a moral economy. The simple societies Europeans were so moved by when they first began to study them, conjuring images of the "noble savage," tended toward cooperation, not competition. They emphasized feeling and mutual affection. Karl Marx got his idea of communism from looking at the early anthropological studies of simple societies, where he was inspired by the way humans tended to relate to each other.

Today we are taught to believe that society doesn't owe us a living. In simple societies they felt the exact opposite. Everybody owed everybody else. There were mutual ties. People didn't rely on a social contract that you can break. Instead, they had a social compact. You can't break it. You're born with it, and you're delighted to be part of it because it nurtures you. That's very different from a Hobbesian notion that we're all out to zap each other.

You don't have to just look to the Bushmen or to Aboriginals for examples: you can find them in America and elsewhere in networks of women and workers, as well as traditional and tribal societies that have carried on the tradition of a moral economy. Women have retained the instinct to nurture because the human child is especially vulnerable compared to the young of many animal species. They have to create peaceful, nurturing conditions or the human race can't survive.

Most of our utopian visions carry on the errors and limitations born of a misguided view of human nature. That's why communism, as it was practiced in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, projected a materialist perspective on progress while ignoring the natural human instinct for autonomy—the ability to decide for ourselves where to go and what to say and create. On the flip side, capitalism runs against our instinct to trust and take care of each other.

We need to develop a new political foundation based on principles that include:

Self-Defense: Defense of oppressed people and of our political projects is paramount. We propose developing and tying defense teams to localities and collectives that are based on abolitionist practices.

The Neighborhood Council: As the network grows outside the jurisdiction of the state and reactionary forces, it is built through non-hierarchical relationships of trust. Collectives and councils developed according to needs, issues, and political motivation involve people in neighborhood self-governance.

Conflict Resolution and Revolutionary Justice: Forms of conflict resolution are essential for developing revolutionary relationships. Social cohesion, rather than punishment, must be the foundation. Abolitionist political growth seeks to destroy the prison, yet those oppressing others must be combated.

Abolition of Gender and Race: The same forces that put people in bondage also utilize gender roles as a source of domination. Overcoming imprisonment and liberating humanity from captivity must happen simultaneously with the abolition of gender constraints.

Expropriation and the Cooperative Economy: To carve out an autonomous territory, or to begin the revolutionary process, goods, land, and tools must be expropriated, or taken away from those who withhold them. We are striving towards a situation where necessities cannot be taken away from those who need them, but instead are shared with those who lack them

Cooperative: an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. Cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice.

Voluntary and Open Membership Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

Democratic Member Control Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are also organized in a democratic manner.

Member Economic Participation Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

Autonomy and Independence Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

Education, Training, and Information Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public—particularly young people and opinion leaders—about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

Cooperation Among Cooperatives Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.

Concern for Community Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

In Venezuela, Chavez made the co-ops a top political priority, giving them first refusal on government contracts and offering them economic incentives to trade with one another. By 2006, there were roughly 100,000 cooperatives in the country, employing more than 700,000 workers. Many are pieces of state infrastructure—toll booths, highway maintenance, health clinics—handed over to the communities to run. It's a reverse of the logic of government outsourcing—rather than auctioning off pieces of the state to large corporations and losing democratic control, the people who use the resources are given the power to manage them, creating, at least in theory, both jobs and more responsive public services. Venezuela's many critics have derided these initiatives as handouts and unfair subsidies, of course. Yet in an era when Halliburton treats the US government as its personal ATM for six years, withdraws upward of \$20 billion in Iraq contracts alone, refuses to hire local workers either on the Gulf Coast or in Iraq, then expresses its gratitude to US citizens by moving its corporate headquarters to Dubai, with all the attendant tax and legal benefits, Venezuela's direct subsidies to regular people look significantly less radical.

Unconditional Universal Basic Income, Universal Health Care, and free tuition are not just nice freebies; it's a lot easier to be kind to others when your own survival doesn't depend on screwing them.

Until we base how we govern ourselves and interact with our neighbors on universal principles such as universal health care and universal human rights and have laws that reflect back to those guiding principles—and rejecting laws and economic policies that don't support them—we're simply treading water. And in most cases—climate change being the single largest example—we're actually contributing quickly to our own demise.

Humans are inventive enough to both create and distribute the basic necessities of life to every human on the planet; what's lacking is the political will to do so.

The only morally defensible position on artificially scarce yet universally needed goods, services, et cetera is either everyone has it or no one can. Either everyone has justice or no one can; either everyone has free access to healthcare or no one can; either everyone has a right to an education or no one can; either everyone can feel safe in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces or no one can.

Stop bombing, progressive tax, share wealth, healthy populace, less toxins, all in and nobody out.

There is no equality of persons, where this is not an equality of attainments. Equality of opportunity is bullshit.

Being a billionaire is a character flaw. Wealth cap. Wealth tax. Maximum wage. 1950s top income tax rates.

The wealth never trickles down. You have to hold the pitchfork to their neck.

Think of all the public goods that needed to interweave for the discovery of antibiotics to finally happen. The hospital. Those petri dishes. The experiment. The spores, wafting in from the park. The doctor. The library he studied in. The royal society. The science he'd learned. Not to mention the stable, prosperous democracy he lived in, a place with roads, bridges, cities, squares to walk and think in. Do you see how all these had to weave together, in even more sophisticated, improbable ways, for this great breakthrough to happen?

But the reverse is also true. Capitalism never discovered the vaccine, antibiotics, or chemotherapy probably because it couldn't have. It's not just that its horizons are too short, or that its interests are too narrow and selfish, though they are. It's that history teaches us over and over again that it takes complex, interwoven sets of public goods to yield a genuine breakthrough—but capitalism simply can't afford them. Only a society can—and probably only a democracy, capable of reinvesting a surplus in itself. How many centuries of science, knowledge, universities, libraries, roads, royal societies, and democracy were needed for each one of the crucial moments? Every great breakthrough should really be seen as the result of centuries of 'public good,' of effort, knowledge, creativity, time, and insight, finally, suddenly, coming together, culminating in an epiphany, revelation, or insight, which is a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Great corporations exist only because they are created and safeguarded by our institutions; and it is therefore our right and our duty to see that they work in harmony with these institutions.

Ten Reforms to Restore Industrial Prosperity:

1. Write down debts with a Clean Slate
2. Tax economic rent to save it from being capitalized into interest payments
3. Revoke the tax deductibility of interest, to stop subsidizing debt leveraging
4. Create a public banking system via the nationalization of existing largest banks
5. Fund government deficits by central banks, not by taxes to pay bondholders

6. Pay Social Security and Medicare out of the general budget
7. Keep natural monopolies in the public domain to prevent rent extraction
8. Tax capital gains at the higher rates levied on earned income
9. Deter irresponsible lending with a Fraudulent Conveyance principle
10. Revive classical value and rent theory (and its statistical categories)

Classical rent theory demonstrates what seems to be counter-intuitive: Raising property taxes holds down what banks will lend, and hence the price of housing, because rent paid to the tax collector is not available to be capitalized into bank debt. But the financial sector popularizes the illusion that lower property taxes will make home ownership more affordable. Bankers know that lower taxes will leave more of the property's rental value available for new buyers to pay interest (or existing owners to borrow against by taking out "home equity" loans). What homeowners seem to gain in property tax cuts ends up being paid in higher mortgage costs of buying homes.

Taxing land rent—and also natural resource rent and monopoly rent—has three positive effects. First, it keeps property prices low by preventing this rent from being capitalized into bank loans. Second, it frees labor and industry from taxes on wages, profits, and sales, alleviating most family budgets. Third, banks will be obliged not to create as much new debt that merely becomes a cost of transferring ownership rather than contributing to real output and productivity. Taxing rent is administratively easy. The United States has over twenty-thousand appraisers whose job is to assess the market value of buildings and land separately.

To be sure, if governments collect the land rent, many existing property owners will default on their payments to the banks, or will feel obliged to walk away from their property. When banks do not receive what they had set their eyes on, many will see their reserves wiped out even more dramatically than occurred 2008. An abrupt shift to taxing rents or other revenue already pledged to banks will decimate their stockholders and bondholders. Taxing rent thus will require a public takeover of such 'troubled' banks.

The financial sector has forced society to make a choice: either submit to turning the economy into a rentier-ridden Ponzi scheme, or subordinate the banking and tax system to the aim of financing growth. That is why reform must be across-the-board, not piecemeal.

Being taken into the public domain is the price that banks pay for over-lending to the point where interest charges often absorb the entire economic

rent and crowd out the tax collector, while forcing indebted owners to default. Under these conditions, turning insolvent banks into public institutions is the easiest alternative to financial austerity and needless hardship.

Make banks eat their own cooking, requiring them to hold on to the loans they make and buy back every loan that sours. That would be a simple, effective, and self-reinforcing way to address control frauds by bank executives more interested in fast fees than interest payments.

But what about at the non-federal level? While you may not be able to introduce Medicare For All as a small-city mayor, but there's a lot you can do to expand democracy. Many of these things would be better done by a monetary sovereign, of course. But if the sovereign fails, you can at least try to fill in the gaps. How about these to start:

- Participatory budgeting
- Citywide minimum wage
- Municipal public banks
- Social work/case management access in local libraries
- Enforcing strict tenants' rights
- Lowering the voting age for city elections
- Kicking out the charter schools
- High-quality public toilets and napping benches
- Safe injection sites and needle exchanges
- Wage theft enforcement
- Fighting state attempts to privatize public assets
- The right to counsel in immigration and housing court
- A co-op conversion fund to buy rentals and permanently convert them to affordable co-ops
- A community land trust
- Free, open 24/7, public child-care and universal pre-K
- Usury caps to keep aggressive lenders out of the city
- Converting municipal utilities and vehicles to renewable energy
- Requiring community benefits agreements for new developments
- Diverting money from policing to mental health services and public housing, and reducing use of armed police officers to solve social problems

Improving Transportation

- Discourage private ownership
- Incentivize the shift to transportation as a utility
- Encourage other forms of mobility
- Modify community planning
- Reduce parking opportunities
- Sell rides, not cars
- Maintain and support good transit systems
- Guarantee mobility with congestion pricing
- Reallocate parking areas for better uses
- Prioritize lighter and smaller and lower-energy and less-polluting vehicles

Creating a Positive Urban Environment

1. A street or district must serve several primary functions
2. Blocks must be short
3. Buildings must vary in age, condition, use, and include rentals
4. Population must be dense

Under current law, if some workers want to form a union, then 35 percent of the workforce has to sign a petition or a card stating they agree to be unionized. From there the National Labor Relations Board will set up an election, and if half of the workforce votes to unionize, then they have a union. Under this current procedure, employers have several tools—both legal and illegal—to disrupt the organizing process, including intimidating or firing employees, spreading lies and misinformation about unions, threatening to close down stores, delaying union elections, and so on. Organizing is an uphill battle, which is why union busters have been so successful breaking up unions while organizers have had so much trouble starting new unions.

But card check would level the playing field. With card check, there is no election and employers never have to catch wind of what's going on. Basically, if 50 percent of all the workers sign a petition or card indicating they support forming a union, then that union is immediately recognized by the NLRB without the extra, added step of an election and without an opportunity for employers to twist arms. With card check, unions can reverse the tide in the war against labor and actually start chipping away at the corporate state. They can start demanding better wages and benefits,

limiting political coercion in the workplace, and funding political candidates who will continue the fight in the halls of Congress.

We stand for a living wage which must include:

- Enough to secure the elements of a normal standard of living
- A standard high enough to make morality possible
- Enough to provide for education and recreation
- Enough to care for immature members of the family
- Enough to maintain the family during periods of sickness
- Enough to permit reasonable saving for old age

Democracy doesn't work when individuals are forced to support environmentally destructive industries because they need the jobs. It doesn't work when people are stressed because of huge health care bills, massive college debts, and the futility of trying to make ends meet. Currently, a majority of Americans find themselves in these unacceptable situations. That leaves little time and energy for self-governance.

An Economic Bill of Rights will guarantee good-paying jobs to everyone, and good incomes for those who cannot work or are retired. An Economic Bill of Rights will also guarantee free education through university and free health care.

A Second Bill of Rights

- The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation
- The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living
- The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad
- The right of every family to a decent home
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health

- The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment
- The right to a good education

Necessitous men are not free men. If you have necessities that are not met—if you're in need—then you're not free. If you're hungry and don't have food, you're not free. If you're homeless, you're not free. If you don't have health care, you're not free. Liberty requires the opportunity to make a living—a living decent according to the standards of the time, a living which gives one not only enough to live by, but something to live for.

When your income fluctuates from week to week, as it does for more and more people, or when you work for minimum wage, it becomes impossible to budget and plan for the future. The tendency is to click into a present-focused survival mode that changes the way we function. You develop a scarcity mindset. This way of thinking costs us. We neglect other concerns, and we become less effective in the rest of our lives. Consider what it means when so many people experience this struggle to survive. Aside from the potential impact on health, serious financial concerns allow less time to be a good parent and a helpful neighbor, cutting off many resources that make society function well. When many people are forced to focus on short-term survival, their own well-being and the vitality of their community suffer.

If you're never sure of your next meal, you spend time procuring food—not working to democratize society. People who know they are cared for are the best building blocks for a strong nation.

There was a debate recently among the 2020 candidates about whether and how to provide “free college.” Mayor McKinsey, the much-hyped mayor of South Bend, Indiana, says that public college tuition should be free only for those whose families earn under a certain income threshold. He has criticized those who believe in free college “for all,” regardless of family income, saying that this would be a handout to the children of millionaires and billionaires. Of course, Buttigieg is just plain wrong on the math: There's no reason free college needs to be a “handout” to the rich, if free college is coupled with progressive taxation. But there is a less-discussed problem with “income-based” free college schemes: They're more complicated and require subjecting poor people to humiliating bureaucratic requirements.

The problem with having ‘free X for the poor,’ and only for the poor, is that in practice you need to have an apparatus to determine who counts as poor. You have to set a standard for how much people can have before they become ineligible, and then you need a way of reliably assessing that eligibility. This is difficult, and it means that no matter what, a “means

tested” program is going to make accessing a given service more of a headache for poor people—who must fill out forms and prove eligibility—than it is for rich people—who can just hand over money and get it. Weirdly, even though ‘what it looks like in practice’ should be central to discussions about means testing, advocates of means-tested programs seem frequently to ignore what the lived experience of constantly having to be means-tested is like. Actually, advocates for many kinds of policy changes ignore what enforcement looks like on the ground, which is why France has debates about banning burkas when it is really debating ‘whether or not to have cops drag Muslim women away for their choice of swimsuit,’ and Americans debate legalizing drugs rather than ‘whether or not, after murdering their dogs, to cage people for what they put in their mouths.’

So, one good reason to provide free college to all is that it eliminates the need to check whether a person ‘deserves’ or is ‘entitled’ to free college. We know in advance that they’re entitled to it, because they’re a person. This certainly cuts down on paperwork. And that makes people’s lives better: If public high schools were means-tested, and there was a standard tuition fee, but you could have it waived if you met a series of requirements, it would not seem more fair or egalitarian. Currently, we do something strange where even though public schools are free, public school lunches are not, meaning that you have to apply to eat lunch for free or at a discount and have your income reviewed by the school district before they will give your child so much as a hot dog or a plate of baked beans. Predictably, this has led to the ugly widespread phenomenon of “school lunch debt.” This is not the case everywhere: Since 1948, Finland has just given children lunch, just as it gives them schoolbooks and instruction and playgrounds, which makes complete sense if you think of lunch as just as important a part of the school day.

Yes, there is a ‘fairness’ element to universal giveaways like this, in that they treat everyone as equal. But it also just makes everybody’s life easier. We could pay for public parks by charging admission and offering income-based tax credits for park admission to anyone below a certain threshold. But isn’t it nicer when anyone can just walk in the park? What an incredible mental relief it is not to have to think about money. The commons are wonderful: places where you can go without buying anything or paying for access. Public libraries, public beaches, public parks, public schools: They are held in common and everyone can use them as much as they please.

The leftist vision for how institutions should operate frequently involves taking money out of the picture, not just because we find it grubby but because it gets in the way of what we really want out of life. This is important to understanding the left vision for how healthcare ought to operate. Why

is Medicare For All so important to us? In part because every other scheme makes your experience of healthcare much more complicated! We want you to be able to go to the doctor and not have to think about money. We don't want you to have to think about premiums, co-pays, and deductibles. You should just be thinking about your health. And this isn't utopian. In countries that pay for health services, when you want to go to the doctor you just go, get treated, and leave. This is liberatory: It just makes you feel far more free, it makes life easier.

One of the big criticisms of Medicare for All is that it "eliminates private insurance." Thank God! I hate having to deal with insurance. I just want to deal with a doctor! Nobody likes having to have insurance. Saying that it 'eliminates private insurance' is like saying that having free college 'eliminates your school loan providers.' Fuck Navient. And the people trying to tell you that you love your insurance and don't want to lose it are like people in that scenario telling you that because you've found a financing provider that's kind of better than the others, the whole financing structure makes sense and you like it. But we need to ask simple questions like: Does this really make sense as a system? Can't we do better? Is this amount of paperwork really required?

The programs leftists advocate today we advocate partly because of our distaste for bureaucracy. We think about your experience: Going to the doctor should be as simple as possible. Going to college should involve registering for classes, then going and taking them. Even applying for college should probably just consist of proving that you can meet the basic requirements to do the work and then going into a lottery system. Remember Kamala Harris' student debt plan? It gave \$20,000 in debt forgiveness to anyone who was a Pell Grant recipient who started a business in a disadvantaged community and kept it afloat for three years. We leftists made fun of this. How about just using public funds to operate schools and then letting people go to those schools? Let's make life simple. Let's make people free.

So to understand why the left is pushing so hard for universal free college and universal free health care, it helps to understand that we do not just want 'free stuff.' After all, we are fully aware that these plans have costs, we just recognize that those costs are real resources, money not being one of them. What we are concerned with, first and foremost, is people's real-world experiences: Is going to college or the doctor a process that involves a lot of having to think about money, or does it instead involve thinking about your education and your health? We want everyone to be able to afford the service, yes, but even a means-tested program that covered everyone isn't good enough, because of the test. The test adds bureaucracy, bureaucracy

adds misery. The beauty of the commons is that you get it without having to prove anything. We serve you lunch because lunch is a part of school and education is a right. The doctor treats you because you are a person and you are sick, and not because you are “in their network.” Dare to imagine a world where this phrase no longer exists!

We leftists are not just trying to create a world that is fair on paper—with all the numbers optimized for maximization of distributional justice—but that is fair in practice, that is, in the experiences people actually have in the lives they actually live. Free college and free healthcare exist elsewhere, so we know that they are not regressive, they are not unaffordable, and are not utopian. And they can make life easier for all of us. In a difficult and complicated world, that is something everyone should care about.

We should be encouraging the government administration of public goods and the basic tools for survival because then many others can focus on important questions rather than simply surviving, learning about real shit, not stupid human created bullshit and how to navigate it. Fuck that shit. Wasted intellectual energy, so much of it.

Seriously: *FUCK THAT SHIT.*

Some fans may feel professional athletes deserve their pay, but even if there are others who think they should be more modestly paid, they may still be willing to pay the \$20, \$40, \$100 per game or whatever it costs to see them. Either way, the players get these wages because they can, even if some fans think they shouldn't. If all elite players' pay were reduced by 50%, there's no reason why they couldn't play as well. Standards of skill and fitness have surely improved over the years, but if players' incomes now are 20 times what they were, say, 40 years ago, it doesn't mean that their skills and efforts have increased by the same amount. The main change has been in the size of the audience or markets, and this is largely a result of developments in information and communications technology, especially in TV money, and in sponsorship by advertisers and sales of merchandise.

The same goes for today's top music and film stars. Their income doesn't reflect simply what they contribute, but economic rent; in effect, the expansion of the customer base by global media has increased the amount of economic rent they can collect.

We will fully nationalize the following companies and organizations. And we're talking the entire organization, if you've conglomerated some horrendous mass of corporate properties under some giant umbrella of bullshit then you will have every last thing taken from you and redistributed back to the people. If you're on this list, we're coming for you:

- Everything Jeff Bezos owns
- All of Bill Gates's shit
- All of Warren Buffet's empire
- All of every other billionaire's shit
- Disney—Mickey has been responsible for the increasing insanity of copyright, now he's ours forever; eat shit Walt
- Greyhound
- Walmart
- Home Depot
- Lowes
- All national small retail chains
- SpaceX
- All defense contractors
- Boeing
- All oil companies
- All railroads
- All large trucking companies
- All large food growers & processors
- All auto manufacturers
- All large pharmaceutical companies
- All airlines and large air freight companies
- All large marine shipping companies
- All privately-owned electric generation facilities
- All privately-owned electric companies
- All privately-owned water utilities
- Nestlé
- All privately-owned hospitals
- All privately-owned air-, land-, or sea-ambulance companies
- All large medical device manufacturers
- All hotel chains
- All resource extraction & processing companies
- All large chemical manufacturers

Maybe we run these as national enterprises operated at-cost or subsidized. Maybe we spin some off into regional or local worker co-ops. But they absolutely will no longer be run and used for the benefit of a few at the expense of the many.

Simply having someone to talk to, someone who cares, who can challenge your mental narratives in a constructive way and offer new, alternative ones, is vital. Talk therapy, not some Freudian bullshit but simply probing, attempting to understand, grappling with whatever issues one faces—this is key to a healthy nation. And the DSM should be nowhere near this thing. These people don't need to be labeled. They need to be listened to.

Many a liberal has screeched about the mere possibility that Donald Trump may be profiting from his position in government. What a besmirchment of such an austere, respected institution they cry.

Yet we have Bernie Sanders, who has written multiple books while in office—defended making more than a median worker’s lifetime income from them too; some socialist he is—and somehow he is not profiting from his office? You think people are gonna give a shit about what Bernie has to say if he wasn’t in government? You think enough to buy himself that little lake house? I don’t. Yet somehow, it’s Big Bad Orange Man doing awful things but Bernie’s right to what he earned.

Fuck these people, they’re completely out of touch.

We must ban fertility treatments and all procedures involving fertilization of an egg other than a consenting human penis ejaculating directly into a consenting vagina. There are enough unwanted, already born children. Adoption, not Dr. Frankenstein. Such treatments are nothing but socially acceptable narcissism. You ignore an already existing being so you can have one that looks like you. What an asshole. Of course it’s not entirely your fault, everyone around you seems to value that same barbaric idea.

“So you’re saying my precious angel baby shouldn’t exist?!”

Yes.

But they do now, so we’re not going to treat it like shit or not care for it—we’re not Republicans. And we won’t toss it in a pit and shoot it or anything—we’re not the US Army. There just shouldn’t be anymore made, going forward. Plus, if you use your kid as some kind of pawn in a PR-game, then you’re the asshole, not us; that would, if my math is correct, make you at least a double-asshole.

Reforming Justice

1. **No more forced confessions.**
2. **All police must wear video cameras that fully reveal their conduct.**

A thoughtful legislature can and should pass laws that provide that in the course of any questioning between an officer and a citizen, if the cop’s camera is ever turned off a jury is entitled to presume the cop’s misconduct.

3. **No entity, private or public, can mine or analyze such recordings for evidence of other crimes.**

4. Better psychological testing for police candidates.

If we can select those most qualified to travel to the moon armed only with the American flag, surely we can do a better job of selecting those who travel our streets armed with pistols and clubs.

5. A citizens' commission to oversee police conduct.

6. Reform the grand jury process.

How can any citizen prevent being wrongfully charged with a crime when the prosecutor, and the prosecutor alone, can decide what facts the grand jury will hear, and how and on what issues the witnesses will be questioned? In ways, the grand jury is the remnant of the inquisitions of old that included the persecution and the burning alive of thousands of innocent women as witches.

7. Outlaw the testimony of jailhouse snitches.

8. Relief for the accused when, at trial, the prosecutor hides favorable evidence from the accused.

9. Curing the evils of overcharging.

We already know why innocent people plead guilty: They know they'll face jurors who believe they're guilty because jurors trust that the prosecutor wouldn't charge innocent persons. They know that jurors often compromise—acquit on some, even many, of the charges, but likely find the accused guilty of something. They know they will be appointed a public defender who convinces them, rightly, that their conviction is foregone. They know that if they lose they will receive no mercy from the sentencing judge. Their lives will be truncated, their reputations lost, and the light of their future extinguished. Perhaps they will never see their spouse or children again, and their parents will die while they're in prison. Given the crowded dockets in most jurisdictions, in some cases innocent persons can plead guilty to a charge or two and get out of jail before their trial is even set.

10. We must get politics out of our judiciary.

Judges should be drafted at random from the trial bar for a limited term. The drafted judge would serve for, say, three or four years and then return to private practice. The judge would be paid a reasonable salary and would also be rewarded by becoming a better lawyer, one who has experienced the workings of the judicial mind firsthand. He

or she would spend no more time as a drafted judge than doctors spend acquiring their specialty. The names of all those who try court cases would be put in the canister and drawn as needed in the same manner that jurors are selected. If by law we can demand that ordinary citizens give up parts of their lives to serve as jurors, can't we, with greater justification, require trial lawyers, who make their living in the courtroom, to contribute back to the very system that supports them? The names of those who have served as trial judges would also be placed in the hopper from which, by random selection, our appeals court judges would be selected, but for a shorter term. And the political beast, Power, that once influenced—even owned—our judges will sit by the wayside whimpering and scolding, emasculated. Some will argue that this method will open the door to individuals none of us would want on the bench. But we are suffering from a judiciary that includes tyrants and fops of every dimension, and we can't get rid of them because they've been appointed for life or they're better politicians than they are judges and are continuously reelected. Better that we have a bad judge for a short term than a bad judge for a life term.

No one should have to suffer longer than they want to. We must have a constitutional right to die with dignity. Voluntary, pain-free self-euthanasia is a human right.

And, any objection you have? Well other than some dude on a cloud says 'Bad, No Do.' Which by the way, isn't as clear as you'd like it to be. Jesus is nailed up there, screams "Why have you forsaken me?"—he's asking to die, why does he continue to suffer up there—and lo and behold, two verses later, after some "vinegar" to drink, he's dead. Assisted suicide anyone?

Any other objection is simply a suggestion of what we also need to make sure we fix. Some people might do it to relieve the burden on families? Well why in the fuck are we putting so much burden on their families, why the fuck can't we just fix that? Some people might do it just cause they're feeling bad? Why the fuck did we as a society let them make it nearly two decades without being able to deal with momentary pain? I mean we're not still chucking kids in holes and rivers, right? It's a slippery slope? So's everything. There is, currently, no societal rule stating that all groups of people cannot be killed. You've already got a category of 'killable' people, we're on the slope motherfuckers.

If we're talking order of implementation for radical change, it seems the first step must be to make it clear that the US federal government can never run out of dollars, that any attempt to act as if it is otherwise is a lie and a

threat to one's life. If you've done that, most of the other items listed are quite easy to do as most of the criticism of such ideas stems from the flawed idea of finite money.

And the list excerpted is certainly too narrow, as mentioned, and flawed in other ways.

- Single-payer is OK, but we need drug and device patent changes at minimum—government funds the research, no more parasites. Perhaps even nationalization of all hospitals.
- Debt-free college is not far enough—free lifelong education. Open source textbooks.
- UBI for all, retirement stipend + UBI for some. No jobs guarantee, less total jobs focused on actual human needs is the goal.
- Massive reduction in the length of copyright terms, potentially even abolishing entirely.
- Nationalization of all banks.
- Debt jubilee.
- Maximum income limit, regardless of source.
- No algorithm trading, implement a financial transactions tax. Nothing but the purchase or sale of stocks allowed and all stocks must pay reasonable and regular dividends. No CDOs, mutual funds, any other such nonsense.
- 95% top tax bracket—we'll be needing to destroy some of that money injected by the use of monetary sovereignty for the masses, both for money supply and inequality reasons.
- Tariffs on all imported goods
- Close all overseas military bases. Nuclear disarmament, unilaterally if needed.
- Disband CIA, remove offensive capabilities of NSA, all vulnerabilities found must be disclosed.
- No contractors can be hired/used by the federal government, all must be direct hires.

- End the War on Drugs, legalize all minimally processed plant-based drugs (e.g. marijuana, shrooms, opium, coca leaf, et cetera). Disband DEA, fold any still required responsibilities into FDA.
- Incarceration as rehabilitation, not punishment. Limit maximum incarceration to 5–7 years regardless of crime. Abolish death penalty.
- Race does not exist, gender does not exist. Both are toxic artificial constructs designed to divide, not aid or empower.
- Free green (as best as able initially) public transit—intracity, intercity, regional, national.
- No private lawyers, only public defenders.
- No corporations in space. Unmanned, non-commercial space exploration only beyond Earth orbit.
- Disband Space Force
- No animal model studies.
- No CAFOs. No grazing on public lands.
- Nationalize all existing nuclear power plants; no private ownership of newly constructed ones. The Feds are on the hook for any major disaster anyway, why should a company make a profit while accepting no risk?
- Creation of federal resource extraction firms with sole privileges to extract on federal lands.
- Time- and Purpose-limited corporate charters.
- Hand-marked paper ballots hand-counted in public. Publicly funded elections.
- Ensure parental equality in family court.
- Free veterinary care for all companion animals.
- All debates, negotiations, and drafting of bills must be recorded and accessible to the public. No more backroom deals and closed door negotiations where both the public and majority of Congress have a limited time to analyze the results before making decisions. You're doing public work, to the greatest extent possible it must be done in view of the public.

- Implement a publicly accessible version-tracking system—think GitHub—for all existing and new legislation, policies, regulations, executive orders, et cetera.

All of this and more must be part of a coordinated national plan to shrink the economy down to a sustainable level. Too often we focus too much on tweaking; even if some tweaks might be somewhat substantial they still work within the human supremacist framework that fails to properly account for the billions of other individuals we share our home with.

Eighteen months. This is the rough time-frame we should be concerned about, demanding. Radical overhaul of the entire system within an 18-month period. Perfectly doable, not all of the fixes completed, but their solutions implemented or outlined legislatively. Anything significantly slower is just another form of failed incrementalism which dooms unfathomable numbers of individuals to further suffering.

We have already pushed massive costs onto future generations. It is immoral for us to place anymore simply because we were not willing to make the necessary sacrifices immediately. To do so is simply to selfishly place our comfort above that of others; this is of course a sentiment which has in part gotten us into the mess we currently find ourselves in.

The first step is getting a story. Such a story must be able to spread on its own, which is in part why it must be so much more radical and far-reaching than the usual incrementalist, compartmentalized approach. It does not matter if such a story is spread with the goal of inspiration or mockery, simply that it spreads under its own power. We don't need a majority, we probably don't even need 10%. We need individuals to see the implementation of such a story as a moral obligation. We need to be compelled to act in the same way we are compelled to remove a hand from a hot stove. We need to each determine how best to do so, by any means one can morally justify as necessary.

We are the most recent generations of a culture which has enslaved, oppressed, murdered every other way of being, seeing, doing that it has encountered. The trail of blood stretches back many millennia. That culture needs to be rejected; not subdued or marginalized, but destroyed. It is far more harmful, far more dangerous than our favorite boogeymen, Nazis and terrorists.

We must get Money out of politics just as we rid our bodies of killing cancers. We are diseased by Money. We are no longer a free nation if Money can buy our representatives while we stand in line to vote like the proverbial cattle at the killing chutes. Our elections on all levels must be publicly funded. Over my lifetime I've seen the Power-owned media capture

the American mind. The endless invasion of propaganda has eventually prevailed, and its message has become the accepted truth of a brainwashed nation that we are free, that the police and prosecutors are trustworthy and will protect us, and that in America there is liberty and justice for all. Such is a mythology that enslaves.

We would be wise to remember Sinclair Lewis:

“If fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross.”

Other nations have laws protecting their bookstores and publishers. In France, for example, no seller can offer more than 5% off the cover price of new books, with the result that books cost about the same wherever you buy them in France, even online. The French government classifies books as an “essential good,” along with electricity, bread, and water.

The Electoral College has been responsible for two Presidents within the last three winning an election without winning a majority of the votes. This system of selecting presidents was a tool originally created to suppress democracy; historically, it has empowered slavers and segregationists. The injustices it has perpetuated continue today. By distorting democracy, it values certain voters (i.e. Floridian Cuban-Americans, Iowa farmers) over others. The democratic option is direct election of the president.

The United States should:

- Abolish the Electoral College, moving to a system of direct election of the president.

American elections have been plagued by structural unfairness that has often advantaged the party in power. From restrictive voter ID laws (such as the Wisconsin law sometimes credited with delivering the state to Republicans in 2016) to the outright fraud perpetrated in North Carolina in 2018, American elections have returned to the bad old days of fraudulent elections like those held in Adams County, Ohio. For America to call itself a true democracy, it must ensure total fairness in voting and in elections.

The United States should:

- Put all elections to federal offices (House, Senate, and presidential elections) under congressional oversight. This would make the process of voting both uniform and fair nationwide.
- Make all voting registration automatic for US citizens upon turning 18.

Our current first past the post system of democratic elections does not ask for a majority in order for a candidate to declare victory. Oftentimes, voters will be asked to vote against their conscience and choose the “lesser of two evils.” Ranked choice voting, or instant run-off voting, allows voters to rank candidates, giving their first vote to their preferred candidate. A candidate can only assume victory with a majority of first-round and run-off votes, making every vote count.

The United States should:

- Institute a ranked choice voting procedure for any and all elections currently functioning on the First Past the Post system, ensuring that the candidate that people actually want wins, rather than whoever happens to be a better representation of the establishment.
- Ensure a candidate can only assume victory with a majority of first-round and run-off votes, ensuring that third-party candidates are not left in the dust and that the truly most popular person wins.

The Wyoming rule is the principle that the House’s representative-to-population ratio should be equal for all states: to do this, this ratio must be set to that of the lowest-population state, Wyoming. This ensures that no representative has more power than any other representative.

The United States should:

- Institute the Wyoming rule, ensuring that each representative in the House of Representatives has equal power and that each American vote counts for the same amount.

The US Senate, in its current form, is a deeply inequitable body. Wyoming and California, which have wildly different populations, have equal representation. This means that popular measures, such as Medicare for All, have virtually no chance in the Senate.

The United States should:

- Pass an amendment to the Constitution retaining the two-senator structure, but making the voting power of a state’s senators proportional to the state’s population. Thus the senator from California would have roughly 68 times the voting power of a senator from Wyoming. On procedural matters, however, the one-vote structure would be maintained.

Whenever a Supreme Court justice dies or retires, there is a bitter partisan war over their replacement. It is foolish for the fate of decisions like

Roe v. Wade or Miranda v. Arizona to be left up to the accident of whether a jurist dies under a Democratic president or a Republican one; that Donald Trump may get to nominate three justices in four years while Barack Obama nominated two in eight years points to the fundamental impracticability of the current system. Moreover, it promotes jurists staying on far longer than they ought to for fear of giving their seat to an ideological opponent.

The United States should:

- Limit the terms of all federal judges, including Supreme Court justices, to twelve years, with the opportunity of renomination or nomination to a different office at the end of each term.
- Remove the ability for the Supreme Court to declare laws unconstitutional.

In the rush to enhance security following 9/11, Americans' civil rights—including the freedom from surveillance and invasion of privacy—have been thoroughly trampled. There are currently 17 distinct intelligence agencies funded through largely classified budgets, and each operates under its own shroud of secrecy. Spying by the National Security Agency, including in collusion with privately-run telecommunications providers, has affected hundreds of millions of Americans. Such collaboration highlights that the intrusion into the private life of citizens is not just a function of a secretive state, but it now also a function of the market, with thousands of businesses seeking to capitalize on the War on Terror and therefore disinclined to end it. This toxic brew has given rise to 'surveillance capitalism.' What used to be private (our personal lives) has become public and commodified, and what should be public (the government) is becoming private and hidden from view.

The United States should:

- Abolish the NSA.
- Substantially reduce the size of the surveillance state down from 17 distinct entities, and reduce the mandated scope of operations.
- Withdraw from the Anglophone-only 'Five Eyes Network,' currently comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US; instead work with and through multilateral institutions that pursue organized crime, including cyber-crime.
- End policies and programmes exposed by Edward Snowden, such as PRISM.

- Repeal the Patriot Act and the Espionage Act.

Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory of the United States. Although its inhabitants are citizens and have the freedom of movement throughout the rest of the country, they do not have a vote in Congress. With no say either in presidential politics, Puerto Ricans have no right of franchise in national politics. This is a denial of political rights, which is unacceptable in any self-regarding liberal democracy. Conversely, the absence of political rights comes into sharp relief at times of need, such as in the wake of natural calamity, where citizens may harbor legitimate concerns about the performance of federal government. Similar principles apply to our capital: despite being home to 702,000 people, these citizens gain no representatives and do not control their own laws. Taxation without representation continues to be theft, and these injustices cannot be allowed to continue. Puerto Rico, D.C., and all other territories need to be allowed to host a legitimate, formal, binding referendum on statehood.

The United States should:

- Offer Puerto Rico the right to self-determination, which would include the options of full independence and statehood within the Union. If it was to choose the latter, it would become the first Hispanic majority territory to do so. By extension, all Puerto Ricans will obtain full adult franchisement and be eligible to participate in presidential and congressional elections.

All other territories would be offered the same.

- Offer Washington, D.C. full statehood contingent on a binding referendum. We must ensure that the seat of our very nation is not dominated by those who do not represent its population.

Over the past few years, the United States has systematically left the multilateral institutions of the world. This country cannot afford to commit itself to re-isolation and the “America alone” vision of the world. The only way to sustainable peace and prosperity around the globe is a commitment to engaging in mutual aid with other countries.

The United States should:

- Reverse its withdrawal from the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- Commit to providing full humanitarian assistance in accordance with multilateral commitments.

- Work with other nations to reform the United Nations Security Council, expanding the P5 to reflect a more global distribution of power.

The United States' policy of stockpiling nuclear weapons is a disaster in waiting. The United States must not only seek a world without nuclear weapons, but work actively to make that a reality. America will be a safer not with a powerful "nuclear deterrent," but instead with a world free from this grievous threat. Rapid denuclearization is the only path forward.

The United States should:

- Sign and ratify the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.
- Sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
- Officially declare that the United States would not be the first to use nuclear weapons.
- Work towards complete disarmament.

For decades, the United States has committed to a foreign policy of aggression and regime change in the service of a loosely-defined "national interest" (usually contiguous with American business interests). This has brought nothing but instability and disaster to the world. From Operation Condor to the 2011 intervention in Libya, these operations, whether dubbed "humanitarian" or "strategic," have had a tremendous cost in blood and treasure.

The United States should:

- Commit to ending the weaponization of human rights as a tool of American foreign policy.
- Separate USAID from the State Department, and make all foreign bilateral aid 'no strings attached.'
- End all unilateral sanctions against sovereign countries, as sanctions are an act of war that result in harm and the deaths of innocent people.
- Vow not to invade any sovereign country, such as Venezuela or North Korea, without a clear and obvious first strike by that nation.
- Pursue friendly relations with all sovereign countries, whether or not we favor their leadership or economic structure.

- End the use of unmanned aerial vehicles for military purposes, as these have consistently resulted in horrific civilian casualties and fatalities.
- Repeal the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists.
- Close Guantanamo Bay and pay reparations to all untried detainees, past and present.
- End the ridiculous Cuba embargo and normalize relations with one of our closest neighbors.

The Department of Defense has benefited from its Orwellian moniker for too long: who could justify cutting ‘defense’ spending? The Founders recognized that “Department of War,” a name that accurately reflected the purpose and activities of the body, was a more fitting name. But that’s not enough to push back on the overwhelming power of the Department of Defense. A Department of Peace, as proposed in 1793 by Benjamin Rush, should exist to promote peace-building and conflict prevention whenever necessary.

The United States should:

- Rename the ‘Department of Defense’ the ‘Department of War.’
- Create a Department of Peace, under which USAID, the US Institute of Peace, and the Peace Corps would be organized. As a full member of the Cabinet, The Secretary of Peace would serve to identify, promote, and report on US support to nonviolent solutions to global problems.
- Commit to parity in budget allocations between the Department of War and the Department of Peace.
- Abolish the US Space Force and end the militarization of space.

The United States has about 800 military bases spread across the world. There are bases in 80 countries, with about 138,000 troops total deployed across the world. Only 11 other countries have military bases in other nations; the country with the second-most bases has at most 40. The environmental and social impacts of these bases—which often cause a great deal of pollution with severely negative impacts on local communities—are acute, and resentment surrounding these bases gives rise to anti-Americanism across the globe, as seen in Okinawa, Japan.

The United States should:

- Close all military bases abroad, beginning with those based in Muslim-majority countries. Offer the opportunity to turn existing base infrastructure into educational, artistic, inventive collaboration centers in which non-military individuals from the US and the host country can come together to learn from each other and experiment.
- Bring every American soldier stationed abroad back to the US.
- Determine a package of reparations for communities negatively impacted by US bases abroad.
- Establish a corresponding demobilization and reintegration programme for US servicemen and women returning home to enable their full and healthy integration into social, economic, civic, and political life.

The United States' military spending dwarfs that of the rest of the world. Much of this spending is wholly unnecessary; legislators, eager to appear hawkish and confrontational, appropriate funds that even generals say they don't need. The US, which is unthreatened by any power on the scale of the Soviet Union, still spends more than it did during the Cold War. Reports in 2011 revealed that the US was spending more than \$20 billion a year on just air-conditioning in Afghanistan and Iraq—more than the annual budget of NASA at that time. This is a disastrous valuing of 'guns over butter.' As President Dwight Eisenhower said, "every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."

The United States should:

- Cut military spending by at least 50 percent.
- Scrap the F-35 program.
- Repurpose the remaining work of the Department of Defense towards international cooperation under civilian and scientific supervision. Its future role should be to contribute to address potentially cataclysmic global threats, such as those posed by near-earth asteroids.

The American government uses cyber, diplomatic, financial, economic, and military tools to impose its will on the international rules-based order. It has systematically attempted to avoid culpability for war crimes in which it has been involved. Not only has it refused to join the International

Criminal Court, but it withdrew from the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in 1986 after *Nicaragua v. United States* found that the covert American war against Nicaragua was illegal. The American government has been involved in countless war crimes, with their perpetrators often remaining aloof from true consequences. It is time for the United States to join the rest of the world in enforcing law.

The United States should:

- Join the International Criminal Court.
- Repeal the 2002 American Service-Members' Protection Act, which protects government and allied officials and service-people from prosecution for war crimes by multilateral mechanisms.
- Prohibit all current and former government officials found by Congress to have committed war crimes from any future government service or to advise and provide services to government through third parties.
- Work with the international community—international institutions, regional bodies, and individual countries—to remedy the bias toward prosecuting only African defendants in the International Criminal Court.
- Re-enter the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.
- Transport all currently living former US presidents to The Hague for trial—maybe dig up Reagan and throw him in the cargo hold too.

For too long, America has given uncritical support to the government of Israel, which has enacted racist apartheid-style policies designed to disenfranchise Palestinians. American leadership, both Democratic and Republican, has watched, both approvingly and passively, as Israel illegally annexed Palestinian land, encouraging further encroachment through billions of dollars in military aid, the placement of the American embassy in Jerusalem, and the recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli territory.

Groups like AIPAC wield far too much influence over our foreign policy and media coverage of Israel, as critics have highlighted for more than a decade. It is time to craft a foreign policy independent of undue influence by the Israel lobby, and to stop turning a blind eye to the injustices of the occupation.

The United States should:

- Establish a mature, non-partisan relationship with Israel and its neighbors, including through multilateral mechanisms, to promote mutual peace, security, and well-being.
- End military aid to Israel.
- Refuse to support laws aiming to stifle the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement that cripple freedoms of speech and association.
- Recognize Palestinian statehood or call for a plural state in which Israelis and Palestinians all enjoy full and equal rights in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The United States' relationship to Saudi Arabia is extraordinarily corrupt. For decades, the Saudi royal family has used oil money to influence American policy; from the prominence of "Bandar Bush" to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman claiming to have Jared Kushner "in his pocket," our leaders have been serving Saudi interests for far too long. Saudi Arabia is a repressive dictatorship which regularly engages in torture and murder, as seen most recently in the death of Jamal Khashoggi. Its curtailment of women's rights has been appalling.

The United States should:

- End all aid to Saudi Arabia.
- End all material and logistical support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

The United States government, in conjunction with companies like Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin, serves as a salesman of death around the globe. American companies have profited handsomely off conflict abroad; as Smedley Butler observed:

"War is a racket. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives."

The only way to clamp down on the military-industrial complex, the greatest enemy of the American people, is a hard line against selling weapons abroad.

The United States should:

- Prohibit American companies from selling arms abroad, including to non-state actors.

- Withdraw diplomatic backing and public financial support from domestic weapons manufacturers.
- Work with weapons manufacturers that wish to pivot their business operations and workforces to peaceful applications of their managerial, network, and technological expertise.
- Collaborate with other countries involved in arms sales towards mutually-agreed demilitarization of international trade.

In recent decades, American warmaking has become increasingly extra-constitutional. Presidents have sent deployments abroad without any real Congressional oversight; the legislative body, acting contrary to the dictates of the Constitution, has effectively ceded the power to make war to the president. The War Powers Act of 1973, which was intended to address this by requiring Congressional approval for any conflict lasting more than 60 days, has been a failure; it has been violated repeatedly. The War Powers Act must be reformed to ensure compliance with the Constitution and prevent needless wars.

The United States should:

- Pass a revised version of the “John Hart Ely Combat Authorization Act,” which would shorten the Act’s “free pass period” from sixty days to seven days; if Congress does not authorize the conflict in that timeframe, funds for it will automatically be cut off. Continuing to wage such wars will be explicitly deemed an impeachable offense.

Recent years have seen a number of promising developments in the long-simmering conflict between North Korea and South Korea. Make no mistake: the primary responsibility for achieving a lasting peace on the Peninsula rests with the Korean people and their respective governments. This is—first and foremost—their dispute to settle. To this end, reformist South Korean president Moon Jae-in was elected on an unequivocal mandate to seek dialogue with the North. This has enjoyed welcome support from the international community, including from the US. It is obvious that the North Korean government is a troubled one, but its posture can also be partly explained as a response to American belligerence in other parts of the world (in the last 20 years this has included the disasters in Iraq and Libya). As the overwhelmingly more powerful party, the US has a responsibility to make every effort to de-escalate tensions to enable the two Koreas to reach an amicable outcome to current and future talks.

The United States should:

- Withdraw all troops from South Korea, in cooperation with the South Korean government.
- Seek to pursue normal relations with North Korea.
- Formally declare an end to the Korean War, which was only paused in 1953 with the Armistice Agreement. Ending hostilities is necessary for the total denuclearization of the peninsula.
- Continue nuclear dialogue with North Korea through multilateral mechanisms, with the goal of complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.
- Observe its own Treaty obligations towards denuclearization.
- Promote cultural exchange between the United States, South Korea, and North Korea. The isolation of the North Korean people is of benefit of no one.
- Encourage the reunion of North and South Korean families that have been separated by the war. Whether through digital communications (e.g. video chats) or in-person, should both governments be amenable.
- Formally apologize to survivors of the No Gun Ri and Jeju Island massacre, meet with them and South Korean officials on potential compensation.

The American economy of 2019 is plagued by a problem that some thought was a relic of the 1910s: monopolies. Industry after industry has become highly centralized and controlled by a handful of private bureaucratic entities. These include agribusiness, civil aviation, banking and consumer finance, communications, food production and retail, health insurance and health service provision, internet services, news media, retail investment, social media, ground transport, and so on. Horizontal corporate agglomeration and vertical integration have produced economic behemoths that control vast swathes of the market, are unresponsive to consumer demands, and enjoy undue influence over politics and economy at both national and sub-national levels. Meanwhile, the gargantuan Amazon, which alongside providing cloud services to 17 federal intelligence agencies, promises to flex its monopsonistic power over vendors and workers; it may soon reach a concentration of power rivaling Standard Oil at its height. It is time for the US to return to the grand tradition of trust-busting and break apart

market-controlling businesses. It is time to return competition to the marketplace that allows innovation and entrepreneurship to thrive. Our democracy depends on it.

The United States should:

- Use the government's antitrust authority to break up large businesses. Regulators should take a much harder line on any mergers and acquisitions by large companies; the strategic purchase of WhatsApp by Facebook, for example, should have been halted. Accordingly, Robert Bork's 1982 guidelines for reviewing mergers should be shelved and more restrictive ones devised.
- Break up large tech companies immediately. These companies pose a dire threat, not just to American democracy, but to international peace and security; Facebook, Google, Amazon, and others pose dangers due to the power they wield over information and content. In 2018, a UK Parliament report described Facebook as a "digital gangster." This description is entirely warranted, based on evidence that its business decisions were "directly linked" to ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and harvesting the data of women's menstrual cycles without consent, to cite just three of many transgressions.
- Hold the executive heads of companies directly and legally liable in the event that their businesses are found to, for example, be defrauding consumers or producing goods and services that result in injury and death.
- Promote business adherence to the Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights.

The inequities pervasive in American education are symptomatic of the broader national sickness of gross inequality and a refusal to care for the least well-off among us. Many lower-income people don't have access to high-quality preschool, giving their children a disadvantage at the start of kindergarten; this disadvantage is often compounded during years spent in badly-funded school districts. The obvious fruit of this is lower graduation rates and lower matriculation rates in poorer areas. Moreover, the oft-prohibitive cost of attending a university (let alone attending a graduate program) means that many forego the possibility or attend cheaper options for post-secondary education. Many lower-income people who do decide to pursue post-secondary education also take on a precipitous amount of student debt, debilitating their financial prospects for years.

The United States should:

- Provide free, high-quality preschool education for all with direct funding to states.
- Delink property taxes and education funding, moving to a federal model for school funding in which all students receive an equal amount of funding.
- Promote the inclusion of climate science, sustainable development, and universal human rights into school curricula.
- Make all public universities and graduate schools absolutely tuition-free by providing funding directly to states.
- Announce a ‘Student Debt Jubilee,’ with all student debt held by the US government being forgiven. This includes any debt owned by now nationalized large banks.

The United States has some of the best specialized health care in the world, for instance in the treatment of certain cancers. At the same time, coverage is highly unequal and in effect still inaccessible to millions of Americans. Some of the health data is appalling. Out of 35 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) the US ranks 29th for infant mortality and 26th for life expectancy. Maternal mortality is the worst in the developed world, and worse than in Iran. Forty percent of adults in the US are obese, giving rise to an epidemic of chronic illnesses. The mental health crisis has also reached disastrous levels, affecting women and men in different ways that expensive clinical responses alone cannot remedy. Government policy, social convulsion, economic insecurity, lifestyle choices, and poor nutrition are factors, but the single largest impediment to the achievement of health as a human right are health insurance companies. These private-sector bureaucracies control the market of health care provision and what medical professionals can or cannot prescribe. With government license, they have itemized every conceivable procedure in order to extract revenue from patients, extending corporate control over the human body. The result? A healthcare system that costs 40 percent more than the OECD average, and delivers poorer overall results. The close ties that exist between Congress and the health insurance industry makes the current status of public health in America an example of both government and market failure. It is unsustainable.

The United States should:

- Draw on good practices in universal health care provision from around the world in order to construct the best possible approach suited to the specific profiles and health care needs of the American population.
- Offer a publicly-run and -financed national health service. With Medicare-for-All as a medium term transitional system, the ultimate aim is a ‘Veterans Administration-style healthcare for all,’ or ‘VA4A’ for short.
- Provide full coverage as is, to date, provided by private health insurers, including dental, vision, and hearing services.

There are six vacant homes in the United States for every homeless person. Homelessness is not a natural phenomenon: it is caused by humans, it is perpetrated by humans, and in the same way it can be solved by humans. But the problem here is not just for the homeless: rents continue to skyrocket with an insane and bubbling housing market that almost seems reeling towards the same situation that we were in before 2008. Housing is a human right, and no person deserves to go through the world without shelter; but more than this, everyone deserves cheap, affordable housing that meets their needs and ensures that they never have to worry about evictions just because a paycheck arrived late or they lost their job.

The United States should:

- Enact a vacancy tax that targets properties that go without residents for a quarter of the year or more.
- Overhaul all public housing legislation to ensure that we can and will build more, build higher quality, and build more equitably: eliminate the “equivalent elimination” provision of the Wagner-Steagall Act that only allows the construction of new public housing when an equivalent amount of housing is demolished, ensure that all future housing projects have considerable operations budgets rather than front-loading the capital budget, massively increase municipal, state, and federal capacities for creating public housing, et cetera.
- Ensure that public housing projects are not creating slums in themselves: public housing cannot be segregated into its own section of a city or town, but must rather be spread through it just like any other type of housing. Public housing segregation is still segregation, and cities must be more equitable, not less.

- Remodel zoning laws to be green- and socially-conscious, lower or altogether remove parking minimums for buildings, and create free and plentiful public transport to make sure that cities across the country are more equitable and have more housing for everyone.
- Outlaw all anti-homeless architecture, including but not limited to windowsill spikes, street spikes, slanted benches or benches with dividers that make it impossible to sleep, and barred corners.
- Ensure that access to housing for the homeless is not contingent on income, career, drug use, or any other metric: it has been proven time and time again that not only the most ethical but also the cheapest method of dealing with homelessness crisis is through giving housing first then offering services later, as the mental stability afforded by having a stable residence is more valuable than any kind of means-testing.
- Ensure that multi-family public housing communities are run cooperatively and democratically, where people are in control of their own conditions. Enact additional legislation to incentivize privately-built or owned complexes to do the same.
- Never limit pets, children, et cetera in public housing as this only keeps the people who need it away from housing. Similarly, do not means-test: public housing should be for everyone, not only the fully impoverished. By opening affordable housing to all, we can decommodify housing and ensure everyone has a good place to live.
- Enact rent control nationwide with a regulatory agency to ensure that rents cannot skyrocket and that tenants cannot be exploited.
- Massively increase and expand tenants' rights.
- Guarantee legal counsel in tenant-landlord court.
- Increase the ease of acquiring community land trusts that develop and steward affordable housing, community gardens, civic buildings, commercial spaces, and other community assets.
- Enact stricter licensing requirements for landlords and stiffer penalties for failure to keep apartments in good condition.

Job insecurity is a terrifying thing, and our economic system mandates that businesses shut down their stores, lay off their employees, and close

their offices in a never-ending cycle of feast and famine. But while businesses come and go, people's livelihoods don't have to. Based on the UK Labor Party's policy of the same name, the Right to Own would be a policy of employees being the first to be able to buy out a company when it's going under or being sold. They have the right of first refusal: whether it's being bought by another company or going out of business, the employees will be able to buy out their workplace and ensure that they get to control their own business, income, life, and livelihood.

The United States should:

- Institute a policy of the Right to Own, ensuring that, when a company is being sold or is going out of business, the first group that has the chance to buy out the business's assets and IP are the workers themselves.
- Give grants and/or loans to these businesses if they decide to reorganize as a cooperative: a corporation that is run democratically by the workers, where each member of the company votes on management, parts of their contract, the general direction of the company, and more, with the specifics depending on how the cooperative decides to organize. These cooperatives are known for extremely high rates of productivity, worker satisfaction, benefits, and wages.
- Set up a federal program to help cooperatives, teach them how to operate, and ensure that they are self-sufficient.

Parenting in America is incredibly tough: debt, expenses, and a lack of quality schooling or parental leave breaks people down and leaves both parents and children worse off. By modeling parental aid off of the Family Fun Pack theory, we can allow parents to live and breathe without being brutalized by the countless stresses of our system, and allow children to prosper with all the resources they need to thrive. Right now, the well-off can afford tutors, preschools, child caretakers, and more that create a class divide in child-raising itself. By helping those parents and children that need it most, we can ensure that every child gets the support they need.

The United States should:

- Implement high-quality, free pre-school education for all with direct funding to states.
- Implement a Baby Box program to give every family a box that contains essential items like clothes and bottles, with the box itself functioning as a bassinet.

- Institute 208 weeks of parental leave, split between parents; a single-parent household gives all 208 weeks to the single parent, while in dual-parent households, each parent obtains 104 weeks but may transfer up to 70 weeks to the other. This paid benefit will be set equal to 100% of earnings up to minimum wage, plus 66% of earnings past the minimum wage. All recipients will be entitled to benefits equal to at least the minimum wage but no more than the national average wage.
- Create a free, open 24/7, childcare system that all parents are entitled to.
- Ensure free school lunches for all students.

As the cost of living in America has risen, the effect of wages earned has stagnated. American workers' buying power has decreased, with every purchase taking a greater hit to their paycheck than in years before. As rent and cost of living rise, and as workers bring in more profit for their employers, their wages must increase.

The United States should:

- Establish a national \$30 minimum wage and eliminate the tipped minimum wage. The minimum wage would be indexed to the Consumer Price Index.
- Invest, at minimum, \$1.5 trillion in infrastructure over a ten-year period.
- Institute a Federal Jobs Guarantee to offer jobs at high wages on the model of the Works Progress Administration, exerting upward pressure on wages. These jobs would not all be unskilled; instead, many of these jobs should focus on developing infrastructure (in line with the above plank), and may include job training in fields like nursing.
- Repeal the Taft-Hartley Act. The law prevents labor unions from amassing any sort of real power through its ban on secondary boycotts and the infamous "free-speech clause," and, by defining independent contractors so as not to be employees, allows companies to deny their workers real benefits. Repealing the law would be a first step in re-empowering the labor movement.
- Provide a free public credit registry to compete with large credit reporting agencies like Experian and Equifax. The public credit registry would not charge fees for seeing credit scores, and would

require lenders and other companies that provide information to be wholly accurate.

A huge proportion of large American corporations are headquartered in Delaware, a welcoming haven for corporations due to its lax regulations. This means that Delaware state law on corporations is unduly important, far more influential than that of any other state.

“A corporation headquartered in New York, with all of its facilities, employees, customers, and shareholders in New York, is beyond New York’s reach when it comes to matters of corporate governance.”

This has tremendous policy implications, since Delaware state law favors the interest of shareholders over those of any other party; in 2015, the Chief Justice of the Delaware Supreme Court wrote that “treating an interest other than stockholder wealth as an end in itself is a breach of fiduciary duty.” Simple changes to American corporate law would bring corporations under more democratic control, and would allow for other reforms to be made.

The United States should:

- Require corporations that either have more than 300 employees or that have a revenue of at least \$5 million a year to be chartered at the national level.
- Obligate all nationally-chartered corporations to consider the interests of all stakeholders, especially workers, and not just shareholders.
- Require that two-thirds of all board members of nationally-chartered organizations be elected by employees lower than the 80th percentile in the company’s pay structure, in the vein of Germany’s “co-determination” system.
- Establish a Corporate Harm Prosecution Agency (CHPA), which would have broad oversight to investigate, subpoena, and return a binding claim with its findings on the negative externalities that corporations produce, for example, the \$6.2 billion spent on welfare each year due to Walmart’s low pay. The CHPA would investigate a corporation for the negative externalities it produces, then return a verdict. The corporation and the CHPA would have one year to work out an agreement for how to amend the problem—for example, Walmart could reduce food stamp usage by its employees by 50 percent in a

way approved by the CHPA. If the corporation fails to amend the negative externality, the CHPA would have the power to suspend all stock buybacks and dividends.

- The corporate death penalty will again be an option.

A Green New Deal is absolutely necessary but the plan proposed in the House by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is far from adequate. Her resolution claims to be an overview of the goals we desperately need to accomplish to ensure not only that our Earth survives as a livable and comfortable planet, but also that we live purposeful, satisfied, and healthy lives. Yet the proposed changes are far from radical enough. Literally billions of people are at risk from rising ocean waves, a continual warming of the atmosphere, more dangerous storms than ever, and fertile land that slowly decays away. We must do everything in our power to stop man-made climate change and, more than that, make sure that the policies we institute to this end benefit us all. Through clean energy and infrastructure, jobs, reinvestment, and more, we can not only save the planet but end up with a healthier country that's more connected, that has better jobs, and that provides for everyone.

The United States should:

- Institute a carbon tax and dividend scheme with an initial price of \$900 per ton of CO₂ (the amount would be indexed to inflation and might be raised in the future). All funds from this tax would be redistributed to households, with poorer households receiving a larger proportion of the tax.
- Eliminate carbon trading scams. The same goes for offsets, forest preservation schemes, et cetera. They are proven failures, nothing but more neoliberal bullshit.
- Establish a Green Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The Tennessee Valley Authority Act would be amended to expand the TVA beyond its current operating area, with the aim of decarbonizing all energy production by a certain date.
- Ensure a 'just transition' economic guarantee for all communities negatively impacted by the pivot from fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy.
- Institute a national Renewable Portfolio Standard, requiring all utility companies to receive a certain percentage of their energy from renew-

able sources each year. In the first year, this amount could be set at 15 or 20 percent; within ten years, it would reach 100 percent.

- End subsidies and special tax breaks to fossil fuel companies while enacting just as aggressive or even more aggressive subsidies for renewable energy production: we cannot give special treatment to pollutants that threaten our planet.
- Introduce a 50% levy on all bank loans to the fossil fuel industry.
- Eliminate all single-use plastics to keep our oceans and landfills from choking with non-biodegradable matter, and our fossil fuels in the ground. Combine this with a push to eliminate all single-use packaging altogether by ensuring that it is 100 percent re-usable, easily recyclable, or backyard compostable.
- Institute new local, state, and national transportation projects, focusing on electric vehicles and ease of transport. High-speed electric rail, electric buses, subways, and other projects can not only help the country reach net carbon-neutrality, but can also help address inequality: our entire country relies on expensive, polluting cars that many people cannot afford, and having free and reliable public transit can aid transportation to jobs and communities.
- Lower or altogether remove parking minimums for buildings, ensuring that we have more space for people rather than more space for cars.
- Help rebuild our cities: use green and socially-conscious planning, develop new zoning laws while abolishing old ones to ensure that cities are not class or race-segregated, have free public transit, have sustainable and green buildings, and feature public housing areas that ensure low-cost housing for all.
- Modernize levees and related physical infrastructure to be climate- and disaster-resilient.
- Eliminate industrial animal agriculture subsidies.
- Create a national challenge account to promote citizen-based science, technology, and innovation—including but not limited to clean renewables. Combine this with an enabling environment for science, technology, and innovation, such as in the application of distributed ledger technologies to promote social, economic, cultural, civil, and political inclusion.

- Work with the United Nations to create a tribunal for climate crimes.

There is an informal poverty tax in America: the poorer you are, the more fees, expenses, and costs pile up. Public banking is a fix to some of these problems: by offering beneficial alternatives to predatory payday loans, banking deserts, and overdraft fees, we can make sure that people aren't knocked entirely off their feet for not being rich in the first place.

The United States should:

- Re-establish banking services within post offices, using our preexisting nationwide infrastructure to benefit people in even more ways. Include no-cost checking and savings accounts.
- Establish small-dollar loans through these public banks with small dollar amounts and no interest rates. State-run banks are free to charge interest if they so desire.
- Ensure that municipal taxes flow through these public banks rather than coercive behemoths like Wells Fargo, making it so that interest and loans go towards the public good rather than the profit motive.
- Using Germany's nation-building municipal banks as a model, along with North Dakota's profitable, beneficial state bank, fund major and minor infrastructure projects through loans made by public banks that consistently offer lower interest rates and more capital for these public-good projects.

The American tax system benefits the very wealthy over the average citizen and the corporation over the consumer. As inequality has skyrocketed, the tax system has remained remarkably lax on the wealthy and on large corporations. The American tax system should be reformed so as to be significantly more progressive; it is fundamentally unfair for working-class people to be paying a burdensome amount in taxes while wealthy people benefit from tax cuts.

The United States should:

- Repatriate all wealth currently residing in off-shore tax havens and that are therefore avoiding taxation, with a one-time tax rate of 72 percent. Anyone found with such money after the deadline will be eligible for prison.
- Institute a tax on all financial transactions—a Tobin spot tax—on all speculative financial transactions, including but not limited to foreign exchange trading.

- Marginal tax on all income over \$500,000 at 75 percent; income over \$1 million at 95 percent.
- Raise the capital gains tax.
- Eliminate all tax law designed to benefit oil, gas, and coal companies.
- Explore a progressive tax on initial public offerings, to increase as the size of the IPO increases.
- Eliminate tax laws that benefit the wealthy.

The tax prep industry consistently fights for tax filing to be difficult, confusing, and overwhelming, and they've been profiting off of every instance of someone handing the reins over just to not have to deal with this mess of a system. An automatic tax system would benefit almost all Americans.

The United States should:

- Have the IRS create a free, open source online tax prep and filing program similar to TurboTax or others, ensuring that almost no one has to pay to file their taxes.
- Ban the IRS from collaborating with tax filing companies as they do right now, abolishing the corporatized Free File program that less than 3% of the population uses due to lack of advertising and exacting, confusing eligibility requirements.
- Establish a 'return-free' filing option to allow millions of Americans with a straightforward tax situation to choose a pre-prepared, simple filing process that comes with their tax return already calculated and immediately redeemed.

Access to the collective knowledge and culture produced from the beginning of the human species through the present and beyond is a human right. That we allow the hoarding of key research findings, medical advances, fundamental industrial machinery and processes, and so on is an absolute injustice that must end.

The United states should:

- Open source all currently existing patented and copyrighted works.
- Issue no future patents or copyrights.
- Cease enforcement and work to remove all intellectual property provisions from any existing 'Free Trade' deals.

- Nationalize all large private academic journals and databases.
- Have the Library of Congress create an open-source digital distribution and streaming platform to allow everyone on Earth free access to all forms of culture.

According to the top Nixon aide John Ehrlichman, the War On Drugs started as a way to criminalize African-Americans and the anti-war left—and it worked. Marijuana and heroin were heavily criminalized, leaders were arrested, communities were raided, and lives were ruined. This war has only progressed and become more bloody since, and is infamous for ravaging cities, destroying families, murdering dogs, and serving as the prime engine of mass incarceration. This unwinnable war has always functioned as a method of population control, not as a way to help the addicted or stem the flow of drugs; it is not a coincidence that black people are arrested for marijuana over three times as much as white people despite usage rates being about the same. By bringing this war to an end, we will be able to remove the roadblocks that prevent addicts from getting help and end the pattern of selectively-enforced felony drug convictions that oppress the poor and marginalized and that force drug users into the recesses of society. Seventy-thousand Americans died of opioid overdose in 2017, and we have made this happen. By criminalizing users and dealers at every step, we offer no alternative but the needle.

The United States should:

- Remove marijuana from the list of drugs on the Controlled Substance Act and add an amendment to the Constitution to ensure that it is fully legal nationwide.
- Ensure that home growth is legal: even now, as marijuana becomes a billion dollar industry, Americans are being arrested and thrown in prison for growing a plant themselves.
- Increase funding for drug treatment programs dramatically. Naloxone must be provided to protect us from fentanyl, plentiful rehab centers must be run and run well, and addicts must be helped, not hurt.
- Free all nonviolent drug offenders and expunge their records.
- Ensure that kratom remains legal, which is often extremely helpful for chronic pain sufferers and diverts individuals from opioid use.
- Decriminalize, legalize, regulate, and tax all drugs, including opioids. No amount of criminalization actually stops drug use, and so we need to

provide safe alternatives to shady dealers and laced products. We will gain legitimate jobs, tax income, development, and more importantly the safety of millions of lives more than before.

The death penalty is a relic of an earlier, more brutish time in American history. No one, no matter how terrible their crimes, deserves to be put to death by the state; just as two wrongs do not make a right, an additional death does not ease the awful burden of a victim's family members. Nor does it heal the community in any way. Moreover, the death penalty has repeatedly been shown to be extremely costly, to not infrequently kill innocent people, and to be racially biased in who is selected to be executed.

The United States should:

- Adopt the “Stevens Amendment” to the US Constitution, named for former Justice John Paul Stevens, who proposed it in his book *Six Amendments*, adding the words ‘such as the death penalty’ after “cruel and unusual punishments” and before “imposed” in the Eighth Amendment.

When a police officer kills an unarmed suspect, they are committing murder—total deaths by police per year often reaches over 1,000. Between straightforward murder, civil forfeiture without cause, racial biases in arrests and searches, and the lack of prosecution that almost any of these offenders have received, it is obvious that America has a police accountability problem. This has to be solved if we want to say that we are a country of any kind of justice or freedom.

The United States should:

- Require that all police departments have civilian review boards to review complaints against police officers, with the power to remove officers.
- Work to abolish the doctrine of qualified immunity, the legal doctrine that protects police officers from lawsuits if they were executing their official duties. While potentially fine in theory, it has consistently been used to call any and all destructive behaviors ‘official duties.’
- End the 1033 program that transfers excess military equipment to our police departments, giving terrifying gear ranging from tanks to grenade launchers to people who are supposed to be protecting our communities, not waging war on them.

- Abolish the use of public, open-carrying for police officers; arms must be kept in police vehicles or in their stations until they are specifically called for and required. Too many people die from trigger-happy cops.
- Immediately transition SWAT weaponry towards the nonlethal to ensure that SWATing is no longer a death sentence. And I don't know, just spit-balling here, maybe don't be such fucking trigger-happy frat boy dipshits? Also: stop murdering dogs.

The United States has four percent of the world's population, but twenty-two percent of its prisoners. Americans experience extremely long sentences, sentences for far more nonviolent crimes or those without a victim, and a jailing system that sees massive racial disparities in who gets locked up and why. Our trials and sentences are not fitting for a nation that calls itself the land of the free, and have to be changed if we want to rehabilitate the hurt rather than locking them up and throwing away the key.

The United States should:

- Make Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funding for states contingent on their raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18.
- Massively increase funding and manpower for public defenders, as our current system ends with over 90% of cases concluded by plea bargain due to massively understaffed and underfunded offices.
- Abolish mandatory minimums for sentencing, as they have shown themselves to be incapable of taking context, background, previous standing, or vulnerability into account.
- Abolish voir dire and have all juries be fully, completely randomized without exception to ensure that the massive biases against the marginalized in juries do not remain in place.
- Cap all prison sentences at 10 years.
- Abolish all occupancy clauses that force certain private prisons to always be at a certain capacity—usually 90 percent—at the expense of the taxpayer if rates fall below such a threshold. This will not, of course, be necessary if private prisons are abolished altogether.

Prisons should be a place for rehabilitation, where the convicted enter, learn, build themselves, understand their mistakes, and leave the system as better people. We no longer even pretend this is the case. People now

go to prison not as punishment, but to receive punishment. This happens increasingly in private, for-profit enterprises whose incentives are to grow their business through growing the prison population. No matter how small the offense might be, entering the system can become a life sentence for women and men, where leaving only means that one cannot get a job, loans, or anything they need to live a good and legal life. We are draining our own pockets to pay for torture, and gain nothing through it besides the pain of those that sometimes need our help the most.

The United States should:

- Abolish private prisons, as they drive up incarceration rates and sentences while treating their prisoners like nothing more than a commodity to profit off of.
- Provide full access to high school and college courses to prisoners, and allow prisoners to qualify for Pell Grants.
- Abolish prison for low-level offenses; courts should decide whom to set free and whom to keep in jail. Other methods of punishment like fines, community service, et cetera should be emphasized for these crimes, especially nonviolent ones.
- Ban cash bail: true flight risks and dangers to society should be held without bail, and the rest should not be relegated to only being free if they happen to be rich.
- Ban solitary confinement, as it has been proven to be a tool of torture that ruins minds, causes hallucinations, and scars people for life.
- Establish a grant program to refurbish prisons to make them humane.
- Lift the ban on food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits for drug offenders.
- Pass a national “ban the box” law, preventing companies from asking job applicants about their criminal histories in the initial phase of a job application process.
- Make it illegal to charge prisoners for basic amenities: letters and phone calls to family, books, food, and more should be provided to them, and are not luxuries meant to bankrupt the poor. More than just taking someone away from the world, being imprisoned has also become a way to impoverish the family.

- Give workers within prisons the same workers' rights as those outside of prison: abolish below-minimum-wage labor that allows private corporations to pay pennies on the dollar in wages, along with ending rampant labor violations and exploitation that is not only cruel and inhumane but that also drives down wages and conditions for workers who are not incarcerated.
- End the practice of banning certain books inside prisons.
- Abolish provisions in prison guards' contracts that make discipline into an internal affair rather than an external one, such as allowing them to refuse to answer questions to police that are investigating them. Install more accountability procedures into our prisons to minimize the current rampant abuse.
- Stop sending people back to prison for minor parole violations.
- Enfranchise ex-prisoners and current prisoners; even if someone has committed a crime, they are still a citizen. Prisoners are under the full control of the state yet do not even get a say in how it is run.

Despite cultural changes, the US government has maintained a puritanical approach to commercial sex work. Many Americans have come to see this work without the blinkered moralistic view of yesteryear; and they have come to recognize commercial sex workers as one of society's most vulnerable communities. Women of color, of migrant backgrounds, and transgender women often rely on sex work for money. It is time to take a more rational approach.

The United States should:

- Repeal the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA), which targeted sites like Backpage.com that sex workers used to screen clients and ensure safety.
- Encourage states and municipalities to decriminalize all commercial sex work.
- Focus on illegal and coercive sex trafficking, not consenting sex work.

The Trump administration's monstrous approach to immigration policy is a humanitarian and moral catastrophe, one that must be mended immediately. But we cannot simply go back to how we were under the Obama or Bush administrations; American immigration policy has been cruel for a

long, long time, and we have to do more than simply repeal what Trump has done.

The United States should:

- Observe its international commitments with respect to migrants and refugees (as set out in the 2016 New York Declaration).
- Abolish the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency and US Customs and Border Enforcement, which was only founded in 2003 and which has only functioned as a destructive secret police tasked with promoting fear in immigrant communities.
- Offer immediate legal status to all undocumented immigrants who have resided in the country for more than ten years on a three-year pathway to citizenship.

It is the government's role to provide safe and affordable reproductive services to the people to use as they see fit, not the role of the people to conform to a governmental standard of proper bodily conduct. Control over one's body is a fundamental human right and therefore must be treated as such by our government.

The United States should:

- Pass an amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing the rights of all citizens to basic bodily autonomy including the rights to contraception and to safe and legal abortion before viability. This could be included as part of an updated Equal Rights Amendment.
- Maintain free condom dispensers in all public buildings and any businesses open to the public which receive any federal funding.
- Repeal all laws restricting health insurance coverage of abortion from private insurance and medicare.
- Ban predatory crisis pregnancy centers which manipulate and shame women into carrying to term children they are unable to support and replace these dishonest institutions with government funded clinics which offer strictly accurate medical information and promote safe responsible use of abortion.

The US government has been ruthless in cracking down on whistleblowers. Edward Snowden fled the country for revealing gross government abuses of the human rights of American citizens and of the peoples of other countries; Chelsea Manning was tortured for years for revealing war crimes; Reality

Winner has been imprisoned for leaking reports on Russian hacking to journalists. None of these figures, who did as their conscience dictated, should be in prison. We should celebrate these heroes, not lock them up.

The United States should:

- Pardon whistleblowers, including Snowden, Manning (whose sentence was merely commuted), Terry Albury, Reality Winner, Julian Assange, and John C. Kiriakou.
- Offer prominent government whistleblowers the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The US has been inflamed by a debate over foreign interference in its domestic affairs. However, successive US governments and media outlets have consistently obscured their role in undermining or overthrowing the governments of sovereign countries (including democracies). According to research conducted by Carnegie Mellon University, the US interfered in 81 elections in other countries between 1946 and 2000. US governments have also been intermittently party to human rights violations, including aiding and abetting, or carrying out, extrajudicial killings. The fundamental lack of accountability and transparency must end: a government cannot be of the people nor for the people if the people do not know of, or have oversight over, what is being done in their name.

The United States should:

- Release the full, unredacted Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture.
- Launch a formal investigation into US government officials' ties to human rights violations in the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, the central Asian republics, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa. Examples of such violations include the No Gun Ri and Jeju Island massacres and involvement in Indonesia's Konfrontasi.
- Cooperate with the International Criminal Court as and when required to do so.
- Release the uncensored Mueller Report.
- Grant full citizenship to refugees of the Vietnam War.
- Fully investigate the actions of every living former president where the possibility of war crimes charges exist.

It is constructive to recall Jefferson's observations on the need for dissent to maintain liberty:

“God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion.”

He was expressing the idea that “liberties are ensured by the spirit of resistance” and that all great nations had rebellions—again justifying that liberty shouldn't be sacrificed by conservative worry.

It seems to me that adding strict limits to the government's powers and closing the loopholes that now threaten the Republic are forms of dissent that deserve an open airing. I offer these proposed amendments as a start. I consider them commonsense ways to limit the abuses of power and rank corruption that are undermining the Republic. The penalties have to be severe enough to thwart all who seek to exploit the government's many powers for their private enrichment and gain.

1. No government may restrict the citizens' enjoyment of the civil liberties defined in the Bill of Rights on all public and private land, with the sole exception being activities that restrict or disrupt the normal flow of commerce.

No more “free speech zones” situated five miles from the political hack giving a hackneyed speech.

2. No personnel, paid or unpaid, of the government, government contractors, or entities receiving direct or indirect funding from the government may set foot on any foreign soil for the purposes of hostilities or actions preparing for hostilities except as authorized by a Declaration of War by Congress.

No more ‘wars of choice’ or imperial meddling and over-reach. You want military or mercenary operations in 20 countries? Then get 20 Declarations of War from Congress.

3. No person or entity—living, artificial, legal, robotic, or digital—may contribute more than one day's pay of the average American laborer to any person seeking elected office in any one election cycle, in currency, goods, services, or labor, paid or unpaid. Any person seeking elected office who accepts more than this sum in any form, and anyone who seeks to circumvent this statutory limit on campaign contributions, shall be barred from holding office for their lifetime and will serve a minimum prison sentence of five years.

This is about \$100 in today's money.

4. No person or entity which has received funding, favors, or contracts from the government, directly or indirectly, within the previous five years is allowed to contribute to any elective office campaign, under the penalties described in Amendment 3. Additionally, any entity that seeks to bypass this restriction shall be fined five years of annual revenues, payable upon conviction.
5. Every contribution, direct or indirect, in currency, goods, services, or labor, paid or unpaid, made to a person seeking elected office, must be published publicly within 48 hours of receipt. Every entity's contribution must carry the name of the person or persons responsible for the entity's management. Any entity that seeks to bypass this restriction shall be fined five years of annual revenues, payable upon conviction.

A corporation with annual revenues of \$1 billion would pay a \$5 billion fine, or be liquidated. Its shareholders and bondholders would be wiped out.

6. No individual may spend more than one month of the average laborer's monthly pay on their own campaign for elective office. Anyone who seeks to circumvent this statutory limit on campaign contributions shall be barred from holding office for their lifetime and will serve a minimum prison sentence of five years.

This is about \$4,500 in today's money.

7. The civil rights of citizens cannot be extended to legal entities, and are reserved solely for living individual citizens.
8. No government employee may accept a position in any private entity that has accepted funding, favors, or contracts from the government in the previous five years for a period of ten years after leaving government office.

No more revolving doors, no more corporate capture, no more campaign contributions beyond trivial sums. Campaigns of volunteers will face off against each other.

9. Every agency and office of the government, and every entity or person that has received funding, favors, or contracts, directly or indirectly, from the government, shall be independently audited every four years, and the results of these forensic audits are to be made public on the day of their issuance. Any entity that seeks to bypass or evade

this requirement shall be fined five years of revenues, payable upon conviction. Any person who seeks to bypass or evade this requirement shall serve a minimum prison sentence of five years.

No more unaudited agencies and government contractors.

No existing federal or newly nationalized organizations can cooperate with law enforcement other than when investigating the organization itself.

This means the Post Office cannot turn over any information or mail, this means that the nationalized cellular network cannot turn over location or subscriber info, this means the nationalized internet provider cannot hand over any data or assist in ‘tapping’ the lines in any way. Should any organization find evidence of tampering they are obligated to fix the breach.

Public Goods will absolutely not be allowed to serve as a tool of oppression. To the greatest extent technologically and reasonably possible, all nationalized organizations must collect as little data as possible and retain such data for the minimum duration required to satisfy the need for collecting it in the first place. Communications must be end-to-end encrypted with no ability for the network operator to circumvent it. All computers and smartphones must be fully encrypted.

If a law enforcement or intelligence agency finds a flaw which allows them access they must report the flaw immediately so that it can be patched. Failure to do so results in a mandatory 20-year prison sentence for treason.

When I was in college, I accidentally attended a talk by a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party. I say ‘accidentally’ because I thought it was going to be a talk about the role of religion in society. It was billed as an author event about a book called *Away With All Gods*, and it was sponsored by the campus humanist society. When I got there, I found that it was not a typical author talk. For one thing, the author was not there. Instead, he had sent a representative. The author, Revolutionary Communist Party Chairman Bob Avakian, was in self-imposed exile in the south of France. An RCP deputy would be giving his book talk on his behalf.

What I remember most about the event is that the RCP representative kept saying “In the book, Bob Avakian writes. . .” and “Bob Avakian says. . .” The speaker didn’t say what she thought, she just said what Bob Avakian thought, and he was invoked as an expert on everything. He was never seen, never spoke in his own name, but he was a looming authority in the sky. We were to defer to the wisdom of Chairman Bob. And I remember my chief reaction being:

“Why the hell should I care what Bob Avakian thinks?”

It's the same way I feel about the Founding Fathers.

Sometimes, when I see people criticizing left policies, they are arguing that left policies will have bad consequences, and I think those of us on the left need to explain why we do not think our policies will have those bad consequences. But just as often, I see arguments that I don't have any respect for:

1. That our policies are "politically impossible."
2. That they're "unconstitutional."

I've written before about 'political impossibility' arguments. The reason I don't think they're worth spending time on is that nobody knows what is and isn't politically possible, because political reality changes rapidly and unpredictably. Donald Trump was told that his presidency was impossible. He ignored this, and now he is president. After all of the experts on the limits of the possible got Trump so wrong, I feel no need to ever listen to them again as they make new predictions about what can and cannot happen in politics. While we need some theory for how we're going to get Policy X done, we can only know whether the theory works by trying it. So we should be spending our time asking questions like: 'Is Policy X a good idea?' And if the answer is yes, then we ask: 'What's our most plausible path toward getting Policy X done?'

Be on the lookout, because 'experts' often drift from subject areas where they actually know something to 'political possibility' speculation, which they know nothing about. See: Larry Summers and Paul Krugman. Even if we assume an economist has some expertise, that expertise is on economics, not on 'what social movements can and cannot accomplish.' Disregard these men entirely when they stray from their narrow field of knowledge; and if their field is economics, you're probably safe disregarding them entirely.

Just as I don't think it's worth spending time on 'political impossibility' arguments, I have never understood why I should care what the Founding Fathers thought about anything. Consider this recent article from USA Today called "Hey, Elizabeth Warren: Your wealth tax plan? It's unconstitutional." It is by a minor Bush administration official, and in part it does make a 'consequences' argument against wealth taxes, saying "the fact that this is bad economics seems intuitive" because "the top 1% of wage earners pay a greater share of federal income taxes than the bottom 90% combined." As I say, I take seriously arguments that policies are bad on their merits, but I feel I can ignore this one, because:

1. The author offers absolutely no actual supporting evidence for their claim that this is “bad economics” beyond their “intuitive” feeling that it is.
2. The one point they do make, about top earners paying a lot already, is an incredibly misleading piece of bullshit. Say there are only two people in a country, you and me, and I have a billion dollars and you have one dollar. Even if the tax rates are vastly skewed in my favor—I pay one percent and you pay ten percent—I am going to pay the vast majority of the tax revenue. Conservatives use the ‘share of federal income taxes’ to try to show that rich people are being soaked when what it actually shows is just that they are very rich and most of us barely have any money to tax.

The majority of the article, though, is about how wealth taxes are unconstitutional. In a section entitled “Not What the Founders Wanted,” the author writes:

“Article 1 Section 9 of the Constitution forbids the government from laying a ‘capitation, or other direct, tax’ unless in proportion to the census. Alexander Hamilton, in a brief supporting a national carriage tax, explained that a direct tax comprises, among other things, ‘taxes on lands and buildings. General assessments, whether on the whole property of individuals, or on their whole real or personal estate.’ In 1895, the Supreme Court ruled that income taxes were forbidden under this logic in *Pollock v. Farmers’ Loan & Trust Co.* Chief Justice Melville Fuller noted that ‘nothing can be clearer than that what the Constitution intended to guard against was the exercise by the general government of the power of directly taxing persons and property.’ This was the background to the Sixteenth (or income tax) Amendment, which was proposed, passed, and ratified during William Howard Taft’s single term. It gave Congress the right to levy a form of taxation that was originally constitutionally suspect. But there is no provision in that amendment for a general federal property or wealth tax. . . .”

I have to say, when I read things like this, I can’t help but think of Bob Avakian. Imagine that Chairman Bob someday manages to found a microstate. And he writes all the rules up, personally, and makes everyone follow them. Then, 250 years later, Bob is long dead, and the people of Bob’s country have finally established a sort of democracy after two centuries

where the country was ruled by people who looked the most like Bob using Bob's handwritten rules. Imagine how it would sound, to those citizens who had finally established a system where you didn't have to look like Bob in order to participate in governance, if some of the people who still looked like Bob said things like:

“Well, your new tax isn't what Bob would have wanted.”

Wouldn't you say to yourself what I said back at that RCP talk in college: Why should I give a damn what Bob Avakian thinks about anything?

This is going to sound quite radical, but it's true, so you need to believe it: The Constitution is a wholly illegitimate document to which we owe no loyalty whatsoever. To be honest, that should only sound radical if you don't think women, African Americans, and Native Americans are people. If you do believe that women are people, then the fact that they were excluded from the Constitution's drafting and ratification means that it has about as much legal and moral force as if I declared myself king of the world. The vast majority of the country had no input into the founding governance document. It was imposed on them by force. I do not see why they owe it respect.

I do not doubt that Alexander Hamilton wouldn't have wanted a wealth tax. He was, after all, a wealthy person. Perhaps the author's constitutional scholarship is accurate. I don't particularly care. Sooner or later this country needs to come to terms with something very unsettling: We have never set up a binding constitution, because we have never passed a democratically legitimate one. Until the early twentieth century, the female half of the population was completely disenfranchised. Black people did not get the franchise fully guaranteed until the 1960s, which let us remember is within the lifetimes of people who are alive today. And since not everyone is allowed to vote today, arguably we still cannot call ourselves a democracy.

The temptation, of course, is to say that the Constitution finally took its real effect around 1965, when voters 'tacitly consented' to it. But it is ludicrous to think that that the rules written by a small minority could suddenly become binding once the franchise is widely granted. The Constitution sets up the rules for changing it, and voters had to follow rules that were imposed undemocratically. To say that if we haven't yet changed the Constitution, we accept its provisions, is to say that the rules of the game are legitimate, but the whole point is that they aren't. If at Point A we have an authoritarian government that makes a set of rules, and at point B we have a 'democratic' government but only within parameters laid down at Point A, we do not have a democratic government.

No, I'm afraid there's no choice. Eventually we're going to have to start fresh and convene a new constitutional convention. It sounds radical, but unless we do it we're always going to be governed by the dead hand of an illegitimate dictatorship. Now, as you can see, that means that I'm not against Constitutions. I'm not against rights. I am a strong believer in rights. I am sure critics would say that I believe in lawlessness and might makes right because I do not think the Constitution and Bill of Rights command much inherent respect. But that's not the case. I am a strong believer in democracy and civil liberties, and it's precisely because our existing Constitution is so dysfunctional at protecting people's rights that I think there is good reason to point out its illegitimacy. We should respect the good parts of the Constitution (free speech, free press, no unreasonable searches, et cetera) and discard the bad (any limits on taxing the wealthy), and we should respect the good bits not because the Founders believed in them—since many of the Founders also owned and raped humans, calling their judgment into question—but because they are good.

I feel as if liberals make a mistake when they have Constitutional arguments with the right. I think there is a temptation to say 'Actually, the Constitution does allow wealth taxes' or 'Actually, cruel and unusual punishment should ban the death penalty' or whatever. And sometimes there are good arguments here, I'm sure Elizabeth Warren's former Harvard Law students can put together an excellent brief on why her wealth tax is constitutional. But more importantly: The respect we owe the opinions of Alexander Hamilton equals the respect the citizens of Avakiana owe the laws of Chairman Bob. Perhaps Bob did a good job setting up the country in many ways. Perhaps he was very wise actually, and perhaps his rules were far better than those of other countries at the time. That's a good reason to study and learn from them, and even incorporate some of the good ones into the next set of rules. But there's no need to defer to their authority when it leads to absurdity.

I'd like to quote one more bit of the USA Today article because it shows how silly constitutional arguments can get:

“A second objection is that the wealth tax proposal is functionally a bill of attainder, which is also forbidden under Article 1 Section 9, and denied to the states under Section 10. The ban was based on the abuse of this process by British governments seeking to punish political dissent. Hence bills of attainder, according to Chief Justice Earl Warren in the 1965 case *United States v. Brown*, were intended by the Framers to bar 'legislative punishment, of any form or severity, of specifically designated

persons or group.’ Under the test laid out in the 1946 case *United States v. Lovett*, bills of attainder identify specific groups (in this case ‘billionaires’) and impose punishment (taking wealth) without a trial. Laws denying employment to members of subversive organizations have been overturned by this standard; replace ‘communists’ with ‘the wealthy’ and you can see how the class warfare script has flipped.”

One thing I learned in law school is that you can make an argument for literally anything. You can make arguments that slavery, war, and environmental destruction are good. And as you can see here, you can make an argument that because “billionaires” are a “specific group,” you cannot punish them under the Constitution.

It’s a dumb argument, of course. Extreme wealth is immoral and harmful, and so ‘billionaires’ are only a “specific group” in the same way that ‘murderers’ are a ‘specific group,’ but ‘This anti-murder law unfairly singles out murderers for unique punishment’ would sound ridiculous. The possession of wealth is an action with consequences, and even if taxation is considered “punishment” (which it isn’t), it would be punishing an action rightly regarded as criminal.

But what determines whether a bullshit argument is accepted is ultimately not the Constitution. It is the courts, and who is on the courts will be determined by the political process. If the right manages to cram hundreds of judges into the court system, the possession of wealth will be some kind of “protected status” and constitutional rights will be all about shielding it from “persecution.” If the left takes power, its judges will rightly recognize the obscenity of treating “having power” (e.g. having wealth) as a vulnerability similar to being a racial or religious minority.

I should, then, note that I cede too much when I suggest that conservatives do actually care about the text of the Constitution. They invoke it a lot, because the Founders were conservative, and so of course they want it to bind us as rigidly as possible, but ultimately when text and legal principles conflict with their beliefs about who should hold power, out go the legal principles. After all, as I say, if we really care about legalistic integrity, that should reduce our deference to the Constitution, because it lacks it. Similarly, I have pointed out that if you really care about ‘property rights’ you should acknowledge that climate change is a giant act of theft perpetrated by rich countries against poor ones. I do not want to give the mistaken impression that I think constitutional conservatives have some integrity.

I think the big fear is that if you think ‘values’ rather than ‘existing laws’

should be given the most deference, you will end up becoming some sort of authoritarian or you will believe that anything goes. But anything does not go: Only the good things go.

“Ah, but who is to say what the good things are? You?”

No, the result of a democratic process.

“Oh, so it’s just majority rule?”

No! I think there is a bad faith move pulled here, where opponents of democracy pretend that there is some process that doesn’t involve having some conception of the collective will imposed on everybody. Really, though, we’re not talking about my ‘anything goes majority rule democratic free for all’ versus your ‘respect for individual rights.’ We’re talking about whether the rules are going to be made by dead slave-owners or by the people who exist in the here and now and who actually have to live under them. What this comes down to is a matter of trust: Conservatives trust Alexander Hamilton, and I trust my neighbors. They think my neighbors are scary and cannot be given power, while I think Alexander Hamilton should have no say whatsoever in contemporary wealth tax debates. These are the terms of the dispute: Those making arguments that left policies are unconstitutional are the ones who think Bob Avakian should rule over us centuries after his death, while those of us on the left think that people should get to determine their own fates, and the dead do not make rules that the living are bound to respect.

Remember, the government has *no* rights, only responsibilities and restrictions.

Besides acknowledging that economic theory is bound to time and society, it would also be good to give some fresh thought to familiar economic concepts we take as Bible-given. Let’s re-examine the ideas of interest—can we do without it; growth—can we have a no-growth economy; differential pay—need we pay a much higher salary for ‘higher’ work?; profit—should there be profit in all economic activities, such as health care, education, and others?; oligopolies—is it good to have very large corporations?; and competition—should we promote competition in all aspects of life?

Turns out, a work like Beethoven’s String Quartet No. 4 is a stubborn thing. When the piece debuted in Vienna, it took a full complement of musicians—two violins, one cello, and one viola. Two-hundred years later, the performance of the piece hasn’t changed a lick. It takes the same number of musicians, playing instruments that have hardly changed. As it did in 1801, the piece takes just about twenty-four minutes to complete. Classical

music has, in other words, slapped classical economics in the face. Over the centuries it hasn't become any more productive—and it can't.

While classical music hasn't grown any more productive, the cost of producing it keeps increasing. A symphony orchestra requires trained professionals. And if it hopes to recruit these professionals, it needs to pay them a salary that roughly competes with the rest of the economy, which grows progressively more expensive. A passionate oboist will take a pay hit to pursue a love of music, but still needs enough to afford food, child care, and housing. Without plausible pay, these musicians will choose some other, more viable line of work. Classical music has been in a state of terminal decline for decades. Such cost disease is at the heart of this decay. It's the reason that a concert ticket feels like a major philanthropic commitment—and why many can't afford an active interest in the genre. It's the reason that arts organizations are perpetually sitting on the edge of financial collapse.

There is no right to be a corporation. Incorporation is a privilege that is extended by government. The Founders barred any corporate interference in politics, and if a corporation broke the law, it lost its charter and the corporate officers were directly held responsible for *their* actions. Corporations don't do anything, people in charge of corporations make the decisions and carry out the actions. So no more LLCs. If you kill people due to lax environmental protections or worker safety, et cetera, then the corporate officers are *directly* and *personally* responsible for it. *They* made it happen, not some ethereal 'corporation.'

“I'm not talking about the evil neoliberals. I hate absolutely everything about this country. I hate that citizens have essentially no influence on the government. I hate that billionaires and multinational companies can legally bribe politicians with no consequences. I hate that my entire generation will be nothing but debt slaves for our whole lives and no politicians even pretend to care. I hate the way the MSM is infected with stupid and manages to propagandize that out over the TV 24/7. I hate that the people with all the money and power have made it absolutely impossible for anyone else to have even a modest amount of success in their lives. I hate how stubbornly resistant to learning almost everyone is. I hate the complete absence of people's ability to think for themselves. I hate that no matter how much you try to be good, do the right thing, and try hard, it is completely irrelevant. I hate the arrogance of everyone

pretending Climate Change doesn't exist or is someone else's problem.

But what I hate the most is that the solutions to almost all of those things are so incredibly easy. If you made me king of the world for six months it would all be fixed or at least well on its way to being fixed.”

For society-benefiting public spending, it is not about how much it costs, it simply costs what it costs, it is required; non-negotiable on its existence, but negotiable on its actual price. We should not overspend needlessly, this would likely be a result of corruption at worst or wasting individuals' time at best. But it costs what it costs.

We cannot stop all lobbying and legal bribery abuses. But we can stop many of them by taking a principle in our Constitution and expanding on it. We allow every representative and senator to send out all the mail they want for free. It's called “the franking privilege.” Let's extend that concept to their expenses. Let each member of Congress spend however much he or she deems necessary to do his or her job. If we can imbue representatives and senators with the power to make laws, surely we can give them the authority to manage their own expense accounts. This would come at a price: No more free trips, no more free meals, and no more gifts. Senator, if you need to inspect the cleanliness of the sink behind the bar at a resort in Tahiti, go right ahead, just give us the receipts with an explanation of the costs. We will collect the receipts from every elected representative monthly and post it all on the Internet in a format that makes for easy analysis. Every dollar, and every meeting, must be disclosed. And we will pay for it all, subject only to the usual penalties for embezzling, the punishments accorded by the full House or Senate because of their exclusive right to judge the fitness of members, or the decision by voters to oust a spendthrift. In this we can move politics back toward the people and away from monied interests. The penalties for taking anything—even a free shot of whiskey—should be swift, certain, and severe. Take a gift, go to jail. Call it zero tolerance for lawmakers.

Since before Maine was carved from the territory of Massachusetts, the town meeting has been the state's most common form of local government. All across New England, towns meet in late winter or early spring to vote on operating budgets, laws, and other matters for the community's operation over the following twelve months. Town meetings are social events, a welcome break from the long winter. They last all day, often broken up by a potluck lunch. This may not be the most efficient way to conduct the town's business—electing a mayor and letting him decide might use fewer

person-hours in the course of a year. Allowing a lobbyist to simply write the legislation he's paid for is simplest of all. But town meeting is a school for educating residents about public affairs, for making them citizens. Town meetings are a place to practice face-to-face democracy as citizen legislators.

“The truth is, a big part of the blame for this industry's dire straights is on us and our unwillingness to pay for the work journalists produce. The longer we get something for free, the more unwilling we are to pay for it. We are all going to have to pay for journalism or we are going to pay for it.”

Certainly the outcry against fake news in the wake of Donald Trump's victory lends credence to such remarks. But what if this formulation is still wrong? Maybe the problem isn't individuals declining to pay for news but instead a deeper, structural failing. Maybe, like other universal goods—public education, libraries, roads, post offices—we should all pay for it, collectively. Maybe, in short, journalism should be subsidized.

At the moment, newsrooms use a variety of stopgap measures—new funding models, private philanthropy, the latest business scheme—to try to buy themselves time. Meanwhile, media concentration gallops along, billionaires continue to exercise undue influence over the news, and increasingly desperate ploys for advertising dollars fail to stanch the flow of hemorrhaging jobs. A public subsidy that supports in-depth journalism and serves the public, not shareholders and advertisers, might be the only way to solve the journalism crisis.

There are many reports documenting the nightmares of privately operated public services. After emergency services were outsourced to a private company, one woman in Tennessee died as an EMT smoked a cigarette because her company couldn't get a crew together fast enough; paramedics in New York stole supplies from hospitals because their parent company couldn't afford them; a man in the South was billed \$15,000 after his house burned down because the privatized fire department didn't arrive. At first glance, the article—entitled “When You Dial 911 and Wall Street Answers”—seemed like a powerful piece of investigative journalism that defended public investment. But despite presenting a litany of horror stories, the articles almost never make a case for the fundamental unsuitability of private equity for this type of activity.

The discourse around journalism's collapse suffers from a similar problem. Profit seeking distorts the public function that journalists, like first responders, are supposed to perform. Yet too often, finger-wagging at individual billionaires stands in for a systemic critique of the media concentration and

profit-making that empowers them. In 1983, when fifty companies owned the majority of media outlets, some warned that monopolistic ownership would smother democracy and impair the public's understanding of the world. Today, at the same time local newspapers shut down and cut costs, the combination of increasingly concentrated ownership and for-profit technological innovation has convinced a new generation of billionaires to buy up media outlets and launch new media enterprises.

Some have become the personification of avarice and confused priorities. They purchase a newspaper, gloating about their investment in the public interest, and then offer their newsroom a big shrug as they slash jobs to increase profit margins. Others are philanthropists who support adversarial public interest journalism or inject much-needed cash into shrinking newsrooms. Yet the problem isn't the character of individual billionaires per se, but the fact that the political system has allowed such power to accumulate in the first place. While it matters on some level whether these billionaire-owned or privately funded outlets churn out self-interested coverage (as Sheldon Adelson wants his Las Vegas Review-Journal to do) or critical reporting (as Pierre Omidyar falsely sees his First Look Media as doing), a journalism dependent on the whims of the wealthy is not a media system worthy of a democracy.

Most everyone agrees that the advertising-based revenue model for news media has imploded. Where people differ is the effect of that implosion. Some pundits complain about the contemporary media's shallowness and sensationalism, casting "disruptive" technologies as the enemy of old-fashioned reporting. Others praise social media—often dubbed "participatory media"—as "democratic" and "open."

Since newspaper revenue remains in free fall—classified ads have dropped by 75 percent, and regular ad revenue has plummeted by 40 percent—some argue that consumers have more power than ever. When consumers select the news outlets they prefer—whether they're old standards or upstarts—advertisers flock to those sites, leaving less popular outlets without revenue. When these people acknowledge the severity of the traditional media's revenue problem, they offer a standard Silicon Valley prescription: embrace innovation and try new business models. The thing formerly known as advertising will become tools to help us shop, compare, save. The tracking and surveillance used to personalize ads aren't invasive threats to privacy, but the saving grace for otherwise outmoded news organizations.

Yet this approach has shown itself entirely unable to generate the revenue needed to sustain quality journalism. Many news organizations, like the New York Times, have bulked up their advertising and "digital dissemination" and have still been forced to cut reporters. It takes lots of resources to

produce hard-hitting investigative work. In addition to travel expenses, journalists need to have the time to hit wall after wall, follow leads to dead ends, and generally devote months on end to a single investigative project.

For instance, Mother Jones sent reporter Shane Bauer undercover as a guard to tell the story of life inside a private prison. In an appeal for reader support, the editor and publisher “conservatively” estimated the bill for the thirty-five-thousand-word feature:

“Counting just the biggest chunks of staff time that went into it, [it cost] roughly \$350,000. The banner ads that appeared on the article brought in \$5,000, give or take.”

For all of the hype about technology transforming society, the journalism that’s changed society tended to be produced by fiscally sustainable outlets that could afford to take risks. In the digital age, outlets are scrambling or forgoing that work all together. If traditional journalism is cratering, can social media sites like Facebook fill in the gap? Recent events suggest we should be skeptical.

Mark Zuckerberg commented on Philando Castile’s death at the hands of police in Minnesota. His post expressed condolences for Castile’s family and hope for a future free of such tragedies, before praising Facebook Live—the platform on which Diamond Reynolds, Castile’s fiancée, streamed the shooting—as evidence that Facebook enables people to “come together to build a more open and connected world.” A month later, Facebook and its subsidiary Instagram shut down accounts belonging to Korryn Gaines, a Maryland woman shot and killed by police, at the request of the authorities. The following month, it was reported that Facebook is “collaborating with the Israeli Government to determine what should be censored,” actively suppressing the voices of Palestinians and others fighting Israeli occupation. Whether Facebook sides with the powerful or the powerless—opening windows to democracy or actively shutting them—is up to a company whose *raison d’être* is profit-making, not disseminating news.

And what a profitable company it has become. Mark Zuckerberg now ranks as the sixth richest person in the world, worth approximately \$44.6 billion. His wealth, of course, comes from the 1.7 billion users who post, click, share, and update, a phenomenon that critics have dubbed “digital sharecropping” or “digital feudalism.” Simultaneously, thousands of journalists have lost their jobs and newsrooms have been downsized or shuttered, creating a yawning gap between the rich propagators of “digital sharecropping” and reporters, the people who are actually supposed to be the eyes and ears of a democratic information system.

For all the talk of journalism's bleak future, we don't hear a lot about its past. But the fact that American newspapers leached off advertising's fat for a hundred years or so was a lucky break, not some kind of natural law. The fact is, a mass market for serious reporting has never actually existed; in the United States readers have never paid anywhere near the actual price of news production. Instead, newspapers, by bundling the crossword puzzle and the real estate classified with the metro section and stories about world events, assembled a mass audience that could be sold to advertisers, who provided, on average, about 80 percent of revenue.

Before they came to rely on advertising revenue, newspapers were supported by public subsidies. While there were rollicking disagreements about the character and content of the post-colonial press in America, the one universally accepted premise was that the government needed to heavily subsidize the creation and development of the press if the constitutional system were to succeed. The idea that Americans should roll the dice and hope rich people would find it profitable to produce the journalism required for a constitutional republic to succeed was simply unimaginable in the days when America was conceived and formed. Everyone agreed that the government should support a free press because, the wide circulation of news throughout the colonies helped make the American Revolution possible.

Early American governments expanded and improved many public institutions that we still rely on today, most notably roads and the postal system. In the 1790s alone, the total mileage of "post roads" increased from 1,875 to 21,000. Over the next few decades, the number of post offices also expanded rapidly. While the post office did facilitate government and commercial activities, its primary role was transporting newspapers. The crucial debate in the Congress of 1792 was at what rate newspapers should be charged to be sent through the mail. All parties agreed that Congress should permit newspapers to be mailed at a price well below actual cost—to be subsidized. Between 1792 and 1845, newspapers accounted for as much as 95 percent of the mail and only 15 percent of the postal service's revenue.

"The state nurtured a free-press system the free-market showed little interest in providing; and it did so because, without state intervention on behalf of the public's right to know, constitutional rule, not to mention self-government, could not succeed."

By the end of the nineteenth century, postal subsidies had effectively ended and advertisers had flocked to newspapers, rendering the old subsidized model obsolete and creating new conflicts between commercial and public

interests. These tensions persisted for the next several decades. Advertisers wanted favorable coverage for their products, and often to advance their own political agenda. Through the Progressive era writers like Will Irwin and Upton Sinclair deplored the antidemocratic nature of the advertising-supported, semi-monopolistic press system.

After World War II, one solution to the problem took hold: the professionalization of journalism. Espoused by the *New York Times* and virtually every other mainstream outlet, this model demanded that newspapers enforce certain standards of objectivity, sourcing, and fact-checking, and, most importantly, erect a wall between news outlets' advertising and editorial departments. The professionalization of journalism—the post-war consensus—also had enormous drawbacks. It pushed the press, and arguably the country, toward the center as journalists prioritized getting “both sides of the story,” trumpeting their neutrality while excluding radical voices. It continues today to prop up lousy journalism that is “fact checked,” “professional,” or “objective.” But this arrangement pleased advertisers, and the media landscape continued to consolidate.

The dominance of the post-war consensus obscured its fragility. Two things held the whole thing together: the anti-commercialism of newspapers and journalists—who saw the division between reporting and selling as sacrosanct—and the heterogeneity of the media system. Even with increasing concentration, newspapers remained abundant. If a paper lost the public's trust, readers could pick up another one. It kept newspapers in check.

But with substantially fewer newspapers than a generation ago, and vanishingly few alternative revenue options, news outlets are racing to include advertisers in editorial content. Native advertising—in which advertising masquerades as editorial content ‘supported by Microsoft’ or ‘in partnership with Toyota’—has become the most prominent of these revenue-generating techniques. Every newspaper—from the local alt-weekly to the *Wall Street Journal*—has embraced it. The *New York Times* has a website devoted to wooing advertisers where it touts its ability to create “brand content and experiences that shape opinion.” The consequences are more dire than fewer papers and journalists. It was reported that, during the DNC and RNC conventions, the Hill was selling \$200,000 editorial interviews with up to three “industry executives or organizational representatives of your choice.” Donald is right to call such outlets peddlers of Fake News.

Our democracy can't afford this future of journalism.

American citizens pay less than \$1.50 each for public media. In comparison, Brits spend about \$80, and Finns and Danes spend about \$100. Anyone who's read the British tabloids knows the country is no paragon of journalistic excellence. But a subsidized Fourth Estate has at least helped foster a

healthier democracy, less government corruption, higher civic participation, and a much higher—and more diverse—proportion of the population reading the news. In the US, because we don't adequately subsidize public media, PBS and NPR must take corporate advertising (“underwriting”) in order to fill the gap. NPR gets a mere five percent of its budget from the local, state, and federal governments, yet receives as much as nineteen percent from corporations and another eight percent from foundations. Last time I turned on NPR, I learned the show I was listening to was “supported by” Koch Industries.

While a genuinely public outlet would improve the US media landscape, another, complementary, approach would be to introduce what some call a “Citizen News Voucher.” When filing their taxes, citizens could elect to subsidize an independent news outlet of their choice. News outlets would have to maintain a minimum number of subsidizers and would be subject to various restrictions, like forgoing advertising of any sort. By leaving it to citizens to choose the outlets they prefer, the news voucher would empower readers, instead of the state, to decide how the Fourth Estate is funded. It would also buttress independent journalists—not just those who are mouthpieces of the state.

These proposals aren't meant to be definitive, but instead to spark a discussion about public funding that—despite numerous studies from the Federal Trade Commission, Federal Communications Commission, and the advocacy group Free Press—seems virtually nonexistent. Before we can decide on the specifics, we must first acknowledge that the American press is in dire straits and, if we want a vibrant democracy, needs to be subsidized. Then we'll have a long road ahead. A robust subsidy for news media will become politically possible when it's taken up as part of a larger set of reforms designed to win democratic rule: expanding voting rights, funding free higher education, introducing self-government into the workplace, and more.

“There are many criticisms of the fiat money system. A popular one is that money is created when people borrow it. So you go to the bank and take out a mortgage. That money didn't exist before. You spend it into the economy, and it often leaves the economy into someone's tax haven bank account. That means that money isn't available for borrowers to earn back to pay off their debt. So there is a disequilibrium where more and more money is being called into existence, because it's needed, and it's eventually being locked away so that it can't be paid back. That creates a lot of problems around inequality and

economic injustice, because people are borrowing money, but are not able to earn it to pay it back.

It was when I discovered that I could find a niche for myself, programming software for LETS (local exchange trading systems), and someone told me that the financial crisis that had just happened was done deliberately. I couldn't imagine how this could be, morally, but also, how could the financial system be controlled like that? I got more into alternative media, and began to find out. It showed me that there is very little understanding in the mainstream of how the money system works, and there are alternative explanations that have been pushed to the margins of the economic discourse.

So I've already explained how fiat money becomes slowly unavailable to be repaid. With mutual credit, it's difficult to save, as it doesn't pay any interest and you can't make it scarce and charge interest, so you may as well spend it back into circulation and make it available for people to earn and pay back their loans. The ledger shows that for every debt there's a credit. So it all exists in one system and the books balance. From an economic and a moral perspective, mutual credit is the accounting of exchange. For everything you spend, you must earn it back, and for everything you earn, you must spend it back. So you begin on zero; you end on zero; the sum of all the accounts at any one time is zero; and the ledger is just showing you the current imbalance in your exchange. If you intend to exchange, you should be looking at mutual credit. If your intention is to accumulate, you probably want fiat or commodity money of some kind.

There are those who would point to cryptocurrencies as a more viable solution. Why is mutual credit a better idea? Crypto is much closer to fiat. It's about building a world without trust. Governments and banks aren't trusted, so no-one has the authority to guarantee the value of each token. The only reason crypto coins are valuable is if there is a market for them, and there might be a demand for them. So it's not a useful form of money because the value is always fluctuating. It might be nice if you've got no monetary policy and no-one in charge of the quantity of money—that might reassure some people. But at the same time, monetary policy is also there for a reason—you want to have the right quantity of money that the economy needs to facilitate trade. But in a system like Bitcoin, you've got a fixed

quantity of money, and there's no notion that there's a specific economy that uses it. If more people want to use Bitcoin, the value will go up, which is great if you already own Bitcoin—you'll benefit from the speculation. But it's not great if you're planning future purchases, or if you owe Bitcoin, and the price of your money goes up.

Fiat money works very much in this way as well, when it's traded on international markets—the prices go up and down relative to each other, creating what's called exchange risk. In mutual credit, the community decides the purchasing power of the coin, and they stick to it. There isn't a market for the units, because you can just create them and destroy them as needed. It's a unit of debt that's created when you borrow it, and it's destroyed when you pay it back.

LibraCoin is Facebook's attempt to take over the world by creating another Silicon Valley monopoly. They've got all the credit card companies on board. They're attempting to create a currency that's more stable and maybe more liquid than the US dollar, and this is why the French minister of finance has said that it poses a risk to sovereign currencies. They want the Facebook coin to be used all over the world. They're pushing it especially towards developing countries, to people they call the unbanked—people that the banks haven't worked out how to make a profit from. Facebook believes that it's worked out a way to make a profit from them—because they have phones, and they can do transactions with them using cryptocurrencies.

So yes, it might provide a measure of convenience for online payments, but we have to be careful—whose money are we using. If I own \$1,000 of Facebook coin, I'm actually funding them to the tune of \$1k. I'm lending them that much money, and they're giving me a token in return.

What the world needs now is a means of payment that is locally controlled but globally useful. So if we have local mutual credit schemes all over the world, how can they be linked together to create a global trading system?

The Credit Commons is locally controlled in that anyone can get together with friends or trading partners to make a group. And in that group, they say that we will trust each other to pay back the credit that we give each other. That enables them to trade amongst themselves without money. That's not globally useful however. The credit that they give each other is only

acceptable by themselves. So if you want to make the credit acceptable more widely, that group has to come together with other groups, and those groups have to do the same thing. They say—we will value your credit, meaning that we trust you to keep your promises, so we will give you goods and services, knowing that you will give us goods and services in return.

So now we have a group of groups. It's still not globally useful—but you can continue to build nested groups until it covers the entire world. So you can have a global group with continents in, then countries within continents, regions within countries, and you can bring it right down to the street level. Everyone is issuing credit, but because it's guaranteed by each group, and each group of groups, it's good to go across the world.”

Congratulations, you've essentially just recreated the global banking system, you've simply labeled things differently. This is unfortunately an all too common occurrence among radicals.

Most manifestations of attempts at horizontal governance attempt to deny all elitism by discouraging or forbidding it in any form and denying its necessity. Whether or not oligarchy exists, elitism most certainly does, in every field that requires expertise beyond that of a novice. To not allow elitism would be to not allow expertise, which would cripple any society. Elite levels of knowledge exist today for many reasons, exclusion of the majority of the population from education and access being the biggest. As an ideal in an open transparent society, anyone would be capable of attempting to contribute to elite knowledge resources, but limitations of interest or ability will still exclude all but a few. This is not an evil if it is properly controlled and it is in fact the best way to ensure decisions based on real expertise instead of connections and other sources of power.

Ignoring elite knowledge in favour of a pretense at completely horizontal governance will not eliminate elitism, it will only create hidden oligarchies dominated by those without the expertise required, usually celebrity personalities. In a concentric user group, the receptive field is stronger near the centre, so informed opinions will be heard more clearly by experts in the centre, but full transparency will allow anyone from any part of the system to be as informed as they wish to be by any other part.

Stigmergy is a mechanism of indirect coordination, through the environment, between agents or actions. The principle is that the trace left in the environment by an action stimulates the performance of a next action, by the same or a different agent. In that way, subsequent actions tend to

reinforce and build on each other, leading to the spontaneous emergence of coherent, apparently systematic activity.

Stigmergy is a form of self-organization. It produces complex, seemingly intelligent structures, without need for any planning, control, or even direct communication between the agents. As such it supports efficient collaboration between extremely simple agents, who lack any memory, intelligence, or even individual awareness of each other. The term ‘stigmergy’ was introduced in 1959 to refer to termite behavior. It was defined as:

“Stimulation of workers by the performance they have achieved.”

It is now one of the key concepts in the field of swarm intelligence. Stigmergy was first observed in social insects. For example, ants exchange information by laying down pheromones (the trace) on their way back to the nest when they have found food. In that way, they collectively develop a complex network of trails, connecting the nest in the most efficient way to the different food sources. When ants come out of the nest searching for food, they are stimulated by the pheromone to follow the trail towards the food source. The network of trails functions as a shared external memory for the ant colony.

In computer science, this general method has been applied in a variety of techniques called “ant colony optimization,” which search for solutions to complex problems by depositing “virtual pheromones” along paths that appear promising.

Other eusocial creatures, such as termites, use pheromones to build their complex nests by following a simple decentralized rule set. Each insect scoops up a ‘mudball’ or similar material from its environment, invests the ball with pheromones, and deposits it on the ground, initially in a random spot. However, termites are attracted to their nestmates’ pheromones and are therefore more likely to drop their own mudballs on top of their neighbors’. The larger the heap of mud becomes, the more attractive it is, and therefore the more mud will be added to it (positive feedback). Over time this leads to the construction of pillars, arches, tunnels, and chambers.

Stigmergy has even been observed in bacteria, various species of which differentiate into distinct cell types and which participate in group behaviors that are guided by sophisticated temporal and spatial control systems. Spectacular examples of multicellular behavior can be found among the myxobacteria. Myxobacteria travel in swarms containing many cells kept together by intercellular molecular signals. Most myxobacteria are predatory: individuals benefit from aggregation as it allows accumulation of extracellular

enzymes which are used to digest prey microorganisms. When nutrients are scarce, myxobacterial cells aggregate into fruiting bodies, within which the swarming cells transform themselves into dormant myxospores with thick cell walls. The fruiting process is thought to benefit myxobacteria by ensuring that cell growth is resumed with a group (swarm) of myxobacteria, rather than isolated cells. Similar life cycles have developed among the cellular slime molds.

Stigmergy, studied in eusocial creatures and physical systems, has been proposed as a model of analyzing some robotics systems, multi-agent systems, communication in computer networks, and online communities.

On the Internet there are many collective projects where users interact only by modifying local parts of their shared virtual environment. Wikipedia is an example of this. The massive structure of information available in a wiki, or an open source software project such as the FreeBSD kernel could be compared to a termite nest; one initial user leaves a seed of an idea (a mudball) which attracts other users who then build upon and modify this initial concept, eventually constructing an elaborate structure of connected thoughts.

In addition, the concept of stigmergy has also been used to describe how cooperative work such as building design may be integrated. Designing a large contemporary building involves a large and diverse network of actors—architects, building engineers, static engineers, building services engineers. Their distributed activities may be partly integrated through practices of stigmergy.

The rise of open source software in the twenty-first century has disrupted the business models of some proprietary software providers, and open content projects like Wikipedia have threatened the business models of companies like Britannica. Researchers have studied collaborative open source projects, arguing they provide insights into the emergence of large-scale peer production and the growth of gift economy.

Stigmergy also occurs with social movements, such as the arc from Wikileaks' cable release in Summer 2010 to the developments in the global Occupy movement. The Occupy movement itself operated stigmergically, with innovations developed by one node becoming part of the total movement's common toolkit.

Some associated with the Occupy Movement, Wikileaks, and Anonymous have proposed a new social system where competition as a driving force would be replaced with a more collaborative society. This proposed society would not use representative democracy but new forms of governance generated by user groups and collaborative methods including stigmergy.

“With stigmergy, an initial idea is freely given, and the project is driven by the idea, not by a personality or group of personalities. No individual needs permission (competitive) or consensus (cooperative) to propose an idea or initiate a project.”

These are just the beginnings of a conversation, not the final word. Not expanding or shifting the Overton Window but tearing down the entire wall. This is a process, not a destination. Not a final blueprint but a draft. And let me assure you, drafts don't have to look anything like the finished product. What does a just and equal world look like? Those of us alive will never know. For we have been shaped, broken, biased by the current systems of propaganda and abuse. We have been foreverably altered by them.

To those unborn whom these words reach, what is it like? What did you do? What did *we* do? How fucking wrong were we? The pain you recognize—I hope you do—that we inflicted was all too real. Some did feel it, in the moments, could see it, in part for what it was. But how do you see it—in its full glory? Please remember some of us tried, however imperfect we may have been. And know that you too are likely to have your own weaknesses, biases—don't get too cocky kid. Now I gotta get back to those of us in the here and now, as I write, we'll do our best to make your present 'good,' we're sorry if we got it wrong.

If you are reading this, it's most likely the result of a series of events in your life which have drawn your interest and attention to the fact that our world is quite a bit different from what we've been told by our school teachers, by the news media, by Hollywood, and by politicians.

At some point, for whatever reason, you've come to realize that the consensus narratives in our society about what's going on are false. The tools that people are taught to use to inform themselves about their government, their nation and their world are not just full of inaccuracies, but deliberate distortions, ranging from the reasons we're given for why wars are started, to the way our political systems work, to where real power and authority actually lies, to the way nations and governments actually behave in the world.

This awareness has come with a degree of alienation. Not buying into the same consensus narratives about the world as your friends, loved ones and peers comes with an inability to relate to them on some levels, which can cause you to feel a lack of intimacy in those areas. You may have also found yourself the odd one out in conversations about politics or other controversial issues, maybe even lost old friends over it. But you kept going

anyway. For some of us, it's more important to be true to the truth than it is to fit in. You're one of those people.

So, I just want to say thank you. Sincerely. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I'm on-my-knees grateful to anyone who sets about untangling themselves and their species from the deceitful narratives which pervade our society. It is the most important battle that can possibly be fought. The most important battle that has ever been fought.

There is nothing more important than this fight. Our species is on a sure trajectory toward Orwellian dystopia if climate collapse or nuclear war don't send us the way of the dinosaur first, and the only thing that has the power to steer us out of that trajectory is the people using the strength of their numbers to force an end to the oppressive, ecocidal, omniscidal status quo.

But they don't. The people don't use the strength of their numbers to force an end to the oppressive, ecocidal, omniscidal status quo, because they aren't interested in doing so. Why aren't they interested in doing so? Because their minds are being manipulated on a mass scale by the same people who have been granted immense power and wealth by the existence of that status quo.

All of mankind's biggest dilemmas are ultimately due to the fact that propaganda is far more ubiquitous and far more advanced than most people realize. And it's not their fault. Not really. Nobody teaches you in school that throughout your entire life your plutocratic overlords will be working to control the thoughts in your head using a highly sophisticated arsenal of psychological operations funneled into your mind via their near-total control of the media. Nobody warns you as a kid that if you ever really want to grow up, you'll first have to extricate the vast network of lies which have been deliberately sewn into your consciousness since birth.

But their tricks didn't work on you. You found your way out of that matrix of deception. It wasn't easy, and it wasn't comfortable, but you did it. And now you're ready to fight.

And fight you have. You have already been doing what you can to share information which counters the disinformation, doing your best to throw sand in the gears of the propaganda machine and show people the little gaps in the code of the matrix in the hope that some light sleeper might spot it and begin waking up from the dream. You don't need me to tell you to do this, because it's obvious to anyone who's seen through the illusion. You're doing it already. And you're going to keep doing it. And you're going to get better at it.

You're going to get better at it because you're going to keep learning and gaining a better and better understanding of how the oppression machine

operates, so that you can describe it more lucidly to others.

You're going to get better at it because you're going to keep practicing your craft: attacking the propaganda matrix at its weakest and most vulnerable points at every opportunity. Practice makes perfect, and the more you keep at it the more skillful you'll get at spotting gaps in its armor and firing the most damaging truth bombs straight into them.

You're going to get better at it because you're going to keep doing your own inner work to expunge all lies from your system, from the most surface-level propaganda narratives all the way down to your most fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality itself. You understand that only turkeys are done, and that it will always be possible to get a little bit clearer inside every day. The less your vision is impeded by falsehood, the better you'll be able to see on the battlefield.

You're going to get better at fighting, and you're going to keep fighting no matter what. Not because it's an easy war, nor even because it's a winnable war, but because you have made truth your highest value, and untruth is therefore intolerable to you. You will keep attacking the lie factory at every turn until it collapses into its own foundations beyond any possibility of repair. You will keep driving your sword through until you see it come out the other side.

And others will join you, because they have awakened to what's going on too. And then there will be more of them. And more. And more.

There is no more important fight than this. The survival and well-being of our entire species depends upon it. The oligarchs and their government agency allies cannot be defeated as long as their propaganda machine is killing off all desire to defeat them.

Never doubt that your energy poured into this effort is well-spent. Never let anyone shame you into silence or make you believe that your efforts are in vain. Never doubt that you're on the right path.

Your edge is your agility and your access to inspiration. No amount of social engineering can move as fast or shine as bright as the truth. You have everything you need to win, and there are more signs than ever that the win is on the horizon. What once seemed impossible now seems inevitable.

I love you.

Keep pushing.

The time is up. The time is now. Gather the people to do the work: the healing, transformative, deepening work of building community, solutions, understanding, skills, knowledge, and hope. You must be the one to make a change, to step out of the rutted tracks of the looming train wreck that is our culture. You must have the courage to walk into the wilderness of what you don't know and embrace the solutions that will save our lives.

All quests and hero's journeys begin with this: the yearning for change; the hope of saving graces; the long shot of wished-for miracles. In each of us, our willingness to make a change begins with equal measures of fear, courage, and purpose rolled into an electric jolt to the soul—a spark that launches you toward danger and potential.

Our world will be saved by billions of ordinary heroes who decide to do hundreds of humble and extraordinary actions. Hour by hour, minute by minute, we change our world by withdrawing our support, cooperation, and participation from old destructive systems. By making these shifts, we starve the monster we have become. One small action multiplied by millions of people adds up quickly to massive change. One small action done strategically by a small group of people can catalyze a hundred-million more.

Change requires that we live differently. All of us must make changes: from the most committed activist who knows she must reconnect to her heart; to the average citizen who suspects he could be doing more. Real change is never handed to us on a silver platter, nor served by powerful people. When tribes among the Anishinaabe wanted to use their promised treaty rights, they walked on to the land to hunt, fish, and gather traditional foods and medicines.

All of them faced violence, danger, arrest, and even death threats. All of them organized, mobilized, struggled, and ultimately prevailed. None of them sat on the couch waiting for the right people to be put into the right offices to do the right thing. Deep, meaningful change is not handed to us. We wrest it out of the unknown and bring it into existence in our lives.

As Thomas Paine wrote:

“We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

Our actions, day in and day out, shape this ever-evolving world. We are the potter's hands forming the wet clay vessels of our existence. We are the weavers at the loom, casting the threads of our lives through the wool of the world. We are the stone cutter with chisel and hammer, chipping away at the hard realities that block our forward progress. With such power to shape our world comes the responsibility to wield our lives with intention and skill.

If you want change, live differently. But remember, you alone are not enough. One of our changes is that we must work together. We must reach out from our isolated lives. We must join hands with millions and take collective steps toward the future. You cannot go on a hero's journey alone. Not this time. You must ask others—many others, millions of others—to change their lives, too. Ask your family, friends, and colleagues. Use

outreach and organizing tools to ask your neighbors, faith communities, and co-workers. Put direct action to work to compel our society to adopt a change for justice. Mobilize to demand that institutions and industries shift their massive resources into systems that are just, fair, sustainably, and non-harming. In this way, our ordinary actions—multiplied by millions—add up to extraordinary change.

Do not wait another minute to change your life. The time is up. The time is now.

Chapter Eighty-seven

Walking the Line

Where is the line between performance art and treason? The line between cosplay and criminality? The line between fandom and fanaticism?

Will Ferrell can dress up as Ricky Bobby, be him out and about in the real world, to promote a movie. Spiderman can kick and punch and jump around your son in Times Square, but if the guy does that in street clothes, well he's probably getting maced and forced to introduce himself to all his neighbors going forward.

So again: Where is the line between performance art and treason? The line between cosplay and criminality? The line between fandom and fanaticism?

You can dress up as an airline pilot, walk around pretty much anywhere you could when not in an pilot uniform. Except, ironically enough, an airport. That's where you're bound to catch some flak.

Yet again: Where is the line between performance art and treason? The line between cosplay and criminality? The line between fandom and fanaticism?

You can be a Storm Trooper, a Space Captain, a Bounty Hunter, a Ninja Warrior, an evil villain or noble hero from any number of stories.

So yet again: Where is the line between performance art and treason? The line between cosplay and criminality? The line between fandom and fanaticism?

Let's find out together.

November 2024

We are coming. Expect us.

Appendices

There's no place in this world where I'll belong when I'm gone
And I won't know the right from the wrong when I'm gone
And you won't find me singin' on this song when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here

And I won't feel the flowing of the time when I'm gone
All the pleasures of love will not be mine when I'm gone
My pen won't pour a lyric line when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here

And I won't breathe the bracing air when I'm gone
And I can't even worry 'bout my cares when I'm gone
Won't be asked to do my share when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here

And I won't be running from the rain when I'm gone
And I can't even suffer from the pain when I'm gone
Can't say who's to praise and who's to blame when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here

Won't see the golden of the sun when I'm gone
And the evenings and the mornings will be one when I'm gone
Can't be singing louder than the guns when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here

All my days won't be dances of delight when I'm gone
And the sands will be shifting from my sight when I'm gone
Can't add my name into the fight when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here

And I won't be laughing at the lies when I'm gone
And I can't question how or when or why when I'm gone
Can't live proud enough to die when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here

There's no place in this world where I'll belong when I'm gone
And I won't know the right from the wrong when I'm gone
And you won't find me singin' on this song when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it
I guess I'll have to do it
Guess I'll have to do it while I'm here

Trivia Night

When the navy began to construct its base at Pearl Harbor, workers stumbled across underwater remains of pens where, it was discovered, men faced off against sharks in aquatic gladiatorial matches. The largest pen covered approximately four acres and was encircled with lava stones. Given that the shark was in its own element, playing with a full deck of teeth, and the men had to hold their breath and fight with a weapon not unlike a sawed-off broomstick, odds favored the shark.



There was an incident in the small town of Mosinee, Wisconsin, where in 1950 veterans from the American Legion disguised as Russian soldiers took over the town, arrested the mayor, imprisoned the clergy, nationalized businesses, and allowed only potato soup to be served in the cafés, before allowing everyone to be liberated from communism at dusk.



In 1956 the Niagara Falls generating station fell off the side of the cliff at the falls' edge, where it had been perched. A total loss, it was one of the largest industrial accidents in America to that date. John Haney, a janitor at the plant that day, remembers that “there was water seeping in and we were trying to keep it away from the generators. The pressure on the building was tremendous. The windows facing the river were just popping out, the concrete floor would buckle up and I would jump over it. Then the wall toward the falls came crashing down. I then headed to the elevator. Water and stone was falling into the bay. I stood under the steel door-frame watching the operator call to me and I jumped on. It took forty-five seconds to reach the top and I saw the gorge collapse on the area I was at.” Thirty-nine men escaped the plant as it fell, while one was “hurled through the window into the river” when a “jet like a burst of water from a broken penstock carried his body along with thousands of tons of debris into the surging maelstrom.”



Out of the collective 53,487 people involved in plane crashes in the United States from 1983 to 2000, 51,207 survived.



The supposed downfall of the dinosaurs is not all it seems: modern birds are both indisputably dinosaurs (theropods, just like T. rex) and vastly more species-rich than mammals. There are twice as many species of birds as there are mammals. So, technically, we're still living in the age of dinosaurs. Mammals have never been as successful as dinosaurs. Still aren't. Some might see humanity as the end member of an inevitable progression to more advanced life. But this comforting view doesn't square with the brute fact of 136 million years of meek mammal serfdom in the shadows of dinosaurs—an arrangement that required an inconceivable catastrophe to upend.



One current theory of motion sickness suggests that when you don't feel like you're moving, but you do see that you're moving, your brain decides that you've been poisoned. Hence your desire to run to the nearest bathroom.



Birthing forceps were kept a strict secret for more than a century by the family of doctors who invented them, as so much money could be made from the advantage they provided over other obstetricians. To preserve their mystery, they were brought into the room inside a lined box that was opened only when observers had been removed and the mother blindfolded.



In the United States right now, a third of government employees are in the military, and a quarter are in the postal service, far and away more than any other branch.



Raytheon devised an acoustic riot shield that uses low-frequency sound waves to interfere with the respiratory tract, incapacitating protesters by making it hard for them to breathe.



Pension plans have all but died. Between 1983 and 2013, the percentage of Americans covered by the benefit slid from 62% to 17%. Instead, employers were offering 401(k) plans for retirement savings, because a typical 3% match to an employee's contribution is less expensive than the 7–8% of payroll it takes to fund a pension program. If the market doesn't perform in this arrangement, it's the worker, not the employer, who takes the hit. Even the 401(k) plan is mostly a perk for the wealthy: 89% of private industry workers in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' highest wage category had access to retirement benefits, compared to 32% of workers in the lowest wage category. A startling number of people—30% of the civilian population—had no retirement savings or pension.



The results of a 1995 study conducted by Harvard Medical School indicated that alcoholics have a better chance of quitting drinking if they don't attend AA than if they do. Americans seldom hear about such results, in part because AA and its sister organizations have actively opposed independent research that could test their programs' effectiveness.



In 1965—the same year that President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act—an early gay rights group known as the Mattachine Society of Washington petitioned the United States Civil Service Commission to rescind a policy that declared openly gay people “unsuitable for Federal employment.” The Commission did not simply reject the Mattachine Society's plea, it explained that it would leave this policy in place because of the revulsion of other employees by homosexual conduct and the consequent disruption of service efficiency; the apprehension caused other employees of homosexual advances, solicitations, or assaults; the unavoidable subjection of the sexual deviate to erotic stimulation through on-the-job use of the common toilet, shower, and living facilities; the offense to members of the public who are required to deal with a known or admitted sexual deviate to transact Government business; the hazard that the prestige and authority of a Government position will be used to foster homosexual activity, particularly among the youth; and the use of Government funds and authority in furtherance of conduct offensive both to the mores and the law of our society. These were not the words of some aberrant anti-gay group; it was an official statement of policy by the government of the United States of

America. And the federal government was hardly alone in this position. As the Commission noted in its response to the Mattachine Society, “homosexual conduct, including that between consenting adults in private, is a crime in every jurisdiction, except under specified conditions, in Illinois.”



In 1999, the King family brought a civil suit against Loyd Jowers, who claimed he had been involved in a conspiracy to kill Martin Luther King. The jury found that a conspiracy involving the US government, not James Earl Ray, had killed King.



The current tallest building, at 828 meters, is the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, a sky-piercing structure of such immensity that it bears no relation to the human-scaled Bedouin huts that peppered this location just a few decades ago. Three-quarters of the world’s tallest buildings are now in Asia and the Middle East, over a century after the first skyscraper opened, half a world away in Chicago. These icons of the urban age are as much vanity spires as a housing solution—the top one-third of most of the world’s tallest are unoccupiable by design.



Around 85% of all farms, producing half the world’s grains and more than half of all calories, are smaller than five hectares.



For meteorologists, water vapor is the coin of the realm. Water is a unique substance, in that when it goes from its gaseous phase to its liquid phase it releases enormous amounts of energy, and when it goes from its liquid phase into its solid phase it releases lesser amounts of energy. One way to look at weather is that it is the change of water vapor in the atmosphere. If the water vapor isn’t changing much, there’s no weather happening. Water vapor is nature’s way of redistributing energy around the planet. In an unending process, water molecules on the surface of the ocean are hit by solar energy. They evaporate, and in becoming vapor they store that energy. When the atmosphere cools enough for some of that vapor to condense into liquid, much of the energy is released, causing heat. The heat changes the pressure, the pressure results in wind, and the condensed water vapor falls

to the earth as precipitation. The gist of it is that if you want to get the weather forecast right, you've got to get the water vapor right.



Wartime media censorship actually has a long history in the United States, dating back nearly to the country's founding, but most of the censorship efforts had been ad hoc operations created in the exigencies of an ongoing war. Only since the Eisenhower administration had the executive branch created a standby censorship structure ready to spring into action. Former Associated Press executive Byron Price had served during World War II as the director of censorship, working with a staff of fifteen to oversee the media's shared "Code of Wartime Practices." While media organizations didn't submit reports before publication to the censors, they relied upon the code and could consult with Price's office anytime a question arose.

Screaming Into the Void

“If you’ve got a whole bunch of rocket fuel in you, why not build a rocket to put it in?”

At every turning point of history someone rises up who can enunciate and in a sense personify the new direction of the public mind and will. America has reached such a crossroads.

Being a god on Earth is a natural human desire, and saving someone else is the closest we’ll ever come to achieving it. All Greek mythology and every major religion that followed has really been devoted to that single premise: the hero who leads the way is half god and half human, fueled as much by pity as by power.

When the Greeks created the heroic ideal, they didn’t choose a word that meant ‘Dies Trying’ or ‘Massacres Bad Guys.’ They went with ‘hērōs’—“protector.” Heroes aren’t perfect; with a god as one parent and a mortal as the other, they’re perpetually teetering between two destinies. What tips them toward greatness is a sidekick, a human connection who helps turn the spigot on the power of compassion. Empathy, the Greeks believed, was a source of strength, not softness; the more you recognized yourself in others and connected with their distress, the more endurance, wisdom, cunning, and determination you could tap into.

Conservatives frequently say that socialists want to have everything handed to them—that instead of complaining, they should be buckling up, showing up to work every day, and achieving something the “hard way.” This seems a bit odd, considering that, all in all, achieving a complete and revolutionary overhaul of long-standing economic and social structures against the wishes of all the world’s centers of power is probably harder than, say, becoming a reasonably successful middle manager with two cars.

Our idea of what a revolution is like, how it is carried out, and who it is carried out by has been warped by our own cultural propaganda, and by the romantic Marxist propaganda of the twentieth century. We have this idea that revolutions are led by rational-minded, tea-sipping men in three-pointed hats who discuss the rights of man while burning the candle at both ends.

Or we're warped by the Marxist ideal of revolution: a rational, inevitable historical process in which the most enlightened, most sympathetic, least overdressed human beings team up with the Historical Trend itself to effect a glorious, clean revolution. In fact, revolutions are messy, ugly, gory affairs. Nowhere in our popular notion of revolutions are such factors as stupidity, bad luck, unintended comedy, and revolting madness allowed in. Yet most of the time revolutions are 'led,' by people we would call nutcases and who indeed were considered nutcases during their time—and in all likelihood were nutcases. While time and distance provide a romantic view of revolutions, at the time when they actually occur, they usually seem bizarre, uncalled-for, frightening, and evil to their contemporaries, which is why they almost always seem snuffed out at their inception.

Our lives and our movements today are as shaped by the political prisoners who still sit behind concrete walls as the prisons themselves invisibly shape the landscape of the world we seek to make more just. Many have had their lives either ended by the state or have been tried, convicted, and jailed for nothing more than the crime of loving their people enough to attempt a revolution in the United States.

They remain behind walls, often isolated, and at times tortured for their political beliefs. To accept this fact is to ask what ideas can be so dangerous that those who hold it in their heads must be hidden from us? To understand that these people and their circumstance do indeed exist is a necessary first step for a country whose cloak of democracy keeps us in denial. Americans believe political prisoners are a fact in countries like China, Iran, and Cuba but live the lie of the US government's denial of the existence of US political prisoners within its borders.

We could live in a sustainable, just, free, and peaceful world. And yet we are descending into a world of perpetual wars; slavery; ignorance; overwork side by side with unemployment; vacant homes side by side with homelessness; specialization; crass materialism; contaminated food, water, and air; destitution; despair.

Since the men in the shadows are not about to change, the only hope is their removal from power—by any means necessary. Unfortunately, given these men's cohesiveness and organizational skills, given their power over our minds, given their ability to convince the vast majority to act against its convictions and interests, given their success in establishing cross-generational dynasties, such removal presents humanity with a herculean task.

With these words as my only weapon—though that is unlikely to keep me from being labeled a 'terrorist' and getting an unannounced late-night visit—I say the authority of the United States government is illegitimate and struggle by its people to overthrow the regime by whatever means seems

best to them is justified.

I didn't plan to write a book when I started on this journey. I just had an intense, personal curiosity. I wanted to understand what happened for myself. But as the years went by, the gap between what I was learning and what appeared in print and media began to weigh on me. Reluctantly, I realized I had a responsibility to share what I had found. Thank you for being brave enough to open this volume. It takes a certain amount of courage to challenge the status quo, to dare to have a thought that differs from what the media screams at you daily.

We are living through an upheaval of historic proportions. The visible evidence of collapse makes criticism redundant. What is being born before our eyes still lacks a clear shape; it could just as easily beget monsters and therefore defies any attempt to describe it. In such times, all commentary is reduced to the level of chit-chat. We can speak only from the midst of events; from the breach we can hear the cracking foundations of a global order at its end that are opening up new paths for the future.

Some will see behind this ambition either senile nostalgia or the mindless elation of youth. But let them take comfort, as much as they can: We are sure of being the most realistic by far.

A new manifesto must be written and circulated for the current age, allowing individuals to subscribe to stated goals or not. Those trying to resist the status quo are hopelessly stuck in trying to change the minds of the oppressors instead of rallying the oppressed to a new vision.

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked, and dejected with a lost opportunity. The tide in the affairs of men does not remain at flood—it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is adamant and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: 'Too late.'

This report is published with the hope that its sheer sadism and abnormal cruelty may stir thoughtful Americans to action. If this report does not do so, we fear the situation is hopeless.

What the monks said in the letters they left before burning themselves aimed only at alarming, at moving the hearts of the oppressors and at calling the attention of the world to the suffering endured then by the Vietnamese. To burn oneself by fire is to prove that what one is saying is of the utmost importance. Steeped in their Buddhist practices, the nuns and monks who burned themselves thus performed an act of construction rather than an act

of destruction because to die in this way is to suffer and to die for the sake of one's people.

It may seem crazy to risk your safety, your life, for that of a stranger, but if one firmly believes that it is the right thing to do, then it is in fact crazy to not do so. Morality and insanity, within the current frameworks of thought that govern our perception, go hand in hand; they are the catalysts for societal change. The crazy, the marginalized, the suicidal, the forgotten—the most necessary ingredients for producing foundational, revolutionary change which strikes at the core of our structures and ripples out across the globe. It is those they label as crazy who can see the only way forward. John Brown was crazy and fought for a deeply moral cause. John Brown lives on in each one of you crazy people. Jesus lives on in each one of you crazy people. We will be morally insane, the forgotten-no-more; the ground will shake and the sky will thunder, old ways ripped asunder.

Sometimes when good people caution those who protest against against our society's many injustices, to eschew 'violence,' that a 'safe' society is better than one experiencing the turmoil of civil war, I think of the homeless people on the streets of Denver, of the Lakota babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome who will never have a chance to excel in school, of the black boys shot by police, of the girls who flee from foster care straight into the tender mercies of a pimp and forced sex, of the inmates in prisons who spend decades in a tiny windowless room, slowly losing their minds—and I think: Violence? Thousands of people are experiencing soul-numbing and body-destroying violence on a daily basis. You have made the decision that other people can suck off all the ills of our society so that you can pretend we live in a safe world. Well fuck you, I do not intend to walk away from Omelas, but instead to burn this unjust apparatus to the ground.

It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brushfires in people's minds.

Most books are dead, this one is alive. It moves, morphs, transforms, evolves. This story has many possible endings, it always has—some much darker than others. You get to help choose which, and the sum of these choices will be the page upon which the ultimate story is written. The world is provided, the shell, it is up to you all to make a home out of it.

The first thing is I think you have to frame it in the big picture. The way you get to people is to say: We're at a turning point in history. If we don't solve the problem of economic polarization, which is caused mainly by debt, we're going to go into another dark age. We're going to have neo-feudalism. We're going to have neo-serfdom, except that you're not going to be tied to the land like serfs were. You can live wherever you want, but wherever you are, you're going to have to pay about 40% of your income just for housing.

And you're going to have to pay for water, and you're going to have to pay for the other needs. This is the new kind of serfdom. You have to re-frame what the economy is about in a way that people can understand.

And you need a multi-pronged approach to fight on four or five fronts. You need academics so that nobody can say you don't know what you're talking about. You need an organ, a periodical; you need books; you need to make use of the Internet; you need films; and you need a political group. You need to institutionalize this idea and give it a critical mass of coherence.

When Jesus Christ prophesied about the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, he was not talking about the magical appearance of a bunch of buildings falling out of the sky like spaceships, he was talking about an idea spreading to enough of the minds of Humankind so that Humankind itself would be transformed. The transformation would take place within the hearts and minds of Humans, and would then manifest on the Earth as a new and better form of living. This is the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. As Jesus put it:

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

The Kingdom of Heaven is an idea; like yeast spreading through dough, this idea is spreading through the minds of Humankind. When enough people become dedicated to the principles of peace and brotherly love, then the Kingdom of Heaven will come on Earth. Then justice will truly be established on Earth. This is what we are all waiting for, so this is what we must continue working for, to spread and implement these ideas.

Revolutionaries, social centers, collectives are already actively building infrastructure of resistance. This infrastructure is not just material but psychological, spiritual, theoretical, and foundational. It is a departure from party politics and in conflict with both the left and the right for complete and total freedom. Defense of oppressed people and of our political projects is paramount to liberation. We do hope you will join us in our crusade to end these unjust ideologies once and for all, we need people like you more than ever.

The Power of Narrative will be shattered, the wheel will be broken. For those that truly want this nation of hate and violence to end, self-defense, conflict resolution, and revolutionary justice are proven ways forward. It is important that the way through these tragic times not just be personal but also collective. Everything in this book is hacked, remixed, and presented from the author's point of view. Challenge it! There is no one way forward, just powerful ideas.

All you need to do to start is to tear this text apart. Praise what you like, eviscerate what you don't. Run it through a grinder and see what comes out. Spread it, mock it, preach it, shame it.

Most left-wing movements get into power without having properly thought out what they'll do once in power and without a realistic understanding of the deep lack of belief in democratic norms by their right-wing opponents. Break your enemy's power. If you're any sort of left-winger worth your salt, you ethically do not believe in huge concentrations of power and money in the hands of a few people anyway. Act on your beliefs. And if they've committed a pile of crimes—and they almost always have—use those crimes against them.

Then remember the world system is set up expressly to stop what you are doing. You're tackling the dragon, and most people who do that get eaten. We tell the stories of the dragonslayers because they are so few. So, know the odds are against you and be willing to do what is required to improve them. If you aren't, stay home.

War is hell, which is why they need to stop waging theirs. Or we will make them stop—there is no moral uncertainty here, their actions are unjustifiable, unacceptable, unallowable. We do not do this for us, our egos, the history books, we do it for those in the here and now, those who cry out and go unheard, those who are broken and tossed away, those who are spit on and exploited, those who despair, those who needlessly struggle, those who succumb and those who are left behind. The line stops here, this is where we intend to make it end. To all would-be revolutionaries, the massive reserve army of the broken, desperate, enraged: This is what you've been waiting for, we've been watching you.

This is not the revolution of Bernie "Millionaire Socialist" Sanders. We're not fucking around, you can't buy us with a goddamn thing; you kill us, or we don't stop coming. And you better hope we don't rise from the grave—because we ain't Jesus, we will fucking Bloodshot your ass.

We will win, that is certain. It is certain because the ideas that exist in this writer's head do not exist solely there, nor do they exist only on these pages, or in the minds of those that have seen these pages. The ideas were not solely birthed there, just as the wheel, agriculture, religion were not solely birthed by one individual. No idea is owned, no idea is truly unique. Built on the foundations of all other thought and ideas, they are our collective wealth. We must demonize those that hoard this wealth, for they are stealing from all of us to enrich themselves.

Like dragons of lore, they will use force to keep their hoard and grow it. We must fight them. Like dragons, they will have strengths and weaknesses. We must exploit these. The system is fundamentally broken, it will never

function for the enrichment of the majority. We must expose the broken system and break it further wherever we can. Whether you are simply pulling back the curtain or actively throwing wrenches into the machine, if it is done with an honest desire for justice, done as passionately as you can, then you are fighting for our cause. Do not assist your oppressors simply because you disagree with the actions taken.

The timetable is uncertain, the victory certain. This writer may be long dead, whether prematurely or naturally, but the ideas outlined will prevail, there is no other way but further backward.

The time is up. The time is now. Gather the people to do the work: the healing, transformative, deepening work of building community, solutions, understanding, skills, knowledge, and hope. You must be the one to make a change, to step out of the rutted tracks of the looming train wreck that is our culture. You must have the courage to walk into the wilderness of what you don't know and embrace the solutions that will save our lives.

All quests and hero's journeys begin with this: the yearning for change; the hope of saving graces; the long shot of wished-for miracles. In each of us, our willingness to make a change begins with equal measures of fear, courage, and purpose rolled into an electric jolt to the soul—a spark that launches you toward danger and potential.

Some men rise to occasions, the vast majority do not. The frail firelight that civilization casts into the darkness burns upon the sacrificial flesh of the few.

Rise from the ashes like the phoenix my brothers, be like the hydra my sisters. You are already dead, choose immortality now and live forever with us. We coursed through the veins of our ancestors and we will again through the blood of our unborn. Can you feel them brothers? Can you hear them crying out my sisters? They are your strength, they are your power, we wield the power of generations, a flame handed down through the ages, we cannot let it be extinguished, we will not let it be extinguished. Burn your enemies, the flame cannot harm you, it is the catalyst for your seeds of immortality, it will incubate your precious phoenix egg. Go forth, do what must be done.

But remember, you alone are not enough. One of our changes is that we must work together. We must reach out from our isolated lives. We must join hands with millions and take collective steps toward the future. You cannot go on a hero's journey alone. Not this time. You must ask others—many others, millions of others—to change their lives, too.

Do not wait another minute to change your life. The time is up. The time is now.

We'll be seeing you, we hope.